Challenges to Democracy in a Shifting Global Landscape: India's Neighborhood Perspective

Soumya Ranjan Gahir

Doctoral Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Ravenshaw University, Cuttack, Odisha, India

Abstract: *The past decade has served as a crucible for democracies worldwide, challenging established norms and practices. The United States, long hailed as the pinnacle of thriving democracy, has faced a confluence of issues akin to those plaguing many third - world nations. As anti - globalization sentiments surged due to economic, socio - political, and territorial contentions among nations, accompanied by a surge in protectionist tendencies, the functional essence of democracy has encountered setbacks demanding urgent redress. This paper concentrates on the South Asian region, particularly India's neighboring countries. Through comprehensive analysis, it seeks to elucidate and appraise the elements catalyzing the erosion of democracy in third - world nations such as Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar. This examination facilitates a deeper grasp of the evolving political dynamics within the South Asian precinct. Furthermore, the study evaluates the repercussions of prolonged regional instability on India and outlines potential pathways for India to foster democratic stability within the region. The paper focuses on comprehending the ramifications of neighboring (un) democratic governance and the intricate interplay between smaller (un) democratic nations and their larger counterparts. By investigating the systemic erosion of democratic values and principles in the region, this study provides theoretical insights grounded in empirical findings.*

Keywords: democracy, South Asia, erosion, regional instability, democratic stability

1. Introduction

The shifting geopolitical dynamics worldwide have thrust one of the most urgent issues of regional stability back into the spotlight. The surge in regional solidarity can be attributed to the transition of the geopolitical stage from the West to the East. The Eastern sphere, which has always held more than just the allure of Russian Communism, has now taken center stage due to the complex geopolitics surrounding the Indo - Pacific region and China's assertive conduct. While the prospects of geopolitical stability are improving, courtesyof many multilateral, minilateral, and intergovernmental engagements, the internal politics and bilateral relationships among nations within this region remain enigmatic.

This instability prevalent in the region can be traced back to a long history of political uncertainty, mainly stemming from the absence of consistently elected governments. In the context of South Asia, which plays a pivotal role in the Indo - Pacific, India has emerged as a significant nation to watch. With its expansive geography, robust economy, formidable military capabilities, proximity to China, and embodiment of a thriving democracy, India possesses several strengths pivotal for establishing itself as a Vishwaguru ("world teacher" or influential nation).

However, a sharp contrast becomes evident in India's neighboring countries. While these nations did experience post - colonial democracies, they struggled to sustain democratic governance over the long term. Pakistan, for instance, was plagued by military coups, beginning in 1958 when military officer Muhammad Ayub Khan seized power, overthrowing and exiling President Iskandar Ali Mirza. Pakistan's current economic and political turmoil can be traced back to decades of instability, placing the nation on the brink of being categorized as a failed state. A similar narrative unfolded in Myanmar, which underwent political upheaval following a military coup in 1962, leading to the suspension of democracy and the dominance of a single - party system governed by the Burmese Socialist Programme Party until 1988. The situation has worsened with military rule prevailing since the 2022 coup. On the other hand, Sri Lanka faced coup - related tensions in the past. However, presently, concerns regarding its democracy are centered around political corruption, fragile institutions, and authoritarian tendencies, all contributing to its current decline.

Hence, this paper delves into the theoretical construct of the democratic domino theory, positing that "changes in the level of democracy in one country spread and influence neighboring countries. " The study will analyze the aforementioned tumultuous neighbors of India, providing insights into the political shifts occurring in the South Asian region. Furthermore, this paper examines the repercussions of prolonged instability in India's neighborhood and outlines potential strategies India could employ to foster democratic stability in the region. The overarching aim of this paper is to ascertain the influence of democratic or undemocratic governance in neighboring nations and explore how smaller democracies impact larger ones and vice versa. By scrutinizing the gradual erosion of democratic values in the region, the paper provides a theoretically grounded and policy - relevant analysis based on its findings.

The Decline of Democracy in Third - World Countries
The 21st century has posed significant challenges to democracies worldwide, extending even to established examples like the United States. Historically, the US stood as a paragon of thriving democracy, inspiring numerous third - world countries that embraced democratic principles after gaining independence in the mid - 1950s. However, contemporary issues have cast shadows over this democratic ideal, blurring the distinction between the challenges faced by third - world countries and those experienced by the US. The unsettling scenes during the 2021 attack on the Capitol remain ingrained in collective memory, underscoring a

pivotal moment that shook the foundations of democratic values within the US. This incident was a turning point, prompting a critical introspection into the global surge of right - wing extremism. Its repercussions extended beyond American borders as a stark reminder of the urgent need to address this rising threat on a global scale.

