

ELECTIONS

The Voice of the People

Understanding How a Democracy Chooses Its Leaders

Time: 9 Hours

Political Science | Class 9

CBSE Curriculum

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this chapter, you will be able to:

- Identify the factors that highlight the importance of elections in a democracy.
- Categorise three types of electoral systems and list examples from around the world.
- Identify the major laws that govern the conduct of elections in India.
- Describe the main provisions of the Representation of the People Acts of 1950 and 1951.
- Define delimitation and explain its purpose in the Indian electoral system.
- Identify the role and functions of the Election Commission of India (ECI).
- Explain constituency, electoral roll, and the role of enumerators (BLOs).
- Understand the party system in India — national, state, and regional parties.
- Explain the meaning and features of a coalition government.
- Explain the key provisions of the Anti-Defection Law (Tenth Schedule).

1. Let Us Begin — A Nation Goes to Vote

Picture election day in your town. Schools are shut. Tricolour flags flutter on every street. Your grandmother, now 75, wakes before sunrise and says: 'I have voted in every election since 1952. I will not miss this one.'

Think of another scene — a farmer in a remote Rajasthan village. He has no electricity, struggles with water shortage, and his children walk ten kilometres to school. Yet today, he stands patiently in a queue at the polling booth. His vote, like the vote of the wealthiest businessperson in Mumbai, carries exactly the same weight: one.

That is the essence of democracy. And elections are its beating heart.

Reflect: Why do you think elections are called the 'festival of democracy' in India? What happens when a government is never voted out of power? Can a society be truly free if its leaders are not chosen by the people?

In this chapter, we will explore elections from every angle — why they matter, how votes are converted into power, who organises the world's largest democratic exercise, and what rules prevent elected representatives from betraying voters. By the time you finish this chapter, you will understand that your future vote is not merely a right — it is a powerful instrument of change.

2. Why Do Elections Matter? — The Importance of Elections in a Democracy

In a democracy, the government must be formed by the will of the people. But how does the government know what the people want? How do citizens choose their leaders without violence? The answer lies in free and fair elections.

Elections are not simply about casting a ballot. They are about accountability, representation, and peaceful transfer of power. Let us examine each reason carefully.

2.1 Elections Ensure Accountability

In a democracy, elected leaders are servants of the people — not masters. If a leader performs poorly, citizens can vote them out at the next election. This keeps leaders alert, responsible, and continuously working for the public good.

Real Example: In the 2004 General Elections, the ruling NDA government, despite predicting a comfortable victory, was voted out of power. Voters in rural India felt excluded from economic growth. The result sent an unambiguous message: no government can take citizens for granted.

2.2 Elections Give Citizens Political Power

Elections are the most powerful tool available to ordinary people. Rich or poor, educated or illiterate — every adult citizen has one vote of equal value. This principle, 'one person, one vote, one value,' is the bedrock of democratic equality.

2.3 Elections Provide Legitimate Government

A government that comes to power through free and fair elections has legitimacy — the moral authority to govern, because it has been chosen by the people. A government that seizes power through force or manipulation lacks this legitimacy and is never truly stable.

2.4 Elections Enable Peaceful Transfer of Power

One of India's greatest democratic achievements is the peaceful transfer of power from one party to another. India has seen governments of many different parties and coalitions — each transition happening through the ballot box, without military coups or violent takeovers. This is something to be genuinely proud of.

2.5 Elections Reflect Public Opinion

When voters choose a party, they also choose its platform — on education, health, taxation, and development. Elections act as a conversation between citizens and government. They tell the government what people expect.

2.6 Elections Protect Rights and Freedoms

As long as elections remain free and fair, citizens can protect all their other rights — because they can elect leaders who respect those rights, or remove leaders who do not. Elections are the ultimate safeguard of liberty.

2.7 Elections Promote National Integration

In a country as diverse as India — with 22 official languages, hundreds of dialects, and every major world religion — elections bring all citizens together around a single shared process. Regardless of background, every adult participates in the same exercise. Elections remind us that we are one democratic nation.

Did You Know? India conducts the largest elections in the world. In the 2024 General Elections, nearly 970 million people were eligible to vote — more than the combined population of Europe!

Summary — Why Elections Are Important:

Factor	What It Means
Accountability	Leaders can be voted out if they fail the public
Equality	Every adult gets one vote of equal value
Legitimacy	Elected government has a public mandate to govern
Peaceful Transfer	Power changes hands without violence or coups
Voice of the People	Citizens choose both leaders and policies
Rights Protection	Free elections safeguard all other democratic rights
National Integration	Diverse citizens unite around a shared democratic process

3. Electoral Systems — How Votes Become Power

Not all democracies elect their representatives in the same way. The method used to translate the votes cast by citizens into seats in a legislature is called an electoral system. Different countries use different systems — and each has distinct strengths and weaknesses.

There are three major types of electoral systems in the world today.

3.1 First Past the Post (FPTP)

How It Works

The country is divided into constituencies (geographic voting areas). Each constituency elects one representative. The candidate who gets the most votes in that constituency wins — even if they do not get more than half the votes. It is a simple race to the finish line.

An Illustration

Candidate	Party	Votes
Candidate A	Party X	45,000 WINNER
Candidate B	Party Y	35,000
Candidate C	Party Z	20,000

Candidate A wins with 45,000 votes — even though 55,000 people voted against them. In FPTP, a plurality (most votes) is enough, not a majority (more than half).

