



India — Va-PoReg Country Report

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11/01/1858 Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom]: The British East India Company, established in 1600 as a trading company attained wide-ranging control over large areas of the Indian subcontinent. The Company was charged with governing and administering India and its rule in India lasted effectively from the 1757 (Battle of Plassey) until 1858 (Lowe 2015). Following the 1857 Indian Rebellion, the British Crown assumed direct colonial rule of India (called British Raj) by annexing the whole subcontinent. The transfer of administrative authority was effectively entrenched in the Act for the Good Government of India of 1858, which was introduced and passed by the British Parliament (Singh/Murari 2022). The act transferred the Government of India from the Company to the Crown by establishing the positions of British Viceroy and Governor General. Both were responsible of administering the government and were regarded as representatives of the British sovereign (Singh/Murari 2022). According to LIED no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held until 1918, from 1919 onward only multiparty legislative elections were held. Elections in colonial India were based on a restricted franchise, heavily limited by qualifications such as property ownership, education, income, and landholding. These elections were part of a gradual process of introducing representative government under British rule, but universal suffrage was not implemented during this period. The introduction of elections began with the Indian Councils Act of 1861, which established legislative councils, though no elections took place, and members were appointed by the British government. The Indian Councils Act of 1892 brought a limited and indirect form of elections, where Indians could nominate representatives to legislative councils, but the franchise remained extremely narrow, limited to elite groups such as landlords and merchants. The Indian Councils Act of 1909, also known as the Morley-Minto Reforms, introduced direct elections to legislative councils for the first time, albeit with a very restricted electorate. The act also established separate electorates for Muslims, deepening the communalization of Indian politics. Only a small segment of the population was eligible to vote, based on property and educational qualifications. The Government of India Act of 1919, known as the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, expanded the electorate to about 10% of the adult male population. It also introduced the system of dyarchy in provincial governments, giving some measure of power to elected Indian ministers, although real power remained in the hands of British officials. The franchise was still limited by property and education. The most significant pre-independence electoral reform came with the Government of India Act of 1935, which extended the franchise further, allowing around 30 million people to vote, including some women. It also introduced provincial autonomy, with elected provincial legislatures having greater authority. Nevertheless, the franchise was still based on property and education, far from being universal, and British control over key sectors remained intact. Colonial-era elections in India were thus largely designed to provide representation to a narrow segment of the Indian population, primarily the elites, while maintaining British dominance. On 04/01/1937, Burma province (today: Myanmar), which had been a part of British India in its entirety since 1885, was separated from British India and made into a distinct colony of the United Kingdom.¹ For more information, see Myanmar. Pre-independence elections were held in British India in December 1945 until January 1946 to elect members of the Central Legislative Assembly and the Council of State. The Indian National Congress emerged as the largest party, winning 59 of the 102 elected seats.² The Interim Government of India, also known as the Provisional Government of India, formed on 09/02/1946 from

the newly elected Constituent Assembly of India. It had the task of assisting the transition of British India to independence. The Viceroy's Executive Council became the executive branch of the interim government. Originally headed by the Viceroy of India, it was transformed into a council of ministers, with the powers of a prime minister bestowed on the vice-president of the Council, a position held by the Congress leader Jawaharlal Nehru.³ According to LIED political liberties were coded as absent. V-Dem's PCLI classifies political liberties as not really present until 1944 and in an ambiguous state from 1945 onward. India is after 1919 a borderline case between a direct rule and an indirect rule colonial regime. From 1900-1934 and in 1947, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent. Between 1935 and 1946, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. On 08/14/1947 the Partition of India granted independence to Pakistan, comprised of West and East Pakistan. The regions of Bengal and Punjab were split between India and Pakistan.⁴ For further information, see Pakistan.

08/15/1947 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]/Start (Monarchical) Electoral Democracy: India attained independence as a Dominion within the Commonwealth on this date (Lansford 2021: 727). The British sovereign remained to be the head of state (Crawford 2006, Kumarasingham 2013). The latter was represented in each capital by a governor general appointed on the advice of the local prime minister (Kumarasingham 2013). However, the role of governor general became almost entirely ceremonial. Power was exercised on a day-to-day basis by the Indian cabinet and two native governors-general.⁵ Jawahar Lal Nehru, leader of the politically dominant Indian National Congress (INC), served as India's first prime minister (Lansford 2021: 727). Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED describes these elections as competitive. V-Dem's EF&FI scores it free and fair while their CEI scores it not really clean. For the relevant period, V-Dem's JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are robust. At the same time, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive.

