# DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND POLITICAL DECISION MAKING IN INDIAN POLITICS

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**ABSTRACT:**

Democracy is not just about people electing their rulers. In a democracy the rulers have to follow some rules and procedures. They have to work with and within institutions. We try to understand this by looking at the manner in which major decisions are taken and implemented in our country. We also look at how disputes regarding these decisions are resolved. In this process we come across two institutions that play a key role in major decisions – legislature and executive. A direct – or participatory – democracy, in turn, is one in which all eligible citizens play an active role in government and vote on these matters directly themselves. In other words, they are afforded the power to make political decisions. Although this would potentially result in decisions that are a truer reflection of the will of the people, increased political involvement, and a more equitable and just society, there are also many challenges to this model of democracy. Perhaps then, an absolute direct democracy is an overly idealistic, or even impractical, vision. However, one way in which we could certainly move closer to a democracy that is more participatory, inclusive, and representative of the general will, is by increasing stakeholder engagement in politics.

**KEYWORDS:**

Decision, Government, Parliament, Prime Minister, President, Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, Cabinet.

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## INTRODUCTION

Long back, former President of the United States of America, Abraham Lincoln said, "Democracy is a government of the people, for the people, and by the people." The term 'democracy' comes from the Greek word demokratia which means "rule of the people". That is, in a democracy the power rests with the people. Following the Industrial and National revolutions of the 19th century, sovereign nations across the world had the task of designing political decision–making processes to govern their communities in a democratic way. Representative forms of government were preferred over other alternatives of "self–rule".

Partisan representative government, competition and elections structured through political parties allowed for the plurality of interests that exists within a community to be represented at the level where political decisions are being made.

## THE DECISION MAKERS

Who takes the decision, clearly, such a big decision could not have been taken by the person who signed that document. The officer was merely implementing the instructions given by the Minister of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, of which the Department was a part. We can guess that such a major decision would have involved major functionaries in our country are;

·   Parliament consists of the President and two Houses, Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha.

·   Executive–Political and Permanent

·   Prime Minister and Council of Ministers.

## ROLE OF PARLIAMENT IN DECISION MAKING

Why do we need a Parliament? In all democracies, an assembly of elected representatives exercises supreme political authority on behalf of the people. In India such a national assembly of elected representatives is called Parliament. It exercises political authority on behalf of the people in many ways:

1.   Parliament is the final authority for making laws in any country.

2.   Parliaments all over the world exercise some control over those who run the government.

3.   Parliaments control all the money that governments have. In most

countries the public money can be spent only when Parliament sanctions it.

4.  Parliament is the highest forum of discussion and debate on public issues and national policy in any country.

5.  Parliament can seek information about any matter.

Since Parliament plays a central role in modern democracies, most large countries divide the role and powers of Parliament in two parts. They are called Chambers or Houses. In our country, Parliament consists of two Houses. The two Houses are Rajya Sabha and the Lok Sabha. The President of India is a part of Parliament. That is why all laws made in the Houses come into force only after they receive the assent of the President. Our Constitution does give the Rajya Sabha some special powers over the states. But on most matters, the Lok Sabha exercises supreme power.

## ROLE OF EXECUTIVE IN DECISION MAKING

The person who signed the document did not take this decision. He was only executing the policy decision taken by someone else. We noted the role of the Prime Minister in taking that decision. But we also know that he could not have taken that decision if he did not have support from the Lok Sabha. In that sense he was only executing the wishes of the Parliament. Thus, at different levels of any government we find functionaries who take day–to–day decisions but do not exercise supreme power on behalf of the people. All those functionaries are collectively known as the executive. They are called executive because they are in charge of the 'execution' of the policies of the government. Thus, when we talk about 'the government' we usually mean the executive.

## POLITICAL AND PERMANENT EXECUTIVE IN DECISION MAKING PROCESS

In a democratic country, two categories make up the executive. One that is elected by the people for a specific period, is called the political executive. Political leaders who take the big decisions fall in this category. In the second category, people are appointed on a long–term basis. This is called the permanent executive or civil services. Persons working in civil services are called civil servants. They remain in office even when the ruling party changes. These officers work under political executive and assist them in carrying out the day–to–day administration.

You might ask: Why does the political executive have more power than the non–political executive? Why is the minister more powerful than the civil servant? The civil servant is usually more educated and has more expert knowledge of the subject. The advisors working in the Finance Ministry know more about economics than the Finance Minister. Sometimes the ministers may know very little about the technical matters that come under their ministry. This could easily happen in ministries like Defense, Industry, Health, Science and Technology, Mines, etc. Why should the minister have the final say on these matters?

The reason is very simple. In a democracy the will of the people is supreme. The minister is an elected representative of the people and thus empowered to exercise the will of the people on their behalf. He is finally answerable to the people for all the consequences of her decision. That is why the minister takes all the final decisions. The minister decides the overall framework and objectives in which decisions on policy should be made. The minister is not, and is not expected to be, an expert in the matters of her ministry. The minister takes the advice of experts on all technical matters. But very often experts hold different opinions or place before her more than one option. Depending on what the overall objective is, the minister decides.

