

Chapter 1. Evolution of Parliamentary Democracy and the Electoral System

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Chapter 1

Evolution of Parliamentary Democracy and the Electoral System

Since Independence, India has conducted 13 Lok Sabha elections. Each election was in itself a unique event, with substantial impact upon the overall politics of India. The first three elections of 1951, 1957 and 1962 gave legitimacy to the governance of the Indian National Congress under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru. It is very significant that the ruling Congress government was able to provide stable and viable governance to the nascent democratic institutions in the initial period of Indian democracy, when internal as well as international circumstance was not so congenial to the survival of parliamentary democracy. The continuance of stable and strong leadership in parliamentary democracy under Congress governments until early 1960s contributed to consolidating the democratic system. During this period, the political parties, both ruling and opposition, learned how to compromise and adjust their attitudes, accommodating themselves to the democratic way of politics. Morris-Jones and Rajni Kothari labelled the party system a “one party dominant system” or the “Congress system.”¹ It can be said that the “one party dominant system” was crucial in consolidating India’s nascent democracy. In this chapter I would like to first explain the main points of the evolution of party politics since Independence. Then, I will discuss the institutional setup of electoral system as well as its development. It is important to understand the political and institutional context within which the statistical analysis of this book will be conducted.

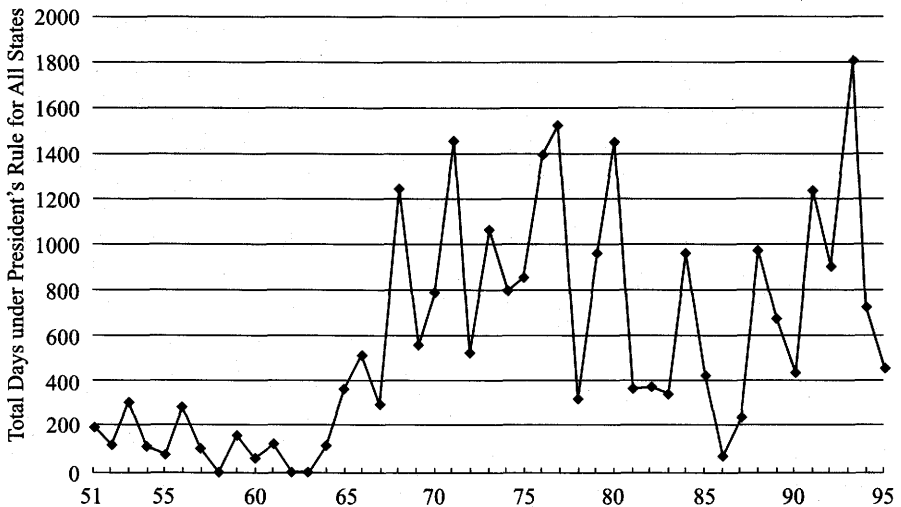
1. Indian Party Politics since Independence

In this section, an outline of the evolution of Indian politics will be given,

with descriptions of the major events in party politics and elections, especially the Lok Sabha elections. In fact, Indian politics have been closely linked with the cycle of elections. In particular, it can be said that the periodic Lok Sabha elections have been the basic pace-setters or trend-setters in Indian politics as a whole. They have conditioned not only the politics in the Centre but also of the States.

Figure I-1, for example, shows total days under President's rule for all the States in each year. President's rule, based on Article 356 of the Constitution, is a mechanism of Central intervention toward State in which the politics of State is considered by the Governor to be out of line with the Constitution. The reasons can include internal disturbances, or the failure to form a new Government due to the lack of a majority in the State Legislative Assembly. The figure shows a discernible link between President's rule and the cycle of Lok Sabha elections. Before the mid-1960s, the imposition of President's rule was rare, showing the stability of State politics as well as Centre-State relations. But after the 1967 election, President's rule was imposed

Figure I-1
President's Rule for States, 1951-95



Source: Lok Sabha Secretariat. 1989. *President's Rule in the States and Union Territories*. New Delhi: Government of India Press; ———. 1996. *President's Rule in the States and Union Territories*. New Delhi: Government of India Press.

Note: The numbers of days under the Governor's rule in Jammu and Kashmir are not included.

frequently, with the peak of the imposition coming within one or two years of Lok Sabha elections. This remains so even though the State Legislative Assembly elections were delinked after 1971. There are two basic reasons for this. One is that State party politics became destabilised after the mid-1960s, with the decline of the popularity of the Congress party. Another reason is the increasing tendency of the Central government to intervene in State politics through President's rule.² The peaks in 1977 and 1980 are typical examples. In addition, the communal politics also evolved in close linkage with electoral politics in the Centre. The demolition of the *masjid* in Ayodhya in December 1992, leading to the massive communal riots was also, in a sense, the result of the electoral politics of parties including not only the Bharatiya Janata Party but also Congress. The peak of President's rule in 1993 was the result of the aftermath of the communal riots in the northern States.

The Lok Sabha election may also have some influence on the economy through the budgetary process. The trend has been recognised as due to the fact that opportunistic ruling parties tend to spend more and charge voters less before elections.³ Although these political budget cycles in India do not seem to be strong enough to influence production output or prices, this type of election "pork-barrel" politics seems to be prevalent not only in Lok Sabha but also all the other levels of elections, including State Legislative Assembly and panchayat elections. However, it is the Lok Sabha elections which are potentially most influential. In the long-run, there may have been a cumulative influence from election politics on the Indian economy, which cannot be ignored.

In the following section, the central description will be made, with reference to the Lok Sabha election.

The One Party Dominant System of the Indian National Congress under Nehru: 1947-66

The Indian National Congress, under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, was the central factor in the evolution of Indian democracy until his death in 1964. Nehru⁴ played a pivotal role in determining the course of Indian politics. In the Nehru era, India consolidated the basis of national integration as a modern nation-state. His government coped fairly well with internal and international pressures. In Kashmir, he faced a conflict with Pakistan immediately after attaining Independence in 1947. In addition, the feudalistic princely "States" had to be integrated not only politically but also socially and economically. His government had to absorb the recalcitrant Nizam

regime of Hyderabad State in 1948, in a so-called “police action” and at the same time had to repress the Telangana movement, a radical class struggle by masses of peasants, during the intervention.

After the geographical boundaries of the Indian Union were settled by the integration of the semi-independent princely States, the next problem was the reorganisation of the newly aggregated States, whose boundaries had been intricately distorted and skewed under British colonization, into language-based States. Andhra State was created in 1953 as a result of violent agitation for a language-based State, precipitating the Central government to constitute a States Reorganisation Commission.⁵ All State boundaries were reorganised along major languages in 1956 on the basis of the report of the States Reorganisation Commission.⁶ The process of reorganisation was not completed within the 1950s, however. Bombay State was bifurcated in 1960 into Maharashtra and Gujarat, and Punjab was also bifurcated into new Punjab and Haryana in 1966. As a result, Punjab became a Sikh-majority State.

In the field of economic policy, the most urgent problem to be tackled was the recovery and reconstruction of the war-torn Indian economy. The Nehru government engaged in work to mitigate the hardship since the 1st Five Year Plan (1951–55). But basic socio-economic reforms such as land reform and the extension of primary education were virtually neglected, though these reforms were important policy programmes of the Congress party.⁷ This was partly because the Congress government feared that the introduction of radical reforms might destabilise the rural society, and hence, the nascent and still weak Indian State itself.

In the field of industrial development, the so-called “socialistic pattern of society” strategy was adopted under the strong leadership of Nehru at the time of the launching of the 2nd Five Year Plan (1956–60). In January 1955, the 60th Session of the Indian National Congress at Avadi decided upon a “socialistic pattern of society” for India as the goal of Congress policy. Based on this resolution, the epoch-making industrial policy resolution⁸ was issued by the government of India in 1956, and constituted the basic policy direction until 1991. It was the declaration of a government-led, import substitution strategy that was to be adopted by India. The 17 core industrial sectors were to be controlled by government. On the other hand, the private sector was allowed to exist and to supplement government efforts in economic development in certain other sectors. The government-led mixed economy strategy continued until the “socialistic pattern of society” strategy was virtually abandoned in 1991.

The Congress government under Nehru won successive victories in the

Table I-1
Major Parties in Lok Sabha Elections, 1952-1999

Year	No. of Seats for Election	Turnout %	Congress		Communist Party of India		Communist Party of India (Marxist)		Jana Sangh/ Bharatiya Janata Party		Janata Party		Janata Dal	
			Votes polled %	Seats obtained	Votes polled %	Seats obtained	Votes polled %	Seats obtained	Votes polled %	Seats obtained	Votes polled %	Seats obtained	Votes polled %	Seats obtained
1952	489	45.7	45.0	364	3.3	16				3.1	3			
1957	493	47.7	47.8	371	8.9	27				5.9	4			
1962	494	55.3	44.7	361	9.9	29				6.4	14			
1967	520	61.2	40.8	283	5.0	23	4.4	19	9.4	35				
1971	518	55.3	43.7	352	4.7	23	5.1	25	7.4	22				
1977	542	60.5	34.5	154	2.8	7	4.3	22			41.3	295		
1980	542	56.9	42.7	353	2.6	11	6.1	36			18.9	31		
1984	542	63.6	49.1	405	2.7	6	5.7	22	7.7	2	6.9	10		
1989	543	62.0	39.5	197	2.6	12	6.6	33	11.4	86			17.8	142
1991	543	55.2	36.5	232	2.5	14	6.2	35	20.1	120			11.9	56
1996	543	57.9	28.8	140	2.0	12	6.1	32	20.3	161			8.1	46
1998	543	62.0	25.8	141	1.8	9	5.2	32	25.6	182			3.2	6
1999	543	60.0	28.3	114	1.5	4	5.4	33	23.8	182				

Source: Election Commission of India, Reports of General Election of various Lok Sabha elections (See also at, <http://www.eci.gov.in/> ARCHIVE).

