

INDIAN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND PARTIES

Section 3: the Indian constitution directs the government to promote social and economic equality and justice

Executive: president is largely ceremonial, and is elected indirectly every five years by an electoral college

- power is with the **prime minister**, leader of the political party with the most seats in the **Lok Sabha**
- The ‘permanent bureaucracy’ is usually responsible for most policy implementation: The **Indian Administrative Service (IAS)** is the top tier of bureaucrats and is historically much respected, although corruption has tainted its reputation in recent years. The level of skill and professionalism drops off sharply below the IAS

Military & Police

- The Indian military, 1+ million strong, has historically been highly professionalized, but is weakening due to:
 - **Indira Gandhi**’s rule, in which political loyalty became key, politicizing the military
 - The growing regional and ethnic demands for secession (particularly in Kashmir)

Judiciary

- a core contradiction: *both* parliamentary sovereignty and judicial review are enshrined in the constitution
- Supreme court: chief justice and 17 other justices, appointed by the president with the advice of the PM—on the bench until retirement at 65: significant backlog of cases.
 - “...to ensure that legislation conforms to the intent of the constitution. Because the Indian constitution is very detailed, however, the need for interpretation is not as great as in many other countries.” (289)
 - Can get involved in ‘tricky’ cultural issues, like the 1985 case in which the Court upheld a verdict finding two men guilty of murdering their wives on the grounds that their dowry was insufficient.
 - Conflict between religious (‘personal law’) and secular law: Court has ruled that secular law prevails in cases, for example, of women seeking divorce or alimony, but Muslim women are excluded from the law
- Ongoing “conflict between socialistically inclined legislation and constitutional rights”
- “Compared to other large, multiethnic democracies, India has generally shown great respect for the pillars of civil rights: a free and lively press, legal protections for citizens’ rights, and an independent judiciary.” (291)

Subnational Government: chief minister of each state heads the state government—also a governor (appointed by pres)

- **Panchayat** system functions at the local, district, and state levels, and is an important exercise in the **devolution** of power: communist-run states (West Bengal, Kerala, etc.) have provided the greatest results—especially in **Kerala**.

Section 4: Legislature, Parties, Social Movements

Legislature: Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha are the (more powerful) lower house and (less powerful) upper house

- Elections at least every 5 years (most recently in 2004 and 2009), from 544 electoral districts via **SMP**
- “The main business of the *Lok Sabha* is to pass new legislation as well as debate government actions” – the *Rajya Sabha*, elected indirectly by state legislatures, modifies bills written by the cabinet and *Lok Sabha* and returns them for a final reading to the lower house, followed by a vote in both houses and approval by the president
- Representation: increasing rural representation in parliament (295), but poor/lower caste representation remains low

The Congress Party: the party of **Nehru**, Indira Gandhi, and now **Manmohan Singh** – a centrist party with a strong system of patronage. Came under challenge in the late ‘60s, after which Indira Gandhi moved the party in a more pro-poor direction, stirring up Hindu nationalism and splitting Congress in two in the process. Congress tilted right-of-center again in the ‘80s and ‘90s, supporting economic liberalization and limited government spending.

The Janata Party: formed short-lived governments in 1977 and 1989. Another centrist party created in opposition to Indira Gandhi’s Emergency. Has subsequently survived only under the umbrella of the United Front (with the CPM).

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP): a right-leaning Hindu-nationalist party (and anti-Muslim)—originally supported by urban, lower-middle-class groups but has broadened its appeal to Hindu nationalists all over the country. The party has responded to criticisms that it is anti-Muslim by adopting a more centrist position. The BJP’s **Atal Behari Vajpayee** was PM between 1999 and 2004, and was regarded as reasonably successful.

The Communist Party of India (CPM): not really a communist party at all—more of a social democrat party.

Social movements: the **dalit** movement (under Mayawati), the **environment** movement (Chipko/Sardar Sarvodaya Dam protests), women’s rights (campaigning against harmful patriarchal Hindu practices) are most prominent