

CHAPTER 4

ELECTORAL POLITICS

OVERVIEW

In Chapter Two we have seen that in a democracy it is neither possible nor necessary for people to govern directly. The most common form of democracy in our times is for the people to govern through their representatives. In this chapter we will look at how these representatives are elected. We begin by understanding why elections are necessary and useful in a democracy. We try to understand how electoral competition among parties serves the people. We then go on to ask what makes an election democratic. The basic idea here is to distinguish democratic elections from non-democratic elections.

The rest of the chapter tries to assess elections in India in the light of this yardstick. We take a look at each stage of elections, from the drawing of boundaries of different constituencies to the declaration of results. At each stage we ask what should happen and what does happen in elections. Towards the end of the chapter, we turn to an assessment of whether elections in India are free and fair. Here we also examine the role of the Election Commission in ensuring free and fair elections.



Do most leaders
fulfil their election
promises?

4.1 WHY ELECTIONS?

Assembly Election in Haryana

The time is after midnight. An expectant crowd sitting for the past five hours in a chowk of the town is waiting for its leader to come. The organisers assure and reassure the crowd that he would be here any moment. The crowd stands up whenever a passing vehicle comes that way. It arouses hopes that he has come.

The leader is Mr. Devi Lal, chief of the Haryana Sangharsh Samiti, who was to address a meeting in Karnal on Thursday night. The 76-year-old leader, is a very busy man these days. His day starts at 8 a.m. and ends after 11 p.m. ... he had already addressed nine election meetings since morning... been constantly addressing public meetings for the past 23 months and preparing for this election.

This newspaper report is about the State assembly election in Haryana in 1987. The State had been ruled by a Congress party led government since 1982. Chaudhary Devi Lal, then an opposition leader, led a movement called 'Nyaya Yudh' (Struggle for Justice) and formed a new party, Lok Dal. His party joined other opposition parties to form a front against the Congress in the elections. In the election campaign, Devi Lal said that if his party won the elections, his

government would waive the loans of farmers and small businessmen. He promised that this would be the first action of his government.

The people were unhappy with the existing government. They were also attracted by Devi Lal's promise. So, when elections were held, they voted overwhelmingly in favour of Lok Dal and its allies. Lok Dal and its partners won 76 out of 90 seats in the State Assembly. Lok Dal alone won 60 seats and thus had a clear majority in the Assembly. The Congress could win only 5 seats.

Once the election results were announced, the sitting Chief Minister resigned. 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. Three days after the election results were declared, he became the Chief Minister. As soon as he became the Chief Minister, his Government issued a Government Order waiving the outstanding loans of small farmers, agricultural labourers and small businessmen. His party ruled the State for four years. The next elections were held in 1991. But this time his party did not win popular support. The Congress won the election and formed the government.



Jagdeep and Navpreet read this story and drew the following conclusions. Can you say which of these are right or wrong (or if the information given in the story is inadequate to call them right or wrong):

- Elections can lead to changes in the policy of the government.
- The Governor invited Devi Lal to become the Chief Minister because he was impressed with his speeches.
- People are unhappy with every ruling party and vote against it in the next election.
- The party that wins the election forms the government.
- This election led to a lot of economic development in Haryana.
- The Congress Chief Minister need not have resigned after his party lost elections.



A C T I V I T Y

Do you know when the last Assembly election was held in your state? Which other elections have taken place in your locality in the last five years? Write down the level of elections (National, Assembly, Panchayat, etc.), when were they held and the name and designation (MP, MLA, etc.) of the persons who got elected from your area.

Why do we need elections?

Elections take place regularly in any democracy. We noted in Chapter One that there are more than one hundred countries in the world in which elections take place to choose people's representatives. We also read that elections are held in many countries that are not democratic.

But why do we need elections? Let us try to imagine a democracy without elections. A rule of the people is possible without any elections if all the people can sit together everyday and take all the decisions. But as we have already seen in Chapter Two, this is not possible in any large community. Nor is it possible for everyone to have the time and knowledge to take decisions on all matters. Therefore in most democracies people rule through their representatives.

Is there a democratic way of selecting representatives without elections? Let us think of a place where representatives are selected on the basis of age and experience. Or a place where they are chosen on the basis of education or knowledge. There could be some difficulty in deciding on who is more experienced or knowledgeable. But let us say the people can resolve these difficulties. Clearly, such a place does not require elections.

But can we call this place a democracy? How do we find out if the people like their representatives or not? How do we ensure that these representatives rule as per the wishes of the people? How to make sure that those who the people don't like do not remain their representatives? This requires a mechanism by which people can choose their representatives at regular intervals and change them if they wish to do so. This mechanism is called election. Therefore, elections are considered essential in our times for any representative democracy.

In an election the voters make many choices:

- 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?

Elections can be held in many ways. All democratic countries hold elections. But most non-democratic countries also hold some kind of elections. How do we distinguish democratic elections from any other election? We have discussed this question briefly in Chapter Two. We discussed many examples of countries where elections are held but they can't really be called democratic elections. Let us recall what we learnt there and start with a simple list of the minimum conditions of a democratic election:

- First, everyone should be able to choose. This means that everyone should have one vote and every vote should have equal value.



We have seen why democracies need to have elections. But why do rulers in non-democratic countries need to hold elections?

- Second, there should be something to choose from. Parties and candidates should be free to contest elections and should offer some real choice to the voters.
- Third, the choice should be offered at regular intervals. Elections must be held regularly after every few years.
- Fourth, the candidate preferred by the people should get elected.
- Fifth, elections should be conducted in a free and fair manner where people can choose as they really wish.

These might look like very simple and easy conditions. But there are many countries where these are not fulfilled. In this chapter we will apply these conditions to the elections held in our own country to see if we can call these democratic elections.

Is it good to have political competition?

Elections are thus all about political competition. This competition takes various forms. The most obvious form is the competition among political parties. At the **constituency** level, it takes the form of competition among several candidates. If there is no competition, elections will become pointless.

But is it good to have political competition? Clearly, an electoral competition has many demerits. It creates a sense of disunity and 'factionalism' in every locality. You would have heard of people complaining of 'party-politics' in your locality. Different political parties and leaders often level allegations against one another. Parties and candidates often use dirty tricks to win elections. Some people say that this pressure to win electoral fights does not allow sensible long-term policies to be formulated. Some good people who

may wish to serve the country do not enter this arena. They do not like the idea of being dragged into unhealthy competition.

