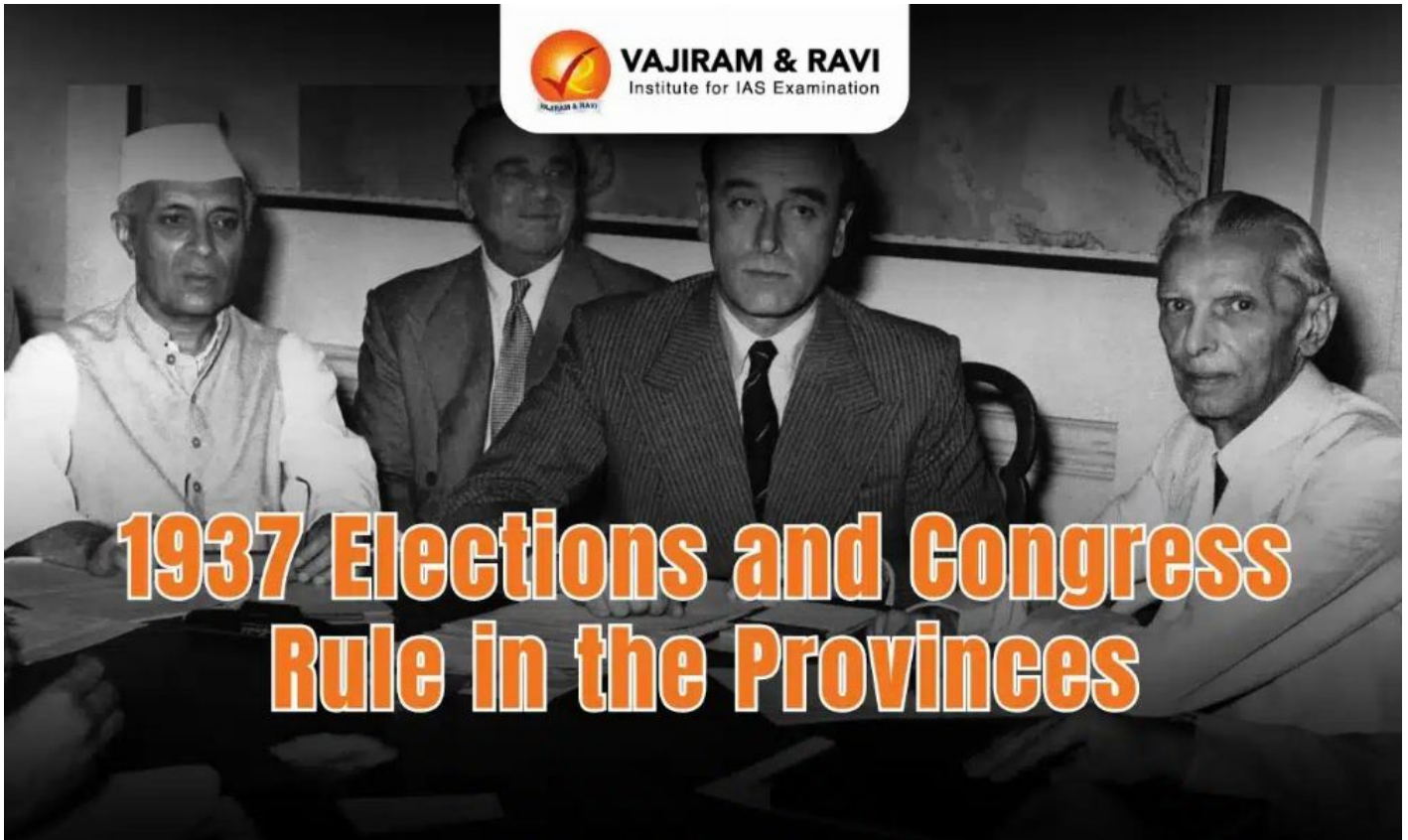


1937 Elections and Congress Rule in the Provinces

July 5, 2026 • vajiramandravi.com



1937 Elections and Congress rule in provinces: The withdrawal of the Civil Disobedience Movement marked a crucial juncture in India's struggle for independence. The national movement faced a critical debate on its future course, particularly in light of the provincial elections held under the Government of India Act, 1935. The Indian National Congress, despite its earlier opposition to the Act, decided to participate in the elections.

The elections of 1937 were conducted to choose representatives for the Provincial Legislative Assemblies across British India. After winning a significant number of seats, Congress formed governments in several provinces, ushering in a period of Congress rule and self-rule for the first time since the British conquest of India.

