



ASIA MAIOR

Vol. XXXIV / 2023

Asia in 2023: Navigating the US-China rivalry

Edited by
Michelguglielmo Torri
Filippo Boni
Diego Maiorano

viella

A large, intricate, light-colored floral or mandala-like pattern is positioned in the bottom right corner of the cover, partially overlapping the text area.

CENTRO STUDI PER I POPOLI EXTRA-EUROPEI “CESARE BONACOSSA” - UNIVERSITÀ DI PAVIA

ASIA MAIOR

The Journal of the Italian think tank on Asia founded by Giorgio Borsa in 1989

Vol. XXXIV / 2023

Asia in 2023: Navigating the US-China rivalry

Edited by
Michelguglielmo Torri
Filippo Boni
Diego Maiorano

viella

Asia Maior. The Journal of the Italian Think Tank on Asia founded by Giorgio Borsa in 1989.

Copyright © 2023 - Viella s.r.l. & Associazione Asia Maior

ISBN 979-12-5469-681-1 (Paper) ISBN 979-12-5469-682-8 (Online)

ISSN 2385-2526 (Paper) ISSN 2612-6680 (Online)

Annual journal - Vol. XXXIV, 2023

This journal is published jointly by the think tank Asia Maior (Associazione Asia Maior) & the CSPE - Centro Studi per i Popoli Extra-europei «Cesare Bonaccossa», University of Pavia

Asia Maior: The Journal of the Italian Think Tank on Asia founded by Giorgio Borsa in 1989 is an open-access journal, whose issues and single articles can be freely downloaded from the think tank webpage: www.asiamaior.org.

The reference year is the one on which the analyses of the volume are focused. Each *Asia Maior* volume is always published in the year following the one indicated on the cover.

Paper version	Italy	€ 50.00	Abroad	€ 65.00
Subscription	abbonamenti@viella.it		www.viella.it	

EDITORIAL BOARD

Editor-in-chief (direttore responsabile):

Michelguglielmo Torri, University of Turin.

Co-editors:

Filippo Boni, The Open University.

Diego Maiorano, The University of Naples «L'Orientale».

Associate editors:

Axel Berkofsky, University of Pavia;

Giulio Pugliese, University of Oxford and European University Institute;

Emanuela Mangiarotti, University of Pavia;

Pierluigi Valsecchi, University of Pavia.

Consulting editors:

Elisabetta Basile, University of Rome «Sapienza»;

Kerry Brown, King's College London;

Peter Brian Ramsay Carey, Oxford University;

Rosa Caroli, University of Venice;

Jaewoo Choo, Kyung Hee University (Seoul, South Korea);

Jamie Seth Davidson, National University of Singapore;

Ritu Dewan, Indian Association for Women Studies;

Laura De Giorgi, University of Venice;

Kevin Hewison, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill;
Lucia Husenicova, University Matej Bel (Banská Bystrica, Slovakia);
David C. Kang, Maria Crutcher Professor of International Relations, University of Southern California;
Rohit Karki, Kathmandu School of Law;
Jeff Kingston, Temple University – Japan Campus;
Mirjam Künkler, Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study – Uppsala;
Noemi Lanna, University of Naples «L'Orientale»;
James Manor, School of Advanced Studies – University of London;
Aditya Mukherjee, Jawaharlal Nehru University;
Mridula Mukherjee, Jawaharlal Nehru University;
Parimala Rao, University of Delhi;
Guido Samarani, University of Venice;
Marisa Siddivò, University of Naples «L'Orientale»;
Eswaran Sridharan, Institute for the Advanced Study of India, University of Pennsylvania;
Arun Swamy, University of Guam;
Akio Takahara, University of Tokyo;
Edsel Tupaz, Harvard University alumnus, Ateneo de Manila University and Far Eastern University;
Sten Widmalm, Uppsala University;
Ather Zia, University of Northern Colorado;

Book reviews editors:

Elena Valdameri, ETH Zürich;
Aurelio Insisa, University of Hong Kong;
Luciano Zaccara, Qatar University.

Editorial secretary:

Chiara Benini

Graphic project:

Nicola Mocchi.

Before being published in *Asia Maior*, all articles, whether commissioned or unsolicited, after being first evaluated by the Journal's editors, are then submitted to a double-blind peer review involving up to three anonymous referees. Coherently with the spirit of the double-blind peer review process, *Asia Maior* does not make public the name of the reviewers. However, the reviewers' names – and, if need be, the whole correspondence between the journal's editors and the reviewer/s – can be disclosed to interested institutions, upon a formal request made directly to the Editor in Chief of the journal.

Articles meant for publication should be sent to Michelguglielmo Torri (mg.torri@gmail.com), Filippo Boni (filippo.boni@open.ac.uk), Diego Maiorano (dmaiorano@unior.it); book reviews should be sent to Elena Valdameri (elena.valdameri@gess.ethz.ch).



ASSOCIAZIONE ASIA MAIOR

Steering Committee: Filippo Boni, Marzia Casolari, Matteo Fumagalli, Michelguglielmo Torri (President).

Scientific Board: Guido Abbattista (Università di Trieste), Domenico Amirante (Università «Federico II», Napoli), Elisabetta Basile (Università «La Sapienza», Roma), Luigi Bonanate (Università di Torino), Claudio Cecchi (Università «La Sapienza», Roma), Alessandro Colombo (Università di Milano), Anton Giulio Maria de Robertis (Università di Bari), Thierry Di Costanzo (Université de Strasbourg), Max Guderzo (Università di Siena), Giorgio Milanetti (Università «La Sapienza», Roma), Paolo Puddinu (Università di Sassari), Adriano Rossi (Università «L'Orientale», Napoli), Giuseppe Sacco (Università «Roma Tre», Roma), Guido Samarani (Università «Ca' Foscari», Venezia), Filippo Sabetti (McGill University, Montréal), Gianni Vaggi (Università di Pavia).



CSPE - Centro Studi per i Popoli extra-europei
"Cesare Bonacossa" - Università di Pavia

Steering Committee: Axel Berkofsky, Arturo Colombo, Antonio Morone, Giulia Rossolillo, Gianni Vaggi, Pierluigi Valsecchi (President), Massimo Zaccaria.



viella

libreria editrice

via delle Alpi, 32

I-00198 ROMA

tel. 06 84 17 758

fax 06 85 35 39 60

www.viella.it

CONTENTS

IX *Foreword*

- 1 SILVIA MENEGAZZI, *China in 2023: Stimulating Economic Recovery along with Patriotic Education*
- 23 GIULIA SCIORATI, *China in 2023: A «Global-Security-Attentive» Foreign Policy*
- 39 MARCO MILANI & ANTONIO FIORI, *Korean peninsula 2023: A year of rising tensions and political polarization*
- 65 GIULIO PUGLIESE & MARCO ZAPPA, *Japan 2023: Still walking in Abe Shinzō's footsteps*
- 125 THAN KIŪ, *Hong Kong 2023: The new Chinese province*
- 145 AURELIO INSISA, *Taiwan 2023 and the 2024 Elections: A DPP partial victory after a contested electoral campaign*
- 167 MIGUEL ENRICO G. AYSON & LARA GIANINA S. REYES, *The Philippines 2022-2023: A turbulent start for the New Era of Marcos leadership*
- 187 EMANUELA MANGIAROTTI, *Malaysia 2023: A reform agenda overshadowed by identity politics*
- 203 RICHARD QUANG-ANH TRAN, *Vietnam 2020-2023: Covid Pandemic Recovery, Unprecedented Leadership Turnover, and Continued Multilateralism*
- 217 CAROLINE BENNETT, *Cambodia 2022-2023: Securing dynastic autocracy*
- 235 MATTEO FUMAGALLI, *Myanmar 2023: New conflicts and coalitions reshape war narrative, challenging an embattled junta*
- 259 DIEGO MAIORANO & RAGHAW KHATTRI, *India 2023: Towards the general elections amid rising social tension*
- 301 IAN HALL, *India 2023: Tactical wins and strategic setbacks in foreign policy?*
- 323 MATTEO MIELE, *Nepal 2020-2023: From the Institutional Crisis to New Political Paths*
- 339 DIEGO ABENANTE, *Sri Lanka 2023: Wickremesinghe's first six months between economic recovery and political uncertainty*
- 353 MARCO CORSI, *Pakistan 2023: Multiple crises in the lead-up to the general elections*
- 375 FILIPPO BONI, *Afghanistan 2023: Taliban governance and international isolation*
- 389 GIORGIA PERLETTA, *Iran 2023: Intensified Focus on the Eastward Strategy and Ongoing Fractures in State-Society Relations*
- Special articles*
- 407 ENRICO FARDELLA, *When history rhymes: China's relations with Russia and the war in Ukraine*
- 433 DAVID SCOTT, *The return of the 'Indo-Pacific'*
- 451 *Reviews*
- 479 *Appendix*

INDIA 2023: TOWARDS THE GENERAL ELECTIONS AMID RISING SOCIAL TENSION

Diego Maiorano

and

Raghav Khattri

University of Naples «L'Orientale»
and National University
of Singapore
dmaiorano@unior.it

National University
of Singapore
khatttri@nus.edu.sg

In 2023, India's political parties started preparations ahead of the 2024 general elections. The ruling BJP banked on Narendra Modi's enduring popularity and his virtual monopoly of India's political scene. Particularly important was the year-long spectacle of India's presidency of the G20, which gave the Prime Minister an endless source of visibility. Opposition parties started a difficult process of negotiation to present themselves as unified as possible at the polls. However, decades of competition among them made the process extremely complicated and uphill. The results of nine state elections, where the BJP performed very well, further complicated their task. The only weak link in the BJP's narrative seems to be the economy, which, despite impressive growth, seems to be fuelling inequality and remains unable to generate enough jobs for India's large and aspirational youth.

KEYWORDS – India; elections; democracy; ethnic tension; economic growth; unemployment.

1. Introduction

In 2023, India entered election mode. With the country going to the polls in spring 2024, political parties started preparations, both in terms of finding ways to appeal to voters as well as in terms of striking deals among each other. Moreover, as many as nine states went to polls during 2023, with the BJP obtaining extremely good results. This was discouraging for opposition parties, as they tried to find ways to avoid a third consecutive term of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), on the other hand, continued banking on Modi's popularity as well as on his promise to make India a country respected on the world's stage. This was particularly evident in the «spectacle» which surrounded India's presidency of the G20. These political dynamics are analysed in section 3.

The BJP seemed to be sailing through the electoral campaign with confidence, and most analysts predicted that Modi would be voted back to power. Modi's only weakness seemed to be the economic situation, analysed in section 2. Growth continued to be robust, but a dissection of the

data shows a remarkable growing of inequality and a persistent inability of the Indian economy to create enough jobs. However, it does not seem that enough Indian voters are putting economic consideration at the centre of their electoral decision-making process.

Finally, India's democracy continued its downward journey. This was particularly evident in two domains: first, the restriction of civil liberties; and, second, the erosion of democratic institutions. Both aspects are analysed in section 4.

2. The Indian Economy between high growth, unemployment and financial uncertainty

2.1. Growth and welfare

Analyses of the Indian economy over the last decades sound like a broken record. On the one hand, virtually every analysis shows robust economic growth; on the other, however, they also show very high levels of unemployment or underemployment and distress. The Indian economy in 2023 perfectly fits this decades-long pattern.

GDP growth remained solid, as did forecasts for the forthcoming years. According to the latest official data, in the two quarters for which data are available at the time of writing (April-June and July-September, 2023), the GDP grew by 7.8 and 7.6% (October 2023). Projections for the 2023/24 fiscal year are also solid [*Reuters* 2023, 1 December]. India thus remained firmly at its place as one of the fastest growing economies in the world. Even taking into account the persistent controversies about the country's GDP data – former Chief Economic Advisor Arvind Subramanian, Princeton Economist Ashoka Mody and former chief statistician of India Pronab Sen all raised doubts about the data and/or the methodology underpinning the calculation of the GDP [*Mint* 2023, 19 September; Thapar 2023, 29 November] – it remains that India's economy is sailing through a very challenging international environment, even though probably not as fast as it claims.

On the other hand, however, according to the Centre for Monitoring the Indian Economy (CMIE), unemployment rose to a 2-year high of 10.09%, largely because of rising joblessness in rural India [*The Wire* 2023, 2 November]. Youth Unemployment stood at 45.4% in 2022/23. Moreover, very worryingly for an economy supposedly in the midst of a «demographic dividend», the Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) – namely the share of persons in the population aged from 15 to 64 who are working or actively searching for a job – declined from a peak of 57% in 2000 to 49% in 2022, indicating both a growing reluctance and inability of women (including and especially educated ones) to enter the labour force as well as a growing number of young people (again, often educated) giving up the search for a job [Daniyal 2023, 18 December].