Our Constitution makers were aware of these problems. Yet they opted for free competition in elections as the way to select our future leaders. They did so because this system works better in the long run. In an ideal world all political leaders know what is good for the people and are motivated only by a desire to serve them. Political competition is not necessary in such an ideal world. But that is not what happens in real life. Political leaders all over the world, like all other professionals, are motivated by a desire to advance their political careers. They want to remain in power or get power and positions for themselves. They may wish to serve the people as well, but it is risky to depend entirely on their sense of duty. Besides even when they wish to serve the people, they may not know what is required to do so, or their ideas may not match what the people really want.

How do we deal with this real life situation? One way is to try and improve the knowledge and character of political leaders. The other and more realistic way is to set up a system where political leaders are rewarded for serving the people and punished for not doing so. Who decides this reward or punishment? The simple answer is: the people. This is what electoral competition does. Regular electoral competition provides incentives to political parties and leaders. They know that if they raise issues that people want to be raised, their popularity and chances of victory will increase in the next elections. But if they fail to satisfy the voters with their work they will not be able to win again.



Ah! So, elections are like exams where politicians and parties know if they have passed or failed. But who are the examiners?

So if a political party is motivated only by desire to be in power, even then it will be forced to serve the people. This is a bit like the way market works. Even if a shopkeeper is interested only in his profit, he is forced to give good service to the

customers. If he does not, the customer will go to some other shop. Similarly, political competition may cause divisions and some ugliness, but it finally helps to force political parties and leaders to serve the people.

read
the
cartoon



Read these two cartoons carefully. Write the message of each of them in your own words. Have a discussion in class on which of the two is closer to the reality in your own locality. Draw a cartoon to depict what elections do to the relationship between voters and political leaders.

4.2 WHAT IS OUR SYSTEM OF ELECTIONS?

Can we say that Indian elections are democratic? To answer this question, let us take a look at how elections are held 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. The Lok Sabha or Vidhan Sabha stands 'dissolved'. Elections are held in all constituencies at the same time, either on the same day or within a few days. This is called a general election. Sometimes election is held only for one constituency to fill the vacancy caused by death or resignation of a member. This is

called a by-election. In this chapter we will focus on general elections.

Electoral constituencies

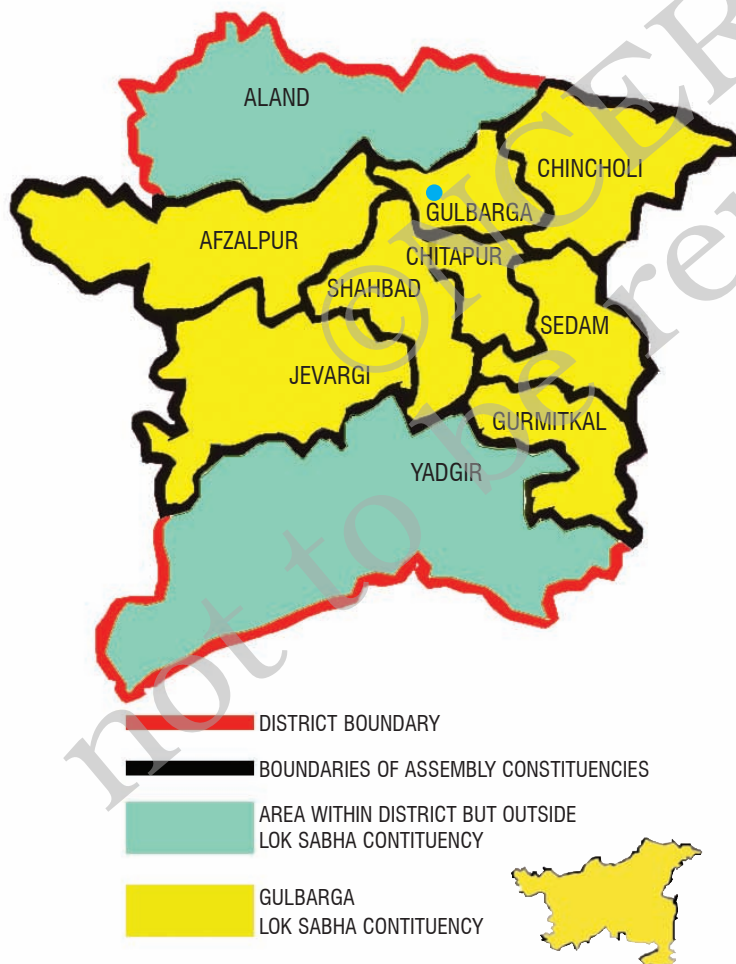
You read about the people of Haryana electing 90 MLAs. You may have wondered how they did that. Did every person in Haryana vote for all the 90 MLAs? You perhaps know that this is not the case. In our country we follow an area based system of representation. The country is divided into different areas for purposes of elections. These areas are called electoral constituencies. The voters who live in an area elect one representative.

For Lok Sabha elections, the country is divided into 543 constituencies. The representative elected from each constituency is called a Member of Parliament or an MP. One of the features of a democratic election is that every vote should have equal value. That is why our Constitution requires that each constituency should have a roughly equal population living within it.

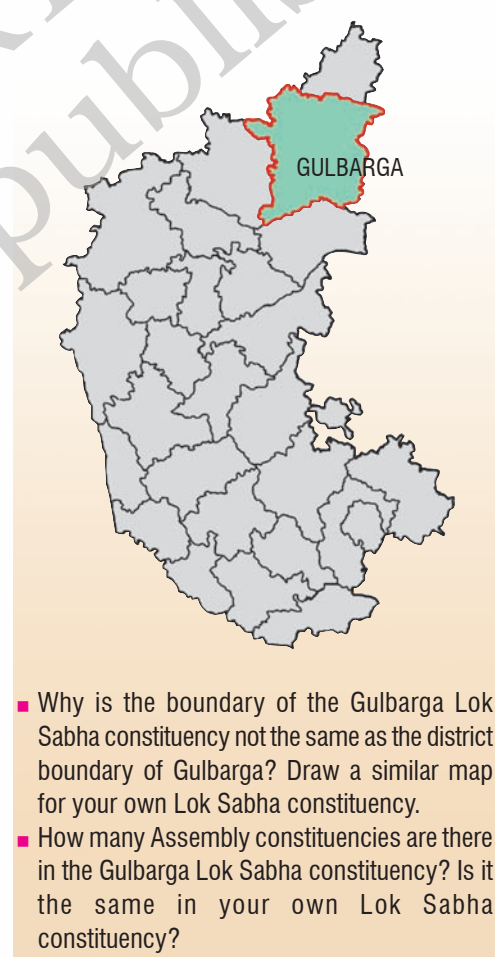
Similarly, each state is divided into a specific number of Assembly constituencies. In this case, the elected representative is called the Member of Legislative Assembly or an MLA. Each Parliamentary

constituency has within it several assemblies constituencies. The same principle applies for Panchayat and Municipal elections. Each village or town is divided into several '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', for each constituency represents one seat in the assembly. 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.

