

Electoral Politics

In a democracy, people are governed through the elected representatives. Governing through elected representatives is the most common form of democracy.

Elections

The mechanism or procedure by which people choose their representatives at regular intervals is called election.

Case of Haryana Assembly

- **Formation of a New Party** Haryana had been ruled by Congress party since 1982. At that time, Chaudhary Devi Lal was an opposition leader. He led a movement called Nvaya Yudh (struggle for justice) and formed a new party called Lok Dal.
- **Election Campaign** In election campaign of 1987 Assembly Election, Devi Lal promised voters that if his party win, he would waive loans of farmers and small businessmen.
- **Voting** As people were unhappy with existing government, they were attracted by Devi Lal's promise. They voted in favour of Lok Dal and its partners which won 76 out of 90 seats in the State Assembly.
- **Announcement of Results** Lok Dal won 60 seats alone and thus, had a clear majority in the Assembly. Congress got only 5 seats. As the election result was announced, the existing Chief Minister of Congress resigned.
- **Appointment of Chief Minister** The newly elected Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs) of Lok Dal chose Devi Lal as their leader. The Governor invited Devi Lal to be the new Chief Minister. After three days of election result, he took oath.
- **New election** Lok Dal ruled the state for 4 years. In 1991 election, Lok Dal did not win people's support. This time Congress won the election and formed the new government.

Chapter Syllabus

- Why Elections?
- What is our System of Elections?
- What makes election in India democratic?

Need of Elections

Elections are needed to elect representatives. In most democracies, people rule through their representatives.

- Elections solve the problems of assessing people on the basis of education, knowledge or experience.
- Elections help in analysing that the people like their representatives or not.
- Elections ensure that the representatives rule as per the wishes of the people and make sure that those who are not working for the people, do not remain their representatives.

In an election, the voters make many choices like

- They can choose who will make laws for them.
- They can choose who will form the government and take major decisions.
- They can choose the party whose policies will guide the government and law-making.

What Makes an Election Democratic?

- Everyone should have the right to choose representative. It means everyone has one vote and every vote has equal value.
- Political parties and candidates should be free to contest elections and offer some real choices to the voters.
- The choices should be offered at regular intervals by conducting elections after a certain period.
- The candidate preferred by the people should get elected.
- Elections should be conducted in a free and fair manner where people can choose representatives according to their wish.

Political Competition

Political competition takes place when different political parties compete to gain the confidence and the vote of the voters. They make promises and give incentives to motivate the voters to vote them.

This electoral competition has many demerits like

- It creates a sense of **disunity and factionalism**¹ (groupism) and party-politics in every locality.

- Factionalism** It refers to splitting up of a group in small factions. In this political concept, a group of persons form a minority in a larger group.
- Booth Capturing** Supporters or hired musclemen of party or a candidate gain physical control of a polling booth and cast false votes by group.
- Threatening** Supporters or hired musclemen of party or a candidate threaten everyone or by preventing genuine voters from reaching the polling booth.
- Constituency Voters** in a geographical area who elect a representative to the Legislative Bodies.
- By-election** If a representative from a constituency dies while in office or if the office falls vacant because of reasons like resignation, fresh elections are held in that particular constituency. Such an election is called by-election.

- Different political parties and candidates often use dirty tricks like **booth capturing**² to win elections.
- The pressure to win electoral fights does not allow to form useful long-term policies.
- Some good people who may wish to serve the country, do not enter in electoral competition.

The electoral competition also has some merits like

- Regular electoral competition provides incentives to political parties and leaders. If they can satisfy the voters with their work, they will be able to win again.
- Important issues are raised by the political parties and leaders due to the competition.
- It helps to force political parties and leaders to serve the people.

On the basis of above merits and demerits we can say that political competition may cause divisions and some ugliness. But it finally helps to force political parties and leaders to serve the people.

Check Point 01

- Chaudhary Devi Lal led a movement called
- Which commission ensures free and fair elections in a democracy?
- Which political party won the 1991 elections of Haryana?
- The right to choose representative means everyone should have vote and every vote has equal value.

System of Elections in India

In India, Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha (Assembly) elections are held regularly after every five years. After five years, the term of all the elected representatives comes to an end.

Elections are held in all constituencies at the same time, either on the same day or within a few days. This is known as **General Election**.