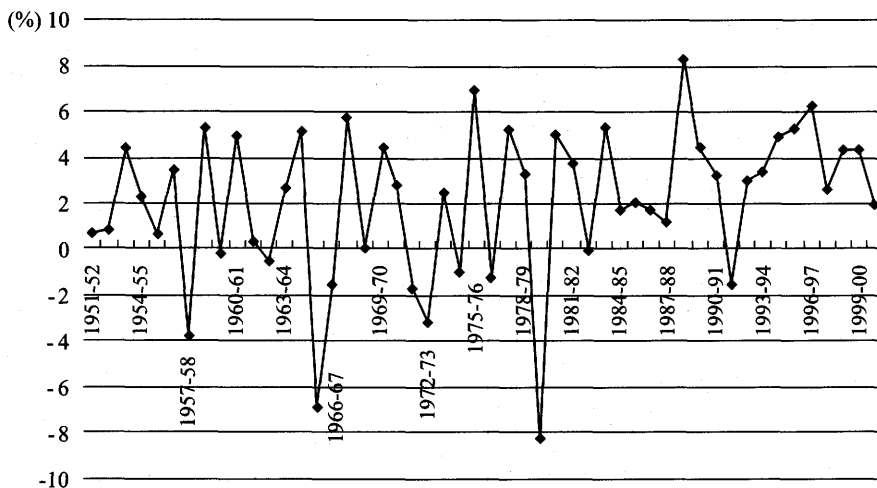
1952, 1957 and 1962 general elections for the Lok Sabha and major State legislative Assemblies. Congress achieved good performance in the general elections in this period, as can be seen in Table I-1. In the elections, Congress secured more than 40 percent of votes polled and won about two-third of Lok Sabha seats. The prestige of the Congress party and Nehru was still high and there were no major viable opposition parties or combinations of opposition parties in this period, providing important conditions for the “one party dominant system” to continue. But the stability and prestige of the Congress government in the 1950s to early 1960s did not last after Nehru’s death in 1964. Already in 1962, India’s defeat in the border war with China had damaged its prestige. But more seriously damaging to the Congress government was the stagnation of economic development. The 3rd Five Year Plan, launched in 1961, was destined to failure. The failure of economic development in the form of “planning,” where the role of government was crucial, brought wide-spread disappointment among the people. The failure of production was especially conspicuous in agriculture, which had been the field most neglected in terms of institutional reform, in the form of land reform, or in terms of investment, as evident in the 2nd Five Year Plan. The widespread disappointment among the people led to negative repercussions against the Congress government in the next election in 1967.

The Populistic and Authoritarian Tendency of the Congress Government under Indira Gandhi: 1967–77

L. B. Shastri succeeded to the Congress government as Prime Minister after Nehru’s death. During his short tenure, he struggled with the aggravation of the official language problem in the Southern States, especially Tamil Nadu, in 1965 and fought through the second Indo-Pakistan war in the same year. His governance came to an abrupt end the following year when he died in a foreign land, immediately after the “Tashkent declaration” which was made to end the second Indo-Pakistan war and normalise Indo-Pakistan relation. Indira Gandhi, the daughter of Nehru, was immediately elected as the new Congress Party President, and became Prime Minister that year.

The biggest problem that Gandhi had to deal with immediately after her inauguration as Prime Minister was the economic situation. The breakdown of the 3rd Five Year Plan was unambiguous. Agricultural production was at its lowest ever, partly because of the drought that had continued for two years from 1965 to 1966. Per capita net national product decreased sharply, as shown in Figure I-2, bringing to the poor the distress of whether they would survive or not. Food production fell into a critical situation, and the

Figure I-2
Annual Growth Rate of Per Capita Net National Product at 1993–94 Prices



Source: Calculated by the author from; Ministry of Finance (Government of India). 2002. *Economic Survey 2001–2002*, at <http://indiabudget.nic.in/es2001-02/chapt2002/TAB12.PDF> (accessed: 25 July 2002).

country had no choice but to depend on international assistance, such as from the United States. The assistance from Western countries, especially from the United States, was an undesirable political development in view of India's leading role in the Non-Aligned Movement and its past experience under Western colonialism. In addition, the assistance from the United States and from international organisations meant receiving an economic reform package, which made more clear the defects or limitations of the "socialistic pattern of society" strategy. In any case, the Five Year Plan was driven into suspension. The severe economic crisis caused unrest among the people, and the "plan-holiday" continued from 1966 to 1969. As a result, the popularity of the Congress government dropped to its lowest since Independence. In 1967, Congress was defeated in many State Legislative Assembly elections, though it was able to continue to hold power in Centre. The number of seats in the Lok Sabha was reduced from 361 in 1962 to 283 in 1967.

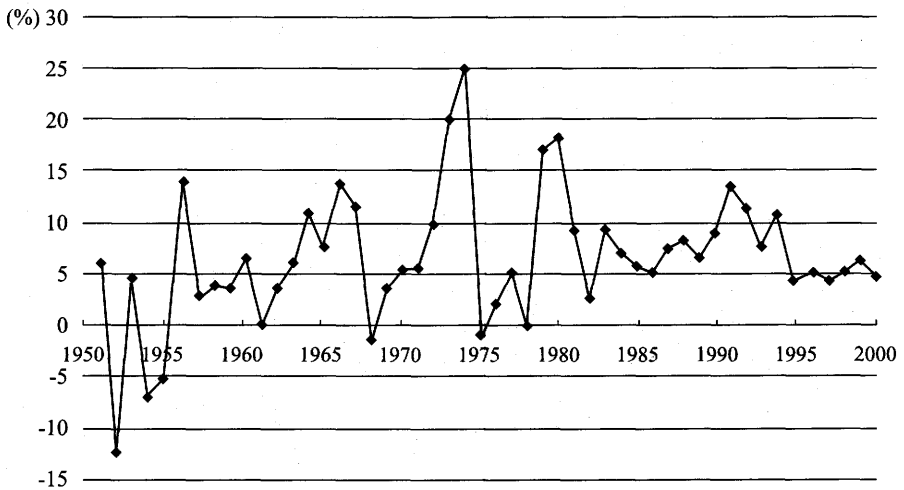
The failure in the general election led to internal tensions within the Congress Party. The relations between Indira Gandhi and the conservative faction, called the "syndicate," were becoming more awkward. It was difficult for Indira Gandhi to make independent decisions in economic as well as other policy areas because of the weakness of her position within the

party. In 1969, the Congress party split, with the Indira Gandhi-led faction becoming Congress (R).⁹ The conservative group formed Congress (O). In this course of political developments, Indira's Congress government radicalised its economic policies so that it could get more support from the vast populace. Fourteen major commercial banks were declared to be slated for nationalisation in 1969. In spite of a Supreme Court ruling against the move, the banks were nationalised in 1970, creating a radical and progressive political image for Indira Gandhi among the people. The attack on the old feudalistic elements also contributed to increasing her progressive image. The privy purses and privileges of the former princely States were attacked by the Congress government, and finally abolished by 1972. During the 1971 election, the populist slogan, "Garibi Hatao" (Remove Poverty), succeeded in securing support from the masses, and contributed to a landslide victory of the Congress party in the Lok Sabha elections. Indira Gandhi's popularity was at its highest at the end of 1971, when the third Indo-Pakistan war broke out. India crushed Pakistan militarily and split it into two parts, the new Pakistan and Bangladesh.

This popularity, however, did not continue for long. In spite of the radicalisation of economic policy in a more "socialistic" direction, the economy continued to stagnate. The annual growth rate of per capita net national product was already minus in 1971 and 1972, as shown in Figure I-2. It was not necessary to wait a long time for the stagnation to turn into deterioration. The oil shock and swift increase of international oil prices in 1973 brought profound damage to the weak Indian economy, which manifested itself in the form of rapid inflation, as shown in Figure I-3. The rapid rise of prices, especially in urban areas, accelerated dissatisfaction against the already inefficient and corrupt State governments. Opposition movements against the ruling Congress government gained momentum, on the basis of the extensive dissatisfaction among the people, and erupted in a massive way first in the State of Gujarat and then in Bihar.¹⁰ Under the severe economic conditions, these opposition movements got increased momentum, and from 1974 became a nationwide anti-government movement under the leadership of J. P. Narayan. The law and order situation deteriorated, especially in the northern and western parts of the country, and Indira Gandhi was threatened with the loss of her capacity as Member of Parliament in the Allahabad High Court judgement against her electoral activity in 1971. These political developments precipitated her to take drastic political measures to survive.¹¹

The state of internal emergency was declared in June 1975, on the pretext of internal disturbances and security threats against India. During the

Figure I-3
Wholesale Prices Increase, 1951–2000



Source: Calculated by the author from the following materials;

Department of Economics and Statistics (Tata Services Limited). 1996. *Statistical Outline of India 1996–97*. Mumbai: Tata Donnelley Limited, p. 207; Chandhok, H. L. and The Policy Group. 1990. *India Database—The Economy Volume I*. New Delhi: Living Media India Ltd., pp. 350–351; Ministry of Finance (Government of India). 1999. *Economic Survey 1998–99*. New Delhi: Government of India Press; Ministry of Finance (Government of India). 2002. *Economic Survey 2001–2002*, at <http://indiabudget.nic.in/es2001-02/prices.htm> (accessed: 25 July 2002).

emergency regime, democratic rights were suspended and “disciplines” were enforced not only in politics but also in the sphere of economic activities. It is true that the authoritarian methods had some positive impact on the socio-economic front. There was progress in land reform, and many people in socially weak sections of rural society attained pieces of land for the first time. Land reform, though important, had been virtually neglected by most State governments. The number of industrial disputes plummeted to the lowest level ever, and agricultural production recovered from the worst. But the “constitutional dictatorship” regime could not be continued without sanctions by the ruled. Finally, a fresh general election to the Lok Sabha was abruptly declared for March 1977. For Indira Gandhi, the election was to be a process of legitimatisation of the emergency regime, but her expectations were betrayed. The people’s verdict in the election was a massive defeat for Indira Gandhi’s Congress party. Its number of seats in the Lok Sabha

decreased from 352 to 154. Congress lost its grip on the Central government for the first time, and the Janata Party—a combination of the main opposition parties of Congress (O), Jana Sangh, Bharatiya Lok Dal and the Socialist Party—came into power in the Centre. Morarji Desai became new Prime Minister, and the state of emergency was withdrawn.

