

CHAPTER 3

Election and Representation

CBSE Class 11 · Political Science · Indian Constitution at Work · Chapter 3

CBSE · Political Science · Class 11

WHAT THIS CHAPTER DOES



Explain why elections are essential to a representative democracy.



Distinguish the First-Past-The-Post system from Proportional Representation and say why India chose FPTP.

Boards prep that builds confidence, not anxiety.

TODAY'S MISSION

Today's mission

1

Explain why elections are essential to a representative democracy.

2

Distinguish the First-Past-The-Post system from Proportional Representation and say why India chose FPTP.

3

Describe reserved constituencies, universal adult franchise, and the Election Commission of India.

4

Master the FPTP-vs-PR comparison and the Election Commission — and score 8/9 on this chapter.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Why this chapter matters

- 1** It is the most scoring chapter in Book I if the electoral SYSTEMS are clear — the FPTP vs PR contrast appears almost every year.
- 2** 7-9 marks per paper, with predictable high-mark questions on FPTP vs PR and the Election Commission.
- 3** It connects directly to Chapter 1's idea that authority flows from 'We, the People' — elections are how the people actually exercise that authority.

TOPIC

A

Elections and the idea of representation

TOPIC

Why a democracy needs elections

REPRESENTATION, NOT DIRECT RULE

In a country of over a billion people it is impossible for everyone to gather and govern directly, so modern democracy is REPRESENTATIVE: citizens choose a small number of representatives who decide on their behalf. Elections are the device

WHAT ELECTIONS DO

Elections perform several jobs at once. They let citizens CHOOSE their representatives and, through them, the government and its policy direction. They make rulers ACCOUNTABLE, because anyone who performs badly can be voted out at the next election. They give the winning side

WHEN IS AN ELECTION DEMOCRATIC?

Holding elections is not enough; many undemocratic regimes hold sham elections. An election is democratic only if certain conditions are met: everyone gets one vote of equal value (universal adult franchise), there is a real choice between candidates and parties,

THE ELECTION SYSTEM MATTERS

A point students often miss is that the RULES for converting votes into seats are not a mere technicality — they shape who wins. The same set of votes, counted under different systems, can produce a very different distribution of seats and even a different government. Designing

TOPIC

B

The First-Past-The-Post system

TOPIC

How First-Past-The-Post works

THE BASIC RULE

Under the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) system the country is divided into small geographical areas called constituencies, each electing ONE representative. Every voter casts a single vote for one candidate, and the candidate who secures the HIGHEST number of votes in that constituency is declared

PLURALITY, NOT MAJORITY

The single most important — and most misunderstood — feature of FPTP is that the winner needs only a PLURALITY (the largest single share), not a MAJORITY (more than 50%). If four candidates split the vote 35-30-20-15, the candidate with 35% wins

MERITS OF FPTP

FPTP has real advantages that explain its survival. It is extremely SIMPLE — the voter just picks one candidate and the counting is easy to understand, which matters in a large and partly less-literate electorate. It creates a clear, direct link between a constituency and ONE identifiable

DEMERITS OF FPTP

The price of these merits is fairness of representation. Under FPTP a party's share of SEATS can differ sharply from its share of VOTES — a party may win a large majority of seats with well under half the national vote, while another with substantial support wins very few seats. Votes cast for

TOPIC

C

Proportional Representation

TOPIC

Proportional Representation and its forms

THE CORE IDEA

Proportional Representation (PR) rests on a different principle: a party should get a share of SEATS that matches its share of VOTES. If a party wins 30% of the votes cast across the country, it should win roughly 30% of the seats — no more, no less. PR therefore tries to make the

THE LIST SYSTEM

In the most common form of PR, the LIST SYSTEM, voters usually vote for a PARTY rather than an individual candidate, often across large multi-member constituencies or the whole country. Each party prepares a ranked list of candidates in advance. After the count, each party is allotted

SINGLE TRANSFERABLE VOTE (STV)

The second form of PR is the SINGLE TRANSFERABLE VOTE (STV), used in multi-member constituencies. Here a voter ranks the candidates in order of preference — 1, 2, 3 and so on. A candidate needs a fixed quota of votes to be elected; once a candidate reaches the

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF PR

PR's great strength is FAIRNESS: it gives small and minority parties a share of seats matching their support, and almost no vote is wasted, so the legislature genuinely reflects the electorate. Its weaknesses are that it can be harder for voters to understand, it often produces no single-party

