

Election Campaigns and Democracy in India 1951-1967: A Study on the Election Commission's Regulations and Their Impacts

Dr. Priya Premlatha¹, Dr. K. Reena²

^{1,2}Assistant Professor in History, Nirmala College for Women (Autonomous), Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India

Abstract

In the paradigm of democratic machinery, the people are the final sovereigns; political parties serve as facilitators of thoughts, needs, and aspirations. The liberty of thought and expression is a fundamental element of democratic governance, making fair elections vital for representing the electorate's mandate. The Indian Constitution upholds the spirit of democracy through adult suffrage, supporting the principle of "one man, one vote," which empowers citizens to actively shape governance and plays a crucial role in the country's political fabric since independence in 1947.

India's electoral process has evolved significantly since the first general elections in 1951-52. The establishment of the Election Commission in 1950 marked a pivotal step towards ensuring free and fair elections. Over the subsequent decades, the Commission has played a crucial role in regulating electoral practices, guiding political parties, and facilitating voter education. The independence of India in 1947, with various challenges like population explosion, illiteracy, food problems, failure of crops, and economic backwardness, conducting elections in a free and fair manner, and helping in the formation of the governments, was a huge task. The present study examines how the structure and regulations enacted by the Election Commission from 1951 to 1967 have influenced election campaigns and democratic engagement in India between the 1951-52 and 1967 general elections and their results. The article also examines the influence of mass media in shaping public awareness and the implications of these dynamics for the integrity of electoral democracy in India.

Keywords: Elections, Democracy, Election Commission, India, Electoral Campaigns, Mass Media, Code of Conduct, Voter Education

1. Introduction

Democracy is the manifestation of people's will to be governed by those they elect. *Vox populi vox dei*, an oft-quoted axiom in democracies which was coined by the Greeks, conveyed that the voice of the people was indeed the voice of God. Democracy enshrines essential values, such as respect for individual rights and the protection of minority interests, maintaining equilibrium within a diverse population. (Jaishri Jethwaney, Samir Kapur, 2019)

In the words of Ernest Barker, "It (democracy) is a principle of the action of the human spirit—the principle that free spirits, in the area of social and political as well as of individual life, should freely guide themselves to freely determined issues. It is also a system of institutions, operative in a political

community, which enables this principle to be realized and serves as the means of its realization." (Earnest Barker, 1938) Adult franchise is the best institution of democracy, which tends to bring about not only social and political equality and liberty of the citizen by removing shackles and barriers of caste, creed, community, and religion but also economic sufficiency and freedom.

2. Review of Literature

The *Election Commission Reports* of various elections in India from 1951 to 1967 have provided a summary of the democratic principles enshrined in the Indian Constitution and the efforts taken by the ECI to conduct elections. *The Evolution of Election Commission in India: An Overview*. The Journal of Indian Politics assesses the emergence of the Election Commission of India and its measures to educate people on the conduct of elections in India. Hasan, Z. (1998). *Politics and the People: The Challenge of Democratic Representation*. Oxford University Press highlights the changing atmosphere in people's thoughts and actions towards elections and its effects on the formation of Indian governments.

3. Research Methodology

The access to different primary and secondary data pertaining to the article provides vast knowledge on democracy, election campaigns, and so on. The study historically describes and narrates the efforts adopted by ECI in educating the citizens of the country in spite of various challenges it has faced.

4. Democracy and the Indian Constitution

Democracy as a political ideal represents certain noble principles and certain high moral and spiritual values, which are laid down in the Preamble to the Constitution of India, namely, JUSTICE, LIBERTY, EQUALITY, and FRATERNITY. But the practical terms and the most obvious sign of democracy in any community are the vote. The very first practical step to translate noble principles and high values that democracy represents is the conferment of the right to vote on the citizens with the rule of "one man, one vote, and no more than one vote." The framers of the Indian Constitution recognized this need through Article 326, which enshrines adult suffrage and empowers every adult citizen to participate in determining the nation's governance. (S. P. Sen- Varma, 1970)

5. Election Commission and Electoral Machinery in India

The period between 1951 and 1967 marks a significant era in India's democratic journey and is characterized by the establishment of a robust electoral framework and the evolution of election campaigns. The Election Commission of India (ECI), constituted to oversee free and fair elections, played a crucial role in regulating political conduct.