Government data, however, show a very different picture of *increasing* participation in the labour force since 2018/19 and *declining* unemployment. Even taking the official data at face value, these are hardly good news. In fact, the improvement would be mostly due to a growing rural workforce, which represents a reverse structural transformation – workers moving to the low productivity rural sector, instead of the other way around [PIB 2023]. Moreover, the latest Periodic Labour Force Survey shows a huge increase in self-employment, from 52% in 2017/18 to 58% in 2022/23 [Government of India 2023]. This is, in all probability, a profound sign of distress. In fact, entrepreneurial self-employment tends to move much more slowly; distress self-employment, on the contrary, suddenly increases at times of crisis, when people out of employment start selling goods or services informally and without any investment. Corroborating this picture, the official data also show an increase of casual workers, another clear sign of distress.

The paradox of very robust economic growth which fails to create enough jobs has long plagued the Indian economy. According to the *State of Working India Report 2023*, by scholars at Azim Premji University, India adds much fewer jobs per unit of economic growth than other developing countries. In fact, there seems to be no relation at all between economic growth and job creation, as «years of fast GDP growth have, on the contrary, tended to be years of slow employment growth» [Azim Premji University 2023].

One of the implications is that much of the fruits of growth remains concentrated at the top of the income scale, thus limiting the betterment of the living conditions of the majority of the population. Vivek Kaul disaggregated GDP data and showed a consistent pattern of increasing inequality since the COVID-19 pandemic [Kaul 2023, 22 May]. For instance, the sales of 2-wheelers have plummeted since 2018/19 and the sale of entry-level motorcycles has fallen even faster (-38% since 2018/19). On the other hand, car sales increased sharply, almost exclusively driven by increasing demand for large SUV, which, in the year under review, constituted 50% of the market [‘Car Economics’ 2023]. A similar story applied to smartphones (where iPhones and other top-end models increased their market share, while overall sales declined) and travel (where there was a sharp contraction of rail travel, as against a complete recovery of air travel to pre-pandemic levels). Finally, data show a declining demand (and declining sales) for Fast Moving Consumer Goods (toothpastes, soap etc.) in rural areas and a demand for work under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) which remains at much higher levels than before the pandemic [Kaul 2023, 22 May]. In short, an x-ray of domestic consumption – which accounts for about 60% of India’s GDP – does not show an image of a very healthy patient and certainly clashes with the glowing headlines about India’s growth story.

In this context, the Budget for the FY 2023/24, presented on 1st February 2023, included some puzzling news, considering that it was the last

full budget before the 2024 general elections. In short, government expenditure went down and there were some rather radical cuts to some of the country's largest welfare schemes. For instance, allocations for MGNREGA – which provides employment on the demand for rural residents – were 33% lower than the Revised Estimates (RE) for the FY 2022/23 [Accountability Initiative 2023a]. The allocation for the Poshan 2.0 scheme – which, since 2021, combined different schemes for the welfare of children, adolescent girls and lactating mothers – was just 1% higher than the previous year's RE and 3% lower than the allocations made four years earlier [Accountability Initiative 2023b]. The Food subsidy was reduced by a whopping 31% over the 2022/23 RE. This was largely due to the rolling back of the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana, a scheme launched during the COVID-19 pandemic which allotted, free of charge, 5 kg of cereals per person per month to every National Food Security Act (NFSA) cardholders (about two-third of the population). The move was supposed to be compensated by the Union Government's decision to lift the nominal price that NFSA cardholders pay to purchase their entitlements under the Act (i.e. Rs. 2 per kg of wheat and Rs. 3 per kg of rice). In other words, a family of five will go from having the right to purchase kg 50 of cereals a month for a price between 50 and 75 rupees, to getting kg. 25 of cereals for free. Families will face a huge loss [Accountability Initiative 2023c].

SCHEME	TIME PERIOD	NOMINAL TERMS	REAL TERMS
SSA	2011-12 to 2018-19	23%	-18%
RMSA	2011-12 to 2018-19	36%	-9%
Samagra Shiksha	2018-19 to 2022-23	27%	2%
ICDS Core	2011-12 to 2020-21	11%	-34%
Mission Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0	2021-22 RE to 2022-23 BE	1%	-5%
PM POSHAN	2011-12 to 2022-23 BE	3%	-45%
CPS	2011-12 to 2020-21	378%	187%
TSC/NBA/SBM-G	2011-12 to 2022-23 BE	254%	126%
MGNREGS	2011-12 to 2022-23 BE	150%	34%
NHM	2011-12 to 2022-23 BE	122%	19%

PMGSY	2011-12 to 2022-23 BE	-2%	-47%
IAY/PMAY-G	2011-12 to 2022-23 BE	103%	9%
NSAP	2011-12 to 2022-23 BE	12%	-20%
IGMSY/PMMVY	2011-12 to 2020-21	284%	131%
PM KISAN	2018-19 to 2022-23 BE	5379%	4295%
Food Subsidy	2011-12 to 2022-23 BE	184%	52%
AB-PMJAY	2018-19 to 2022-23 BE	221%	157%
AB-HWCs	2018-19 to 2021-22 RE	30%	11%
NRDWP/NRDWM/JJM	2011-12 to 2022-23 BE	606%	279%
Source: [Accountability Initiative 2023d]. See appendix for a brief description of each scheme. Reproduced with permission.			

Overall, the cuts to social spending are quite radical, also considering that the figures just presented are in nominal terms. Given the high inflation which affected the country over the last two years, the roll back of some of the most important welfare schemes are even more impactful in real terms. In fact, expenditure on five large schemes (covering nutrition, old age pension, maternity benefits and rural employment), declined from 0.49% of the GDP in 2022/23 to 0.36% in 2023/24. In 2009/10, these schemes represented 0.93% of the GDP [Drèze and Khera 2023, 1 February].

This may sound surprising not only because India is going towards a general election; but also because Modi made welfare one of the central planks of its electoral agenda [Aiyar 2019]. An analysis of 19 welfare schemes over the period 2008-2023 reveals that the Modi governments enacted profound remodulation of the «right agenda» [Ruparelia 2013] inherited by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) regime. As Table 1 shows, while some schemes have been heavily defunded in real terms, others have fared much better. Generally speaking, schemes providing services saw lower or much lower budgetary allocations, while schemes providing tangible goods – housing, toilets, cash and insurance – have been prioritised [Accountability Initiative 2023d]. Incidentally, the latter category includes all of the schemes most closely associated with the Prime Minister [Aiyar & Tillin 2020] and his «welfarist agenda» [Subramaniam and Felman 2021, 14 December].

2.2. *The Hindenburg Report*

In late January 2023, a tsunami hit India's financial market. A small, New York-based, short-selling¹ firm, Hindenburg Research, published a report accusing the Adani Group of «brazen stock manipulation and accounting fraud», constituting the «largest con in corporate history» [Hindenburg Research 2023]. The Adani group's 7 listed companies lost more than US\$ 100 billion in capitalisation over the following weeks. (Hindenburg Research «shorted» Adani companies' stocks before publishing the report, thus profiting enormously from the fall in stocks' prices). Adani Total lost 85% of its market value as of November 2023 [*Business Standard* 2023, 23 October].

The report was explosive for several reasons. First, it was the result of a 2-year investigation, which was taken very seriously by national and international investors. The Adani Group's 400-pages rebuttal, did not calm the markets [Adani Group 2023].

Second, Gautam Adani, before the publication of the Hindenburg Report India's richest and the world's third richest man, was widely known to be very close to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In fact, their two stories were largely intertwined, since the early days of Modi as Gujarat's Prime Minister [Jaffrelot 2021]. When the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won the national elections in 2014, Modi flew to Delhi on Adani's private jet.

Third, Modi and Adani's partnership has become increasingly close since 2014. Adani's personal net worth – largely based on the value of his stocks – went from US\$ 7 billion in 2014 to US\$ 120 billion on the eve of the Hindenburg Report [Reed and Parkin 2023, 3 February]. In just three years before the Hindenburg report, the average market value of his 7 listed companies increased by a whopping 819%. In absolute terms, the Adani Group increased its value from US\$ 8 billion in 2014 to US\$ 288 billion in 2022, largely because of a series of large-scale business deals, mostly focused on building infrastructures, both in India and abroad – a key development strategy of the Narendra Modi government [*The Economist* 2023, 23 May]. In other words, Adani emerged as India's «national champion», whose fortunes could not be separated from India's overall growth story. In fact, the Adani Group said as much in its rebuttal to the Hindenburg report, dubbing it a «a calculated attack on India and on the independence, integrity and quality of Indian institutions» [Tranvelli 2023, 4 February].

Fourth, opposition parties attacked the government on the issue. Given that the BJP had won the 2014 elections also on the basis of a fight against «crony capitalism» and corruption in the wake of a series of large scam that had marked the UPA 2 government, this was potentially a very embarrassing situation for the Prime Minister. However, Modi decided to remain largely silent on the issue [Ellis-Petersen 2023, 31 August]. The only

1. Short selling is a trading strategy aimed at profiting from a decline in an asset's price.

veiled reference to the whole saga was during a speech in Parliament, where he said that the trust which «crore of Indians» put on him was his «protective shield» from his detractors [*India Today* 2023, 9 February].

The consequences, however, were not very significant, signalling once again Modi's insulation from otherwise catastrophic political downfalls. Of course, the Adani Group's heavy financial losses persisted for months after the publication of the report, especially after *The Guardian* and *The Financial Times* published previously undisclosed documents, suggesting that the Hindenburg's report was accurate on the most substantial points it had raised [Ellis-Petersen and Goodley 2023, 31 August]. Furthermore, the two newspapers suggested that SEBI (India's regulatory agency overseeing the financial market) had investigated the Adani Group since before 2014, but then lost interest. The Supreme Court ordered an investigation, whose results, after numerous postponements and deferments, were finally presented in November 2023. In short, the Supreme Court asserted that the Hindenburg report could not be taken at face value and that any decision on the matter would have to wait for the findings of the SEBI's investigation [Ananthakrishnan 2023, 25 November]. All of Adani listed companies bounced back. Probably the most serious consequences will be the loss of credibility for India's financial markets and regulatory capacity among international investors. However, it might well be that international investors will forget the whole episode quickly. In November 2023 (even before the Supreme Court's decision), for instance, the United States International Development Finance Corporation announced a US\$ 553 million loan to an Adani-owned port in Sri Lanka, largely to counter China's presence in the island [Parking & Cornish 2023, 8 November].

3. *Towards the 2024 general elections*

During 2023, India entered election mode. This was not only because as many as nine states – where about a fifth of the population lives – went to polls (section 3.1.), but also because of the looming 2024 general election. This set in motion a number of strategies by political parties, which will be analysed in section 3.2.

A second, worrying development of 2023 was the outbreak of violence and social tension in various parts of the country. Section 3.3. will look at the communal riots at the outskirts of Delhi; at the movement to make the state of Uttarakhand «Muslim-free»; and at the large-scale violent confrontation in Manipur.

Finally, the third important development was the continuation of the erosion of democracy, which was especially evident in the realm of civil liberties, to which the following sub-section is dedicated.

3.1. *State elections*

The 2023 state elections were held in three rounds for nine states, the first one in February (Meghalaya, Nagaland and Tripura), the second one in May (Karnataka), and the third one in November (Mizoram, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Telangana).² The BJP was in power (via majority or coalition) in five of these nine states – Tripura, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Karnataka, and Madhya Pradesh. In the February elections, the BJP alliance with the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT) won the Tripura elections while the BJP-Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP) alliance retained power in Nagaland. Furthermore, in Meghalaya, the BJP supported Conrad Sangma and his National People's Party, who were in government during the previous term, playing a crucial role in helping them to remain in power. In the May elections, the BJP lost to Congress in Karnataka. The November elections, the last before the 2024 general elections, had a few surprises. In what was termed as a «tight race» [*Reuters* 2023, 30 November], the BJP retained power in Madhya Pradesh with a full majority. Furthermore, the BJP won Rajasthan – a state where there were little to no signs of anti-incumbency. The most surprising result was from Chhattisgarh. Almost every exit poll [*The Times of India* 2023, 30 November] indicated either a Congress win or a hung assembly. However, the BJP emerged as the party with the majority, winning 54 out of 90 seats. In Mizoram, the Mizo National Front was ousted from power by the Zoram People's Movement. Lastly, the state of Telangana was the only sigh of relief for the Congress, which managed to defeat the two-time incumbent Bharatiya Rashtra Samiti (BRS), the political successor of the Telangana Rashtra Samiti (TRS). Telangana was the second southern state won by Congress in 2023 (after Karnataka). With two states under direct Congress rule, a coalition in Tamil Nadu, a strong footprint in Kerala, it can be argued that the Congress holds considerable power in South India.

Although the state elections are generally not a good indicator of how the general elections are going to pan out, these results did re-affirm that the BJP was very strong in the Hindi heartland and Congress and its INDIA alliance (on which more in section 3.2.) were more firmly rooted in South India. Let us now unpack how these elections unfolded. For sake of simplicity, let's discuss the elections by their macro-regions: Hindi-heartland and the South.

