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## A study of public opinion on internal democracy within Indian political parties

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### Abstract

In a democratic country, there may be many political parties. All the political parties claim that they will strengthen the democracy in country but the democratic practices within the parties are negligible. Internal democracy within a party, also known as intra-party democracy. The present research study will try to analyze public opinion in the context of internal democracy within political parties and suggests the way to increase the democratic practice and procedures within the party. This is a descriptive and analytical study with mixed research approach. Data was collected through self-made 'Public Opinion Internal Democracy Scale'. A sample of 400 Indian citizens was selected using stratified random sampling. Analysis of data was done using Mean, Standard Deviation, Percentage and Content analysis. Findings reveals that standard deviation was very less in compare to Mean, it shows that there was almost same opinion about internal democracy within political parties. The public strongly suggest the transparency, accountability, fair internal election, decentralization of powers, equal participation of youth and women etc. to promote the culture of internal democratic practices in political parties.

**Keywords:** Democracy, democratic practice, internal democracy, transparency, accountability etc.

### Introduction

Democracy is not for only governance or a system of governance but it covers also many dimension of a citizen. It also reflected in the culture and structure in functioning of political parties. India is a representative democracy, in which political parties play role of intermediaries between citizens as well as state. The internal functioning of political parties directly affects stability and quality of the democratic process on any country. In India mostly the intra-party democracy has remained under explored or it is ignored rather than elections, policies, governance and other issues related to politics.

Internal democracy within a political party refers to the level or degree which a political party practice democratic procedures to maintain its intra-party democracy. Internal democracy within a political party includes transparent membership procedure, democratic and inclusive leadership selection, regular internal elections, consensus decision-making, accountability procedure, and candidate selection mechanisms. However, in Indian politics the parties criticized to each other on the basis of their hierarchical organisations dominated by a single leader, and single family oriented party. This type of centralisation and lack of internal democracy is the matter of concerns to scholars, activists and citizens due to increasing demand for political transparency, reforms and accountability. *"Political parties play a crucial role in democratic governance. They are responsible for shaping policy agendas, mobilizing voters, and providing leadership in the formulation and implementation of laws and policies"* Das (2023) <sup>[1]</sup>.

In last some years the internal democracy has weakened the internal democratic values and structure due to centralisation and opaque candidate selection process. According Kavitha, A. (2018) <sup>[2]</sup> *"One of the big unanswered question in Indian political life is the process determining the selection of candidate. Different parties adopt different approaches, and the selection of candidates by a cabal of senior figures in the party is not uncommon. There is no uniformity of selection process, and often selection is ad-hoc, resulting in a staggering number of candidates with questionable antecedents."* Law commission and Election Commission of India of India have suggested and emphasised for internal democracy to

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strengthening democratic institutions. However, there is a little bit reforms in the context of internal democracy among political parties in India.

But despite these concerns, the perceptions, attitude and expectations of common citizens regarding internal democracy of political parties not received sufficient attention by political parties in India. In a democratic nation citizens are ultimate stakeholders. Their view on how political party should function internally, intra-party elections, respect of internal decisions, transparency and decision making affects their political engagement or voting behaviour. This issue also remained a research oriented.

The present research study aims to fill that gap by exploring public opinion on internal democracy in Indian political parties. It seeks to understand how citizen understand the internal functioning of the political party. The present study will explore that how lack of internal democracy in political parties affects public trust in political parties and the vast democratic procedure. This research will focus on citizen's opinion that will help to plan and strengthen ongoing discussion on democratic reform, accountability and transparency in India. A deeper demand and expectation of public also encourage and force political parties to adopt democratic practices and reforms internally and thereby the Indian democracy can be more representative, transparent, participatory and resilient.

### Need and Importance of Study

Political parties are the foundation of any democratic system, so it is necessary to be transparency, responsibility and participation inside them. Although, the democracy in India seems to strengthen at national and state level, but there is lacking internally in political parties. *"Indian democracy over the past 75 years is a story of both deepening and sometimes decline. It has matured in terms of electoral participation, federalism, social inclusion, and grassroots governance. Political parties' internal democracy is very meagre; women representation should be increased"* Raju, M. B. (2025) [3].

In this condition it is very important to study of public opinion on this matter. Internal democracy in political parties insures that the party leaders should be accountable towards the party members, so that tendencies like centralization of leadership and nepotism can be curbed. This study may be helpful to promoting new leadership,

transparent decision making, spirit of equal opportunity within the political parties. Apart from this when political parties work in democratic manner, so decision become more representative and people oriented and it increases public faith in political system. The lacking of internal democracy often creates problems such as factionalism, corruption and partisanship. So, the findings from this study may provide guidance to political parties in moving more ethical and disciplined direction. This study will be an important effort to strengthen election reforms, political responsibility and public cooperation.

