

SOCIAL SCIENCE (CIVICS)
CHAPTER 03: ELECTORAL POLITICS
(Notes; Version 2.0; Updated on 13.12.2024)

IMPORTANT TERMS

- **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.
- **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**: Conditions 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 malpractice indulged by a party or candidate to increase 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.

Q1. What is an Election?

A mechanism by which people choose their representatives at regular intervals and change the representatives if they wish to do so. This mechanism is called the election.

Q2. Why do we need elections?

A rule of the people is not possible in any large country and it is not possible for everyone to have the time and knowledge to take decisions on all matters. Therefore, in most democracies, people rule through their representatives. Therefore, elections are considered essential to choose such representatives. In an election the voters make many choices:

- (i) They can choose representatives who will make laws for them.
- (ii) They can choose leaders who will form the government and take major decisions.
- (iii) They can choose the party whose policies will guide the government and law making.



Q3. What makes an election democratic? (a simple list of the minimum conditions of a democratic election)

- (i) Everyone should be able to choose their representatives means that everyone should have one vote and every vote should have equal value.

- (ii) Parties and candidates should be free to contest elections and should offer some real choice to the voters.
- (iii) Elections must be held regularly after every few years.
- (iv) Candidate preferred by the people should get elected.
- (v) Elections should be conducted in a free and fair manner where people can choose as they really wish.

Q4. Is it good to have political competition? (Merits and Demerits of electoral or political competition)

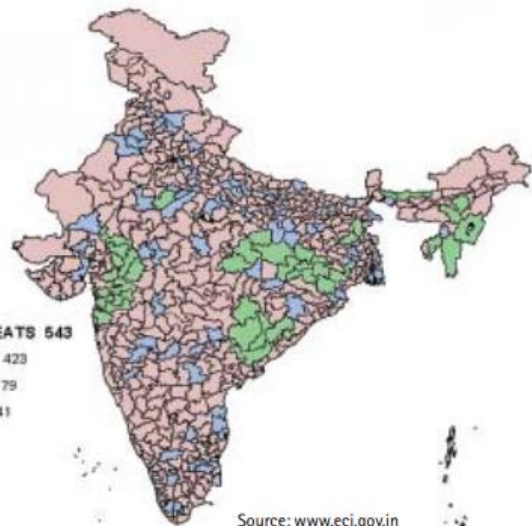
Demerits:

- (i) It creates a sense of disunity and 'factionalism' in every locality.
- (ii) Different political parties and leaders often level allegations against one another.
- (iii) Parties and candidates often use dirty tricks to win elections.
- (iv) Some good people who may wish to serve the country do not enter politics due to an unhealthy competition.



Merits

- (i) Constitution makers believed that this system works better in the long run.
- (ii) Free competition improves the knowledge and character of political leaders.
- (iii) If a political party is motivated only by the desire to be in power, even then it will be forced to serve the people.
- (iv) Political competition may cause divisions and some ugliness, but it finally helps to force political parties and leaders to serve the people.



Q5. How elections are held in India?

- (i) **General Election** - 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.
- (ii) **By-election** - Sometimes the election is held only for one constituency or two to fill the vacancy caused by death or resignation of a member. This is called a by-election.
- (iii) **Electoral constituencies** - The country is divided into different areas based on population for the purpose of elections. These areas are called electoral constituencies. For Lok Sabha elections, the country is divided into 543 constituencies.
- (iv) **Reserved Constituencies and need for Reserved Constituencies** - Some constituencies are reserved for people who belong to the Scheduled Castes and

Scheduled Tribes In a reserved constituency only someone who belongs to the Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes can stand for election.

Our Constitution entitles every citizen to elect its representative and to be elected as a representative. The Constitution makers worried that in an open electoral competition, weaker sections may not stand a good chance to get elected.

VOTERS' LIST

- The list of those who are eligible to vote is prepared much before the election and given to everyone. This list is officially called **Electoral Roll** and is commonly known as the Voters' List.
- In India, 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 an unsound mind can be denied the right to vote, but only in rare situations.
- 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.



NOMINATION OF CANDIDATES

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

Legal declaration introduced by the Supreme Court for filing Nomination papers.

- Every candidate has to make a legal declaration,
 - i. giving full details of serious criminal cases pending against the candidate;
 - ii. giving full details of Details of the assets and liabilities of the candidate and his or her family; and
 - iii. giving full details of educational qualifications of the candidate.

Q6. Why is there no educational qualification for candidates to conduct elections?

- (i) Educational qualifications are not relevant to all kinds of jobs. The relevant qualification for being an MLA or an MP is the ability to understand people's concerns, problems and to represent their interests.
- (ii) Even if education was relevant, it should be left to the people to decide how much importance they give to educational qualifications.
- (iii) Putting an educational qualification would go against the spirit of democracy as it would deprive a majority of the country's citizens the right to contest elections (with poor literacy rate)

ELECTION CAMPAIGN

In our country, such campaigns take place over 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 mobilize their supporters.

