

Prime Minister Tenure Debate in India - Explained

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Prime Minister Tenure Latest News

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi has become the longest-serving elected head of government in India, reigniting debate on executive term limits.

Constitutional Position on Executive Tenure

- India's Constitution does not prescribe any term limit for the office of the Prime Minister.
- The Prime Minister continues in office as long as they enjoy the confidence of the Lok Sabha. This principle is rooted in the parliamentary system adopted from the British model.
- The framers of the Constitution believed that democratic accountability through Parliament would act as an effective check on executive power.

Constituent Assembly's Rationale

- The reasoning behind the absence of term limits was clearly articulated during the Constituent Assembly debates.

- **Dr B.R. Ambedkar** emphasised the concept of “**daily accountability**” through parliamentary mechanisms such as question hour, no-confidence motions, and adjournment motions.
- He argued that these mechanisms were more effective than periodic elections in ensuring executive responsibility.
- Thus, the Constitution relied on continuous legislative oversight rather than fixed tenure restrictions.

Comparative Perspective on Term Limits

- India stands out among major democracies for not having executive term limits.
- Countries such as the United States, Brazil, and Indonesia impose limits on the tenure of their executive heads.
- In parliamentary systems, term limits are generally absent because leaders can be removed through legislative processes.
- However, this assumption depends on the effectiveness of institutional checks within the system.

Impact of Anti-Defection Law

- The introduction of the **Tenth Schedule** through the **52nd Constitutional Amendment** in 1985 significantly altered the balance between the legislature and executive.
- The anti-defection law mandates the disqualification of legislators who vote against the party whip.
- This has weakened the effectiveness of no-confidence motions, as ruling party members are unlikely to vote against their own government.
- As a result, the primary mechanism envisioned by the framers to check executive power has been diluted.

Weakening of Parliamentary Accountability

- In addition to the anti-defection law, the absence of strong intra-party democracy further reduces accountability.
- Unlike in the United Kingdom, where party members can challenge leadership, Indian political parties lack structured mechanisms for internal leadership change.
- This creates a situation where both legislative and intra-party checks on executive authority are weakened.

The Presidential Convention Paradox

- Interestingly, India has developed an informal convention limiting the President to two terms, despite the Constitution not mandating such a restriction.
- No President has served more than two terms, even though the office is largely ceremonial.
- In contrast, the Prime Minister, who exercises real executive power, faces no such formal or informal limitation.
- This creates an institutional asymmetry in the constitutional framework.

Debate on Democratic Legitimacy

- One argument against imposing term limits is that repeated electoral victories reflect the will of the people.
- However, prolonged incumbency may provide structural advantages such as control over institutions, influence over policy, and shaping of the political narrative.
- This raises concerns about whether electoral processes alone can ensure adequate checks on executive power.

Possible Reforms

- Experts suggest that there are two potential reform pathways.
 - First, restoring parliamentary accountability by exempting confidence motions from the anti-defection law.
 - Second, introducing a constitutional amendment to limit consecutive terms for Prime Ministers and Chief Ministers, while allowing a return after a gap.
- These reforms aim to balance democratic choice with institutional safeguards.

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