



A HISTORICAL EXPLORATION OF THE NEXUS BETWEEN CRIME AND POLITICS

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ABSTRACT

India stands as one of the most enduring and vibrant democracies in the world. Since independence, its democratic framework—anchored in constitutional principles and popular representation—has served as a model for many developing nations. However, in recent decades, the infiltration of individuals with criminal backgrounds into the political sphere has become a grave concern. The misuse of power by such elements undermines governance, weakens public trust, and threatens the moral foundations of democracy. This paper examines the historical evolution of the criminalization of politics in India, traces its causes, assesses its implications, and reviews the legal and institutional measures taken to counter it. Ultimately, it argues for a stronger collective commitment—by citizens, parties, and institutions—to preserve the sanctity of democratic governance.

KEYWORDS: *Democracy, Elections, Political Parties, Criminalization, Governance*

INTRODUCTION

The criminalization of politics in India refers to the growing participation of individuals with criminal records in the country's political institutions. This trend has eroded the ethical core of public life and has distorted the functioning of democracy. Historically, India's political culture has been guided by *Dharma*—moral and ethical duty—and participatory traditions where rulers were accountable to the people. Yet, over time, this moral foundation has been challenged by corruption, nepotism, and the entry of criminal elements seeking political legitimacy.

Since 1947, when India emerged as a sovereign democratic republic, elections have served as the primary instrument of representation. However, in recent decades, electoral contests have increasingly been influenced by money power, muscle power, and manipulative politics. This growing nexus between crime and politics not only endangers the rule of law but also weakens citizens' faith in democratic institutions

OBJECTIVES

1. To trace the historical evolution and interconnection between crime and politics in India.
2. To analyse the underlying causes for the entry of criminals into politics.
3. To examine the major initiatives and reforms undertaken to address the criminalization of politics.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW: THE EVOLUTION OF CRIME–POLITICS NEXUS

The roots of criminalization in Indian politics can be traced to the 1970s—a turbulent decade marked by political unrest, the Emergency (1975–77), and growing disillusionment with governance. During this period, the nexus between politicians, local strongmen, and the bureaucracy began to take shape. Initially, criminals were used as instruments of political mobilization—especially in rural areas—to influence voters and suppress opposition.

By the 1980s and 1990s, this symbiotic relationship deepened. The rise of regional parties and coalition politics further intensified competition for votes. Politicians increasingly relied on local mafias and musclemen, who, in turn, sought political protection from prosecution. Over time, many such individuals entered politics directly, transforming from “political aides” to “political actors.”

Today, this relationship has become institutionalized. A significant proportion of elected representatives—both in Parliament and in State Assemblies—have pending criminal cases, many involving serious offences such as murder, extortion, and crimes against women.

STATUS OF CRIMINALIZATION: STATISTICAL INSIGHTS

India's electoral landscape is vast, comprising **six national parties**, over **fifty state parties**, and nearly **2,800 unrecognized parties** (Election Commission of India, 2022). Yet, an alarming number of candidates contest elections with criminal records.

Lok Sabha Election	Winners Analysed	MPs with Criminal Cases	MPs with Serious Criminal Cases
2009	543	162	76
2014	542	185	112
2019	539	233	159

According to the **Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR)**, 43% of Lok Sabha MPs elected in 2019 declared criminal cases, marking a 109% increase in serious offences since 2009. Nearly one-third of these cases involve grave crimes such as murder, attempted murder, or crimes against women.

This data reflects a dangerous trend—the normalization of criminality within India’s political culture.

CAUSES OF CRIMINALIZATION OF POLITICS

1. **Political–Bureaucratic Nexus:** Collusion between corrupt politicians and complicit bureaucrats fosters an environment where criminals can thrive and gain political legitimacy.
2. **Vested Electoral Interests:** Political parties often prioritize winnability over integrity, nominating candidates with strong local influence regardless of their criminal record.
3. **Muscle and Money Power:** Criminals provide funding and coercive control during elections, manipulating voter behavior through fear or financial inducement.
4. **Weak Legal Enforcement:** Despite existing laws, delays in trials and weak implementation allow convicted or accused individuals to contest elections.
5. **Voter Unawareness:** A lack of voter education regarding candidates’ backgrounds perpetuates the success of tainted leaders.
6. **Vote-Bank Politics:** Identity-based politics—rooted in caste, religion, or community—often overshadows ethical considerations.
7. **Systemic Corruption:** The deep-rooted culture of corruption encourages a politics of patronage and protection.
8. **Institutional Loopholes:** Ineffective election monitoring and the absence of time-bound disqualifications contribute to the persistence of criminal elements.

IMPACT ON INDIAN DEMOCRACY

- **Erosion of Democratic Values:** The presence of criminal elements in governance weakens public faith in democratic institutions.
- **Breakdown of Rule of Law:** Criminal politicians manipulate law enforcement to protect themselves and their associates.
- **Corruption and Misgovernance:** The pursuit of personal profit replaces public welfare, worsening socio-economic disparities.
- **Decline in Administrative Efficiency:** Individuals lacking ethical or administrative capacity undermine bureaucratic functioning.
- **Public Disillusionment:** Citizens lose confidence in the political system, leading to apathy and reduced participation.

INITIATIVES AGAINST CRIMINALIZATION

1. Constitutional and Legislative Measures

- **Representation of People Act (RPA), 1951:** Section 8 disqualifies candidates convicted of crimes with imprisonment of two years or more. Section 125A mandates disclosure of criminal cases and assets.
- **Special Courts for MPs and MLAs:** Established in various states to expedite cases involving elected representatives.
- **Committees and Reports:**
 - Vohra Committee Report (1993)—identified the nexus between criminals, politicians, and bureaucrats.
 - Law Commission's 244th Report (2014)—recommended disqualification upon framing of charges for serious offences.

2. Judicial Interventions

- **Association for Democratic Reforms v. Union of India (2002):** Mandated disclosure of candidates' criminal, financial, and educational details.
- **Lily Thomas v. Union of India (2013):** Disqualified convicted legislators from holding office.
- **Public Interest Foundation v. Union of India (2019):** Directed political parties to publicise candidates' criminal backgrounds.
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POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Strict Enforcement:** The Election Commission must enforce Supreme Court directives and penalise non-compliant parties.
- **State Funding of Elections:** Implementation of the *Dinesh Goswami* and *Inderjeet Committee* recommendations to curb illicit funding.
- **Speedy Trials:** Fast-track courts for elected representatives should resolve pending cases within fixed timeframes.
- **Ethical Candidate Selection:** Political parties must self-regulate and deny tickets to individuals with criminal backgrounds.
- **Voter Awareness:** Civic education campaigns should empower voters to make informed and moral choices.

CONCLUSION

India's democracy, rooted in the ideals of justice, equality, and liberty, remains one of the most resilient political systems in the modern world. Yet, its moral foundation is under strain due to the pervasive nexus between crime and politics. If unchecked, this phenomenon could erode the constitutional values envisioned by the framers of the Republic.

The responsibility to restore ethical governance rests not only with the legislature and judiciary but also with political parties and the electorate. A vigilant citizenry, combined with robust institutional accountability, can help cleanse the political arena. Only through collective moral renewal can India ensure that its democracy remains not merely procedural, but truly just and representative.

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