

**For the People, By the People: Formulation of A Customised Democracy Index for
India Based on Perceptions of Indians**

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Abstract

In the current political era marred by the rise of authoritarian regimes all over the world, even in democratic countries like the U.S., the Democracy Index has become all the more important in monitoring the trends of the movements of countries across the spectrum of democracy. The aim of this research study was to contribute to the evaluation of democracy by developing a predictive index customised to Indian respondents' perceptions of the relative importance of democratic principles in India. An online survey of a cross-section of Indian respondents was conducted: they were asked to rate 10 political principles that had been covered in India's discourse on the practice of democracy in India. Separate multiple regression analyses based on different categories — Democracy for the Individual, Institutions and Processes, and Outcomes — identified Inclusivity and Checks & Balances, Civil Liberties, Periodic Elections, and Stability of Governance as statistically significant variables. However, in combination, only Inclusivity and Checks & Balances proved to be statistically significant. However, the thematic analysis of the qualitative data from the respondents confirmed that respondents often raised issues of Civil Liberties, Periodic Elections, and Stability of Governance in tandem with Inclusivity and Checks & Balances. Therefore, it was concluded that these five political principles should be included in India's Democracy Index. Moreover, to help policymakers and other stakeholders of community improve the practice of democracy for India, the following recommendations are proposed: 1) Formulate and implement multicultural and multi-religious programmes and activities; 2) Protect civil liberties in every sphere of life; 3) Ensure that check and balances are maintained; 4) Participate in elections as a voter and volunteer; and 5) Advocate against the use of violence that will undermine the country's stability.

Keywords: democracy, Democracy Index, inclusivity, checks & balances, civil liberties, periodic elections, governance, institutions and processes of democracy

For the People, By the People: Formulation of A Customised Democracy Index for India Based on Perceptions of Indians

The 21st century, in particular the last decade, has seen the rise of autocracies, with democracy under siege. Among the most influential and resourceful countries in the world — the US, China, and Russia — there has been a decided shift towards more authoritarian leaders, i.e., Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin, and Xi Jinping, respectively. Each of them has been undermining the process and institutions of democracy in their own way, with Trump's systematic efforts to intimidate the media (Walt, 2017), Xi altering term limits to effectively remain in power for life (“China's Xi Allowed”, 2018), and Putin expanding the scope of his powers and increasing the number of years in office (Kara-Murza, 2020).

While the authoritarian conduct of Xi and Putin may not be so surprising, given the entrenched nature of the countries' regimes, what is far more disturbing is that even freely-elected leaders such as the chief executives of the US and India, the world's two largest democracies, are blatantly violating key democratic principles (Walt, 2017). As defined by Dahl (1971), democracy is characterised by the following eight criteria: “the right to vote; the right to be elected; the right of political leaders to compete for support and votes; elections that are free and fair; freedom of association; freedom of expression; alternative sources of information; and institutions that depend on votes and other expressions of preference” (as qtd. in Dalton et al., 2007, p. 2).

The adverse impact of the erosion of democracy all over the world is perhaps no better manifested than in the 14th consecutive year of decline in global freedom in 2019 (Repucci, 2020). The global slide began in 2006, with 113 countries experiencing a net decline, in stark contrast to just 62 reporting a net improvement. According to Repucci (2020), democracy is facing its most serious crisis in decades. Fundamental democratic principles such as free and fair elections, rights of minorities, freedom of the press, and the rule of law have all come under attack around the world.

This is why tools such the *Democracy Index* are useful in tracking the movement of a country across the spectrum ranging from autocracy to democracy. Developed by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU, 2020), it measures the state of democracy in 167 countries by generating a country's score from 60 indicators that relate to the integrity of the electoral

systems and processes, the protection of civil liberties, status of the governance and the overall political environment. The index categorises each of these countries under the following four regime types along the spectrum of democracy: “full democracies” (countries with index score of 8.01 to 10), “flawed democracies” (6.01–8), “hybrid regimes” (4.01– 6), and “authoritarian regimes” (countries with index score of 0 to 4) (EIU, 2020, p. 53). Based on the Democracy Index of 2019, there are 22 full democracies (e.g., New Zealand and United Kingdom), 54 flawed democracies (e.g., USA and India), 37 hybrid regimes (e.g., Pakistan and Turkey), and 54 authoritarian regimes (e.g., North Korea and Iraq) (EIU, 2020).