The basic reason of the defeat was obviously the abuse of authority and the misuse of authoritarian power by the Congress government. In 1978, the final report of the Shah commission on the state of emergency revealed many cases of abuse of power and repressive methods.¹²

It is worth mentioning that Indira Gandhi did not resort to repressive methods to protect her power when her defeat in the election became clear. This is a clear contrast from the Pakistan or Bangladesh cases up until the 1980s, in which the ruling juntas after coups did not return their power voluntarily. Indira Gandhi accepted the electoral verdict according to the Constitution. The fundamental reason is that the legitimacy of elections had been deeply rooted until the 1970s, and even Indira could not spoil it.

The widespread abuses of power and authoritarian repression under the emergency regime brought major changes to the political perception of various strata of people, especially in northern India. The traditional support structures for the Congress party in these areas were disturbed, and this became a very important factor for the increasing political instability in the following decade.

Destabilisation of the Party System: 1977–1989

Since the Janata Party was an alliance of four opposition parties with different ideological backgrounds and political interests, the development of internal tensions and conflict was almost inevitable. An intense fight for leadership occurred between Prime Minister Morarji Desai and Charan Singh of the Bharatiya Lok Dal, and the organisational integration was far from complete. Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (hereafter RSS), a Hindu nationalist organisation and parent organisation of Jana Sangh, had a distinct identity as a cohesive entity. These and other factors led to the split of Janata Party¹³ and, as a result, the Charan Singh minority government being finally established with the help of Indira Gandhi's Congress party. The latter suffered from another major split in 1978, and became Congress (I).¹⁴ However, the support of Congress (I) for the Charan Singh faction was soon withdrawn and consequently an interim general election of the Lok Sabha was scheduled after the dissolution of the Lok Sabha by the President. The economic situation was deteriorating because of the second oil shock of

1979. The sharp fall of the net national product and the sharp rise in inflation from 1979 to 1980, as shown in Figures I-2 and I-3, further increased the already widespread dissatisfaction toward the Janata Party government. The election held in 1980 ended with a landslide defeat for the Janata Party and a victory of Congress (I). Indira Gandhi returned to the Prime Ministership.

However, the return of the Congress Party of Indira Gandhi did not mean the return to the old pattern of Congress Politics. People did not support Congress as it had been before the emergency. Populistic slogans like "Garibi Hatao" had lost their appeal to the people. Stagnation in economic development, the political awakening of the masses through successive mobilisation by electoral politics, the bitter experience of the emergency regime, etc., these factors cumulatively contributed to the destabilisation of party politics in various ways. Congress (I)'s popularity began to decline clearly after 1983. Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka had been seen as stable support bases for Congress party since Independence. But in the 1983 State Legislative Assembly elections, the Congress State governments were replaced by the newly-formed Telugu Desam Party in Andhra Pradesh and Janata Party in Karnataka.

Ethnic strife was also a threat to Congress rule, especially in the peripheral regions. In the State of Assam, there were tensions over lands, job, political rights, etc., between native Assamese people and immigrant Bengalese who had flowed in over many years. The tensions exploded in the course of 1983 Assembly election and many people were injured and killed, as mentioned before. The legitimacy of the Congress State government was seriously damaged by the conflict.

But the most serious political problem in the 1980s was Punjab. The intervention of Indira Gandhi Congress in the State's politics, the divisive nature of Akali politics, the destabilisation of the social structure in the rapid economic development, all resulted in the creation of religious extremism based on the Sikh religion, which demanded a separate Sikh country out of the India Union. The military crackdown against militants in the Golden Temple by Indira Gandhi's Central government was an injury to the religious sentiment of Sikhs, and led to her assassination in October, 1984 by her own Sikh bodyguards. The assassination led to widespread anti-Sikh riots.¹⁵ Many innocent Sikhs were killed, and Sikh militants killed many Hindu in retaliation. The political turmoil and terrorism did not die down until the early 1990s. Normalcy gradually returned from the 1992 Assembly election in the State. Although the percentage turnout was abysmally low of 23.96% in the election, the process itself no doubt created a political atmosphere leading to normalcy.

The effect of the assassination of Indira Gandhi was a massive emotional outpouring for the Congress party and Rajiv Gandhi, the newly chosen Prime Minister and son of Indira Gandhi. The Lok Sabha election at the end of 1984 saw a landslide victory for the Congress party. The wave of sympathy was undoubtedly an important factor contributing to the overwhelming victory.¹⁶ The Congress party secured nearly half of all votes for the first time since independence, and won 405 seats, as shown in Table I-1.

Rajiv Gandhi was sincere in trying to solve the serious problems which had been created by his mother. His government tried to settle the Punjab disturbance by joining hands with moderate Akali faction, resulting in the Punjab accord in 1985. On the Assam issue, in the same year his government also concluded the Assam accord with native Assamese organisations for the solution of the ethnic problem. In Sri Lanka as well, his government was compelled to intervene in the internal war between secessionist Tamil militants and the Sri Lanka government, leading to the conclusion of the Sri Lanka accord in June 1987. In all the cases, however, the accords failed to become the basis for solving the ethnic entanglements, because they included terms that were difficult to implement or unrealistic.

In the sphere of economic policy, the Rajiv Gandhi government tried to change the out-dated bureaucratic regime of industrial policy, which was called "License Raj." His government introduced economic liberalisation in limited areas, such as the electronics industry. However, these reform experiments in limited areas did not lead to the overall dismantling of the rigid bureaucratic economic system during his period, due to resistance from the vested interests of the "License Raj" regime.¹⁷ On the other hand, his progressive economic policy increased the level of consumption, especially in metropolitan areas, but at the same time raised the feeling of increasing economic disparities among the lower strata. In addition, the concentration of political power around Rajiv Gandhi made the top brass of the Congress leadership susceptible to the temptations of corruption. A scandal involving kickbacks from a defence deal with the Swedish Bofors Company was exposed in 1987, tremendously tarnishing the clean image of the Rajiv Gandhi government. His popularity began to decrease after 1987, and several important personalities such as V. P. Singh abandoned his cabinet and parted company with his party. In the 1989 Lok Sabha election, the Congress party experienced an unexpected and massive defeat, as shown in Table I-1.

The Era of the Multi-Party System and Coalition Government: 1989–1999

A multi-party system has become the normal state of affairs since 1989, with regional parties based in particular States increasing their political importance in central politics. The phenomenon of the increasing strength of regional parties has been closely related with the organisational decay of the Congress party. The “decay” of the Congress party has consisted of the weakening of the party’s institutional set-up and procedures. This decay was accelerated under Indira Gandhi, as was well examined by Kohli’s study.¹⁸ Her top-down style of leadership weakened the grassroots and bottom-up initiatives of party cadres, making it difficult for influential leaders at the State level to act independently. The concentration of party power in the hands of Indira Gandhi and her followers provided rich soil for abuses of political power during her tenure in power, further eroding the party organisation as well as morale of party workers. Rajiv Gandhi inherited this decaying party organisation.

However, it must be pointed out that the increasingly top-down style of Indira Gandhi was, in a sense, an inevitable response to the political climate surrounding her. Influential regional leaders were becoming more and more independent in line with the increasing fluidity of State level politics, which in turn was related to overall socio-economic changes in the society. Her setback in the 1977 Lok Sabha election was, in a sense, a demonstration of the failure of her dictatorial solution to the political fluidity. It can also be seen as a failure of the one party dominant system. The multi-party system would have come into being earlier, in the mid-1980s, had there not been the wave election in 1984 following her assassination. In any case, the full-fledged emergence of the multi-party system at the Centre can, thus, be considered to be the result of the long process of interaction between the party system and socio-economic change.

Since the 1989 election, no single party has been able to secure a majority in the Lok Sabha. The strategic combination of parties, therefore, has become crucially important in forming governments at the Centre. As shown in Table I-2, although the form and combination of parties in ruling coalitions has been changing since 1989, the fact remains that only coalitions allow parties to form governments at the centre.

In the case of the 1989 election, the National Front, a combination of Janata Dal¹⁹ and other State or regional parties, was supported by the rightist Bharatiya Janata Party (hereafter BJP) which was the former Jana Sangh,²⁰ on the one hand, and the leftist Communist Party of India (Marxist)

Table I-2

Diagrams of Coalitions of the Main Political Parties after 1989 at the Central Level

a. Immediately after the 1989 General Election

Congress and allied party [208]

Congress[197] + All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (Tamil Nadu) [11]

Bharatiya Janata Party (= BJP) [86]*

BJP[86]

National Front [145]*

Janata Dal[142], Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (Tamil Nadu) [0], Telugu Desam Party (Andhra Pradesh) [2], Asom Gana Parishad (Assam) [**], Indian Congress (Socialist) (some limited area) [1]

Left Front [52]

Communist Party of India (Marxist) (West Bengal, Kerala) [33], Communist Party of India [12], Revolutionary Socialist Party (West Bengal) [4], All India Forward Bloc (West Bengal) [3]

* BJP and the National Front carried out electoral cooperation in many constituencies in northern and western India.