GULBARGA LOK SABHA CONSTITUENCY



GULBARGA DISTRICT IN KARNATAKA



Reserved Constituencies

Our Constitution entitles every citizen to elect its representative and to be elected as a representative. The Constitution makers, however, were worried that in an open electoral competition, certain weaker sections may not stand a good chance to get elected to the Lok Sabha and the state Legislative Assemblies. They may not have the required resources, education and contacts to contest and win elections against others. Those who are influential and resourceful may prevent them from winning elections. If that happens, our Parliament and Assemblies would be deprived of the voice of a significant section of our population. That would make our democracy less representative and less democratic.

So, the makers of our Constitution thought of a special system of reserved constituencies for the weaker sections. 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 Scheduled Castes can stand for election. Similarly only those belonging to the Scheduled Tribes can contest an election from a constituency reserved for ST. Currently, in the Lok Sabha, 79 seats are reserved for the Scheduled Castes and 41 for the Scheduled Tribes. 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.

This system of reservation was extended later to other weaker sections at the district and local level. In many states, seats in rural (panchayat) and urban (municipalities and corporations)

local bodies are now reserved for Other Backward Classes (OBC) as well. However, the proportion of seats reserved varies from state to state. Similarly, one-third of the seats are reserved in rural and urban local bodies for women candidates.

Voters' list

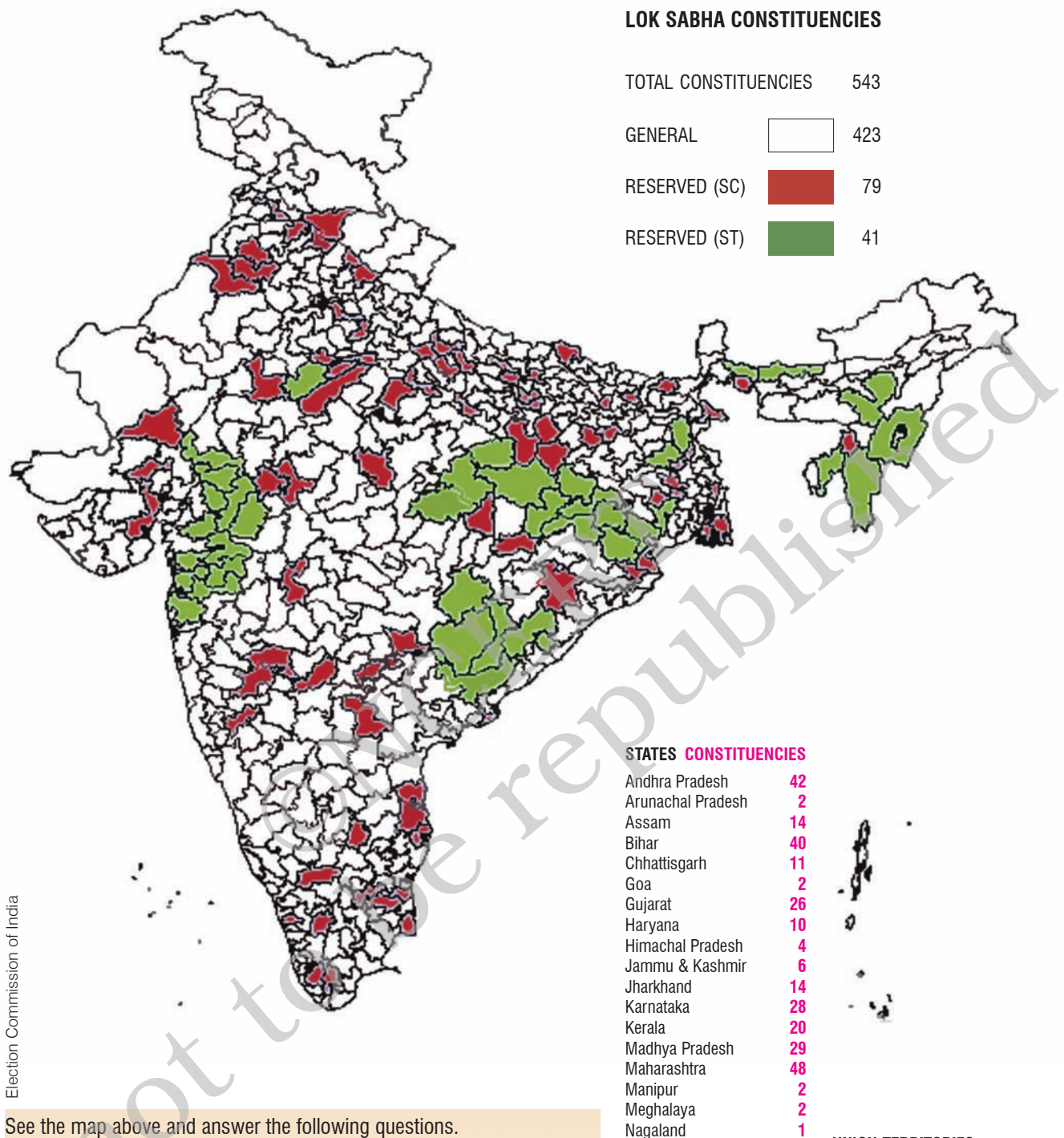
Once the constituencies are decided, the next step is to decide who can and who cannot vote. This decision cannot be left to anyone till the last day. In a democratic election, the list of those who are eligible to vote is prepared much before the election and given to everyone. This list is officially called the Electoral Roll and is commonly known as the Voters' List.

This is an important step for it is linked to the first condition of a democratic election: everyone should get an equal opportunity to choose representatives. In Chapter One we read about the principle of universal adult franchise. In practice it means that everyone should have one vote and each vote should have equal value. No one should be denied the right to vote without a good reason. Different citizens differ from one another in many ways: some are rich, some are poor; some are highly educated, some are not so educated or not educated at all; some are kind, others are not so kind. But all of them are human beings with their own needs and views. That is why all of them deserve to have an equal say in decisions that affect them.

