

EDITORIALS – 1ST SEP 2026

1. Step up regulation (GS Paper I Society)

This editorial ‘Step up regulation’ was published in The Hindu on 1st Sep 2026, highlights the need for stronger quality control amid rapid private-sector expansion of AYUSH medical education.

Expansion and underlying concerns

- In 2024, non-government institutions constituted 86% of Ayurveda and 85% of homoeopathy colleges; during 2021–2024, permitted seats rose 43%, admission capacity 25%, and AYURGYAN allocations nearly sixfold.
- Rapid expansion raises concerns over students’ preparation for evidence-based practice, though AYUSH education’s quality deficiencies predate the current growth phase.
- The CAG’s 2005 audit found widespread shortages of hospital beds, outpatient services and staff in homoeopathy colleges, with bed occupancy ranging from 1% to 71%.
- A 2020 study reported that many Ayurveda institutions had teaching-staff shortages exceeding 50% of the prescribed standards.

Regulatory evidence and reform imperative

- The NCISM has withheld or denied permissions over faculty and infrastructure gaps; by August 21, it had denied permission to 17 private Ayurveda colleges, several for inspection non-compliance.

- Incentives to maximise intake while limiting faculty and laboratories weaken quality; in Hillside Ayurveda Medical College (2023), the Karnataka High Court noted excess admissions for financial gains.
- The National Commission for Homoeopathy gave its lowest grade to 41% of colleges, including nearly half of private institutions, amid disputed faculty strength, intake violations and alleged fictitious faculty.

Beyond Editorial

Public health consequences of poor AYUSH training

- Competency-linked safety: The WHO states that traditional-medicine safety depends on practitioner competence, product quality, communication and regulation, making rigorous clinical training essential for preventing harm.
- Toxicity risk: A 2018 BMJ case report documented severe liver injury associated with Bhasma consumption, underlining the need for training in dosage, contraindications and toxicology.
- Pharmacovigilance gaps: The Ministry of AYUSH created the Ayush Suraksha platform to record suspected adverse drug reactions, but inadequate practitioner reporting can conceal emerging safety risks.
- Misleading claims: In 2024, Uttarakhand suspended licences for 14 Patanjali products during Supreme Court proceedings over misleading advertisements, illustrating the importance of evidence-based claims.

- Referral delays: The WHO's regional framework warns against care by poorly qualified traditional practitioners, as failure to recognise clinical red flags can delay emergency or specialist treatment.
- Economic burden: The WHO estimates that unsafe health care reduces global economic growth by about 0.7% annually, showing the wider cost of preventable clinical errors.
- Integration setback: The WHO Global Traditional Medicine Strategy 2025–2034 prioritises evidence, safety and regulation; inconsistent training can therefore obstruct AYUSH integration into mainstream health care.

2. Political demography, the future of democracy (GS Paper I Society)

This editorial 'Political demography, the future of democracy' was published in The Hindu on 1st Sep 2026, highlights how uneven demographic change is reshaping political representation, federalism, resource distribution and democratic governance.

Political mobilisation around demography

- Political and religious figures, including Elon Musk, M.K. Stalin, N. Chandrababu Naidu, Mohan Bhagwat and church leaders, increasingly promote pronatalism amid concerns over fertility, ageing, migration and identity.

- India's Census 2027 and subsequent Lok Sabha delimitation have intensified concerns over unequal population trends across States and communities.
- Political demography remains academically marginal and publicly polarised between conspiracy-driven mobilisation and dismissal of genuine concerns as nativism or xenophobia.
- Pronatalist incentives in Japan, South Korea, China and Italy have not restored fertility because births depend on housing, employment and education, gender relations, childcare costs and future expectations.

India's uneven demographic transition

- India's total fertility rate has fallen to 2.0 under NFHS-5; fertility declined across all major religions, with the Muslim rate falling from 4.4 in 1992 to 2.4 in 2019–21, narrowing community gaps.
- Continued population growth increasingly reflects longer lifespans and population momentum, while births, ageing and wealth remain unevenly distributed across regions and social groups.
- Kerala's median age is about 37 years in 2026 and may reach 47 by 2051, while Uttar Pradesh remains among the youngest States at 26.9 years against India's 29.2 years.
- The 2011 Census recorded about 45 crore internal migrants, while nearly two lakh Indians relinquish citizenship annually, reflecting mobility driven by unequal economic opportunities.

