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1. Indian Politics in 2025

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter attempts to capture India's political evolution in 2025 until as late in the year as can feasibly be covered.¹ Mid-2025 marked the end of the first year of the third term of the Narendra Modi-led government of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, or the Indian People's Party), the principal party, historically, of the Indian Right. This nationalist party's ideology is centered on the political and cultural predominance of the country's 80 percent majority belonging to the Hindu religion. It often exhibits a marked hostility to Muslims, the main minority at about a seventh of the population.² This is abundantly reflected in the writings and speeches of the party's and Hindutva ideology's main thinkers and leaders, past and present.³ The year 2025 marks part of the eleventh and twelfth years of Prime Minister Modi's government. Developments during 2025 reflect not only a broad continuity with policy thrusts over the past two-term decade but also the attempts to deal with new challenges from within and without.

THE EFFECTS OF THE 2024 ELECTION ON THE BJP-LED GOVERNMENT

Before discussing 2025, it is necessary to understand the impact of the 2024 election on the

nature of the BJP-led coalition government. In the Modi-led BJP's two terms (2014–19 and 2019–24), the BJP enjoyed a majority on its own in the more powerful, directly elected Lok Sabha (Lower House of Parliament), though not in the Rajya Sabha (Upper House, elected by state legislators in India's twenty-eight states and eight Union Territories by proportional representation). It retained its preelectoral allies in the cabinet to enhance its legislative power and to boost its Upper House numbers because of the importance that preelectoral coalitions have acquired in boosting electoral performance since 1989 and especially since 2014. To illustrate, while the BJP got 282 seats (out of a Lok Sabha total of 543), or a slight majority, 57 of these 282 were dependent on significant preelectoral allies across states, without which the BJP would have fallen short of a majority. Likewise, even the BJP's enhanced majority of 303 seats in 2019 depended, for 42 seats, on significant preelectoral allies in three states (Maharashtra, Bihar, and Punjab).⁴ Hence, incentives exist to include preelectoral allies in cabinets, not to speak of their importance in many states for contesting elections to state legislative assemblies.

In the 2024 election, the BJP won 240 seats despite preelectoral alliances but did not reach the majority mark of 272 out of 543 (see table 1.1 for the seats won, state-wise, by BJP-led

alliance's parties). It formed a new type of coalition unlike India's eleven earlier coalition governments. Of these, eight were minority coalitions in which the ruling coalition did not enjoy a majority but depended on external support from parties outside the coalition on an issue-by-issue basis. Three coalition governments were what are called oversized coalitions or surplus majority coalitions with a majority party—that is, coalitions in which one party has a majority but includes preelectoral or postelectoral partners in the cabinet. The two Modi-led, BJP-led coalitions of 2014–24 belonged to this type. The Modi-led, BJP-led coalition formed in 2024, however, was a surplus majority coalition without a majority party because the BJP did not have a majority. With its allies who participated in the government (as ministers), its Lok Sabha majority came to 286, and with its allies who did not participate in government, it had the support of another 7, taking its majority to 293, while the opposition INDIA (Indian National Developmental and Inclusive Alliance) coalition totaled 234. This was a surplus majority coalition as it needed only the largest three allies to reach the halfway mark of 272 and had majority-redundant allies over that number as a political insurance policy. No single ally had the numbers to unseat the government by pulling out of the coalition, leaving the BJP relatively secure and able to follow its own agenda without fearing a loss of power. Even if the largest ally, with 16 seats, pulled out it would not reduce the effective coalition of 293 executive plus legislative allies to less than the 272 needed for a majority. These essential facts set the background for our discussion of Indian politics in 2025.⁵

The Modi-led, BJP-led coalition government thus began 2025 with a feeling of stability and confidence. This was boosted by the fact that the BJP, with its allies, had won state assembly elections in late 2024 in the two important states of Maharashtra and Haryana and in February 2025 won the elections to the legislative assembly of the Union Territory of Delhi, defeating the Aam

Aadmi Party (Common Man's Party) that had been in power for two terms. As of February 2025, the BJP was in power in fourteen of India's twenty-eight states, either ruling on its own or as the senior coalition partner, and in one (Delhi) of India's three Union Territories with a legislative assembly. In the Rajya Sabha, the BJP started 2025 with a majority for the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), not the BJP alone, including 12 nominated candidates (there are 12 seats for nominated candidates of national eminence in various fields). As of September the BJP had increased its numbers to 102 seats and the NDA to 132 (including 7 of the nominated), out of a Rajya Sabha total of 245 seats. State-level victories are important for three reasons.