In our country, all the citizens aged 18 years and above can vote in an election. Every citizen has the right to vote, regardless of his or her caste, religion or gender. Some criminals and persons with unsound mind can



Like in Panchayats, should we not have at least one-third seats in the parliament and assemblies reserved for women?



See the map above and answer the following questions.

- What is the number of Lok Sabha constituencies in your state and the neighbouring two states?
- Which states have more than 30 Lok Sabha constituencies?
- Why do some states have such a large number of constituencies?
- Why are some constituencies small in area while others are very big?
- Are the constituencies reserved for the SCs and STs evenly spread all over the entire country or are there more in some areas?

be denied the right to vote, but only in rare situations. It is the responsibility of the government to get the names of all the eligible voters put on the voters' list. As new persons attain voting age names are added to the voters' list. Names of those who move out of a place or those who are dead 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. The government has tried to give this card to every person on the voters list. The voters are required to carry this card when they go out to vote, so that no one can vote for someone else. But the card is not yet compulsory for voting. For voting, the voters can show many other proofs of identity like the ration card or the driving licence.

Nomination of candidates

We noted above that in a democratic election people should have a real choice. This happens only when there are almost no restrictions on anyone to contest an election. This is what our system provides. Anyone who can be a voter can also become a candidate in elections. The only difference is that in order to be a candidate the minimum age is 25 years, while it is only 18 years for being a voter. There are some other restrictions on criminals etc. but these apply in very extreme cases. Political parties nominate their candidates who get the party symbol and support. Party's nomination is often called party 'ticket'.

Every person who wishes to contest an election has to fill a 'nomination form' and give some money as 'security deposit'.

Recently, a new system of declaration has been introduced on direction from the Supreme Court. Every candidate has to make a legal declaration, giving full details of :

- Serious criminal cases pending against the candidate;
- Details of the assets and liabilities of the candidate and his or her family; and
- Education qualifications of the candidate.

This information has to be made public. This provides an opportunity to the voters to make their decision on the basis of the information provided by the candidates.

Educational qualifications for candidates

Why is there no educational qualification for holding such an important position when some kind of educational qualification is needed for any other job in the country?

- Educational qualifications are not relevant to all kinds of jobs. The relevant qualification for selection to the Indian cricket team, for example, is not the attainment of educational degrees but the ability to play cricket well. Similarly the relevant qualification for being an MLA or an MP is the ability to understand people's concerns, problems and to represent their interests. Whether they can do so or not is examined by lakhs of examiners — their voters — after every five years.
- Even if education was relevant, it should be left to the people to decide how much importance they give to educational qualifications.
- In our country putting an educational qualification would go against the spirit of democracy for yet another reason. It would mean depriving a majority of the country's citizens the right to contest elections. If, for example, a graduate degree like B.A., B.Com or B.Sc was made compulsory for candidates, more than 90 per cent of the citizens will become ineligible to contest elections.



Why are the candidates required to give a detailed statement of their property?

ELECTORAL ROLL, 2005
State - Mizoram

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| No., Name and Reservation Status of Assembly Constituency: 17 - SAITUAL(ST) | | Part No. : 15 |
| No., Name and Reservation Status of Parliamentary Constituency in which the Assembly Constituency is located : 1 - MIZORAM(ST) | | |
| 1. DETAILS OF REVISION | | |
| Year of Revision : 2005 | Roll Identification: Basic roll of Intensive Revision, 2005 integrated with all supplements preceding Special Summary Revision, 2006. | |
| Qualifying Date : 01.01.2006 | | |
| Type of Revision : Special Summary | | |
| Date of Publication : 20.10.2005 | | |
| 2. DETAILS OF PART AND POLLING AREA | | |
| No. & name of sections in the part : | | |
| 1 TUALBUNG | | Main Village/Town : TUALBUNG RD Block : THINGSULTHLIAH Police Station : SAITUAL Sub-Division : SAITUAL District : AIZAWL PIN Code : 796261 |

Chief Electoral Officer, Mizoram

State Code & Name : S16 , Mizoram

Assembly Constituency Number and Name : 17 - SAITUAL(ST)

Part No : 15

PS No. & Name : 15 - TUALBUNG

| Serial No (1) | HouseNo (2) | Name of the Elector (3) | Relationship (4) | Name of Relation (5) | Sex (6) | Age (7) | EPIC No. (8) |
|------------------|----------------|----------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|------------|------------|-----------------|
|------------------|----------------|----------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|------------|------------|-----------------|

Section No & Name: 1 TUALBUNG

Pin:796261

| | | | | | | | |
|----|---|-----------------|---|----------------|---|----|------------|
| 1 | 1 | LALAWMPUIA | F | CHAWNGDINGA | M | 30 | FDZ0043257 |
| 2 | 1 | CHHUANKIMI | H | LALAWMPUIA | F | 26 | FDZ0043745 |
| 3 | 2 | ROTHUAMA | F | TAWNVELA | M | 56 | FDZ0042648 |
| 4 | 2 | LALRUATI | H | ROTHUAMA | F | 55 | FDZ0045021 |
| 5 | 2 | LALRINGZUALI | F | ROTHUAMA | F | 28 | FDZ0043513 |
| 6 | 2 | LALNUNZIRA | F | ROTHUAMA | M | 19 | |
| 7 | 3 | LALDUHAWMA | F | KAPLUNGA | M | 38 | FDZ0045443 |
| 8 | 3 | ZOTHANSANGI | H | LALDUHAWMA | F | 35 | FDZ0008557 |
| 9 | 4 | C. LALHMULIANA | F | DARCHHUNGA | M | 41 | FDZ0043760 |
| 10 | 4 | LALRAMMAWII | H | C. LALHMULIANA | F | 33 | FDZ0043315 |
| 11 | 5 | REMRUATA | F | THANGLUAIA | M | 36 | FDZ0045237 |
| 12 | 5 | C. LALFAKAWMI | H | REMRUATA | F | 27 | FDZ0043117 |
| 13 | 6 | RAMHLUNA | F | AIKIMA | M | 30 | FDZ0045047 |
| 14 | 6 | LALBIAKDIKI | H | RAMHLUNA | F | 26 | FDZ0044073 |
| 15 | 7 | C. LALCHAWIKIMA | F | LALHNEMA | M | 27 | FDZ0043869 |
| 16 | 7 | LALSANGPUII | H | LALCHAWIKIMA | F | 26 | FDZ0043877 |
| 17 | 8 | NGURLIANI | H | NEIHKIMA | F | 81 | FDZ0043729 |

Match the following features of our electoral system with the principles they reflect.

| Principles | Features of election system |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Universal adult franchise | Each constituency has roughly the same population |
| Representation of weaker sections | Everyone who is 18 years of age or older has a right to vote |
| Open political competition | Anyone can form a party or contest elections |
| One vote one value | Reservation of seats for the SCs and the STs |



Election Campaign

The main purpose of election is to give people a chance to choose the representatives, the government and the policies they prefer. Therefore it is necessary to have a free and open discussion about who is a better representative, which party will make a better government or what is a good policy. This is what happens during election campaigns.