Even though the Democracy Index is certainly a comprehensive tool, it cannot inherently factor in the unique characteristics of specific countries due to its inherent reliance upon a standardised set of criteria for all countries. To contribute further to the endeavour to monitor the development of democracy, this research study sought to develop a more customised version of the democracy index that relates specifically practice of democracy from the perspective of the Indian public.

On paper, India seems quite close to the ideal democracy: a constitution; free, fair, and regular elections; universal adult franchise; each citizen having fundamental rights; a system of checks and balances; division of power amongst central, state, and local governments; minority rights; civil liberties and so on (Kohli, 2001). Yet, this is far from the truth and doesn't provide the complete & accurate picture of Indian politics. India's laws and policies lack implementation and our political parties fail to uphold the spirit of the constitution with the infringement of fundamental rights of specific groups, particularly the targeting of Muslims under the current Modi government (Varshney 2017). For instance, thousands of people were detained in Kashmir during a lockdown last year due to unrest triggered by the Modi government's controversial stripping of Kashmir's statehood (“At Least 2,300 People Have Been Detained”, 2019). With the media blackouts and the army's control of the state, it has been difficult to even know the true extent of the oppression. Furthermore, despite the existence of democratic institutions such as a purportedly independent judiciary in India, its actual performance has been marred by the abuse of power, failure to check the national government's overreach of authority and widespread corruption, bolster equality in the country (Mehta, 2007).

Given these realities about the turbulent state of democracy in India, this research study sought to elicit the perspective of the ordinary people of India in identifying the democratic principles that they considered to be important for the growth of democracy in India. It would also serve to generate vital insights that would be helpful for policymakers and stakeholders to do their part to improve the state of democracy in India moving forward.

Description of Research Study

Research Aim and Research Approach

The research aim was to develop a predictive index for identifying the political principles that influence Indian respondents' perceptions of the political orientation of India's ruling regime on the EIU's Democracy Index. Essentially, this research study sought to develop an index that would be customised to the unique political and socio-economic realities of India.

In order to develop the predictive index, 10 political principles were carefully selected from literature as practices (desired or actual) of Indian democracy over the past decades. Indian respondents were then asked to rate the extent to which each of these principles reflects the reality of India as a democracy. Finally, the respondents were also asked to rate their perceptions of the political orientation of India's ruling regime in terms of the EIU's Democracy Index.

Separate multiple regression analyses were used to identify and determine the relative influence of the 10 political principles on the Indian respondents' perceptions of India as a democracy on the Democracy Index.

Null Hypothesis: The self-formulated political principles (as described below) have no effect on the Indian respondents' perceptions of India as a democracy on the Democracy Index.

Alternative Hypothesis: The self-formulated political principles (as described below) have an effect on the Indian respondents' perceptions of India as a democracy on the Democracy Index.

In addition, open-ended questions were incorporated to gather respondents' explanations of their ratings to provide further information that could help to supplement the analysis and interpretation of the quantitative data.

Data Collection

Sampling

An online survey was disseminated through WhatsApp and additional social media platforms to reach out to a wide cross-section of Indian respondents. The only criteria were nationality and age — the latter was simply to ensure that the respondents would be able to understand the principles being evaluated. This was done in order to gather as representative a perspective of the Indian population as possible. Ultimately, 125 respondents participated in the survey.

Survey

The online survey questionnaire comprised two key sections:

1) Perceived Score of India on the Democracy Index

Respondents were asked to rate India as a democracy based on EIU's Democracy Index. Respondents were told what the Democracy Index is and showed some examples of countries with their scores on the Democracy Index to help them arrive at their perceived rating of India as a democracy.

2) Self-Reported Ratings of 10 Political Principles

Respondents were then asked to rate each of the following statements in terms of the extent to which they reflect the reality of democracy in India on a scale of 1-10, "1" being "Not at all" and 10 being "Highly".