Democratic and federal implications

- The 'one person, one vote, one value' principle must operate alongside group representation because demographic change affects both social federalism and political federalism.
- Population size alone cannot determine claims over power or resources; States' investment in human development and differing age structures must inform federal balancing.
- Ageing regions will require greater welfare resources, while shrinking groups may fear political decline, intensifying disputes over taxation, fiscal transfers, development and representation.
- Group identities are compatible with democracy; institutions must accommodate demographic differences without converting them into permanent political antagonism or exploiting replacement fears.

Beyond Editorial

Constitutional options for equitable delimitation

- Seat expansion: The 2026 delimitation proposal seeks to increase Lok Sabha seats from 543 to 816, allowing all States to gain seats without reducing existing representation.
- Proportional protection: Under the proposal, southern States would rise from 129 to 195 seats while retaining nearly 24% representation, limiting penalties for early fertility reduction.
- Demographic reward: The Fifteenth Finance Commission assigned 12.5% weight to demographic performance while

using Census 2011 data, offering a precedent for balancing population with responsible fertility policies.

- **Historical compromise:** The 84th Constitutional Amendment froze interstate seat allocation until the first Census after 2026, while the 87th Amendment permitted boundary revision using Census 2001.
- **Intra-State correction:** The post-2001 delimitation redrew constituency boundaries without changing each State's total seats, demonstrating that voter-value disparities can be addressed separately from interstate allocation.
- **Public consultation:** The Delimitation Commission constituted under the 2002 law held 130 public sittings across 67 places, providing a precedent for participatory boundary revision.
- **Federal ratification:** Under Article 368, a constitutional amendment affecting State representation in Parliament requires ratification by at least half the State legislatures, ensuring federal consent.

3. V-Dem's democracy index rates India at its lowest since 1975 (GS Paper II Polity)

This editorial 'V-Dem's democracy index rates India at its lowest since 1975' was published in The Hindu on 1st Sep 2026, highlights India's declining democratic indicators across elections, institutions, civil liberties and academic freedom.

CHART 1: V-Dem's democracy index score for India is at its lowest since 1975. It was 0.39 in 1975, slightly higher than the 0.38 recorded in 2025

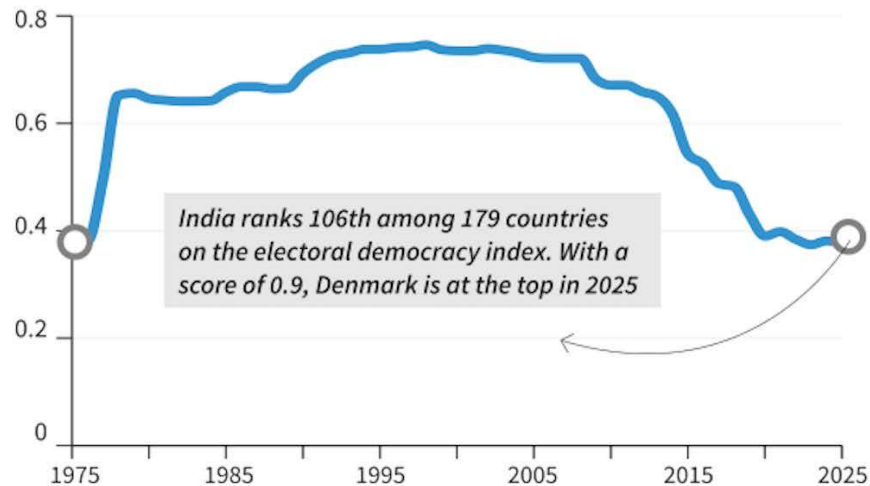


CHART 2: India's scores across election-related indicators involving the functioning of Election Management Body (EMB) and conduct of elections