11/26/1949 Continuation Electoral Democracy (as a Republic): India adopted its first constitution and became a democratic republic on 01/26/1950.⁶ The functions of the governor general were transferred to and performed by the president of India.⁷ Universal suffrage was introduced in 1950 irrespective of race or gender or religion.⁸ As per FH's classification for this regime period since 1972, the country receives a score of 5 as free, which we categorize as rather free. In addition to that, political liberties were absent according to LIED. V-Dem's PCLI scores them as somewhat present since 1948. In the period from 10/25/1951 to 02/21/1952 the first parliamentary elections after independence were held. The Indian National Congress (INC) won a landslide victory, winning 364 of the 489 seats and 45% of the total votes polled and Jawaharlal Nehru became the first democratically elected Prime Minister of the country.⁹ Despite universal suffrage and constitutional assurances of "justice, liberty, and equality in opportunity,"¹⁰ the persistence of the caste system renders the Indian democracy an electoral democracy. The democratic regime is accompanied by numerous abuses of civil and personal freedoms, particularly affecting the lower castes and, most of all, the Dalit community.¹¹ Thus, despite nominally having access to the political process and despite state efforts to ameliorate the living conditions of the Dalit, they continue to encounter a variety of political disadvantages that impede their access to political power and participation (Saeed 2007).¹² However, the caste system predominantly persists in rural areas, gradually diminishing in significance in urban environments.¹³ When Jawaharlal Nehru of the Congress Party, the first prime minister, died in 1964 he was replaced by newly elected party leader Lal Bahadur Shastri, who died shortly after, in 1966. A small group of influential men within the Congress Party, known as the "Syndicate", decided for Indira Ghandi, the late Nehru's daughter, to become the new party leader and thus, the new prime minister.¹⁴ While her being the first female prime minister of India at this early point in history is interesting, and later she is reelected, this practice of

succession is not exactly democratic. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. For the entire period LIED categorizes elections as competitive. V-Dem's EF&FI classifies elections as free and fair until 1970, after which it only scores them as somewhat free and fair. V-Dem's CEI changes its scoring earlier, as it scores elections as clean before 1967. From this point on, it scores them as somewhat clean. According to our criteria, India is an electoral democracy in this period. From 1952 to 1966, based on Polity5's evaluation, the executive's power was limited to a degree between substantial constraints and parity with other institutions, fitting Intermediate Category 3. Since 1967, as per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was on par with or below that of other branches, reflecting executive parity or subordination. For the year 1950, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating comprehensive constraints on the executive. For 1951, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. From 1952 to 1964, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also comprehensive. From 1965 onwards, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were comprehensive.

06/25/1975 End Electoral Democracy/Start Electoral Autocracy: On this date, a state of emergency was declared which limited democratic rights: political opponents were imprisoned, the press was censored, and the practice of forced sterilization was enforced upon the impoverished as a form of birth control. This period was also known as the Reign of Terror. Within the Congress, Indira Gandhi outmaneuvered her rivals and the party split in 1969 - into the Congress (O) (comprising the old-guard known as the "Syndicate") and her Congress (R). On 06/12/1975, Justice Jagmohanlal Sinha of the Allahabad High Court found the prime minister guilty on the charge of misuse of government machinery for her election campaign. The court declared her election null and void and unseated her from her seat in the Lok Sabha. The court also banned her from contesting any election for an additional six years. Justice V. R. Krishna Iyer, on 06/24/1975, upheld the High Court judgement and ordered all privileges Gandhi received as an MP be stopped, and that she be debarred from voting (Paul 1996: 51-55).¹⁵ The Emergency was a direct reaction to this verdict and comes extremely close to an autogolpe. During this time LIED categorizes elections as competitive. V-Dem's EF&FI and CEI score them as somewhat free, fair and clean. As classified by FH for 1975, the country is partly free with a score ranging from 6 to 7, which we place in the rather free category. In 1976 the country is classified as partly free with a score of 8, which we categorize as rather not free. Besides, political liberties were still coded as absent (LIED). V-Dem's PCLI scores changed to ambiguous in 1975 and to not really present in 1976. As per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was significantly constrained by institutional checks during this time. We would argue that Polity5 overlooked the missing constraints on the executive during this period.

