

Most democracies today rule through representatives and these are chosen through elections. People choose representatives who make laws for them. These representatives also form the govt. and take major decisions.

Note

No elections, no democracy: All the citizens in modern democracy cannot participate in administration. This function is performed by their elected representatives. Only through election we can get rid of corrupt, criminal and anti-people government and change it for a new government. It is through elections that voters can maintain their control over executive and prevent them from becoming despotic and autocratic. Without elections no democratic government can be formed.

Election Commission is an autonomous body provided for in the constitution of India and assigned the responsibility of conducting free and fair elections which are the backbone of democracy.

What Makes an Election Democratic?

- Both democratic as well as non-democratic countries hold elections.
- In a democratic election some minimum conditions should be fulfilled like one person, one vote and every vote has the same value; Elections should be held after regular intervals.
- Parties and candidates should be free to contest elections and the voters should have a real choice.
- Elections should be conducted in a free and fair manner.

Is it Good to have Political Competition?

Election is a form of political competition among political parties; Electoral competition has many merits and demerits:

Demerits of Electoral Competition

- It creates disunity and factorisations.
- It prevents the formation of sensible long-term policies.
- Due to this some good people may not enter this arena as competitors.

Merits of Electoral Competition

- Our constitution framers opted for free competition in elections.
- They felt this would work better in the long run, as in the real world, people want power and to remain in power.
- Political competition is way in which political leaders may be rewarded or punished by the people for their performance or non-incentives.
- Political competition provides incentives to political parties and leaders.
- If they work for the people chances of their victory will increase.
- So even if power is the only motivation, even then they will serve the people.

Our System of Elections

- Elections are held in India for Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha after every 5 years.
- Their term lasts for 5 years after which both the Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha are dissolved.
- Elections for the Lok Sabha are known as General Elections.

Electoral Constituencies

- Voters in a geographical area who elect a representative to the legislative bodies are known as electoral constituencies; each constituency elects one representative.
- For the Lok Sabha elections, the country is divided into 543 constituencies.
- Similarly, each state is divided into a certain number of assembly constituencies.
- Each village or town is divided into several 'wards' that are like constituencies.

Electoral Politics: Why election are useful and necessary?; the importance of electoral competition; the difference between democratic and non-democratic elections; the stages of elections and the role of the Election Commission (EC) in ensuring free and fair elections.

Reserved Constituencies

- In order to ensure the election of weaker sections of society, to ensure the voice of the deprived section, and to ensure

that our democracy is truly representative we have a special system of reserved constituencies.

- Some constituencies are reserved for people belonging to the Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST).
- Currently 79 seats are reserved for SC and 41 for ST, a number in proportion to their share in the total population.
- This was extended to panchayat and corporation even for the OBC (Other Backward Castes).
- Similarly, one-third seats are reserved for women in rural and urban local bodies.

Voters List

- The list of those eligible to vote is prepared much before the election. This is officially called the Electoral Roll or Voters List; From time to time the Electoral Rolls are updated and revised.
- All citizens aged 18 years and above can vote in an election regardless of his/her caste, religion or gender. Some criminals and persons with unsound mind can be denied the right to vote.

Nomination of Candidates

- Anybody who is a voter can be a candidate except that a candidate has to be at least 25 years old.
- Political parties nominate their candidate; every candidate has to fill a nomination form and give some money as a security deposit.

Election Campaign

- People must know in an election about the candidates of political parties and their policies in order to make the right choice.
- This is done by election campaign when candidates contact their voters.
- This contact is through door to door campaigning, TV news, debates and discussions, slogans, posters and advertisements.
- Candidates and political parties try to focus public attention on major issues; They hold rallies address the people and use catchy slogans; However, they have to follow a moral code of conduct.

Polling and Counting of Votes

- On the day of the election the voters go to their polling booth and cast their vote.
- Nowadays electronic voting machines (EVMs) are used to record votes; The machine shows the name of the candidate and the party symbol.

- The voter has to press the button against the name of the candidate whom he/she wants to give her vote.
- The EVMs are sealed and opened on the day of counting of votes; this is reported by television channels, radio and newspapers.
- Within a few hours it becomes clear as to who the winner is and who will form the new government.

Independent Election Commission

- Elections are conducted by an independent and very powerful EC which enjoys the same kind of independence that the judiciary enjoys.
- EC takes decision on every aspect of control and conduct of elections.

Functions of Election Commission

- Announcement of elections and declaration of results.
- Implementing the code of conduct and punishing its violation by any political party or candidate.
- Prevents misuse of governmental power, can transfer government officials.
- When on election duty government officers work under the control of the EC and not the government.
- Can order re-polling.

Popular Participation

India has a high voter turnout as illiterate and underprivileged people vote in larger proportion sections. Common people in India attach a lot of importance to elections as they feel that their vote matters.

Acceptance of Election Outcome

- Ruling parties routinely lose elections both at National and State level.
- Mostly the electoral outcomes are accepted as people's verdict by the losing party.

Challenges to Free and Fair Elections

- Candidates and parties with a lot of money do have an unfair advantage over smaller parties and independents.
- Concern over number of criminals entering politics and contesting elections.
- Some families dominate in the elections.
- Lack of choice to the voters in policies and candidates.
- **Booth capturing:** Supporters or hired musclemen of party or a candidate gain physical control of a polling booth and cast false votes by threatening everyone or by preventing genuine voters from reaching the polling booth.

