

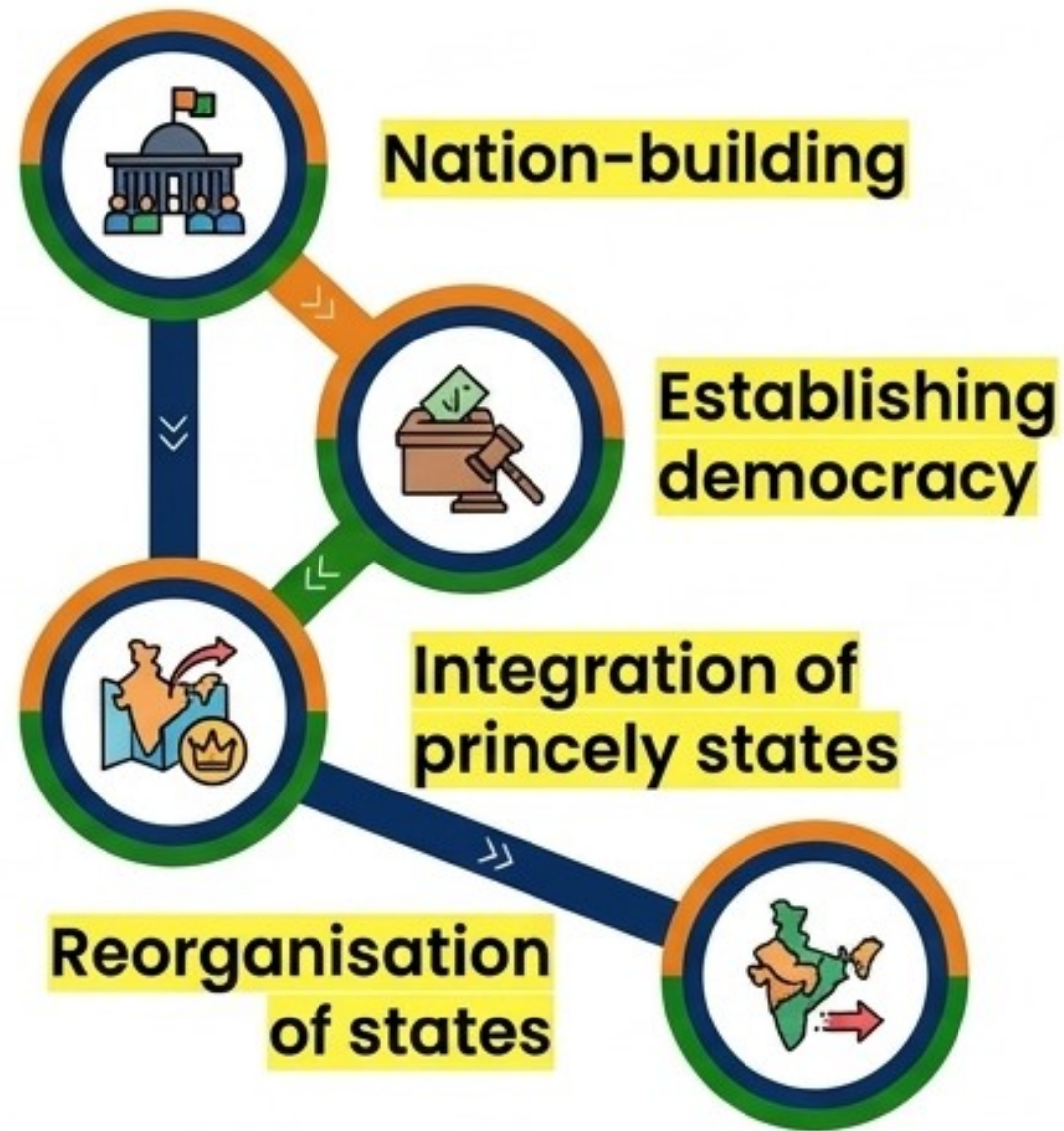


ERA OF ONE-PARTY DOMINANCE

Chapter 2



Link with the Previous Chapter



India adopted a **democratic system** after Independence.