03/21/1977 End Electoral Autocracy/Start Electoral Democracy: On this date, the Emergency that had curtailed democratic rights in India formally ended.¹⁶ We code this regime change event as a voluntary exit because Prime Minister Indira Gandhi not only called elections in January 1977, confident of her reelection, but also accepted the outcome when the Indian National Congress was decisively defeated. In the elections held from 03/16 to 03/20, the opposition Janata Party secured a majority in parliament, while Gandhi's party suffered its first major loss since independence. On 03/24/1977 Morarji Desai was sworn in as Prime Minister.¹⁷ The crucial point is that the restoration of democratic competition was initiated by Gandhi herself and, most importantly, that her regime stepped down after losing power at the ballot box, marking this as a voluntary exit rather than a forced collapse. Indira Gandhi was democratically voted out of office, but was reelected in 1980, now running for the Congress-Indira Party which she created after her ousting from office. She remained in office until she was assassinated in 1984 by her own bodyguards, who were Sikhs.¹⁸ Her assassination entailed a series of Anti-Sikh-pogroms with thousands of Sikhs killed.¹⁹ Indira Gandhi was

succeeded by her son Rajiv Gandhi as prime minister, who was in the same party. While her succession took place within the constitutional framework, the whole incident of her assassination and the disastrous violence following can be interpreted as an expression of the injustices and social tensions.²⁰ Corruption scandals and ethnic unrest marked the tenure of Rajiv Gandhi, culminating in the Congress party's loss in the 1989 general elections.²¹ VP Singh of the Janata Dal party became Prime Minister, supported by the BJP and other smaller parties. The coalition broke when the BJP withdrew their support and Singh's government subsequently lost a parliamentary vote of confidence on 11/07/1990. A new government was formed under Chandra Shekhar, which also collapsed only months later. On 05/21/1991, Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated while campaigning for the Congress party, which went on to win the elections. Continued inter-communal conflict as well as corruption scandals diminished the election results of the Congress party. The BJP subsequently emerged as the largest party in the elections of 05/1996, but remained without a definitive majority. A BJP-led coalition lasted only 13 days, followed by a 14-party coalition led by the Janata Dal. This "United Front" government lasted a year, in 03/1997 the Congress party withdrew their support. A new United Front coalition was formed, with Kumar Gujral becoming Prime Minister. Elections were held again in 02/1998, after the Congress party had once again withdrawn their support for the United Front in 11/1997. On 03/20/1998, a BJP-led government emerged, with Atal Bihari Vajpayee as Prime Minister.²² On 02/21/1999 Vajpayee signed the Lahore Declaration with Nawaz Sharif, then-Prime Minister of Pakistan, aimed at easing relations between the two nations.²³ Elections were held again in 09/1999 after the coalition failed in 04/1999. With the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), a new coalition led by the BJP emerged, gaining the majority and forming a new government around Vajpayee in 10/1999. In 05/2004 the new United Progressive Alliance (UPA), led by the Congress party, won the elections and Manmohan Singh became the first Sikh Prime Minister. On 07/25/2007 Pratibha Patil was sworn into office and became the first female president of India. The UPA won again in the 2009 parliamentary elections.²⁴ The NDA won legislative balloting from 04/07 to 05/12/2014, with 336 seats, with the BJP securing an absolute majority of 282 seats. BJP leader Narendra Modi was named prime minister on 05/20/2014 and formed a coalition government with other parties in the NDA (Lansford 2021: 729). The elections were considered generally free and fair, though some violations of campaign rules were reported. However, the government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has since 2014, increasingly adopted discriminatory policies against the Muslim minority (Ding/Slater 2021).²⁵ During this era, the caste system remained a significant societal and political concern, contributing to the characterization of this period as an electoral democracy.²⁶ India's democracy is an interesting case in terms of compromise building, because many regional and local parties are elected into the national parliament. Consequently, large coalitions have to be constructed, which culminated in the 1998 National Democratic Alliance, a coalition consisting of 41 parties.²⁷ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED continues its classification of elections as competitive. V-Dem's EF&FI and CEI initially stay at their scoring of somewhat free, fair and clean elections. The EF&FI goes up to scoring elections as free and fair in 1984. The CEI increases its score to clean elections between 1991 and 2008. Per FH, for the period until 1979, the country is classified as free, scoring between 2 and 4, which we also place in the free category. Between 1980 and 1990 the country receives a score of 5 as free, which we categorize as rather free. In 1991 and 1992 a score of 6 to 7 designates the country as partly free, which aligns with our interpretation of rather free. For the period from 1993 to 1995 India is classified as partly free with a score of 8, which we categorize as rather not free. In 1996 and 1997 it is categorized as partly free, which we interpret as rather free. For the remaining period the country receives a score of 5 as free, which we categorize as rather free. Moreover, political liberties were present until 2017 according to LIED. V-Dem's PCLI also classifies the political liberties as present until 2011 and as somewhat present from 2012 onwards. Based on Polity5's assessment, during this period, the executive was either equal to or subordinate to other institutions, demonstrating strong constraints on decision-making authority. For the year 1976, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. For 1977, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both

interpreted by us as indicating robust constraints on the executive. From 1978 to 1995, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were comprehensive. From 1996 to 2014, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating comprehensive constraints on the executive. For the year 2015, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. Since 2016, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating robust constraints on the executive.