Furthermore, the democratic landscape has been complicated by the resurgence of anti - globalization sentiments fueled by economic disparities, socio - political tensions, and territorial disputes among nations. These factors have catalyzed the revival of protectionist tendencies, eroding the efficacy of democratic systems. This challenge is not confined to any specific region. However, it resonates particularly strongly within third - world democracies grappling with balancing their developmental goals with the demands of a shifting international order.

Consequently, the functional essence of democracy finds itself marginalized in the face of these multifaceted challenges. The erstwhile stable model of democratic governance upheld as an aspiration by emerging nations now confronts a series of intricate tests that necessitate innovative solutions. As we navigate this intricate web of issues, it becomes imperative to forge a new understanding of democracy that can adapt to the evolving global landscape while remaining faithful to its core principles.

1.1 Democracy in South Asia: Challenges and Progress in a Historical Context

The era of decolonization marked a pivotal shift in global politics, offering nations the opportunity to secure true freedom, uphold their rights, and elect leaders through universal suffrage. This departure from colonial rule presented a chance to establish accountable governance rather than entrenched monarchies. However, the journey toward democracy for newly independent nations was far from simple. Challenges such as partitioning India and Pakistan and delayed government formation posed significant hurdles.

The influence of democracy's success, exemplified by the United States' two - century track record, cannot be overlooked. The success of other nations depended on the vision of independent leaders and the governance models they aimed to create. Nevertheless, translating democratic ideals into practical systems proved complex. Nations that had long endured colonial rule faced the challenge of adapting to democracy after centuries of imperial administration. Coupled with the complications of post - independence partitions, many nations initially veered toward dictatorial decision - making models rather than embracing people - centered governance. Consequently, numerous new democracies succumbed to autocracy or military rule, struggling to balance diverse societal demands amidst the lure of power among the ruling elites.

Among these struggles, India stands out as a remarkable example of a successful transition to democracy. The Constituent Assembly's meticulous and well - debated constitution - drafting process bolstered India's democratic foundations. A constitution serves as a guiding charter

without which democratic governance falters. India's Constituent Assembly meticulously addressed every aspect vital for the nation's functioning, providing a robust basis for the rule of law. In contrast, Pakistan's journey fell short of Muhammad Ali Jinnah's aspiration for a democracy infused with Islamic principles. The ratification of Pakistan's constitution in 1973 led to its identification as the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, but the nation's trajectory deviated from Jinnah's democratic ideals.

The trajectory of Myanmar's democracy has been tumultuous. Since its 1947 independence, the nation has undergone three constitution iterations. Only in 2008 did Myanmar unveil a constitution hailed by the military as a 'roadmap to democracy', an idea earlier put forward in 2003 ("Myanmar's Road Map to Democracy" 2003) . This illustrates the challenges inherent in establishing stable democratic governance, particularly when faced with a history of political uncertainty and military involvement. Unlike Pakistan and Myanmar, Sri Lanka's democratic journey is more transparent. While not devoid of challenges, the nation's democratic transition is less marred by ambiguity.

The evolution of democracy in South Asia reflects the potential and the hurdles inherent in establishing accountable governance following decolonization. While India is an inspiring example of how meticulous constitution drafting can fortify democratic foundations, the paths of Pakistan, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka showcase the intricate balance required to navigate societal demands and political ambitions. The region's history underscores the ongoing endeavor to transform theoretical democratic ideals into pragmatic political realities.

2. The Significance of a Stable Neighborhood: India's Experience with Unstable Neighbors

In an interconnected world, maintaining harmonious relations with neighboring countries and ensuring regional stability are pivotal factors for a nation's growth and prosperity. A volatile neighborhood, characterized by conflicts and economic challenges, often results in an unsteady region and amplifies security concerns. South Asia stands out as a prime example among the regions grappling with such issues. The trajectory of South Asia has been fraught with challenges, largely attributed to the inability to resolve disputes between two major nations, India and Pakistan. However, the evolving geopolitics of the region are being shaped by the emerging dynamics in the Indo - Pacific, opening both opportunities and challenges. While India has adeptly leveraged these changes to its advantage, the struggles of countries like Pakistan and Myanmar in capitalizing on initiatives from countries such as Japan and the US underscore the impact of domestic instability and geopolitical alignments, particularly their proximity to China.