Countries Using FPTP

- India | United Kingdom | United States | Canada | Bangladesh

Advantages

- Simple and easy to understand — voters choose one candidate
- Usually produces stable single-party governments with clear majorities
- Strong, direct link between a voter and their local representative
- Results are declared quickly after polling closes

Disadvantages

- A party can win most seats with only 35–40% of total votes nationwide
- Millions of 'wasted' votes (votes for losing candidates have no effect)
- Smaller parties are chronically underrepresented
- Does not accurately reflect the true distribution of public opinion

3.2 Proportional Representation (PR)

How It Works

In Proportional Representation, seats are distributed to parties in proportion to the total votes they receive across the country. If a party wins 30% of votes, it gets approximately 30% of seats. Every vote truly counts.

Two Common PR Methods

1. Party List PR: Voters vote for a party, not an individual. Each party gets seats based on its share of votes and fills those seats from a pre-ranked list of candidates. Used in South Africa, Israel, and Sweden.
2. Single Transferable Vote (STV): Voters rank candidates in order of preference. Votes transfer when a candidate is eliminated. Used for India's Rajya Sabha elections and Presidential elections.

Countries Using PR

- Germany | South Africa | Israel | New Zealand | Sweden | Norway

Advantages

- More accurate reflection of voters' true preferences
- Smaller and newer parties get fair representation
- Very few wasted votes
- Encourages diverse voices and communities in parliament

Disadvantages

- Often leads to coalition governments, which can be unstable
- Voters may not have a direct relationship with a local representative
- More complex to understand and administer
- May lead to fragmented, deadlocked parliaments

3.3 Mixed Electoral System

How It Works

Some countries combine elements of both FPTP and PR. Part of the legislature is elected from single-member constituencies (FPTP), and the remaining seats are filled using party lists (PR). This attempts to get the best of both systems.

Countries Using Mixed Systems

- Germany — combines FPTP constituencies with nationwide PR lists
- Japan | Mexico | New Zealand | South Korea

Advantages

- Combines local representation (FPTP) with proportional fairness (PR)
- More parties get representation than in a pure FPTP system
- Retains the direct link between voters and their local representative

Comparison of Electoral Systems:

Feature	FPTP	Proportional Representation	Mixed
Simplicity	Very simple	Complex	Moderate
Representation	Local focus	National vote share	Both
Government Stability	Usually stable	Often coalition	Moderate

Wasted Votes	Many	Very few	Fewer than FPTP
India Uses?	YES (Lok Sabha, Assembly)	YES (Rajya Sabha, President)	No
Examples	India, UK, USA, Canada	South Africa, Israel, Sweden	Germany, Japan

India and PR: India uses FPTP for elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. However, elections to the Rajya Sabha, State Legislative Councils, and the offices of the President and Vice-President use Proportional Representation (Single Transferable Vote method).

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4. The Laws That Govern Elections in India

Free and fair elections do not happen by themselves. They require a strong legal framework — a set of laws, rules, and codes that every political party, candidate, and government official must follow. India has built one of the world's most comprehensive systems of election law.

4.1 The Constitution of India — The Supreme Framework

The Constitution itself provides the ultimate legal authority for elections in India:

Article	What It Provides
324	Establishes the Election Commission of India; vests superintendence, direction, and control of all elections in it
325	No person shall be excluded from the electoral roll on grounds of religion, race, caste, or sex — the principle of Universal Adult Suffrage
326	Elections to Lok Sabha and State Assemblies on the basis of adult suffrage — every citizen 18 years or older has the right to vote
327	Parliament has the power to make laws about elections to Parliament and State Assemblies
329	Courts cannot interfere with the electoral process; disputes can only be raised through an Election Petition after results are declared

4.2 The Representation of the People Act, 1950

This landmark law provides the groundwork for voter eligibility and the preparation of electoral rolls.

Key Provisions of RPA 1950

- Provides for the qualification of voters and preparation of electoral rolls
- Specifies the delimitation of constituencies and allocation of seats to States and Union Territories
- Defines voter qualification — any citizen above 18 years who is not disqualified by law
- Disqualifies from registration: non-citizens, persons of unsound mind, and those disqualified for corrupt or illegal practices
- Lays down procedures for preparation, revision, and correction of electoral rolls

In simple terms, the RPA 1950 answers the question: **'Who gets to vote?'**

4.3 The Representation of the People Act, 1951

While the 1950 Act focuses on who can vote, the 1951 Act governs every aspect of how elections are actually conducted. It is the comprehensive rulebook for the democratic game.

Key Provisions of RPA 1951

- Governs the conduct of elections to Parliament and State Assemblies
- Lays down qualifications and disqualifications for membership of Parliament and State Assemblies

- Defines and regulates corrupt practices — bribery, voter impersonation, booth capturing, intimidation
- Specifies limits on candidates' election expenditure
- Provides the procedure for filing election petitions and resolving election disputes
- Deals with recognition of political parties by the Election Commission
- Covers the counting of votes, declaration of results, and conduct of by-elections

In simple terms, the RPA 1951 answers the question: **'How are elections actually conducted, decided, and disputed?'**

Key Distinction: RPA 1950 = Who can vote and how voter lists are prepared. RPA 1951 = How elections are conducted, what is a corrupt practice, how disputes are settled.

4.4 Other Important Laws and Codes

- Model Code of Conduct (MCC): Issued by the ECI when elections are announced. Not a statute but enforced strictly. It prohibits use of government resources for campaigning, inciting voters on caste/religion lines, and voter bribery.
- Indian Penal Code / Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita: Sections covering election offences such as rigging, impersonation, and intimidation.
- Information Technology Act: Regulates social media misuse and spread of misinformation during elections.
- Anti-Defection Law (Tenth Schedule, 1985): Prevents elected members from switching parties after election. Discussed in detail in Section 10.