5.1. The Election Commission: Constitution and Functions

The Election Commission of India was established under Article 324 of the Constitution, operates as an independent constitutional authority, and is charged with overseeing elections in the country. The primary duties of the Commission include the superintendence, direction, and control of the conduct of elections for the Parliament and state legislatures, as well as the offices of President and Vice-President. The Commission consists of the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners as required and has primarily functioned under the leadership of a Chief Election Commissioner. (R. K. Trivedi, 1984) The powers conferred upon the Election Commission enable it to maintain a neutral stance while conducting elections, which is essential for the fairness and integrity of the electoral process. This

independence helps bolster public confidence in the electoral machinery and promotes active citizen participation.

5.2. Electoral Machinery of ECI

At the state levels, the electoral machinery is headed by a Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), who administers the conduct of elections in the respective states. The preparation and revision of electoral rolls are done by Electoral Registration Officers and Assistant Electoral Registration Officers. Effective conduct of elections reposes on the shoulders of Returning Officers and Assistant Returning Officers, who are responsible for managing polling stations and ensuring adherence to regulatory guidelines during the electoral process. (R. K. Trivedi, 1984)

6. Election as a Festival

As any election approaches, the enthusiasm of the public intensifies and leads to an atmosphere that is often described as a 'festival.' It is during the festive election that the citizens become animatedly divided into supportive factions for their chosen candidates, and political debates dominate public conversations. The political parties prepare themselves for the fight with the rival contestants, starting their campaign in full swing by holding meetings, demonstrations, and processions, etc., and by distributing handbills, posters, pamphlets, etc., to galvanize support and enthuse voters.

The election process in India is characterized by a highly structured system that aims to facilitate the smooth conduct of elections across diverse regions and demographics. This structured approach is paramount for maintaining order during elections, especially given India's vast population and regional disparities. (R. K. Trivedi, 1984)

7. Election Campaign: Dynamics and Importance

The period commencing immediately after the withdrawal of candidatures in accordance with the provisions of section 37 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, and ending with the polling day, is called the campaign period under the law (section 126 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951), and public meetings are prohibited in any polling areas during the period of forty-eight hours ending with the conclusion of the poll, which becomes the crucial period for the contesting candidates and the political parties. (S.P. Sen-Varma, 1972)

The campaign serves multiple purposes that go beyond mere solicitation of votes. It functions to inform voters about candidates' positions on pertinent issues, instills civic pride, and fosters engagement in political discourse. The active participation of citizens in party rallies, public meetings, and discussions about candidates and policies cultivates a politically aware electorate, which is essential for effective governance.

Election campaigns are largely fed and sustained by propaganda and publicity carried out by the rival political parties and candidates. Party propaganda is not meant to be primarily informative but, on the other hand, cannot but be laudatory or recriminative in a large measure. The primary objective is not to impart political education to the electorate but to persuade the voters to vote in favour of a particular political party—or candidate. (S.P. Sen-Varma, 1972)

This heightened engagement showcases the dynamic nature of Indian democracy, wherein citizens actively express their preferences and concerns. The excitement surrounding elections underscores the importance of political representation in a diverse democracy, where issues of national significance often eclipse personal, community-based considerations.

8. Voter Education Initiatives by Election Commission of India

Recognizing the need for an informed electorate, the Election Commission undertook various initiatives to educate voters about the importance of their participation in democratic processes. These initiatives include the dissemination of educational materials, such as pamphlets and brochures, along with community outreach programmes to reach the voters—especially in rural and less educated segments of the population—with key information about the voting process and their rights.

The introduction of multimedia campaigns, including the broadcast of educational documentaries and public service announcements via radio and television, aids in promoting awareness. These campaigns emphasized the importance of exercising the right to vote without fear, ensuring that the electorate understands that their votes are vital for shaping governance.

8.1. Election-Wise Description: Key Developments and Challenges

8.1.1. First General Elections (1951-52)

During the first general elections in India in 1951-52, nearly 397 newspapers were started during the period of the elections, and most of them didn't exist after the election. These efforts by the Press proved very useful in educating the voters and the candidates in different aspects.