3.1.1. *The elections in the Hindi Heartland*

Even though Rajasthan shows the door to the incumbent every election, there was hope that in the 2023 elections, Congress would defy the pattern as Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot of Congress remained popular [Lodha

2. See the appendix for the details of all election results.

2023, 24 October]. However, the results were rather puzzling. The BJP won 115 assembly seats, secured around 42% of the vote share, and stormed back into power after five years. Let's unpack what went wrong for Congress in Rajasthan. Welfare was one of the principal points of debate in the elections. Gehlot's government launched many ambitious welfare schemes during its term. During 2023, Rajasthan became the first state to pass the Right to Health Bill, which makes treatment free at government hospitals and a select few private hospitals [Khan 2023, 25 March]. Previously, Gehlot also launched the Chiranjeevi Health Insurance Scheme, the Income Guarantee Act, the Workers Security Act, the Inflation relief camps, the Gig Workers Security Act, among others. In short, the Congress government did make a serious effort to implement an ambitious welfare agenda, in what is one of India's poorest states. Lokniti-CSDS surveys show that people did reap benefits from these welfare schemes [Kumar & Kumawat 2023, 6 December]. However, the party was not very successful at translating welfare into votes. The BJP, on the other hand, had an edge over the Congress when it came to conversion of welfare benefits (of central government schemes) to votes. For instance, 45% of the 48% of the voters who reaped the benefits of the Ujjwala Yojna (a Central government scheme) voted for the BJP [Kumar & Kumawat 2023, 6 December].

Some probably crucial factors which shaped electoral outcomes in the state were the in-fighting in the Congress camp, ever since Sachin Pilot's rebellion [*The Economic Times* 2020, 29 December] and allegations of corruption, atrocities against woman, and the exam paper-leaks [*The Indian Express* 2023, 4 November].³ The Lokniti-CSDS survey found out that 57% of the voters believed that corruption in the State had increased in the last five years [Mishra & Singh 2023, 6 December], and, when asked on how important the corruption factor was while deciding their vote, two-thirds of the voters said that it was important. Furthermore, the «majority of the respondents felt that 'paper leak' was a 'very important' factor for them in deciding who to vote for, while seven of every 10 respondents said that rising crimes against women was a matter of concern» [Lodha *et al.* 2023, 6 December]. Lastly, and most importantly, the election was not a straight duel of a chief minister against a chief minister candidate. Instead, it was a battle involving the Prime Minister against a chief minister. In fact, one of the slogans of the BJP was «Modi ki guarantee» – a way to remind voters that promises from local candidates came with a «guarantee» of the Prime Minister [Shastri 2023, 6 December]. Thus, the sum of these factors and Modi's enduring popularity worked well for the BJP and condemned the Congress to yet another electoral loss.

3. There were question paper leaks for several government exams. Recruitment exam for grade III librarians was cancelled in December 2019 due to a question paper leak. Furthermore, the Rajasthan Eligibility Examination for Teachers (REET) level I and II were also cancelled due to the same problem.

The results in Madhya Pradesh were also surprising. The BJP had been in power in Madhya Pradesh for almost two decades and thus naturally feared an anti-incumbency wave. Yet, the BJP managed to retain power and won 163 out of 230 legislative seats, bagging a whopping 48.55% of the vote share. Welfare, in this case too, did not seem to have a large impact. According to the Lokniti-CSDS survey, the beneficiaries of the Central government schemes «voted in a little larger proportion in favour of the BJP» [Borbora & Gyani 2023, 7 December]. Interestingly, even the people who did not benefit from the schemes voted for the BJP. For instance, «among the beneficiaries of the Mukhyamantri Kaushal Samvardhan Yojana, a skill-development scheme, 58% voted for the BJP compared with 33% who chose the Congress, but only 12% reported having benefited from it» [Borbora & Gyani 2023, 7 December].

Allegations of corruption did not harm the BJP much. Even though 62% of the people thought that corruption had increased in the state, less than half of them voted for Congress [Weston & Yadav 2023, 7 December]. Furthermore, 43% still believed that the BJP is an anti-corruption party [Weston & Yadav 2023, 7 December]. All the above is puzzling. A major argument which can perhaps explain these surprising results is that the BJP campaign did not project a single political leader as the chief minister in waiting [Anand Mohan 2023, 8 December]. Rather, the BJP fielded many party bigwigs like Narendra Singh Tomar, Kailash Vijayvargiya, Prahlad Patel, among others. This allowed the BJP to project multiple chief minister faces, which countered the existent anti-incumbency. On the other hand, Congress only relied on Kamal Nath and Digvijaya Singh – both had their own camps and did not involve the central leadership much in the campaign. Moreover, the two veteran leaders in the state probably failed to inspire a sense of novelty in the state's politics.

Perhaps the most shocking election outcome was Chhattisgarh. The Congress was expected to retain power and come back with a full majority. However, here again, the BJP shocked the Congress, and won 54 out of 90 seats with a 46.27% vote share. The issue of welfarism and development took a back seat again, as the BJP focussed the election campaign on corruption. In the first week of November 2023, four days before the first phase of the state elections, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) said that «they were probing an alleged payment of over ₹500 crore over some time to Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel by a betting app promoter» [Palshikar & Prakash 2023, 8 December]. This caused the campaign to turn into a slugfest and Congress's narrative and work on development and welfare were shadowed. As a result, the BJP was ahead among the people who decided to vote during the campaign, scoring 46% of the vote share against Congress's 41% [Palshikar & Prakash 2023, 8 December]. Furthermore, the BJP managed to capitalize on the tribal votes. A third of Chhattisgarh's assembly seats are reserved for Scheduled Tribes (STs), who account for

about one third of the state population. The Baghel-led Congress government had been very vocal when it came to opposing the Uniform Civil Code – a long-standing demand of the BJP, seeking to end differentiated personal laws, based on the religion of the person – and had argued that this law would infringe upon the customary rights of the tribal groups. Nonetheless, Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s campaign in Chhattisgarh brilliantly surpassed the Congress in winning tribal support [Paswan 2023, 4 December]. In fact, Modi emphasized the central programs for the development of tribal regions and the rise in the number of tribal people holding important positions in politics, including the presidency of India [Naidu 2023, 6 December]. Modi’s persistent outreach, which included re-naming a railway station after a tribal legend and recognizing the venerated tribal figure Govind Guru in his *Man Ki Baat* speech, probably struck a chord with tribal voters [Paswan 2023, 4 December]. The national level tribal community was effectively engaged and acknowledged by these activities. As a result, all 14 Assembly seats that went to the Congress in 2028 in the tribal region of Surguja flipped to the BJP. In another tribal region (Bastar) where the Congress won 11 of the 12 seats in 2018 and managed to win the last one in a by-poll, the party lost eight of the seats [Paswan 2023, 4 December].

Lastly, the choice of chief ministers by the BJP in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh was also very interesting. The BJP announced Vishnu Deo Sai, a tribal leader as the chief minister of Chhattisgarh; Bhanu Lal Sharma, a first-time Brahmin MLA as the chief minister of Rajasthan; and Mohan Yadav, a politician belonging to the Other Backward Classes (OBCs), as the chief minister of Madhya Pradesh. All of these chief ministers replaced BJP state stalwarts like two-time Rajasthan chief minister Vasundhara Raje, four-time Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, and three-time Chhattisgarh chief minister Raman Singh. It can be argued that this change of people at the top of state governments across the Hindi heartland highlights the BJP central command’s decision to limit the sphere of influence of tall state leaders [Pathak 2023, 14 December].

We can see how these elections, even though shaped by local factors, were national in character. The voters did not reward good governance in Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, and did not punish corruption in Madhya Pradesh. The voters voted for the BJP regardless of the benefits they reaped from the Congress and regardless of the qualms they had with the BJP. Interestingly, the Congress did not benefit either from its stance on the need to conduct a nation-wide caste census, like the one recently conducted in Bihar (see section 3.2). The issue was thought to help the Congress bag the votes of the OBCs, but survey results show that the BJP was able to maintain its lead among them. All of this shows that Modi’s popularity remains a very important factor in determining the BJP’s electoral fortunes.

3.1.2. *Elections in the South*

In 2023, the Congress won two elections in the southern states of Karnataka and Telangana by defeating the incumbents – the BJP in the former state [Prabhu 2019, 23 July] and the BRS in the latter.⁴ The Telangana victory seems particularly remarkable as the Congress managed to defeat not only the two-time incumbent, but also, arguably, the man who led to the creation of Telangana – K. Chandrashekhara Rao (KCR) of the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS). One major factor that helps explaining the Congress's victory in Telangana is the rise of Revanth Reddy as a leader [Reddy 2023, 10 December]. Reddy had been an MLA from the Telugu Desam Party, who joined the Congress in 2017. Apart from the charismatic campaign by Revanth Reddy, anti-incumbency for KCR was unfolding due to corruption and low welfare scheme penetration. In the run up to the elections, there was a growing public discontent concerning the rampant corruption in KCR's government. Around «half the voters in the State felt that corruption had increased over the past five years. Only about a quarter believed that there was a decrease in corruption» [Attri & Mittal 2023, 5 December]. The Congress also benefitted from the lower penetration levels of KCR's welfare schemes. In fact, a significant chunk of voters did not benefit from them. For instance, there were 79% non-beneficiaries of the state government's Double Bedroom Housing Schemes [Prakash & Krishna 2023, 5 December]. Out of this, 41% voted for the Congress while 36% voted for the BRS [Prakash & Krishna 2023, 5 December]. A similar trend could be seen in almost all welfare schemes. The result was that the Congress gained the votes of the majority chunk of the non-beneficiary population [Prakash & Krishna 2023, 5 December].

Telangana was not the only southern state where the Congress found success. Earlier in the year, it defeated its arch-nemesis- the BJP to win the Karnataka Legislative Elections. Congress secured 135 out of 224 seats - a 55 seats jump from its performance in 2018. The Congress managed to microfocus on local issues and rode on the anti-incumbency tide against the BJP. According to Lokniti's survey, 42% and 41% of the voters were either dissatisfied or somewhat dissatisfied with the state government and central government, respectively [Malik & Kumar 2023, 15 May]. Two of the key reasons for this dissatisfaction were unemployment and poverty. Around 30% of the voters thought that unemployment was the biggest issue in the 2023 elections compared to 3 % in 2018 [Attri & Kapoor 2023, 15 May].

4. Although the BJP was the incumbent during the time of the 2023 legislative elections in Karnataka, it did not form government in 2018. A coalition of the Congress and the Janata Dal (Secular) – or (JD(S) – did. However, in July 2019, 17 MLAs belonging to the Congress and JD(S) resigned, and the Congress-JD(S) coalition, then in government, fell. Several of the rebel MLAs joined the BJP after resigning, which suggests that the BJP was behind the fall of the Congress-JD(S) coalition.

Also, 21% of the voters thought that poverty was the biggest issue in the election [Attri & Kapoor 2023, 15 May]. As a result, «close to five in 10 of those who stated unemployment and poverty as the biggest issue in this election voted for the Congress (47% and 48%, respectively) as compared with three in 10 for the BJP» [Attri & Kapoor 2023, 15 May]. Furthermore, corruption also helped the Congress. Out of the 51% voters who believed that corruption had increased, 43% voted for the Congress compared to 30% who voted for the BJP [Palshikar 2023, 15 May]. The problems of unemployment, poverty and corruption badly impacted on the BJP's attempt to play on Hindutva politics in the state. For instance, in February 2022, the BJP state government of Karnataka had issued an order to ban Hijabs in educational institutions [*The Times of India* 2023, 30 April], leading to several right-wing students protesting against Muslim female students wearing Hijabs to college, often physically preventing them to enter their schools. There were also other attempts to push a Hindutva agenda, including an amendment to the legislation regulating cow slaughter. However, the Hindutva card did not strike a chord with Karnataka voters [Veeraraghav 2023, 20 March] as it did with voters of the Hindi heartland.

3.2. *The road to 2024 and the return of quota politics*

While, at the time of writing, the dates for the national elections (due at the latest in Spring 2024) have not been announced yet, most political parties started preparations. At the national level, three processes became apparent during 2023. First, unsurprisingly, the BJP continued to bank on Narendra Modi's popularity and his nationalist agenda. Second, some opposition parties began a difficult process of setting asides their differences, to contest the national elections united against the BJP. Third, the continuing inability of the Indian economy to generate enough jobs, engendered a resurgence of «quota politics» as both the opposition and the ruling party promoted new ways to reserve jobs in the public sector and public universities to different categories of people.

