



## Internal Democracy in Political Parties

**For Prelims:** Election Commission, local body, Representation of the Peoples' Act, 1951

**For Mains:** Internal Democracy of Political Parties and its need

### Why in News?

The [Election Commission](#) is likely to take up the issue of internal democracy within parties.

### What is the Need for Internal Party Democracy?

- **Representation:** The absence of intra-party democracy has contributed to political parties becoming **closed autocratic structures**. This adversely impacts the constitutional rights of all citizens to [equal political opportunity](#) to participate in politics and contest elections.
- **Less Factionalism:** A leader with strong grassroots connections would not be sidelined. This will allow less factionalism and division of parties. E.g., Sharad Pawar formed Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), Mamata Banerjee formed All India Trinamool Congress after leaving Indian National Congress (INC).
- **Transparency:** A transparent party structure with transparent processes will **allow proper ticket distribution and candidate selection**. The selection would not be based on the whims of a few powerful leaders in the party but will represent the choice of the larger party.
- **Accountability:** A democratic party will be **accountable to its party members**, for they will lose elections in the next cycle for their shortcomings.
- **Decentralising Power:** Every **political party has State and local body units**, an election at each level will allow creation of power centres at different levels. This will allow decentralisation of power and the decision making will take place at the ground level.
- **Criminalization of Politics:** As there is **no well-defined process for the distribution of tickets** to candidates before elections, tickets are given to candidates on the vague concept of winnability. This has led to an additional problem of [candidates with criminal backgrounds](#) contesting elections.

### What are the Reasons for Lack of Intra-Party Democracy?

- **Dynasty Politics:** The lack of intra-party democracy has **also contributed to the growing nepotism in political parties**. With senior party leaders fielding their kins in elections, the succession plans for "family" constituencies are being put in place.
- **Centralised Structure of Political Parties:** The centralised mode of functioning of the political parties and the stringent anti-defection law of 1985 deters party legislators from voting in the national and state legislatures according to their individual preferences.
- **Lack of Law:** Currently, **there is no express provision for internal democratic regulation** of political parties in India and the only governing law is provided by **Section 29A of the [Representation of the Peoples' Act, 1951](#)** which provides for registration of political parties with the ECI. However, ECI does not have any statutory power to enforce internal democracy in parties or to mandate elections.

- **Personality cult:** There is a **tendency of hero worship in people** and many times a leader takes over the party and builds his own coterie, ending all forms of intra-party democracy.
- **Easy to Subvert Internal Elections:** The ability of existing repositories of power to subvert internal institutional processes to consolidate power and maintain the status quo is unquestionable.

## What about the Direction of the Election Commission on Internal Democracy?

- **Representation of the People Act, 1951:**
  - The ECI has **periodically used guidelines issued for registration of parties** under Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 to remind parties to conduct elections and to ensure that **their leadership is renewed, changed or re-elected every five years.**
  - The EC's guidelines for parties applying for registration under the Act state that the **applicant should submit a copy of the party constitution.**
- **Power of De-registration of Political Parties:**
  - The commission has **asked the Law Ministry for the power to deregister political parties in the past,** but the proposal has not been implemented so far.
- **No Permanent President for a Party:**
  - The Election Commission of India (ECI) has **also recently rejected the idea of a 'permanent president' for a party.**
    - The ECI says such a step is inherently anti-democratic.

## Way Forward

- There is a **need for a new interpretation and some bold moves** from the ECI re-interpreting the existing laws, like:
  - Political parties should hold organizational elections regularly.
  - The **parties are required to inform the ECI about changes** in their office bearers and addresses.
  - They are **required to submit a document of expenditure** incurred during elections and in the non-election period.
- It shall be the **duty of the political party to take appropriate steps** to ensure the holding of elections at all levels. The political party shall hold elections of national and State levels in the presence of the observers to be nominated by the ECI.
- The **ECI shall be competent to inquire into allegations** of non-compliance with any of the provisions requiring elections. **ECI should have the penal power to deregister a party** until free and fair elections in the party are conducted.

**[Source: TH](#)**

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