WORKED EXAMPLE

Same votes, different results — FPTP vs PR

- 1 Suppose, across a country, Party A wins 40% of the total votes, Party B 35%, and Party C 25%.
- 2 Under PR (list system): seats are allotted in proportion — Party A gets about 40% of the seats, B about 35%, C about 25%. The legislature mirrors the vote.
- 3 Under FPTP: the result depends on where the votes fall constituency by constituency. A party with 40% of the vote, if it comes first in most constituencies, can win a LARGE majority of seats — far more than 40% — while Party C's 25%, spread thinly, may win very few seats.
- 4 Lesson: the SAME votes produce a proportional legislature under PR but can produce a lopsided, single-party-majority legislature under FPTP. This is the heart of every 'distinguish FPTP from PR' question.

TRY IT · SOLVE BEFORE YOU PEEK

A student writes: 'Under FPTP a candidate must win more than 50% of the votes, and India uses Proportional Representation for the Lok Sabha.' Identify the two errors.

SOLUTION

ANSWER Error 1: FPTP requires only a PLURALITY (the most votes), not a majority of 50%+. Error 2: India uses FPTP — not Proportional Representation — for direct elections to the Lok Sabha; PR-STV is used only for indirect elections (President, Vice-President, Rajya Sabha, Legislative Councils).

TOPIC

D

India's choice, reserved seats and the franchise

TOPIC

Why FPTP - Reserved constituencies - Franchise

WHY INDIA CHOSE FPTP

The makers of the Constitution debated PR but chose FPTP for direct elections for several practical reasons. It is SIMPLE for voters to understand — a vital consideration for a large, newly enfranchised and partly illiterate electorate. It gives every locality ONE clear representative who is directly

RESERVED CONSTITUENCIES

To make sure that historically disadvantaged groups are adequately represented, the Constitution provides RESERVED constituencies for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. In such a constituency, only a candidate belonging to

UNIVERSAL ADULT FRANCHISE

India adopted UNIVERSAL ADULT FRANCHISE from its very first election: every adult citizen has the right to vote regardless of caste, religion, gender, education, property or income. This was a bold democratic experiment, since many older democracies had

HOW CBSE TESTS THESE

These three ideas supply reliable 3-4 mark questions. For 'why FPTP', give simplicity, local accountability and stable government as distinct points. For reserved constituencies, the marking scheme rewards the precise distinction that reservation governs who can CONTEST not who

TOPIC

E

The Election Commission of India

TOPIC

The independent referee of Indian elections

AN INDEPENDENT CONSTITUTIONAL BODY

The Election Commission of India (ECI) is an **INDEPENDENT** constitutional body established by Article 324 to superintend, direct and control elections to Parliament, the State Legislatures, and the offices of President and Vice-President. It is

COMPOSITION AND SECURITY OF TENURE

The Commission is a **MULTI-MEMBER** body consisting of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and such other Election Commissioners as the President may appoint; it began as a single-member body and is now generally three members. The appointments are made

FUNCTIONS OF THE COMMISSION

The Commission's functions cover the whole electoral process. It prepares and periodically revises the **ELECTORAL ROLLS** (voters' lists) so that every eligible citizen can vote. It supervises the nomination of candidates, the conduct of **POLLING** and the

POWERS AND FREE, FAIR ELECTIONS

To do its job the Commission has wide **POWERS**. It can order a **REPOLL** in a booth or constituency, or even **COUNTERMAND** (cancel and re-order) an election where serious malpractice has occurred. It can transfer officials it considers partisan during the

TOPIC

F

Malpractice and electoral reform

TOPIC

Threats to fair elections and how to fix them

COMMON ELECTORAL MALPRACTICES

Even with an independent Commission, Indian elections face well-known threats. **RIGGING** and **BOOTH-CAPTURING** — where polling is fraudulently manipulated or polling stations seized — distort the verdict. The growing influence of **MONEY POWER** lets wealthy candidates and

THE AGENDA FOR REFORM

Various reforms aim to make elections fairer. Stricter regulation and disclosure of election **EXPENDITURE** seeks to curb money power. Keeping candidates with serious criminal records out of the contest, and requiring candidates to declare their assets and cases, targets the **criminalisation of politics**.