Let's start with the BJP. Perhaps the most notable effort to boost the party's (and, even more so, the Prime Minister's) popularity, was the (rather blatant) attempt to intertwine domestic politics and foreign policy during the India's presidency of the G20 [Hall 2024]. Preparations to use the G20 as a domestic politics platform likely started years before, when India asked Italy to switch the presidency in order to make it coincide with the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the Republic (in 2022) and then again when India switched with Indonesia so that the G20 would coincide with the year preceding the general elections (2023). In case anyone was doubting the BJP's intention to bank on the G20 for domestic purposes, the symbol chosen was a lotus (i.e. the BJP's symbol) and Indian cities were inundated by thousands of G20 billboards with the lotus symbol and Modi's picture [Miller and Harris 2023, 20 April].

More than 200 meetings were organised in as many as 56 cities spread across the country, over most of the year, thus securing a continuing and nation-wide publicity for the Prime Minister. That the BJP would make the most of India's G20 presidency was clear from the very first day, when all Indian mobile phones received a text message celebrating the event. Billions of rupees were spent – US\$ 500 million in Delhi only [*FirstPost* 2023, 8 September] – to install millions of flowers, countless murals and billboards, lights and extravaganzas of various genres. In each city – and particularly in New Delhi – an intense effort to «beautify» urban landscape was promoted. When one of the authors of this article visited the capital in January 2023 (just a few weeks before the Foreign Ministers' meeting), South Delhi looked impressively clean and well maintained if compared with the situation prevailing during his previous visit, just a few months before (May 2022).

«Beautification» also entailed, according to media and human rights organisations' reports, the forcible removal of many poor people and the demolition of their shelters and informal economic activities [Bakhsh 2023, 11 September]. When removal was not possible or desirable, the authorities built walls or erected curtains around slums, to hide them from the sight of the delegates. One slum area in-between New Delhi and the airport, for instance, was completely surrounded by green curtains and its residents were not allowed to go out, except late at night, when the police surveillance withdrew [Bakhsh 2023, 11 September].

Overall, the G20 had an enormous resonance on India's media, and the publicity drive which accompanied it helped reinforce one of Modi's key messages since he became Prime Minister: that he is the leader who is making India a respected and powerful nation on the world stage. According to the Mood of the Nation poll conducted in August 2023 (just before the final G20 summit), 61% of the respondents thought that Modi's stature had increased India's standing in the world [*India Today* 2023, 25 August].

This is not the first time that foreign policy – traditionally an electoral consideration only for a tiny slice of the electorate – gains mass relevance under Narendra Modi. The most recent example is the Pulwama terrorist attack which occurred shortly before the 2019 elections. Most probably, India's muscular response to it contributed to the BJP's victory [Gupta and Shrimankar 2019]. In fact, Modi consistently used foreign policy to further his domestic agenda [Hall 2019]. His appeal, to a significant extent, relies on the idea that he is the man capable of making India strong, both domestically and abroad. In other words, Modi has made a consistent attempt to merge foreign policy – and in particular India's status on the world stage – into his idea of nationalism, similarly to what he has been able to do by combining development and (Hindutva) nationalism into a powerful political platform [Palshikar 2017].

Looking at the 2024 general elections, however, it seems clear that the BJP's main electoral idea is to double down on *Hindutva*. This is evident

from the fact that Modi himself consecrated the Ram Temple in Ayodhya on 22 January 2024. The construction of the temple – even though it is far from completed – is possibly the greatest ever achievement of Hindu nationalism. Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged the people of the country to celebrate Diwali in their houses on 22 January [Seth 2023, 31 December]. In their speeches, both Uttar Pradesh's Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and Modi have made it clear that the temple town of Ayodhya is set to witness a «massive infrastructural facelift that would make it an entirely new town» [Pathak 2023, 30 December]. According to Modi this symbiosis of development and tradition is a must for any nation that wants to develop [Matthew, 21 November]. The set for the BJP's electoral campaign seemed to be ready.

Overall, opinion polls show that the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) remains the front-runner. This is due to a combination of genuine popularity on the part of the Prime Minister and continuing erosion of the democratic process. Both developments have tilted the playing field in favour of the ruling party.

Many of the hopes of the critics of the Prime Minister rely on a new coalition of 28 opposition parties formed in the course of 2023, the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA). The coalition does represent a serious attempt by the opposition parties to unseat the BJP, as multi-party contests in a First-past-the-post electoral system had significantly helped the BJP to win a super majority of the seats, although with a minority of the popular vote. Ideally, there will be only one INDIA candidate in each constituency, thus limiting the dispersion of the non-BJP vote. Yet, much will depend on the parties forming the INDIA to strike seat sharing agreements – an incredibly difficult task, given the intense competition between the constituting parties at the state level. Also, it is far from certain that different political parties will be able to convince their voters to «transfer» their votes to other coalition allies, especially if these allies have a history of intense competition at the local level.

The first step towards opposition unity came when 19 parties decided to boycott the inauguration of the new Parliament in May 2023, chiefly because Modi decided to inaugurate it himself and without the President of India, Droupadi Murmu (who, according to the Constitution, is an integral part of the Parliament) [Manoj 2023, 25 May]. The new House of the People – a pet project of the Modi administration, part of a radical rethinking of the entire area in New Delhi, aimed at «decolonising» the architectural landscape [Chandavarkar 2023, 17 August] – was inaugurated by Modi on 28th May 2023. One of the ideas behind the Central Vista project (as the redevelopment of Lutyens Delhi is called) is for Modi to leave behind an enduring legacy, one that marks a clear break from the past and inaugurates – also physically – the «new India» [Sen 2023a].

In the following months, opposition parties met three times in Patna (June), Bengaluru (July) and Mumbai (September), during which the

alliance formally took shape and started defining its agenda. The largest constituent parties of the INDIA are the Congress, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK, Tamil Nadu), the All India Trinamool Congress (AITC, West Bengal), the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD, Bihar), (the Samajwadi Party (SP, Uttar Pradesh) the Shiv Sena (Uddhav Thackeray faction) and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) (both from Maharashtra), the Aam Admi Party (AAP), among others. Overall, at the time of writing, the INDIA has 142 seats in the Lok Sabha and about a 40% of the seats at the state level.

The first cracks in the alliance, however, emerged as the state elections approached. The SP, for instance, accused the Congress of not being willing to compromise on the allocation of tickets in Madhya Pradesh. Similarly, JDU's leader Nitish Kumar complained that the Congress is not willing to discuss opposition unity until after the state elections are over [Sharma 2023, 5 November]. State-level competition is indeed the crucial obstacle in opposition unity and will only intensify in the months to come.

Overall, the degree of opposition unity will depend on how political parties will weight two conflicting interests. On the one hand, the Modi administration may have sent enough warning signals to opposition parties that they might consider a third Modi term as an existential threat. The expulsion of Rahul Gandhi from the Parliament (see below) and the continuing usage of investigative agencies to undermine opposition leaders might indeed constitute existential threats which could make the opposition parties see their own interests as going beyond the short-term compromises necessary to eliminate such threat. On the other hand, however, the pressure that party leaders will face during the ticket-allocation process and the threat by disgruntled politicians to either join the BJP or running as independents – thus jeopardising the effort to minimise the dispersal of the non-BJP vote – might harden the uncompromising stances of the individual parties, especially in a low-trust environment like the one created by decades of fierce competition.

A third development which could have a significant impact on the 2024 elections is what we could call the return of quotas politics, i.e. the revived salience of reservations in legislative bodies and public sector jobs and universities for certain categories of people. Two key developments took place during 2023. First, the government approved a decade-long legislative project, conferring women reserved seats in Parliament and in the states' legislative assemblies. Second, the Bihar government published the results of its caste census, which triggered nation-wide calls for similar exercises.

Decades in the making, the Parliament nearly unanimously approved the Constitution (128th Amendment) bill (known as the Women Reservation bill), finishing a journey started during the first UPA government (2004-09), when a similar bill had been introduced in Parliament. Previous attempts to guarantee a minimal representation of women in legislative bodies dated

back to the 1990s, and indeed the issue was discussed at length also in the Constituent Assembly. The bill was the first to be considered in the new Parliament building.

The bill reserves 33% of the seats in the Lower House and in the state assemblies for women [Sen 2023b]. India has one of the lowest shares of women legislators in the world [Rai & Spary 2019]. Currently, there are 78 women MPs in the Lok Sabha, or 14% of the total (the world's average is 26.5%) [Parline]. This contrasts with the growing participation of women in the political process. In 2019, women's turnout was higher than men's – a notable achievement considering that, in 1962, the gap between men and women voters was about 17 percentage points [Jain 2021, 26 November].

The passage of the bill was rightly celebrated by the government as a major achievement. Politically, women are a key constituent of Modi's BJP [Spary 2020]. Moreover, the move might also contribute to the betterment of India's performance on goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals, which measures, among other things, the share of women legislators at the national and local levels.

However welcome the passing of the bill was, the Women's Reservation Act, 2023, lacks teeth, to be truly effective, at least in the short term. First, the quota will apply only after the next delimitation of the constituencies. This not only needs fresh census data – the 2021 census was inexplicably delayed – but it will also have to wait until at least 2026, when the delimitation of constituencies can legally be executed. The last time that the number of seats allocated to each state was done (the crux of the delimitation process) was 1971, after which two moratoria (in 1971 and 2002) stopped the process for 55 years (the 2002 extension is set to expire in 2026) [Dharanidharan and Wong 2023, 5 June]. In other words, as Home Minister Amit Shah himself made it clear, the act will be implemented only after 2029 [Singh, Vijaita, 2023, 20 September].

Moreover, the delimitation – to reiterate, a legislative requirement for the reservation to be implemented – is a very delicate political process, as changes in population since 1971 have seen the southern states to stabilise their population⁵ much more quickly than the northern states, thus making inter-state imbalances in representation even more severe. For example, according to projection, the five southern states – Karnataka, Kerala, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu – should have an increase of 17 seats in the Lok Sabha. On the other hand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra might see an increase of 105 seats [Bharati 2023, 21 September]. (The new Parliament building can accommodate 888 MPs). In other words, states which, because of more effective policies and faster economic development, managed to stabilise their popu-

5. The expression «stabilize the population» refers to the process which ensures that a population size remains relatively constant, without any significant negative or positive fluctuation.

lation, will be effectively penalised, by losing a substantial share of their representation in national politics. Needless to say, this is a very delicate matter. To go back to the women's reservation bill, it is unclear at the moment – and for the foreseeable future – how and when the delimitation exercise will be carried out – and with what implications. One thing that might have crossed the mind of the BJP leadership is that with the substantial expansion of the number of seats in the party's stronghold (the Hindi belt) due to the delimitation, the consequences on the party's internal functioning will be limited, whereas it will force southern regional parties to sideline some stalwarts (or their sons) – a risky process.

A second unresolved question in the bill is the matter of within-quota reservation for the OBCs. One fear is that, in its absence, upper caste women will corner most of the reserved seats. This had in fact been one the key stumbling blocks in previous attempts to legislate quotas for women. Significantly, several opposition parties raised the issue during the parliamentary debate, but their concerns were ignored [Phukan 2023, 20 September].

A much more controversial development was the renewed salience of caste-based quotas, triggered by the publication of the Bihar's caste survey report. The last time that castes had been counted (except for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs)), was 1931. In fact, the results of the nation-wide Socio-Economic Caste Census (conducted in 2011) were never made public.

The Bihar's census revealed a widely expected outcome: the share of the OBCs in the state was 63% of the population, whereas the upper caste share was just 15.5% [Singh, Santosh, 2023, 3 October]. The publication of the report immediately raised the issue of caste-based reservation in the legislature as well as in public sector jobs and universities. The existing quota was 27% for the OBC, which is less than half of their share of Bihar's population.

The issue is technically complicated and politically explosive. As far as the technical aspect is concerned, the Supreme Court has repeatedly ruled that a (rather arbitrary) cap of 49% quota applies. Given that, nationally, 16% and 8% of the spots are reserved for SCs and STs, respectively and 27% for OBCs, the Supreme Court rulings have blocked any attempt to extend reservations – except in Tamil Nadu, where quotas covering about 68% of the population pre-date the Supreme Court's ruling. However, in 2019, the Indian government reserved 10% of seats and jobs to so-called Economically Weaker Section (EWSs), introducing for the first time an economic (rather than caste-based) system of reservations – even though, in practice, it applies to the upper castes only [Maiorano 2020]. This means that the 50% ceiling has been effectively breached, although it is unclear whether a purely caste-based extension of the reservations would pass the Supreme Court's scrutiny.

In a year preceding a high-stake election, however, it is the political value of the quota conundrum that matters most. The debate on quotas

has implication for both the ruling party and the opposition, which need to calculate risks and benefits on the basis of national as well as state-level considerations.

For the BJP, expanding the reservations was a sensitive political issue, similar to that in which the party found itself in the early 1990s, when V.P. Singh extended reservations to the OBCs. At that time, the response of the BJP – whose social base, back then, was predominantly constituted by the upper castes in North India – pushed on the Hindutva pedal and on the Ram Mandir issue to unify the Hindus. The situation was somewhat similar today. On the one hand, the party must respond somehow to the demand for broadening reservations – also considering that the OBCs have become a key constituency of Modi's BJP (along with its traditional upper caste base) [Maiorano 2019]. On the other hand, the government was preparing to inaugurate the Ram Temple in Ayodhya in January 2024, just a few months before the general election.

