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The Continued Pursuit of the Perfect Election

Context

- Elections in India are a regular democratic exercise shaped by **constitutional timelines** and administrative planning.
- However, recent Assembly elections in Assam, Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal stand out due to the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls and heightened political tensions between State governments and the Centre.
- These elections reflect both the sophistication and the strain within **India's democratic framework**.

The Scale and Logistical Brilliance of Elections

- Conducting elections across 2.19 lakh polling stations for a vast electorate of 17.4 crore voters is an extraordinary administrative effort.
- Polling teams traverse remote terrain, forests, hills, and riverine regions to ensure **inclusive participation**, even for a handful of voters.
- This reflects a deep commitment to universal franchise and electoral access.

- Over 25 lakh officials, including security personnel, micro-observers, and administrative staff, are deployed.
- Legal provisions ensure their allegiance to the **Election Commission of India**, reinforcing **institutional neutrality**.
- The appointment of **central observers** and reshuffling of officials aim to ensure free and fair elections, though such steps sometimes trigger political friction.
- A significant development is the reduction in multi-phase polling, particularly in politically sensitive regions.
- In West Bengal, polling has been reduced from eight phases in 2021 to two phases, indicating improved **election management** and stronger **security coordination**.

The Persistent 'Four M' Challenges

- Indian elections continue to face the four Ms: **Money power, Muscle power, Misinformation, and MCC violations**.
- While electronic voting machines and strong security have reduced overt coercion, other challenges have intensified.
- The role of electoral inducements, cash, gifts, and welfare promises, remains deeply embedded in political competition.
- Seizures of illicit materials worth thousands of crores highlight the scale of this issue.
- Freebies, cash transfers, and fiscally questionable promises often distort voter choice and undermine electoral integrity.
- **Misinformation**, including **fake news** and **deepfakes**, has become a critical concern in the digital era. Despite regulatory efforts such as pre-certification of advertisements and monitoring of campaign content, enforcement remains uneven.
- The rapid spread of misleading narratives challenges the ability of voters to make informed decisions.
- Violations of the **Model Code of Conduct (MCC)**, especially appeals based on caste, religion, and ethnicity, continue to threaten social harmony.
- In diverse regions like Kerala and politically polarised areas like West Bengal, such tactics can intensify divisions. Balancing free speech with necessary regulation remains a complex issue.

Technological and Institutional Innovations

- To address these challenges, the Election Commission of India has introduced measures aimed at enhancing **transparency, accountability, and voter participation**.
- Initiatives such as live webcasting, stricter monitoring of campaign expenditure, and improved media regulation aim to curb malpractice.
- Citizen-centric reforms have strengthened engagement. The **SVEEP programme** has improved voter awareness, while innovations like home voting for senior citizens and persons with disabilities ensure inclusive democracy.
- Additional measures such as better-designed voting interfaces and secure polling environments enhance voter convenience.
- The SIR process has improved the accuracy of electoral rolls by removing ineligible entries, contributing to higher voter turnout, which traditionally ranges between 70% and 80%.

- These steps collectively strengthen **democratic participation** and trust in the system.

The Ethical Responsibility of the Voter

- The integrity of elections ultimately depends on the civic responsibility of voters. Citizens must resist **inducements**, reject **misinformation**, and exercise **independent judgment**.
- Voting is not merely a procedural act but a moral obligation tied to the values of the Constitution of India.
- Allowing **false narratives**, divisive rhetoric, or material incentives to influence decisions weakens democracy.
- Strengthening **civic awareness** and encouraging **critical thinking** are essential to preserving the sanctity of elections.
- An informed electorate acts as the strongest safeguard against manipulation and corruption.

Conclusion

- Elections in India embody a remarkable blend of scale, innovation, and democratic commitment.
- Despite challenges posed by **money power**, **misinformation**, and **political polarisation**, continuous reforms and institutional vigilance sustain the credibility of the process.
- The role of the Election Commission of India remains central, but the ultimate success of elections lies in the hands of responsible citizens.
- Each election is not just a political contest but a reaffirmation of **democratic values**, **electoral integrity**, and the collective will of the people.

The Continued Pursuit of the Perfect Election FAQs

Q1. What makes elections in India unique?

Ans. Elections in India are unique due to their vast scale, complex logistics, and commitment to inclusive participation.

Q2. What is the role of the Election Commission of India?

Ans. The Election Commission of India ensures free, fair, and transparent conduct of elections.

Q3. What are the “four Ms” in Indian elections?