First, the BJP's seats are disproportionately concentrated in the northern and central (Hindi-speaking) states and in the three western states of Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Goa, plus three Union Territories in these regions, totaling 304 seats (272 is needed for a majority). In order to be assured of victories in future contests, it greatly needs to enhance its penetration of the southern and eastern states.

Second, the BJP, along with its allies, enjoys a slight majority in the Rajya Sabha, which is elected by proportional representation by the state assemblies. Since ordinary bills have to be passed in both houses with a simple majority, the BJP needs to spread its geographical base to win more seats.

Third, if the BJP wants to pass constitutional amendments without depending on deals with allies or other parties, it needs a two-thirds majority in both houses. A major part of its ideological agenda, to be discussed below, will need constitutional amendments, so the spread across states is important for this and the aforementioned reasons.

Many of the political developments of 2025 have the shadow of coming state elections hanging over them. Elections are due in the large state

TABLE 1.1 THE BJP-LED NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE, 2024

Party	Seats contested	Seats won
Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)	441	240
Telugu Desam Party (TDP)	17	16
Janata Dal (United) (JD [U])	16	12
Shiv Sena	15	7
Pattali Makkal Katchi	10	0
Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) (LJP)	5	5
Nationalist Congress Party	5	1
Bharath Dharma Jana Sena	4	0
Janata Dal (Secular) (JD[S])	3	2
Tamil Maanila Congress (Moopanar)	3	0
Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam	2	0
Apna Dal (Soneylal)	2	1
Asom Gana Parishad	2	1
Jana Sena Party	2	2
National People's Party	2	0
Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD)	2	2
All Jharkhand Students Union	1	1
Hindustani Awam Morcha (HAM)	1	1
Naga People's Front	1	0
Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party	1	0
Sikkim Krantikari Morcha	1	1
Rashtriya Lok Morcha	1	0
Rashtriya Samaj Paksha	1	0
Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party	1	0
United People's Party Liberal	1	1
Independent	1	0
Total	541	293

Notes: While the legislative coalition = 293, parties in the government with ministers from the Lok Sabha (executive coalition) = BJP (240), TDP (16), JD(U) (12), Shiv Sena (7), LJP (5), JD(S) (2), RLD (2), Apna Dal (S) (1), HAM (S) (1) = 286. The Republican Party of India's (RPI's) minister is from the Rajya Sabha so does not count in the executive coalition in the Lok Sabha, which is 286, while the legislative coalition is 293. This, technically, makes the TDP pivotal with 16 seats out of 286, but if the effective coalition in the Lok Sabha is the legislative coalition, all of whom were preelectoral allies, then the TDP is not pivotal for a majority.

Source: Election Commission of India.

(fourth in parliamentary seats) of Bihar, currently ruled by the BJP with allies, by the end of 2025, and four major states—Tamil Nadu and Kerala in the south, West Bengal and Assam in the east—are due for elections by mid-2026, for which the buildup has started. Of these four only Assam is ruled by the BJP.

KEY IDEOLOGICAL AND POLICY PLANKS PROMOTED IN 2025

So far the main developments and focus of domestic politics in 2025 have been the promotion of some of the BJP's key ideological planks.

First—and this is largely within executive power—has been the promotion of its ideology through the educational system at both the level of the school curriculum at the central (federal) level and in federal public universities. Changes have been made within history and social sciences textbooks to broadly reflect a Hindu-nationalist BJP worldview, and similar changes are sought at the undergraduate level through changes in syllabi.