1951-52 → First General Elections
→ Beginning of the era of **one-party dominance**

👉 Conducted through universal adult franchise (irrespective of caste, religion, gender, or economic status).

👉 Driven by the **democratic aspirations** of the people.

Began with the establishment of the **Election Commission**. **Sukumar Sen** became the **first Chief Election Commissioner**.



Challenges in Conducting Elections



1. Huge electorate

Around 17 crore people were eligible to vote. Most of them had never voted before.



2. Illiteracy

A large part of the population was illiterate. Therefore, special arrangements were needed to help voters identify candidates.



3. Electoral system

India adopted the First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) system. The candidate receiving the highest number of votes in a constituency was declared the winner.

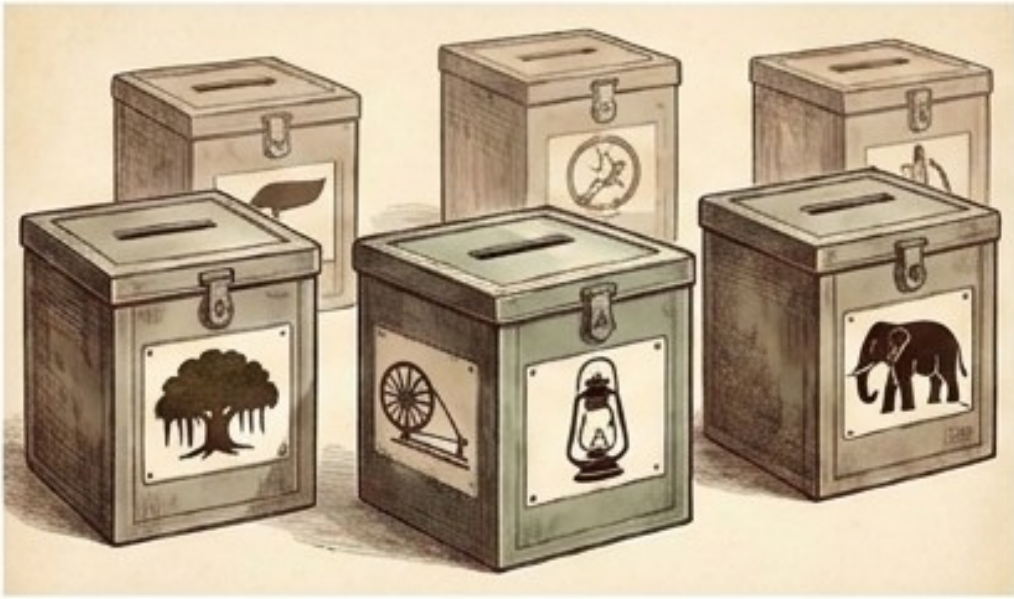


4. Preparation of electoral rolls

Preparing a complete list of eligible voters was a difficult task. Elections had to be organised across a huge and diverse country.

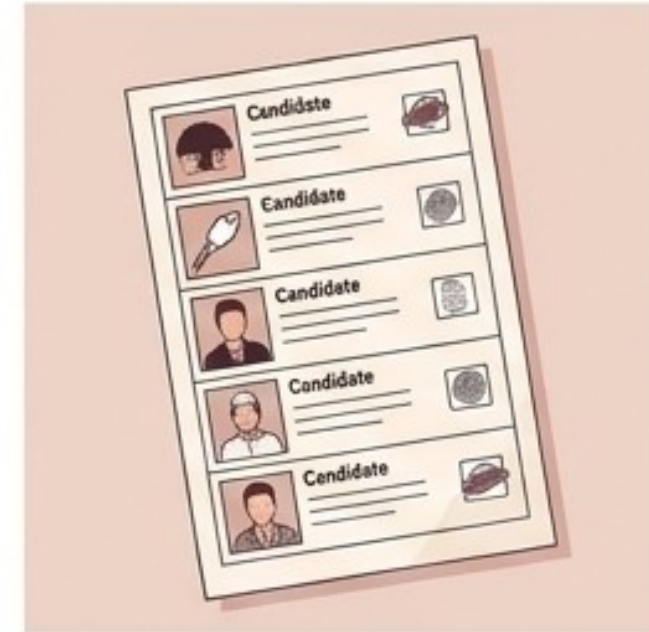
Landmark: The first general elections were a major test of India's democratic system.