The following 10 statements represent the political principles identified in India's discourse on democracy. They have been further grouped under the following categories:

Democracy for the Individual

- In India, political equality (one vote, each vote having equal value) makes people feel on par with others.
- In India, everyone has the right to free speech and civil liberties, thus ensuring that all perspectives can be presented and heard.
- Anyone can become actively involved in politics at all levels of the politico-administrative structures and have a say in the decision-making process of the policies.

Institutions and Processes of Democracy

- India's judiciary, legislature and executive systems ensure the proper balance of power.
- There are choices between different political parties and leaders for everyone.
- India's periodic elections hold political parties and leaders accountable, thus making it worthwhile to use up resources that could have been spent in other areas such as healthcare and education.

Outcomes of Democracy

- India's democracy is characterised by stable governance, instead of frequent changes of government.
- India's democracy is supported by steady economic growth.
- India's democracy ensures that there is no economic disparity between cities and countryside.
- India is an inclusive society that caters to people of different religions, castes and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Open-ended Question

- Please elaborate on your democracy rating and any other related area covered in the survey.

Data Analysis

Regression Analyses were run to identify which political principles influenced Indian respondents' evaluations of India on the democracy index and the extent of their influence. The outcome could thus enable one to develop a predictive index for predicting Indian citizens' evaluations of a ruling regime across the democratic-authoritarian spectrum based on their ratings of individual aspects of democracy. Qualitative data from open-ended questions were also analysed to provide additional interpretations of the quantitative data.

Results

In this section, all the results from the statistical analyses, as outlined in the “Description of Research Study” section, are presented and examined in detail. The political principles that influenced Indian respondents' evaluations of India on the democracy index and the extent of their influence are identified and discussed.

A regression analysis was conducted to identify which of the 10 political principles identified in this research study influenced Indian respondents' evaluations of India on the democracy index and the extent of their influence (see Table 1).

Table 1

Full Regression Analysis — 10 Political Principles

<i>Regression Statistics</i>	
Multiple R	0.847330344
R Square	0.717968711
Adjusted R Square	0.693229124
Standard Error	0.843351992
Observations	125

<i>ANOVA</i>					
	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Significance F</i>
Regression	10	206.4100447	20.6410045	29.0210471	6.6185E-27

Residual	114	81.08165446	0.71124258			
Total	124	287.4916992				

	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Lower 95%</i>	<i>Upper 95%</i>
Intercept	0.501562312	0.540606613	0.92777687	0.35548349	-0.5693752	1.57249985
Checks and Balances	0.261789935	0.081536021	3.21072737	0.00172051	0.1002677	0.42331217
Periodic Elections	0.078976866	0.081437628	0.96978347	0.33420749	-0.0823504	0.24030418
Cities and Countryside	0.037567389	0.036982001	1.01582898	0.31186193	-0.0356937	0.11082845
Vote Equality	0.004780519	0.029617393	0.16140919	0.87205684	-0.0538913	0.06345235
Civil Liberties	0.06699487	0.064774595	1.03427694	0.30319579	-0.0613231	0.19531284
Inclusivity	0.413119394	0.078482533	5.26383866	6.7109E-07	0.2576461	0.56859269
Economic Growth	-0.016316076	0.041797315	-0.3903618	0.69699748	-0.0991162	0.06648408
Political Parties	-0.004730284	0.046187398	-0.102415	0.91860718	-0.0962272	0.08676659
Stability of Governance	0.034929395	0.05247602	0.66562584	0.50699485	-0.0690252	0.13888399
Political Involvement	0.055732802	0.029201791	1.90854052	0.05883605	-0.0021157	0.11358133

On the whole, the 10 predictors produced a strong overall result that was statistically significant: R Square = 0.72, $F(10, 114) = 29.02$, $p < .01$. However, of the 10 variables, only two were found to be statistically significant: Checks and Balances, $t(114) = 3.21$ (higher than the critical value of 1.98), $p < .01$ and Inclusivity, $t(114) = 5.26$, $p < .01$.