5. Delimitation — Drawing the Boundaries of Democracy

5.1 What Is Delimitation?

India is a vast country with a population of over 1.4 billion people spread across 28 states and 8 Union Territories. To ensure every citizen's vote carries equal weight, the country is divided into constituencies — geographical areas, each of which elects one representative to the legislature.

Delimitation is the process of fixing or redrawing the boundaries of these constituencies, based on the most recent Census data. As population shifts and grows unevenly, constituency boundaries must be updated — otherwise some constituencies would have far more voters than others, making certain votes effectively less powerful.

Why Delimitation Matters: A constituency mapped in 1976 may have had 500,000 voters. By 2025, the same area might have 1.5 million voters — while another constituency has remained at 400,000. This creates massive inequality in the value of each vote. Delimitation corrects this imbalance.

5.2 Purposes of Delimitation

1. Equalise the size of constituencies so that each has roughly the same number of voters — ensuring the principle of 'one person, one vote, one value' is genuinely equal.
2. Allocate reserved seats for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) as mandated by the Constitution, based on where these communities are concentrated.
3. Reflect population changes — states with higher population growth may receive more seats; those with slower growth may not.
4. Ensure geographic rationality — constituencies should be compact and should not unnecessarily cut across district or administrative boundaries.

5.3 The Delimitation Commission

What Is It?

The Delimitation Commission is a high-powered, independent body set up by the Central Government under the Delimitation Commission Act. It is responsible for redrawing the boundaries of all parliamentary and state assembly constituencies.

Composition

Member	Who They Are
Chairperson	A retired Judge of the Supreme Court of India (appointed by the President)
Ex-officio Member 1	Chief Election Commissioner of India
Ex-officio Member 2	State Election Commissioner of the concerned state

Key Features of the Delimitation Commission

- It is a quasi-judicial body — it has some powers similar to a court.

- Its orders CANNOT be challenged in any court of law, preventing political interference through litigation.
- It works completely independently, free from political pressure or government direction.
- It invites public objections and suggestions before finalising constituency boundaries.
- Its decisions are published in the Gazette of India and the concerned State Gazette.

History of Delimitation in India

Commission	Year	Key Note
1st Delimitation Commission	1952	Based on 1951 Census data
2nd Delimitation Commission	1963	Based on 1961 Census data
3rd Delimitation Commission	1973	Based on 1971 Census; total Lok Sabha seats fixed at 543
4th Delimitation Commission	2002–2008	Based on 2001 Census; Jammu & Kashmir excluded at the time
5th Delimitation (Expected)	Post-2026	Based on first Census after 2026; total seats may increase

The Seat Freeze: Since 1976, India froze the total number of Lok Sabha seats at 543 until after the 2026 Census. This was done because southern states — which had achieved better population control — feared losing seats to faster-growing northern states. After 2026, the total seat count may be revised — a topic of major ongoing debate.

5.4 Delimitation vs Reservation of Seats

Delimitation	Reservation of Seats
Redrawing the geographical boundaries of constituencies	Designating certain constituencies for SC/ST candidates only
Based on population data from the latest Census	Based on the proportion of SC/ST population in that area
Done by the independent Delimitation Commission	Decided as part of the delimitation exercise

6. The Election Commission of India — Guardian of Democracy

6.1 What Is the Election Commission of India?

The Election Commission of India (ECI) is a constitutional body established under Article 324 of the Constitution. It is an independent, permanent institution responsible for the superintendence, direction, and control of the entire electoral process in India.

Think of the ECI as the referee of the democratic game called elections. Without an impartial referee, players cheat, rules are broken, and the result loses legitimacy. The ECI ensures all participants follow the rules.

Article 324 (verbatim): 'The superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of the electoral rolls for, and the conduct of, all elections to Parliament and to the Legislature of every State and of elections to the offices of President and Vice-President shall be vested in the Election Commission.'

6.2 Composition of the Election Commission

The Election Commission currently consists of:

- The Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) — the head of the ECI
- Two Election Commissioners (ECs)

They are appointed by the President of India on the recommendation of a committee comprising the Prime Minister, a senior Cabinet Minister, and the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha. They serve for 6 years or until age 65, whichever is earlier.

The Chief Election Commissioner can be removed only through an impeachment process — requiring a majority of Parliament — providing security of tenure and ensuring complete independence from the government of the day.

6.3 Role and Functions of the Election Commission of India

A. Administrative Functions

- Preparation, revision, and maintenance of electoral rolls for all constituencies
- Issuing notification of elections and announcing election schedules
- Setting up polling booths and ensuring accessibility for differently-abled voters
- Issuing Voter Photo Identity Cards (EPIC/Voter ID) to all registered voters
- Appointing Returning Officers, Presiding Officers, and election staff

B. Regulatory Functions

- Recognising and de-recognising political parties as National or State parties
- Allotting reserved election symbols to parties and candidates
- Enforcing the Model Code of Conduct during election periods
- Fixing limits on campaign expenditure and monitoring compliance
- Monitoring campaign speeches and materials for violations

C. Quasi-Judicial Functions

- Deciding disputes about recognition of political parties
- Settling disputes about allotment of election symbols
- Hearing complaints about Model Code violations and taking action
- Recommending to the President or Governor on disqualification of elected members

D. Supervisory Functions

- Overseeing the entire election process from announcement to result declaration
- Deploying central armed forces in sensitive areas to ensure peaceful polling
- Managing EVMs (Electronic Voting Machines) and VVPAT machines across all polling booths
- Conducting Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) campaigns

6.4 How the ECI Ensures Its Independence

1. Security of tenure — CEC can only be removed by a Parliamentary process; not by the government alone.
2. Not subject to executive direction — the ECI answers to the Constitution, not to any ministry or department.
3. Financial independence — ECI's expenditure is charged to the Consolidated Fund of India, not subject to Parliamentary vote, so the budget cannot be used as a pressure tool.
4. Power to postpone elections — ECI can delay elections in case of violence, natural disaster, or any threat to free and fair polling.