WHY REPRESENTATION STILL FALLS SHORT

The chapter also asks whether our representatives truly reflect society. Despite reserved seats, some groups — notably women — remain under-represented in Parliament and the Assemblies, which has fuelled long debates about reserving seats for

THE BIG TAKEAWAY

Pulling the chapter together: elections turn the people's will into a government through an electoral **SYSTEM** (India's is **FPTP** for direct polls), corrected by devices like reserved constituencies, resting on universal adult franchise, and policed by an independent Election Commission under **Article 324**. The quality

THEOREM · LOAD-BEARING RESULT

Why the choice of electoral system matters

“ The electoral system is not a neutral technicality: the SAME votes, counted under First-Past-The-Post versus Proportional Representation, can produce a different distribution of seats and even a different government. Choosing a system therefore means choosing what a democracy values most.

STATEMENT

Under FPTP the winner of each single-member constituency needs only a plurality, so a party's seat share may diverge sharply from its vote share, typically rewarding large parties with

WHY THIS MATTERS

- This is the central analytical claim of the chapter
- India chose FPTP for direct elections because it prized simplicity, clear local accountability and stable government over perfect proportionality — a deliberate value-judgement, not an accident

WATCH OUT FOR

NOTE Never say an FPTP winner needs a majority (50%+) — only a plurality. And remember India uses BOTH systems: FPTP for the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, PR by STV for the President, Vice-President, Rajya Sabha and Legislative Councils. Stating that India uses PR for the Lok Sabha is an instant error.

WORKED EXAMPLE

Describe the composition, powers and functions of the Election Commission

- 1** Composition — an independent constitutional body under Article 324; the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners, appointed by the President; CEC has security of tenure (removed like a Supreme Court judge), which guarantees independence.
- 2** Functions — prepares and revises the electoral rolls; supervises nomination, polling and counting; recognises parties and allots election symbols; frames and enforces the Model Code of Conduct.
- 3** Powers — can order a repoll or countermand an election where malpractice occurs; can transfer partisan officials; can act against any party or candidate, including the ruling party, that breaks the rules.
- 4** Conclude — these powers plus its independence are what enable the Commission to conduct free and fair elections, the foundation of Indian democracy.

TOPIC

What FPTP means

TRAP → TRUTH

- × **MISTAKE** In the First-Past-The-Post system a candidate must win more than 50% of the votes to be declared elected.
- ✓ **CORRECT** FPTP requires only that a candidate get MORE votes than every other candidate in that constituency — a simple plurality, NOT a majority. A candidate can win with, say, 35% of the votes if that is the highest single share. 'First past the post' is a horse-racing image: whoever crosses first wins, regardless of by how much. Expecting a 50% majority is the single most common conceptual error in this chapter.

TOPIC

FPTP vs Proportional Representation

TRAP → TRUTH

× **MISTAKE** FPTP and Proportional Representation are basically the same thing with different names.

✓ **CORRECT** They are opposite philosophies. Under FPTP the country is divided into territorial constituencies and the single candidate with the most votes in each wins — a party's share of SEATS can be very different from its share of VOTES. Under Proportional Representation a party gets seats roughly IN PROPORTION to its total share of votes, so a party with 30% of the national vote wins about 30% of the seats. The whole chapter turns on grasping this difference.

TOPIC

Which system India uses

TRAP → TRUTH

× **MISTAKE** India uses Proportional Representation for all its elections.

✓ **CORRECT** India uses FPTP for direct elections to the Lok Sabha and the State Legislative Assemblies. Proportional Representation by the Single Transferable Vote is used only for INDIRECT elections — the election of the President, the Vice-President, and members of the Rajya Sabha and the State Legislative Councils. So India uses BOTH systems, but FPTP for the main mass elections that students usually have in mind.

TOPIC

Reserved constituencies

TRAP → TRUTH

- × **MISTAKE** In a constituency reserved for Scheduled Castes, only members of Scheduled Castes are allowed to vote.
- ✓ **CORRECT** Reservation applies to WHO CAN CONTEST, not to who can vote. In an SC-reserved constituency, only a candidate belonging to a Scheduled Caste may stand for election, but EVERY voter in that constituency — of any caste or community — votes as usual. Reservation of constituencies ensures that disadvantaged groups get adequate representation in the legislature, while keeping the universal right to vote intact.

TOPIC

Status of the Election Commission

TRAP → TRUTH

× **MISTAKE** The Election Commission is a department of the central government that the ruling party can control.