### Statement of the Problem

The research problem stated as follow-

'A Study of Public Opinion on internal Democracy within Indian Political Parties.'

### Objectives of the Study

According to the need, theme and importance of the study, following are the objectives of study-

1. To find out public perception about the level of transparency, fairness and participation within political parties.
2. To assess public awareness about importance of internal democracy within political parties.
3. To identify factors influencing public opinion on internal democracy.
4. To examine the role of party leadership structure in promoting or restricting internal democracy.
5. To find out the impact of internal democracy on party credibility, accountability and election output.
6. To collect suggestions from the public for improving internal democracy within political parties.

### Research Methodology

This is a descriptive and analytical research study with qualitative and quantitative approach. The data was collected using self-made research tool 'Public Opinion on Internal Democracy Scale' through survey method. The tool consists 25 close ended and 01 open ended questions. Tool was three point (Agree, Neutral and Disagree) Likert scale. The reliability and validity of the tool was found satisfactory. All the Indian citizens aged group 18-60 were considered the population of study. A sample of 400 citizens was selected using stratified random sampling as following-

**Table 1:** Selection of study Sample

Gender	Male		Female	
	200		200	
Locality	Rural		Urban	
	200		200	
Age group	18-25	26-35	36-45	46-60
	100	100	100	100
Educational level	Below 10 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup>	Graduate	Post graduate
	100	100	100	100
Occupation	Student	Employed	Home maker	Unemployed
	100	100	100	100

A total of 400 respondents were selected related various groups

The study was delimited to Lucknow district of Uttar Pradesh only. For the purpose of analysis data mean, standard deviation, percentage and content analysis were used.

### Analysis of Data

For the purpose, draw of research conclusions, analysis of collected data was done by using various statistical

techniques. Some of statistical treatments to analysis data are presented below-

### 1. Descriptive analysis of the opinion about internal democracy within the political parties of India

For the purpose of descriptive analysis, the Mean and Standard Deviation were calculated for all respondents of every statement as given below table-

**Table 2:** Mean and S.D. for public opinion on internal democracy

S. N.	Statement for Opinion	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation
1	Parties choose candidate through fair procedures.	2.84	.46	Most of the people are agree that there is no fair procedure in political parties to choose candidate.
2	Party leaders are elected regularly through internal elections.	2.52	.78	Almost 70 percent respondents agree that leaders are not elected regularly through internal elections.
3	Ordinary members can influence important party decisions.	2.76	.51	Only 18 percent people agree that ordinary members can influence important party decisions.
4	Party leadership is accountable to its members.	2.60	.78	30 percent respondents agree that Party leadership is accountable to its members.
5	Open debate occurs before major policy decisions.	2.80	.40	Almost 86 percent respondents disagree that Open debate occurs before major policy decisions.
6	Party funds and finances are transparent.	2.42	.85	Almost 65 percent respondents are agree that party funds and finances are transparent.
7	Internal disputes are resolved fairly.	1.86	.85	Only 56 percent respondents are agree that internal disputes are resolved fairly.
8	Party encourage youth and women participation.	2.56	.67	76 percent of respondents are disagree that Party encourage youth and women participation.
9	Members have equal opportunity to contest leadership positions.	2.74	.66	Almost 75 percent respondents disagree for equal opportunity to contest leadership positions.
10	There is too much centralization of power in leadership.	2.90	.30	Almost 90 percent respondent agree that there is too much centralization of power in leadership.
11	Political parties should be legally required to conduct internal elections regularly.	1.2	.53	Half of the respondents agree that political parties should be legally required to conduct internal elections regularly.
12	The election commission should monitor internal democracy of parties.	1.14	.45	55 percent of respondents agree that election commission should monitor internal democracy of parties.
13	I would be more likely to vote for a party that practices internal democracy.	1.00	.00	All the respondents have similar opinion and agree that I would be more likely to vote for a party that practices internal democracy.
14	It should be on highest priority to maintain internal democracy in political parties.	1.12	.43	Almost, 62 percent respondents are in the favor having internal democracy on highest priority.
15	The president of any political party should be elected a new person every time.	1.14	.45	Almost, 60 percent agree that president of any political party should be elected a new person every time.