6.5 Landmark Reforms Introduced by the ECI

Reform	What It Does
Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs)	Replaced paper ballots; tamper-resistant, produces fast results, reduces booth-capturing
VVPAT	Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail — after voting, voters see a paper slip confirming their choice for 7 seconds, enabling audit of results
NOTA	None of the Above — voters can reject all candidates; introduced in 2013 to allow formal expression of dissatisfaction
Voter ID Card (EPIC)	Electoral Photo Identity Card introduced by CEC T.N. Seshan in 1993 to reduce impersonation and voter fraud
C-VIGIL App	Citizens can report MCC violations with photos and GPS location; complaints resolved within 100 minutes
SVEEP Programme	Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation — drives awareness about voter registration and the importance of voting
National Voters' Day	25 January celebrated annually to encourage youth voter registration and civic participation

T.N. Seshan — The CEC Who Transformed Indian Elections: In the early 1990s, Indian elections were plagued by booth capturing, voter intimidation, and rampant bribery. T.N. Seshan, appointed CEC in 1990, used the full powers of Article 324 to strictly enforce the Model Code of Conduct, deploy security forces at polling booths, and penalise violators

regardless of their political connections. His tenure transformed the credibility of Indian elections.

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7. Constituencies, Electoral Rolls, and Enumerators

7.1 What Is a Constituency?

A constituency is a defined geographical area from which voters elect one representative to a legislative body. India's Lok Sabha has 543 constituencies — each electing one Member of Parliament.

Think of it this way: India is divided into 543 geographic blocks. Every block is a constituency. The voters within that block collectively elect one person to speak for them in Parliament.

Types of Constituencies in India

Type	Body Elected	Key Facts
Parliamentary Constituency	Lok Sabha MP	543 total; each is divided into several Assembly constituencies
Assembly Constituency (Vidhan Sabha)	State MLA	Approximately 4,120 across all states
SC-Reserved Constituency	MP/MLA from SC community	84 Lok Sabha seats are reserved for Scheduled Castes
ST-Reserved Constituency	MP/MLA from ST community	47 Lok Sabha seats are reserved for Scheduled Tribes

7.2 What Is an Electoral Roll?

An electoral roll (also called a voters' list) is the official, authoritative list of all citizens who are eligible to vote in a particular constituency. Only those whose names appear on the electoral roll of a constituency can vote there.

Information Contained in the Electoral Roll

- Full name of the voter
- Unique Voter ID number (EPIC number)
- Photograph of the voter
- Residential address
- Part number (the section of the roll the voter belongs to) and serial number within that part

How Is the Electoral Roll Prepared?

1. The Election Commission announces a schedule for updating the electoral roll.
2. Booth Level Officers (Enumerators) go door-to-door to verify and collect voter details.
3. New voters (those who have turned 18) register using Form 6.
4. Voters who have moved to a new address update their details using Form 8.
5. Names of deceased persons or those who have permanently moved away are removed.
6. A draft electoral roll is published; citizens can file objections or corrections.
7. The final electoral roll is published before elections.

Two Types of Electoral Roll Revision

- Summary Revision: Done annually, usually in January. Only additions, deletions, and corrections are made. Quick process.
- Special Revision: A comprehensive, door-to-door re-enumeration of the entire voter list. Done less frequently, but is thorough.

Are You Registered? If you turn 18 by 1st January of any year, you can register as a voter. Online registration is available at voters.eci.gov.in. Registering to vote is your first civic responsibility — do not miss it!

7.3 Who Is an Enumerator?

An enumerator — officially called a Booth Level Officer (BLO) — is a government official assigned to a specific polling booth area. Typically a schoolteacher or other government employee, their responsibilities include:

- Identifying and registering eligible new voters in their area
- Verifying existing voters' details during summary revisions
- Removing names of deceased persons or those who have permanently moved away
- Updating corrections in names, addresses, and photographs
- Spreading voter awareness and helping citizens with registration forms

Scale of the BLO System

Each Booth Level Officer is typically responsible for approximately 1,000 to 1,500 voters. Across India, hundreds of thousands of BLOs work throughout the year to keep voter lists accurate and up-to-date. They are the grassroots link between the Election Commission and the individual citizen.

8. The Party System in India

8.1 What Is a Political Party?

A political party is an organised group of people who share broadly similar political views and come together with the aim of winning elections, forming a government, and implementing their policies.

Political parties are essential to democracy because:

- They present policy choices to voters through election manifestos
- They organise governments after winning elections
- They provide structured opposition to check and scrutinise the ruling party
- They educate and mobilise citizens on political and social issues
- They aggregate the diverse interests of different communities and regions

8.2 Evolution of India's Party System

Period	Characteristic	Key Feature
1947–1967	Congress dominance	Indian National Congress won all general elections; described as the 'Congress System'
1967–1989	Challenge to dominance	Regional parties emerged; Emergency (1975–77); first non-Congress government (Janata Party, 1977)
1989–2014	Coalition Era	No single party won an outright majority; coalition governments became the norm
2014–present	Return to majority	BJP won outright majority in 2014 and 2019; leads coalition in 2024 after falling short of majority

8.3 Classification of Parties by the Election Commission of India

A. National Parties

A party is recognised as a National Party if it fulfils any ONE of the following criteria:

- Wins at least 2% of seats in the Lok Sabha (minimum 11 seats) from at least 3 different states, OR
- Secures at least 6% of valid votes in elections in 4 or more states AND wins at least 4 Lok Sabha seats, OR
- Is already recognised as a State Party in at least 4 states

Examples of current National Parties: BJP, INC, AAP, BSP, CPI(M), NCP, AITC.

