

# IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS OF THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF INDIAN DEMOCRACY

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## ***Abstract***

*This study explores the distinctive nature of India's approach to democracy promotion, characterized by cautious engagement and strategic prudence. Unlike Western models, which often involve direct intervention, India's methodology emphasizes non-imposition and respect for sovereignty, reflecting its historical Cold War-era principles such as the Panchsheel Agreement and the Gujral Doctrine. India's support for democracy is primarily reactive, providing assistance only upon request and focusing on sharing its democratic practices rather than enforcing them. The study highlights India's involvement in global initiatives like the UN Democracy Fund and its collaborative efforts with the U.S., illustrating a strategic balance between international engagement and diplomatic caution. By offering practical assistance—such as Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), indelible ink, and training through the India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management (IIIDEM)—India upholds its commitment to supporting democratic processes while respecting recipient nations' sovereignty. This nuanced approach enhances India's global stature and reflects its strategic efforts to maintain strong diplomatic relations and address international challenges without imposing its values.*

**Keywords:** *Democracy Promotion, India's Foreign Policy, Sovereignty and Non-Imposition, Cold War Principles, International Collaboration, Democratic Assistance.*

## **1. Introduction**

India's approach to democracy promotion represents a distinctive and nuanced strategy in the global landscape of democratic support. This study examines how India navigates the complex terrain of democracy promotion through a method that contrasts sharply with Western interventionist models. Grounded in historical principles such as the Panchsheel Agreement and the Gujral Doctrine, India's methodology prioritizes respect for sovereignty and non-imposition, a legacy from its Cold War-era foreign policy. Unlike Western models that often involve proactive measures and direct intervention, India adopts a reactive stance, offering

democratic assistance only upon request. This approach underscores a commitment to sharing its democratic experiences and practices—rather than imposing them—through practical support mechanisms. India's involvement in global initiatives like the UN Democracy Fund and its strategic collaborations with the United States exemplify its balanced approach to international engagement. By providing practical assistance, such as Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), indelible ink, and training through the India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management (IIIDEM), India maintains its focus on supporting democratic processes while respecting the sovereignty of recipient nations. This study highlights how India's cautious and strategic engagement not only enhances its global stature but also reflects a sophisticated balancing act between diplomatic prudence and global responsibility.

## 2. Methodology

To analyze India's distinctive approach to democracy promotion, this study employs a multi-faceted methodology. It begins with a conceptual framework that defines democracy through key elements such as electoral mechanisms, leader accountability, and government limits. The historical context examines India's Cold War-era non-intervention stance, shaped by principles like the Panchsheel Agreement and the Gujral Doctrine, and contrasts this with its evolving position in the post-Cold War era, influenced by engagements such as the Indo-US Vision Statement and the UN Democracy Fund. Case studies of India's democracy assistance, including the provision of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), indelible ink, and training at IIIDEM, illustrate the practical aspects of its support for democratic processes. The study also explores India's role in international election observation and its collaboration with the UN, assessing the impact of these activities. Finally, it examines the rationale behind India's cautious approach to democracy promotion, contrasting it with Western methods and analyzing how it balances support with strategic and diplomatic considerations.

## 3. Result & Discussion

**Democracy Promotion:** The concept of democracy is a complex and often debated one. While definitions of democracy vary, most share a few core elements. First, democracies are characterized by institutional mechanisms that enable people to elect their leaders. Second, leaders must vie for public support and, once in office, are expected to act in the interests of the public. Third, government power is limited and held accountable to the people. During the

Cold War, democracy was often framed as a counter to Communist regimes. The fall of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the Eastern bloc in the early 1990s were hailed as victories for Western political and economic systems. In this new global context, the promotion of democracy gained international legitimacy. Proponents of democracy promotion often reference the democratic peace theory, which originates from Immanuel Kant's "Perpetual Peace" (1795). Kant argued that liberal democratic states, due to their internal power structures, are less likely to engage in wars without justifiable reasons based on collective interests.

**In-depth Examination of the Distinctiveness of Indian Democracy:** Democracies are expected to avoid wars without strong justification and to be more cooperative compared to other regimes. Kant's theory suggests that democracies are more peaceful and conducive to international trade and cooperation. He also proposed that democratic states would form a "pacific union" that prevents wars and expands over time. Western powers leveraged this theory to justify promoting democracy. India, while valuing its democratic system, has not aimed to export its governance model. Its foreign policy, rooted in non-alignment and non-interference, was influenced by the Cold War and concerns about U.S. dominance. In the 1990s, India was not seen by the West as a model democracy, with Freedom House labeling it as "partially free" and some U.S. internationalists criticizing it as "illiberal". When Western powers encountered significant obstacles in their democracy promotion efforts, they began to consider involving rising democratic powers like India. By the mid-1990s, many countries viewed democracy promotion as an illegitimate interference in their internal affairs, often equating it with "regime change" aimed at replacing undesirable governments through military or other means. In response, developing countries started to crack down on such activities by expelling or harassing Western NGOs and banning local groups from receiving foreign funds.