** In Assam, the Lok Sabha election could not be held because of the outbreak of ethnic violence. The seats in Assam were vacant.

b. Immediately after the 1991 General Election*

Congress and allied party [243]

Congress[232] + All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (Tamil Nadu) [11]

BJP[120]

BJP[120]

National Front [74]

Janata Dal [59], Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (Tamil Nadu) [0], Telugu Desam Party (Andhra Pradesh) [13], Asom Gana Parishad (Assam) [1], Indian Congress (Socialist) (Some limited area) [1]

Left Front [56]

Communist Party of India (Marxist) (West Bengal, Kerala) [35], Communist Party of India [14], Revolutionary Socialist Party (West Bengal) [4], All India Forward Bloc (West Bengal) [3]

* The election was held in Punjab later, in 1992. So, the result was not included here. The election was not held in Jammu and Kashmir because of the disturbed political situation.

c. Immediately after the 1996 General Election

Congress and allied party [140]

Congress[140] + All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (Tamil Nadu) [0]

BJP and allied parties [195]

BJP[161], Shiv Sena (Maharashtra) [15], Samata Party (Bihar) [8], Haryana Vikas Party (Haryana) [3], Akali Dal (Punjab) [8],

United Front [179]

《State or Regional parties》 Janata Dal[46], Samajwadi Party (Uttar Pradesh) [17], Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (Tamil Nadu) [17], Tamil Maanila Congress (Tamil Nadu) [20], Telugu Desam Party (Andhra Pradesh) [16], Asom Gana Parishad (Assam) [5], Indian National Congress (Tiwari) (some limited area) [4], Madhya Pradesh Vikas Congress (Madhya Pradesh) [1], Karnataka Congress Party (Karnataka) [1]

《Left Front》 Communist Party of India (Marxist) (West Bengal, Kerala) [32], Communist Party of India [12], Revolutionary Socialist Party (West Bengal) [5], All India Forward Bloc (West Bengal) [3]

d. Immediately after the 1998 General Election

Congress and allied parties [162]

Congress[141], Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (Southern part of Bihar) [0], Rashtriya Lok Dal (Bihar) [17], Republican Party of India (Maharashtra) [4]

BJP and allied parties [256]

BJP[179], Shiv Sena (Maharashtra) [6], Samata Party (Bihar) [12], Biju Janata Dal (Orissa) [9], Akali Dal (Punjab) [8], Trinamool Congress (West Bengal) [7], Lok Shakti (Karnataka) [3], Haryana Vikas Party (Haryana) [1], NTR Telugu Desam Party (Some area in Andhra Pradesh) [0], All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (Tamil Nadu) [18], Pattali Makkal Katchi (Tamil Nadu) [4], Marmaralchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (Tamil Nadu) [3], Tamizhaga Rajiv Congress (Tamil Nadu) [1], Janata Party[1] (Some limited area), other parties.

United Front [98]

《State or Regional parties》 Janata Dal[6], Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (Tamil Nadu) [6], Tamil Maanila Congress (Tamil Nadu) [3], Telugu Desam Party (Andhra Pradesh) [12], Samajwadi Party (Uttar Pradesh) [21], Asom Gana Parishad (Assam) [0], Jammu and Kashmir National Conference (Jammu and Kashmir) [2],

《Left Front》 Communist Party of India (Marxist) (West Bengal, Kerala) [32], Communist Party of India (Some limited area) [9], Revolutionary Socialist Party (West Bengal) [5], All India Forward Bloc (West Bengal) [2]

Other parties

Bahujan Samaj Party[5], Haryana Lok Dal (Haryana) [4], Muslim League (Kerala) [2], Kerala Congress (Mani) (Kerala) [1], United Front of Assam Minorities[1], Samajwadi Janata Dal (Uttar Pradesh) [1], Rashtriya Lok Dal (Bihar) [1], Manipur State Congress Party (Manipur) [1], Autonomous State Demand Committee[1], Sikkim Democratic Front (Sikkim) [1], Peasants and Worker's Party (Maharashtra) [1], All India Majlis-E-Ittehadul Muslimeen (Andhra Pradesh) [1], All India Indira Congress[1], Independents[3]

e. Immediately after the 1999 General Election

Congress and allied parties [136]

Congress [114], All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (Tamil Nadu) [10], Rashtriya Lok Dal (Bihar) [7], Rashtriya Lok Dal (Western part of Uttar Pradesh) [2], Muslim League (Kerala) [2], Kerala Congress (Mani) (Kerala) [1]

National Democratic Alliance [304]

BJP [182], Telugu Desam Party (Andhra Pradesh)* [29], Janata Dal (United) (Bihar, Karnataka) [21], Shiv Sena (Maharashtra) [15], Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (Tamil Nadu) [12], Biju Janata Dal (Orissa) [10], Trinamool Congress (West Bengal) [8], Pattali Makkal Katchi (Tamil Nadu) [5], Indian National Lok Dal (Haryana) [5], Jammu and Kashmir National Conference (Jammu and Kashmir) [4], Marmaralchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (Tamil Nadu) [4], Akali Dal (Punjab) [2], Akhil Bhartiya Lok Tantrik Congress (Uttar Pradesh) [2], Manipur State Congress Party (Manipur) [1], Himachal Vikas Congress (Himachal Pradesh) [1], Sikkim Democratic Front (Sikkim) [1], M.G.R. Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (Tamil Nadu) [1], Independent [1]

Other parties

《State or regional Parties》 Samajwadi Party (Uttar Pradesh) [26], Bahujan Samaj Party (Uttar Pradesh) [14], Nationalist Congress Party (Maharashtra) [8], Janata Dal (Secular) [1], Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) (Liberation) (Bihar) [1], Samajwadi Janata Dal (Uttar Pradesh) [1], Bharipa Bahujan Mahasangha (Maharashtra) [1], Peasants and Worker's Party (Maharashtra) [1], All India Majlis-E-Ittehadul Muslimeen (Andhra Pradesh) [1], Akali Dal (Mann) (Punjab) [1], Independents [5]

《Left Front》 Communist Party of India (Marxist) (West Bengal, Kerala) [33], Communist Party of India (Some limited area) [4], Revolutionary Socialist Party (West Bengal) [3], All India Forward Bloc (West Bengal) [2], Kerala Congress (Kerala) [1]

* The Telugu Desam Party was not a constituent of the National Democratic Alliance but supported it from outside of the government. But it is included in the National Democratic Alliance for the convenience of simplification of the relationship of the parties.

Source: Made by the author from various materials.

Note: “[]” shows the number of seats obtained by the party. States within parenthesis are the main areas of influence of the party.

(hereafter CPI(M)) on the other. Although it involved indirect cooperation, the association of ideologically opposite parties, that is, the BJP and CPI(M) was a product of realpolitics. The common aim of the combination of these antagonistic parties was anti-Congressism.

The National Front coalition government headed by V. P. Singh soon collapsed. One cause was internal conflicts among different parties and personalities, and another the impact of important political developments such as the repercussions of the government declaration of quotas for backward classes in recruitment to the central government sector and higher educational institutions,²¹ and the tension caused by the Ayodhya movement under the BJP and its related organisation. In 1990, the Chandra Shekhar group split from the Janata Dal and, though being an extreme minority in the Lok Sabha, succeeded in forming a Central government with the support of Congress. However, Congress soon withdrew its support and the government collapsed. The next Lok Sabha election was held between May and June 1991, and Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated during this period. The sad event led to a limited wave of sympathy toward Congress, and contributed to a moderate recovery of lost ground for Congress.²²

Congress returned to the central government with the support of one regional party and independents. P. V. Narasimha Rao, a veteran Congressman, was sworn in as the new Prime Minister. The most important policy initiative during his government was, without doubt, the launching of structural reform and full-fledged economic liberalisation. The new industrial and trade policy, issued in July and August 1991,²³ was a virtual farewell to the "socialistic pattern of society" ideology. It was not a half-hearted attempt at liberalisation as had been seen during Rajiv's era. Governmental control over the investment activities of private companies was removed in many important industrial sectors, the trade policy was liberalised, and the restriction against foreign investment was eased tremendously. But the beginning of structural reform and economic liberalisation did not mean the immediate improvement of the economic life of the populace. Rather, the reform, in the form of cutting government expenditures, brought about a deterioration of the conditions of the lower strata of people, at least in the initial period of reform. This is considered one of the basic reasons for the declining popularity of the Congress government.

Another important factor behind the decline in Congress' popularity was the rising trend of Hindu nationalistic or communalistic sentiments in the northern and western parts of India, which had been brewed by Hindu nationalist forces from the mid-1980s. The central symbol of the movement

is Ayodhya, which is said to be the birthplace of Lord Ram. Babri Masjid, a mosque which was said to have been constructed in the sixteen century after the destruction of the legendary Ram temple, was destroyed in December 1992 by extreme Hindu nationalist elements, leading to widespread violence and riots between Muslims and Hindus.²⁴ The BJP government of Uttar Pradesh resigned from office to take responsibility for the destruction of the Masjid. The central government temporarily outlawed the RSS and other Hindu nationalistic organisations, arrested BJP leaders such as L. K. Advani, and dismissed BJP State governments in Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. Although the popularity of the BJP fell in the short run, the Congress party lost much more popularity in its traditional support bases. Narasimha Rao's Congress party was soundly defeated in the eleventh Lok Sabha election held in 1996. Its number of seats dropped from 232 to just 140. By contrast, the BJP's strength increased to 161 seats, and it became the largest party in the Lok Sabha for the first time.