In spite of the large-scale illiteracy in the country, the press played a crucial role in creating and sustaining a keen interest in the elections in the public mind. It has aroused sustained interest of the people in election matters and helped them to appreciate the issues involved and the importance of exercising their franchise with intelligence and discretion.

A series of documentary films were screened with the sole purpose of educating the voters on election matters and were released all over the country. The radio generally proved to be a potent aid to publicity and mass education. From time to time, the Chief Election Commissioner gave a series of talks on the radio that covered subjects like

1. The General Elections—Democracy's biggest experiment;
2. Delimitation proposals;
3. Holding of a poll;
4. Public servants and democracy;
5. The citizen voter;
6. The women citizens; (Sukumar Sen, 1955)

Many of the Chief Electoral Officers broadcasted similar talks in the respective states, and All India Radio gave interesting non-party talks or dialogues on elections in order to cater to the needs and tastes of the villagers. The government accepted the Election Commission's advice, and no broadcasting facilities were extended to the parties for their election campaign. The press played a crucial role in fostering public interest and engagement in electoral matters. (Sukumar Sen, Sen, 1955)

8.1.2. Second General Elections (1957)

In 1957, at the instance of the Commission, the Ministry of Information published posters and folders and the Broadcasting of the Government of India in the following :

1. 1,900,000 copies of a broadsheet entitled "How you should vote."
2. 950,000 copies of a poster entitled "Maintain Order at Polling Stations."
3. 950,000 copies of a poster entitled "One voter votes at a time."
4. 1,900,000 copies of an illustrated folder entitled "Hints for Voting," which were published in 13 languages, namely, Hindi, English, Urdu, Gurmukhi, Oriya, Gujarati, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Malay-

alam, Kannada, Bengali, and Assamese, and widely distributed throughout the country.

The Ministry of Information released a short film entitled "It is your vote," and it was exhibited in the four thousand and odd cinema halls in the country. The cost of production was Rs. 20,139; the film was dubbed in 13, and it explained to the electorate the meaning and the value of their votes and insisted all adult citizens exercise their franchise freely and intelligently without favouring any political party. Six cinema slides covering the subjects mentioned below were shown throughout the country :

- a. Vote without fear. Your vote is secret.
- b. Maintain order at polling stations.
- c. Form separate queues for men and women.
- d. One voter votes at a time. Short film. Cinema slides. 205
- e. Put your ballot paper into the ballot box through the slit painted white, and
- f. It is your duty to vote. (Election Report, 1959)

The Chief Election Commissioner broadcasted on five occasions on radio broadcasts from the Delhi Station of the All India Radio in English and its re-broadcast in the regional languages from the various stations of the All-India Radio emphasized on

1. Electoral rights for displaced persons,
2. Appeal to citizens to. check electoral rolls,
3. Procedure for the coming general elections,
4. Ensuring free and fair elections, and
5. Appeal for clean elections. (Election Report, 1959)

An election "quiz" programme undertaken by the Delhi Radio "Quiz" Station of the All-India Radio got a good reception during this election.

8.1.3. 1960 KERALA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ELECTION

In the 1960 Kerala Legislative Assembly election, the Commission took steps to evolve a code of conduct for observance by organized political parties. Meetings and processions, speeches and slogans, posters and placards were the major campaign tools that existed, and the following instructions were made for the candidates regarding Speeches and slogans. (K.V.K.Sundaram, 1965)

1. Depreciatory or insulting remarks about the private lives, personal habits, or physical peculiarities or handicaps of individuals should be avoided on the public platforms.
2. Derogatory remarks on the religion, caste or community of individuals should not be made.
3. Statements that are likely to wound the religious susceptibilities of any section of the people in any manner should not be made.
4. Statements and slogans suggestive of violent action against any members of other political parties should be avoided.
5. A high standard of decency and decorum while making speeches. or raising slogans should be aimed at by all political parties. Nothing should be said or done that is likely to excite people to acts of indecency or violence.
6. Political parties should adopt an attitude of mutual tolerance and forbearance, especially in situations when the uncontrolled exercise of the right of free speech and expression is likely to stir up ill feeling and lead to disorder and violence. When meetings by different political parties are held in close proximity or processions have to pass by one another, use of provocative slogans and gestures should be scrupulously avoided.