National Party status brings significant benefits: a reserved symbol used across all states, free airtime on Doordarshan and All India Radio, and larger premises for party offices.

B. Recognised State Parties

A party is a State Party in a particular state if it:

- Wins at least 3% of total seats in the State Assembly (minimum 3 seats), OR
- Wins at least 1 Lok Sabha seat per 25 Lok Sabha seats allotted to that state, OR

- Secures 6% of valid votes and wins 1 Assembly or 1 Lok Sabha seat from the state, OR
- Secures 8% of the total valid votes in a State Assembly election

Examples: DMK (Tamil Nadu), Shiv Sena (Maharashtra), Samajwadi Party (Uttar Pradesh), TRS/BRS (Telangana).

C. Registered (Unrecognised) Parties

Most parties in India fall in this category. Registered with the ECI but not having met the criteria for State or National recognition. They can contest elections but do not receive the benefits of recognised parties.

8.4 Characteristics of India's Multi-Party System

- Numerous parties compete in elections at national and state level
- Different parties often dominate in different states, reflecting regional diversity
- Alliances and coalitions are common, especially at the national level
- The party system reflects India's enormous social, linguistic, religious, and regional diversity
- Parties range from national giants like BJP and Congress to single-state regional parties with focused local agendas

Think About It: Why does India have so many political parties? Is a multi-party system good or bad for democracy? Can smaller regional parties serve an important democratic function even if they never form a government at the national level?

9. Coalition Government — When No One Wins Outright

9.1 What Is a Coalition Government?

A coalition government is formed when no single political party wins enough seats to form a government on its own — i.e., it does not achieve an outright majority in the legislature. In such cases, two or more parties come together, agree on a shared programme, and jointly form the government.

In India's Lok Sabha with 543 seats, a party needs 272 seats (a simple majority) to form the government. When no party reaches this number, parties form alliances, and the leader of the largest alliance is invited by the President to form the government.

9.2 How a Coalition Forms

1. General elections are held. No single party wins 272+ seats.
2. The President invites the leader of the single largest party or pre-election alliance to try to form the government.
3. Parties negotiate: They discuss portfolio allocation (which party gets which ministries), agree on a Common Minimum Programme (CMP) — a shared policy agenda — and sign formal agreements.
4. The coalition is sworn in. Its stability depends on all coalition partners continuing to support the government in Parliament.

9.3 Key Features of Coalition Governments

- Formed by multiple parties: Two or more parties with different ideologies come together around agreed shared goals.
- Common Minimum Programme: Coalition partners agree on a minimum shared policy agenda; they may differ on other issues.
- Portfolio allocation: Ministerial posts are distributed among partners proportionally to their seat strength.
- Outside support: Some parties may support the government in Parliament without formally joining the cabinet.
- Conditional stability: If a major partner withdraws support, the government may fall and fresh elections may be necessary.
- Consensus-based decision-making: Major policy decisions require agreement among partners, which can slow governance.

9.4 Famous Coalitions in India

Coalition	Period	Key Partners	Prime Minister
National Front	1989–91	Janata Dal + regional parties	V.P. Singh
United Front	1996–98	Multiple regional parties	H.D. Deve Gowda / I.K. Gujral
NDA (1st)	1999–2004	BJP + 24 alliance parties	Atal Bihari Vajpayee

UPA (1st & 2nd)	2004–2014	INC + regional parties; outside support from Left	Manmohan Singh
NDA (3rd)	2024–present	BJP + TDP + JD(U) + others	Narendra Modi

9.5 Advantages and Disadvantages of Coalition Governments

Advantages	Disadvantages
Represents diverse regional and social opinions	Governments can be less stable; may fall suddenly
No single party can dominate all policy	Smaller partners may hold the government 'hostage'
Regional parties can voice local concerns at national level	Slow decision-making due to the need for consensus
Encourages compromise and democratic discussion	Conflicting ideologies may cause policy paralysis
Reflects India's extraordinary diversity	Small parties may demand influence disproportionate to their vote share

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10. The Anti-Defection Law — Staying True to Your Mandate

10.1 What Is Defection?

Imagine you voted for a candidate who represented Party A. After the election, that very candidate switches to Party B — your vote was effectively cast for someone who now belongs to a different party. This act of switching parties after being elected is called defection or 'floor crossing.'

Defection became a catastrophic problem in India after the 1967 elections. Many elected members switched parties — sometimes multiple times in a single year — in exchange for money, ministerial posts, or other personal benefits.

Aaya Ram, Gaya Ram: Haryana MLA Gaya Lal changed his party affiliation three times within just 15 hours on 24 August 1967. First to Congress, then back to Independents, then to Congress again. This gave rise to the phrase 'Aaya Ram, Gaya Ram' — meaning a politician who switches parties at will for personal gain. The incident highlighted the urgent need for legal protection against defection.

10.2 What Is the Anti-Defection Law?

The Anti-Defection Law was enacted through the 52nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1985, which added the Tenth Schedule to the Constitution of India. It came into force in 1986.

The law's core purpose is to prevent elected members from switching parties after their election, thereby protecting political stability and honouring the voters' mandate.

10.3 Key Provisions of the Tenth Schedule

A. When Is a Member Disqualified?

An elected member faces disqualification from their legislative seat if:

1. They voluntarily give up membership of their political party. Note: Even making public statements against the party or participating in another party's activities may be treated as 'voluntarily giving up membership.'
2. They vote or abstain from voting in the legislature contrary to a direction issued by their party, without obtaining prior permission and without the party condoning the action.
3. An independent (non-party) member joins a political party after their election.
4. A nominated member joins a political party more than 6 months after taking their seat.