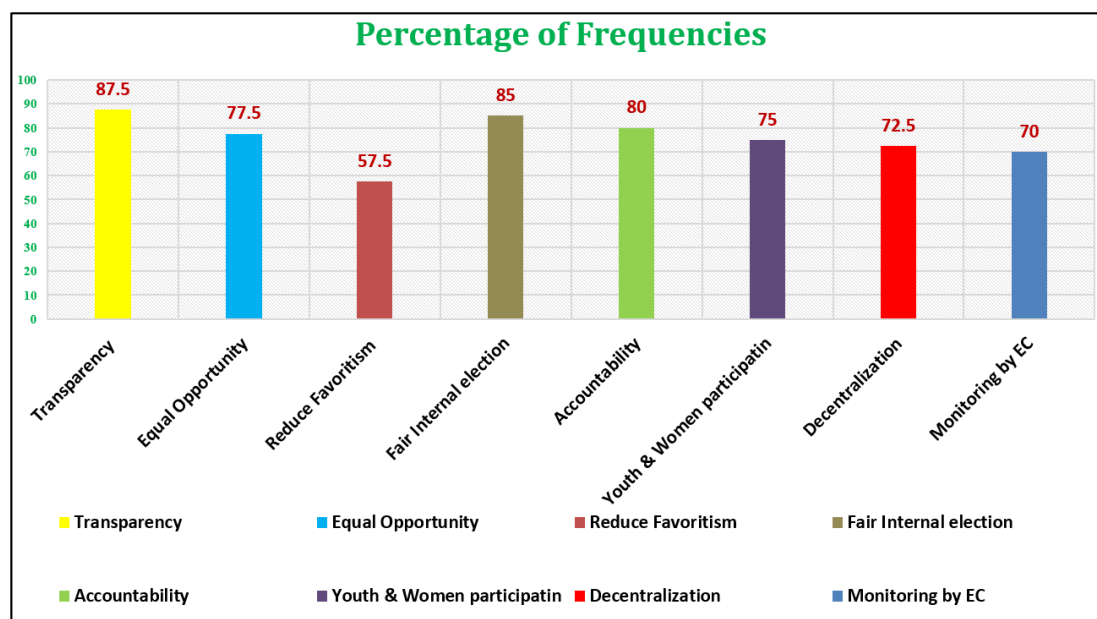
The values of mean and standard deviation reveals that there very less deviation of opinion compare to the mean. Majority of the respondents are agreeing with the statements.

## 2. Thematic qualitative analysis of data

To analyze the qualitative data related to the make political parties more democratic internally, some themes or areas of improvement and the frequencies of themes by respondents recognized as following-

**Table 3:** Frequencies of themes related to internal democracy

Themes	Frequency	% of respondents
Transparency	350	87.5
Equal opportunities to all party members	310	77.5
Reduce favoritism	230	57.5
Fair internal election	340	85.0
Accountability of party leadership	320	80.0
Youth and women participation	300	75.0
Decentralization of powers	290	72.5
Monitoring by election commission	280	70.0

**Chart 1:** Percentage of Frequencies for internal democracy

According to the table 03 thematic or content analysis has been done of 400 respondent's suggestions in the context of improvement in internal democracy of Indian political parties. The results reveal that 87.5 percent of respondents suggest the transparency, 77.5 percent suggest the equal opportunity, 57.5 percent suggest to reduce favoritism, 85 percent favor to fair election, 80 percent suggest the accountability, 75 percent respondents favor youth and women participation, 72.5 percent respondents want decentralization within political parties and 70 percent favor the election commission monitoring of party's internal democracy.

### 3. Various group percentage for thematic analysis related to internal democracy

**Table 4: Gender wise percentage**

S. N.	Themes	Gender	
		Male	Female
1	Transparency	85	84
2	Equal opportunities to all party members	75	70
3	Reduce favoritism	72	73
4	Fair internal election	79	74
5	Accountability of party leadership	82	83
6	Youth and women participation	86	80
7	Decentralization of powers	78	72
8	Monitoring by election commission	65	63

**Table 5: Locality wise percentage**

S. N.	Themes	Locality	
		Rural	Urban
1	Transparency	81	82
2	Equal opportunities to all party members	75	79
3	Reduce favoritism	72	70
4	Fair internal election	71	73
5	Accountability of party leadership	83	87
6	Youth and women participation	85	80
7	Decentralization of powers	78	79
8	Monitoring by election commission	74	72

**Table 6: Age wise percentage**

S. N.	Themes	Age group			
		18-25	26-35	36-45	46-60
1	Transparency	82	85	81	84
2	Equal opportunities to all party members	79	75	75	70
3	Reduce favoritism	70	72	72	73
4	Fair internal election	73	79	71	74
5	Accountability of party leadership	87	82	83	83
6	Youth and women participation	80	86	85	80
7	Decentralization of powers	79	78	78	72
8	Monitoring by election commission	72	65	74	63