In the period under review, Modi's response was muted – he ignored the issue for some time, also keeping in mind the RSS' opposition to expanding reservations. When he did speak on the issue, he made the somewhat convoluted argument that conducting a nation-wide caste census would promote majoritarianism and hurt religious minorities [Naidu 2023, 4 October]. Home Minister Amit Shah, on the other hand, underscoring how sensible and intractable the issue was for the BJP, also said that the party «never opposed» a caste census and that it required «careful thought» [Tiwari 2023, 4 November].

The INDIA Alliance pushed the issue and promised to lift the 50% quota cap and conduct a nationwide caste census; a position captured by Rahul Gandhi's slogan «*jitni abadi, utna haq*» (which roughly translates as «rights proportionate to population»). The Congress party also promised a caste census in Rajasthan, ahead of the state elections in November 2023. Other constituent parties were also on board, starting from Nitish Kumar's RJD and other «Mandal parties» of North India, for which the demand make ideological and political sense [Phukan 2023, 2 October].

The issue was delicate for the opposition as well, though. Mamata Banerjee, chief minister of West Bengal, has been a vocal opponent of the census, even vetoing its inclusion in the INDIA Mumbai resolution in September 2023 [Marpakwar 2023, 2 September]. Banerjee's opposition probably stems from the fact that her own party received a substantial share of the upper caste vote at the 2021 state elections (42% as against the BJP's 46%). Pushing for reservation might lead to a considerable transfer of upper caste vote to the BJP [Sardesai 2021, 6 May].

Even Congress's chief ministers were wary of opening the Pandora's box. For instance, in the period under review Karnataka's Congress Chief Minister Siddaramaiah refused to release the results of the state caste census, conducted in 2015, presumably fearing to hurt the dominant Vokkaliga

and Lingayat communities. Both communities voted in substantial numbers for the Congress at the 2023 state elections, contributing significantly to its victory [Deb 2023, 17 October]. The BJP too was struggling with the need to combine a national and a state-level policy. For instance, Modi quite explicitly backed Rahul Gandhi's «*jitni abadi, utna haq*» proposal, when talking to Madigas (a Dalit community) in poll-bound Telangana [Singh, D.K., 2023, 20 November].

To complicate things further, state governments were under pressure to provide incentives to private employers who hired «locals» – such policies have been adopted or proposed in numerous states such as Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Punjab, Gujarat and Maharashtra [The Times of India 2021, 16 April]. Such reservations in the private sector, however, put further pressure on an already unfavourable job market, thus fuelling demands for reservations in the public sector. In fact, several states saw large-scale protests demanding caste-based quotas in recent years, including Maharashtra, Karnataka, Gujarat and Haryana, among others. In some cases, there have been counter-protests by OBCs – whose share of reserved jobs would decrease if other communities were included in the OBC category. For instance, Maharashtra had to deal with a series of protests by the Maratha and the Lingayat communities, both asking for reservations, as well as by OBCs groups resisting the move [Deshpande 2023, 20 November; India Today 2023, 31 October].

In short, all political parties were in front of complex political choices, which would inevitably leave many disgruntled voters behind. The results of the state elections of December 2023 – when the Congress lost badly precisely where quota politics were supposed to work best, namely in the Hindi belt – caused some rethinking within the Congress and the INDIA alliance. In any case, no reservation policy will solve the real crux of the problem – India's economic inability to create enough jobs to a large, growing, and aspirational youth.

3.3. *Rising social tension*

One of the consequences of the persisting lack of employment opportunities for India's youth is the presence, across the country, of a standing «army» of young and often frustrated people, a small section of which is prone to be involved in violence. While conflict is a recurring feature of India's political life, three developments stood out, for different reasons, during 2023: first, the communal riots in Nuh (Haryana), at the outskirts of Delhi; second, the acceleration of a movement to chase away Muslims from Uttarakhand; and third, the large-scale violence in the state of Manipur.

The riots in Haryana in a way followed what has become a familiar script. Similarly to the way in which Ram Navani's processions have been weaponised by radical Hindu groups in recent years [Scroll.in 2023, 31 March], the Nuh riots originated from a religious procession organised by

the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), an organisation part of the RSS's umbrella. The procession had passed through Nuh – one of the few districts in the country with a Muslim majority – for the past three years. In 2023, however, a radical, self-appointed, cow vigilante (known as Monu Manesar) – who was absconding from the police for murder – posted a video where he announced that he would be present at the procession. The video sparked off reactions from local Muslims. On the day of the procession (31 July), a mob attacked the procession with stones and rudimentary incendiary weapons [Dhankhar 2023, 2 August]. A few thousand Hindus found shelter in a local temple, which was surrounded by rioters for hours before the police dispersed the crowds. Hindu shops were looted and destroyed. The events led to retaliation by a violent Hindu mob in nearby Gurugram – the capital's financial and technological hub – where a Mosque was attacked, the local imam killed and economic ventures owned by Muslims looted and destroyed. The state, once violence was brought under control, proceeded with arresting hundreds of people. Like in the case of the Delhi riots of 2020 [Mairano 2021], most of the arrested were Muslims, who on their part found it «impossible» to file a complaint against radical Hindu groups [Raj 2023, 14 August]. The state government also ordered and executed the destruction of «illegal» properties of (mostly Muslim) residents [Aafaq 2023, 14 August].

While the chain of events is sadly familiar – provocation, reaction, counter-reaction, restoration of order, partisan state action – a very worrying novelty was the usage of firearms and their open display. This is the second major riot – the first being the one in Delhi in 2020 – where most of the killed had gunfire wounds [Bhardwaj 2020, 28 February]. Moreover, armed violence was most likely pre-planned, as both those taking part in the procession and those who attacked it were armed with guns, incendiary weapons, stones, sticks and swords. Even a member of Modi's Cabinet, Minister of State Rao Inderjit Singh, criticized as «wrong» the open display of arms at the VHP procession [Siwach 2023, 2 August]. Moreover, videos emerged in which people wearing a Bajrang Dal (an VHP's sister organisation) t-shirt opened fire with a rifle, with armed police personnel standing right behind, not intervening [Siddiqui 2023, 4 August]. Other videos showed militants openly carrying automatic weapons, in what was an unprecedented and blatant display of illegal firearms [Anwar and Jha 2023, 2 August]. Finally, the open usage and display of weapons seems to suggest that repeated calls over the last few years by radical Hindu leaders, including members of the BJP, to get weapons for «self-defence» [*The Indian Express* 2023, 7 October; *Scroll.in* 2023, 7 January] is perhaps slowly becoming a reality. In fact, in the wake of the Nuh's riots, Hindutva outfits in Haryana, promptly asked for guns, supposedly to protect themselves [*Scroll.in* 2023, 14 August].

In Uttarakhand, mostly bloodless tension has been growing for a few years, as attempts by radical Hindu groups to make the state the «Holy

Land» of Hindus gathered pace. This was not a new project, but recent events represent a marked acceleration. The main objective of the movement was to make the state «Muslim-free», as participant at a rally in the city of Puroala chanted on 29 May 2023 [Mander 2023, 3 November]. In several towns across the state, Muslim families were indeed forced to leave [Mittaland and Jafri 2023, 31 July].⁶ Posters appeared on Muslim-owned shops warning «love jihadis» to leave; Hindu landlords renting out properties to Muslims were pressured to evict them or face social boycotts; tens of Muslim shrines were demolished; the police was asked to enforce more strictly Haridwar's bylaws, prohibiting non-Hindus to settle there; calls to extend the ban to other holy towns and sites were made; local authorities and politicians – including Congress members – participated in rallies where Muslims were warned to leave their hometowns.

The BJP-ruled state government, led by Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami (a life-long RSS member), hardly concealed their support to the movement. Not only did references to Uttarakhand as the Dev Bhoom (Land of the Gods) made their way into official parlance and documentation [Mander 2023, 3 November], but the state tightened laws increasing penalties for forced conversions and launched «background checks» on people coming from outside the state, supposedly to curb «love jihad» [Mishra 2023, 10 June]. The latter is a consistent demand by Hindutva outfits, who claim that people from «a certain community» are increasingly moving to the state to change the demography of Uttarakhand and launch various forms of «jihad», including «love», «land», «trade» and «shrine» jihads [Mittaland and Jafri 2023, 31 July]. The state administration was also very reluctant to act against speakers at the 2021 Dharm Sansad, where extremist Hindu leaders explicitly called for the mass murder of the Muslims [Mander 2023, 3 November]. In short, Uttarakhand is seeing perhaps the most advanced and thorough attempt to transform the state into a Hindu Rashtra – one where Muslims have no place.

Finally, violence on a large scale engulfed the north-eastern state of Manipur, beginning in May 2023. This was the first major eruption of violence not directed against the Indian state since 1992. Rather, violence exploded between two of the states' largest ethnic groups, the Meiteis and the Kukis. At the time of writing, the crisis was still unfolding.

The root causes of the conflict in Manipur are complex and deep rooted. At the most fundamental level, the conflict originates from the very way the territory that forms the state of Manipur became part of Independent India. During the colonial era, Manipur was a princely state and was clearly divided into two areas: the Imphal Valley and the hills areas surrounding the Valley, over which the maharaja only had nominal supervision.

6. Most of what follows is taken from Mittaland and Jafri's long and detailed reportage, published in *The Caravan*.

Therefore, when the Maharaja acceded to India in 1949, the hills were also included, despite that they had been effectively autonomous till then.

The two areas differ significantly in their social composition. While the Valley is mostly inhabited by Meiteis, in the hills live several tribal groups, the most numerous of which are the Kukis and the Nagas. Both have strong ethnic ties with ethnic groups across the border, in Myanmar and Bangladesh, as well as other north-eastern Indian states. The Meiteis are largely Hindus, the Kukis largely Christians.

The two groups have been coexisting more or less peacefully, and with some intermingling. Overtime, Kukis came to work and live in the Valley, as well as Meitei in the hills. However, sources of conflict simmered. To simplify, Meiteis resented Kukis' Scheduled Tribes status – which gave them preferential access to government jobs – and prevented Meiteis to purchase land in the hills. (Kukis have no restrictions to buy land in the Valley). The Meiteis count for about 90% of the population, but occupy only about 10% of the land.

The Kukis, on the other hand, resented the severe underdevelopment of the hills area, which they see as a result of the Meitei's dominance over the state's politics. In fact, the state has 40 Meiteis MLAs, as against 20 between all other ethnic groups. The Kukis (and other ethnic groups living in the hills) have been demanding more autonomy and say over state politics, but the autonomous local bodies have no real power. In fact, the state of Manipur is the only one in the North-East of India where the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution – which grants legislative and taxation powers to local tribal councils – is not applied [*The North-East Affairs* 2023, 3 July].

In recent years, a series of events precipitated the situation. First, the civil war in Myanmar [Fumagalli 2023] caused the displacement of thousands of people, who share ethnic ties with the Kukis. While Myanmar's Kuki-Chins were welcomed in Mizoram (where Kukis form a majority of the population), they were met with hostility in Manipur, where they were dubbed as «illegal immigrants» or even «drug traffickers» [Sayeda 2023, 28 November].

Second, and partly fuelled by immigration from Myanmar, new forms of Meitei nationalism – more radical than its previous avatars – radicalised a section of the community. In particular, the RSS invested significant resources in the state, with the objective of mobilising Meiteis in opposition to religious minorities and «illegal immigrants». The BJP (in power since 2017) too promoted Meitei nationalism and collaborated with organisations such as the Meitei Nationalist Party, which explicitly had the objective of protecting the Meiteis and India [Singh Amom Malemnganba 2023]. Moreover, Kuki leaders (including some belonging to the BJP) claimed that the Chief Minister repeatedly used abusive language against their community [Thapar 2023, 9 May].

Third, over the past few years – and especially since Assam undertook the National Register of Citizens exercise [Torri 2020: 368-376] – Meitei

youths have been asking for a similar register in Manipur [Deka 2023, 6 May]. The crux of the matter was what Meitei saw as an abnormal growth of the population in the hills, which they attributed to illegal migration. When the state government formed a Cabinet sub-committee to look into the matter and identify foreigners, tension mounted further.

Fourth, the state government took some policy decisions which were seen as threatening by the Kukis. In November 2022, for instance, the government passed an order which declared 38 tribal villages as encroachers of forest land, a move supposedly aiming at curbing poppy cultivation (which the state government had repeatedly accused the Kukis of being responsible for). Evictions followed suits, which Kukis saw as an attempt to remove them from the land they had occupied for generations. Another decision by the government which contributed to rising tension was the state's withdrawal from the ongoing ceasefire against two Kuki militant groups and the arrest of Mark T. Haokip, a separatist leader. All of these instances were read by Kukis as unequivocal signs that the state government had decided to turn visibly against their community.