But the BJP did not succeed in forming a central government because of the lack of co-operation of the other main opposition parties. A. B. Vajpayee's BJP government, though nominated by the President, lasted only 13 days before resigning. The coalition which succeeded the BJP was the United Front, consisting of Janata Dal and other State or regional parties on the one hand, and Left Front parties on the other. In addition, the Congress party supported the formation of the United Front government to oppose the BJP. Deve Gowda of Janata Dal was sworn in as Prime Minister. But the United Front government was soon destabilised due to the intervention of the Congress party. The political crisis caused by Congress' intervention resulted in the defeat of the Deve Gowda government in May 1997. The Prime Minister had no choice but to resign and a new Prime Minister, I. K. Gujral, was sworn in. However, the United Front government led by I. K. Gujral fell in November 1997, following the withdrawal of support by the Congress party. The brief experience of the coalition government demonstrated a lack of political stability. The main reason for the failure was the simple fact that the coalition could not secure a majority in the Lok Sabha, compelling it to depend upon the unstable support of Congress, which was basically not interested in having other parties holding power at the centre. At this time, the possibility of one party majority in the Lok Sabha was seen as almost impossible, and the problem of coalition governments has become how to maintain majority support in the Lok Sabha. This problem had to be tackled by the BJP-led coalition after the Lok Sabha election in 1998.

The 12th Lok Sabha election was conducted in February 1998 after the resignation of the United Front government led by Gujral. The BJP emerged

victorious, securing 182 seats. This time, it succeeded in forming a minimum winning coalition right after the election. The experience of failure of the United Front and the unpopularity of the Congress party led by Sitaram Kesri were favourable factors helping the BJP to get the support of small parties. Factions which had once participated in the United Front or which had split from Congress or Janata Dal did not hesitating to participate in the BJP-led coalition. BJP was able to provide a stable formula for the coalition to the parties, in the form of the National Agenda for Governance, and within it the BJP showed self-restraint regarding its Hindu nationalistic tendency. For regional parties, participation in the central government provided the chance to enhance political clout. And for parties struggling for survival, participation in the power centre was crucial, as was the case for All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (hereafter AIADMK). The strategic moves for power on the part of the BJP, as well as by other smaller parties, produced the minimum winning coalition.

However, since the coalition was a minimum one, the government could be destabilised by just small changes in the political dynamics between constituent parties. AIADMK, led by J. Jayalalitha, was a very destabilising factor. It abandoned its support for the BJP coalition government in March 1999. In 1998, it had decided to abandon its traditional cooperative relationship with the Congress party in Tamil Nadu and, instead, support the BJP coalition in the government formation. The leader had been charged with serious corruption and was seeking political support from the central government to ease her difficult condition. She expected that the weak central government could be influenced in her favour if she gave the support which the BJP needed so desperately. But her hopes were not satisfied by the BJP coalition government, and for this reason she withdrew her party's support. As a result the BJP coalition government collapsed prematurely, and a fresh election was held in September and October 1999.

The BJP's election strategy was well prepared and very clear. It carefully restrained its radical rightist image, emphasising a responsible and cooperative attitude in relation to the other coalition partners. Much effort was put into better electoral cooperation with the coalition parties. The formation of a new coalition, the National Democratic Alliance, was declared by the BJP in May, far ahead of the campaign. Its manifesto was issued in August.²⁵ On the other hand, the opposition parties were not in a position to counteract the BJP coalition. The experiences of the failures of the National Front and United Front acted as impediments to the formation of non-BJP and non-Congress coalitions. In addition, the preparations of the Congress party were far from satisfactory, though the entry of Sonia

Gandhi, the wife of the late Rajiv Gandhi, into active politics was a positive factor for the recovery of Congress' popularity.

The result of the 13th Lok Sabha election was the emergence of a relatively stable coalition led by the BJP, the National Democratic Alliance, which secured 304 seats. As shown in Table I-1, the BJP only won the same number of seats as in the previous election, but succeeded in attracting many parties into the coalition made up of more than 17 major parties, as shown in Table I-2. Within the coalition, it has become increasingly evident that stability depends upon the BJP's self-restraint concerning its Hindu nationalistic agendas including the Ayodhya issue and the position of Kashmir.²⁶ The National Democratic Alliance government has lasted three years at the time of writing this book and, by and large, remains stable.

It is obvious that in India the evolution of the party system and major political events has been closely related to the election process. It is, therefore, important to examine the dynamics of elections and their relevance to macro socio-economic changes.

2. Evolution of the Electoral System

The electoral system is very important. The institutional setup of elections affects the strategies and prospects of political parties not only in elections but also in their everyday activities. India basically inherited the British parliamentary system. In the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections, the first-past-the-post system has been adopted, with the exception of certain constituencies in the 1952 and 1957 elections. The candidate who secures a plurality of the votes is elected. The adoption of other systems was also discussed in the Constituent Assembly, which met for the first time in New Delhi in December 1946, and was continued until 1949. The proportional representation system was discussed for adoption as an alternative election system. Its adoption was considered in order to prevent "the tyranny of the majority,"²⁷ which in practice meant the tyranny of the Hindu caste majority. Proportional representation was considered by some members of the Constituent Assembly as a way to ensure the representation of minority interests. Religious minorities, especially Muslim, were very sensitive to the position of their communities in India after Partition. Moreover, there were other categories of minorities, such as the Scheduled Castes (hereafter SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (hereafter STs). The former are castes who experienced poverty and discrimination on the basis of untouchability, which had been created historically. The latter are backward communities outside of

the mainstream of Hindu caste society but that have their own distinct cultures. The adoption of a proportional representation system or reservation of seats for Muslims or other categories of minorities was discussed from this viewpoint.

But the proportional representation system was, in the end, not adopted for the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assembly elections. There were a several reasons for this. First, it was considered to be too complicated a system for a backward country to deal with. Widespread illiteracy and a lack of political and administrative awareness were considered to be impediments for its proper functioning.²⁸ Another reason against its adoption was that political parties had not yet been properly formed.²⁹ A viable and sound party system is, of course, an indispensable prerequisite for the functioning of a proportional representation system. In addition, it was pointed out that the adoption of the proportional representation system might lead to the fragmentation of the party system,³⁰ and as a result, to the ultimate disintegration of the country. The setup of special safeguards for minorities was made only for SCs and STs, in the form of reservations. Reservations on the basis of religion were not allowed after the experience of the Partition.

Electoral System

The central institution administering the elections of both the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies is the Election Commission of India. Substantial autonomy and independence in the functioning of Election Commission, which is a prerequisite for free and fair elections, is carefully guaranteed in the Constitution. It must be noted that the Election Commission of the Union administers not only the Lok Sabha election but also State Legislative Assembly elections. This is because the higher authority and autonomy of the Union are considered necessary for State level elections in order to prevent various kinds of political interferences in the State. The Election Commission is in charge of elections to Parliament and to the Legislature of every State, as well as to the offices of President and vice-President held under the Constitution.³¹ The details of the electoral process are prescribed in the Representation of People Act, 1950, and the Representation of People Act, 1951.

Parliament consists of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. In the Rajya Sabha, the Vice-President holds the post of chairperson, and the vice-chairperson is elected from the members. At present, the Rajya Sabha consists of 233 persons who are elected by the State Legislative Assembly of

each State on a proportional representation basis. In addition, the President appoints 12 members from among well-informed persons. The candidates must be at least 30 years old. The term of office is six years. One third of the members are re-elected every two years, and there is no process of dismissal. The Rajya Sabha, the second chamber of Parliament, has the character of the representative of the States in the Indian federal polity.

The Lok Sabha, the lower house of Parliament, is the most important representative body in India. The chairperson and vice-chairperson are elected by the members. Members must be not less than 25 years old, and are elected by people aged 18 years or more. The voting age was lowered from 21 years to 18 years in 1989, by the Constitution Sixty-first Amendment Act, under the Rajiv Gandhi Congress government.

Political Parties are registered with the Election Commission and allotted a particular symbol for election purposes. They are classified into national parties, State parties, registered parties, or independents, and this classification is decided basically on the basis of votes polled by the party in the previous election. In the 1999 Lok Sabha election, for example, there were seven national parties: the BJP, Bahujan Samaj Party, Communist Party of India (hereafter CPI), CPI(M), Indian National Congress, Janata Dal (Secular), and Janata Dal (United). A Symbol is allocated to each party with reference to its registered status so that voters can easily identify it, which is a system devised for an educationally backward populace. The term of office is five years. Vacancies must be filled by by-elections within six months.³² At present, 543 persons are elected. In addition, the President is able to nominate not more than two members from the Anglo-Indian community to ensure adequate representation for that group.

There is reservation system which functions as a preferential measure for backward people. In the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies, a certain percentage of the seats is reserved for SCs and STs. In the Lok Sabha at present, 79 seats are reserved for SCs and 41 seats for STs. The percentage of seats reserved is fixed to be proportional to the percentage of their population.³³ The reservation system has to be sanctioned every 10 years to decide whether it is to be continued or not, and so far it has been sanctioned in Parliament for continuation. In the 1952 and 1957 Lok Sabha elections, the reservation was made basically in the form of double member constituencies³⁴ where one person had two-votes, one for a general candidate and another for an SC or ST candidate. In the case of the STs, there were single-member constituencies for ST majority areas, where only ST candidates could stand for election.³⁵ But the double-member constituencies were not favoured by political parties because of their vast size. They were

abolished under the "Two Member Constituencies (Abolition) Act, 1961," and the double-member constituencies were bifurcated in both the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections. Since 1962, all constituencies have been single member. Decisions on SC or ST constituencies are made based on the proportion of the population of each community in the constituency.