B. Exceptions — When Disqualification Does NOT Apply

The Tenth Schedule provides two important exceptions:

3. Merger: If at least two-thirds (2/3) of the total members of a legislative party merge with another party, this is a valid merger — not defection. All members of the merging faction are protected from disqualification.
4. Speaker / Chairman Election: A member elected as Speaker or Chairman of a legislature may resign from their party. If they later resign the speakership, they may rejoin the party.

C. Who Decides on Disqualification?

- In Parliament — the Speaker of the Lok Sabha or Chairman of the Rajya Sabha decides disqualification questions
- In State Legislatures — the Speaker or Chairman of the concerned Assembly or Council

A Controversy: The Speaker is typically a member of the ruling party. This creates a potential conflict of interest in deciding disqualification cases involving the ruling party's own members. The Supreme Court has held that judicial review of the Speaker's decisions is permissible, especially when there are unreasonable delays.

10.4 Why Was the Anti-Defection Law Necessary?

- Without the law, governments could be toppled easily by buying elected members — political instability would be constant.
- Elected members could betray the voters who elected them on a party ticket.
- Unstable governments could not implement long-term policies for development.
- Money and muscle power would dominate political life even after elections.
- The voters' mandate — the result they voted for — would be routinely violated.

10.5 Strengths and Limitations of the Anti-Defection Law

Strengths	Limitations and Criticisms
Prevents political instability caused by arbitrary party-switching	Speaker's role as decision-maker is a conflict of interest
Protects and respects the voters' mandate	The merger exception (2/3 rule) can enable organised, large-scale defections
Discourages horse-trading and political corruption	Suppresses free voting — members cannot vote their conscience against the party line
Promotes party discipline and programme-based governance	Delays in disqualification hearings can be used strategically by the ruling party

11. Think Deeper — Questions for the Critical Mind

Good education is not just about learning facts — it is about asking hard questions. Here are some challenging questions about elections and democracy. Discuss them with your class, debate them with friends, and form your own reasoned opinions.

Can money corrupt elections? How does wealth inequality affect democratic equality?

India limits campaign expenditure per candidate — but enforcement is extremely difficult. Candidates often spend far more than the legal limit. When the wealthy can pour crores into advertising, rallies, and voter gifts, does it give them an unfair advantage over a poor but capable candidate? Is political equality possible when economic inequality is so vast?

Is the FPTP system the best for India? Should India consider Proportional Representation?

Under FPTP, a party can win a comfortable majority of seats with only 37–40% of the total votes cast. Crores of votes for losing candidates have no effect on the final outcome. Would a Proportional Representation system more accurately reflect the true preferences of Indian voters? Or would it lead to permanent coalition paralysis?

Should voting be made compulsory in India?

In Australia, voting is mandatory and carries a fine for non-compliance. In India, voter turnout varies — some elections see 80%+ participation, others see below 55%. Would compulsory voting make democracy more representative? Or would it violate individual freedom by forcing people to participate in a process they wish to abstain from?

Should people with serious criminal charges be barred from contesting elections?

A significant number of elected MPs and MLAs in India have serious criminal cases pending against them. The RPA 1951 disqualifies someone only after conviction, not merely upon being charged. Should candidates with serious pending charges (murder, rape, kidnapping) be ineligible to contest? Or does this risk being misused to eliminate political opponents through fabricated criminal cases?

Is the Anti-Defection Law truly democratic?

The Anti-Defection Law prevents elected representatives from voting freely on legislation — they must vote with their party or face disqualification. Some argue this reduces a legislature member to a rubber stamp of their party leadership. Should an MP who genuinely believes a bill is harmful to their constituency be able to vote against it without fear of disqualification? Or would that open the door to legislative instability and corruption?

12. Case Studies — Learning from Real Democratic Moments

Case Study 1: Bihar 2005 — When Democracy Needed Two Rounds

In February 2005, Bihar held state assembly elections. The result was a hung assembly — no party or alliance had enough seats to form a government. President's Rule was imposed, and the assembly was kept in suspended animation. When fresh elections were held in October-November 2005, the NDA (led by Nitish Kumar) won a majority and formed the government. This case illustrates how FPTP can sometimes fail to produce a clear majority, requiring costly repeat elections.

Discuss: (1) What is a hung assembly? (2) What are the costs of holding elections twice? (3) Could a different electoral system have produced a clear result?

Case Study 2: Missing Voters — The Problem of Inaccurate Electoral Rolls

In many Indian elections, particularly before the introduction of Booth Level Officers (BLOs), thousands of eligible voters found their names missing from the electoral roll when they reached the polling booth. Some were deleted by mistake; others were never added. This effectively disenfranchised legitimate voters. The ECI's introduction of BLOs and the annual Summary Revision process was directly aimed at addressing this systemic failure.

Discuss: (1) Why might someone deliberately want eligible voters' names removed from rolls? (2) How does this affect the principle of Universal Adult Suffrage? (3) What would you do if you found your name missing on election day?

Case Study 3: The Goa Political Crisis (2019) — The Anti-Defection Law Tested

In July 2019, 10 Congress MLAs in Goa merged with the Bharatiya Janata Party, claiming it was a valid merger under the Anti-Defection Law since they constituted more than two-thirds of the Congress legislative party in the state. However, Congress challenged this, arguing the calculation of two-thirds was disputed. The case went to court, exposing how the merger exception in the Tenth Schedule can be used to engineer large-scale, organised defections while technically complying with the letter of the law.

Discuss: (1) What motivated these MLAs to switch parties? (2) Does the merger exception undermine the purpose of the Anti-Defection Law? (3) Should an independent body (rather than the Speaker) decide disqualification cases?