In this situation of rising social tension, a decision by the state's High Court in April 2023 was the last straw. The Court directed the state government to consider a request put forward by the Meitei community to be granted Scheduled Tribe status. Kukis immediately saw a plot to allow Meitei to buy land in the hills and to eat up their share of government and university jobs. At the beginning of May 2023, riots broke out.

Between May and December 2023, more than 200 people died, tens of thousands were displaced and thousands of churches, temples, shops and homes were destroyed [Yasir and Kumar 2023, 1 December]. Several police and army outposts were attacked and thousands of weapons went missing. Militants had in fact at their disposal army-grade weapons, including RPGs [Lama 2023, 31 December]. At the time of writing, there is no solution in sight to end the hostilities. In fact, it seems that the situation is radicalising and that the two communities now see each other as «irreconcilable enemies» [Guha 2023, 5 November].

In December 2023, Home Minister Amit Shah announced that the central government signed a peace agreement with one of Meiteis militant groups, the United National Liberation Front (UNLF) [*Scroll.in*, 29 November]. This is one of several Meiteis' separatist organisations, which had been banned by the government in November. Shah expressed hope that other organisations would follow suit and renounce violence. However, observers expressed scepticism, as several armed groups – which had been dormant or relegated to jungle areas across the border with Myanmar – had started recruiting again on Indian soil, explicitly targeting young men who had been victims of the recent wave of violence [Zaman 2023, 11 December]. On the Kuki side, a newly formed organisation, the Indigenous Tribal Leaders Forum (ITLF), issued an ultimatum to the government, asking for a

completely separate administration for the Kukis, a demand that the state government resisted [Zaman 2023, 1 December].

Not surprisingly, mainstream Indian media have virtually ignored the conflict, partly because the region tends to be covered very little in general, and partly because the crisis is a deep embarrassment for the central government. In fact, the growing authoritarian climate in India makes it very risky and un-rewarding for media to take a line against the government. To this subject we now turn.

3.4. *The continuing erosion of democracy*

During 2023 India's democracy continued to erode. The V-dem main indexes continued their downward trends, reaching 0.4 (Electoral Democracy Index, the same value it had in 1976, during the Emergency regime) and 0.31 (Liberal Democracy Index, it was 0.27 in 1976) [V-dem].

The topic has been abundantly covered in previous issues of *Asia Maior* [Torri 2020; Torri 2021; Maiorano 2022; Maiorano 2023] as well as elsewhere [Tudor 2023; Ganguly 2023]. While some scholars argued that the obituaries of India's democracy are exaggerated [Verma 2023] or have roots than go much further back in time than the current regime [Singh, Tripurda-man, 2023], most analysts do agree that there has been a significant erosion of democratic norms and practices in the last decade [Yadav 2023].

In 2023, this erosion was particularly evident in two domains: freedom of speech and independence of institutions. On freedom of speech, three episodes are worth mentioning. First, in February 2023, the BBC released a two-part documentary on Modi, which was very critical of the Prime Minister [Ellis-Petersen 2023, 14 February]. The government decided to ban it and, a few weeks later, BBC's India offices were raided by income tax officials and subsequently forced to restructure their India operations [Singh, Namita, 2023, 12 December].

Second, in October 2023, the police arrested Prabir Purkayastha and Amit Chakravarty of Newslick, a media outlet which had been the subject of a *New York Times* investigation which linked the website to an international network that funds Chinese propaganda [Travelli *et al.* 2023, 3 October]. Some of Newslick's journalists, which has an editorial line very critical of the current government, were also conducting investigations on the Adani group. The news outlet was raided, as were the homes of some of its journalists, some of whom were booked under the draconian anti-terrorism law Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA).

Third, there has been turmoil in academic circles too. In late 2022, the Centre for Policy Research (CPR), India's premier think tank, was investigated for alleged violations of Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) and its certificate, necessary to access foreign funds, suspended [*The Indian Express* 2023, 11 October]. This crippled CPR's finances and most of its staff was either fired or retained with no salary. While all these cases

may or may not result in convictions, they fit a pattern of using investigative agencies to stifle dissent and independent voices.

Finally, institutional erosion continued during 2023. In March 2023, Rahul Gandhi was sentenced to two years in prison by a court in Gujarat for an ostensibly offensive remark he made during the 2019 electoral campaign. Two years was the minimum requirement for the Lok Sabha to proceed to Gandhi's disqualification as a Member of Parliament, which was executed the following day. Eventually, the Supreme Court suspended his conviction, pending appeal, which cleared the way for him to be reinstated as an MP [Ellis-Petersen 2023, 4 August]. At the moment, it is still uncertain whether Gandhi will be able to contest the 2023 elections.

Another instance which showed the remarkable erosion of institutional proceeding occurred in late 2023. More than 100 MPs were suspended for asking a probe on the security breach happened on 13th December 2023, when, on the 22nd anniversary of the 2001 attack on the Parliament, two men entered the building and started shouting anti-government slogans [The Indian Express, 2023, 14 December]. The suspension of the MPs and the subsequent boycott by opposition parties of the on-going parliamentary session, led to the passing of some critical bills without debate or scrutiny [Mehta 2023, 22 December]. The most crucial one was a bill modifying the rules for appointing the Chief Election Commissioner. According to the new rules – passed by both chambers of Parliament in December 2023 – the selection committee will consist of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, and another Cabinet member (which replaces the Chief Justice of India). In other words, India's electoral watchdog will now be nominated exclusively with the votes of the sitting government [Election Commissioner Bill 2023].

4. *Conclusion*

India entered 2024 as a country that appeared to be going towards an inevitable third term for Prime Minister Modi and the BJP. The enduring popularity of the Prime Minister – reflected also in the state election results – was making the task of opposition parties almost unsurmountable. In 2023, some 20-odds parties started negotiations for presenting a unified front against the BJP, but their historical rivalries and the BJP's ability to set the narrative and attract opposition leaders into its ranks was a source of frustration and complication of what already was a very complicated political process.

While the Indian economy kept growing robustly during 2023, its inability to generate jobs continued to be a major reason why inequality appeared to be growing larger and larger. While this might represent the BJP's weakness, it also seems that many voters will keep economic considerations on the back burner when deciding who to vote for.

APPENDIX 1:

Brief description of India's welfare schemes, mentioned in table 1⁷

Ayushman Bharat - Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY) is a health insurance scheme aimed at providing access to quality inpatient secondary and tertiary care to poor and vulnerable families, and reducing catastrophic out-of-pocket expenditures arising out of serious health episodes. The scheme expands the previous Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY).

Child Protection Services (CPS), earlier known as the Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS), aims at providing preventive and protective care and rehabilitation services to any child in a vulnerable situation that may lead to abuse, neglect, exploitation, abandonment and separation from families. The scheme included both children in conflict with law, and those who come in contact with law either as a victim or as a witness, as defined under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act. The scheme was launched in 2009 and restructured into Mission Vatsalya as per Union Budget 2022-23.

Food Subsidy is provided by the Government of India (GoI) for the supply and distribution of foodgrains and other essential commodities. With the passing of the National Food Security Act (NFSA) in 2013, nutritional security became a right. Under the Act, adequate quantities of quality food at affordable prices are to be provided to two-thirds of India's population.

Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) is GoI's flagship programme aimed at providing basic education, health, and nutrition services for early childhood development. The scheme was launched in 1975 and reconstituted into Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0 in FY 2021-22.

Jal Jeevan Mission is GoI's rural drinking water programme to provide functional tap connections to every household for drinking, cooking, and other domestic needs on a sustainable basis by 2024. It subsumes the National Rural Drinking Water Programme (NRDWP).

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) is GoI's flagship rural employment programme which aims to provide at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment based on demand. The scheme was launched in 2006 and is the largest scheme of the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD).

Mission Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0 was launched in FY 2021-22 after restructuring ICDS, POSHAN Abhiyaan, and the Scheme for Adolescent Girls. The scheme aims to redress some of the challenges identified with the existing schemes and converge nutrition-related initiatives of the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD).

7. These descriptions are reproduced with permission from Accountability Initiative 2023d.

National Health Mission (NHM) is GoI's flagship scheme to achieve universal access to quality healthcare by strengthening health systems, institutions, and capabilities. It consists of two sub-missions: a) the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM), launched in 2005 to provide accessible, affordable, and quality healthcare in rural India; and b) the National Urban Health Mission (NUHM), a sub-mission launched in 2013 for urban health.

National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) was launched in 1995 with the objective of supporting minimum needs of specific social groups such as the elderly, widows and disabled persons living in Below Poverty Line (BPL) households.

Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana - Gramin (PMAY-G) is GoI's flagship 'Housing for All' scheme. The scheme aims to provide monetary assistance for the construction of a pucca house with basic amenities to all rural houseless families and those living in dilapidated and kutcha houses. It was constituted after restructuring of Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY) in 2016.

Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) was launched in 2000 with an aim to provide all-weather road connectivity in rural areas. The scheme is being run by MoRD and envisages connecting all habitations with more than 500 residents in the plains, and more than 250 residents in hilly, tribal, and desert areas. Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM KISAN) is GoI's income support scheme aimed at supplementing farmers' incomes to enable them to take care of expenses related to agriculture and allied activities as well as domestic needs. It provides an annual cash transfer of ₹6,000 to all landholding farmers through Direct Benefits Transfer (DBT) mode into their bank accounts.

Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMJY) is a maternity benefit scheme providing conditional cash transfers to pregnant women and lactating mothers for the first live birth. The scheme has evolved over a period of time with the launch of the Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY) in 2010.

Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman (PM POSHAN), previously known as the National Programme of Mid-Day Meals in School (MDM), aims to provide one hot cooked meal in government and government-aided schools from FY 2021-22 to FY 2025-26. The scheme has the dual objective of addressing hunger and improving the nutritional status of eligible children as well as encouraging poor children belonging to disadvantaged sections to attend school more regularly and help them concentrate on classroom activities.

Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) was GoI's flagship secondary education programme. The scheme was launched in March 2009 with the objective of augmenting access and quality of secondary education. It was integrated into Samagra Shiksha in FY 2018-19 along with Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Teacher Education.

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) was GoI's flagship elementary education programme. Launched in 2001, it aimed to provide universal educa-

tion to children between the ages of 6 to 14 years. It was integrated into Samagra Shiksha.

Swachh Bharat Mission – Gramin (SBM-G) is GoI's flagship rural sanitation programme run by the Ministry of Jal Shakti (MJS). It is a community-led programme whose first phase aimed at providing access to sanitation facilities and eradicating the practice of open defecation by 2 October 2019. SBM-G Phase II aims to achieve ODFPlus (Open Defecation Free - Plus) status for ODF villages.

APPENDIX 2

State elections results 2023

Table 2A – Results of the elections to the Legislative Assembly of Rajasthan 2023

Alliance	Party	Seats won (difference from 2018)	Vote share (difference from 2018)
None	BJP	115 (+42)	41.69 (+2.92)
INDIA	INC (incumbent)	69 (-31)	39.53 (+0.23)
	RLD	1	-
	Total	70 (-31)	
BAP	BAP	3 (+3)	-
RLP+	RLP	1 (-2)	2.39 (-0.01)
	ASP (KR)	0	-
	Total	1	
BSP	BSP	2 (-4)	1.82 (-2.21)
None	IND	8 (-5)	-

Legend: BJP = Bharatiya Janata Party; INDIA= Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance; INC = Indian National Congress; RLD = Rashtriya Lok Dal; BAP = Bharat Adivasi Party; RLP= Rashtriya Loktantrik Party; ASP(KR) = Azad Samaj Party (Kanshi Ram); BSP= Bahujan Samaj Party; IND = Independents.

Table 2B – Results of the elections to the Legislative Assembly of Madhya Pradesh 2023

Alliance	Party	Seats won (difference from 2018)	Vote share (difference from 2018)
None	BJP	163 (+54)	48.55 (+7.53)
	INC (incumbent)	66 (-23)	40.40 (-0.49)
	BAP	1	-
	IND	0 (-4)	-

Legend: BJP = Bharatiya Janata Party; INC = Indian National Congress; BAP = Bharat Adivasi Party; IND = Independents.

Table 2C – Results of the elections to the Legislative Assembly of Chhattisgarh 2023

Alliance	Party	Seats won (difference from 2018)	Vote share (difference from 2018)
None	BJP	54 (+39)	46.27 (+13.27)
	INC (incumbent)	35 (-33)	42.23 (-0.77)
BSP+	BSP	0 (-2)	2.05 (-1.85)
	GGP	1(+1)	-
	Total	1	
None	IND	0	-
	Others	0	-

Legend: BJP = Bharatiya Janata Party; INC = Indian National Congress; BSP = Bahujan Samaj Party; GGP= Gondvana Gantantra Party; IND = Independents.

