

CUET · POLITICAL SCIENCE · CLASS XII · CODE 323

Era of One-Party Dominance

CUET unit: Politics in India Since Independence — Era of One-Party Dominance

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Snapshot

- Establishes how independent India set up free and fair elections through the Election Commission (1950) under Sukumar Sen, India's first Chief Election Commissioner.
- Traces the first three general elections (1952, 1957, 1962) and the overwhelming dominance of the Indian National Congress at both Centre and States.
- Explains the "Congress system" — a coalitional, ideological, and social umbrella party that contained factions and accommodated diversity.
- Introduces major opposition parties of the 1950s — Socialist Party, CPI, Bharatiya Jana Sangh, Swatantra Party — and the role they played.
- High-yield CUET chapter: factual questions on dates, leaders, party founders, and the Kerala Communist episode of 1957 recur every year.

Detailed Notes

2.1 Core concepts

India chose democracy despite poverty and illiteracy, unlike many post-colonial states that slid into one-party rule or military dictatorship. NCERT is at pains to record that the freedom struggle had been committed to democracy from the start, and the Constitution made this commitment institutional (NCERT §"Challenge of building democracy", p. 27). The Constitution was adopted on **26 November 1949**, signed on **24 January 1950**, and came into effect on **26 January 1950**. The **Election Commission of India** was set up in **January 1950**, with **Sukumar Sen** as the first Chief Election Commissioner (NCERT p. 27). Holding the first general election was, 's words, a "mammoth exercise." About **17 crore eligible voters**, only about **15% literate**, were to elect approximately **3,200 MLAs and 489 Lok Sabha members**; some **3 lakh officers and polling staff** were trained, and a separate ballot box with each candidate's symbol was placed at every polling station — about **20 lakh steel ballot boxes** were used in 1952 (NCERT pp. 28–29). After the first two elections, a single ballot paper with names and symbols was introduced; from the late 1990s the **EVM** was adopted, with the whole country shifting to EVMs by 2004 (NCERT box "Changing methods of voting", p. 29). The Election Commission also rejected nearly **40 lakh entries of women** listed only as "wife of …" or "daughter of …", and ordered

revision or deletion of these entries — an early gender-recognition intervention (NCERT p. 28).

The first election was conducted from **October 1951 to February 1952** over six months; turnout was more than half of all eligible voters; on average there were more than four candidates per seat (NCERT p. 30). The results did not surprise anyone: **Congress won 364 of the 489 Lok Sabha seats** in 1952, and the **Communist Party of India (CPI)**, with only **16 seats**, emerged as the second-largest party in the Lok Sabha (NCERT p. 30). In state assembly elections held alongside the Lok Sabha polls, the Congress won majorities everywhere except Travancore-Cochin, Madras and Orissa, where it nonetheless managed to form the government with the help of others (NCERT p. 32). **Jawaharlal Nehru** became Prime Minister after the first general election; in **1957 and 1962** the Congress again won three-fourths of the Lok Sabha seats, completing what NCERT terms the era of one-party dominance.

A vital observation follows. In 1952 the Congress got only **45% of the votes** but **74% of the seats** because India had adopted the **first-past-the-post** electoral system, which gives the party with more votes than any other a disproportionately higher share of seats. The Socialist Party, by contrast, got more than 10% of the votes but less than 3% of the seats (NCERT p. 32). These figures to make a wider point: the apparent overwhelming dominance was partly an artefact of the electoral system; in vote-share terms, the picture was far more competitive than the seat tally suggested.

Communist victory in Kerala (1957). The Communist Party won **60 of 126 seats** and **E.M.S. Namboodiripad** became the **first democratically elected Communist Chief Minister in the world**. The Centre dismissed his government in **1959 under Article 356** — an episode widely cited as the first use of emergency provisions for partisan political purposes (NCERT box "Communist victory in Kerala", p. 33). The nuanced framing of the Kerala episode invites caution: the CPI did not win an outright majority of 64; it formed the government with the support of five Independents. **The origins of the Socialist Party** are traced to the **Congress Socialist Party (CSP)**, formed within the Congress in 1934. In **1948** the Congress amended its constitution to ban dual membership, which forced the socialists to form a separate Socialist Party in 1948. Later splits produced the Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party, the Praja Socialist Party (PSP) and the Samyukta Socialist Party (SSP) (NCERT box "Socialist Party", p. 34).

