
**Modi's India: Assessing the Vulnerability and Longevity of the
Competitive Authoritarian Regime**

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Introduction:

In June 2024, India, the world's largest democracy, re-appointed Narendra Modi as Prime Minister for his third consecutive five-year term. Modi, the 74-year old career-politician and long-time leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), was first instituted as prime minister in 2014 after the BJP won the majority of the seats in the Lok Sabha, India's Lower House of Parliament¹. Modi succeeded former prime minister Dr. Manmohan Singh in a peaceful transition of power and assumed a state that experienced relative democratic stability². Upon assuming office, Modi promised economic and infrastructural reform. His term as prime minister has ushered in an era of democratic backsliding; Modi has transformed India to a competitive authoritarian regime.³ This paper will reveal how Modi has contained the three areas of democratic vulnerability - the legislature, elections, and mass mobilization - that threaten the stability of his regime. The regime's ability to endure despite these threats suggests its foreseeable longevity.

An Overview of Competitive Authoritarianism and Modi's Vulnerability:

Competitive authoritarian regimes violate basic democratic principles and are endangered by them. Levitsky and Way define competitive authoritarian regimes as those that violate formal democratic institutions to an extent such that the four tenets of democracy they identify 1) the presence of open, free, and fair elections 2) universal adult suffrage 3) the protection of civil and political liberties and 4) full authority of elected officials to govern, are not upheld. These regimes cause an uneven playing field between the government and the opposition and are

¹ S. D'Souza, Premiership of Narendra Modi, Encyclopædia Britannica, September 20, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Narendra-Modi/Premiership>.

² T. Bharti, *Pradhanmantri Sangrahalaya: Museum on Indian Prime Ministers*, 2024, <https://www.pmsangrahalaya.gov.in/prime-ministers-of-india>; Coppedge et al., *V-Dem India 1900 - 2023 Dataset v14, Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project*, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.23696/mcwt-fr58>.

³ Bharti, *Pradhanmantri Sangrahalaya*, 2024.

characterized by harassment of journalists and political opponents, a lack of independent media, the use of bribery during elections, and other acts which subvert democracy. However, competitive authoritarian regimes are not fully authoritarian; while unfair, the opposition can still hold and gain power and pose a credible threat to the regime⁴. The traditional threats to authoritarian regimes, e.g. coup risk, military intervention, modernization, foreign intervention, etc., do not pose substantial risk to Modi's regime. The civilian government has strong control of the military and the necessity of India's stability as a powerhouse in Asia mitigates the risk of foreign intervention⁵. The areas that opposition forces can use to weaken or depose authoritarian incumbents which Levitsky and Way identify are through the judiciary, media, legislature, and elections⁶. Beyond these areas, one additional mechanism threatens the stability of competitive authoritarian regimes - mass mobilization⁷. However, in India, the co-optation, or the integration of potential oppositional forces into the regime,⁸ of the judiciary and the media demonstrate how certain democratic threats have been neutralized.

The Judiciary and The Media

In competitive authoritarian regimes, the judiciary is commonly subverted through the use of bribes, impeachment, and other co-optation mechanisms⁹. While a strong and independent judiciary can oppose an incumbent regime, in India, the judiciary has aligned itself with the BJP

⁴ Levitsky and Way, "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism."

⁵ D. S. Raje-Byrne, "Who Guards the Guardians?" *The Problem of a Civilian-Controlled Military in India*, Feature from King's College London, June 13, 2022, <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/who-guards-the-guardians-the-problem-of-a-civilian-controlled-military-in-india>; Derek Grossman, *U.S.-India Ties Remain Fundamentally Fragile*, *RAND*, April 7, 2024, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2024/04/us-india-ties-remain-fundamentally-fragile.html>.

⁶ Levitsky and Way, "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism."

⁷ Jay Ulfeder, "Contentious Collective Action and the Breakdown of Authoritarian Regimes," *International Political Science Review* 26, no. 3 (2005): 311-334.

⁸ Jennifer Gandhi and Adam Przeworski, "Authoritarian Institutions and the Survival of Autocrats," *Comparative Political Studies* 40, no. 10 (2007): 1279-1301.