Therefore, the regression analysis was done again by using only the two statistically significant variables. As shown in Table 2, the predictive effects of these factors are confirmed: Checks and Balances, $b = 0.35$, $t(122) = 5.10$ (higher than the critical value of 1.98), $p < .01$, and Inclusivity, $b = 0.42$, $t(122) = 6.51$, $p < .01$. These two predictors explained a statistically significant proportion of the variance in the Perceived Score of Democracy, $R^2 = 0.69$, $F(2, 122) = 135.11$, $p < .01$.

Table 2

Limited Regression Analysis — Checks and Balances and Inclusivity

<i>Regression Statistics</i>	
Multiple R	0.83003247
R Square	0.68895391
Adjusted R Square	0.68385479
Standard Error	0.85614063
Observations	125

<i>ANOVA</i>					
	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Significance F</i>
Regression	2	198.0685308	99.0342654	135.112416	1.1543E-31
Residual	122	89.42316844	0.73297679		
Total	124	287.4916992			

	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Lower 95%</i>	<i>Upper 95%</i>
Intercept	1.33066704	0.295255293	4.50683552	1.5203E-05	0.7461797	1.91515439
Checks and Balances	0.34980196	0.068584359	5.10031684	1.2587E-06	0.21403237	0.48557155
Inclusivity	0.42804439	0.065742829	6.51089097	1.7454E-09	0.2978999	0.55818889

Given that the R square had dropped from 0.72 in the full regression analysis to 0.69 with the limited regression analysis, additional regression analyses with the combination of predictors by category (“Democracy for the Individual”, “Institutions and Processes of Democracy” and “Outcomes of Democracy) were run. The intent was to identify additional statistically significant factors that could be used to form a matrix for measuring perceptions of level of democracy from the perspectives of Indians.

With the “Individual” category, only the Civil Liberties factor was statistically significant: $b = 0.48$, $t(121) = 7.21$ (higher than the critical value of 1.98), $p < .01$ (see Table 3).

Table 3

Limited Regression Analysis — “Individual” Category

<i>Regression Statistics</i>	
Multiple R	0.5523795

R Square	0.3051231
Adjusted R Square	0.2878947
Standard Error	1.2849135
Observations	125

ANOVA

	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Significance F</i>
Regression	3	87.72036267	29.2401209	17.7105219	1.3536E-09
Residual	121	199.7713365	1.65100278		
Total	124	287.4916992			

	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Lower 95%</i>	<i>Upper 95%</i>
Intercept	3.5250151	0.54185171	6.5054979	1.8311E-09	2.45227678	4.59775354
Vote Equality	-0.0093702	0.044291535	-0.2115565	0.83280898	-0.0970569	0.07831662
Civil Liberties	0.4750004	0.065875254	7.21060499	5.2558E-11	0.34458299	0.60541787
Political Involvement	-0.0487279	0.042128146	-1.1566579	0.24969061	-0.1321316	0.03467592

Next, a regression analysis was run with the predictors from the “Institutions and Processes” category. Table 4 shows that apart from Checks and Balances, $b = 0.44$, $t(121) = 5.56$ (higher than the critical value of 1.98), $p < .01$, Periodic Elections, $b = 0.28$, $t(121) = 3.53$, $p < .01$, is also statistically significant.

Table 4

Limited Regression Analysis — “Institutions and Processes” Category

<i>Regression Statistics</i>	
Multiple R	0.7938130
R Square	0.6301391
Adjusted R Square	0.6209690
Standard Error	0.9374306
Observations	125

ANOVA

	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Significance F</i>
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Regression	3	181.159785	60.3865951	68.7166981	5.1773E-26
Residual	121	106.331914	0.87877615		
Total	124	287.491699			

	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>Standard</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Lower 95%</i>	<i>Upper 95%</i>
	<i>s</i>	<i>Error</i>				
Intercept	1.3431090	0.34751833	3.86485821	0.00018019	0.65510487	2.03111326
Checks and Balances	0.4388995	0.07893565	5.56021946	1.6367E-07	0.28262561	0.59517351
Periodic Elections	0.2775153	0.07852003	3.53432511	0.00057995	0.1220642	0.43296641
Political Parties	0.0618144	0.04787936	1.29104607	0.19914884	-0.0329754	0.15660428

The subsequent regression analysis was run with the predictors from the “Outcomes” category. Table 5 shows that apart from Inclusivity, $b = 0.63$, $t(120) = 12.26$ (higher than the critical value of 1.98), $p < .01$, Stability of Governance, $b = 0.13$, $t(120) = 2.90$, $p < .01$, is also statistically significant.

