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Even As Ruling BJP Grows Politically Stronger, Question Marks On Indian Democracy (/perspective/even-ruling-bjp-grows-politically-stronger-question-marks-indian-democracy)

While in operational terms, India's democracy was downgraded by several international bodies in recent years to 'partly free', its perceptible decline is perhaps most evident in the distrust generated by the bureaucratic fiat of a selective voter revision. As the exercise has struck off names without a clear audit or requisite time for discussion for explaining and correcting such deletions, the tag of the world's largest democracy appears troubled by these developments.



(/contributors/24928/Dr. Rashmi Singh) By Dr. Rashmi Singh (/contributors/24928/Dr. Rashmi

Singh) | Jan 13, 2026



Representational Photo

The last year has been a year of consolidation of power for the BJP-led NDA government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in India after its reduced majority in the 2024 national elections, it has managed to regain power in several state elections while keeping a united house with its allies. The BJP won Delhi and Bihar in 2025, returning to power in Delhi after a stunning 27-year gap and tiding over expected anti-incumbency in Bihar in its tie up with regional party JD(U). The BJP managed to get the greater share of cabinet posts in the Bihar government, including the crucial home ministry and the speaker.

The party also managed to continue its hold over the Rajya Sabha after its candidate, C. P. Radhakrishnan, was elected as vice-president in September, defeating the opposition INDIA alliance's nominee, B. Sudershan Reddy. These wins confirmed the position of the BJP as a dominant player in national elections as well as a competitive party in state elections. They further affirm the tremendous electoral and institutional hold the BJP has on the current political system which remains intact despite the setback of the last general election.

Concerns Over Transparency

However, this consolidation has been met with growing concerns from the opposition over the lack of transparency in the conduct of elections. The Congress party (INC) rang alarms in August this year on the discrepancies in the voter lists found in the Mahadevapura segment of the Bangalore Central seat in Karnataka. The leader of the opposition claimed that they were denied access to digitized voter rolls, and by sifting through lakhs of physical voter rolls they were able to find duplicate votes and missing addresses that they claim accounted for the massive lead of the BJP in the assembly segment that helped it win the seat in 2024. The INC claimed that this was a clear case of a theft of the people's mandate or "vote chori" and has alleged that this could be the case for hundreds of other constituencies.

As the revelations from the INC pointed out glaring duplications from the electoral rolls, a special intensive revision (SIR) was already underway in Bihar. As around 6.5 million voters were removed from the draft list, questions were raised on why the process was undertaken three months before assembly polls were due in the state, especially as the state has a high percentage of poor migrants who could not be present for such a revision. More worryingly, the 'special' vote revision exercise has been flagged for pushing the burden of procuring documents for proving citizenship onto the voter and the authority for determining citizenship on the booth level officers (BLO). The initial charge against the exercise was on the absence of Aadhar as a citizenship document from the list, and most of the mandatory documents asked for are not ordinarily obtainable by marginalized voters. Various discrepancies and a rushed process have been the repercussions of the revision, which has been replicated in several other states to undertake what the ruling party argues is the "purification" of voter lists. Similar concerns have been raised with the SIR process in West Bengal in November and December this year.

Is Election Commission Neutral?

These allegations have created a disquiet on the role of the Election Commission of India (ECI), which has been under the scanner for no longer playing a neutral role in the ongoing tussle between the ruling party and the opposition. Crucial evidence, such as the camera footage from polling booths, is not available even 45 days after elections, and the lack of digital rolls that can help match existing discrepancies makes it nearly impossible to check the voter rolls in time for raising complaints. If in 2024 the ECI was seen avoiding ticking off the ruling party and PM Modi for their reportedly communal speeches, in 2025 it has ignored the violations of model code of conduct and offer of financial inducements during Bihar elections as the government has actively defended its role in every controversy. The unrelenting pressure of the SIR deadline on BLOs has caused several tragic deaths and suicides, while the poll body has simply dismissed these reports as politically motivated.

Is Indian Democracy Weaker?

All these developments have outwardly closed the democratic opening that seemed to have momentarily presented itself in 2024, and the mix of institutional power, financial clout and hold on media that the BJP has, puts it in a firm position in its third term. While in operational terms, India's democracy was downgraded by several international bodies in recent years to 'partly free', its perceptible decline is perhaps most evident in the distrust generated by the bureaucratic fiat of a selective voter revision. As the exercise has struck off names without a clear audit or requisite time for discussion for explaining and correcting such deletions, the tag of the world's largest democracy appears troubled by these developments. The country's weaker sections risk being taken off the list in the strange haste demanded by the commission and the universality of the vote and its value appears undermined in the rush.

What Awaits In 2026?

A number of contests are awaited in 2026, including state elections in West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry – many of which are going to be fiercely contested between the BJP and strong regional players. The BJP has revived its coalition with AIADMK in Tamil Nadu and has been working on restructuring party units in all upcoming contests. West Bengal is the state the party is especially interested to win to make it a symbolic conquest.

Some of the BJP's controversial bills, such as 'one nation one election', currently being examined by the joint parliamentary committee, are also likely to be tabled in the coming year and may rework the timeline of elections in the coming years. The arduous exercise of census and delimitation is likely to come up for debate as well, as the currently fixed proportion of seats in the parliament may be reworked – which will threaten the weightage and consultative capacity of many of India's southern states and test the country's federal arrangement.

(The author is Assistant Professor in Jindal School of Liberal Arts and Humanities, Jindal Global University, Sonipat, India. Views expressed are personal. She can be contacted at rsingh1@jgu.edu.in (<mailto:rsingh1@jgu.edu.in>)).

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