Separate Ballot Boxes



- Each candidate was given a **separate ballot box**.
- The candidate's **name/symbol** was placed on the box.
- Voters dropped their **ballot paper** into the box of the **candidate they wanted to support**.

Single Ballot Paper



- The method was **changed**.
- A **single ballot paper** was introduced, with **candidates represented by their symbols**.
- This made the **voting process simpler**.

Important Keyword: Changing voting methods → separate ballot boxes → single ballot paper.

The Indian National Congress (INC) won the first three general elections.

1951-52

1957

1962

Why was Congress dominant?



A strong organisation & Nationwide presence.



A long history connected with the freedom struggle.



Support from different social and ideological groups.



Popular and influential leaders.

Congress was therefore able to become the dominant party in the early years of Indian democracy.



Class 12 Political Science | Rapid Revision



1957 Kerala Election



The **Communist Party of India (CPI)** won the election in Kerala.



E.M.S. Namboodiripad became the Chief Minister.



Kerala became the **first state** where a communist government came to power through elections.



Later Developments

The Communist government introduced several radical and progressive policy measures → The Congress and other groups opposed some of its policies → The **government** was eventually **dismissed** in 1959 under Article 356.

Importance: The Kerala experience showed that **political competition existed** even during the era of **Congress dominance**.

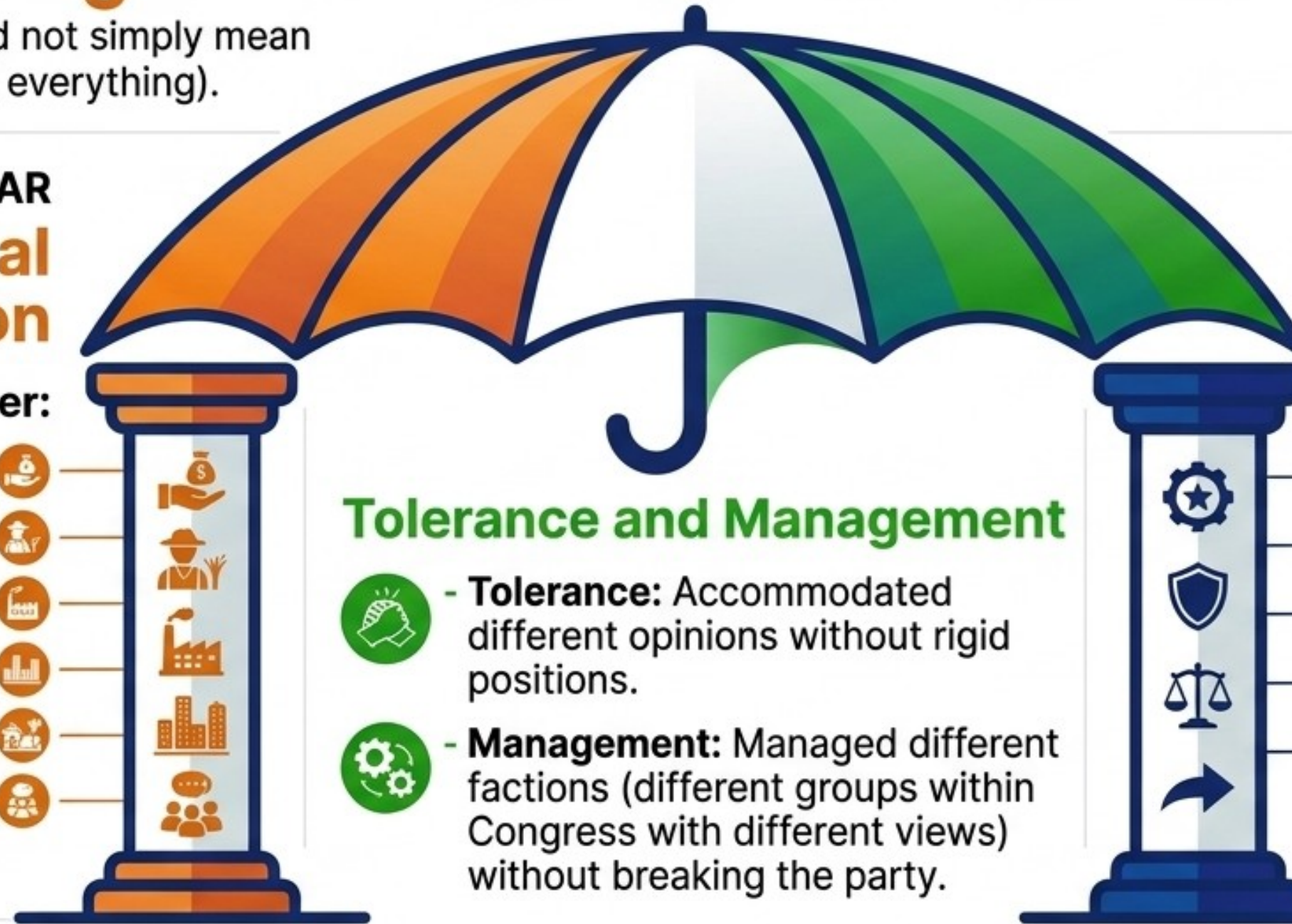
Nature of Congress Dominance

(Congress dominance did not simply mean that one party controlled everything).

LEFT PILLAR Sociological Coalition

Brought together:

Rich and poor
Peasants
Industrialists
Urban groups
Villagers
Different castes
and communities.



RIGHT PILLAR Ideological Coalition

Included:

Socialists
Conservatives
Liberals