Table 5

Limited Regression Analysis — “Outcomes” Category

<i>Regression Statistics</i>	
Multiple R	0.8082302
R Square	0.6532361
Adjusted R Square	0.6416773
Standard Error	0.9114628
Observations	125

ANOVA

	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Significance F</i>
Regression	4	187.799966	46.94999144	56.5142041	1.0144E-26
Residual	120	99.6917334	0.830764445		
Total	124	287.491699			

	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>Standard</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Lower 95%</i>	<i>Upper 95%</i>
	<i>s</i>	<i>Error</i>				

Intercept	1.1595486	7	0.50664217	2.288693537	0.02384634	0.15643242	2.16266491
Stability of Governance	0.1337180	5	0.04611499	2.899665786	0.00444372	0.04241358	0.22502251
Inclusivity	0.6312294	3	0.05150109	12.25662175	6.8156E-23	0.52926082	0.73319797
Economic Growth	0.0002375	3	0.04357506	0.005451117	0.99565971	-0.086038	0.08651311
Cities and Countryside	0.0498067	2	0.03947784	1.261637321	0.20952622	-0.0283567	0.12797009

A final regression analysis was then run with all the five statistically significant predictors that had been identified in the regression analyses by categories of democracy.

Table 6

Final Limited Regression Analysis with Statistically Significant Variables

<i>Regression Statistics</i>	
Multiple R	0.839188144
R Square	0.704236742
Adjusted R Square	0.691809714
Standard Error	0.84530081
Observations	125

ANOVA

	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Significance F</i>
Regression	5	202.4622175	40.4924435	56.6697653	7.0623E-30
Residual	119	85.02948174	0.71453346		
Total	124	287.4916992			

	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Lower 95%</i>	<i>Upper 95%</i>
Intercept	0.955517318	0.329780218	2.89743673	0.00447954	0.30251955	1.60851509
Civil Liberties	0.084547276	0.063296214	1.33573986	0.18418338	-0.0407855	0.2098801
Periodic Elections	0.071638409	0.080210523	0.89312981	0.37359028	-0.0871864	0.23046326
Checks and Balances	0.250587773	0.080438787	3.11526046	0.00230341	0.09131094	0.4098646
Inclusivity	0.391958603	0.073608536	5.3249069	4.8369E-07	0.24620635	0.53771086

Stability of Governance	0.039176853	0.052172639	0.75090802	0.45419034	-0.0641302	0.14248389
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On the whole, the 5 predictors produced a strong overall result that was statistically significant: R Square = 0.71, $F(5, 119) = 56.67$, $p < .01$. However, of the 5 variables, only the original two variables were found to be statistically significant, in order of impact: Inclusivity, $b = 0.39$, $t(119) = 5.26$ (higher than the critical value of 1.98), $p < .01$, Checks and Balances, $b = 0.25$, $t(119) = 5.32$, $p < .01$. All the other variables were statistically insignificant, as their p values were $> .05$.

Therefore, the predictive equation for predicting the perceived level of democracy for India is as follows based on the figures from Table 2.

$$1.33 + 0.34*(\text{rating: perception of Checks and Balances}) + 0.43*(\text{rating: perception of Inclusivity}) = \text{perceived level of democracy}$$

Therefore, if an Indian respondent were to rate India as “10” for Checks and Balances and “10” for “Inclusivity”, this individual’s perception of India’s level of democracy would be:

$$1.33 + 0.34*(10) + 0.43*(10) = \mathbf{9.03} \text{ (out of 10)}$$

Conversely, if an Indian respondent were to rate India as “1” for Checks and Balances and “1” for “Inclusivity”, this individual’s perception of India’s level of democracy would be:

$$1.33 + 0.34*(1) + 0.43*(1) = \mathbf{2.1} \text{ (out of 10)}$$

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Based on the results of all the regression analyses, it is evident that for the Indian respondents, their perceptions of the levels of Inclusivity, as well as Checks and Balances, were highly important in determining their perceptions of the level of democracy in India. The two variables alone accounted for 69% of the perceived level of democracy.