This code, which proved very useful in Kerala during the general election of 1960, made the Commission circulate it to all the recognized political parties in India and to the state governments to accept the code by all parties contesting the general elections in their states. (K.V.K.Sundaram, 1965)

8.1.4. Third General Election (1962)

In 1962, the Commission afforded broadcasting facilities to the political parties during the electioneering period in consultation with the All India Radio authorities with certain schemes. The Commission recognized six parties, namely Congress, Communist, Praja Socialist, Swatantra, Socialist, and Jan Sangh as eligible for participating in Central broadcasts, and similarly every recognized party in a State with contesting candidates not less than one-sixth of the assembly constituencies of the state was eligible to participate in the election broadcasts in that state.

Though there was no censorship in the broadcast, the expected speakers had to maintain a high standard of decorum in their election propaganda. They were not allowed to use language that was considered unparliamentary in a legislature. The broadcast was confined to advocating the policies of the speaker's party and criticizing, in general terms, the policies of other parties in the field. They were not to speak for or against individual candidates, and, in particular, depreciatory or insulating remarks about individuals were to be avoided. Propaganda based on religion, race, caste, or community and derogatory remarks on the religion, race, caste or community of individuals were to be completely avoided. (K.V.K.Sundaram, 1965)

8.1.5. Fourth General Election

By the success of adopting code of conduct for elections at Kerala in 1960, the Commission brought about an agreement with the party broadcasts, which became a regular feature at the general elections of 1967. The Fourth General Elections of 1967 brought a wind of swift changes in the political atmosphere of India. The election resulted in the formation of non-Congress governments in a number of states, and there was no single party with an absolute majority. The elected representatives of the people in a number of state assemblies forgot the election promises and pledges held out to the electorate at the time of election by and on behalf of the parties by whom they were sponsored and started defecting in large numbers in quick succession from their respective parties. The principal causes for defections in a number of states after the 1967 general elections were a desire for personal power and gain. No single party commanded an absolute majority in some of the states, and coalition governments were formed; and this in turn accentuated the evil of defection. (S. Sen-Varma, 1970)

The 1967 general elections were the first time the Indian voters were reaching maturity and could no longer be taken for granted by any political party. Indian voters, though they were illiterate, possessed a strong fund of common sense. Before casting their votes, they consider and calculate carefully for whom they would vote. The voters require proper guidance on the right lines so that they cast their votes in favour of the candidate of their own free choice after listening to the discussions and debates of the various political parties and candidates. The political dynamics of this election illustrated a growing maturity among voters, highlighting the need for respectful engagement from political parties, as well as an adherence to electoral ethics to cultivate public trust. (S.P.Sen-Varma, 1970)

9. Role of Mass Media in Elections

Mass media has long served as a potent tool in informing the electorate and framing electoral narratives. From traditional print media to modern broadcasting, the media landscape has played a pivotal role in bolstering democratic engagement. The press, functioning in multiple regional languages, empowered

citizens despite challenges related to widespread illiteracy. The establishment of All India Radio and later Doordarshan provided essential platforms for widespread dissemination of electoral information and public debates. (S.P.Sen-Varma, 1972)

In rural areas, where access to print media was limited, radio emerged as a critical channel for educating voters about their rights and responsibilities during elections. The use of radio, particularly by the Election Commission, allowed for engaging the electorate effectively, utilizing short, impactful messages to ensure that each citizen understood the voting process and the importance of their voice in governance. (S.P.Sen-Varma, 1972)

9.1. Challenges in Media Utilization

Despite the potential for mass media to enhance electoral engagement, challenges arose, particularly regarding the equitable distribution of broadcasting time among political parties. The lack of consensus among major political entities led to missed opportunities for utilizing radio as a platform for political education. The Election Commission's repeated attempts to structure party broadcasts highlight the ongoing struggle for fair representation in the electoral discourse.