13. Did You Know? — Fascinating Facts About Indian Elections

1	India's first General Elections (1951–52) were the largest democratic exercise in world history at the time — about 173 million people voted over 68 phases spanning four months.
2	The 2024 Indian General Elections had nearly 970 million registered voters — more than the combined populations of the United States, Brazil, and the United Kingdom.
3	India's highest polling booth is in Hikkim, Himachal Pradesh, at 15,256 feet above sea level — the highest polling station in the world.
4	In some remote areas of India, election officials travel for days on foot or by helicopter to set up a polling booth for just one or two voters. This extraordinary commitment ensures that every eligible citizen can exercise their right to vote.
5	The NOTA option was introduced in 2013. In the 2019 General Elections, approximately 1.06% of all votes cast — about 6 million people — chose 'None of the Above.'
6	The Voter ID card (EPIC) was introduced by CEC T.N. Seshan in 1993 despite massive political resistance. Before this, voter impersonation was rampant. The card transformed the integrity of polling.
7	New Zealand was the first country to grant women the right to vote — in 1893. India gave all adult women the right to vote from its very first elections in 1952, which was ahead of many Western nations.

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14. Classroom Activities

Activity 1: Mock Election

Organise a mock election in your class. Divide students into 4–5 'constituencies.' Volunteers form 'parties' with short manifestos. Hold a brief campaign period, then vote using paper slips. Count votes using the FPTP method. Then re-calculate what the results would look like under Proportional Representation. Discuss: Which method more fairly reflects the class's true preferences?

Activity 2: The Aaya Ram, Gaya Ram Simulation

In groups, simulate a hung assembly scenario with 5 fictional parties. Each group negotiates with others to form a coalition. After the coalition is formed, one group announces it is withdrawing support. Role-play the consequences: Does the government fall? What happens next? How does the Anti-Defection Law apply?

Activity 3: Electoral Roll Awareness Drive

Ask students to check whether all eligible family members (aged 18+) are registered voters. Use voters.eci.gov.in or the Voter Helpline 1950 to check and correct registrations. Create a short poster explaining how to register as a voter on your 18th birthday.

Activity 4: Debate — 'Should India Switch to Proportional Representation?'

Divide the class into two groups — one defending India's current FPTP system, the other arguing for Proportional Representation. Research your arguments, present your case with evidence, and then hold a class vote on which system is more suitable for India.

Activity 5: Constituency Research Project

Using a political map, identify 5 Lok Sabha constituencies in your state. Find the current MP for each, the party they belong to, their winning margin, and the total voter turnout. Present your findings and discuss: Which constituency was most closely contested? What does a large winning margin tell us about the voters in that area?

15. Quick Revision Notes

- Elections are the heartbeat of democracy — ensuring accountability, equality, legitimacy, and peaceful transfer of power.
- Three types of electoral systems: First Past the Post (FPTP), Proportional Representation (PR), and Mixed systems.
- India uses FPTP for Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections; PR (STV method) for Rajya Sabha, Presidential, and Vice-Presidential elections.
- Representation of the People Act, 1950: Covers voter eligibility, electoral roll preparation, and seat allocation.
- Representation of the People Act, 1951: Governs how elections are conducted, defines corrupt practices, regulates campaigns, and provides for election dispute resolution.
- Delimitation = redrawing constituency boundaries based on Census data to ensure equal representation. Conducted by the independent Delimitation Commission, whose orders cannot be challenged in court.
- Election Commission of India (ECI): Constitutional body under Article 324; independently supervises all elections in India; headed by the Chief Election Commissioner.
- ECI's key functions: Electoral rolls, Model Code of Conduct, party recognition, EVM management, security deployment, SVEEP campaigns.
- A constituency is a geographical unit that elects one representative. India has 543 Parliamentary constituencies (84 SC-reserved; 47 ST-reserved).
- Electoral roll (voters' list): Official list of eligible voters maintained by Booth Level Officers (Enumerators/BLOs).
- India's multi-party system classifies parties as National, State, or Registered (Unrecognised) based on ECI criteria.
- Coalition government: Formed when no single party wins an outright majority; requires shared programme, portfolio allocation, and consensus decision-making.
- Anti-Defection Law (Tenth Schedule, 1985): Disqualifies members who voluntarily leave their party or vote against party direction; 2/3 merger exception applies.
- The Speaker/Chairman of the legislature decides disqualification cases — a feature criticised as a conflict of interest.
- Key landmarks: T.N. Seshan transformed election integrity (1990s); EVMs introduced nationally (1999); VVPAT added (2013); NOTA introduced (2013); C-VIGIL App launched (2018).

16. Practice Questions — CBSE Style

A. Multiple Choice Questions (1 mark each)

1. The Election Commission of India derives its constitutional authority from:
(a) Article 19 (b) Article 324 (c) Article 370 (d) Article 352
2. Which of the following countries uses the First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral system?
(a) Germany (b) Sweden (c) Israel (d) India
3. The Tenth Schedule of the Indian Constitution deals with:
(a) Fundamental Rights (b) Directive Principles (c) Anti-Defection Law (d) Distribution of Powers
4. The purpose of the Delimitation Commission is to:
(a) Count votes after elections (b) Redraw constituency boundaries (c) Declare election results (d) Recognise political parties
5. Under the Anti-Defection Law, a merger is valid only if at least _____ of the legislative party's members agree:
(a) One-third (b) One-half (c) Two-thirds (d) Three-fourths

B. Very Short Answer Questions (2 marks each)

1. What is an Electoral Roll? Who is responsible for maintaining it at the grassroots level?
2. State the composition of the Delimitation Commission.
3. What does NOTA stand for? When was it introduced in Indian elections?
4. How many Parliamentary constituencies does India have? How many are reserved for Scheduled Castes?
5. What was the 'Aaya Ram, Gaya Ram' incident and what problem did it highlight?