**Nuanced Shift in Indian Position:** By the turn of the century, India shifted from non-interference to a more supportive stance on Western democracy promotion, driven by a desire for closer U.S. ties and recognition of India's democratic credentials. During the Clinton and Bush administrations, the U.S. sought collaboration with India to promote democracy globally, leading to the Indo-US Vision Statement in 2000, which pledged cooperation in strengthening democratic institutions and combating terrorism. Indian leaders, including Prime Ministers Vajpayee and Singh, linked democracy with resilience against extremism, aligning with Western concerns. India's engagement included joining the 'Community of Democracies' as a founding member in 1999 and supporting the UN Democracy Fund (UNDF), where it became the second-largest contributor. However, India remained cautious, limiting its commitments to

initiatives like the UNDF and carefully navigating its role in global democratic efforts. This approach reflects India's strategy of cautious prudence, balancing its interests while engaging in democracy promotion.

**Rationale for Cautious Prudence:** India views democracy as the most acceptable form of government but remains critical of Western 'democracy promotion,' which it perceives as patronizing and akin to 'regime change' or the imposition of foreign systems. This perception makes such promotion unacceptable to countries sensitive about their sovereignty. India prefers terms like 'democratic assistance' and believes that support for democracy should be offered only when requested. India's cautious stance is influenced by its colonial past, where Western interventions were often framed as civilizing missions, making India wary of Western value promotion. Additionally, post-colonial sensitivity to sovereignty, reinforced by the Non-Aligned Movement, continues to shape India's approach. While India was once a vocal critic of great power agendas, it now carefully balances its international positions to protect its national interests, moving away from assertive diplomacy.

**Table 1 Panch sheel (Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence)**

1	Mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty,
2	Mutual non-aggression,
3	Mutual non interference in each other's internal affairs,
4	Equality and mutual benefit and
5	Peaceful coexistence

**Table 2 Gujral Doctrine**

1	non-reciprocity
2	No allow use of territory against each other
3	non-interference in the internal affairs of one other
4	Respect each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty
5	Settle all disputes through peaceful bilateral negotiation

### Rationale for Cautious Prudence

**India's cautious approach to democracy promotion is driven by several factors:**

- **Historical Commitment:** India adheres to the principles of non-intervention, as established by the Panchsheel Agreement and the Gujral Doctrine. This historical stance influences its reluctance to actively promote democracy.

- **Sovereignty Concerns:** India views Western-led democracy promotion as potentially intrusive and akin to regime change, which infringes on national sovereignty. Thus, it prefers terms like ‘democratic assistance’ and insists that such support should be offered only upon request.
- **Diplomatic Influence:** India’s role as a leader among developing countries means that aligning too closely with Western democracy promotion could damage its relationships with traditional allies, who might see this as alignment with Western interests.
- **Strategic Interests:** India must balance its democracy promotion efforts with strategic and economic interests, particularly in regions like the Middle East and Myanmar, where it has significant material concerns.
- **Domestic Politics:** India’s vibrant democracy and coalition politics require broad domestic support for foreign policy shifts. Risk-averse domestic politics prevent drastic changes without consensus. Overall, India’s cautious stance on democracy promotion reflects its historical principles, strategic interests, diplomatic concerns, and domestic political considerations.

**Mechanisms of Democracy Assistance:** India's successful democratic evolution has enhanced its global image and soft power, supporting its bid for a UN Security Council seat. Many developing countries, inspired by India's model, seek its assistance through the Election Commission for electoral support and training. While India avoids a high-profile role in Western-led democracy promotion, its democratic success demonstrates that democracy can thrive in complex post-colonial contexts. India's economic growth further challenges the notion that development and democracy are incompatible. India's democratic experience serves as a valuable model for developing countries. Unlike Western approaches, India offers assistance only upon request, adhering to the principle that democracy should not be imposed but shared when asked. India's democratic assistance primarily comes from government requests, managed by the Election Commission of India (ECI), which works directly with state institutions. This top-down approach contrasts with the Western bottom-up method that involves civil society and NGOs, which some governments perceive as interference backed by powerful Western nations. India's method avoids the need for a global network of democratic experts, focusing on sharing its practices and institutions only when other countries express interest.