Examining the respondents' responses to the open-ended questions, which provided them with the opportunity to elaborate upon their responses, produced additional helpful insights that supplemented the quantitative data. It further enabled us to develop a more sophisticated perceived democracy matrix that is customized to the unique political and socio-economic realities of India.

What the analysis of the qualitative data confirms is the respondents' elevated valuation of Inclusivity in their conceptions of what should lie at the heart of India's democracy. It is interesting to see how these respondents echo one another in their celebration of democratic theories and structures underpinning the makeup of Indian democracy, while being mindful of its vast discrepancies with real-life situation (all italics and labels of predictors of democracy are my own):

India is a democratic country with strong foundation and believes *unity in diversity*.
[Inclusivity]

Our Constitution made India a *democratic, secular* and socialist Republic, but nowadays, I find it is more in theory than practice... *Freedom of speech* is at stake and *religious intolerance* can be easily witnessed. [Civil Liberties, Inclusivity]

India is proud to be the largest democracy in the world... people exercising *freedom of expression, movement and religion*. At the same time, we quite often experience *rampant inequalities, injustice or nonfulfillment of social expectations*. [Civil Liberties, Inclusivity]

The current government is using its power to turn the world's largest democracy into a superficial one. Our theoretical laws, regimes and values are good, but they aren't followed in practical life. India is a country with *diversity in terms of religion, geo political situation, caste*, the current government must understand this. *Secularity and equality* is in danger. [Inclusivity, Civil Liberties]

There are even more respondents who were despondent about the state of India's democracy in actuality, citing the failure to practise true inclusivity on the part of communities, and particularly, the government:

Freedom of speech is at stake and *religious intolerance* can be easily witnessed. [Civil Liberties, Inclusivity]

Situations that have taken place in the recent past, like the *Delhi riots*, the *beating up of Jawaharlal Nehru University students* and faculty members, the *vulgar language used by those in power* has led to my firm belief that India is not what it actually should be, a democratic country which *caters to everyone's needs*. [Inclusivity, Civil Liberties]

We have had every government using *draconian laws* such as the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act used to *stifle opposite views*. [Another] thing is the rise of the *so-called nationalism*, or rather the concept of Hindu Rashtra, which can be seen with the *rising [number of] cases of lynching* since 2014. That's why Indian democracy could be doing much better. [Inclusivity, Civil Liberties]

What the respondents are referring to is also supported in the literature and news reports. For instance, in a siege against civil liberties, the authorities have suppressed the critical voices of the academic and artistic community “in order to appease Hindu religious-nationalist and Muslim fundamentalist groups” (Singh, 2018, p. 1). An example of the lack of inclusivity is the Delhi Riots refer to multiple instances of bloodshed, property destruction, and rioting in Delhi in which Hindu mobs attacked Muslims with inadequate intervention from the police, which started on 23 February 2020 (Gettleman et al., 2020). 53 people were killed, out of which two-thirds were Muslims who were shot, slashes with repeated blows or set on fire (Gettleman et al., 2020).

It is noteworthy that all of these comments address *both* inclusivity and civil liberties. In a sense, one can say that within a democracy, the respect for the civil liberties of every individual is a fundamental foundation for creating an inclusive society. Even though it is not ultimately considered to be statistically significant in the overall regression, it is statistically significant by category. The confirmation of its importance in the qualitative data indicates that it should be added to the predictive matrix, as a reflection of the respondents' high valuation of this political principle.