In our country such campaigns take 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 voters, political leaders address election meetings and political parties mobilise their supporters. This is also the period when newspapers and television news are full of election related stories and debates. But election campaign is not limited to these two weeks only. Political parties start preparing for elections months before they actually take place.



A C T I V I T Y

What was the election campaign like in your constituency in the last Lok Sabha elections? Prepare a list of what the candidates and parties said and did.

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 them to vote for their party on that basis. Let us look at some of the successful slogans given by different political parties in various elections.

- The Congress party led by Indira Gandhi gave the slogan of **Garibi Hatao (Remove poverty)** in the Lok Sabha elections of 1971. The party promised to reorient all the policies of the government to remove poverty from the country.
- **Save Democracy** was the slogan given by Janata Party in the next Lok Sabha election held in 1977. The party promised to undo the excesses committed during Emergency and restore civil liberties.
- The Left Front used the slogan of **Land to the Tiller** in the West Bengal Assembly elections held in 1977.
- **Protect the Self-Respect of the Telugus** was the slogan used by N. T. Rama Rao, the leader of the Telugu Desam Party in Andhra Pradesh Assembly elections in 1983.

In a democracy it is best to leave political parties and candidates free to conduct their election campaigns the way they want to. But it is sometimes necessary to regulate campaigns to ensure that every political party and candidate gets a

Standing outside the polling station, the criminal politician says to the voter: "Why do you bother? You can go, I got your vote cast". Does booth capturing always take place in this visible form? Are there less visible ways of booth capturing?

read
the
cartoon



fair and equal chance to compete. According to our election law, 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; and
- Spend more than Rs. 25 lakh in a constituency for a Lok Sabha election or Rs. 10 lakh in a constituency in an Assembly election.

If they do so, their election can be rejected by the court even after they have been declared elected. In addition to the laws, all the political parties in our country have agreed to a Model **Code of Conduct** for election campaigns. According to this no party or candidate can:

- Use any place of worship for election propaganda;

- Use government vehicles, aircrafts and officials for elections; and
- Once elections are announced, Ministers shall not lay foundation stones of any projects, take any big policy decisions or make any promises of providing public facilities.

Polling and counting of votes

The final stage of an election is the day when the voters cast or 'poll' their vote. That day is usually called the election day. Every person whose name is on the voters' list can go to a nearby 'polling booth', situated usually in a local school or a government office. Once the voter goes inside the booth, the election officials identify her, put a mark on her finger and allow her to cast 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.

Are the elections too expensive for our country?

A large amount of money is spent in conducting elections in India. For instance, the government spent about Rs.1,300 crores in conducting Lok Sabha elections in 2004. That works out to about Rs. 20 per person on the voters' list. The amount spent by parties and candidates was more than what the government spent. Roughly speaking, the expenditure made by government, parties and candidates was around Rs. 3,000 crore or Rs. 50 per voter.

Some people say that elections are a burden on our people, that our poor country cannot afford to hold elections once every five years. Let us compare this expenditure with some other figures:

- In 2005, our government decided to buy six nuclear submarines from France. Each submarine will cost about Rs. 3,000 crore.
- Delhi plans to host Commonwealth Games in 2010. The current estimate for its cost is about Rs. 2,000 crore.

Are the elections too expensive? You decide.

Election result in Gulbarga

Let us go back to our example of Gulbarga. In 2004, a total of 11 candidates contested elections in that constituency. The total eligible voters were 14.39 lakhs. Of these 8.28 lakh voters had cast their votes. The candidate of the Congress party, Iqbal Ahmed Saradgi secured about 3.12 lakh votes. This was only about 38 per cent of the total votes polled. But since he had secured more votes than anyone else, he was declared elected a Member of Parliament from Gulbarga Lok Sabha constituency.

Election Result of Gulbarga constituency, GENERAL ELECTION TO LOK SABHA, 2004

| CANDIDATE | PARTY | VOTES POLLED | % OF VOTES |
|--|-------|--------------|------------|
| Iqbal Ahmed Saradgi | INC | 312432 | 37.76 |
| Basawaraj Patil Sedam | BJP | 254548 | 30.82 |
| Vithal Heroor | JD(S) | 189001 | 22.84 |
| Suryakant Nimbalkar | BSP | 26723 | 3.23 |
| Sanganna | IND | 15212 | 1.84 |
| Arun Kumar Chandrashekara Patil | KNDP | 7155 | 0.86 |
| Bhagavanreddy B | IND | 6748 | 0.82 |
| Hamid Pasha Sarmast | MUL | 4268 | 0.52 |
| Basawanth Rao Revansiddappa Sheelwanth | AIFB | 3900 | 0.47 |
| Sandesh C Bandak | USYP | 3671 | 0.44 |
| Umesh Havanoor | SP | 3380 | 0.41 |

- What is the percentage of voters who had actually cast their votes?
- To win an election is it necessary for a person to secure more than half the votes polled?

Earlier the voters used to indicate who they wanted to vote for 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. Nowadays electronic voting machines (EVM) are used to record votes. The machine shows the names of the candidates and the party symbols. Independent candidates too have their own symbols, allotted by election officials. All the voter has to do is to press the button against the name of the candidate she wants to give 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 from a constituency are opened and the votes secured by each candidate are counted. The agents of all candidates are present there to ensure that the counting is done properly. The candidate who secures the highest number of votes from a constituency is declared elected. In a general election, usually the counting of votes in all the constituencies takes place at the same time, on the same day. Television channels, radio and newspapers report this event. Within a few hours of counting, all the results are declared and it becomes clear as to who will form the next government.

Identify the fair and the unfair electoral practices among the following:

- A minister flags off a new train in his constituency a week before polling day.
- A candidate promises that she will get a new train for her constituency if she is elected.
- Supporters of a candidate take the voters to a temple and make them take an oath that they will vote for him.
- The supporters of a candidate distribute blankets in slums in return for a promise for vote



Why are party agents present in the polling booth and the counting centre?