✓ **CORRECT** The Election Commission of India is an INDEPENDENT, constitutional body created by Article 324. The Chief Election Commissioner has security of tenure — he can be removed only in the same difficult manner as a judge of the Supreme Court, not at the pleasure of the government. This independence is precisely what allows the Commission to conduct free and fair elections and to act against the ruling party itself when election rules are broken.

TOPIC

Universal adult franchise

TRAP → TRUTH

- × **MISTAKE** Universal adult franchise means literate adults above 21 are allowed to vote.
- ✓ **CORRECT** Universal adult franchise means EVERY adult citizen has the right to vote regardless of caste, religion, gender, education, property or income — literacy is NOT a condition. India granted this right from the very first election, and the voting age was lowered from 21 to 18 by the 61st Constitutional Amendment in 1989. Adopting universal franchise at independence, for a poor and largely illiterate population, was a bold democratic experiment.

TOPIC

What 'free and fair' elections need

TRAP → TRUTH

× **MISTAKE** An election is free and fair as long as voting happens by secret ballot.

✓ **CORRECT** A secret ballot is necessary but far from sufficient. Free and fair elections also require an independent Election Commission, an honest and updated voters' list, a level playing field for all candidates, a Model Code of Conduct that limits the misuse of official power, control over money and muscle power, and impartial conduct of polling and counting. The chapter treats electoral malpractice (rigging, booth-capturing, misuse of money) as the central threat that electoral reform must address.

TOPPER TEMPLATE · MARK-BY-MARK

5-6 mark question: 'Distinguish between the First-Past-The-Post system and the system of

1 DEFINE EACH SYSTEM

2 m

'In the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) system the country is divided into small geographical constituencies, each electing one representative; the candidate who secures the highest number of votes (a simple plurality, not necessarily a majority) is declared elected. In Proportional Representation (PR) the seats a party wins are roughly in proportion to its share of the total votes; PR works either through the list system (voters vote for a party, which then fills its quota of seats from a ranked list) or through the Single Transferable Vote.'

2 CONTRAST ON THE KEY HEADS

2 m

Contrast point by point: (a) Basis of victory — FPTP: most votes in a constituency wins; PR: seats proportional to votes nationwide. (b) Vote-to-seat relation — FPTP: a party's share of seats can differ sharply from its share of votes; PR: the two are closely matched. (c) Small parties — FPTP tends to under-represent small and dispersed parties; PR gives them a fairer share. (d) Government formation — FPTP usually produces a clear majority and stable government; PR often produces coalitions.

3 INDIAN USAGE + WHY IT MATTERS

2 m

'India uses FPTP for direct elections to the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies because it is simple for voters to understand and tends to give a stable government, while PR by the Single Transferable Vote is used for the indirect election of the President, Vice-President and the Rajya Sabha. The choice of system therefore shapes how faithfully votes are converted into seats and how stable the resulting government is.'

TOPPER TEMPLATE · MARK-BY-MARK

5-6 mark question: 'Describe the composition, powers and functions of the Election

1 COMPOSITION AND INDEPENDENCE

2 m

'The Election Commission of India is an independent constitutional body set up under Article 324. It is a multi-member body consisting of the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners, appointed by the President. To keep it independent of the government of the day, the Chief Election Commissioner enjoys security of tenure and can be removed only through the same difficult process as a judge of the Supreme Court.'

2 FUNCTIONS

2 m

'Its functions include: superintendence, direction and control of the entire election process; preparing and revising the electoral rolls; supervising the nomination of candidates and the conduct of polling and counting; recognising political parties and allotting election symbols; and enforcing the Model Code of Conduct during elections.'

3 POWERS + WHY INDEPENDENCE MATTERS

2 m

'The Commission has wide powers: it can order a repoll or countermand an election where malpractice has occurred, transfer officials it considers partisan, and act against any party or candidate — including the ruling party — that violates election rules. This independence and these powers are precisely what enable it to conduct free and fair elections, the foundation of Indian democracy.'

TOPPER TEMPLATE · MARK-BY-MARK

3-4 mark question: 'Why did India adopt the FPTP system?' or 'What are reserved

1 SIMPLICITY

1 m

'The FPTP system was adopted partly because it is extremely simple for ordinary voters to understand — the voter simply votes for one candidate in one constituency, and the candidate with the most votes wins. For a largely new and partly illiterate electorate, this simplicity was a major advantage.'