The secondary most influential factor that is also statistically significant is the system of Checks and Balances. There were also respondents who pinpointed this feature as an important factor in their comments:

India is the World's largest democracy, with *good systems* in place and an *active legislature* and a *strong judiciary*. [Checks and Balances]

A fair and independent electoral process, an independent judiciary, a Parliament with a noisy opposition, a relatively free press and an army that has stayed away from politics have been the achievements of India's democracy, but in recent years, there have been limitations like the CAA¹ and the Kashmir situation.² [Checks and Balances]

Although the respondents appreciate the fact that India can boast of all the trappings of democracy, in terms of having the necessary checks and balances in place, such as independent institutions, this has not prevented the passage of one-sided laws. Under the dominance of Modi's ruling party in the legislative body, such laws have gotten passed. Its return to power in the 2019 elections has ushered in a new dominant party system in India, one that does not bode well for Indian democracy (Vaishnav & Hinton, 2019).

Another aspect of the quote to highlight above is that the respondents considered Periodic Elections to be an integral part of the creation of a system of Checks and Balances in India's democracy. Ultimately, even with the rule of parties that have not served the interests of the Indian people, Indians at least know that they have the opportunity to vote them out thanks to Periodic Elections:

We have witnessed the conduct of *successful elections, peaceful changes of government* at the Centre and in the States. [Periodic Elections, Stability of Governance]

¹ CAA stands for Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 ; The act provides a path to Indian Citizenship for illegal immigrants of Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, and Christian religious minorities, but doesn't make illegal Muslim immigrants eligible for Indian Citizenship

² The Kashmir situation refers to the Jammu and Kashmir lockdown and communications blackout. This was imposed to prevent protests during which thousands of people, mostly young men, have been detained in Jammu and Kashmir, which was triggered by the government's stripping of the statehood of Jammu and Kashmir.

This is why Periodic Elections, a variable that is a necessary accompaniment to Checks and Balances, should also be included in the perceived democracy matrix for India. As with Civil Liberties, this variable is also statistically significant by category.

Finally, as the above quote also shows, events like periodic elections would not be able to take place without stable governance that can ensure peaceful transitions — yet another statistically significant variable by category. The importance of stable governance was also reiterated by another respondent as an important feature of India's democracy:

India's democracy has shown *stable governments* coming into power and now people have a sense of understanding of what's good for them, both at the national and state [level]. [Stability of Governance]

Therefore, Stability of Governance is the final predictor that will also be incorporated into the matrix through the qualitative analysis of the data.

CONCLUSION

The regression analysis showed that the null hypothesis can be partially rejected as two of the predictors, Inclusivity, as well as Checks and Balances, are statistically significant in predicting Indian respondents' perceived level of democracy of India. Together, they accounted for almost 70% of the Indian's perceptions of India's democracy. Limited multiple regression analyses by categories identified additional statistically significant variables — Civil Liberties, Periodic Elections, and Stability of Governance. Even though they were not found to be statistically significant in a limited regression analysis combining all the statistically significant variables from different categories, they were included based on the fact that they were highlighted by the respondents, often in tandem with Inclusivity, as well as Checks and Balances. Therefore, as the practical objective of this research study is to produce a predictive democracy matrix for India, based on the perceptions of Indians, they were included in the matrix and ranked in order importance based on their coefficients as derived from final regression analysis (see Table 6):

1. Inclusivity (0.39)

2. Checks and Balances (0.25)
3. Civil Liberties (0.08)
4. Periodic Elections (0.07)
5. Stability of Governance (0.04)

Future research should thus be conducted, involving larger samples of the population from a wider cross-section of society. As the statistically significant variables only accounted for 70% of the variance of the perceived level of democracy, other predictors should be considered.

Based on the quantitative and qualitative findings, it is evident that the Indian respondents are fiercely proud of the existence and maintenance of the systems of democracy, manifested in the Checks and Balances of the separateness of the executive office, the legislative body, and the judiciary; Periodic Elections, and Stability of Governance. The increasing voter turnout in the last few decades, rising to 67.4% in 2019 (Shorzman & Schultz, 2019), in India testifies to the citizens' fundamental belief that their vote matters and can make a difference.