**CHECK
YOUR
PROGRESS**

4.3 WHAT MAKES ELECTIONS IN INDIA DEMOCRATIC?

We get to read a lot about unfair practices in elections. Newspapers and television reports often refer to such allegations. Most of these reports are about the following:

- Inclusion of false names and exclusion of genuine names in the voters' list;
- Misuse of government facilities and officials by the ruling party;
- Excessive use of money by rich candidates and big parties; and
- Intimidation of voters and **rigging** on the polling day.

Many of these reports are correct. We feel unhappy when we read or see such reports. But fortunately they are not on such a scale so as to defeat the very purpose of elections. This becomes clear if we ask a basic question: Can a party win an election and come to power not because it has popular support but through electoral malpractices? This is a vital question. Let us carefully examine various aspects of this question.

Independent Election Commission

One simple way of checking whether elections are fair or not is to look at who conducts the elections. Are they independent of the government? Or can the government or the ruling party influence or pressurise them? Do they have enough powers to be able to conduct free and fair elections? Do they actually use these powers?

The answer to all these questions is quite positive for our country. In our country elections are conducted by an independent and very powerful Election Commission (EC). It enjoys the same kind of independence that the judiciary enjoys. The Chief

Election Commissioner (CEC) is appointed by the President of India. But once appointed, the Chief Election Commissioner is not answerable to the President or the government. Even if the ruling party or the government does not like what the Commission does, it is virtually impossible for it to remove the CEC.

Very few election commissions in the world have such wide-ranging powers as the Election Commission of India.

- EC takes decisions on every aspect of conduct and control of elections from the announcement of elections to the declaration of results.
- It implements the Code of Conduct and punishes any candidate or party that violates it.
- During the election period, the EC can order the government to follow some guidelines, to prevent use and misuse of governmental power to enhance its chances to win elections, or to transfer some government officials.
- When on election duty, government officers work under the control of the EC and not the government.

In the last fifteen years or so, the Election Commission has begun to exercise all its powers and even expand them. It is very common now for the Election Commission to reprimand the government and administration for their lapses. When election officials come to the opinion that polling was not fair in some booths or even an entire constituency, they order a repoll. The ruling parties often do not like what the EC does. But they have to obey. This would not have happened if the EC was not independent and powerful.



Why does the Election Commission have so much powers? Is this good for democracy?

EC issues notification constituting 14th Lok Sabha

Photo I-cards not mandatory in Bihar polls

EC tightens norms for poll expenses

EC accepts new Haryana DGP

EC to visit Gujarat again, review poll arrangements

EC will seek power to censure political ads

HC asks EC to bar 'criminal' netas

EC says no immediate plan to ban Exit Polls

EC shoots down HM advice on poll reforms

EC orders repoll in 398 more booths

EC to keep closer eye on hidden poll costs

**CHECK
YOUR
PROGRESS**

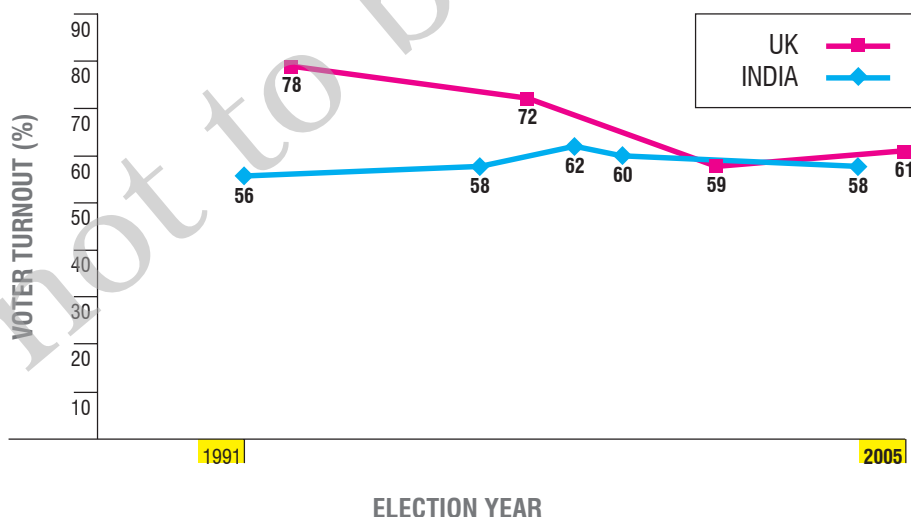
Read these headlines carefully and identify which powers are used by the Election Commission in each instance to ensure free and fair elections.

Popular participation

Another way to check the quality of the election process is to see whether people participate in it with enthusiasm. If the election process is not free or fair, people will not continue to participate in the exercise. Now, read these charts and draw some conclusions about participation in India:

1 People's participation in election is usually measured by voter turnout figures. Turnout indicates the per cent of eligible voters who actually cast their vote. Over the last fifty years, the turnout in Europe and North America has declined. In India the turnout has either remained stable or actually gone up.

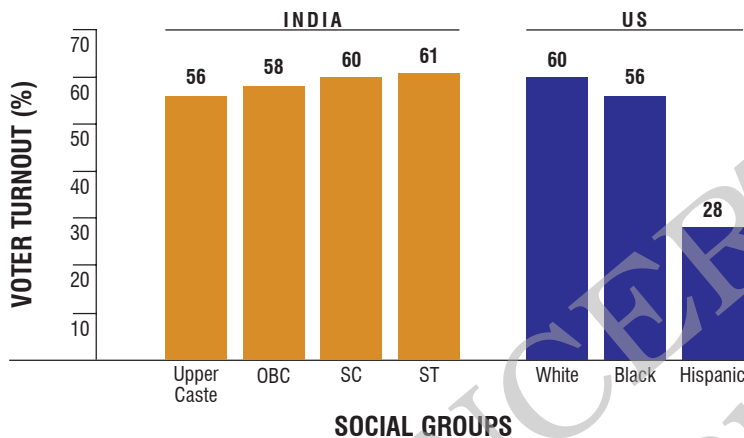
1 VOTER TURNOUT IN INDIA AND THE UK



2 In India the poor, illiterate and underprivileged people vote in larger proportion as compared to the rich and privileged sections. This is in contrast to western democracies. For example in the United States of America, poor people, African Americans and Hispanics vote much less than the rich and the white people.