Right-wing groups
Different shades of
political opinion.

Congress dominance = Social coalition + Ideological coalition + Tolerance + Management

Emergence of Opposition Parties

Opposition existed from the beginning: Criticising policies, providing alternatives, and keeping a check to maintain democracy.



Socialist Party

Advocated socialism and greater equality.
Emerged from the socialist tradition within the freedom movement.



Communist Party of India (CPI)

Based on communist ideology.
Wanted major economic and social transformation.



Bharatiya Jana Sangh

Represented a different ideological perspective.
Emphasised nationalism and cultural concerns.



Swatantra Party

Favoured free enterprise and a smaller role of the state in the economy. Opposed excessive state control.

Main Point: Although they had limited electoral success, they provided alternative political viewpoints and strengthened India's democratic system.

Objective Assessment | Multiple Choice Questions

1. Which of the following best explains why Congress dominance in the early years of independent India should not be equated with a one-party system?
 - A. Congress did not contest elections
 - B. Other political parties were allowed to compete in free elections
 - C. Congress formed governments only through coalitions
 - D. Opposition parties were constitutionally prohibited

2. Consider the following statements about the first general elections in India:
Statement I: The elections were conducted on the basis of universal adult franchise.
Statement II: Their successful conduct demonstrated the viability of democracy in a newly independent country.
Choose the correct option:
 - A. Both Statement I and Statement II are correct, and Statement II explains Statement I
 - B. Both Statement I and Statement II are correct, but Statement II does not explain Statement I
 - C. Statement I is correct, but Statement II is incorrect
 - D. Statement I is incorrect, but Statement II is correct