The **nature of Congress dominance** is the signature theme. Unlike China, Cuba, or Syria (where the Constitution legally permits only one party) or Myanmar, Belarus, Egypt and Eritrea (where one party is effectively dominant through legal or military measures), Congress dominance in India happened under conditions of **free and fair democratic elections** — similar to the **African National Congress (ANC)** in post-apartheid South Africa (NCERT p. 35). The Congress was a "**social and ideological coalition**." Originally founded in **1885** as a body of the English-speaking upper-caste urban elite, the party grew into a rainbow coalition representing India's diversity of classes, castes, religions and languages (NCERT pp. 36–37). The "CPI box" on p. 37 traces the Communist Party's evolution: communists worked from within the Congress from **1935**; they parted ways

in **December 1941** when the party decided to support the British in the war against Nazi Germany; the party formally abandoned violent revolution in **1951**; in **1964**, the party split into CPI and CPI(M) along the Soviet–China ideological rift.

The internal factions within the Congress acted as a "**balancing mechanism**"; political competition took place largely within the Congress, making it act as both ruling party and opposition. The political scientist **Rajni Kothari** called this the "**Congress system**" (NCERT p. 40). Among other major opposition parties, the **Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS)** was founded in **1951** by **Shyama Prasad Mukherjee**, with its lineage traced to the **RSS and Hindu Mahasabha**. It emphasised "one country, one culture, one nation," called for **Akhand Bharat** (reunion of India and Pakistan), advocated Hindi as the official language, and supported India's acquiring nuclear weapons (especially after China's 1964 atomic test). The BJP traces its roots to the BJS; the BJS won **3 Lok Sabha seats in 1952** and 4 in 1957 (NCERT box "Bharatiya Jana Sangh", p. 39). The opposition parties of the period offered **principled criticism** of the Congress, kept the ruling party in check, and prevented anti-democratic resentment. There was, in the early years, mutual respect between the ruling party and the opposition — **Ambedkar and Shyama Prasad Mukherjee** were members of Nehru's first cabinet (NCERT pp. 40–41). The "Congress system" came under pressure from the mid-1960s onwards.

2.2 Definitions to memorise

Term	Definition	Page
Delimitation	Drawing the boundaries of the electoral constituencies.	28
Electoral rolls	List of all citizens eligible to vote.	28
Universal Adult Franchise	Right to vote for all adult citizens irrespective of literacy/property — called by an editor "the biggest gamble in history."	30
First-past-the-post (FPTP)	Election system in which the party with more votes than others gets a disproportionately higher share of seats.	32
Election Commission of India	Constitutional body set up in January 1950.	27
Sukumar Sen	First Chief Election Commissioner of India.	27
17 crore voters	Eligible electorate at the first general election.	28
489 Lok Sabha seats	Strength of the first Lok Sabha.	28
364 seats	Congress tally in 1952.	30
16 seats	CPI tally in 1952 (largest opposition).	30
Congress system	Rajni Kothari's term for Congress acting as both ruling party and opposition through internal factions.	40
Faction		

Term	Definition	Page
	Group within a party based on ideology or personal ambition; tolerated inside Congress.	38–40
Akhand Bharat	Reunion of India and Pakistan, advocated by Bharatiya Jana Sangh.	39
Bharatiya Jana Sangh	1951 party founded by Shyama Prasad Mukherjee; predecessor of BJP.	39
Congress Socialist Party (1934)	Faction within Congress; ancestor of the Socialist Party.	34
Socialist Party (1948)	Formed after Congress banned dual membership.	34
Praja Socialist Party / Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party / SSP	Later socialist splits.	34
Democratic socialism	Ideology of the Socialist Party.	34
Communist Party of India (CPI)	Largest opposition in first Lok Sabha; split into CPI and CPI(M) in 1964.	37
CPI(M)	Formed by 1964 split along Soviet–China rift.	37
E.M.S. Namboodiripad	First democratically elected Communist Chief Minister in the world (Kerala 1957).	33
Article 356 dismissal (Kerala, 1959)	Centre dismissed Namboodiripad's elected government.	33
ANC (South Africa)	The comparative example of one-party dominance under free elections.	35
EVM rollout	Late 1990s; complete by 2004.	29