4 The interest of voters in election-related activities has been increasing over the years. During the 2004 elections, more than one-third voters took part in a campaign-related activities. More than half of the people identified themselves as being close to one or the other political party. One out of every seven voters is a member of a political party.

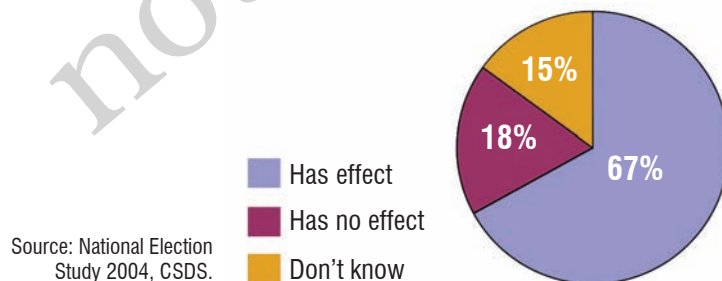
2 VOTER TURNOUT IN INDIA AND US BY SOCIAL GROUPS, 2004



Source: Figures for India from National Election Study 2004, CSDS. Figures for US from National Election Study 2004, University of Michigan.

3 Common people in India attach a lot of importance to elections. They feel that through elections they can bring pressure on political parties to adopt policies and programmes favourable to them. They also feel that their vote matters in the way things are run in the country.

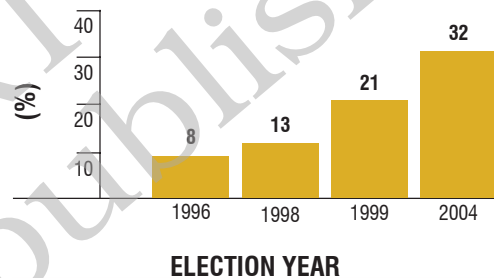
3 DO YOU THINK YOUR VOTE MAKES A DIFFERENCE?



Source: National Election Study 2004, CSDS.

4 THOSE WHO PARTICIPATED IN ANY ELECTION RELATED ACTIVITY IN INDIA

Source: National Election Study 1996-2004, CSDS.



ACTIVITY

Ask the eligible voters in your family whether they voted in the last election to the Lok Sabha or to the state assembly. If they did not, ask them why did they not vote. If they did, ask them which party and candidate they voted for and why. Also ask them whether they had participated in any other election-related activity like attending an election meeting or rally etc.

Acceptance of election outcome

One final test of the free and fairness of election has in the outcome itself. If elections are not free or fair, the outcome always favours the powerful. In such a situation, the ruling parties do not lose elections. Usually, the

losing party does not accept the outcome of a rigged election.

The outcome of India's elections speaks for itself:

- The ruling parties routinely lose elections in India both at the national and state level. In fact in every two out of the three elections held in the last fifteen years, the ruling party lost.
- In the US, an **incumbent** or 'sitting' elected representative rarely loses an election. In India about half of the sitting MPs or MLAs lose elections.
- Candidates who are known to have spent a lot of money on 'buying votes' and those with known criminal connections often lose elections.
- Barring very few disputed elections, the electoral outcomes are usually accepted as 'people's verdict' by the defeated party.

Challenges to free and fair elections

All this leads to a simple conclusion: elections in India are basically free and fair. The party that wins an election and forms government does so because people have chosen it over its rivals. This may not be true for every constituency. A few candidates may win purely on the basis of money power and unfair means. But the overall verdict of a general election still reflects popular preference. There are very few exceptions to this rule in the last fifty years in our country. This is what makes Indian elections democratic.

Yet the picture looks different if we ask deeper questions: Are people's preferences based on real knowledge? Are the voters getting a real choice? Is election really level playing **field** for everyone? Can an ordinary citizen hope to win elections? Questions of



The leader is coming out of a press conference: "What was need to say that we have distributed tickets only amongst suitable and winnable family relations?" Do you think that family politics is confined to only a few states or parties?

read
the
cartoon

Titled 'Electoral Campaigns', this cartoon was drawn in the Latin American context. Does this apply to India and to other democracies in the world?

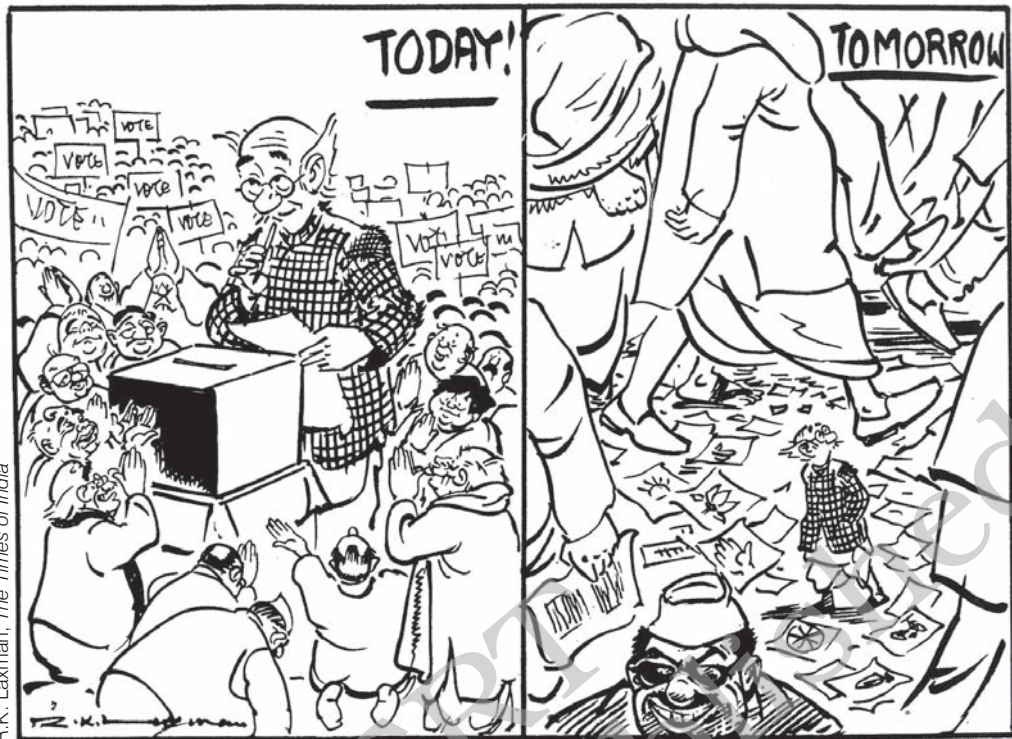


©Nerrilicon, El Economista, Cagle Cartoons Inc.