**Table 7: Educational level wise percentage**

S. N.	Themes	Educational level			
		Below 10 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup>	Graduate	Post graduate
1	Transparency	81	83	79	82
2	Equal opportunities to all party members	80	65	77	69
3	Reduce favoritism	80	73	76	75
4	Fair internal election	75	80	72	76
5	Accountability of party leadership	88	86	85	84
6	Youth and women participation	80	86	85	80
7	Decentralization of powers	80	75	72	70
8	Monitoring by election commission	72	67	76	70

**Table 8: Occupation wise percentage**

S.N.	Themes	Occupation			
		Student	Employed	Home maker	Unemployed
1	Transparency	80	86	83	78
2	Equal opportunities to all party members	78	74	76	71
3	Reduce favoritism	70	72	72	73
4	Fair internal election	73	75	76	70
5	Accountability of party leadership	86	79	80	84
6	Youth and women participation	80	86	85	80
7	Decentralization of powers	70	79	70	74
8	Monitoring by election commission	74	67	79	66

Table no. 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 clearly indicate various group percentage on themes related to opinion on internal democracy within the Indian political parties. The main focus area in which the most opinions falls, are transparency within the party, accountability of party leaders and members, participation of youth and women in any political party etc.

### Research findings and Discussion

To strengthen the democracy in any nation it is necessary to practice of democratic procedure and culture within the political parties also. Internal democracy with democratic

practices as regular, fair and transparent elections within the political parties. Any political party should organize the periodic elections for all national and local level positions. Elections should be supervised by 'Independent Internal Election Authorities' and monitored by Election Commission of India. Every political should prepare their democratic constitution and every party member should have the right to vote and contest for positions within the party. The tenure should be limited of the position bearers; it will prevent forming political dynasties. To increase the leadership accountability and representativeness, transparent internal elections are compulsory. Transparency within the



party practices play the key role to ensure internal democracy. The rules, constitution and internal practices of any political party must publish publically. Financial funds, source of income, expenditures, donations and statements should be transparent for all party members and citizens. Party decisions as making alliances, candidate selection and policy making taking consensually. The misuse of party fund and resources may be prevented by establishing internal auditing committees. Transparency enhances trust and party's democratic legitimacy.

Internal democracy within the parties needs active participation from the grassroots level. Political party should empower their local committees and regional units to invite ideas, select local candidate and participation in decision-making process. Central leadership should connect with local members through regular meeting and consultation. Political education and guidance strengthen democratic culture within the parties. Every political party should focus on organizing training sessions, workshops, debate and seminars to orientation their members on democratic values, principles and ethics. A well trained party cadre can better hold leadership accountability. Political education helps prepare new leaders from diverse backgrounds. The 'think tanks' within the political parties could create a pool of future leaders committed to democratic functioning. It is urgent need in present scenario in the context of party's internal democracy that political parties need independent institutions within their structure like creating disciplinary and grievance redressal committees ensures that concerns are solved impartially. These institutions should be autonomous to take action against any corruption, misconduct and favoritism. Decision making on all the levels of party should be democratic and consensually rather than single person dominance. *"In order to ensure an effective legal regime to guarantee genuine adherence to the principle of inner party democracy in India, the two fundamental factors-institutional as well as functional, which impede the consolidation of democratic culture in the parties, needs to be adequately addressed"* (Mishra & Ghosh, 2019) <sup>[8]</sup>.

In Indian political parties generally candidate selection controlled by only top leadership on the basis differ from democratic way. To select the worthy candidate party should introduce internal consultative mechanisms where members can vote to a candidate. This practice will ensure the competent, meritorious and popular candidate selection rather than loyalty or kinship. According to Agrawal (2025) <sup>[4]</sup> *"Within party structures significantly affects the democratic character and governance quality of political parties. Many Indian parties operate under hierarchical leadership models, where decision making is concentrated in a few individuals or dynastic families. This top-down approach often stifles internal dissent and limits grassroots participation in party decisions."* A transparent and consensually candidate nomination process will enhance accountability in leaders. Democracy always advocates the equality of opportunity. A real democracy empowers ordinary members than token participation. Every ordinary member should have right of voting in internal elections, party's constitutional amendments and policy framing. Party should be recognizing and rewarding active participation by promotion, responsibilities and public acknowledgement. Within the party practices domination should be replaced by dialogue. Party should organize open discussion, internal

forums and debates on policy for adopting major changes. This will stop factionalism and enrich consensus. Finally, internal democracy cannot survive without a democratic political culture nurtured by ethics, tolerance and respect for variations. Every political party must be promoting democratic values like equality, justice, transparency, accountability and dialogue. By discouraging muscle and money power in internal affairs, more honest and capable citizens may be promoted. Finally, when a party become more transparent, participatory and accountable the overall health of Indian democracy will improve. Democracy in political parties will promote better governance, stronger institutions and highly citizen faith in the political parties and process.

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