Another important argument on reservations has been taken place for more than five years. It involves the reservation of seats in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies for women. It has been argued that the reservation of seats for women in the Union Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies would give women their due representation. The argument has not yet been concluded, and The Women's Reservation Bill has not yet passed Parliament, though ostensibly most of the major political parties do not oppose its introduction.³⁶

In any election, the composition of constituencies is very important. In India, the constituencies for the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies are based on geographical areas. However, there is an exception in the State Legislative Assembly of Sikkim, in which one seat is reserved for Buddhist "Sanghas" belonging to monasteries.³⁷ According to the Representation of People Act, 1950, each Lok Sabha constituency consists of several constituencies from the State Legislative Assembly.³⁸ The boundaries of the Assembly constituencies, therefore, may overlap those of a Lok Sabha constituency but do not cross it geographically. It must be understood, though, that minor and partial changes in constituency boundaries have been constantly made due to, for example, the reorganisation of States, changes in the boundaries of administrative units like districts, or, occasionally, physical changes in the course of a river. But overall delimitations of the boundaries of constituencies have only been made a few times. Long-term demographic changes, such as uneven population growth in different areas, urbanisation, and immigration, all work to increase the difference in the number of voters among constituencies, necessitating the adjustment of accumulated imbalances.

There is a Constitutional mechanism that can be used to prevent increasing imbalances. Article 82 of the Constitution prescribes, "upon the completion of each census, the allocation of seats in the House of the People to the States and the division of each State into territorial constituencies shall be readjusted."³⁹ Thus, after the completion of every decennial population census, overall fresh delimitations of the geographical areas of Assembly as well as Lok Sabha constituencies are supposed to be conducted. But actually, such measures were conducted only in 1956, 1966 and 1976. Since 1976, delimitations for India as a whole have not been conducted.

Overall delimitations for India were frozen by the Constitution (Forty-Second Amendment) Act, 1976, "until the relevant figures for the first census taken after the year 2000 have been published."⁴⁰ This is, for one thing, because the delimitation requires tremendous efforts, and, for another, it is politically a very sensitive exercise. Those southern States, such as Tamil Nadu and Kerala, which have been relatively successful in controlling population growth, have been vocal in opposing the delimitation which "punishes" States which have made honest efforts to control the population.

The postponement of the delimitation has brought about widening disparities between constituencies. The political weight of each vote has been diluted in the constituencies where population growth has been rapid. The electoral roll is revised before every Lok Sabha or Assembly election. After the 1976 delimitation exercise, in the 1977 Lok Sabha election, the average number of voters per constituency was 592,419 persons, with a standard deviation in the number for 542 constituencies being 100,872 persons. In the 1999 election, these figures were 1,141,805 and 263,111 (for 542 constituencies). Although the average number of voters increased 1.9 times, the standard deviation increased 2.6 times.⁴¹ The diversification of number of electorate between constituencies is obvious.

No candidate can contest an election from more than two constituencies. This restriction was enacted in 1996.⁴² Previously, candidates could contest from as many constituencies as they liked. If they won in plural constituencies at the same time, they had to choose one constituency and abandon the others within a prescribed time limit.

The institutional evolutions mentioned so far concern the mechanism of elections itself. But there are institutional evolutions which, although not affecting the electoral process directly, indirectly influence it by restricting the functioning of political parties.

Among them, one interesting institutional development was the enactment of the Constitution (Fifty-second Amendment) Act, 1985, which became popularly known as the Anti-Defection Act. The evil of defection has been recognised clearly from the 1960s.⁴³ The defection of many Members of the Lok Sabha or Rajya Sabha, or State Legislative Assemblies, from one party to another was a factor contributing to the destabilisation of parliamentary democracy. After the enactment of the Anti-Defection Act, members of parliament could lose their qualification if they split from their parent party with less than one-third of the members of the parent party. Although there have been many cases of successful splits, where the members of the split factions did not lose their qualification as Members of Parliament, the act seems to have some effect in preventing parties from disintegrating.

Another important institutional evolution which influenced the functioning of political parties was the compulsory registration of every political party to the Election Commission, as prescribed in 1989,⁴⁴ and the endowment in 1994 to the Election Commission of the power to suspend or withdraw recognition of a registered political party for failing to observe the Model Code of Conduct or lawful directions or instructions from the Election Commission.⁴⁵ These provisions together have enhanced the authority of the Election Commission, which has been eager to “normalise” the functioning of political parties. It has seen its authority strengthened and has been placed in the position to virtually enforce on political parties the submission of party constitutions and activities to it, as well as the holding of internal organisational elections based on party’s own constitution, etc.

As explained before, the party system has been on a decaying trend since the 1960s. In particular, the tendency toward decay of the Congress party as an organisation has been clear since the Indira Gandhi era. The strengthening of the Election Commission’s disciplinary power against political parties, therefore, might have been an inevitable institutional evolution to put a stop to the decay. For organisationally loose parties, such as Congress and Janata Dal, the enhancement of the authority of the Election Commission has, therefore, had an impact on their functioning as parties. When the strengthening of the disciplinary power took place, internal organisational elections were hurriedly conducted according to their party constitutions. But there were apparently no major difficulties for the BJP and CPI(M), which are much more well-organised than Congress or Janata Dal, in adapting themselves to the new situation.⁴⁶

Corrupt Electoral Practices and Electoral Reforms

One serious problem in the election process, which deeply damages the legitimacy of elections, is the existence of many anomalies in the electoral process. Generally speaking, elections in South Asia are not perfectly peaceful processes. In Indian elections, similarly, there have been many cases of violent clashes and killings. The maintenance of law and order is always an important task for the Election Commission. Paramilitary forces, police and, sometimes the Army are mobilised to keep the electoral process from being disturbed by anti-social elements. However, there are potentially more serious anomalies, which can tarnish the fairness of the electoral process: widespread practices of corruption. Corrupt practices take various forms including bribery, booth capturing, and, in extreme cases, physical

violence, etc. Corruption and malpractice in elections are also detrimental to the accuracy of the data and, as a result, damage the proper statistical analysis of the election data in this study.

The Representation of the People Act, 1951⁴⁷ defined the following as corrupt practices: (1) Bribery; (2) Undue influence, that is to say, any direct or indirect interference or attempt to interfere on the part of the candidate or his agent; (3) The appeal by a candidate or his agent or by any other person with the consent of a candidate or his election agent to vote or refrain from voting for any person on the ground of his religion, race, caste, community or language or the use of, or appeal to religious symbols or the use of, or appeal to, national symbols, such as the national flag or the national emblem for the furtherance of the prospects of the election of that candidate or for prejudicially affecting the election of any candidate; (4) The publication by a candidate or his agent, of any statement of fact which is false in relation to the personal character or conduct of any candidate; (5) The hiring or procuring, whether on payment or otherwise, of any vehicle or vessel by a candidate or his agent or by any other person; (6) Unauthorised excessive expenditure beyond the upper limit of statutory election expenses; (7) The obtaining by a candidate or his agent, any assistance for the furtherance of the prospects of that candidate's election, from any police, excise, or other higher officers of the government or stipendiary judges and magistrates; and (8) Booth capturing by a candidate or his agent or other person.⁴⁸

There is no doubt that these corrupt practices cannot be ignored as a reality in the actual electoral process. Among corrupt practices, those involving money seem to be the most serious in the contemporary electoral process. This is, for one thing, because elections have become more and more costly. There are legal limitations on election expenses, which are to be revised periodically. In the case of the 1999 Lok Sabha election, Rs. 15 lakh was the upper limit for each candidate to spend for electioneering in most of the States and the Union Territory of Delhi. The figure was Rs. 10, 8 or 6 lakh for the small States or Union territories.⁴⁹ However, it is quite doubtful that most of the candidates abided by these statutory upper limits.

Table I-3, for example, shows the total number of persons disqualified under Section 10A of the Representation of People Act, 1951, as of 30th June, 1999. Section 10A prescribes disqualification on the grounds of election expenses. If a candidate fails to submit a proper account of election expenses before the Election Commission within three months, he or she is to be disqualified for a period of three years. Section 10A exists as a check against financial malpractice. It is not necessarily true that all the cases in the table are directly related to corrupt practices or crude bribery, but there is

Table I-3
Total Number of Persons Disqualified under Section 10A of
Representation of People Act, 1951

S.No.	State Union Territories	No. of persons disqualified in respect to House of People	No. of persons disqualified in respect to the State Legislative Assemblies
1	2	3	4
1	Andhra Pradesh	511	388
2	Arunachal Pradesh	-	4
3	Assam	25	234
4	Bihar	332	1290
5	Goa	8	23
6	Gujarat	75	340
7	Haryana	63	809
8	Himachal Pradesh	10	24
9	Jammu & Kashmir	14	9
10	Karnataka	81	303
11	Kerala	24	227
12	Madhya Pradesh	428	96
13	Maharashtra	152	662
14	Manipur	8	3
15	Meghalaya	-	9
16	Mizoram	-	8
17	Nagaland	-	-
18	Orissa	55	130
19	Punjab	61	63
20	Rajasthan	141	38
21	Sikkim	4	-
22	Tamil Nadu	53	437
23	Tripura	1	27
24	Uttar Pradesh	1203	1008
25	West Bengal	57	217
UNION TERRITORIES			
26	Andaman & Nicobar	2	-
27	Chandigarh	11	-
28	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	3	-
29	Daman & Diu	3	-
30	Delhi	109	122
31	Lakshadweep	-	-
32	Pondicherry	3	31
	Total	3413	6090

Source: Election Commission of India. n.d. "List of Persons Disqualified Under Section 8A, 11A(2) And 10(A) of The Representation of The People Act, 1951 (As On 30-6-1999)", See at <http://www.eci.gov.in/OTHERS/DisqualiFull.pdf> (accessed: 3 March 2003).