Second, the BJP has been preparing the country for a sequence of policies that could have potentially major political changes, including a census in 2027 that would lead not only to the intrastate redistricting of seats but an interstate reallocation of parliamentary seats. This census would also count the numbers of castes, which has not been done since 1931 under British rule. An early exercise for the 2027 census is already planned for late 2025.

Third, in parallel with the above measures, changes—including the necessary constitutional amendments—will be sought to implement an ambitious electoral reform called One Nation One Election (ONOE).

Fourth, and complementary to the above electoral reforms proposed, will be moves, ostensibly by the

independent Election Commission of India (ECI), to revise the electoral rolls (voter lists) in India, state by state, to delete ineligible voters—that is, those who cannot prove their citizenship. This process just started in July 2025 with the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the voter list in Bihar, which is due for state assembly elections in late 2025.

The following paragraphs elaborate on the above policy planks, none of which are new and all of which have roots in the BJP's long-standing ideological framework or in its last term.

The national census, held in the first year of each decade since 1881, was last held in 2011 and skipped in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. India's population was 1,210 million in 2011. In 2025, United Nations estimates put it at somewhat over 1,400 million, overtaking China by a slight margin to become the world's most populous country.⁶ What is significant here is that the delayed census now slated for 2027 has three potential political implications.

First, this census would ask people their caste and enumerate the numbers of each caste. In India, caste structures are state specific, and over four thousand castes are in existence according to anthropologists.⁷ It is politically significant that although reservations, or quotas, were enacted in public employment and college admissions proportional to the population for two categories, the Scheduled Castes (ex-untouchables, untouchability having been abolished in the Constitution) and Scheduled Tribes (aboriginals), quotas for a range of castes termed Other Backward Classes (OBCs), who were well below the national average in income and education and by representation in public employment, were added in 1990 as a matter of policy, with 27 percent of public employment and college admissions reserved for them. There then came a felt need for accurate data about the OBCs, which was lacking since no comprehensive caste census had taken place since 1931. Both the Congress and the BJP had been

opposed to a caste census and have been historically opposed to OBC quotas, but the Congress over the past year, along with its allies in the opposition INDIA alliance, has come around to supporting a caste census, calculating that it will benefit from the OBC voters who form the core base of some congressional allies in some states. The BJP, historically an upper-caste- and middle-class-oriented urban-centric party that has over the past three decades expanded downward and outward to encompass large sections of the population beyond its traditional support base, started supporting a caste census in 2025.

All parties are competing to expand their support base among the vast OBC electorate but fear that a caste census will actually show a percentage increase among the OBCs, as well as among the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes, and the major minority, Muslims. All of these are among the poorer, less-educated sections of the population among whom fertility rates, though dropping, are dropping slower than among the upper castes and the better off in general. So while both the BJP and the Congress are hoping to make electoral gains, they also are apprehensive about these potential and indeed likely shifts in group proportions that the coming census may reveal.

Second, the coming census is likely to show a slight increase in the population share of the relatively poorer, less-educated segments of the population such as the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and the main minority, the Muslims. The first two of these groups have population-proportionate quotas in the Lok Sabha of 84 and 47 seats, totaling 131 seats, or 24 percent of seats, and in public employment and college admissions. An increase in the proportion of Muslims, even if slight, will feed Hindu-nationalist anxieties. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (the BJP's parent organization) chief Mohan Bhagwat has already urged Hindus to have more children, and both Prime Minister Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah have in public speeches repeatedly warned against

"demographic changes," a code word for increases in the population of Muslims.⁸ It might also help the BJP electorally by enabling an explicit or coded appeal to Hindu anxieties in many states.

