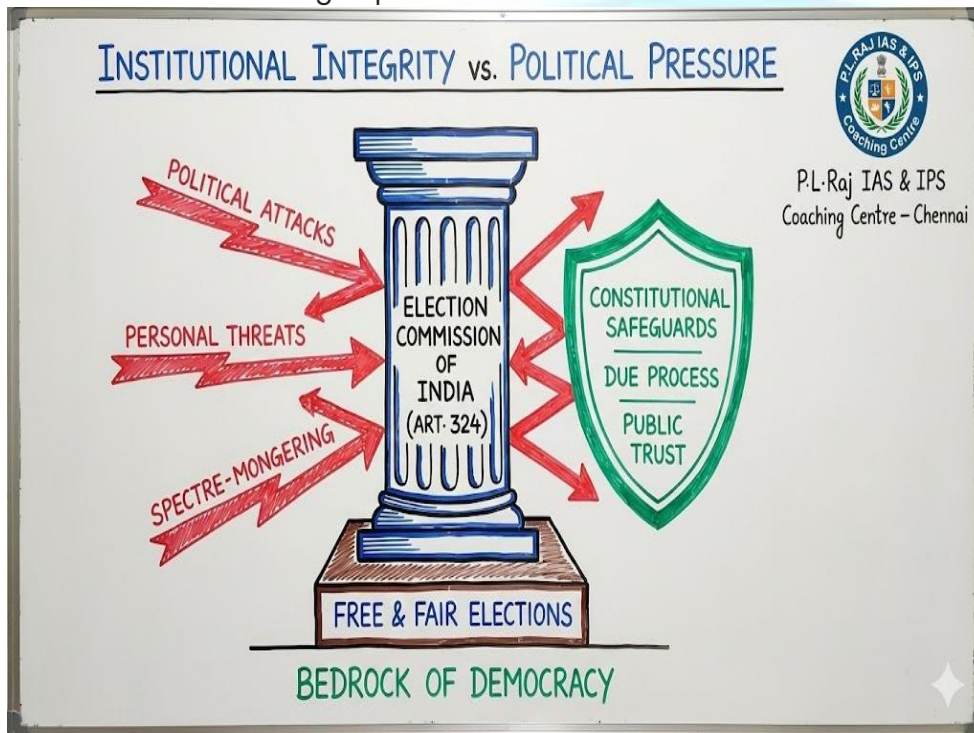


The Politics of Blame and the Sanctity of Institutions

Introduction

In a vibrant democracy like India, the relationship between political parties and constitutional institutions is foundational to the health of the republic. Recently, however, this relationship has been strained by a sharp escalation in rhetoric from the Congress party leadership against the Election Commission of India (ECI). At a rally in New Delhi, top leaders not only criticized the EC's impartiality but also issued direct threats of retribution against individual Election Commissioners. While constructive criticism is vital for accountability, this shift towards personalized attacks and threats of "retroactive laws" marks a disturbing departure from democratic norms.



The Congress Leadership's Blame – A Question of Responsibility

The Congress party's accusations, framed around the narrative of "vote chori" (vote theft), have moved beyond procedural complaints to direct assaults on the EC's credibility. By naming individual commissioners and promising punitive action upon returning to power, the leadership has sidestepped the established mechanisms for grievance redressal.

Nature of Irresponsibility – Democracy provides specific channels for addressing electoral malpractice—courts, formal complaints, and parliamentary procedures. Bypassing these to issue public threats undermines the rule of law. It signals a refusal to engage with the process and instead delegitimizes the umpire of the electoral game. This approach is widely seen as a reflection of the party's frustration with successive electoral defeats rather than a verifiable critique of the electoral process itself.

The Significance of Institutional Integrity

The Election Commission of India is not just an administrative body; it is a constitutional authority created under Article 324 to ensure the superintendence, direction, and control of elections.

Guardian of Democracy – Since the 1990s, the ECI has earned a global reputation for conducting free and fair elections on a massive scale. Its credibility is the bedrock of public trust in Indian democracy.

The Danger of Erosion – When political parties—especially those with a history of governance—attack the institution indiscriminately, they erode public faith not just in the current commissioners, but in the electoral system itself. If the integrity of the poll process becomes a casualty of political blame-games, the legitimacy of every future government comes into question.

Election Commission Measures for Free and Fair Elections

Despite the political noise, it is essential to recognize the robust mechanisms the EC employs to maintain electoral integrity –

1. **Model Code of Conduct (MCC)** – The EC strictly enforces the MCC to ensure a level playing field, preventing the ruling party from using state machinery for electoral gains.

2. **Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) & VVPATs** – The introduction of Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trails (VVPATs) has added a layer of verification to EVMs, addressing concerns about tampering.
3. **Observers and Micro-Observers** – The EC deploys central observers to constituencies to oversee the nomination, campaign, and counting processes.
4. **Decriminalization Efforts** – The EC consistently pushes for disqualifying candidates with criminal backgrounds and monitoring election expenditure to curb money power.

Criticism of Democratic Morality

The actions of the Congress leadership at the Ramlila Maidan rally represent a low point in democratic morality.

Spectre-Mongering – Instead of focusing on political mobilization or introspection regarding their electoral setbacks, the leadership has chosen to create a spectre of institutional bias. This "spectre-mongering" distracts from the substantive issues of governance and opposition strategy.

Undermining Due Process – Threatening officials with "retroactive laws" is anathema to the principles of natural justice and constitutional immunity. It suggests a desire to subordinate independent institutions to political will, a stance that contradicts the democratic values the party claims to uphold.

The CEC's Response – It is also true that the current Election Commission has faced valid questions regarding its impartiality. At times, responses from the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) have appeared defensive or aligned with the ruling dispensation's narrative. However, the solution to a perceived weakening of the EC is rigorous, evidence-based accountability, not crude intimidation.

Conclusion

The integrity of the electoral process is too precious to be reduced to a political football. The Congress party, as a primary stakeholder in India's democracy, has a responsibility to protect the dignity of institutions even while questioning them. By resorting to threats and generalized accusations, it diminishes its own standing more than that of the EC. True democratic morality demands that political battles be fought on the terrain of policy and public connect, leaving the referee—the Election Commission—to be held accountable through constitutional means, not through the politics of intimidation. The health of India's democracy depends on restoring respect for the process and the institutions that safeguard it.

Practice Question for Mains

1. "The integrity of constitutional bodies is the bedrock of Indian democracy. Critically analyze the recent trend of political attacks on the Election Commission of India, discussing the implications for institutional autonomy and democratic morality." (15 marks)

Answer Guidelines –

1. Introduction – Mention the constitutional mandate of the EC (Article 324) and its role in ensuring free and fair elections.

2. Body

The Trend – Discuss the shift from procedural criticism to personalized attacks and threats (referencing the recent Congress rally). Explain how this constitutes "spectre-mongering" and undermines public trust.

Institutional Integrity – Analyze why maintaining the EC's dignity is crucial. Acknowledge that while the EC faces valid scrutiny regarding impartiality, the response must be procedural (courts, evidence), not intimidatory.

Democratic Morality – Argue that threatening "retroactive action" violates democratic norms and the rule of law. It reflects a refusal to engage in introspection and political work.

3. Conclusion – Conclude that the preservation of democracy requires political parties to respect the umpire, ensuring that accountability is sought through due process, not through the erosion of institutional authority.