

Decline in representative character of Governments and elected Representatives

N Bhaskara Rao



With more and more candidates getting elected to Assemblies and Lok Sabha with less than 30 percent of polled votes, what kind of accountability could be expected from such representatives?

As we gear up to the 15th Lok Sabha poll, we need to ponder about certain broad trends in the electoral process. We should be concerned that on three counts the electoral process falls short of expectations of a democratic system over the years.

The first, fragmentation of polity continues to cause frequent uncertainties (instability) in the functioning of legislative bodies. The second, the representative character of the electoral process has remained static. In fact, the winner of elections, both in the case of Lok Sabha and Assemblies, hardly represent a quarter of total voters. Thirdly, one or other political party continues to come to and operate in power more or less

number" is at stake. (Table 1, 2 and 3 explain these trends).

With more and more candidates getting elected to Assemblies and Lok Sabha with less than 30 percent of polled votes, what kind of accountability could be expected from such representatives?. The number of those who got elected with less than 30 percent of polled votes in Madhya Pradesh, for example, had gone up from 14 in 1991 to 27 in 2008. in the case of Lok Sabha, the number of those who got elected with less than 40 percent of polled votes had gone up, instead of declining, from six in 1977 to 109 in 2004.

With parties coming to power, as a single large majority, in States winning less than 30 percent of

polled votes, (which in facts accounts for hardly one-fifth of all citizens), what kind of governance could be expected?. In a coalition regime, the situation is even more complex. BJP ruled in Rajasthan coming to power in 2004 with 39 percent of polled votes. Even in 2008 Congress party came to power in Rajasthan with 36.8 percent of polled votes. In Madhya Pradesh too BJP came to power in 2004 with 42.5 percent of votes polled which in 2008 Assembly election had gone down to 37.6 percent. BJP came to power in Karnataka in 2008 with 34 percent. That was despite the contest in these States was primarily between two parties.

Despite increased exposure to news media and increased

Table 1: Declining representative character : Lok Sabha winners

Won with votes of	1977	1980	1984	1989	1991	1996	1998	1999	2004
Less than 40% of polled	6	84	28	66	115	170	107	100	109
41 to 50% of polled	62	157	136	160	215	224	257	223	213
More than 50% of polled	474	288	378	303	204	149	179	220	217
Total Seats	542	529	542	529	534	543	543	543	539

Source : CMS Analysis of EC Data

on party (partisan) lines rather than representing all sections/ regions. As a result, inclusiveness of elected Governments, credibility of elected leaders and efficiency of their performance for "greater good of the greater

Table 2: How Representative the Ruling Parties: Number of those who got elected to Assembly with less than 30% of votes polled

State	1990-91	1993	1996-98	2002-03	2007-08
Rajasthan	12	8	10	11	17
Madhya Pradesh	14	10	16	20	27
Uttar Pradesh	96	31	19	105	77

Source: CMS Analysis of EC Data

coverage of poll process by news media in the last ten years, representative character of elected ones has not improved. In fact, it has declined. What has been the effect of number of news channels which has gone up to more than 100 by 2008.

Even increased "note-for-vote" phenomena across the country and across sections of voters has not enhanced representative character. The percent of voters who are being paid cash on the eve of polling has been more than one-fourth of voters, according to a recent CMS study.

2004 Lok Sabha poll.

Even increased "note-for-vote" phenomena across the country and across sections of voters has not enhanced representative character. The percent of voters who are being paid cash on the

eve of polling has been more than one-fourth of voters, according to a recent CMS study. CMS Media Lab, which analyses contents of news channels, has brought out how constrained and "more of the same" phenomena of coverage of news media has been. One-third of the content of news bulletins is about poll campaigns during election season.

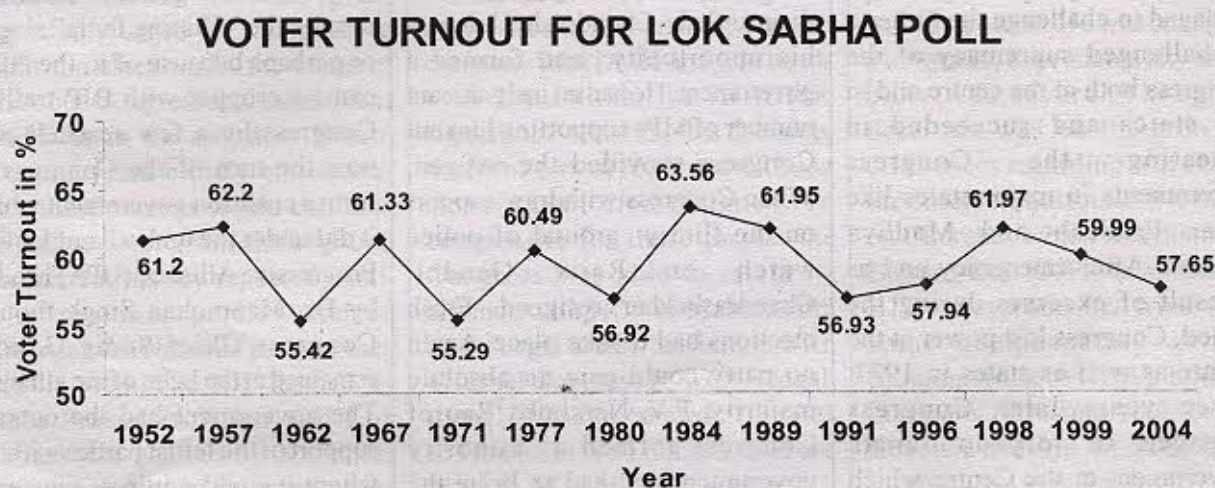
This dilemma of democracy may be attributed to the phenomena of "pre-emptive journalism" and "preemptive electoral practices". We need to be concerned about these trends of "dampening democracy" instead of deepening democracy.

Table 3: Declining Representative Character of Party in Power in Key States

State Name	Year 2000 – 2004	Year 2005 – 2008
	(Percent)	
Rajasthan	39.19 (BJP)	36.80 (INC)
Madhya Pradesh	42.50 (BJP)	37.60 (BJP)
Punjab	35.81 (INC)	37.09 (SAD)
Chhattisgarh	39.26 (BJP)	40.30 (BJP)
Uttar Pradesh	25.41 (SP)	30.43 (BSP)
Bihar	28.34 (RJD)	20.46 (JD(U))
Karnataka	35.27 (INC)	33.86 (BJP)

Source: CMS Analysis of EC Data

Chart 1: Voter Turnout for Lok Sabha Poll



Source: CMS Analysis of EC Data

And, what has the effect of pre-poll surveys and exit polls which too have proliferated during this period despite doubtful

credentials. Even voter turn out has not improved. The voter turnout declined from 60 percent in 1977 to 57.5 percent in

Dr Rao is Chairman, Centre for Media Studies.