2 CLEAR ACCOUNTABILITY + STABLE GOVERNMENT

1 m

'FPTP creates a direct link between a voter and one identifiable representative for the local constituency, making the representative accountable to a specific area. It also tends to give a clear parliamentary majority to one party, producing a stable and effective government — important for a newly independent nation.'

3 RESERVED CONSTITUENCIES (FOR THE ALTERNATIVE QUESTION)

2 m

'A reserved constituency is one where only a candidate belonging to a particular group — Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes — may contest, though all voters of that area vote as usual. They are provided because, under open competition, weaker and dispersed sections might never win seats; reservation guarantees them adequate representation in the legislature in proportion to their population, in keeping with the constitutional commitment to social justice.'

PYQ PATTERNS

Top PYQ patterns to drill

#1

Explain the First-Past-The-Post system. / Distinguish between FPTP and Proportional Representation. (5-6 marks)

Almost every year (CBSE SQP 2019, 2021, 2023; School Annual 2020, 2022)

#2

Describe the composition, powers and functions of the Election Commission of India. (5-6 marks)

CBSE SQP 2020, 2022; School Annual 2019, 2023

#3

Why did the makers of the Indian Constitution choose the FPTP system over Proportional Representation? (3-4 marks)

CBSE SQP 2021; School Annual 2022, 2024

#4

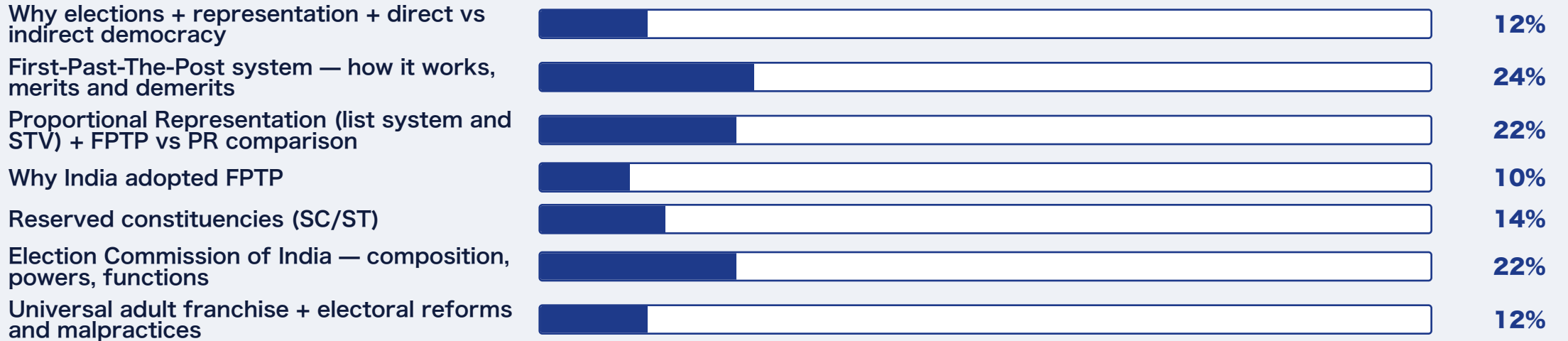
VSA

Who appoints the Chief Election Commissioner? What is the minimum voting age? Full form

MARKS DISTRIBUTION

10-year marks distribution

10-YEAR PYQ MARKS DISTRIBUTION



RECAP · MEMORISE THESE

5-line revision

1 Elections & systems — Elections make representative democracy work. FPTP: most votes (plurality, not majority) in a constituency wins — India uses it for Lok Sabha and Assemblies. PR: seats in proportion to votes,

2 India's design — India chose FPTP for direct polls (simple, local accountability, stable government) and PR-STV for indirect polls (President, VP, Rajya Sabha, Councils). Reserved seats: only SC/ST may CONTEST, all vote. Universal adult franchise: every adult votes, age 18

3 Election Commission — Article 324 — independent constitutional body; CEC + Election Commissioners appointed by President; CEC has security of tenure. Functions: rolls, symbols, Model Code, conduct of polls; powers: repoll,

WHAT'S NEXT

What's next

- Chapter 4 — Executive (builds on how the government formed through these elections actually exercises power).
- Sit the 15-MCQ Quick Drill (companion PDF) — under 20 minutes, target $\geq 12/15$.
- Then the full Board-Pattern Paper — 30 marks, 60 minutes, real exam pattern.

You now know how India turns votes into a government — and who keeps it fair.

Prove it. Take the drill, sit the paper, master the chapter.

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