Table 2D – Results of the elections to the Legislative Assembly of Telangana 2023

Alliance	Party	Seats won (difference from 2018)	Vote share (difference from 2018)
INDIA	INC	64 (+45)	39.40 (+11.00)
	CPI	1 (+1)	0.34 (-0.07)
	Total	65	39.74 (+10.93)
NDA	BJP	8 (+7)	13.90 (+6.92)
	JSP	0	0.25
	Total	8	-
None	BRS (incumbent)	39 (-49)	37.35 (-9.55)
	AIMIM	7	2.22 (-0.48)
	Others	0 (-3)	-
	IND	0 (-1)	-

Legend: INDIA= Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance; INC = Indian National Congress; CPI= Communist Party of India; NDA = National Democratic Alliance; BJP = Bharatiya Janata Party; JSP= Jana Sena Party; BRS= Bharat Rashtra Samiti; AIMIM= All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen; IND= Independents.

Table 2E – Results of the elections to the Legislative Assembly of Mizoram 2023

Alliance	Party	Seats won (difference from 2018)	Vote share (difference from 2018)
None	ZPM	27 (+19)	37.86 (+14.96)
	MNF (incumbent)	10 (-16)	35.10 (-2.60)
	INC	1 (-4)	20.82 (-19.16)
	BJP	2 (+1)	5.06 (-3.03)
	AAP	0	0.09 (+0.09)
	IND	0	-

Legend: ZPM= Zoram People's Movement; MNF= Mizo National Front; INC = Indian National Congress; BJP = Bharatiya Janata Party; AAP= Aam Aadmi Party; IND = Independents.

Table 2F – Results of the elections to the Legislative Assembly of Karnataka 2023

Alliance	Party	Seats won (difference from 2018)	Vote share (difference from 2018)
None	INC	135 (+55)	42.88 (+4.74)
	BJP (incumbent)	66 (-38)	36.00 (-0.35)
	JDS	19 (-18)	13.3 (-5.01)
	KRRP	1 (+1)	0.63 (+0.63)
	SKP	1 (+1)	0.25 (+0.2)
	IND	2 (+1)	4.07 (+0.17)
	Others	0 (-2)	2.18 (-0.32)

Legend: INC = Indian National Congress; BJP = Bharatiya Janata Party; JDS= Janata Dal (Secular); KRRP= Kalyana Rajya Pragathi Paksh; SKP= Sarvodaya Karnataka Paksha; IND = Independents.

Table 2G – Results of the elections to the Legislative Assembly of Tripura 2023

Alliance	Party	Seats won (difference from 2018)	Vote share (difference from 2018)
NDA (incumbent)	BJP	32 (-4)	38.97 (-4.62)
	IPFT	1 (-7)	1.26 (-6.12)
	Total	33 (-11)	40.23 (-10.78)
SDF	CPI-M	11 (-5)	24.62 (-17.6)
	INC	3 (+3)	8.56 (+6.77)
	AIFB	0	1.03 (+0.47)
	RSP	0	0.67 (-0.08)
	CPI	0	0.48 (-0.34)
	IND	0	0.65
	Total	14	36.01 (-10.08)
None	TMP	13 (new)	19.69 (+19.69)
	AITC	0	0.88 (+0.58)
	IND	0	1.6
	Others	0	0.23

Legend: National Democratic Alliance = NDA; BJP = Bharatiya Janata Party; IPFT= Indigenous People's Front of Tripura; SDF= Secular Democratic Forces; CPI-M= Communist Party of India (Marxist); INC = Indian National Congress; AIFB= All India Forward Bloc; RSP= Revolutionary Socialist Party; CPI= Communist Party of India; TMP= Tipra Motha Party; AITC= All India Trinamool Congress; IND = Independents.

Table 2H – Results of the elections to the Legislative Assembly of Meghalaya 2023

Alliance	Party	Seats won (difference from 2018)	Vote share (difference from 2018)
None	NPEP (incumbent)	26 (+6)	31.49 (+11.43)
	UDP	12 (+6)	16.21 (+4.61)
	AITC	5 (+5)	13.78 (+13.38)
	INC	5 (-16)	13.14 (-15.36)
	VPP	4 (new)	5.46 (+5.46)
	BJP	2	9.33 (-0.27)
	HSPDP	2	3.56 (-1.74)
	PDF	2 (-2)	1.88 (-6.32)
	GNC	0	00.53 (-0.9)
	Others	0 (-1)	0.23
	IND	2 (-1)	0.79

Legend: NPEP= National People's Party; UDP= United Democratic Party; AITC= All India Trinamool Congress; INC = Indian National Congress; VPP= Voice of the People Party; BJP = Bharatiya Janata Party; HSPDP= Hill State People's Democratic Party; PDF= People's Democratic Front; GNC= Garo National Council; IND = Independents.

Table 2I – Results of the elections to the Legislative Assembly of Nagaland 2023

Alliance	Party	Seats won (difference from 2018)	Vote share (difference from 2018)
NEDA	NDPP	25 (+7)	32.24 (+7.02)
	BJP	12	18.8 (3.51)
	Total	37 (+7)	51.04 (+10.53)
None	NCP	7 (+7)	9.56 (+8.50)
	NPEP	5 (+3)	5.76 (-1.14)
	LJP (RV)	2 (+2)	8.64 (+8.64)
	NPP	2 (-24)	7.09 (-31.71)
	RPI (A)	2 (+2)	3.69
	JD (U)	1	3.25 (-1.25)
	INC	0	3.56 (+1.45)
	IND	4 (+3)	6.27
Others	0	0.83	

Legend: NEDA= North East Democratic Alliance; NDPP= Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party; BJP = Bharatiya Janata Party; NCP= Nationalist Congress Party; NPEP= National People's Party; LJP (RV)= Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas); NPP= Naga People's Front; RPI (A)= Republican Party of India (Athawale); JD (U)= Janata Dal (United); INC = Indian National Congress; IND = Independents.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aafaq, Zafar, 2023, 14 August, 'Collective punishment? Demolitions in Haryana's Nuh spanned at least 50 km', *Scroll.in*.
- Accountability Initiative, 2023a, 'Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme', *Budget Briefs*, 15(10).
- Accountability Initiative, 2023b, 'Mission Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0', *Budget Briefs*, 15(6).
- Accountability Initiative, 2023c, 'Food Subsidy and the National Food Security Act', *Budget Briefs*, 15(2).
- Accountability Initiative, 2023d, 'The Evolution of India's Welfare System from 2008-2023: A Lookback'.
- Adani Group, 2023, *Adani Response*, 29 January.
- Aiyar, Yamini, 2019, 'Modi Consolidates Power: Leveraging Welfare Politics', *Journal of Democracy*, 30(4): 78-88.
- Aiyar, Yamini, & Louise Tillin, 2020, '«One nation,» BJP, and the future of Indian federalism', *India Review*, 19(2): 117-35.
- Anand Mohan, J., 2023, 8 December, 'Decode politics: As dust settles, here are 5 reasons why BJP won MP, and Cong lost plot', *The Indian Express*.
- Ananthkrishnan, G., 2023, 25 November, 'Hindenburg: SC says can't assume report credible until probed into', *The Indian Express*.
- Anwar, Tarique, and Mukund Jha, 2023, 2 August, 'How communal violence engulfed Mewat's Nuh', *Newsclick*.
- Attri, Vibha, & Himanshu Kapoor, 2023, 15 May, '2023 Karnataka Assembly elections BJP's failure to tackle unemployment, poverty hit it hard', *The Hindu*.
- Attri, Vibha, & Priyanka Mittal, 2023, 5 December, '2023 Telangana Assembly elections The perception of corruption', *The Hindu*.
- Azim Premj University, 2023, *State of Working India 2023: Social Identities and Labour Market Outcomes*, Bangalore.
- Bakhsh, Zenaira, 2023, 11 September, '«This Is Humiliating» India Hides Its Poor for the G20 New Delhi Summit', *Inkstickmedia*.
- Bharati, Manoranjan, 2023, 21 September, 'What India Will Look Like After 2026 Delimitation', *NDTV*.
- Bhardwaj, Ananya, 2020, 28 February, 'Why Northeast Delhi violence is India's first Hindu-Muslim riots with guns', *The Print*.
- Borbora, Abhinav Pankaj, & Manish Gyani, 2023, 7 December, 'Welfare scheme beneficiaries push BJP to victory in Madhya Pradesh', *The Hindu*.
- Business Standard, 2023, 23 October, 'Adani Total meets Hindenburg's predicted valuation with 85% plunge in stock'.
- 'Car Economics to explain India's skewed growth model', 2023, 20 January, *cenfa.org*.
- Chandavarkar, Prem, 2023, 17 August, 'The Architecture of Democracy', *The India Forum*.
- Daniyal, Shoaib, 2023, 18 December, 'Youth unemployment is a major problem in India – so why is it absent from national politics?', *Scroll.in*.
- Deb, Abhik, 2023, 17 October, 'Why the Opposition's support for a caste census falters in some states', *Scroll.in*.
- Deka, Kaushik, 2023, 6 May, 'Poppy cultivation, eviction drives, illegal influx, old scars – why Manipur is burning', *India Today*.
- Deshpande, Alok, 2023, 20 November, 'OBC leaders across parties come together against Maratha quota, Maharashtra's headache mounts', *The Indian Express*.

- Dhankhar, Leena, 2023, 2 August, 'Nuh clashes: How the violence was planned', *Hindustan Times*.
- Dharanidharan, Salem, and Brian Wong, 2023, 5 June, 'Why the Future of Indian Democracy Hangs on a Prudent and Pragmatic Approach to Delimitation', *The Wire*.
- Drèze, Jean, and Reetika Khera, 2023, 1 February, 'The Sharp Decline in Total Expenditure on Social Security Schemes', *The Wire*.
- [Election Commissioner Bill 2023] 'The Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Bill, 2023', 2023, *prsindia.org*.
- Ellis-Petersen, 2023, 14 February, 'What is the BBC Modi documentary and why is it so controversial?', *The Guardian*.
- Ellis-Petersen, 2023, 4 August, 'India's supreme court suspends Rahul Gandhi's two-year defamation jail term', *The Guardian*.
- Ellis-Petersen, Hannah, 2023, 31 August, 'Rahul Gandhi demands Modi investigation into Adani Group', *The Guardian*.
- Ellis-Petersen, Hannah, and Simon Goodley, 2023, 31 August, 'Modi-linked Adani family secretly invested in own shares, documents suggest', *The Guardian*.
- FirstPost, 2023, 8 September, 'G20 Summit: How much money was spent on Delhi?'. Government of India, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 2023, 9 October, *Annual Report July 2022-June 2023*.
- Fumagalli, Matteo, 2023, 'Myanmar 2022: Fragmented sovereignties and the escalation of violence in multiple warsapes', *Asia Maior*, Vol. XXXIII/2022: 261-80.
- Ganguly, Sumit, 'Modi's Undeclared Emergency', *Journal of Democracy*, 34(3): 144-51.
- Guha, Ramachandra, 2023, 5 November, 'Six months of chaos in Manipur show utter failure of double-engine government', *Scroll.in*.
- Gupta, Pranav, and Dishil Shrimankar, 2019, August, 'How nationalism helped the BJP', *Seminar*, Vol. 720.
- Hall, Ian, 2019, *Modi and the Reinvention of Indian Foreign Policy*, Bristol: Bristol University Press.
- Hall, Ian, 2024, 'India 2023: Tactical Wins and Strategic Setbacks in Foreign Policy', *Asia Maior*, Vol. XXXIV/2023.
- Hindenburg Research, 2023, 'Adani Group: How The World's 3rd Richest Man Is Pulling The Largest Con In Corporate History'.
- India Today, 2023, 9 February, 'Modi vs Opposition: How PM made himself heard amid 'Adani' slogans'.
- India Today, 2023, 25 August, 'Mood of the Nation poll: 61% says PM Modi's stature has increased globally'.
- India Today, 2023, 31 October, 'Lingayat community protests demanding reservation for sub-castes in Maharashtra'.
- Jaffrelot, Christophe, 2021, *Modi's India: Hindu Nationalism and the Rise of Ethnic Democracy*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- Jain, Bharti, 2023, 26 November, 'Women voter participation exceeds that of men in 2019 LS polls', *The Times of India*.
- Kaul, Vivek, 2023, 22 May, 'The State of the Indian Economy Today: What do the Numbers Actually Say?', *The India Forum*.
- Khan, Hamza, 2023, 25 March, 'With Right to Health Act, Ashok Gehlot seeks to build on his healthcare legacy, eyes a fresh term', *The Indian Express*.
- Kumar, Devesh, & Lalit Kumawat, 2023, 6 December, 'Did welfare measures make a mark on Rajasthan voters?', *The Hindu*.