Third, the other major political consequence of the census is the likely shift in population proportions between states and regions. Going by the trend of the past few decadal censuses, the southern states and some others have been growing more slowly than the northern and central Hindi-speaking states. As far back as 1976, the interstate allocation of Lok Sabha seats was frozen on the basis of the 1971 census to avoid penalizing, in terms of representation, states that were more successful in implementing the family planning (birth control) program, population control being a major policy priority at that time. In 2003, Parliament extended the freeze on the interstate reallocation of seats to 2026. The freeze will end next year, and there will be a fresh reallocation based on the results of the coming census. The new reallocation will and has already increased anxieties regarding falling relative numbers and Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha seats in the non-Hindi-speaking southern states—that is, of relative disempowerment. This has already led to calls in some of these states, like Tamil Nadu, for couples to have more children.⁹ The BJP is likely to gain from the probable relative increase in the population share of its stronghold Hindi-speaking northern and central Indian states. However, it has moved to allay the South's fears by saying that the overall strength of the Lok Sabha will be increased by the constitutionally allowed quarter so that states that are relative losers do not lose seats in absolute numbers. Relative representation between states is a sensitive issue in India's language-based federal system.

The other major political-systemic change being promoted, since its last term, by the BJP is the ONOE policy proposal. From the first national elections in 1952 to the fourth in 1967, India had simultaneous elections at the national and state levels in almost all states, resulting in coterminous five-year

terms. This changed from 1969 onward when coalition governments in a number of states collapsed, necessitating midterm elections. Furthermore, the fifth national election was called early, in 1971, before the scheduled date in 1972, by then prime minister Indira Gandhi following the Congress Party's split in 1969, sensing that an early election could present her a sweeping victory, which did materialize. From that point forward, national and state assembly elections for the majority of states did not coincide. As a result, there were state elections in at least some states in each year of a parliamentary term. The BJP has been arguing, since its last term, that such a staggered electoral calendar negatively impinges on policy and development because of added electoral costs and delays in development policies at the state level. Since allocations are frozen after the election schedule is declared, under an interparty agreement the Model Code of Conduct (for elections) kicks in so that incumbent parties cannot buy votes through last-minute discretionary allocative and other policies. While there might be a certain logic and truth to this argument, the non-NDA opposition that is currently in power in ten of the twenty-eight states suspects that ONOE is meant to help the BJP because simultaneous elections will result in issues and leadership at the national level, instead of the state level, dominating the media and the voter's mindspace, something that survey evidence confirms.¹⁰

The ONOE proposal, however, will require a number of constitutional changes, as several former Supreme Court judges have pointed out, that would require majorities of two-thirds in both houses, of those both present and voting. Such changes would be subject to passage by at least a simple majority of the membership of the house and then subject to judicial review, and some amendments would require passage by at least half the state legislatures.¹¹ As several judges have observed, the fate of state assemblies and hence state governments whose terms would be terminated before running their full course in order to coincide with the next national election would

be left in the hands of the ECI. The ECI's sweeping powers, after recent changes in the mode of appointment of election commissioners (three of them), are viewed as susceptible to control by the central government and the ruling party, now the BJP. The fate of the states could potentially be left to the discretion of the ECI for long periods. This is suspected to be part of a broader centralizing thrust in the BJP's policies. This brings us to the developments in 2025 on the autonomy of key institutions in India's democracy, centrally the ECI and the states in India's federal system, both of which have seen controversial events.

INSTITUTIONS AND INDIA'S DEMOCRACY

On the institutional front, the ECI's appointment mode was changed in the last BJP term from the Supreme Court-recommended three-member appointment committee consisting of the prime minister, the chief justice of the Supreme Court, and the leader of the opposition in Parliament to a committee consisting of the prime minister, one more minister, and the leader of the opposition.¹² This gives the government of the day a decisive say in the appointment of the three election commissioners.

More broadly, on the question of the autonomy of constitutional institutions and the quality of democracy in general, the BJP-led coalition government has been continuing along the Hindu-nationalist ideological path with little or no check exercised on it by the allied parties. The two most serious issues that have cropped up this year with regard to democratic quality are as follows: First, the SIR of the voter list that has been implemented in the major state of Bihar since July 2025, a few months before Bihar's assembly election was due in November 2025. Second, the issue of delayed or withheld assent by governors of states to bills passed by the state assemblies, sometimes passed twice, seriously impinges on the autonomy of

states in India's federal system. Let us look at the latest developments concerning these two issues.