⁹ Levitsky and Way, "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism."

government and has not served as an effective check on executive power¹⁰. In democracies, the media plays an important role investigating and reporting government actions, leading to an informed electorate¹¹. However, independent media is repressed in competitive authoritarian states, including India. Since Modi came into power, India has dropped 21 positions and ranks 161st out of 180 in the Reporters Without Borders' World Press Freedom Index¹². While both the judiciary and media present areas of democratic contestation, in India, these institutions have not significantly threatened Modi's regime. Although legislative, electoral, civilian safeguards persist and create some hope of future regime breakdown, Modi has leveraged these institutions to reinforce his authority.

The Legislature, Elections, and Mass Mobilization

The three institutions that have posed notable challenges to the democratic backsliding in India are the legislature, elections, and mass mobilization. Legislatures provide the opposition a legitimate space for organizing and denouncing the regime¹³. In India, the legislature has served to slow the nation's authoritarian descent because of the entrenched multi-party system and federal structure of the government that has necessitated cooperation the BJP and other parties in both the federal and state levels of government¹⁴. Elections, the most important area of contestation, provide the most direct mechanism for the opposition in competitive authoritarian regimes to challenge and overthrow their authoritarian incumbents. Although mechanisms

¹⁰ *The Economist*, *How Independent Is India's Supreme Court?*, February 22, 2024, <https://www.economist.com/asia/2024/02/22/how-independent-is-indias-supreme-court>.

¹¹ Levitsky and Way, "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism."

¹² Anirban Dutta, *Small Signs of Hope—But a Long Way to Go—for Indian Media Independence*, *Columbia Journalism Review*, June 7, 2024, https://www.cjr.org/the_media_today/india_elections_modi_media.php.

¹³ Levitsky and Way, "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism."

¹⁴ G. Price, *Democracy in India*, Chatham House – International Affairs Think Tank, 2023, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2022/04/democracy-india>.

implemented by the incumbents create unfair advantages, incumbents take elections seriously¹⁵. In India, the most recent elections reflected the instability of the BJP's party platform. Expected to be a landslide victory, the opposition alliance, the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA), made substantial gains in the 2024 elections¹⁶. Mass mobilization - particularly amongst vulnerable populations and civil society organizations - has emerged in response to an oppressive state apparatus fueled by Hindutva, a Hindu-nationalist ideology¹⁷. Popular movements threaten the stability of authoritarian regimes by portraying citizens' discontent, prompting the attention and potential intervention of key actors¹⁸. The scope of this paper will focus on the vulnerabilities posed by the legislature, the electorate, and civilian mobilization to India's competitive authoritarian regime and how Modi has overcome these threats to entrench his power.

Legislature:

Legislatures are one democratic mechanism which threatens the stability of competitive authoritarian regimes by offering the opposition a legitimate platform to organize, contest the regime's authority, and influence-policy making. However, the threat legislatures pose can be mitigated. When done successfully, as Modi has achieved, the neutralization of this threat can solidify a competitive authoritarian regime.

¹⁵ Levitsky and Way, "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism."

¹⁶ Sudha Kapoor, India Election: Why Did Modi's BJP Lose in Stronghold Uttar Pradesh?, Al Jazeera, June 6, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/6/6/india-election-why-did-modis-bjp-lose-in-uttar-pradesh-its-fortress>.

¹⁷ Al Jazeera, *Mapping the Results of the India Election 2024*, June 6, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/6/6/mapping-the-results-of-the-india-election-2024>; BBC News, *Citizenship Act Protests: Three Dead and Thousands Held in India*, December 19, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-50833361>.

¹⁸ Ulfeder, "Contentious Collective Action and the Breakdown of Authoritarian Regimes"

Authoritarian regimes, especially those headed by what Gandhi and Przeworski refer to as non-royal civilians (or simply civilian regimes), threats posed by the opposition are neutralized through co-optation, e.g. providing opposition groups a limited stake in government. This limited stake is commonly provided through partisan legislatures which provide opposition groups an institutional setting where they have access power, an opportunity to pursue their interests in a system with rules, and transparency of the dictator's agenda. For the dictator, legislatures provide information on the strength and demands of the opposition, a way to control power access, and the appearance of the implementation of democratic practices. This tug of war between the authoritarian and the political opposition ultimately impacts the longevity of the authoritarian in office and depends on the level of domestic cooperation, strength of the opposition, and the level of institutionalization, the use of formal political institutions that facilitate political co-optation within the regime¹⁹. Using contemporary India as a case-study, moderate levels of domestic cooperation and oppositional strength coupled with a high level of institutionalization suggests the continued endurance of the regime.