Challenges Posed by Unstable Neighbors:
1) Regional Instability and Security Concerns: The instability of neighboring countries can lead to regional turmoil, undermining economic development and raising security apprehensions. Ongoing conflicts and

political instability in South Asian countries have hindered collaborative efforts for growth and stability, reflecting India's challenges due to its unstable neighbors.

2) Unresolved Conflicts: South Asia's progress has been hampered by the persisting unresolved issues, prominently the enduring rivalry between India and Pakistan. This unresolved tussle has strained bilateral relations and radiated tension across the region, contributing to a climate of uncertainty.

3) Impact on Economic Growth: An unstable neighborhood can impede economic growth through reduced trade, investment, and regional cooperation. The potential for collective economic gains remains to be explored, mainly due to the inability of nations in the region to foster cooperative frameworks.

Shifting Geopolitics and Opportunities in the Indo - Pacific:
1) **The emergence of the Indo - Pacific Dynamics:** The evolving global order, focusing on the Indo - Pacific region, has introduced new dynamics that impact South Asia. The region's strategic significance has grown due to the interests of major powers, creating opportunities for countries that can strategically position themselves.

2) **India's Advantageous Position:** India has adeptly navigated the changing geopolitical landscape, capitalizing on its geographic location and emerging as a critical player in the Indo - Pacific. By nurturing relationships with various nations and leveraging its economic potential, India has enhanced its influence and access to opportunities.

3) **Challenges for Pakistan and Myanmar:** In contrast, countries like Pakistan and Myanmar face challenges in fully capitalizing on opportunities presented by countries such as Japan and the US. Domestic instability and geopolitical alignments, particularly their close ties with China, have limited their ability to engage effectively in the emerging Indo - Pacific paradigm.

The impact of unstable neighbors on India is multi - faceted, encompassing security concerns, economic implications, and diplomatic challenges. South Asia's journey toward stability and prosperity hinges on resolving longstanding disputes, fostering cooperation, and adapting to the changing global order. As the Indo - Pacific gains prominence, India's strategic navigation sets an example for neighboring countries, highlighting the importance of stability and effective diplomacy in harnessing opportunities for growth and influence on the international stage.

2.1 Trade Disparities and Regional Security Challenges in South Asia

Trade relations among the South Asian neighbors have languished for decades, hampering economic growth, social cohesion, and regional security. Despite a shared history before partition and historical ties, post - independence relations have struggled to gain momentum in a multilateral framework. The partition's aftermath created considerable instability, with India and Pakistan at odds, hindering cooperation. Despite existing bilateral and multilateral Free Trade Agreements (FTA), South Asian trade represents only a paltry 5% of global trade, starkly contrasting with East

Asia and the Pacific, which account for 50%. The Sub - Saharan region, accounting for 22% of global trade, has boosted intra - regional trade through concerted government efforts to enhance trade relations and facilitate smoother trade mechanisms (Sinha and Sareen 2020).

The evident trade disparities highlight the untapped economic potential within South Asia. Geopolitical uncertainties and domestic turmoil have exacerbated the lack of consensus among nations, hindering cooperation. Recent internal upheavals in the Indian neighborhood have further strained regional ties. Economic instability further dampens social interactions between countries, undermining the prospects for a comprehensive regional security initiative. The rise of China as a major security concern for South Asian nations is notable. Nevertheless, a unified effort to counter China's influence still needs to be present due to Pakistan's alignment with Beijing.

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has made inroads into every South Asian nation except India and Bhutan, presenting economic opportunities and security challenges. India's strategic ambitions, coupled with its economic concerns, have kept it cautious regarding the BRI. China's increasing dominance in the region is partly attributed to the region's disunity. Capitalizing on this disarray, China has exploited economic and military advantages to establish its influence and create divisions among neighboring countries.

To address the existing challenges, South Asian nations must strive for greater unity and collaboration. Trade can play a pivotal role in fostering connections and improving relations between countries. Enhanced political stability and cross - border cooperation are essential to unlock the region's untapped potential. A shared commitment to counter security threats, such as China's growing influence, requires coordinated efforts that transcend historical grievances. Collaborative security measures, informed by a collective vision for regional stability, can mitigate external threats.