First, part of the broad powers enjoyed by the ECI under Articles 324–29 of the Constitution is the ability to revise the voter lists to delete deceased voters, add new voters, and eliminate duplication wherein a voter can be registered and hence potentially vote in two places, a concern during times of large-scale domestic migration, both intra- and interstate. This exercise started with the SIR's implementation in Bihar in July 2025 in anticipation of the Bihar state election in November. This is a precursor to similar revision exercises to be undertaken in other states.

The current SIR exercise, however, differs markedly from earlier such efforts to update voter lists. First, it is compressed into an extremely short time of about two months for a state electorate of close to eighty million people. Second, and more importantly, it reversed the presumption followed since independence that people who are ordinarily resident are citizens and therefore have the right to vote. This was based on the fact that in a relatively poor country with a vast population of poor and illiterate or less-educated people, most people lack identification documents like birth certificates. This time the ECI has, in effect, asked people for proof of citizenship by requiring them to produce a range of documents that large numbers do not possess and does not recognize the validity of the most common national identity card, Aadhaar, or even ECI-issued voter identity cards. The ECI has thus begun to carry out citizenship tests that are, strictly speaking, not its mandate but that of the home ministry. However, the courts have not halted the SIR exercise on the grounds that the ECI is mandated to revise the voter list and has sweeping powers in electoral management. In Bihar as many as 6.5 million have been struck from the voter list (including on the grounds of being deceased, having moved, etc.), and this has roused broad opposition by the opposing parties, who have charged it and the ruling party of "vote

theft" and mass disenfranchisement. This will have the effect of bringing down the total number of voters despite population growth

In tandem with criticism of the ECI over the Bihar SIR is criticism from the Congress Party and its leader, Rahul Gandhi, regarding the ECI allegedly manipulating the Maharashtra assembly election last year by adding unexplained numbers of voters to the state's voter list. This led to an allegedly implausible increase in voters in the few months between the national election in the state and the state assembly election only a few months later. Congress and Gandhi have leveled a similar charge regarding the massive increase in the voter list in a particular assembly constituency that was a part of the Bangalore Central Lok Sabha constituency in the 2024 national election. It has been alleged that fake voters, registered at the same address, were enrolled to "steal" the election.¹³

What is new here is that for the first time, in 2025, the opposition is questioning the fairness of elections and the neutrality of the ECI. Until now, all the criticism, both domestic and international, of India's democratic backsliding into an illiberal democracy has focused on violations of the democratic rights and freedoms, in between elections, of the opposition, dissidents, and minorities but has never questioned the legitimacy of the electoral process and results.¹⁴

Until now the Supreme Court has intervened mildly in the SIR exercise by asking the ECI to consider as valid, for purposes of voter registration, the Aadhaar national identity cards and the ECI-issued EPIC (Elector's Photo Identity Card) cards for earlier elections as well as ration cards (for subsidized foodstuffs, issued to the poor) but has not challenged the new premise of doubting citizenship unless proven. It can arguably do so despite the ECI's sweeping powers of election management under Articles 324–29 since in 2003 it forced a certain degree of transparency on candidates running for office by making it mandatory that they

declare their assets and liabilities, their criminal records, and their educational qualifications. This forbearance is of a piece with the Supreme Court's slow-motion consideration of appeals, since 2019, against the passage of certain laws that appellants have challenged as unconstitutional. These delays have lasted five to six years in the cases of the abolition of Article 370 (special status to Jammu and Kashmir, eventually supported by the Court) and the electoral bonds scheme (eventually struck down). The Citizenship Amendment Act has yet to be taken up for hearing after nearly six years. Many suspect the possibility of silent pressure on the Court, though this is not provable.

The alliance of the BJP, along with a major regional party, the JD(U), and smaller allies, won a sweeping victory in the Bihar state assembly election in November, taking 202 out of 243 seats. The BJP emerged as the single largest party with 89 seats but short of a majority on its own. It ceded the Chief Ministership to the incumbent Nitish Kumar of the JD(U) but won major new ministerial portfolios for the first time. The SIR exercise might have helped it, along with other factors, but this cannot be definitively pinned down.