C. Short Answer Questions (3 marks each)

1. Explain any three reasons why elections are essential in a democracy.
2. What is the difference between the Representation of the People Act, 1950 and the Representation of the People Act, 1951? Give two points of difference.
3. Describe any three functions of the Election Commission of India.
4. What is a coalition government? Mention two features and two challenges of a coalition government.
5. Explain the concept of delimitation. Why is it necessary to redraw constituency boundaries periodically?

D. Long Answer Questions (5 marks each)

1. Compare and contrast the First Past the Post (FPTP) system and the Proportional Representation (PR) system of elections. Which system does India use and for which elections? What are the key advantages and disadvantages of each? You may use a comparison table.
2. Explain the Anti-Defection Law in India with reference to: (a) the reasons for its introduction; (b) its key provisions regarding disqualification; (c) the exceptions under which disqualification does not apply; and (d) at least two criticisms of the law.

3. Describe the role of the Election Commission of India in ensuring free and fair elections. In your answer, cover its constitutional basis, composition, independence, key functions (administrative, regulatory, quasi-judicial), and at least three landmark reforms it has introduced.

E. Case-Based Questions (4 marks each)

Case 1:

After state elections, the results were: Party A: 48 seats, Party B: 42 seats, Party C: 30 seats, Party D: 12 seats, Party E: 8 seats. Total seats in the assembly: 140. The Governor invited the leader of Party A to form the government. Party A then negotiated with Parties C and D, agreeing to share cabinet positions and adopt specific regional policies. Together, they commanded 90 seats — a majority.

1. What type of government was formed? Define the term.
2. What is meant by 'portfolio sharing'? Why did Party A need to share portfolios with other parties?
3. What is a 'Common Minimum Programme'? Why is it important in a coalition?
4. If Party D (12 seats) withdraws support, does the government retain its majority? What happens next?

Case 2:

Mohan, an MLA representing Party X, votes against his party's direction on a key financial bill. He argues he voted according to his conscience and in the best interest of his constituency. The party leadership files a petition for his disqualification under the Tenth Schedule. Mohan argues that his right to vote freely in the legislature is being suppressed.

1. Can Mohan be disqualified under the Anti-Defection Law? Give reasons.
2. What would have protected Mohan from disqualification in this situation?
3. Who decides Mohan's disqualification case? Why has this process been criticised?
4. Does the Anti-Defection Law protect or weaken parliamentary democracy? Give one argument for and one against.

F. Assertion–Reason Questions (2 marks each)

Instructions — Select the correct option:

- (A) Both A and R are true, and R correctly explains A.
- (B) Both A and R are true, but R does NOT correctly explain A.
- (C) A is true, but R is false.
- (D) A is false, but R is true.

Question 1:

Assertion (A): The Chief Election Commissioner of India cannot be easily removed from office by the government of the day.

Reason (R): The CEC enjoys security of tenure and can only be removed through an impeachment process similar to that of a Supreme Court judge, requiring a special majority in both Houses of Parliament.

Question 2:

Assertion (A): The Anti-Defection Law allows a group of legislators to join another party without disqualification.

Reason (R): The Tenth Schedule permits merger of a legislative party if at least two-thirds of its elected members agree to merge with another party.

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17. Glossary — Key Terms Explained

Term	Definition
Election	A formal process in which citizens vote to choose their representatives or decide a policy question
Universal Adult Suffrage	The right of every adult citizen, regardless of religion, caste, race, sex, or economic status, to vote in elections
Electoral System	The method used to translate votes cast by citizens into seats in a legislature
First Past the Post (FPTP)	An electoral system where the candidate with the most votes in a constituency wins — even without an absolute majority
Proportional Representation	An electoral system where seats are distributed to parties in proportion to the total votes they receive
Constituency	A defined geographical area that elects one representative to a legislative body
Delimitation	The process of redrawing the boundaries of electoral constituencies based on population data from the latest Census
Delimitation Commission	An independent body that redraws constituency boundaries; its decisions cannot be challenged in any court of law
Electoral Roll	The official list of all eligible voters in a constituency, also called the voters' list
Enumerator / BLO	A Booth Level Officer who collects voter details door-to-door and maintains the accuracy of the electoral roll at the grassroots level
Election Commission of India	Constitutional body under Article 324 responsible for the superintendence, direction, and control of all elections in India
Model Code of Conduct	Guidelines issued by the ECI during election periods; not a statute but strictly enforced to ensure free and fair elections
National Party	A political party recognised by the ECI as having significant electoral presence in at least 3–4 states at the national level
Coalition Government	A government formed when no single party wins an outright majority; two or more parties join with a shared programme to govern
Common Minimum Programme	A shared policy document agreed upon by coalition partners, outlining the government's core commitments
Defection	The act of an elected member leaving or switching their political party after being elected, contrary to the voters' mandate
Anti-Defection Law	The Tenth Schedule (52nd Amendment, 1985) that disqualifies elected members who defect from their party against the prescribed rules
EVM	Electronic Voting Machine — a tamper-resistant electronic device used in Indian elections to cast and count votes
VVPAT	Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail — a device attached to an EVM that prints a paper slip for 7 seconds showing the voter's chosen candidate, enabling audit verification

NOTA	None of the Above — an option on the EVM ballot allowing voters to formally reject all candidates
Hung Assembly/Parliament	A situation where no single party or pre-election alliance wins an outright majority of seats in the legislature
RPA	Representation of the People Acts (1950 and 1951) — the two foundational laws governing elections, voter eligibility, and conduct of elections in India

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