In conclusion, the persistently underwhelming trade relations among South Asian countries have hindered economic growth, social cohesion, and regional security. Despite historical ties, the post - independence period has witnessed limited progress in fostering multilateral cooperation. The vast trade disparities within the region underline the unrealized economic potential. The rise of China's influence, exemplified by the Belt and Road Initiative, underscores the need for greater unity and collective action. By prioritizing political stability, trade enhancement, and collaborative security measures, South Asian nations can pave the way for a more prosperous and secure future.

2.2 Challenges Confronting India's Foreign Policy in the Region

Since its involvement in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in 1985, India has demonstrated its commitment to fostering regional development. However, the organization's shortcomings have been attributed to persistent issues such as the Jammu

and Kashmir dispute with Pakistan and cross - border terrorism. The Kargil War further complicated India - Pakistan relations, prompting India to explore alternative regional cooperation avenues such as BIMSTEC and BBIN.

While India has sought to move beyond the Pakistan factor in South Asia, it has encountered challenges in fully capitalizing on this opportunity. The notion of a "Big Brother" syndrome has emerged in friction between India and its smaller neighbors—Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh (Ghimire 2015) (Gupta 1984) (Sharma 2020) . Although recent attempts have been made to address these issues, China's influence poses a significant obstacle to India's regional aspirations. China has adeptly leveraged the instability within South Asia to strengthen its position and foster trust among regional nations. China has expanded its regional footprint through economic assistance and initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In response, India has engaged in damage control, including financial assistance and prioritizing neighboring countries during the Covid - 19 pandemic (Bose 2021) . However, the impact of these efforts has been moderate, leaving neighboring countries in a delicate position and disinclined to take sides.

Beyond the China factor, India's foreign policy faces challenges from the evolving situations in Pakistan, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka.
1) Pakistan's Instability: Pakistan's historical instability has long concerned India. Recent developments suggest that while Pakistan's internal turmoil may not directly spill over into India, it could distract Pakistan from managing elements that could pose risks to India, such as India - focused militant groups (Biswas 2023) .
2) Myanmar's Military Rule: The military rule in Myanmar has revived India's security concerns in its Northeast region and its broader Act East policy. India has maintained a balanced stance, condemning violence while refraining from endorsing the 2020 election results. The situation poses complexities for India's regional ambitions (Hangsing and Tonsing 2022) .
3) Sri Lanka's Economic Struggles: Sri Lanka's economic challenges, exacerbated by the Covid - 19 pandemic, present further obstacles. Despite progress claims, the nation grapples with high inflation, increased poverty rates, and a substantial debt burden (Jayasinghe 2023) . India and China both assume observer and financial assistance roles, with India's vigilance, heightened due to China's parallel involvement.

India's foreign policy in the South Asian region faces multifaceted challenges, from historical bilateral issues to the growing influence of China and the complexities of regional instability. As India strives to navigate these hurdles, it must carefully balance its relationships with its neighbors and develop proactive strategies to strengthen regional cooperation, economic stability, and security.

2.3 The Imperative for Democratic Consolidation in the Region

Democracy is a cornerstone of people's governance, furnishing a platform for their voices to resonate. While democratic systems encounter challenges, the emergence of a robust global consensus on the efficacy of democracy has acted as a deterrent against the slide into autocracy.

The populace's steadfast resistance against their respective regimes in nations such as Pakistan, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka underscore the ingrained democratic values within them. This reaffirms that the essence of governance remains rooted in the people's will rather than being dictated by a select few.

Nonetheless, while the populace's determination to safeguard their rights and national interests is commendable, more is needed to reinstate a functional governance framework. What is presently imperative is the stabilization of democracy. Strategic measures must be devised to fortify democratic institutions, enhance political engagement, foster the supremacy of the rule of law, and ensure the fundamental human rights of each citizen.

In the grand scheme, it becomes paramount to avert such fragile regimes from descending into violence or authoritarianism. Instead, a conducive environment must be cultivated, one in which democratic values can take root and flourish.