**Table 3 International Cooperation**

<b>Multilateral Organizations</b>	<b>MOU with Individual Countries</b>
Forum of Heads of Election Management Bodies of SAARC countries	Afghanistan, 22 April 2008
Commonwealth Electoral Network	Bhutan, 17 September 2011
Association of Asian Election Authorities	Brazil, 14 December 2010
United Nations Development Programme	Russian Federation, 21 December 2010
International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA)	Nepal, 7 June 2011
International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFS) - MOU Partner	Chile, 7 July 2011
Advisory Group to the Global Commission on Democracy, Elections, and Security	Indonesia, 16 August 2011
Proposed Association of World Election Bodies (A-WEB)	Egypt, 18 September 2012
	South Africa, 11 October 2011
	Republic of Korea, 1 August 2012
	Côte d'Ivoire, 10 September 2004
	Mexico, 27 October 2004
	Venezuela, 31 August 2012
	Libya, 30 November 2012
	Mauritius, 11 April 2013
	Bangladesh, Kenya, Jordan

The Election Commission of India (ECI) has built a reputation over sixty years for managing some of the world's largest and most complex elections. Recognized for its efficiency and credibility, the ECI has signed MOUs with 14 countries and eight multilateral organizations, including the UN. Countries like Bangladesh, Kenya, and Jordan, despite not having formal MOUs, interact closely with the ECI for training and support. The MOUs reflect a mutual learning approach, emphasizing respect for sovereignty rather than imposing a top-down model. For example, Dr. Brigalia Bam of the Electoral Commission of South Africa noted that



the partnership with the ECI benefits not just the two countries but potentially the entire African region. This cooperative approach underlines India's role in extending democratic assistance through bilateral and multilateral engagements, showcasing its distinctive and respectful method of promoting democracy. India's assistance in democracy includes strengthening electoral systems and institutions, training personnel, developing human resources, and enhancing voter education and participation, particularly of marginalized groups.

**Three key areas of assistance stand out for their popularity and impact:**

1. **Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs):** The ECI offers detailed briefings and training on EVMs, which are increasingly sought by other countries. EVMs are beneficial in large, diverse populations, making voting more accessible and reducing fraud. While they offer many advantages, including faster counting and reduced invalid votes, they are not without risks, such as potential tampering or hacking.
2. **Indelible Ink:** This semi-permanent ink, applied to voters' fingers to prevent double voting, is valuable in countries with unreliable or non-standard identification systems. Mysore Paints and Varnish Limited, which manufactures the ink, supplies it to various countries, including through donations by the Indian government. The ink is used globally in countries like Egypt and Cambodia to ensure electoral integrity.
3. **Training at IIIDEM:** The India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management (IIIDEM) provides specialized training for election management bodies. Established in 2011, it collaborates with various international and inter-governmental organizations, offering courses to personnel from numerous countries. Recent courses have focused on election management and training for officials from countries such as Kenya, Nigeria, and Afghanistan.

These forms of assistance highlight India's distinctive approach to supporting democratic processes, emphasizing mutual respect and cooperation.

**India's election assistance includes:**

- **Capacity Development Courses:** The ECI has conducted various courses, such as a 2012 program for 30 trainees from 18 countries, a 2013 course for 12 South Asian election officials, and a special training for 20 Afghan officials in February 2013.
- **Training at IIIDEM:** Since its establishment in 2011, the India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management (IIIDEM) has held over 50 national courses and 11 international workshops for election officials from countries like Kenya, Nigeria, and Afghanistan.

- **Election Observation:** ECI members participate in election observation missions globally, ensuring they select hosts carefully. Notable missions include observing elections in Egypt and assisting in Afghanistan's parliamentary elections. Despite complex diplomatic situations, such as strained relations with the Maldives, India has continued to support democratic processes.
- **UN Collaboration:** India works with the United Nations and its agencies, providing electoral support and expertise. The ECI contributes to UN electoral assistance and participates in UNDP-organized events, reflecting Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's commitment to sharing India's experience and resources.

India's approach to democracy assistance is distinctive for its non-impositional stance. Unlike Western countries, India does not attach conditions to its aid, respecting recipient nations' sovereignty and focusing on mutual cooperation and support only upon request. This policy has enhanced India's reputation as a development partner, especially among countries wary of Western conditionalities.

#### 4. Conclusion

India's approach to democracy promotion exemplifies a distinctive blend of cautious engagement and strategic prudence, distinguishing it from more interventionist Western models. Rooted in historical principles such as the Panchsheel Agreement and the Gujral Doctrine, India's stance is characterized by a firm commitment to non-imposition and respect for national sovereignty. Unlike Western approaches that often involve direct intervention, India provides democratic assistance only upon request, focusing on sharing its own democratic practices rather than imposing them. This method is clearly demonstrated in India's participation in global initiatives like the UN Democracy Fund and its collaborative efforts with the U.S. India's support for democratic processes includes providing tools such as Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) and offering training through the India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management (IIIDEM). This approach underscores India's dedication to fostering democracy worldwide while maintaining a respectful distance from the internal affairs of other nations. By adhering to these principles, India not only enhances its global reputation but also strengthens its diplomatic relationships, navigating global challenges in a manner that upholds the sovereignty of other countries. This balanced strategy enables India to promote democratic values effectively while preserving its diplomatic integrity.



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