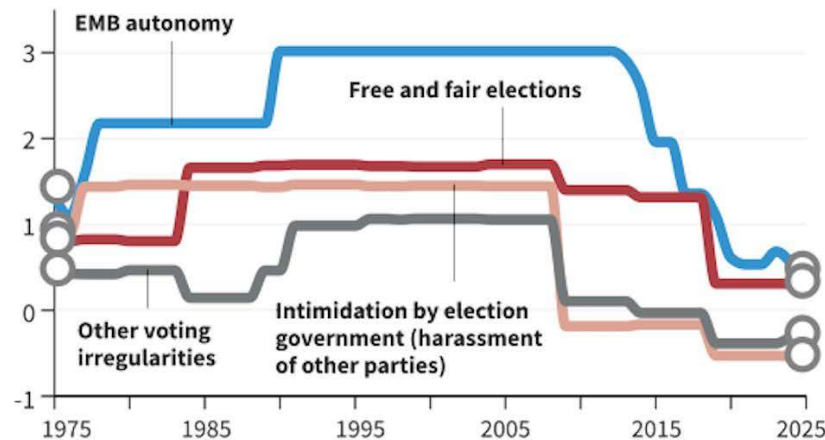
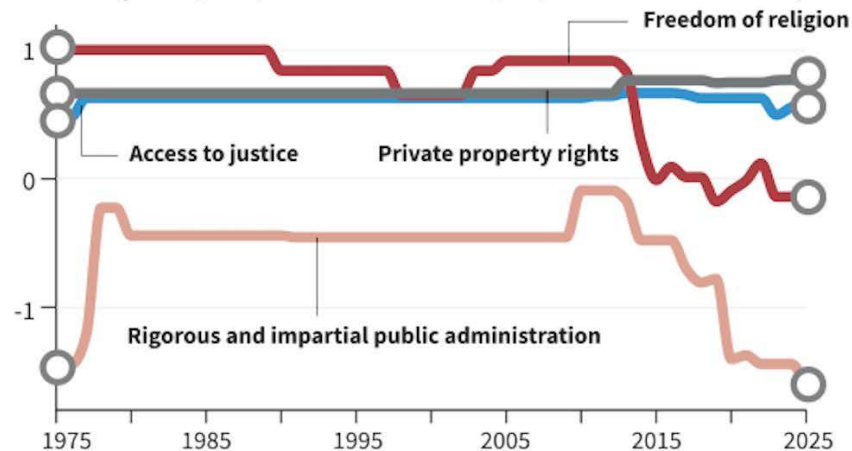


CHART 3: India's scores across indicators on religion, private property, access to justice, and public administration, as per V-Dem Institute's report



International concerns and overall assessment

- In its first review of India since 2007, UN CERD expressed grave concern over alleged large-scale law-enforcement violations and exclusion of voters, particularly Muslims, during the Special Intensive Revision.
- The University of Gothenburg-based V-Dem Institute, using a multidimensional assessment, classified India as slowly “autocratising” through the systematic weakening of democratic institutions.
- India’s Electoral Democracy Index fell from 0.39 during the 1975 Emergency to 0.38 in 2025, ranking 106th among 179 countries, while Denmark led with 0.9.

Electoral, judicial and administrative decline

- India’s performance has declined since 2009 across Election Management Body autonomy, free and fair elections, voting irregularities and electoral intimidation.
- Indicators covering executive compliance with court orders, judicial accountability and corruption influencing judicial decisions have reached their lowest levels in five decades.
- Scores for access to justice, freedom of religion, private-property rights and impartial public administration have also deteriorated substantially.

Expression and academic freedom

- Declining institutional autonomy has coincided with weaker academic and cultural expression, greater media bias, government censorship and harassment of journalists.

- Academic indicators covering freedom of expression, knowledge exchange, research and teaching, and institutional autonomy have sharply declined.

Beyond Editorial

Methodological limitations of global democracy indices

- Conceptual variation: V-Dem uses five democracy principles, the EIU assesses 60 indicators across five categories, and Freedom House separately measures political rights and civil liberties.
- Expert dependence: V-Dem draws upon over 4,000 country experts and generally uses five experts per country-year, making several scores dependent on informed but interpretive judgments.
- Measurement uncertainty: V-Dem converts five-point expert ratings into estimates through a statistical measurement model, so scores should be read with uncertainty intervals rather than as exact values.
- Historical revision: V-Dem's 2026 report uses Dataset Version 16 and recalculates earlier observations whenever methods, evidence or expert participation improve, altering historical comparisons.
- Reporting lag: The Democracy Report 2026 records conditions as of December 31, 2025, meaning later institutional reforms or setbacks remain outside that annual assessment.

- **Ranking sensitivity:** India's 2025 score of 0.38 was only marginally below its 1975 score of 0.39, showing how small numerical differences can produce strong historical claims.
- **Triangulation need:** V-Dem findings should be compared with EIU and Freedom House assessments, Election Commission data, judicial decisions and institutional reports before drawing comprehensive conclusions.