Sometimes election is held only for one constituency³ to fill the vacancy caused by death or resignation of a member. This is known as **By-election**⁴.

Electoral Constituencies

In India, an area based system of representation is followed, where the country is divided into different areas for purpose of elections. These are called **Electoral Constituencies**. Every voter who lives in an area, votes for one representative.

For Lok Sabha election, India is divided into 543 constituencies. The representative elected from each constituency is called **Member of Parliament** or an MP. Our constitution requires that each constituency should have a surplus equal population living within it.

For Vidhan Sabha election, each state is divided into a specific number of assembly constituencies and the elected representative of each assembly constituency is called the **Member of Legislative Assembly** or an MLA. Each parliamentary constituency has several assembly constituencies within it. The same principle applies for Panchayat and Municipal elections. Each village or town is divided into different wards that are like constituencies. Each ward elects one member of the village or the urban local body. Sometimes these constituencies are counted as seats, as each constituency represents one seat in the assembly.

For example, when we say that 'Lok Dal' won 60 seats in Haryana, it means that candidates of Lok Dal won in 60 assembly constituencies in the state and thus Lok Dal had 60 MLAs in the State Assembly.

Reserved Constituencies

Our constitution makes made provision of reserved constituencies to ensure representation of every section of society.

Some constituencies are reserved for people who belong to the **Scheduled Castes (SC)** and **Scheduled Tribes (ST)**. In a SC reserved constituency, only someone who belongs to the SCs can contest for election.

Similarly, in a ST constituency, only someone who belongs to the STs can contest for election.

A few seats in Lok Sabha (84 for SC and 47 for ST) are reserved for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). This number is in proportion to their share in the total population. Thus, the reserved seats for SC and ST do not take away the legitimate share of any other social group.

3. **Electoral Roll**: It is the voters' list prepared by a door-to-door survey to include only bonafide voters and minimise role of bogus voters.
4. **Universal Adult Franchise**: Every Indian citizen of 18 years and above has the right to vote irrespective of caste, creed and sex.

Reservation in District/Local Level

In many states, seats in rural (panchayat) and urban (municipalities and corporations) local bodies are reserved for **Other Backward Classes (OBC)**.

The proportion of seats reserved varies from state to state. One-third of the seats are reserved in rural and urban local bodies for women candidates.

Voters' List

In a democratic election, the list of those who are eligible to vote is officially called the **Electoral Roll**³ and is commonly known as the Voters' List.

It is the responsibility of the government to get the names of all the eligible voters put on the voters' list.

The right to vote, falls under **Universal Adult Franchise**⁴. It means all the citizens who aged 18 years and above can vote in an election regardless of his or her caste, religion or gender.

As new persons attain voting age, names are added to the voters' list and names of those who move out of a place or those who were died are deleted.

A complete revision of the list takes place every five years. This is done to ensure that it remains up to date.

In the last few years, a new system of **Election Photo Identity Card (EPIC)** has been introduced. However, this card has not been made compulsory for voting, and voters can show any other proofs of identity like the ration card, driving licence or Aadhaar Card to cast a vote.

Nomination of Candidates

Anyone who is a voter can also become a candidate in elections. However, to be a candidate in election, the minimum age is 25 years.

Political parties nominate their candidates who get the party support and symbol. Party's nomination is often called **Party Ticket**.

The candidate has to fill a nomination form and give some money as a security deposit.

Moreover every candidate has to make a legal declaration giving full details of

(i) Educational qualifications of the candidate.

(ii) Details of the assets and liabilities of the candidate and his/her family.

(iii) Serious criminal cases pending against the candidate.

These informations provided by the candidates has to be made public so that the voters can make their decision on the basis of the information.

Educational Qualifications for Candidates

There is no educational qualification for candidates for being an MP or an MLA. However, the relevant qualification for candidates is the ability to understand people's concerns, problems and to represent people's interests.

Putting an educational qualification would go against the spirit of democracy because it would deprive a majority of the citizens right to contest elections.

Election Campaign

Election campaign means the promotion (or propaganda) of the policies, offers and promises that the candidates make to voters to fulfill, if they are elected. In this way, voters can decide the candidate to vote for. They vote for the candidate whose policies they like.