Domestic Cooperation and Oppositional Strength

The need for domestic cooperation inherent in governments, which rely on legislatures to pass and enact policy, presents one democratic safeguard against competitive authoritarian regimes. Although Modi has ushered in an era of democratic backsliding during his three terms in office, the nation's descent into an authoritarian regime has been tapered because of the historically entrenched multi-party system and federal structure of the government that has necessitated cooperation between the BJP and other parties in both the federal and state levels of government²⁰. 41 parties are represented in the Lok Sabha. In the most recent election, the BJP

¹⁹ Gandhi and Przeworski, "Authoritarian Institutions and the Survival of Autocrats"

²⁰ Price, *Democracy in India*.

won 240 of the 543 seats in Lok Sabha, less than the 273 seats needed for any party to win the simple majority needed to instate the nation's prime minister. However, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) coalition, which the BJP leads, was able to secure 293 seats and reinstate Modi as prime minister²¹. INDIA led by the Indian National Congress party (INC), was able to secure 142 seats in the Lok Sabha²². This parliamentary divide is significant because the NDA coalition does not have the $\frac{2}{3}$ majority needed to amend the constitution. However, the NDA does possess the simple majority needed to pass ordinary bills and acts²³. The BJP has used their majority to pass the Citizenship Amendment Act, farm laws, and changes in the electoral procedures which have infringed on the civil liberties of minority groups, threaten the livelihood of the poor, and call into question the integrity of elections²⁴. Due to the need of opposition forces to pass constitutional amendments, but not acts, the need for domestic cooperation in India is moderate.

Although INDIA does not possess the simple majority needed to prevent the passage of certain bills in the legislature, they still possess considerable influence in state-level politics. The federalist structure of India's politics grants local autonomy to each of the states, increasing the need for cooperation between national and state governments. For instance, the upper house of parliament, the Rajya Sabha, is composed of representatives from state legislatures²⁵. The contest between NDA and INDIA controlled state legislatures is much closer than it is on the national field. 57% of the population lives in NDA controlled states, while 43% of the population lives in

²¹ PRS Legislative Research, *Profile of the 18th Lok Sabha*, October 26, 2024, <https://prsindia.org/parliamenttrack/vital-stats/profile-of-the-18th-lok-sabha>.

²² D. Munjal, *Which Are the 26 Parties in the India Combine, the Face of Opposition Unity for the 2024 Lok Sabha Polls?*, *The Hindu*, July 26, 2023, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/which-are-the-26-parties-in-the-india-combine-the-face-of-opposition-unity-for-the-2024-lok-sabha-polls/article67115171.ece>.

²³ Parliament of India, Lok Sabha, *The Law Making Process* (New Delhi, 2022).

²⁴ P. N. Kaul, *Increasing Authoritarianism in India under Narendra Modi*, Australian Institute of International Affairs, August 2, 2023, <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/increasing-authoritarianism-in-india-under-narendra-modi/>

²⁵ Price, *Democracy in India*.

INDIA controlled states²⁶. Moreover, key states lie within the control of the opposition. Uttar Pradesh, India's largest state with 80 seats in parliament, has historically been known as the gateway towards politics and has been the heart of the campaign for the former prime ministers of India²⁷. In 2014, the BJP held control of the state and won 71 out of the 80 seats. In 2019, the BJP held 62 seats. However, in 2024, the BJP lost 29 seats, losing their majority in the state; the INC now holds the most seats in Uttar Pradesh with 37²⁸. Taking into consideration the constraints the INDIA faces in the national field and their influence in state governments, the strength of the opposition in India is moderate, offering support for a future of greater legislative threat. However, the high levels of regime institutionalization mitigates the legislature's influence.