Some of the successful slogans given by different political parties in various elections:

- (i) The Congress party led by Indira Gandhi gave the slogan of **Garibi Hatao (Remove poverty)** in the Lok Sabha elections of 1971.
- (ii) **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.
- (iii) The Left Front used the slogan of **Land to the Tiller** in the West Bengal Assembly elections held in 1977.
- (iv) **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.



Model Code of Conduct for election campaigns

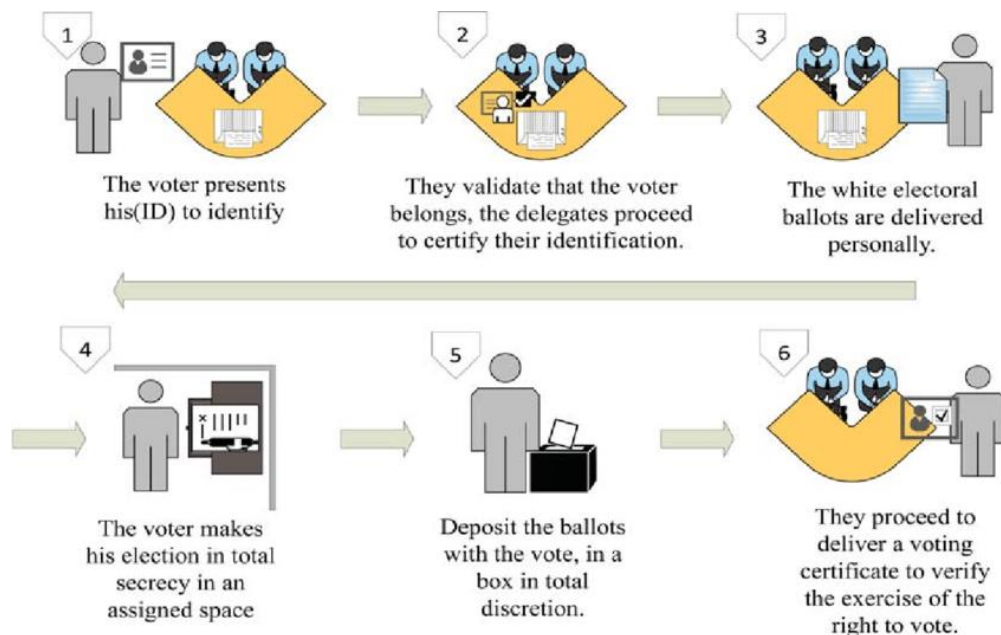
According to our election law,

- (i) no party or candidate can bribe or threaten voters.
- (ii) no party or candidate can appeal to them in the name of caste or religion.
- (iii) no party or candidate can use government resources for election campaign; and
- (iv) no party or candidate can spend more than Rs. 25 lakhs in a constituency for a Lok Sabha election or Rs. 10 lakhs in a constituency in an Assembly election.
- (v) no party or candidate can use any place of worship for election propaganda.
- (vi) no party or candidate use government vehicles, aircraft and officials for elections; and

- (vii) Once elections are announced, Ministers shall not lay foundation stones of any projects, take any big policy decisions or made 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', and cast vote.



Nowadays electronic voting machines (EVM) are used to record votes. The machine shows the names of the candidates and the party symbols.



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

WHAT MAKES ELECTIONS IN INDIA DEMOCRATIC?

Election Commission

An independent and powerful commission appointed by the President of India to conduct the free and fair election is called the **Election Commission**. The commission has three members and once they are appointed, they are not answerable to the President or the government.



Powers and functions of the Election Commission of India.

- (i) EC 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 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.
- (iv) When on election duty, government officers work under the control of the EC and not the government.

Popular participation of people in Election

- i. People's participation in the election is usually measured by **voter turnout** figures. Turnout indicates the percent of eligible voters who actually cast their vote. In India, the turnout has either remained stable or actually gone up.



- ii. In India, the poor, illiterate and underprivileged people vote in larger proportion as compared to the rich and privileged sections.

- iii. 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 programs favourable to them.

- iv. 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 campaign-related activities.

More than half of the people are being close to one or the other political party.

Acceptance of election outcome by the candidates and parties

- i. 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.
- ii. 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 connections often lose elections.
- iv. 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 IN INDIA

- (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 independents.
- (ii) 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.

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- (iii) Some families tend to dominate political parties; tickets are distributed to relatives from these families.
- (iv) 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.
- (v) Smaller parties and independent candidates suffer a huge disadvantage compared to bigger parties.