

India: the biggest democracy in the world

With 1 267 million inhabitants, of which 834 million can vote, India is the largest democracy in the world. Despite India's linguistic and religious diversity, the 2014 general elections have given the newly elected Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, a strong mandate. Since coming into office, Modi has reinforced his focus on the economy and international trade, which may further cement EU-India relations. The EU and India have been strategic partners since 2004. They began negotiations on a free trade area in 2007, although several Indian political parties have concerns over these.

The **Republic of India** (Bharat Ganrajya) is a 'Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic [Republic](#)' with a **parliamentary system** of government. The Supreme Court of India has described it as a '**federal structure with a strong bias towards the Centre**'. The Constitution maps out the separation of legislative powers and responsibilities between the centre and states, classifying competences for the Union, States or 'Concurrent'. [Shri Pranab Mukherjee](#) was elected President in July 2012. [Narendra Modi](#) was elected Prime Minister in May 2014.

The Indian Parliament

The Indian Parliament is **bicameral**. It is comprised of Lok Sabha, the lower house, and Rajya Sabha, the upper house. These houses have joint legislative powers although Lok Sabha is uniquely responsible for money bills. Moreover, the government must resign if it loses its majority in Lok Sabha. The Parliament, however, has no say on foreign affairs, including on treaties with other countries. At state level, citizens are represented in Legislative Assemblies known as [Vidhan Sabha](#). In unicameral states this is the sole house, but in the seven states with bicameral system it makes up the lower house. In these cases [Vidhan Parishad](#) (the Legislative Council) is the upper house.

[Lok Sabha](#) (House of the People): is the only directly elected chamber and represents India's people. It can have a maximum of 552 members: up to 530 members represent India's [29](#) states, and up to 20 members represent the seven [Union territories](#). Two additional members from the Anglo-Indian community can be nominated by the Indian President should they feel that the community is not adequately represented in the house. The current 541 [members](#) were elected for a five-year term. Of the 22 languages recognised by the Constitution, 15 are spoken in the house and simultaneously [interpreted](#) into Hindi and English, but not vice versa. [Rajya Sabha](#) (Council of States, the upper house) consists of up to 250 indirectly elected members, and there are currently 242 members. Of these, 12 are appointed by the President while the rest are elected by the state assemblies or union territories. One third of the house is appointed every two years, and members sit for six-year terms. The [Vice-President of India](#) is ex-officio Chairman of Rajya Sabha.

The general elections in 2014

General elections for Lok Sabha, using the first-past-the-post electoral system, took place from [7 April to 12 May](#) 2014, with [464](#) political parties taking part. Adding to a rising trend, turnout was 66.4% (553 million), the highest since India gained independence in 1947. Both parties' names and symbols were included on ballot papers to help illiterate voters. In addition, all polling stations were equipped with electronic voting machines. Of the 8 251 candidates, 8.1% were women. The [62](#) women elected represent 11.4% of Lok Sabha members. In the Rajya Sabha there are [29](#) women representatives, or 12% of members.

Main political parties in India's Parliament

A [registered](#) political faction in India is recognised as a 'National party' or 'State party' depending on the number of seats or votes it secures at a general election to Lok Sabha or to a Legislative Assembly.

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a National party, is the biggest political group in Parliament following a [landslide victory](#) in the last general elections. This Hindu nationalist party, with its stronghold in the north,

has come under internal criticism and pressure for some of its business and economy-focused policies. Nonetheless BJP is the first party to gain an absolute majority in Lok Sabha since 1984. The party secured 282 seats, despite receiving only 31% of the votes, which is the lowest vote share for a parliamentary majority. It now leads the 29-party National Democratic Alliance ([NDA](#)) which overall won 336 of 545 of seats in the lower house. In contrast the NDA is a minority in Rajya Sabha, with 64 of 242 seats.

Narendra Modi expressed the will during the 2014 electoral campaign to deepen economic relations with India's partners. As one of India's largest trading partners, this emphasis may help to boost trade between India and the EU and put negotiations on an **EU-India Free Trade Agreement** (FTA) back on the agenda following a lengthy deadlock. There is, however, still opposition to the agreement, notably from other BJP leaders who, in statements in 2013, expressed their concerns over the possible effects that EU-subsidised agricultural products would have on Indian markets. They have demanded a comprehensive debate be held in Parliament on all FTAs. They also signed up to the '[Delhi Declaration on the EU-India FTA](#)', in which several parties showed hostility towards an EU-India FTA.

Indian National Congress ([INC](#)), a secular and centre-left National party, **has dominated Indian politics since the country gained independence**. INC has traditionally focused its policies on welfare and other measures to help the poor, although during the election campaign seemed to uphold free-market values to a greater extent than it had done previously. INC is the pillar of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) coalition, which lost the last general elections. INC lost 162 seats since the last elections and now has just 44, while the UPA coalition gained only 59. Nonetheless the party remains the largest in Rajya Sabha. In the light of the catastrophic defeat, the party's President [Sonia Gandhi](#) and her son, [Rahul Gandhi](#), vice-president, offered to [resign](#), but this was unanimously rejected by the Congress Working Committee. Some observers [bet](#) on Sonia Gandhi's daughter, [Priyanka Gandhi Vadrap](#), playing a bigger role in INC, particularly since she is seen to resemble her grandmother, Indira Gandhi.

All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam ([AIADMK](#)) is a State party which represents the Tamil minority, based in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry. It holds 37 seats in Lok Sabha, where it is the [third](#) largest faction.

All India Trinamool Congress ([AITC](#)) is a State party that supports secularism and whose founder and leader, [Mamata Banerjee](#), a former INC member, was the first woman to be appointed Chief Minister of West Bengal. With its 34 seats in Lok Sabha, it is the fourth largest party in the lower house.

Communist party of India (Marxist) [CPI\(M\)](#), is a National party whose electoral base is the country's poor. The party has two main strongholds: West Bengal (next to Bangladesh), which it was in charge of from 1977 to 2011, and Kerala (in India's south-west). CPI(M) holds nine seats in both Lok Sabha and in Rajya Sabha. CPI(M), which is one of the signatories of the 'Delhi Declaration on the EU-India FTA', has [criticised](#) the lack of transparency from the INC-led government on negotiations on an EU-India FTA. It urged the government to wait for the report on the issue from the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Commerce. CPI(M) expressed particular concern about the agriculture sector and about the impact on standards of intellectual property protection in the health services.

The European Parliament and India

Although the relationship between the European Parliament and Lok Sabha dates back to 1981, it was in 2007 that an EP **Delegation for relations with India** ([D-IN](#)) was created. In addition Lok Sabha set up a Friendship Group for Relations with the European Parliament in 2008. Nevertheless, following the 2009 elections in India, Lok Sabha did not form a new Friendship Group. Instead, the Delegation has managed this relationship through other Indian bodies.

Since the biggest part of EU-India relations are focused on trade, the European Parliament drafted a [resolution](#) on 'the state of play in the EU-India Free Trade Agreement negotiations', which was adopted on 11 May 2011. MEPs, disappointed with the slow pace of negotiations, insisted that the FTA be adopted with multilateral rules, namely WTO rules and obligations. They urged the Commission to include legally binding clauses on human rights in the agreement.

Indeed, Parliament's resolutions on India have tended to focus on **human rights** in recent years. The EP adopted a [resolution](#) on 'Violence against women in India' on 17 January 2013. MEPs have also dealt with 'Caste discrimination in India' with a [resolution](#) adopted on 13 December 2012. The death penalty was another issue of concern for the European Parliament, which adopted resolutions on this topic, following executions in India, on [7 July 2011](#) and [23 May 2013](#).