Institutionalization

The level of institutionalization under Modi's regime is incredibly high. As described above, India's parliamentary system of government and partisan legislature serves to provide a stake in the government to opposition forces. However, the power of the opposition is mitigated by the electoral control mechanisms that the BJP has implemented. These include the selective disenfranchisement of rural, low-income, and religious minority populations²⁹. Additionally, the introduction of unfair political financing schemes that have disproportionately supported the BJP and the jailing of prominent opposition leaders have led to an unfair electoral advantage of the

²⁶ Shiv Aroor, BJP Now Has 12 States, Congress Has 3: India's Electoral Map and Road to 2024, India Today, December 4, 2023, <https://www.indiatoday.in/elections/story/bjp-political-map-landscape-after-latest-win-assembly-elections-congress-india-electoral-map-and-road-to-2024-lok-sabha-elections-2471578-2023-12-04>.

²⁷ Geeta Pandey, "Uttar Pradesh: The State Holding the Key to India PM Modi's Re-Election," *BBC News*, May 28, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cqee449v15lo>.

²⁸ Kapoor, *India Election: Why Did Modi's BJP Lose in Stronghold Uttar Pradesh?*.

²⁹ B. Sen, *The World's Largest Election Ever Is Neither Free Nor Fair*, *Truthout*, June 3, 2024, <https://truthout.org/articles/the-worlds-largest-election-ever-is-neither-free-nor-fair/>.

BJP³⁰. The aforementioned examples show that the high levels of institutionalization that characterize Indian politics provide a stake to the opposition; however, the opposition's power is tempered by electoral control mechanisms that serve to inhibit the opposition's ability to participate competitively in elections.

Considering the moderate need for cooperation and the moderate strength of the opposition, it can be concluded that the high levels of institutionalization would serve to increase the longevity of Modi's tenure as prime minister. In spite of the fluctuating intensity of the opposition's threat, the overinstitutionalization exercised allows Modi to defend his power. Modi is set to be one of the longest prime ministers of India³¹.

Elections:

Elections provide the most direct mechanism for a citizenry to contest and potentially overthrow competitive authoritarian regimes. Incumbent leaders will thwart the basic integrity of elections - which affords one vote to each eligible citizen - in their favor. Yet, even electoral manipulation is not enough to remove the threat of the ballot box. However, selective disenfranchisement and uneven political financing have allowed Modi and the BJP to continue to assert their dominance in government.

Most of the world's democracies can be characterized as having a robust winning coalition, the subset of the electorate that is needed to keep an incumbent in power, and a robust

³⁰ Alia Chughtai and Sanya Khalid, *All You Need to Know About Indian Elections*, *Al Jazeera*, April 11, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/4/11/india-elections-all-you-need-to-know>; Anirban Mukherjee, *India Election: 'Billionaire Raj' Is Backing Modi and Leading to Autocracy*, *Bloomberg*, March 25, 2024, <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2024-03-25/india-election-billionaire-raj-is-backing-modi-and-leading-to-autocracy>; Isaac Chotiner, *Has Modi Pushed Indian Democracy Past Its Breaking Point?*, *The New Yorker*, March 31, 2023, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/has-modi-pushed-indian-democracy-past-its-breaking-point>.

³¹ *Jawaharlal Nehru to Narendra Modi: Longest-Serving PMs of India*, *The Economic Times*, February 24, 2024, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/jawaharlal-nehru-to-narendra-modi-longest-serving-pms-of-india/jawaharlal-nehru-1947-1964/slideshow/108045655.cms?from=mdr>.

selectorate, the subset of the population that can become the winning coalition. In democracies, the selectorate is the enfranchised population and the winning coalition is generally the 51% of the selectorate needed to win an election. On the contrary, most autocracies can be characterized by a large selectorate, but a small winning coalition. Autocrats do not rely on elections to maintain their power and instead usually rely on the support of a small number of elites³². In democratic regimes experiencing backsliding, as India is, the integrity of elections is slowly thwarted in favor of the incumbent.

