

- Electoral Politics

## Electoral Politics

Electoral politics is the process through which people in a democracy choose their representatives by voting in elections. It is a fundamental feature of democratic governance, allowing citizens to select leaders who will make laws, form governments, and implement policies on their behalf.

### Why Elections?

In any democracy, elections are held regularly to ensure that the government reflects the will of the people. Elections are also conducted in some non-democratic countries, but democratic elections have specific characteristics that make them free and fair.

In elections, voters make important choices:

- Choosing who will make laws for them.
- Deciding who will form the government and take major decisions.
- Selecting the party whose policies will guide governance and lawmaking.

### What Makes an Election Democratic?

Democratic elections have certain minimum conditions:

- **Universal Adult Franchise:** Every adult citizen has the right to vote, and every vote has equal value.
- There must be multiple political parties and candidates to choose from, ensuring freedom to contest and a wide choice for voters.
- Elections must be held at regular intervals.
- The candidate preferred by the people should be elected.
- Elections should be conducted in a free and fair atmosphere.

### Is Political Competition Good?

Political competition is essential for elections to be meaningful. It usually occurs among political parties and candidates at the constituency level. While competition has some drawbacks, it also has important benefits.

**Demerits:**

- Can create disunity and excessive party politics.

- May lead to allegations and use of unfair tactics.
- Long-term policies may be difficult to formulate.
- Discourages good people from entering politics.

#### Merits:

- Forces the ruling party to perform well to retain power.
- Encourages parties and leaders to be responsive to people's needs.

## What is Our System of Elections?

India conducts general elections every five years for the Lok Sabha (House of the People) and the Vidhan Sabha (State Legislative Assembly). Sometimes, midterm elections are held if these bodies are dissolved before their term ends.

## Electoral Constituencies

India follows an area-based system of representation. The country is divided into electoral constituencies, each electing one representative.

- There are 543 Lok Sabha constituencies, each electing a Member of Parliament (MP).
- States are divided into Assembly constituencies, each electing a Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA).
- Local bodies like Panchayats and Municipalities are divided into wards, each electing one member.

## Reserved Constituencies

The Constitution of India provides for reserved constituencies to ensure representation for Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and women. One-third of seats in rural and urban local bodies are reserved for women candidates.

## Voters' List

The Electoral Roll, commonly known as the Voters' List, is prepared before elections and contains the names of all eligible voters. The Election Photo Identity Card (EPIC) system issues photo ID cards to voters, though carrying EPIC is not mandatory if other valid identity proofs are presented.

## Nomination of Candidates

Any Indian citizen eligible to vote can become a candidate, provided they are at least 25 years old. Political parties nominate candidates who receive party symbols and support. Candidates must submit a nomination form and a security deposit.

## Election Campaign

Election campaigns allow parties and candidates to present their ideas and persuade voters. The Model Code of Conduct regulates campaigns to ensure fairness, prohibiting bribery, threats, use of government resources, and excessive spending.

## Polling and Counting of Votes

On election day, voters cast their votes at polling booths using Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs). After polling, EVMs are sealed and stored securely. Votes are counted on a fixed date, and results are declared promptly.

## Independent Election Commission

The Election Commission of India is an independent authority responsible for conducting free and fair elections. It oversees the entire election process, enforces the Model Code of Conduct, and can order re-polls if unfair practices are detected.

## Popular Participation

Voter turnout measures participation. In India, voter turnout is generally high, including among poor and underprivileged groups. People believe elections allow them to influence policies and hold leaders accountable.

## Acceptance of Election Outcome

India's elections are generally accepted as free and fair. Defeated parties usually accept results as the people's verdict. Incumbents often lose elections, and candidates with criminal backgrounds or who buy votes often lose.

## Challenges to Free and Fair Elections

- Wealthy candidates have an unfair advantage.
- Criminal elements influence candidate selection.
- Political nepotism affects ticket distribution.
- Major parties often have similar policies, limiting voter choice.
- Smaller parties and independents face disadvantages.

## Glossary

- **Elections:** The process by which people choose their representatives at regular intervals.
- **Franchise:** The right of people to vote and elect representatives.
- **Voters' List:** The official list of eligible voters prepared before elections.
- **Election Photo Identity Card (EPIC):** A photo ID issued to voters for identification during elections.
- **Campaign:** Efforts by candidates and parties to persuade voters.
- **Code of Conduct:** Rules governing the behavior of parties and candidates during elections.
- **Election Manifesto:** A document outlining a party's policies and programs before elections.
- **Incumbent:** The current holder of a political office.

## Example

Analyse the concept of one person, one vote, one value.

Answer:

1. The Indian Constitution guarantees equal representation rights to all citizens.
2. All citizens aged 18 and above can vote; those 25 and above can contest elections.
3. Universal Adult Franchise means every person has one vote of equal value.
4. Despite differences in wealth, education, or status, all citizens deserve equal say in political decisions.

## Practice Set

### Easy

- What is the meaning of Universal Adult Franchise?
- Who can become a candidate in Indian elections?

### Moderate

- Explain the role of the Election Commission in Indian elections.
- What are reserved constituencies and why are they important?

### Challenging

- Discuss the merits and demerits of political competition in elections.
- Identify challenges faced in ensuring free and fair elections in India.

## Answer Key

- **Universal Adult Franchise:** The right of all adult citizens to vote, with each vote having equal value.
- **Candidate Eligibility:** Any citizen aged 25 or above who is eligible to vote.
- **Election Commission Role:** Conducts and supervises elections, enforces the Model Code of Conduct, and ensures fairness.
- **Reserved Constituencies:** Seats reserved for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and women to ensure fair representation.
- **Merits of Political Competition:** Encourages government accountability and better performance.
- **Demerits of Political Competition:** Can cause disunity and discourage good candidates.
- **Challenges:** Influence of money and criminal elements, nepotism, limited voter choice, and disadvantages for smaller parties.

## Quick Reference

- **Election:** Process of choosing representatives.
- **Universal Adult Franchise:** Equal voting rights for all adults.
- **Election Commission:** Independent body managing elections.
- **Reserved Constituencies:** Seats set aside for marginalized groups.
- **Model Code of Conduct:** Rules for fair election campaigns.
- **Electronic Voting Machines:** Devices used to cast and count votes.