Note: Clause 10A reads as follows:

"10A. Disqualification for failure to lodge account of election expenses. If the Election Commission is satisfied that a person-

- (a) has failed to lodge an account of election expenses within the time and in the manner required by or under this Act, and
- (b) has no good reason or justification for the failure.

the Election Commission shall, by order published in the Official Gazette, declare him to be disqualified and any such person shall be disqualified for a period of three years from the date of the order."

no doubt that the table shows the prevalence of financial malpractice in elections. Among such forms of financial malpractice, the most serious involve bribery in which the power of money is used to get voters' support. Money power can be also used to obtain "muscle power," which is essentially illegal influence through coercive methods.

There is no clear data which accurately gauges the extent and depth of the influence of "money power" and "muscle power" in the overall electoral process.⁵⁰ These factors are closely related to the criminalisation of politics.⁵¹ The Vohra Committee on the criminalisation of politics quoted a case reported by the Central Bureau of Investigation in Bombay city, "The money power is used to develop a network of muscle-power which is also used by the politicians during elections."⁵² The committee proceeded to point out, "the muscle power of the crime Syndicates is sustained by their enormous financial power which, in turn, is secured by the Mafia elements by committing economic offences with impunity."⁵³ In order to prevent the criminalisation of politicians, a measure was adopted in August 1997, according to which all candidates for elections to Parliament and State Legislatures are required to file affidavits about their convictions in cases of corruption covered by Section 8 of the *Representation of the People Act, 1951*, which disqualifies persons convicted of corruption.⁵⁴

Other arguments and proposals have been made to ensure that the electoral system works effectively in fair and free conditions. There are some arguments in favour of strengthening the power and authority of the Election Commission, including measures such as: strengthening its disciplinary authority; strengthening its power to issue instructions and make recommendations regarding elections; and, making consultations with election officers compulsory when making police arrangements during elections. A ban on the transfer of election officers on the eve of elections was also proposed in order to restrict ruling parties from meddling in the electoral process in their own favour. On the monitoring of election expenses, the inclusion of expenses of parties and friends in the election expenses of candidates, a ban on donations by companies to political parties, and the state funding of elections, etc., have been proposed.⁵⁵ The argument in favour of having the state fund elections is common among some experts and scholars.⁵⁶

Thus, various electoral reforms have been made on various aspects of the electoral process. Although there are exceptional cases, in Jammu and Kashmir, it can be said the Election Commission through its monitoring role has been, by and large, successful in preventing corrupt practices from becoming prevalent in the overall electoral process in spite of the existence

of many anomalies. If corrupt practices were institutionalised systematically in favour of the ruling party or parties, we could not have seen the changes of Union government in 1977 or 1989 and after.

Functioning of the First-Past-the-Post System

India chose the first-past-the-post system at the time of Independence, as mentioned above. It goes without saying that, theoretically, the major problem with the first-past-the-post system is the existence of many wasted votes. According to my own calculation, based on all the constituencies, from the first (1952) to 13th (1999) Lok Sabha general elections, on average the successful candidate secured between 45 to 60 per cent of the votes. This means that the extent of the wasted votes in the first-past-the-post system ranges from about 55 to 40 per cent. We cannot ignore the fact that the political views of roughly one half of the voters are essentially not reflected in the election of parties and candidates.

In connection with the wasted votes, the first-past-the-post system entails another problem: the wide inconsistency between the percentage of votes obtained by a party and the percentage of seats obtained by the party. The party which benefited most from the inconsistency has been the Congress party. In the first three elections, it won 73 to 75 percent of the seats in the Lok Sabha with 45 to 48 percent of the votes. This was also the case in the 1984 election. This, of course, hinged on the lack of electoral co-operation by the opposition parties. If the major opposition parties had succeeded in forming cohesive electoral co-operation, the high percentage votes would not automatically have led to an exaggerated number of seats for Congress. This happened in 1977 and 1989. The Congress party received 34.5 per cent of the votes, but only 28.4 per cent of the seats in the 1977 election, when the Janata Party was created from the four main opposition parties. In 1989 also, Congress got only 36.3 per cent of the seats while receiving as much as 39.5 per cent of the votes. This was because of the tight electoral cooperation between the National Front and BJP on the one hand, and the National Front and Left Front on the other. Since the 1996 elections, Congress has been able to get only 26 to 29 per cent of the votes and only 20 to 25 per cent of the seats. It is obvious from this that the formation of coalitions has become important since the end of the 1980s, and especially after the 1996 election.

At present, the most successful party in forming coalitions is the BJP. The BJP-led coalition, the National Democratic Alliance, continues to maintain a safe majority in the Lok Sabha. Although the National Democratic Alliance appears to be a loose combination of BJP and anti-Congress regional or

State based parties, the functioning of the Alliance government, led by A. B. Vajpayee, has not been as unstable as expected. The stability of the Alliance stands in contrast with the first BJP-led coalition government in 1998, which collapsed the next year.

The BJP is generally known as a party of Hindu nationalism. There are many parties in the National Democratic Alliance which oppose radical Hindu nationalism. The BJP, at least ostensibly, has been trying to soften its radical Hindu nationalist image in order to woo other parties into coalitions. The efforts by the BJP to change its appearance into that of a moderate and responsible party may have acted as a pretext for other parties, which were eager to share power at the Centre, to choose the BJP as a coalition partner. In addition, State-based regional parties have another reason for participating in coalitions in the Centre. In many States, especially the southern States, it is not the BJP but Congress which is their main contending rival in the State Legislative Assembly elections. Consequently, there is a good reason for the regional parties to cooperate with the BJP which is in power at the Centre, in order to counteract Congress.

Generally speaking, in the first-past-the post system, coalition formation can be a key factor in determining which parties are victorious in an election. There seems to be an institutional effect of the first-past-the post system, where the pressure of elections works to promote the formation of coalitions among relatively small parties. The formation of coalitions at the Central level is closely related to that at the State Legislative Assembly level, which is a demand of the first-past-the-post system. The rule known as Duverger's law seems to work in coalition formation, and this will be examined later.

One final thing should be explained concerning the relation between State Legislative Assembly and Lok Sabha elections. Up until 1967, general elections for both State Legislative Assembly and Lok Sabha were conducted simultaneously for the convenience of both parties and voters. But since the 1971 Lok Sabha elections, the elections for State Legislative Assembly and for the Lok Sabha have been basically separated. The main reason for this is said to have been the political motivation of the ruling party. The Congress government led by Indira Gandhi thought that it would be advantageous to separate the Lok Sabha election from the backdrop of the State Legislative Assembly elections, which were fought on the basis of local politics. For a nationally popular leader such as Indira Gandhi, it would be easy to gain the support of voters when they were not under the influence of regional politics. These expectations were not betrayed. She won a massive victory in the Lok Sabha election in 1971 on the slogan of "Garibi Hatao."

Notes

- ¹ See, Kothari, Rajini. 1964. "The Congress 'System' in India." *Asian Survey*, Vol. IV, no. 12, December; Morris-Jones, W. H. 1964. *The Government and Politics of India*. London: Hutchison, pp. 148–179.
- ² Concerning this, see, Dua, B.D. 1994. "The Prime Minister and the Federal System." in Manor, James (ed.). *Nehru to the Nineties—The Changing Office of Prime Minister in India*. London: Hurst & Company.
- ³ Sen, Kunal and Rajendra R. Vaidya. 1996. "Political Budget Cycles in India." *Economic and Political Weekly*, 27 July.
- ⁴ Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964) consolidated his leading position within the Indian National Congress, not in 1947 but in 1950, when S. V. Patel, then Home Minister and the most influential figure in Congress, died.
- ⁵ From 1920, the Congress party had supported the idea of reorganising the States on the basis of major languages. But Nehru government was not eager to implement the reorganisation until the early 1950s, because his government feared that the language-based reorganisation might provoke regional sentiments of nationalism and eventually result in political destabilisation and, ultimately, the Balkanisation of the nascent Indian federation.
- ⁶ States Reorganisation Commission (Government of India). 1955. *Report of the States Reorganisation Commission*. New Delhi: Government of India Press.
- ⁷ See for example, All-India Congress Committee. 1949. *Report of the Congress Agrarian Reforms Committee*. Madras: Madras Publishing House.
- ⁸ Government of India. 1956. "Industrial Policy Resolution." The text is reprinted in Planning Commission. 1956. *Second Five Year Plan*. New Delhi, Annexure, pp. 43–50.
- ⁹ Congress (R) = Congress (Requisition). Congress (O) = Congress (Organisation). Indira Gandhi's group "requisitioned" in November 1969, a meeting of AICC of its own factional members in order to establish their leadership and split the Congress party. Concerning the process of split see, Singh, Mahendra Prasad. 1981. *Split in a Predominant Party: The Indian National Congress in 1969*. New Delhi: Abhinav Publications.
- ¹⁰ See, Shah, Ghanshyam. 1977. *Protest Movements in Two Indian States: A Study of the Gujarat and Bihar Movements*. Delhi: Ajanta.
- ¹¹ Concerning the failure of the Five Year Plan strategy and the process of political economy, see, Frankel, Francine. 1978. *India's Political Economy 1947–1977—The Gradual Revolution*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press; Nayar, Baldev Raj. 1989. *India's Mixed Economy—The Role of Ideology and Interest in Its Development*. Bombay: Popular Prakashan; Jannuzi, F. Tomasson. 1994. *India's Persistent Dilemma: The Political Economy of Agrarian Reform*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- ¹² On the repressive aspects of the Emergency, see, Government of India. 1978. *Shah Commission of Inquiry, I, II & III*. Delhi: Government of India Press.
- ¹³ See, for example, Limaye, Madhu. 1994. *Janata Party Experiment: An Insider's Account of Opposition Politics: 1977–80, Volume Two*. New Delhi: B. R. Publishing.
- ¹⁴ "Congress (I)" = Congress (Indira).
- ¹⁵ An opinion poll conducted just before the 1984 General Election revealed the