Nonetheless, the respondents' responses also reflected their disappointment with the failure of the institutions and the processes in preventing the passage of one-sided laws and producing the desired democratic outcomes. In particular, the respondents yearned for an India that is able to bridge its ethnic, religious, caste and socioeconomic divides and live up to its secular constitutional vision. Along the same lines, they also highlighted their desire for communities and the government to respect civil liberties and allow for the freedom of expression, which is part and parcel of creating an inclusive society. Unfortunately, their perspective seems to be in stark contrast to the current government's divisive policies of promoting pro-nationalist sentiments and fomenting anti-Muslim sentiments (Vaishnav & Hinton, 2019).

Nonetheless, the respondents' comments about their importance in Indian democracy show how they still have faith that one day these democratic systems and processes Indian democracy in practice will ultimately produce a secular and inclusive India that is truly democratic. The following recommendations are proposed for policymakers and other stakeholders of the community in the endeavour to contribute to India's progress towards being a full-fledged democracy that lives up to its constitutional ideas:

1. **Promote the implementation of multicultural and multi-religious programmes and activities:** These activities would help to forge a sense of connection between all communities and offer minority communities, such as Muslims, Sikhs, and Dalits, a sense of inclusivity. These cultural exchanges could hopefully overcome the sense of divide that separates diverse communities.
2. **Protect civil liberties in every sphere of life:** Protecting civil liberties, like the right to free speech and right to freedom of religion, would improve the relationship between the government and its citizens. Allowing for critical expression would not only offer citizens a sense of security and self-expression, but also ensures that there are external voices that can speak up against the transgressive actions of the government such as the imposition of its will on people.
3. **Do one's part to ensure that checks and balances are maintained:** The system of checks and balances is one of the most important aspects of a democracy. With this system, each of the three branches (legislature, judiciary, and executive) can limit the power of the others, ensuring that no branch becomes too powerful (Mehta, 2007). The extent to which checks and balances are maintained is a key indicator of how democratic a country is. In autocratic countries like China and Russia, the governing leaders are so powerful that they overrule the judiciary's decisions, thus undermining the system of checks and balances ("China's Xi Allowed", 2018; Kara-Murza, 2020). Therefore, it's really important to do one's part to ensure that checks and balances are maintained.
4. **Participate in elections as a voter and volunteer.** As citizens, we need to do our bit to maintain the democratic spirit of the country. In voting during elections, we should be politically aware and make the most of the opportunity to elect the most representative leaders. Moreover, we also try to make others aware too by volunteering in campaigns.
5. **Advocate against the use of violence that will undermine the country's stability.** Stability of Governance is essential for any government to implement its policies and bring about the changes that it has envisioned. We should thus resort to peaceful,

non-violent measures to solve problems in order to maintain the country's democratic nature, as violent protests or riots undermine stability.

During this study, it was evident that the people of India feel very strongly about the Democratic character of India. The two most statistically significant political principles, Inclusivity and Checks & Balances, speak volumes about the growing political maturity of Indians.

The Preamble to the Indian Constitution, written in January 1950, begins with "WE, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA" and, even after seventy years, the people of India still want the government to ensure that we are ONE and do not want the government to segregate or fragment the country for their ulterior motives.

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Appendix

Participation Invitation Letter

Dear Invitee,

My name is Viren Kalra. I am a high school student at Delhi Public School, RK Puram. I am kindly requesting your participation in an online survey about your perceptions of the status of India's democracy in relation to 10 political principles. This survey will take no longer than 10 minutes to complete.

The intent of this research study is to identify and assess the relative importance of specific political principles in influencing Indians' perceptions of India as a democracy on the democratic-authoritarian spectrum.

Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. Any information you provide will be kept anonymous. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or any identifying information in the research report.

Thank you in advance for your time and participation. Your contribution will be helpful in developing a customised democracy index for India, which will contribute to our country's discourse on this subject.

I would greatly appreciate your responses by Saturday, 9th May.

If you have any queries or concerns, please contact me via viren.kalra7@gmail.com.

To begin the study, click on the survey link at the end.

Sincerely,

Viren Kalra