In India election campaigning takes place for a two-week period between the announcement of the final list of candidates and the date of polling.

During this period, the candidates contact their electorate⁵, political leaders, address election meetings and political parties mobilise their supporters. This is also the period when television news and newspapers are covered with election-related stories and debates.

Political parties start preparing for elections in advance before they actually take place. In election campaigns, political parties try to focus public attention on some big issues. They want to attract the public to that issue and get their votes on that basis.

Slogans Given by Different Political Parties

Some of the successful slogans given by different political parties in various elections are given below.

* The Congress party led by Indira Gandhi gave the slogan of **Gharibi Hatao (Remove poverty)** in the Lok Sabha elections of 1971. The party promised to recreate all the policies of the government to remove poverty from the country.

5. **Electorate**: It refers to the entire body of people who are qualified to vote in the elections for the legislatures or local bodies.

6. **Code of Conduct**: A set of norms and guidelines to be followed by political parties and contesting candidates during election time.

7. **Polling Booth**: A makeshift place where people go to cast their votes on the election day.

* Janata Party gave the slogan **Save Democracy** in the Lok Sabha election held in 1977.

* The Left Front gave the slogan **Land to the Tiller** in the West Bengal Assembly elections held in 1977.

* NT Rama Rao, the leader of the Telugu Desam Party gave the slogan **Protect the Self-Respect of the Telugu** in Andhra Pradesh Assembly elections in 1983.

Code of Conduct and Laws

To regulate election campaign, so that every political party and candidate gets equal chance to campaign, there are some election laws. According to these laws, no party or candidate can

- bribe or threaten voters.
- appeal to them in the name of caste or religion.
- use government resources for election campaign.
- spend more than ₹ 25 lakh in a constituency for a Lok Sabha election or ₹ 10 lakh in a constituency in an Assembly Election.

If any party or candidate is found violating any of the above law, their candidature can be rejected by the court even after they have won the election.

In addition to the laws, all the political parties in our country have agreed to a model **Code of Conduct**⁶ for election campaign. According to this,

- no party or candidate can use any place of worship for election propaganda.
- no candidate can use government vehicles, aircrafts and officials for elections.
- once elections are announced, ministers shall not lay foundation stones of any project, take any big policy decision or make any promise of providing public facilities.

Polling & Counting of Votes

The final stage of an election is the day, when the voters cast or 'poll' their vote. It is called an **Election day**.

Every person whose name is on the voters' list can go to a nearby **polling booth**⁷ and cast his/her vote.

Once the voter goes inside the booth, the election official identify him/ her, put a mark on the voter's finger and allow him/ her to cast his/ her vote.

An agent of each candidate is allowed to sit inside the polling booth and ensure that the voting takes place in a fair way.

Earlier voting was done by putting a stamp on the ballot paper. A **ballot paper** is a sheet of paper on which the names of the contesting candidates along with party name and symbols are listed.

Now, **Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs)** are used to record votes where voter presses button against name of the candidate, he/she wants to cast his/her vote.

Once the polling is over, all the EVMs are sealed and taken to a secure place. A few days later, on a fixed date, all the EVMs are opened and the votes secured by each candidate are counted.

The candidate who secures the highest number of votes from a constituency is declared elected.

Check Point 02

1. What is By-election?
2. India is divided into Lok Sabha constituencies.
3. How many seats are reserved for women in local bodies?
4. What is EPIC?
5. Land to the Tiller was the slogan given by

Democratic Elections in India

There are many factors which ensure that elections held in India are democratic.

These are discussed below:

Independent Election Commission

In our country, elections are conducted by an independent and very powerful **Election Commission (EC)**. It enjoys the same kind of independence as the judiciary enjoys.

The **Chief Election Commissioner (CEC)** is appointed by the President of India. After appointment, CEC is not answerable to the President or the government.

Powers enjoyed by the Election Commission are:

- (i) It takes decisions on every aspect of conduct and control of elections from the announcement of elections to the declaration of results.
- (ii) It implements the code of conduct and punishes any candidate or party that violates it.

- (iii) During the election period, the Election Commission can order the government to follow some guidelines. These guidelines prevent use and misuse of governmental power to enhance its chances to win elections or to transfer some government officials.
- (iv) Government officers on election duty, work under the control of the Election Commission and not the government.
- (v) If election officials come to the opinion that polling was not fair in some booths or even an entire constituency, they order a repoll.