3. India's Role in Nurturing Democracy in its Neighbourhood

Since gaining independence in 1947, India has recognized the profound impact of shared history and the traumas caused by partition on its aspirations. As a nation characterized by diversity and a rich historical tapestry, India has taken a nuanced and considered approach toward its neighboring countries. While India's journey towards understanding and embracing democracy initially encountered challenges, the appeal of democracy's inherent ethos and values drove its adoption by many newly independent nations. Rather than labeling India as a mere advocate of democracy in South Asia, it is crucial to recognize how India's resilience in overcoming poverty, navigating through the trials of the 1975 emergency, and effectively managing coalition governments has provided a valuable roadmap for sustainable democratic governance.

Development:
1) Complex Historical Context: India's history is intertwined with the legacies of colonialism and the painful partition, which has sensitized the country to the nuances of regional relationships. This historical awareness has shaped India's approach to its neighbors, acknowledging the significance of shared experiences and ensuring that these experiences inform its foreign policy decisions.
2) Evolution of Indian Democracy: India's early encounter with democracy was accompanied by a learning curve, revealing the challenges inherent to democratic systems. However, these challenges did not deter India's commitment to democratic governance. Instead, they catalyzed a process of introspection and adaptation, strengthening the democratic institutions over time.
3) Values and Ethos of Democracy: The allure of democracy lies not just in its procedural aspects but also

in the foundational values it upholds, such as individual rights, freedom of expression, and participatory decision - making. These values resonated with nations seeking to carve out their identities after attaining independence, making democracy an attractive choice.

4) India's Exemplary Democratic Trajectory: Rather than positioning India as an outright advocate of democracy, it is essential to highlight the country's remarkable democratic journey. The transformation from a struggling post - colonial state to one of the world's largest democracies has been punctuated by challenges India has adeptly navigated. The recovery from periods of economic difficulty, like the aftermath of colonial rule, and the adept management of politically diverse coalition governments underscore India's commitment to democratic stability.

5) Lessons for Neighbors: India's experiences serve as a valuable template for neighboring countries aiming to establish and sustain democratic governance. The ability to manage a multi - ethnic, multi - religious society while upholding democratic principles can offer insightful lessons to nations facing similar complexities.

India's role in nurturing democracy within its neighborhood goes beyond mere advocacy. It involves a deep - rooted understanding of historical contexts, a commitment to democratic values, and a demonstration of resilience in facing challenges. India's democratic trajectory, marked by overcoming economic struggles, weathering political emergencies, and managing diverse coalitions, offers a roadmap to guide neighboring nations toward sustainable and effective democratic governance.

3.1 India's Historical Approach to Regional Diplomacy

A nuanced interplay of strategic, economic, and cultural considerations has characterized India's historical approach to regional diplomacy. Deeply rooted in its heritage, India's revered ancient text, the *Arthashastra*, stands as a testament to its early recognition of the importance of neighborhood policy and diplomatic engagements in safeguarding national security interests.

The visionary statesman Jawaharlal Nehru drew inspiration from Kautilya's timeless wisdom, which found practical manifestation in the non - alignment movement. This transformative approach underscored India's commitment to preserving its sovereignty and pursuing its national interests without tethering itself to any particular geopolitical bloc. By doing so, India emerged as a beacon of strategic autonomy in a world gripped by Cold War tensions.

These diplomatic endeavors were not confined to theoretical realms but translated into tangible actions, drawing the active participation of numerous newly decolonized nations. During this era, India's sagacious navigation of global dynamics played a pivotal role in shaping international relations. It fostered a sense of solidarity among nations seeking to assert their independence, amplifying their collective voice on the global stage.

India's historical regional diplomacy has been a harmonious blend of age - old wisdom, modern pragmatism, and a resolute commitment to safeguarding its national interests. This approach helped India navigate the intricacies of global power dynamics and contributed significantly to the emancipation of erstwhile colonized nations and the reshaping of the global order.

3.2 Domino Theory of Democracy: A South Asian Perspective

India faces significant internal challenges that complicate its role within the region. The analogy of the 'Domino Theory of Democracy' is particularly relevant when examining India and its neighboring countries. The theory posits that changes in the level of democracy in one country can trigger a similar spread of changes in neighboring countries, akin to falling dominos. However, when applying this theory to the South Asian context, the outcomes become intricate. While earlier sections of this paper have explored how an unstable neighborhood undermines India's foreign policies, a deeper analysis of Indian democracy over the past decade reveals a persistent struggle against its challenges.