Aftermath of CDM withdrawal

After the withdrawal of the **Civil Disobedience Movement**, there was a debate on the future course of the national movement and acceptance of office in the provincial elections conducted in accordance with the 1935 Government of India Act. The debates were on the following three perspectives:

- **Constructive work on Gandhian lines:**
 - Like after the **NCM**, Rajendra Prasad, Sardar Patel and others were in favour of constructive works towards nation-building until the next course of action would be decided.

- **Constitutional struggle through participating in the election:**
 - Constitutionalists like M.A. Ansari, Asaf Ali, Bhulabhai Desai, S. Satyamurthy, and B.C. Roy was in favour of the constitutional battle with the British.
 - They were advocating to contest the provincial elections.
- **Rejection of both and continuation of CDM:**
 - Jawahar Nehru and Subhash Chandra Bose wanted to take a different line by continuing the **Civil Disobedience Movement**.
- **Gandhi:**
 - Although not supportive of participation in the elections, he gave a free hand to all three sections to pursue their own methods.

A Parliamentary Board was established by the **All India Congress Committee (AICC)** in May 1934 to conduct elections on behalf of the Congress.

The Debate on the 1937 Election

Participation in the elections would have implied that Congress was in support of the **Government of India Act of 1935**, which they had already criticised and opposed. But in 1937, provincial elections were held, and Congress, after extensive debate, decided to participate on the basis of a detailed political and economic programme. However, there were sharp **differences over the acceptance of office**.

- **Opposition to acceptance of the office:** Subhash Bose, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Congress socialists and communists opposed accepting the office because doing so would have negated the nationalists' rejection of the 1935 Act.
- **Proponents of acceptance of the office:** Leftist leaders proposed entry into the councils and acceptance of the office with an aim to create deadlocks in the legislature.
- **Gandhi's position:**
 - Initially, Gandhi was opposed to the acceptance of office, but by the beginning of 1936, he was willing to give a trial to the formation of Congress ministries and self-government.
 - But he warned that the aim of accepting office should be for the service of people, not for their own political benefits.

Lucknow Session of Congress, 1936

The **Lucknow session in 1936** was presided over by **Jawaharlal Nehru** and was important for the decision regarding the election and the acceptance of office.

- It was decided to **fight the elections**, but the decision for the matter of **office acceptance was postponed**.
- The adoption of **socialist goals** as a means to solve the agrarian problems was laid out.
- The Government of India **Act of 1935 was rejected** by a resolution.

Congress and the 1937 Election

The elections of 1937 were the first major elections held under the Government of India Act of 1935. The 1935 Act expanded the electorate, allowing a larger number of people to vote and participate in the democratic process.

Manifesto of Congress for the 1937 Election

The **parliamentary committee of the AICC** was given the task of drafting the 1937 Election Manifesto of the Congress, whose goal was to "Explain the political and economic policy and programme of the Congress".

Prominent features of the Election Manifesto included:

- **General Aim:** The purpose of sending Congressmen to the legislatures was not to cooperate with the Government but to combat the Act of 1935.
 - **Political:** They promised to work for civil liberties, the release of political prisoners and detainees and undoing the wrongs done to the peasants.
 - **Economic:** They would secure a decent standard of living, regular hours of work and better conditions of labour. They promised the right to form unions and suitable machinery for dispute settlements with employers.
 - **Social:** They promised the removal of untouchability, equal status of women and encouragement of khadi and village industries.

1937 Election Result

The 1937 Election was held in 11 provinces – Madras, Central Provinces, Bihar, Orissa, United Provinces, Bombay Presidency, Assam, NWFP, Bengal, Punjab, and Sindh.

- **Congress's performance:**
 - It won 716 out of the 1161 contested seats.
 - Majority in the six provinces
 - Became the largest party in Bengal, NWFP, Assam, and Bombay (but not majority)
 - Performed poorly in Punjab and Sindh

Office Acceptance and the Special Meeting of AICC

Now, the time had come to discuss the office acceptance, which had been postponed so far. Congress met in **March 1937** to decide on the acceptance.

- **Decision:**
 - The 'conditional acceptance' was decided by a resolution passed by Rajendra Prasad (with the implicit favour of Gandhi).
 - The condition was that the governors should not intervene with the functioning of ministries.
 - The argument in favour of the acceptance was that, by doing this, Congress would be able to give relief to the workers and peasants through its economic and social programmes.
- **Reactions:**
 - The members of the Congress Socialist Party such as Jayprakash Narain, Sahajanand Saraswati, N.G. Ranga and Indulal Yajnik, considered this as a retreat from the policy of non-cooperation with imperial power.

- Most of the Indian capitalists, particularly G.D. Birla, favoured the decision.