Challenges to Electoral Inclusion and Insulation

Elections in competitive authoritarian regimes can be manipulated in a multitude of ways. Authoritarian regimes have a “menu of manipulation” that threaten seven essential dimensions of democratic elections. These include 1) empowerment - the delegation of decision making power 2) freedom of supply - the ability to form and support an opposition 3) freedom of demand - the power to learn and access independent information about the opposition 4) inclusion - the enfranchisement of all constituents 5) insulation - the safety to express electoral preferences 6) integrity - the equality of all votes 7) irreversibility - the respect and adherence to all electoral outcomes³³. Although the vast majority of these dimensions have been violated under Modi, the most pressing electoral concerns come with violations in electoral inclusion and insulation - reflected in the explicit manipulation of the selectorate and winning coalition from one that reflects a robust democracy to one of an authoritarian regime³⁴. In India, Modi has specifically targeted those in poverty and from religious minorities; these populations are repressed and more

³² Andreas Schedler, "The Menu of Manipulation," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002): 36-50.

³³ Schedler, "The Menu of Manipulation," 2002

³⁴ Priya Chacko, "With Democracy under Threat in Narendra Modi's India, How Free and Fair Will This Year's Election Be?", *The Conversation*, July 26, 2024, <https://theconversation.com/with-democracy-under-threat-in-narendra-modis-india-how-free-and-fair-will-this-years-election-be-226321>.

likely to vote for Modi's opposition; Modi increases his chances of re-election by reducing their political salience.

Disenfranchisement

The nation's poor face significant challenges to liberty and enfranchisement, a violation of electoral inclusion. For instance, 2 million people in the state of Assam were stripped of their citizenship and held indefinitely after being unable to produce their birth certificates. This adds to 65% of the rural population and a significant number of those from low-income classes do not possess this document. Since identification is needed in order to participate in elections, effectively disenfranchising impoverished people who may be unable to pay to secure identification. Muslims and other minority groups have faced targeting and a loss of citizenship as well. Citizenship laws have been altered to make it harder for Muslims and easier for other groups to naturalize; political participation in some areas is restricted because of insurgent violence rooted in hindu-nationalism³⁵. The selective disenfranchisement of poor and minority populations, and the empowerment of others, reflects the targeted actions on the part of the government to mold the selectorate of the population in their favor by silencing dissidents.

Political Financing

Modi also uses government funds to gain and maintain the support of the winning coalition in order to remain in power. Traditionally, in democracies, since the winning coalition is large, leaders decide to use their funds to distribute public goods, cheap incentives that affect a large number of people. These can include funding public education, health care access, infrastructural development, direct cash assistance, and other programs. In autocracies, since the winning coalition is small, it is more efficient for leaders to provide private goods, such as tax

³⁵ Sen, *The World's Largest Election Ever Is Neither Free Nor Fair*.

breaks, subsidies, and loose regulations in key industries, to key players³⁶. Modi's funding priorities reflect India's descent into an electoral autocratic state, gradually providing more financial incentives to his elite supporters while still maintaining a meager distribution of public goods necessary to maintain the support of the masses in the world's largest democracy.

The growth of an uneven political financing system driven by elite investment has leveraged to support Modi and the BJP³⁷. The introduction of electoral bonds has introduced significant amounts of black money into elections³⁸. In spite of the fact that they have been deemed unconstitutional by the supreme court as it allowed entities to make anonymous unlimited donations to a candidate. The greatest beneficiary? Modi. 75% of these electoral bonds, more than \$1.5 billion, have been provided to the BJP³⁹. These companies were in turn provided with major government contracts, reflecting government corruption⁴⁰. During Modi's time in office, the top income earners have had their income double, those in the middle and lower classes have grown a fraction of that. This is because significant industries have been monopolized, lucrative contracts awarded, protectionist trade policies passed, and tax cuts implemented⁴¹, reflecting a distribution of private goods characteristic of autocratic regimes.

Meager funds have been allocated to the distribution of public goods, such as the provision of monthly rations of food and other basic services, characteristic of democracies⁴². Instead, during the most recent election season, bribery was pervasive in swaying constituents' votes, another example of a violation of electoral insulation. The Indian Election Commission

³⁶ Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, James Morrow, Randolph Siverson, and Alastair Smith, "Political Competition and Economic Growth," *Journal of Democracy* 12, no. 1 (2001): 58-72.

³⁷ Chacko, *With Democracy under Threat*.

³⁸ Chughtai and Khalid, *All You Need to Know About Indian Elections*.