10. Results of an Effective Code of Conduct

The implementation of a Model Code of Conduct provided for equitable conditions under which elections could be contested. This code served as a guiding framework for political parties and candidates, outlining acceptable behavior and practices during the campaign period. Its effectiveness is evident in the reduction of electoral misconduct and the promotion of a respectful and peaceful electoral environment. (R.K. Trivedi, 1984)

10.1.1 Impact on Electoral Integrity

The adherence to the principles outlined in the Code fostered an atmosphere of accountability and responsibility among political parties. It aimed to mitigate clashes and ensured that all stakeholders, including voters, candidates, and officials, uphold ethical standards throughout the electoral process. (R.K. Trivedi, 1984)

10.1.2. Public Reception and Compliance

While challenges remained with certain parties' compliance, overall public sentiment has favoured the guidelines outlined in the Code. Increased cooperation among political parties, alongside the effective monitoring of compliance by the Election Commission, led to a more orderly and peaceful electoral process. (R.K. Trivedi, 1984)

11. Findings

The success of an effective election as a democratic process lies upon the citizens, the electors, the political parties, and the candidates. Unless all these agencies make elections peaceful, free, pure, and fair, even the best efforts of the government and the Election Commission and the most comprehensive provisions of the law cannot achieve much. The broad examination of election campaigns and the role of the Election Commission between 1951 and 1967 reveals critical insights about the landscape of electoral politics in India:

1. **Institutional Framework:** The establishment of the Election Commission has been fundamental in promoting democratic practices, which has provides a regulatory framework that reinforces the conduct of fair elections in India.

2. **Voter Engagement:** Initiatives aimed at educating the electorate have proven essential in fostering a politically aware citizenry, essential for a robust democracy towards the effective formation of the government.
3. **Role of Mass Media:** Media has played a key role in shaping electoral discourse, has enhanced public awareness, has helped in forming public opinion, and kindled the spirit of decision-making in the minds of citizens of the country.
4. **Effectiveness of Regulatory Mechanisms:** Compliance with the Model Code of Conduct has played a vital role in maintaining electoral integrity, reducing misbehaviour, and fostering transparency throughout the electoral process.

12. Conclusion

The developments in electoral campaigns and the regulatory landscape in India from 1951 to 1985 illustrate the maturation of democratic practices in the country. The Election Commission has played a pivotal role in ensuring electoral integrity, while the active participation of various stakeholders remains crucial for the continued advancement of democracy. The lessons gleaned from this historical period underscore the need for consistent efforts to adapt and refine electoral practices to address emerging challenges.

As India moves forward, it is imperative for political leaders, the electorate, and civil society to work collaboratively to strengthen the democratic framework. The continued importance of voter education, media engagement, and adherence to ethical electoral practices will be crucial in ensuring that the democratic ideals enshrined in the Constitution are realized and upheld for future generations.

References:

1. Jaishri Jethwaney, Samir Kapur. 2019. When India Votes the Dynamics of successful Election Campaigning. Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd.
2. Earnest Barker. 1938. The Citizen's Choice, Cambridge at the University.
3. Sukumar Sen. 1955. Report on the First General Elections in India 1951-52, Volume I (General). Election Commission India. Govt. of India Press.
4. Report on The Second General Elections in India 1957 Volume I (General). 1959. Election Commission India. Govt. of India Press.
5. K. V. K. Sundaram. 1965. Report on the Third General Elections in India 1962, Volume I (General), Election Commission India. Govt. of India Press.
6. K. V. K. Sundaram. 1967. Report on the Fourth General Elections In India 1967, Volume I (General), Election Commission of India. Govt. of India Press.
7. S. P. Sen- Varma. 1970. The Mid-Term General Elections in India 1968-69 Volume I (General). Election Commission of India. Govt. of India Press.
8. S.P. Sen- Varma. 1972. Report on The Fifth General Elections in India 1971-72 Narrative And Reflective Part. Election Commission of India. Govt. of India Press.
9. R. K. Trivedi. 1984. Election Commission of India First Annual Report 1983, Election Commission of India. Govt. of India Press.
10. Sidhant Chandalia, Anirudh Lekhi. (2013). Regulation Of Election Campaign Finance In India: Making Elections Truly Free And Fair". July - September, 2013. Published in Articles section of www.manupatra.com. NUJS LAW REVIEW 6 NUJS L.Rev.3.