- **Code of conduct:** A set norms and guidelines to be followed by political parties and contesting candidates during election time.
- **Constituency:** Voters in geographical area who elect a representative to the legislative bodies.
- **Incumbent:** The current holder of a political office. Usually the choice for the voters in elections is between the incumbent party or candidate and those who oppose them.
- **Level playing field:** Condition in which all parties and candidates contesting in an election have equal opportunities to appeal for votes and to carry out election campaign.

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

Multiple Choice Questions

1. Which of these is not a good reason to say that Indian elections are democratic?
 - a. India has the largest number of voters in the world.
 - b. India's Election Commission is very powerful.
 - c. In India, everyone above the age of 18 has a right to vote.
 - d. In India, the losing parties accept the electoral verdict.
2. The Voter's List is prepared by
 - a. the Panchayats and Municipalities
 - b. the Central Government
 - c. the Legislature
 - d. the Election Commission
3. At present the number of Lok Sabha constituencies are in the state of

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|--------|--------|
| a. 550 | b. 545 |
| c. 543 | d. 540 |
4. The maximum number of Lok Sabha constituencies are in which state?

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| a. Andhra Pradesh | b. Bihar |
| c. Maharashtra | d. Uttar Pradesh |
5. Who gave the slogan 'Garibi hatao'?

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| a. Jawaharlal Nehru | b. Lal Bahadur Shastri |
| c. Indira Gandhi | d. Rajiv Gandhi |
6. Which of the following methods are not allowed by the election law?
 - a. bribing or threatening voters
 - b. appealing in the name of caste or religion
 - c. using government resources to campaign
 - d. all of the above
7. Which of the following is not a function of the EC?
 - a. nominating candidates
 - b. scrutiny of nomination
 - c. allotting symbols
 - d. enforcing moral code of conduct
8. An incumbent representative is:
 - a. the representative of the opposition parley
 - b. the sitting representative
 - c. the future representative
 - d. the previous representative
9. Which of the following statements is not true?
 - a. Poor people are not interested in voting.
 - b. Poor people vote in high numbers.
 - c. Common people attach lot of importance to their vote.
 - d. Voting percentage in India is high.
10. The number of constituencies reserved for Scheduled Castes in India is:

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|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| a. 80 | b. 79 | c. 75 | d. 72 |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|
11. The number of constituencies reserved for Scheduled Tribes in India is:

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|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| a. 50 | b. 49 | c. 45 | d. 41 |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|
12. During election the voters make many choices, Select the correct options.
 - (i) Who will make laws for them?
 - (ii) Who will grant fundamental Rights?
 - (iii) Who will form the government and take major decisions?
 - (iv) Who will check the functioning of courts?

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| a. (i) and (iii) | b. Only (ii) |
| c. Only (iii) | d. Both (ii) and (iv) |
13. Which of the following statements about the reasons for conducting elections are false?
 - a. Elections enable people to judge the performance of the government.
 - b. People select the representative of their choice in an election.
 - c. Elections enable people to evaluate the performance of the judiciary.
 - d. People can indicate which policies they prefer.

14. Is it good to have political competition? Which of the following statement justify this?
- It creates a sense of disunity and factionalism.
 - Political competition helps to force political parties and leaders to serve people.
 - It gives a fair chance to people for the responsible government.
 - Political competition cause divisions and some ugliness.
15. Which of the following statements regarding elections and Election Commission hold true?
- Election Commission of India has enough powers to conduct free and fair elections in the country.
 - There is a high level of popular participation.
 - It is very easy for the party in power to win an election.
 - Many reforms are needed to make our elections completely free and fair.
- (i), (ii), and (iii)
 - (i), (ii) and (iv)
 - (i),(ii),(iii) and (iv)
 - Only (iii)
16. Which among the following is **not** correct?
- The Election Commission conducts all election for the Parliament and Assemblies
 - The Election Commission directs and controls the preparation of electoral rolls
 - The Election Commission cannot fix the election dates
 - The Election Commission does the scrutiny of nomination papers.
17. Analyse the following statements regarding the fair electoral practice?
- A minister flags off a new train in his constituency a week before polling day
 - A candidate promises that she will get a new train for her constituency if she is elected
 - Supporters of a candidate take the voters to a temple and make them take an oath that they will vote for him
 - The supporters of a candidate distribute blankets in slums in return for a promise for
18. Who appoints Chief Election Commissioner in India?
- The Governor
 - The President of India
 - The Chief Justice
 - The Prime Minister
19. Here are some facts on Indian election. Which of them reflect the weakness of our electoral system?
- The Lok Sabha has always has less than 10 percent women members
 - The Election Commission often refuses to accept the governments should be held.
 - The present Lok Sabha has more than 145 members whose assets are more than Rs. 1 crore
 - After losing an election the Chief Minister says “I respect the people’s verdict”.
- (i)
 - (iii)
 - (i) and (iii)
 - (ii) and (iv)
20. Which of the following sentiments about the reason for conducting elections are false?
- Elections enable people to judge the performance of the government
 - People select the representative of their choice in an election
 - Elections enables people to evaluate the performance of the judiciary
 - People can indicate which policies they prefer

ANSWERS

| 1. | 2. | 3. | 4. | 5. | 6. | 7. | 8. | 9. | 10. |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| a | d | c | d | c | d | a | b | a | b |
| 11. | 12. | 13. | 14. | 15. | 16. | 17. | 18. | 19. | 20. |
| d | a | c | c | b | c | b | b | c | c |