³⁹ Mukherjee, *India Election: 'Billionaire Raj' Is Backing Modi*.

⁴⁰ Chacko, *With Democracy under Threat*.

⁴¹ Mukherjee, *India Election: 'Billionaire Raj' Is Backing Modi*.

⁴² Mukherjee, *India Election: 'Billionaire Raj' Is Backing Modi*.

cites that they seized more than \$1 billion in assets only between March and May of this year⁴³. It seems that these limited economic rents provided to a particular segment of the selectorate, in addition to the religious polarization of the constituency, are being used as cover against the larger economic and political dealings which are occurring. These actions indicate that Modi and the BJP are narrowing the winning coalition to the ultra-wealthy who are receiving significant private goods and providing Modi and the BJP with the support he needs to finance and win the election.

Since the beginning of his prime ministership, Modi has been slowly altering selectorate and the winning coalition from one that reflects a robust and competitive democracy to one that characterizes an autocratic regime through violating tenants of electoral inclusion and insulation. What should have been a society characterized by inclusive citizenship and popular sovereignty, is now a society that is increasingly characterized by one that selectively provides and revokes citizenship. The shifting selectorate and winning coalition in the country is also associated with a biased apportionment of public and private goods. In a democracy, political and economic rents should primarily be catered towards the public, since an incumbent requires the support of a majority. However, in India, the significant needs of the public are not being addressed as is reflected in worsening inequality and limited upward mobility. Instead, the Ambani's of India are having their wealth increased through favorable governmental intervention. A persistent subversion of electoral integrity will increase the likelihood Modi's reign will continue to persist.

Mass Mobilization:

Both the legislative and electoral contestation in India has been facilitated by mass-based mobilization spurred in large part by religious-based oppression driven by the BJP propagation

⁴³ Omkar Khandekar, *In a Remote Indian State, Trading Cash and Gifts for Votes Is an Open Secret*, NPR, May 31, 2024, <https://www.npr.org/2024/05/31/1252054006/india-elections-bribery-arunachal-pradesh>.

of nationalist Hindutva ideology. Large movements driven by popular discontent threaten incumbents. As established, in India, while the integrity of elections has been threatened, politicians still rely on their constituents to secure their seats in power; with high rates of discontent, politicians will be less likely to align with Modi or the BJP. However, the personalist dimension of Modi's regime minimizes the threat grass-roots mobilization poses.

The rise in Hindu-nationalism has been associated with an increase in repression against religious minorities and lower castes, consequently fueling popular protests. For instance, there have been multiple cases of Muslims being lynched simply because of suspicions of possessing beef or of Christians being attacked after being accused of facilitating religious conversions⁴⁴. From a legal standpoint, the passage of the Prevention of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Act which criminalized interfaith relationships in Uttar Pradesh or the 2019 Citizen Amendment Act which restricts the citizenship pathways for Muslim immigrants are examples of this⁴⁵. Quantitative measures have gauged that under Modi's leadership, religious based repression in India has gone from substantial to severe⁴⁶. However, the increase in repression against vulnerable populations has increased citizen engagement in politics, posing a threat to Modi's power.

In response to the Citizen Amendment Act, tens of thousands of people took to the streets in protest of the law and more than 200 petitions were developed and processed by the judicial

⁴⁴ P. N. Kaul, *Increasing Authoritarianism in India under Narendra Modi*, *Australian Institute of International Affairs*, August 2, 2023, <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/increasing-authoritarianism-in-india-under-narendra-modi/>.

⁴⁵ Simon Fuchs, *The Authoritarian Leader's Playbook: How Narendra Modi Captured India's Legal System and Is Rewriting the Country's History in His Image*, *The Conversation*, June 11, 2024, <https://theconversation.com/the-authoritarian-leaders-playbook-how-narendra-modi-captured-indias-legal-system-and-is-rewriting-the-countrys-history-in-his-image-226889>.