- widespread psychological impact of Indira Gandhi's assassination all over India. In the poll, 47% of respondents (11,297 persons) answered that "National integration" was the most important issue. The prevalence of such a sense of political crisis all over India was quite unusual in ordinary times, and might have led to the situation where the electorate tended to vote for Congress all over India uniformly. See, *India Today*. 1984. "Opinion Poll: The Rajiv Whirlwind." 31 December.
- ¹⁶ See, for example, Shourie, A. et al. (eds.). 1985. *The Assassination and After*. New Delhi: Roli Books International.
- ¹⁷ Kohli, Atul. 1989. "Politics of Economic Liberalization in India." *World Development*, Vol. 17, no. 3.
- ¹⁸ Kohli, Atul. 1990. *Democracy and Discontent: India's Growing Crisis of Governability*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. This work is a comparative examination of the Congress party institution between the 1960s and 1980s, on the basis of Weiner's study. See, Weiner, Myron. 1967. *Party Building in a New Nation: The Indian National Congress*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Also see, Rudolph, Lloyd I. and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph. 1987. *In Pursuit of Lakshmi: The Political Economy of Indian State*. Hyderabad: Orient Longman, Chapter 4.
- ¹⁹ Janata Dal was formed in 1988, from V.P. Singh's Jan Morcha, two factions of the Lok Dal, most member of the Janata Party, and others.
- ²⁰ After the 1980 Lok Sabha election, the old Jana Sangh group split from the Janata Party and became the "Bharatiya Janata Party."
- ²¹ See, Yadav, K.C. 1994. *India's Unequal Citizens: A Study of Other Backward Classes*. New Delhi: Manohar, Chapter 3.
- ²² See, *Frontline*. 1991. Sen, Abhijit and C. P. Chandrasekhar, "Verdict' 91—Going behind the figures." 19 July; *India Today*. 1991. "Sympathy Factor." 15 June.
- ²³ Ministry of Industry (Government of India). 1991. *Statement on Industrial Policy, July 24, 1991*. New Delhi: Veerendra Printers; Ministry of Commerce (Government of India). 1991. *Statement on Trade Policy, August 13 1991*. New Delhi: Veerendra Printers.
- ²⁴ Concerning the recent growth of the "Hindu nationalist movement", see, Andersen, Walter K. and Shridhar D. Damle. 1987. *The Brotherhood in Saffron: The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Hindu Revivalism*. New Delhi: Vistaar; Malik, Yogendra K. and V. B. Singh. 1994. *Hindu Nationalists in India—The Rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party*. Boulder: Westview Press; Basu, Tapan et al. 1993. *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags: A Critique of the Hindu Right*. New Delhi: Orient Longman; Jaffrelot, Christophe. 1996. *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India and Indian Politics 1925 to 1990s—Strategies of Identity-Building*. New Delhi: Viking; Ghosh, Partha S. 1999. *BJP and the Evolution of Hindu Nationalism—From Periphery to Centre*. New Delhi: Manohar; Hansen, Thomas Blom. 1999. *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- ²⁵ The manifesto, *An Agenda of National Democratic Alliance*, was a joint manifesto of the constituent parties. Basically, there were no party manifestos by the individual parties.
- ²⁶ See, National Democratic Alliance. 1999. *For a Proud, Prosperous India: An Agenda, National Democratic Alliance, Election Manifesto: Lok Sabha Election*,

1999. New Delhi.

- ²⁷ See, for example, the remarks by Kazi Syed Karimuddin (C. P. & Berar: Muslim) on 4 January 1949. Government of India. 1966. *Constituent Assembly Debates, Volume VII: Official Report (4-11-1948 to 8-1-1949)*. New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat; See another remark by Mr. Z. H. Lari on 25 May 1949 in the debates on "Report of Advisory Committee on Minorities, etc." Government of India. 1966. *Constituent Assembly Debates, Volume VIII: Official Report (16-5-1949 to 16-6-1949)*. New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat.
- ²⁸ There was an extreme argument that people should not be given the right to vote. However, the crux of argument was that negative incentives should be pushed onto the voters so that the illiterate people would force themselves to learn how to read and write within a few years. See, for example, the remarks by Pandit Thakur Dass Bhargava (East Punjab: General) on 4 January 1949. Government of India. 1966. *Constituent Assembly Debates, Volume VII, op. cit.*
- ²⁹ See, for example, the remarks by Lakshmi Narayan Sahu (Orissa: General) on 6 January 1949. Government of India. 1966. *Constituent Assembly Debates, Volume VII, op. cit.*
- ³⁰ See, for example, the remarks by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar on 4 January 1949. Government of India. *Constituent Assembly Debates, Volume VII, op. cit.*
- ³¹ Article 324, *The Constitution of India*.
- ³² In 1997, the Parliament passed a law making it mandatory to fill vacant seats within six months. Before that time it was not uncommon for by-elections to be delayed for a much longer period. See, Ali, Rehna. 2001. *The Working of Election Commission of India*. New Delhi: Jnanada Prakashan, p. 46
- ³³ Article 330, *The Constitution of India*.
- ³⁴ There was one triple-member constituency in the 1952 Lok Sabha election in West Bengal, with one SC and one ST candidate elected in addition to one general candidate.
- ³⁵ In the case of the 1957 election, out of 31 ST constituencies, 16 were single member constituencies reserved only for STs. Election Commission of India. 1957. *Delimitation of Parliamentary and Assembly Constituencies Order, 1956*. New Delhi, pp. 1-96
- ³⁶ M. S. Gill, former Chief Election Commissioner, has insisted on the introduction of representation for women in the electoral system, because "It is the political parties who are not giving adequate space to women in the political arena." *The Hindu*. 2003. 6 March, "Immediate decision on women's quota bill needed: Gill." See, <http://www.hinduonnet.com/THEHINDU/2003/03/06/stories/2003030602531300.htm> (accessed: 9 March 2003).
- ³⁷ 7(1A). Government of India. *The Representation of the People Act, 1950*, inserted on September 1st, 1979.
- ³⁸ Article 13 D of Part II B, *ibid.*
- ³⁹ Article 82. Government of India. *The Constitution of India*.
- ⁴⁰ Inserted by *The Constitution (Forty-second Amendment) Act, 1976*, in Article 82.
- ⁴¹ Calculated by the author with data of the Election Commission of India for 1977 and 1999 Lok Sabha election.
- ⁴² 33(7). Government of India. *The Representation of the People Act, 1951*, made in 1996.
- ⁴³ The evil of defections became especially evident after the 1967 election, which led

to the resolution of the Lok Sabha to establish a committee to investigate the problem of the unhealthy development of defections. See, Ministry of Home Affairs (Government of India). 1969. *Report of the Committee on Defections*. New Delhi: Government of India Press.

- ⁴⁴ 29A of *The Representation of the People Act, 1951*, *op. cit.*, which was inserted on 15 June, 1989
- ⁴⁵ 16A of Election Commission of India. *The Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968*, which was inserted on 18 February, 1994.
- ⁴⁶ See, Ali, *op. cit.*, pp. 58–59.
- ⁴⁷ On the evolution and functioning of *The Representation of The People Act, 1951*, see, for example, Jhingta, Hans Raj. 1996. *Corrupt Practices in Elections—A Study Under The Representation of The People Act, 1951*. New Delhi: Deep & Deep.
- ⁴⁸ Section 123 of *The Representation of The People Act, 1951*, *op. cit.*, as amended up to 15 March, 1989.
- ⁴⁹ It was revised in December 1997 by Election Commission of India. *The Conduct of Elections (Amendment) Rules, 1997*.
- ⁵⁰ Actual election expenditures generally are several times more than the statutory upper limit. See, for example, *India Today*. 1996. Rekhi, Shefali and G.C. Shekhar, “Funding the Politician.” 31 March.
- ⁵¹ In recent elections, the “winnability” of candidates has been critical for any party. There is said to be a phenomenon in recent elections where “a person with a criminal background and a Police-record, irrespective of his political symbol, has 75 per-cent better chances of winning election against a non-police-record candidate.” See, Ali, *ibid.*, p.227.
- ⁵² Ministry of Home Affairs (Government of India). 1993. *Vohra Committee Report*, (Chairman: N. N. Vohra, Home Secretary). New Delhi, p. 2.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 5
- ⁵⁴ It was made under Article 324 of the Constitution. See, Election Commission of India. 2000. *Proposals on Electoral Reforms Sent by Election Commission of India to the Government of India from July 1998 to June 2000*. New Delhi: Publication Division (Election Commission of India), p. 11.
- ⁵⁵ See, *ibid.*, pp. 24–6.
- ⁵⁶ See, for example, Sridharan, E. 1997. *Toward Collective Action for State Funding of Elections? A Comparative Perspective on Possible Options*, Center for Institutional Reform and The Informal Sector (University of Maryland); Ministry of Law, Justice and Company Affairs (Government of India). 1999. *Report of the Committee on State Funding of Elections*. New Delhi: Government of India Press.