## PRIME MINISTER AND COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

Prime Minister is the most important political institution in the country. Yet there is no direct election to the post of the Prime Minister. The President appoints the Prime Minister. But the President cannot appoint anyone he likes. The President appoints the leader of the majority party or the coalition of parties that commands a majority in the Lok Sabha, as Prime Minister. Council of Ministers is the official name for the body that includes all the Ministers. Cabinet Ministers are usually top–level leaders of the ruling party or parties who are in charge of the major ministries. Usually the Cabinet Ministers meet to take decisions in the name of the Council of Ministers. Cabinet is thus the inner ring of the Council of Ministers. All decisions are taken in Cabinet meetings. That is why parliamentary democracy in most countries is often known as the Cabinet form of government. The Cabinet works as a team. The ministers may have different views and opinions, but everyone has to own up to every decision of the Cabinet. No minister can openly criticize any decision of the government, even if it is about another Ministry or

Department. Every ministry has secretaries, who are civil servants. The secretaries provide the necessary background information to the ministers to take decisions. The Cabinet as a team is assisted by the Cabinet Secretariat. This includes many senior civil servants who try to coordinate the working of different ministries.

## POSITION OF THE PRIME MINISTER

The Constitution does not say very much about the powers of the Prime Minister or the ministers or their relationship with each other. But as head of the government, the Prime Minister has wide ranging powers. He chairs Cabinet meetings. He coordinates the work of different Departments. His decisions are final in case disagreements arise between Departments. He exercises general supervision of different ministries. All ministers work under his leadership. The Prime Minister distributes and redistributes work to the ministers. He also has the power to dismiss ministers. When the Prime Minister quits, the entire ministry quits. Thus, if the Cabinet is the most powerful institution in India, within the Cabinet it is the Prime Minister who is the most powerful. The powers of the Prime Minister in all parliamentary democracies of the world have increased so much in recent decades that parliamentary democracies are sometimes seen as Prime Ministerial form of government. As political parties have come to play a major role in politics, the Prime Minister controls the Cabinet and Parliament through the party. The media also contributes to this trend by making politics and elections as a competition between top leaders of parties. In India too we have seen such a tendency towards the concentration of powers in the hands of the Prime Minister. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, exercised enormous authority because he had great influence over the public. Indira Gandhi was also a very powerful leader compared to her colleagues in the Cabinet. Of course, the extent of power wielded by a Prime Minister also depends on the personality of the person holding that position. However, in recent years the rise of coalition politics has imposed certain constraints on the power of the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister of a coalition government cannot take decisions as he likes. He has to accommodate different groups and factions in his party as well as among alliance partners. He also has to heed to the views and positions of the coalition partners and other parties, on whose support the survival of the government depends.

## POSITION OF THE PRESIDENT IN DECISION MAKING PROCESS

While the Prime Minister is the head of the government, the President is the head of the State. In our political system the head of the State exercises only nominal powers. The President is not elected directly by the people. The President can never claim the kind of direct popular mandate that the Prime Minister can. This ensures that he remains only a nominal executive. The same is true of the powers of the President. If you casually read the Constitution you would think that there is nothing that she cannot do. All governmental activities take place in the name of the President. All laws and major policy decisions of the government are issued in her name. All major appointments are made in the name of the President. These include the appointment of the Chief Justice of India, the Judges of the Supreme Court and the High Courts of the states, the Governors of the states, the Election Commissioners, ambassadors to other countries, etc. All international treaties and agreements are made in the name of the President. The President is the supreme commander of the defence forces of India. But we should remember that the President exercises all these powers only on the advice of the Council of Ministers. The President can ask the Council of Ministers to reconsider its advice. But if the same advice is given again, he is bound to act according to it. Similarly, a bill passed by the Parliament becomes a law only after the President gives assent to it. If the President wants, he can delay this for some time and send the bill back to Parliament for reconsideration. But if Parliament passes the bill again, he has to sign it.

## CHALLENGES IN DECISION MAKING

**The decision–making process facing many problems those problems are;**

### 1. Lack of knowledge of ministers

One of the major issue in Indian politics is that most politicians are either semi–educated or least educated or having suspect degree holders. Its create diversion among better educated politicians and poor educational background politicians.

### 2. Criminal background of politicians

It's difficult to build free and fair politics in India for the reason that involvement of criminal in active politics.

**3. Alliance Government**

Under the alliance government party cannot breach the limit. Policy not come due to opposition and decision–making process will be slow. Few policies may not come into action due to opposition. Every day, the party has to check whether numbers of supporters are good in health.

**4. Availability of few major parties**

In scenario of Indian political era one the major parties is Congress and BJP. The benefit of major and strong political party is that it can do what is good to people and at the same time power applied forcefully.

**5. Family politics**

Family politics is an ordinary thing in Indian political system. The Father, Mother, daughter and relatives found in Assemblies and parliament.

**6. Community based politics**

Caste politics is one of the worst scenario in India. These are deeply prevailing in Indian villages. Rural people support political parties based on caste.

**7. Businessmen in politics and politicians in businesses**

Majority of Member of Parliament and Member of Legislative Assembly are millionaires, there are engaged with businesses. Nearly all services were to be in government's hands but due to improper management them services moved to private sector. As result politicians try to getting friendly policies allied to their businesses using the law.

**CONCLUSION:**

Competitive elections, positive discrimination and involvement of diverse social forces have created space for popular participation in India. But, our democracy faces challenges from corruption, poverty, fickle coalitions, regionalism, and violence. Real decision–making is controlled by powerful elite groups. Sovereignty is conceived in terms of powerful governments, not free citizens; democracy begins and ends with the ballot box. Only Parliament is exposed to public mandate.

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**Conflict of interest:**

The Authors have no conflict of interest to declare that they are relevant to the content of this article.