Parliament has also become a battleground in ways that should not be the case. The opposition has been alleging since the BJP's earlier term—especially since nearly 150 Lok Sabha members were suspended in late 2023 and several important bills passed during this time—that the presiding officers of both houses have been highly partisan when they should by convention be politically neutral and that free debate has been controlled and suppressed. The same allegations have been made in 2025 with regard to both the budget session in February–March and the monsoon session in July–August. According to the research organization Parliamentary Research Service, the sessions were short, the opposition was restricted in its ability to raise criticism and questions, and the government failed to adequately respond to

questions and demands for information. And, most importantly, bills were rammed through with very little freewheeling debate.¹⁵

The other major development with constitutional implications is the apparent erosion of state powers and therefore the federal structure, which the Supreme Court has considered part of the unamendable “basic structure” of the constitutional dispensation. Several (centrally appointed) governors of opposition party-ruled states, who are supposed to be ceremonial constitutional figureheads, have delayed assent to bills passed in the state legislatures, a constitutional requirement for bills to become law. Opposition state governments have alleged that this is partisan behavior and is being done at the behest of the BJP at the center, counter to constitutional conventions. The fact that there is no time limit for a gubernatorial assent to bills, even if passed the second time by the state assembly, and no time limit for presidential assent to state bills referred to the president by state governors points to loopholes in the system. The opposition has alleged that governors are being used to undermine federalism and reduce opposition-ruled states to powerlessness. The Supreme Court has also raised questions about extreme delays.

Last, and this is not a new development but one coming from the BJP-led coalition's previous term, is the delay in government approvals of judge appointments to the Supreme Court and to the chief justices of the High Courts. The system of appointment by a collegium, essentially a selection committee consisting of the five senior-most judges of the Supreme Court, which has been in place since 1994, needs the formal approval of the government, which can delay but not make appointments counter to the collegium's recommendations. Here again one sees a pattern of delay in the approval of some names, perhaps as a sign of disapproval. In its first term, the BJP-led government tried to promote a National Judicial Appointments Commission to appoint judges, but

this was struck down by the Supreme Court of the day as going against judicial independence, part of the basic structure of the Constitution that the Court is bound to defend. The background to this is a decision by a judicial majority in 1973 that the legislature cannot amend what the Court termed the Constitution's "basic structure," consisting of certain essential features including fundamental rights, federalism and secularism among others, as this would violate the Constitution itself.¹⁶

From time to time, signals have been sent, some indirectly, that the government is unhappy with the Court's decisions and with what has been called judicial overreach against parliamentary supremacy in a democracy, as a well as the basic-structure doctrine of certain essential features that cannot be amended. Delaying tactics is perhaps part of that signaling.

RESPONSES TO GLOBAL POLITICAL, MILITARY, AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS

This chapter does not focus on the responses to, and relations with, the administration of US President Donald Trump and with Russia, China, and Pakistan on general foreign policy issues, security, and trade, except to the extent that they directly affect domestic politics. Ian Hall's chapter in this volume directly addresses foreign policy issues. Unsurprisingly, foreign affairs become increasingly closer to home and start to affect domestic politics in an era of growing internet connectivity and social media penetration, along with a more educated and informed populace that has growing external connections. As indicators, the Indian diaspora stands at thirty-five million, and the number of Indians who traveled abroad last year was twenty-eight million.¹⁷ One of the main international developments that has impinged on India's domestic politics in 2025 was the four-day semi-war with Pakistan following India's response to a

terrorist attack in Pahalgam, Kashmir, on April 22 in which twenty-five Indian tourists and a local Kashmiri resident were shot dead by the attackers.