Ans. The four Ms refer to Money power, Muscle power, Misinformation, and Model Code of Conduct violations.

Q4. How does misinformation affect elections?

Ans. Misinformation misleads voters and undermines informed decision-making.

Q5. What is the responsibility of voters in a democracy?

Ans. Voters must make informed and ethical choices while resisting inducements and false narratives.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Ensuring Federalism Within Delimitation

Context

- The principle of democratic representation in India, as outlined in **Article 81**, requires that parliamentary seats be distributed among States in proportion to their population.
- This principle functioned effectively in earlier decades when population differences were limited.
- However, with India now the world's most populous nation and significant demographic divergence across States, strict adherence to population-based allocation raises concerns of fairness.
- The upcoming **Census 2026** and subsequent **delimitation** exercise present an opportunity to reassess this framework.

Changing Demographic Realities

- The 84th Constitutional Amendment Act (2002) extended the freeze on parliamentary seats to encourage population stabilisation.
- Over time, most States have made progress toward achieving the **Total Fertility Rate (TFR)** of 2.1, the level required for stable population growth.
- Yet, disparities persist, with some States maintaining higher fertility rates than others. This uneven progress has created a paradox.
- States that achieved early success in controlling population growth now exhibit lower population increases, while others continue to grow rapidly.
- If representation is based solely on population, **high-fertility States** could gain greater political representation, while **low-fertility States** may lose influence despite better governance outcomes. This imbalance challenges the principle of equitable representation.

The Case for Demographic Performance

- A more balanced approach involves incorporating **Demographic Performance (DemPer)** into seat allocation.
- This method draws from the framework of the Finance Commission, which uses both population size and demographic efficiency in distributing resources.
- Similarly, delimitation can combine population with performance indicators.
- Under this approach, the existing 543 Lok Sabha seats remain unchanged, while additional seats are allocated based on both population and DemPer.
- Two components define DemPer: **early achievement of replacement-level fertility (with a 10% weightage) and the rate of fertility decline between 2005 and 2021 (with a 90% weightage).**
- This model ensures that all States gain seats, with more populous States receiving higher absolute increases, while protecting the proportional share of better-performing States.
- It maintains the dominance of population as a criterion but introduces fairness by rewarding sustained efforts in population control.

Federalism and Democratic Equity

- India's democracy is not only about numerical equality but also about ensuring **a fair voice for all States.**

- A purely population-based system risks undermining federal stability and creating regional resentment.
- Recognising demographic performance aligns representation with **good governance** and reinforces incentives for responsible policymaking.
- Importantly, the issue extends beyond a simple **north-south divide**, as several northern and smaller States have also achieved significant progress in controlling population growth.
- By balancing democratic equality with federal fairness, the delimitation process can enhance the legitimacy of representation while preserving national unity.

Determining the Size of the Lok Sabha

- Another key consideration is the size of the Lok Sabha. In 1971, each Member of Parliament represented around 10–11 lakh people.
- With India's population now exceeding 1.4 billion, expanding the number of seats is necessary to maintain effective representation.
- However, an excessively large legislature may weaken the quality of debate and decision-making.
- A cap of around **700 seats** offers a practical compromise, ensuring **adequate representation** while preserving the efficiency and deliberative capacity of Parliament.

Conclusion

- The forthcoming delimitation exercise represents a critical moment for India's democracy.
- While **population-based representation** remains essential, it must be complemented by considerations of **demographic performance**.
- Integrating DemPer into seat allocation provides a balanced approach that rewards population control efforts, safeguards equitable representation, and strengthens the foundations of cooperative federalism.
- Such a framework ensures that democracy reflects not only numbers but also fairness, promoting both **national unity** and **institutional stability** in an increasingly diverse and populous nation.

Ensuring Federalism Within Delimitation FAQs

Q1. What does Article 81 of the Constitution mandate?

Ans. Article 81 mandates that parliamentary seats be distributed among States in proportion to their population.

Q2. Why is population-based delimitation considered problematic today?

Ans. Population-based delimitation is problematic because States have experienced uneven demographic growth, leading to potential unfair representation.

Q3. What is Demographic Performance (DemPer)?

Ans. Demographic Performance is a criterion that evaluates States based on their success in controlling population growth.

Q4. How does the proposed model allocate additional Lok Sabha seats?

Ans. The proposed model allocates additional seats based on both population size and demographic performance.

Q5. What is the suggested ideal size of the Lok Sabha?

Ans. The suggested ideal size of the Lok Sabha is around 700 seats to balance representation and efficiency.

Source: The Hindu

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