

## Internal Democracy of Political Parties

### Why in News?

Many national and regional political parties in India are struggling to maintain democratic structures.

### What is the internal democracy of political parties?

- **Internal democracy** - The processes and mechanisms by which party members participate in decision-making and leadership selection.
- It's a crucial aspect of a healthy democratic system, ensuring that the party represents the interests of its members and is accountable to them.
- Key components of internal democracy in political parties include its democratic functioning various aspects of it.
- **Open Membership** - Parties should have open membership policies, allowing anyone who meets the criteria (e.g., age, citizenship) to join.
- **Regular Elections** - Regular elections for party leadership positions, such as party president or leader, ensure that members have a say in who represents them.
- **Internal Party Elections** - Members should have the right to participate in internal party elections for various positions, from local to national levels.
- **Party Conventions** - Party conventions provide a platform for members to discuss party policies, elect leaders, and ratify decisions.
- **Free Expression** - Members should have the right to freely express their opinions and dissent within the party, without fear of reprisal.
- **Fair Competition** - Internal party elections should be fair and transparent, with equal opportunities for all candidates.
- **Accountability** - Party leaders should be accountable to the party membership and subject to internal disciplinary procedures if they violate party rules or principles.
- **Transparency** - Party decision-making processes should be transparent, with information about party activities and finances made publicly available.

### What are the challenges to internal democracy of political parties?

- **Concentration of Power** - The tendency in political parties towards the concentration of power in one or few leaders at the top.
- **Heroism** - India's multi-party democracy thrives on diversity but often sees political parties driven by individual charisma rather than internal democracy.
- **Dominance of Elites** - In some cases, a small group of elites may dominate a party, limiting the influence of ordinary members.
- **Factionalism** - The formation of factions within parties can undermine internal democracy by creating divisions and hindering consensus-building.
- **Corruption** - Corruption within parties can erode public trust and undermine

democratic principles.

- **Lack of Participation** - Low levels of member participation in party activities can weaken internal democracy and lead to a disconnect between party leadership and the membership.
- **Violation of Party Constitution** - Not keeping membership registers, not holding organisational meetings, and not conducting internal elections regularly.
- **Lack of Transparency** - Ordinary members of the party do not get sufficient information on what happens inside the party.

### What is the role of EC in maintaining internal democracy of political parties?

*The Election Commission of India is an autonomous constitutional authority constituted under Article 324 for administering Union and State election processes in India.*

- **Registering Authority** - The EC is the registering authority for all the political parties in our country and thus gives the parties a legal recognition as an entity.
- **Functional Monitoring** - EC monitors whether the political parties are functioning according to their Constitution, by-laws, etc through periodical review of compliance.
- **Oversee Party Election** - Elections monitors whether the elections to their office bearers are taking place regularly.
- **Recognising Party Split** - Whenever there is a split in an election party, EC recognizes a group based on 4 tests political party's symbols order, 1968.
  - Following the party Constitution
  - Majority of the party
  - Majority of the legislature
  - Proceeding according to the by-laws.
- All these four tests are applied every time starting from Sadiq Ali case.

### What are the challenges to EC?

- **Limited Jurisdiction** - ECs typically have jurisdiction over elections for public offices, but their authority over internal party matters is often limited.
- **Judicial Ruling** - 2002 ruling of the Supreme Court restricted the EC from going into the political process and anything which is part of the political process per se of political parties.
- **No Deregistration Power** - EC has no power to de-register a political party based on any violation of party's constitutional and not conducting periodic elections.

*They can de-register if registration has been obtained on the basis of fraud or other things.*

- **Impact of Independence** - When EC becomes political, it becomes susceptible to various political pressures from which it should maintain its distance.
- **Party Autonomy** - Parties often assert their autonomy and resist external

interference, even when their internal processes may be undemocratic.

- **Limited Resources** - ECs may have limited resources and personnel to investigate and address complaints of undemocratic practices within parties.

### What lies ahead?

- Consider the wholistic approach of delivering elections on the stipulated time and in a free fair manner.
- Educate the electorate to consider the internal democracy of political parties an important parament while voting for a party.
- Develop clear and specific laws and regulations governing inner-party democracy.

### Reference

[The Hindu | Inner democracy of Political Parties](#)