Popular Participation

This is another way to check the quality of election process. If the election process is not free or fair, people will not continue to participate in the exercise.

People's participation in election is usually measured by **voter turnout**¹⁰ figures. Turnout indicates the per cent of eligible voters who actually cast their vote.

Over the last 50 years in India voters turn out is either remained stable or actually gone up.

In India, the poor, illiterate and underprivileged people vote in larger proportion as compared rich and privileged sections. This is in contrast to Western democracies.

Acceptance of Election Outcome

If elections are not free or fair, the outcome always favours the powerful. In such a situation, the ruling parties do not lose elections. But this is not the case in **rigged election**¹¹. When the losing party does not accept the outcome.

The outcome of India's election is given below:

- (i) The ruling parties routinely lose elections in India both at the National and State Level.
- (ii) In the US, an **Incumbent**¹² or sitting elected representative rarely loses an election. But in India, about half of the sitting MPs or MLAs lose elections.
- (iii) Candidates who are known to have spent a lot of money on buying votes and those with known criminal connection often lose elections.
- (iv) Except some disputed elections, the electoral outcomes are usually accepted by the defeated party as 'people's verdict'.

¹⁰ **Voter Turnout** The percentage of eligible voters who cast their votes in an election.
¹¹ **Rigged Election** Elections on the basis of fraud or malpractices.
¹² **Incumbent** The current holder of a political office. Usually, the choice for the voters in elections is between the incumbent party or candidate and those who oppose them.

Challenges to Free and Fair Elections

The challenges to free and fair elections are listed as follows:

- (i) Candidates and parties with a lot of money may not be sure of their victory, but they do enjoy a big and unfair advantage over smaller parties and independent candidates.
- (ii) Some candidates with criminal records are able to secure party tickets from major parties.
- (iii) Some families tend to dominate political parties; tickets are distributed to relatives from these families.
- (iv) Elections offer only little choice to ordinary citizens as both the major parties are quite similar to each other in policies and practice.

- (v) Smaller parties and independent candidates suffer a huge disadvantage compared to bigger parties in terms of money power and organisational support.

These challenges exist not only in India, but also in many established democracies.

Check Point 03

1. The Chief Election Commissioner is appointed by the of India.
2. What is voter turn out?
3. What do you mean by rigged election?
4. In an incumbent representative rarely loses an election.
5. Candidates with criminal records in the election is a to free and fair election in India.

SUMMARY

- The mechanism by which people can choose their representatives at regular intervals is called **Election**.
- In elections, the voters can choose who will form the government. Each vote has an equal value.
- In India, the **General Elections** for Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha are held regularly after every five years and elections are held in all constituencies at the same time.
- Sometimes election is held for one constituency to fill the vacancy caused by death or resigning of a member. This is known as **By-election**.
- In India, an area based system of representation is followed where the country is divided into different areas for election purposes is called **Electoral Constituencies**.
- For Lok Sabha election, India is divided into 543 constituencies. The representatives elected from each constituency are called **Members of Parliament or MPs**.
- For Vidhan Sabha, each state is divided into number of Assembly constituencies. The elected representative from each Assembly constituency are called **Members of Legislative Assembly or MLAs**.
- Each village or town is divided into several wards and same electoral procedure takes place for **Panchayat and Municipal Elections**.

- A special system of **Reserved Constituencies** for the weaker sections especially for the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) is also followed in India.
- Reservation is also followed for seats in rural and urban local bodies, for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and women.
- In democratic elections, the list of people eligible to vote is prepared much before the election and is officially called the **Electoral Roll** or the **Voter's List**. Which is updated from time to time.
- In our country, all the citizens aged 18 years and above has the Right to Vote regardless of his or her caste, religion or gender. This is known as **Universal Adult Franchise**.
- A new system of **Election Photo Identity Card (EPIC)** has been introduced. Each political party has to agree to **Model Code of Conduct**.
- Voting is done through ballot papers and **Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs)**.
- In our country, elections are conducted by an independent and very powerful body, known as **Election Commission**.
- The **Chief Election Commissioner (CEC)** is appointed by the President of India and is not answerable to the President or the government.