05/19/2019 End Electoral Democracy/Start Electoral Hybrid Regime: Parliamentary elections were held between April and May 2019. The ruling BJP won 303 seats, giving its National Democratic Alliance coalition a stable majority of 353 seats. The decline of democratic quality continued and according to our classification the regime crossed the threshold from electoral democracy to electoral hybrid regime. This includes deficits in the institutional restrictions on the executive regarding the judiciary and the general centralization of power. Furthermore, civil rights are being increasingly restricted.²⁸ According to FH, a score of 6 to 7 for the assessed regime period designates the country as partly free, which aligns with our interpretation of rather free. Political liberties decreased back to absent in 2018 according to LIED. V-Dem's PCLI scores them as ambiguous since 2019. During this regime period, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also robust. In 2021, FH downgraded India from free to partially free and stated: "Modi and his party are tragically driving India itself toward authoritarianism."²⁹ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED continues to classify elections as competitive. The V-Dem EF&FI reduces its scoring back to somewhat free and fair elections in 2019. Their CEI drops back down to ambiguous clean elections from 2019 onwards. Most recently, the 2024 parliamentary elections were held between April and June.³⁰ Although Modi's BJP was predicted to win an absolute majority, they did not achieve this feat. Instead, they lost significantly, compared to the last election, and only secured 240 seats. The Indian Congress Party came second with 99 seats and the Samajwadi Party third with 37 seats.³¹ This still makes the BJP the largest party in parliament by far but is a sign, that the opposition is not as defeated as it was feared to be by outside observers. Modi will, however, retain his position of power and have the ability to continue his shift towards authoritarianism.

Electoral Hybrid Regime as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional Sources (Heller 2000, Kohli 1992, Kohli/Bardhan 1988, Lijphart 1996, Rudolph/Rudolph 1967, Varshney 1998)

Notes

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_rule_in_Burma#Separation_from_India

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1945_Indian_general_election

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interim_Government_of_India

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Partition_of_India

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Governor-General_of_India

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1951%E2%80%939352_Indian_general_election

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Governor-General_of_India

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_suffrage#cite_note-centralasiainstitute.org-37

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1951%E2%80%939352_Indian_general_election

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution_of_India

¹¹ <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/campaigns/caste/presskit.htm>

¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dalit#Prevention_of_Atrocities_Act

- ¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caste_system_in_India#Apartheid_and_discrimination
- ¹⁴ <http://www.chisols.org/narratives.html> , see narratives for version 5.0, India_R: 1.
- ¹⁵ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Emergency_\(India\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Emergency_(India))
- ¹⁶ <https://www.britannica.com/event/the-Emergency-India#ref405284>
- ¹⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1977_Indian_general_election
- ¹⁸ <https://www.zeit.de/2004/15/ustinov>
- ¹⁹ https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indira_Gandhi#Attentat
- ²⁰ <http://www.chisols.org/narratives.html>, see narratives for version 5.0, India_R: 1.
- ²¹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_India_\(1947%E2%80%93present\)#1980s](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_India_(1947%E2%80%93present)#1980s)
- ²² [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_India_\(1947%E2%80%93present\)#1980s](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_India_(1947%E2%80%93present)#1980s)
- ²³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lahore_Declaration
- ²⁴ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_India_\(1947%E2%80%93present\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_India_(1947%E2%80%93present))
- ²⁵ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/india/freedom-world/2021>
- ²⁶ For further information see information about the Indian caste system between 10/25/1951 – 06/25/1975.
- ²⁷ <http://www.chisols.org/narratives.html> , see narratives for version 5.0, India_V: 1-2
- ²⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narendra_Modi#
- ²⁹ <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2021/democracy-under-siege>
- ³⁰ <https://elections24.eci.gov.in/>
- ³¹ <https://results.eci.gov.in/PcResultGenJune2024/index.htm>

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