Is this an accurate picture of what happens to the voter before and after elections? Must this always happen in a democracy? Can you think of examples when this did not happen?

read
the
cartoon

R.K. Laxman, The Times of India



- 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 independents.
- In some parts of the country, candidates with criminal connection have been able to push others out of the electoral race and to secure a 'ticket' from major parties.
- Some families tend to dominate political parties; tickets are distributed to relatives from these families.
- Very often elections offer little choice to ordinary citizens, for both the major parties are quite

similar to each other both in policies and practice.

- Smaller parties and independent candidates suffer a huge disadvantage compared to bigger parties.

These challenges exist not just in India but also in many established democracies. These deeper issues are a matter of concern for those who believe in democracy. That is why citizens, social activists and organisations have been demanding reforms in our electoral system. Can you think of some reforms? What can an ordinary citizen do to face these challenges?

Here are some facts on Indian elections. Comment on each of these to say whether they reflect the strength or the weakness of our electoral system:

- The Lok Sabha has always had less than 10 percent women members.
- The Election Commission often refuses to accept the government's advice about when the elections should be held.
- The current Lok Sabha has more than 145 members whose assets are more than Rs.1 crore.
- After losing an election the Chief Minister said: "I respect the people's verdict".

**CHECK
YOUR
PROGRESS**

Booth capturing: Supporters or hired musclemen of party or a candidate gain physical control of a polling booth and cast false votes by threatening everyone or by preventing genuine voters from reaching the polling booth.

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

Constituency: Voters in a geographical area who elect a representative to the legislative bodies.

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.

Level playing field: Condition in which all parties and candidates contesting in an election have equal opportunities to appeal for votes and to carry out election campaign.

Rigging: Fraud and malpractices indulged by a party or candidate to increase its votes. It includes stuffing ballot boxes by a few persons using the votes of others; recording multiple votes by the same person; and bribing or coercing polling officers to favour a candidate.

Turnout: The percentage of eligible voters who cast their votes in an election.



1 Which of the following statements about the reasons for conducting elections are false?

- a Elections enable people to judge the performance of the government
- b People select the representative of their choice in an election
- c Elections enable people to evaluate the performance of the judiciary
- d People can indicate which policies they prefer

2 Which of these is *not* a good reason to say that Indian elections are democratic?

- a India has the largest number of voters in the world
- b India's Election Commission is very powerful
- c In India, everyone above the age of 18 has a right to vote
- d In India, the losing parties accept the electoral verdict

3 Match the following

It is necessary to keep the voters list up to date because

Some constituencies are reserved for SCs and STs so that

Everyone has one and only one vote so that

Party in power is not allowed to use government vehicles because

there is a fair representation of all sections of our society

everyone has equal opportunity to elect their representative

all candidates must have a fair chance of competing in elections

some people may have moved away from the area where they voted last

exercises

- 4 List all the different election related activities mentioned in the chapter and arrange them in a time sequence, beginning with the first activity and ending with the last. Some of these activities are given below: releasing election manifestos; counting of votes; making of voters' list; election campaign; declaration of election results; casting of votes; ordering of re-poll; announcing election schedule; filing nomination.
- 5 Surekha is an officer in-charge of ensuring free and fair elections in an assembly constituency in a state. Describe what should she focus on for each of the following stages of election:
 - a Election campaign
 - b Polling day
 - c Counting day
- 6 The table below gives the proportion of different communities among the candidates who won elections to the US Congress. Compare these to the proportion of these communities in the population of the US. Based on this, would you suggest a system of reservations in the US Congress? If yes, why and for which communities? If no, why not?

| | Proportion of the community (in per cent) in the | |
|-----------|---|------------------|
| | House of representatives | Population of US |
| Blacks | 8 | 13 |
| Hispanics | 5 | 13 |
| Whites | 86 | 70 |

- 7 Can we draw the following conclusions from the information given in this chapter? Give two facts to support your position for each of these.
 - a Election Commission of India does not have enough powers to conduct free and fair elections in the country.
 - b There is a high level of popular participation in the elections in our country.
 - c It is very easy for the party in power to win an election.
 - d Many reforms are needed to make our elections completely free and fair.
- 8 Chinappa was convicted for torturing his wife for dowry. Satbir was held guilty of practicing untouchability. The court did not allow either of them to contest elections. Does this decision go against the principles of democratic elections?
- 9 Here are some reports of electoral malpractices from different parts of the world. Is there anything that these countries can learn from India to improve their elections? What would you suggest in each case?
 - a During an election in Nigeria, the officer in charge of counting votes deliberately increased the votes of one candidate and declared

him elected. The court later found out that more than five lakh votes cast for one candidate were counted in favour of another.

- b** Just before elections in Fiji, a pamphlet was distributed warning voters that a vote for former Prime Minister, Mahendra Chaudhry will lead to bloodshed. This was a threat to voters of Indian origin.
- c** In the US, each state has its own method of voting, its own procedure of counting and its own authority for conducting elections. Authorities in the state of Florida took many controversial decisions that favoured Mr. Bush in the presidential elections in 2000. But no one could change those decisions.

10 Here are some reports of malpractices in Indian elections. Identify what the problem in each case is. What should be done to correct the situation?

- a** Following the announcement of elections, the minister promised to provide financial aid to reopen the closed sugar mill.
- b** Opposition parties alleged that their statements and campaign was not given due attention in Doordarshan and All India Radio.
- c** An inquiry by the Election Commission showed that electoral rolls of a state contain name of 20 lakh fake voters.
- d** The hoodlums of a political party were moving with guns, physically preventing supporters of other political parties to meet the voters and attacking meetings of other parties.

11 Arun was not in class when this chapter was being taught. He came the next day and repeated what he had heard from his father. Can you tell Ramesh what is wrong with these statements?

- a** Women always vote the way men tell them to. So what is the point of giving them the right to vote?
- b** Party politics creates tension in society. Elections should be decided by consensus not by competition.
- c** Only graduates should be allowed to stand as candidates for elections.

Assembly elections are usually held every year in a few states of the country. You can collect information about the elections that take place during this session. While collecting news items, divide these into three parts:

- Important events that took place before the election – main agenda discussed by political parties; information about people's demand; role of the Election Commission.
- Important events on the day of the election and counting – turnout in elections; reports of malpractice; re-polls; the types of predictions made; and the final outcome.
- Post elections – reasons offered by political parties for winning or losing elections; analysis of the election verdict by the media; selection of the Chief Minister.