In response to the Pahalgam terror attack, India launched a broad retaliatory military action named Operation Sindoor.¹⁸ It began on May 7 and consisted initially of missile and drone attacks on nine terror hubs in Pakistan. This led to an eighty-seven-hour semi-war in which both sides carried out missile and drone attacks on each other's military sites, including air force bases, in stand-off mode, as neither air side's ground forces or military aircraft crossed over into the other's territory or airspace. This resulted in the (admitted) loss of an unspecified number of Indian military aircraft as well as claims, three months later in August, by the Indian Air Force that several Pakistani military aircraft were shot down. It also resulted in considerable damage on the ground, including to Pakistani air force bases. A ceasefire agreement took place on May 10 after the Indian director-general of military operations was contacted by his Pakistani counterpart. President Trump has since claimed over two dozen times that he was responsible for mediating the ceasefire, including by using tariff threats, and helped to prevent a nuclear war. India has vehemently denied that the United States mediated the ceasefire, claiming that Pakistan approached it for peace talks after taking hits that it could not handle. In terms of domestic politics, the Modi government has been successful in projecting Operation Sindoor as an Indian victory and an effective retaliation to Pakistani terror.

The Trump tariffs of up to 50 percent in late August 2025 targeting a range of Indian export goods are sure to have knock-on effects on India's exports and hence on employment in these sectors and in the towns and states where such export industries are concentrated. The repercussions are still playing out, however, and it is too early to predict the domestic political effects. There is no Indo-US trade agreement

finalized as of late November; if one is concluded, tariffs might be reduced, and India's exports and export-dependent employment might get relief from pressure.

CONCLUSION

During 2025, the BJP has played a dominant role in its coalition despite being short of a majority on its own, with the allied parties not interested in, or unwilling or unable to, resist its continuing Hindu-nationalist and centralizing policy thrust. Indeed, according to *India Today* magazine's comprehensive and large-sample Mood of the Nation (MOTN) opinion poll, done twice a year in February and August, the BJP started the year in a stronger position than after the 2024 election.¹⁹ The MOTN poll asks the question: Who would you vote for if an election were held now? The February 2025 poll reported a simple majority for the BJP, of 281 seats based on a 41 percent vote share, higher than 2024's actual numbers of 240 seats and 36.8 percent of the votes, with increases for the NDA in both seats (343) and votes (47 percent). This indicated significant gains since the mid-2024 national election, perhaps partly reflected in its state-level victories in late 2024 and early 2025. However, despite the August 2025 MOTN poll reporting a slippage to 260 seats, short of a majority for the BJP with about the same vote share as in the February poll, with the NDA slipping to 324 seats, the BJP and the NDA have retained their dominance, while the opposition INDIA alliance shows strains. Modi leads Rahul Gandhi by 52 percent to 25 percent for the prime minister position in the latest poll, as Modi is consistently more popular than his party.

The poll reported that the tax cuts for the middle class in the February national budget and the nationalist fervor around Operation Sindoor in the four-day semi-war in May only slightly bumped up the BJP's support, the latter by about 5 percent compared to the 15 percent bump that the party

received after the airstrike on Balakot in Pakistan in February 2019 in response to a terrorist attack in Kashmir that killed forty-odd soldiers. The tariff war with the United States under Trump, a new development that is still unfolding, has left the public confused, leading to no particular trend in support of or against the government. However, a high growth of 7.8 percent in the first fiscal quarter, April–June, has probably quietly helped the BJP-led coalition.

On the whole, the BJP-led NDA government seems stable. It won a landslide victory in the Bihar election in November and has been able to get its way policy-wise as of the later part of 2025, although policy changes that need constitutional amendments are moot, given that larger parliamentary numbers are needed by the present coalition.

NOTES

1. This article was finalized in late November 2025.
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4. See Adnan Farooqui and E. Sridharan, "INDIA and the 2024 Elections: A New Chapter in Coalition Politics," *Economic and Political Weekly* 19, no. 48 (2024): 45–52.
5. For detailed analyses of the evolution of coalitions in India, see Eswaran Sridharan, *Elections, Parties and Coalitions in India: Recent History and Theory* (Permanent Black, 2024).
6. "India to Overtake China as the World's Most Populous Country by April 2023, United Nations Projects," United Nations, April 2023, <https://www.un.org/india-overtake-china-world-most-populous-country-april-2023-united-nations-projects>.

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