In recent times, the current Indian regime has encountered criticism for curtailing freedom of expression, suppressing protests, arresting anti - regime activists and scholars under stringent laws such as the UAPA (Unlawful Activities Prevention Act), and pursuing divisive Hindutva policies that seemingly exclude religious minorities. This complex scenario creates a two - way domino effect, wherein changes within India can influence the surrounding nations and vice versa.

It is essential to distinguish India from its less stable democratic neighbors. While India does not qualify as an unstable democracy, the critical question is whether India can act as a stabilizing force in the region. The answer, in this regard, is affirmative. While India might not be the epitome of a flawless democratic model, it can significantly promote stability. However, a clear - cut democratic exemplar within the region poses challenges. Without adequate checks in place, the potential impact of the domino effect could erode democratic values within India itself.

Comparatively, the domino effect witnessed in the United States, with its influential population, has restrained India's potential deviations. This underscores the need for India to address concerns raised by its populace. By leading by example, India can exert influence through its foreign policies and bilateral agreements to ensure stability in its neighboring countries. Such an approach not only safeguards democratic principles but also contributes to regional stability.

4. Significance of the Findings

The findings of this research hold immense significance in understanding the complex challenges faced by democracy in the South Asian region, particularly from India's neighborhood perspective. By delving into the erosion of democracy in countries like Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar, this study sheds light on the intricate interplay of historical, political, and social factors that contribute to the instability of democratic institutions. The research

underscores the importance of contextualizing democracy within the specific challenges faced by each nation, highlighting that the path to accountable governance is not linear but shaped by the unique dynamics of each country.

The research's exploration of the impact of unstable neighbors on India brings attention to the multifaceted nature of regional instability. From security concerns to economic implications, these challenges underscore the interconnectedness of South Asian nations and the need for collaborative efforts to achieve stability and prosperity. The study's emphasis on India's strategic navigation and diplomacy within the evolving global order provides valuable insights into how regional powers can influence international dynamics.

Furthermore, the research draws attention to the persistently underwhelming trade relations within South Asia, highlighting the economic and security benefits that could arise from greater regional cooperation. The rise of China's influence in the region, contrasted with the historical ties of South Asian nations, underscores the urgency of fostering unity and collective action to harness economic potential and counterbalance external influences.

The analogy of the 'Domino Theory of Democracy' presents a thought - provoking framework for understanding the intricate relationship between India and its neighboring countries. By recognizing the potential ripple effects of democratic changes within India and its impact on the region, the study highlights the need for India to address its internal challenges in order to promote stability and democratic values in its neighborhood effectively.

5. Conclusion

In a rapidly shifting global landscape, the challenges to democracy in India's neighborhood have far - reaching implications for regional stability, economic growth, and global order. This research has provided

- A comprehensive exploration of these challenges,
- Offering insights into the evolution of democracy in South Asia,
- The impact of unstable neighbors on India,
- The significance of regional cooperation, and
- India's role as a potentially stabilizing force.

The historical trajectory of democracy in South Asia is a testament to the intricate nature of balancing societal demands and political ambitions. While India stands as a beacon of successful democratic institution - building, the paths of neighboring nations illustrate the ongoing struggle to translate democratic ideals into pragmatic realities. The nuanced understanding of this evolution is vital for crafting effective policies that promote stability and democratic values.

The study's analysis of India's strategic navigation in the Indo - Pacific and its commitment to safeguarding national interests reinforces the importance of diplomacy in managing regional dynamics. As South Asia grapples with historical disputes, economic disparities, and changing global power structures, India's example underscores the potential of diplomacy to foster cooperation, resolve conflicts, and leverage opportunities for growth and influence.

The 'Domino Theory of Democracy' highlights the intricate relationship between India and its neighbors, showcasing how changes in one country can influence the political landscape in neighboring nations and vice versa. India's internal challenges and democratic struggles add complexity to this relationship, underscoring the need for India to address its domestic concerns in order to promote stability and democratic principles regionally effectively.

This research provides a holistic understanding of the challenges to democracy in India's neighborhood and the potential pathways for India to contribute to regional stability. By recognizing the impact of historical legacies, internal dynamics, and global shifts, policymakers can make informed decisions to foster cooperation, economic growth, and democratic values. As South Asia continues to navigate its path in the global arena, India's role as a stabilizing force can shape a more prosperous, secure, and democratic future for the entire region.

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