- Lama, Prawesh, 2023, 31 December, 'Militants ambush Manipur Police commandos with RPG in Moreh; four injured, barracks damaged', *Hindustan Times*.
- Lodha, Sanjay, 2023, 24 October, 'BJP, Cong, BJP, Cong...this election, will Rajasthan finally break the pattern?', *The Indian Express*.
- Lodha, Sanjay, Sandeep Shastri, Suhas Palshikar, & Sanjay Kumar, 2023, 6 December, 'Why the Congress lost Rajasthan', *The Hindu*.
- Maiorano, Diego, 2019, 'The 2019 Indian Elections and the Ruralization of the BJP', *Studies in Indian Politics*, 7(2): 176-90.
- Maiorano, Diego, 2020, 'India 2019: The general election and the new Modi wave', *Asia Maior*, Vol. XXX/2019: 327-44.
- Maiorano, Diego, 2021, 'India 2020: Under the COVIS Hammer', *Asia Maior*, Vol. XXXI/2020: 305-30.
- Maiorano, Diego, 2022, 'Democratic backsliding amid the COVID-19 pandemic in India', *Asia Maior*, Special Issue No.2: 101-16.
- Maiorano, Diego, 2023, 'India 2022: Political realignments in a BJP-dominated system', *Asia Maior*, Vol. XXXIII/2022: 299-326.
- Malik, Aaliya, & Devesh Kumar, 2023, 15 May, '2023 Karnataka Assembly elections Dissatisfaction with the government's performance mattered in the election', *The Hindu*.
- Mander, Harsh, 2023, 3 November, 'How state-backed Hindutva rhetoric is fuelling the ethnic cleansing of Uttarakhand', *Scroll.in*.
- Manoj, C. G., 2023, 25 May, '20 Opposition parties announce boycott of new House inauguration by PM', *The Indian Express*.
- Marpakwar, Prafulla, 2023, 2 September, 'Mamata blocks demand for caste census in resolution', *The Times of India*.
- Matthew, Liz, 2023, 21 November, 'Road to 2024: Hindutva plus welfare emerges as BJP pitch for polls, Congress not far behind', *The Indian Express*.
- Mehta, Pratap Bhanu, 2023, 22 December, 'The collapse of parliamentary democracy in Bharat that is not India', *The Indian Express*.
- Miller, Manjari Chatterjee, and Clare Harris, 2023, 20 April 'Modi's Marketing Muscle', *Foreign Policy* (<https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/04/20/india-modi-g20-presidency-pr-marketing-elections/>).
- Mint 2023, 19 September, 'Indian economy to exceed growth estimates after strong Q2 beat: economists'.
- Mishra, Ishita, 2023, 10 June, 'Background checks will curb «love jihad», says Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhama', *The Hindu*.
- Mishra, Jyoti, & Avika Singh, 2023, 6 December, 'Corruption weighed heavily on Congress in Rajasthan' *The Hindu*.
- Mittaland, Tusha, and Alishan Jafri, 2023, 31 July, 'Driving Muslim out of «Devbhoomi»', *The Caravan*.
- Naidu, Jayprakash, 2023, 4 October, 'PM Modi hits back at Rahul Gandhi demand for caste census: «Does Congress want to take away rights of minorities?»', *The Indian Express*.
- Naidu, Jayprakash S, 2023, 6 December, 'Decode Politics: 5 likely reasons why Congress suffered Chhattisgarh setback', *The Indian Express*.
- Palshikar, Suhas, 2017, 15 May, 'India's Second Dominant Party System', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 52(12).
- Palshikar, Suhas, 2023, '2023 Karnataka Assembly elections Issue of corruption resonated with voters ahead of election day', *The Hindu*.

- Palshikar, Suhas, & Aadyot Prakash, 2023, 8 December, 'From development to defamation: the election campaign in Chhattisgarh', *The Hindu*.
- Parkin, Benjamin, & Chloe Cornish, 2023, 8 November, 'Hindenburg: SC says can't assume report credible until probed into', *Financial Times*.
- Parline - global data on national parliaments (<https://data.ipu.org/>).
- Paswan, Aditi Narayani, 2023, 4 December, 'Rajasthan, MP, Chhattisgarh results show that freebies don't strike a chord with voters', *The Indian Express*.
- Pathak, Vikas, 2023, 14 December, 'Takeaways from BJP's CM, Deputy CM picks: Satrap fade-out, central roadmap, constant rejig', *The Indian Express*.
- Pathak, Vikas, 2023, 30 December, 'In message on Ram Temple, PM Modi includes faith, labharthi, caste and infra push', *The Indian Express*.
- Phukan, Sandeep, 2023, 20 September, 'Lok Sabha passes historic women's reservation Bill', *The Hindu*.
- Phukan, Sandeep, 2023, 2 October, 'INDIA bloc cites Bihar data to reiterate demand for nationwide caste census', *The Hindu*.
- PIB, 2023, 9 October, 'Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) Annual Report 2022-2023 Released'.
- Prabhu, Nagesh, 2019, 23 July, 'Karnataka political crisis: How it took root and grew', *The Hindu*.
- Prakash, Aadyot, & Subhabita Krishna, 2023, 5 December, 'Telangana Assembly election Poor reach of popular welfare schemes dashed BRS's hopes of scoring hat-trick', *The Hindu*.
- Rai, Shirin, & Carole Spary, 2019, *Performing Representation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Raj, Kaushik, 2023, 14 August, 'In Riot-Torn Nuh, A Muslim Man Has Found It Impossible To Get His Complaint Registered', *article14*.
- Reddy, R. Ravikanth, 2023, 10 December, 'A. Revanth Reddy Rise to power', *The Hindu*.
- Reed, John, and Benjamin Parkin, 2023, 3 February, 'The Adani affair: the fallout for Modi's India', *Financial Times*.
- Reuters, 2023, 30 November, 'India's ruling BJP, opposition Congress in tight race to win state elections-exit polls'.
- Reuters, 2023, 1 December, 'Indian economy to exceed growth estimates after strong Q2 beat: economists'.
- Ruparelia, Sanjay, 2013, 'India's New Rights Agenda: Genesis, Promises, Risks', *Pacific Affairs*, 86(3):569-90.
- Sardesai, Shreyas, 2021, 6 May, 'West Bengal Assembly Elections - Subaltern Hindutva on the wane?', *The Hindu*.
- Sayed, Zaina Azhar, 2023, 28 November, 'How Myanmar Civil War Affects The Kuki-Zo People In Manipur', *Outlook*.
- Scroll.in, 2023, 7 January, 'Over 100 ex-bureaucrats seek action against Pragya Thakur for asking Hindus to stock weapons at home'.
- Scroll.in, 2023, 31 March, 'From Bengal to Maharashtra, violence breaks out during Ram Navami processions, over 20 injured'.
- Scroll.in, 2023, 14 August, 'Haryana: Hindutva outfits demand guns for «self-defence» at mahapanchayat near Nuh'.
- Scroll.in, 2023, 29 November, 'Manipur: Meitei militant group United National Liberation Front signs peace agreement with Centre'.
- Sen, Ronojoy, 2023a, *House of the People - Parliament and the Making of Indian Democracy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Sen, Ronojoy, 2023b, 29 September, 'Indian Parliament Passes Women's Reservation Bill', *ISAS Briefs No. 1067*.
- Seth, Maulshree, 2023, 31 December, 'Celebrate Diwali across country on January 22, on the day of Ram temple ceremony: PM Modi at Ayodhya', *The Indian Express*.
- Sharma, Saurabh, 2023, 5 November, 'Parliament and the Making of Indian Democracy', *Business Today*.
- Shastri, Sandeep, 2023, 6 December, 'Role of the leadership factor in the Rajasthan verdict', *The Hindu*.
- Siddiqui, Imran Ahmed, 2023, 4 August, 'Haryana clashes: Video shows alleged Bajrang Dal activist opening fire, cops look away', *The Telegraph*.
- Singh, Amom Malemnganba, 2023, 'Meitei Majoritarian Politics of the BJP in Manipur', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 58(1): 10-12.
- Singh, D. K., 2023, 20 November, 'SC justice for Madigas—How PM Modi endorsed Rahul Gandhi's 'jitni abadi, utna haq' politics', *The Print*.
- Singh, Namita, 2023, 12 December, 'BBC India forced to restructure operations over media ownership rules', *The Independent*.
- Singh, Santosh, 2023, 3 October, 'Four takeaways from Bihar caste survey: On its significance, possible impact on elections', *The Indian Express*.
- Singh, Tripurdaman, 2023, 'The Authoritarian Roots of India's Democracy', *Journal of Democracy*, 34(3): 133-43.
- Singh, Vijaita, 2023, 20 September, 'Women's reservation Bill will be implemented only after 2029: Amit Shah', *The Hindu*.
- Siwach, Sukhbir, 2023, 2 August, '«Who gave weapons to the religious yattris at Nuh?» asks Union MoS Rao Inderjit Singh', *The Indian Express*.
- Spary, Carole, 2020, 'Women candidates, women voters, and the gender politics of India's 2019 parliamentary election', *Contemporary South Asia*, 28(2): 223-41.
- Subramaniam, Arvind, and Josh Felman, 2021, 14 December, 'India's Stalled Rise', *Foreign Affairs*.
- Thapar, Karan, 2023, *The Wire*, 9 May, 'Manipur Violence Is Ethnic Cleansing, Biren Singh Anti-Kuki, He Must Go: BJP MLA Paolientlal Haokip'.
- Thapar, Karan, 2023, 29 November, 'Full Text: Pronab Sen Explains Why Data on Which GDP Is Calculated Is A Major Concern', *The Wire*.
- The Economic Times, 2020, 29 December, 'Rajasthan 2020: Sachin Pilot's rebellion shakes Congress, state sees «resort politics»'.
- The Economist, 2023, 13 May, 'India is getting an eye-wateringly big transport upgrade'.
- The Indian Express, 2023, 7 October, 'BJP MP Adityanath's outfit offers guns to Hindus in Dadri'.
- The Indian Express, 2023, 11 October, 'Centre for Policy Research using foreign contributions for 'undesirable purposes', govt informs Delhi High Court'.
- The Indian Express 2023, 4 November, 'Decoding Politics: Rajasthan question paper leak scams, key BJP campaign ammo against Ashok Gehlot'.
- The Indian Express, 2023, 14 December, (How the 2001 Parliament attack unfolded — and what happened afterwards).
- The North-East Affairs, 2023, 3 July, 'Sixth Schedule in Manipur'.
- The Times of India, 2023, 16 April, 'State after state is passing or proposing job reservation for locals'.
- The Times of India, 2023, 30 April, 'Explained: What was Hijab ban row? Is it a major issue in Karnataka Elections?'.

- The Times of India, 2023, 30 November, 'ElectionsWithTimes'.
- The Wire, 2023, 2 November, 'Unemployment Rate Rose to Two-Year High of 10.09% in October: Report'.
- Tiwari, Ankita, 2023, 3 December, 'Election dynamics altered as women voters took centre-stage across 5 states', *India Today*.
- Tiwari, Deeptiman, 2023, 4 November, 'Caste census: Amit Shah says BJP never opposed it, needs careful thought', *The Indian Express*.
- Torri, Michelguglielmo, 2020, 'India 2019: Assaulting the world's largest democracy: building a kingdom of cruelty and fear', *Asia Maior*, Vol. XXIX/2019: 156-59.
- Torri, Michelguglielmo, 2021, 'India 2020: The deepening crisis of democracy', *Asia Maior*, Vol. XXX/2020: 331-75.
- Travelli, Alex, Suhasini Raj, and Hari Kumar, 2023, 3 October, 'New Delhi Police Raid Homes and Offices of Journalists', *The New York Times*.
- Tudor, Maya, 2023, 'Why India's Democracy Is Dying', *Journal of Democracy*, 34(3): 121-32.
- V-dem (<https://v-dem.net/>).
- Veeraraghav, TM, 2023, 20 March, 'Historic Factors May Be An Impediment To Hindutva In Karnataka: James Manor', *NDTV Profit*.
- Verma, Rahul, 2023, 'The Exaggerated Death of Indian Democracy', *Journal of Democracy*, 34(3): 152-60.
- Weston, Rahul, & Rishikesh Yadav, 2023, 7 December, 'Madhya Pradesh Assembly election Corruption didn't sway votes from BJP', *The Hindu*.
- Yadav, Vineeta, 2023, 'Why India's Political Elites Are to Blame', *Journal of Democracy*, 34(3): 162-72.
- Yasir, Sameer, and Hari Kumar, 2023, 1 December, 'Dozens of Unclaimed Bodies Show That an Indian Conflict Remains Open', *The New York Times*.
- Zaman, Rokibuz, 2023, 1 December, 'From 'self-rule' call to setting the narrative, how ITLF has become new Kuki-Zo voice in Manipur', *Scroll.in*.
- Zaman, Rokibuz, 2023, 11 December, 'Latest Manipur killings confirm long-dormant Meitei insurgency is seeing a revival', *Scroll.in*.