Faizpur Session of Congress, 1937

It was the first session to be held in a village and was headed by Jawaharlal Nehru again. It officially demanded the formation of a **Constituent Assembly**. The session is significant for laying out agrarian programmes such as:

- 50% reduction in rent and revenue and exemption of uneconomic holds from rent and land tax
- Taxation on agricultural income
- Abolition of feudal levies and forced labour
- Cooperative farming
- Wiping out arrears of rent and modification of ejectment laws
- Recognition of peasant unions, etc.

Congress Rule in Provinces After the 1937 Election

Congress formed governments in the Central Provinces, Orissa, United Provinces, Bihar, Bombay, Madras, and later NWFP and Assam after the 1937 Election. These governments were functional for slightly longer than two years (28 months).

Province	Congress Prime Minister
Bombay	B.G. Kher
United Province	Govind Ballabh Pant
Madras	C. Rajagopalachari
Orissa	Hare Krishna Mehtab
Central Province	Dr. Khare
Bihar	Sri Krishna Sinha
Northwest Frontier Province	Dr. Khan Saheb

Programmes and Performance of the Congress Ministries

Political Prisoners and Civil Liberties

The Congress, through its election manifesto, was committed to civil liberties within the confines of non-violence.

- Ban on **newspapers and press restrictions** were lifted.
- **Deportation and internment orders were cancelled**, and political prisoners and revolutionaries were freed.
- The Civil Disobedience Movement-related officials' pensions were reinstated.

Peasants

- All the provinces governed by the Congress adopted tenancy legislation.
- The Civil Disobedience Movement's no-rent campaign caused those lands in Bombay to be sold to new owners, but the Congress was able to get them back to the original owners.
- The protection of the peasants from moneylenders and the expansion of irrigation facilities were priorities across all provinces.

Labour

- In October 1937, **AICC** gave a programme for labour, which included;
 - Holidays with pay
 - Employment insurance
 - Leave with pay during sickness and devise a way to fix minimum wages
 - Recognition of these Trade Unions by the State for having a peaceful and legal policy, etc.
 - To avoid strikes and lockouts, the ministry in Bombay introduced the Industrial Disputes Bill.
- In Bengal, Congress supported the **strikes in Jute mills**.
- During the **TISCO worker's strikes** at Jamshedpur, Nehru and Rajendra acted as the arbitrators between Tatas and workers.

Constructive Programme

In all the Congress-ruled provinces, sincere efforts were made to introduce prohibition, encourage education and give an impetus to village industries, which included:

- A vigorous campaign in favour of **prohibition**
- A **grant of 2 Lakh rupees** for Khadi and hand-spinning by the Madras Ministry
- Honorary **medical officers** to be appointed in hospitals
- Investment in public buildings is considerably reduced, etc.
- **Wardha Scheme:** An All India National Education Conference was held at Wardha. The Conference came up with a plan that called for:
 - **Free and mandatory education** for seven years throughout the nation.
 - Use of **mother tongue** as the medium of instruction.
 - Emphasis on **vocational** and Manual Training, etc.

Major achievements of the Congress Ministries

- Reduction in Salaries of Ministers
- The Declaration of Fundamental Rights
- Welfare Schemes for Tribals
- Carrying Jail Reforms
- Repeal of Moplah Outrages Act
- Carrying out commercial and economic surveys

Drawbacks in Congress rule in Provinces

- **A blemish on civil liberties:** In Bombay, the government had used **CID against communists** and leftists. Socialist leaders like **Yusuf Mahherally and S.S. Batliwala** were arrested for their speeches.
- **Peasant cause:** Congress faced opposition from **right-wing leaders** for implementing the tenancy and zamindari reforms, as right-wing leaders were more inclined toward zamindars. In most of the areas, the zamindars remained in a **dominant position**.
- **Labour cause:** The ministries treated militant trade union protests as law and order problems. Many times, the ministries resorted to Section 144 and arrested the leaders. This made leftist leaders unhappy.
- **Praja Mandal movement:** Congress was in a dilemma to support the Praja Mandal movement for **greater democracy** or not.
- **Minority issues:** **The Pirpur committee by the Muslim League** had accused Congress of minority discrimination and interference in the religious rites.
- **No Coalition with Muslim League:** Congress in many provinces, such as Bengal and Assam, refused to partner with the League. It could have averted the idea of Pakistan's resolution.

Resignation of Congress Ministers

In November 1939, the Viceroy Linlithgow unilaterally included India in the imperialist war (Second World War) without even consulting the Congress, prompting the Congress Ministries to resign. While the nationalists supported the Congress, the Muslim League led by Jinnah celebrated this day as "deliverance day," and the subsequent events gave rise to the Satyagraha movement in 1940 and the Quit India movement in 1942.

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