

The 2024 Indian general election I: Introduction

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In the first piece in a series of five, we look back at ten years of Narendra Modi's administration in the world's largest democracy.



Picture credit: India TV News

Introduction

The 2024 Indian general election has been going on since 19 April, with the results due to be announced on 4 June. The Indian elections are the largest democratic vote in the world, with more than 950 million people eligible to participate this year.

The incumbent prime minister, Narendra Modi, is seeking a third term of office as head of the Bharatya Janata Party (BJP). The opposition alliance is led by the Indian National Congress, which has dominated Indian politics for most of the post-independence period. Every opinion poll indicates that the BJP is easily winning another term and is expected to surpass its 2019 performance. Under the first-past-the-post system of the parliamentary election, Modi and his party are likely to secure a comfortable parliamentary majority in the 543-seat Lok Sabha.

In this first piece in a series of five commentaries, we will look at the BJP's record in office.

Economy and society

India is the world's fourth-largest economy by purchasing power parity (approximately \$15 trillion, or 8 percent of the world total). Apart from the sharp decline during the COVID pandemic, India has shown healthy [growth rates](#) throughout the BJP's rule, although [unemployment](#) remains above 8 percent. Inflation has mostly remained below ten percent. GDP per capita has almost doubled during this period, but from a very low starting point. More problematic is the distribution of wealth within Indian society. While few live in absolute poverty, social and economic inequality is stark. The number of billionaires has tripled during the BJP's rule; the [top 1 percent](#) accounts for almost a quarter of the country's income and 40 percent of its wealth. 90 percent earn less than the average wage. In a more general sense, economic growth has not been particularly striking compared to previous periods. Certainly, it has been nothing like the growth rates that propelled China's rise. As argued by [The Economist](#), for India to unleash its potential, much bolder and more determined economic reforms are required.

In other ways, Modi and the BJP's reign have been controversial. The BJP's ideology of Hindu nationalism has left many among India's religious and ethnic minorities feeling marginalised and fearful for their future. More controversial still is the BJP's impact on Indian democracy and governance. Since 2014, India has been sliding from 85th to 93rd place on Transparency International's [Corruption Perceptions Index](#). Additionally, critics have accused the prime minister of exhibiting [authoritarian tendencies](#) and overseeing democratic backsliding. In 2024, [Freedom House](#) ranked the country as 'partly free'; as recently as 2020 it held a ranking of 'free'. In terms of [media freedom](#), India has, according to Reporters without Borders, slid twenty places since 2014 and is now squeezed between Turkey and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

India and the world

Modi's tenure has seen India's international profile rise, with the hosting of the September 2023 G20 summit in New Delhi widely seen as a personal success for the prime minister. As relations between Russia and the United States (US) have deteriorated sharply since Russia began its full-scale war on Ukraine, many have hoped India will join with the West in opposing its aggression. Not least, given India's long-standing disputes with Russia's main

ally, China. India, however, has pursued its [own policy of non-alignment](#), abstained from condemning Russia at the UN, and declined to join any sanctions regimes. It has instead prioritised working with other BRICS countries, seeking to chart a middle course.

The perceived mistreatment of Muslim communities in India and the ongoing conflict with Pakistan have made Modi something of a *bête noire* in the Muslim world. The most controversial of all, though, was the 2023 accusation by Canada's government that India had conducted an [assassination](#) on Canadian soil of Sikh separatist activist Hardeep Singh Nijjar, who held Canadian citizenship. While India considers these activists supporters of terrorism, their actions, if proven, are a massive transgression of the norms of conduct between supposedly friendly states. There are also numerous accusations of [Indian spying](#) against Australia. Interestingly, as a sign of India's growing power and influence in recent years, the US has [largely held off](#) on criticising India's behaviour.

In the next few commentaries

The commentary pieces, scheduled for publication over the next ten days, will delve deeper into a number of issues. László Csicsmann will discuss Hindu nationalism and its continued impact on Indian domestic politics; Debasish Nandy will consider India's general position in international society and its stances on key issues relating to international order. Imran Khan and Scott N. Romaniuk will analyse the election's impact on relations with Pakistan and China, respectively, India's two most important bilateral relationships.

India, which has the world's largest population, is expanding economically, gaining political influence, and gaining confidence. These are some of the main factors that will impact the geopolitics of the region and beyond. The next five years will be shaped by the results of the election.

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