3. Which feature most clearly explains the character of the Congress as a “social and ideological coalition”?
 - A. It followed one rigid ideology without internal differences
 - B. It accommodated diverse social groups and ideological viewpoints
 - C. It allowed only regional leaders to join the party
 - D. It avoided internal competition among its leaders

Objective Assessment | Multiple Choice Questions

4. Assertion (A): Congress was able to maintain its dominance in the first three general elections.
Reason (R): Congress had a nationwide organisation and the legacy of the national movement.
- A. Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A
 - B. Both A and R are true, but R is not the correct explanation of A
 - C. A is true, but R is false
 - D. A is false, but R is true
5. Which of the following sequences correctly represents the early electoral history of independent India?
- A. First General Elections → Congress victory → continuation of Congress dominance
 - B. Congress victory → First General Elections → formation of Election Commission
 - C. Formation of Swatantra Party → First General Elections → Congress victory
 - D. First General Elections → abolition of opposition parties → Congress dominance
6. The presence of factions within the Congress during the period of one-party dominance had which significant political effect?
- A. It completely eliminated ideological differences
 - B. It provided space for competing interests to operate within the party
 - C. It prevented Congress from winning elections
 - D. It resulted in the abolition of opposition parties

MCQ ANSWER KEY

1-B | 2-B | 3-B | 4-A | 5-A | 6-B

Subjective Assessment | Long-Answer Questions

1. “The dominance of the Congress Party in the first three general elections was not merely a result of electoral advantage.” Analyse the major factors responsible for Congress dominance.

Answer:

- Congress had the legacy of the national movement and was associated with the freedom struggle.
- It possessed a well-organised nationwide party structure.
- It had a broad social and ideological base and accommodated different interests and groups.
- Jawaharlal Nehru’s popularity and leadership strengthened its appeal.
- The First-Past-the-Post system also helped Congress convert its widespread support into a large number of seats.

2. “India experienced one-party dominance, but it did not become a one-party system.” Explain the distinction with suitable arguments.

Answer:

- In India, several political parties were allowed to contest elections.
- Elections were conducted through universal adult franchise and were based on democratic competition.
- Opposition parties were free to criticise the government and participate in elections.
- Congress dominated because it repeatedly won elections, not because other parties were legally prohibited.
- Thus, India had one-party dominance within a multi-party democratic system, unlike a one-party system where political competition is restricted.

Subjective Assessment | Long-Answer Questions

3. "The Congress Party functioned more like a social and ideological coalition than a conventional political party." Examine the statement.

Answer:

- Congress brought together people belonging to different social groups, classes, regions and communities.
- It accommodated different ideological positions within the same organisation.
- Internal factions represented competing interests and leadership groups.
- These factions often competed within Congress rather than leaving it to form separate parties.
- This broad and accommodative character helped Congress maintain its dominance.

4. The first general election of 1951–52 was a major test of India's democratic experiment. Explain the difficulties involved and its significance.

Answer:

- India had a very large population, with a substantial proportion of people being illiterate.
- Conducting elections on the basis of universal adult franchise on such a large scale was unprecedented.
- The Election Commission had to create electoral rolls and develop suitable voting arrangements and symbols.
- Despite these challenges, the elections were successfully conducted.
- They demonstrated that democracy could function in a newly independent and socially diverse country.

Subjective Assessment | Long-Answer Questions

5. “The opposition parties, though electorally weak in the early years, played an important role in the development of Indian democracy.” Examine.

Answer:

- Opposition parties provided an alternative to Congress and represented different ideological and social viewpoints.
- Socialist groups, Communist Party, Bharatiya Jana Sangh, Swatantra Party and others raised alternative political and economic issues.
- Their presence ensured that Congress dominance did not mean the absence of political competition.
- They criticised government policies and contributed to public debate.
- Their existence strengthened the democratic and plural character of Indian politics.