

The Changing Grammar
of Indian Politics:
Populism, Welfare and
Centre-State Relations.

India's Electoral Systems

- First Electoral System – 1952-1967 – Congress Dominance
- Second Electoral System - 1967 to 1989: Growing Opposition at the State Level
- Third Electoral System – 1989 to 2014 – Dawn of Coalition Politics
- Fourth Electoral System – 2014-2025 – Unipolarity
 - One Party Dominance
 - Party-State?

What is Populism?

- Populism is a political movement centered on the idea of a 'people' in opposition to the 'establishment.' The 'people' may be defined as native, folk, rural, working class, etc., while the establishment is understood as elites.
- An overthrow of the elites – Plutocrats, Political leadership aligned with the state.
- A charismatic leader – Reliance on a charismatic leader leads to deinstitutionalization of political parties and the decline of institutions such as the media.
- Post-ideological movement – Is skeptical of all ideologies and intellectuals. This is also the result of the decline of class politics.

Constitution's 'seamless web'

- The constitutional scholar Granville Austin, in his classic work *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation* describes the constitutional ideals of unity, social revolution, and democracy as constituting a 'seamless web.' The founders believed that 'none of its goals was to be pursued nor could be achieved separately or at the expense of one another.'
- The trajectory of Democracy and Development in Post-Colonial India was distinct from the trajectory in the West.

The First Constitutional Amendment, 1951.

- Empowered the state to make special provisions for the advancement of socially and economically backward classes.
- Provided for the saving of laws providing for the acquisition of estates, etc.,
- Added a Ninth schedule to protect the land reform and other laws included in it from judicial review.
- Added three more grounds of restrictions on freedom of speech and expression, viz., public order, friendly relations with foreign states, and incitement to an offense. Also, made the restrictions 'reasonable' and thus, justiciable in nature.

The First Constitutional Amendment, 1951.

- Civil Liberties: On 8 February 1950 Bombay High Court released communists who were indefinitely detained under the *Bombay Public Safety Measures Act*; On 14 February, the Patna High Court, declared the *Bihar Maintenance of Public Order Act* as “ultra vires”.
- Freedom Of Speech: On 1 March 1950, the Madras government banned the circulation of the communist magazine *Cross Road*; On 2 March 1950, a pre-censorship order was passed to regulate news about communal matters and Pakistan. On 26 May, the Supreme Court overturned both measures.
- Land Reforms: The Patna and Allahabad High Courts rejected Zamindari’s abolition on grounds of the Right to Property and Compensation.

Are Democracy and Development Compatible?

- Why does the Indian Constitution separate fundamental rights from directive principles of state policy?
- Do fundamental rights correspond only to 'procedural' or 'formal' rights?
- Is substantive equality possible only by the directive principles of state policy?
- Do fundamental rights represent a 'liberal' agenda, while the directive principles a 'socialist' agenda?

Constitutional vision of development

- Economic inequalities had to be addressed, but this did not necessitate any division between ‘formal’ or ‘procedural’ fundamental rights and ‘substantive’ directive principles of state policy – the two were not incompatible with one another.
- Instead, it was only by the maintenance of fundamental rights that the more substantive goals of poverty alleviation etc. could be achieved. Democracy was a cherished value, and end in itself, and not a means to an end.

The National Emergency, 1975-77.

- Sajjan Singh vs. State of Rajasthan, 1964
- Golaknath vs. State of Punjab, 1967.
- Abolition of Privy Purses and Bank Nationalisation, 1967-69.
- Nationalisation of Property – Minerva Mills vs. Union of India, 1980.
- Appointment of Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister, 1966.
- Congress Defeat in 1967 state elections
- Keshavananda Bharti or the Basic Structure case, 1973.
- Declaration of National Emergency, 1975.
- Role of the Opposition and Judiciary in resisting the National Emergency.

Notes on the Lok Sabha Elections, 2024.

- Democracy and the Right to Vote – Role of Election Commission.
- Ethnicisation of elections – Civic Nationalism and Cultural Nationalism
- The 2024 elections saw the reemergence of regional parties, albeit as part of national coalitions.
- Social Movements led by farmers impacted the electoral outcomes in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh.
- The perceived threat to Reservations and the Constitution led to a significant shift of support to the Opposition.

Notes on the Lok Sabha Elections, 2024.

- Electoral and Political Reforms – One Nation, One Election?
- Welfare Provision – Public Goods or Private Goods?
- Beyond Federalism? Changing nature of center-state relations.