2.3 Diagrams / processes to remember

A sequence of cartoons and visuals recur as CUET stems. The **cover sketch by Shankar** (p. 26) depicts the dual role of the Congress during one-party dominance — useful for image-based stems. The **Shankar cartoon dated 20 May 1951** (p. 28) shows the Congress election committee formed to select candidates, with Nehru, Morarji Desai, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, Dr B.C. Roy, Kamaraj Nadar, Rajagopalachari, Jagjivan Ram, Maulana Azad, D.P. Mishra, P.D. Tandon and Govind Ballabh Pant — a who's-who of mid-century Congress leaders. The **sample ballot paper** used from the third to the thirteenth general elections is reproduced on p. 29; it bridges the 1952 candidate-symbol-box system and the EVM era. The **electoral map of India 1952–1962** (p. 31) anchors the claim of pan-India Congress dominance. The **Shankar "Tug of War" cartoon dated 29 August 1954** (p. 40) is the signature visual: Nehru and his cabinet are perched on a tree while A.K. Gopalan, Acharya Kripalani, N.C. Chatterjee, Srikantan Nair and Sardar Hukum Singh attempt to topple it — a vivid metaphor for the "principled criticism" role of the opposition. The **photograph of Nehru's first cabinet** after Rajagopalachari's swearing-in as Governor-General in 1948 (p. 41) is the visual

anchor for the cross-party-respect argument (Ambedkar and Shyama Prasad Mukherjee in the cabinet).

Three processes are worth drilling. **Process A — Election machinery (1950–52):** Constitution effective 26 January 1950 → ECI set up in January 1950 → Sukumar Sen appointed first CEC → electoral rolls compiled (40 lakh "wife of …"/"daughter of …" entries deleted) → 20 lakh steel ballot boxes prepared → polling October 1951 to February 1952 → Congress wins 364/489 → Nehru becomes PM. **Process B — Socialist Party trajectory:** Congress Socialist Party 1934 → Congress bans dual membership 1948 → Socialist Party formed → Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party → Praja Socialist Party → Samyukta Socialist Party. **Process C — CPI trajectory:** Communists in Congress from 1935 → break in December 1941 (war against Nazi Germany) → 16 seats in 1952 Lok Sabha → renunciation of violent revolution 1951 → Kerala victory 1957 (60/126; Namboodiripad CM) → dismissal under Article 356 in 1959 → 1964 split into CPI and CPI(M) along Soviet–China rift.

2.5 Key Articles / Treaties / Events

Reference	Source / Subject	NCERT cite
Adoption of Constitution	26 November 1949	p. 27
Signing of Constitution	24 January 1950	p. 27
Commencement of Constitution	26 January 1950	p. 27
Setting up of Election Commission	January 1950 (Sukumar Sen first CEC)	p. 27
First general election	October 1951 – February 1952	p. 30
1952 results	Congress 364/489; CPI 16 (second)	p. 30
1952 vote share	Congress 45% votes, 74% seats; FPTP effect	p. 32
Kerala 1957	Communist Party 60/126; Namboodiripad first elected Communist CM in world	p. 33
Article 356 dismissal	Kerala Communist government, 1959	p. 33
Congress Socialist Party formed	1934, within Congress	p. 34
Socialist Party formed	1948, after dual-membership ban	p. 34
Bharatiya Jana Sangh founded	1951, by Shyama Prasad Mukherjee	p. 39
BJS in 1952 Lok Sabha	3 seats	p. 39
Communists' break from Congress	December 1941	p. 37

Reference	Source / Subject	NCERT cite
CPI – CPI(M) split	1964 along Soviet–China rift	p. 37
EVM nationwide rollout	Complete by 2004	p. 29