⁴⁶ Varieties of Democracy, *Religious Organization Repression*, V-DEM, 2023, https://v-dem.net/data_analysis/VariableGraph/.

system in opposition to the law⁴⁷. This movement reflects the continued strength of civil society in spite of the fact civil society based repression has increased significantly under Modi⁴⁸. The increase in mass mobilization is reflected quantitatively as well. Since its low in 2015 to its peak in 2020, the instances and support for mass mobilization in India has increased 5 fold⁴⁹. Due to the severe religious persecution, it should be no surprise that support for democracy falls along religious lines. A 2019 study by the Pew Research Center shows that Hindus in India prefer a leader with a strong hand than a democratic government. On the contrary, all other religious groups surveyed - Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Budhists, and Jains - support a democratic government over a strong singular leader⁵⁰. Thus, increases in religious repression may have actually galvanized the population, increasing mass mobilization and democratic pressure. These effects are evident in the recent election which increased the representation of politicians from the INDIA coalition in India⁵¹.

The Impact of Mass Mobilization

However, there seems to be little evidence to suggest that this mobilization will have a significant effect on the breakdown of Modi's regime. Although not fully autocratic, Modi's government has characteristics of both single-party and personalist regimes. Single-party autocracies are regimes where political power resides in one party which has authority over policy, government positions, and local organizations. The party's monopoly on power stems from a central ideology that serves the majority of the people⁵². Although there are many parties

⁴⁷ Al Jazeera, *Mapping the Results of the India Election 2024*; BBC News, *Citizenship Act Protests: Three Dead and Thousands Held in India*

⁴⁸ Varieties of Democracy, *CSO Repression*, 2023, https://v-dem.net/data_analysis/VariableGraph/.

⁴⁹ Varieties of Democracy, *Mass Mobilization*, 2023, https://v-dem.net/data_analysis/VariableGraph/.

⁵⁰ Pew Research Center, *Nationalism and Politics*, Pew Research Center, June 29, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/06/29/nationalism-and-politics/>.

⁵¹ Al Jazeera, *Mapping the Results*, 2024.

⁵² Jay Ulfeder, "Contentious Collective Action and the Breakdown of Authoritarian Regimes," *International Political Science Review* 26, no. 3 (2005): 311-334.

represented in India's government, the supremacy of the BJP-led coalition and influence the party has over diverse societal institutions cannot be understated. Further, the Hindu-majority nation has largely supported the BJP because of the Hindutva ideology it propagates⁵³. Jay Ulfedr, a prominent American political scientist, argues that collective action in single-party systems threaten the ideological foundations of the regime and pose a threat to it. But, the personalist dimension of the regime suggests that collective action will pose no threat to its stability⁵⁴.

Personalist regimes are ones in which power is highly concentrated in one individual. Personalistic regimes largely depend on elite-bargain and not mass mobilization, thus, collective action does little to threaten the stability of the regime⁵⁵. Modi is the face of the BJP, has developed a cult of personality, and eroded internal dissent within the BJP, all characteristics of a personalist leader. The lack of success of collective action of personalist regimes is reflected in India. The protests in the UP against the Citizenship Amendment Act, which makes faith a consideration in citizenship and targets the Muslim minority, led to the death of more than 30 protestors and were ultimately unsuccessful⁵⁶. Thus, although instances of mass-mobilization against Modi's government pose some risk to the regime's stability, the personalistic characteristics of the regime suggest that the threat is limited.

Conclusion:

In all, Modi's government faces vulnerabilities stemming from legislative and electoral contestation and mass mobilization. However, these vulnerabilities have been effectively addressed through legislative co-optation and over-institutionalization, violations of electoral

⁵³ Kaul, *Increasing Authoritarianism in India*.

⁵⁴ Ulfeder, "Contentious Collective Action and the Breakdown of Authoritarian Regimes."

⁵⁵ Ulfeder, "Contentious Collective Action and the Breakdown of Authoritarian Regimes."

⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch, *India: Protests, Attacks Over New Citizenship Law*, October 28, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/09/india-protests-attacks-over-new-citizenship-law>.

inclusion and insulation, and the suppression of popular movements. The recent election in which INDIA gained seats in the legislature provides hope that democratic contestation is possible. However, Modi's ability to overcome these safeguards has paradoxically consolidated his power - each vulnerability Modi overcame reinforces the durability of the regime. The current extent of governmental corruption and repression suggests that, for the time being, Modi's rule will continue and competitive authoritarianism will persist in India.

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