2.4 Common confusions / NTA trap points

- 1. Constitution adoption (26 Nov 1949) vs signing (24 Jan 1950) vs commencement (26 Jan 1950)** — three distinct dates often confused.
- 2. First election** was held from October 1951 to February 1952 but is called the "1952 election" because most parts voted in January 1952.
- 3. CPI was the largest opposition party in the first Lok Sabha (16 seats), NOT the Socialist Party** — Socialists had more votes (>10%) but fewer seats (<3%) due to FPTP.
- 4. Bharatiya Jana Sangh was founded in 1951 by Shyama Prasad Mukherjee;** the BJP traces its roots to it — do not confuse BJS with BJP directly.
- 5. Kerala 1957** — Communist Party won **60 of 126 seats** (NOT an outright majority of 64); needed the support of five Independents; Namboodiripad became the world's first democratically elected Communist CM.
- 6. Sukumar Sen** was the first Chief Election Commissioner — Election Commission set up in **January 1950**, not 1951.
- 7. 45% vote–74% seat disproportion** is attributed to FPTP — distractors often invent "Congress won 74% of the popular vote."
- 8. Communist Party broke from Congress in December 1941**, not in 1947 — over the issue of supporting the British in the war against Nazi Germany.
- 9. CPI–CPI(M) split happened in 1964**, not in 1957 or 1971; the rift was along the Soviet–China ideological line.
- 10. Akhand Bharat** is a Bharatiya Jana Sangh demand for reunion with Pakistan — NOT a Congress or Socialist Party position (p. 39).
- 11. "Congress system" is Rajni Kothari's coinage** — NOT Nehru's or Patel's (p. 40).
- 12. Ambedkar and Shyama Prasad Mukherjee were in Nehru's first cabinet** — used to argue for early cross-party respect (p. 41).

Practice MCQs

PYQ Alignment

This is among the highest-yielding CUET Political Science chapters — questions on the first general election (year, CEC, seats), the Kerala 1957 Communist government, founders of BJS/Socialist Party/CPI, the "Congress system" of Rajni Kothari, and the FPTP vote-seat disparity appear almost every year. Statement-based and match-the-following questions on opposition parties and their leaders are especially common; CUET 2023 and 2024 both featured items on Sukumar Sen, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, and the year/founder of Bharatiya Jana Sangh. The 1964 CPI–CPI(M) split and the December 1941 Communist–Congress break recur in date-based recall stems.

CUET 2023 — Actual PYQs from this chapter

Q.2 (CUET 2023) The following symbol (three bullocks yoked together) belongs to which political party?

- A) Indian National Congress B) Bharatiya Kisan Party C) Socialist Party D) Bharatiya Jana Sangh
- Tests:** Era of one-party dominance / first elections **Answer:** Not in extracted key

CUET 2024 — Actual PYQs from this chapter

Q.5 (CUET 2024) Match List-I with List-II. List-I | List-II A. S.A. Dange | I. Bharatiya Jana Sangh B. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee | II. Swatantra Party C. Minoo Masani | III. Praja Socialist Party D. Ashok Mehta | IV. Communist Party of India Options:

- A) A-IV, B-I, C-II, D-III B) A-I, B-III, C-II, D-IV C) A-I, B-II, C-IV, D-III D) A-III, B-IV, C-I, D-II
- Tests:** Era of one-party dominance / first elections **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.6 (CUET 2024) Who was the leader of the anti-caste movement and the founder of Independent Labour Party?

- A) Acharya Narendra Dev B) Rafi Ahmed Kidwai C) A.K. Gopalan D) Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar
- Tests:** Era of one-party dominance / first elections **Answer:** Not in extracted key

CUET 2025 — Actual PYQs from this chapter

Q.4 (CUET 2025) The first general elections in India were held between:

- A) 1951–1952 B) 1952–1953 C) 1953–1954 D) 1954–1955
- Tests:** Era of one-party dominance / first elections **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.5 (CUET 2025) How many women were not recorded in the first draft of electoral rolls?

- A) 10 lakh B) 20 lakh C) 30 lakh D) 40 lakh **Tests:** Era of one-party dominance / first elections **Answer:** Not in extracted key

