

FOREWORD



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People of India struggled hard for representative form of democracy during independence movement. Only a very small fraction of the adult population was granted voting right due to unreasonable qualifications laid down by the British government. Therefore, demand for enfranchisement of every adult person in the country was raised from time to time during freedom struggle.

In this historic background, the Constituent Assembly under Article 326 of the Constitution enfranchised every Indian above 21 years of age on a qualifying date in their constituencies. The resolution to have an electoral democracy in the country based on universal adult franchise irrespective of gender, literacy and socio-economic status was a very bold decision at the time of independence. It generated skepticism within the country and also in western democracies only to be disproved subsequently.

The Election Commission of India (ECI) translated the vision of universal adult franchise by conducting successive inclusive elections for all sections of the society such as weaker sections, women, minorities, trans genders, persons with disabilities and other marginalized people making democracy representative in character.

ECI set up under Art 324 of the Constitution is an independent, neutral and apolitical constitutional authority. An independent ECI free from any external executive interference is absolutely essential for holding free and fair election in the country. ECI enjoy trust and confidence of people of the country for delivering regular, periodic, credible and acceptable elections every time and on time since 1952. Such is the track record of ECI in delivering free and fair elections over a period of 65 years that it is rightly regarded as a global gold standard in the arena of electoral governance in the world.

ECI, since 1952, has generated and employed huge quantity of electoral information and data during various phases of elections including their planning and operations. In view of ever increasing significance of electoral data and persistent demand of stakeholders, ECI has, of late, laid focus on better management of election data by using new tools and software, a work in progress.

Current ECI data is largely based on a few major electoral indicators. There are many other parameters in electoral democracy which are of great value to stakeholders including academicians and researchers. It is observed that such data is either just not available or not accessible at one place in simple, analyzable, easy to understand and in interesting and readable format. The parameters such as historical data of bye-elections held since 1952 or deleted and modified constituencies, are unavailable in condensed and summarized form. I have felt a kind of data gap (between what we have and what stakeholders expect to get) which need to be filled for effective management of ever evolving complexities and strategies of elections.

In this background, I was delighted and also excited at the prospect when Dr. R.K. Thukral, editor of the proposed first ever "Election Atlas of India" contacted me for a foreword. He, at length, took me through the mind boggling data and facts in the proposed atlas.

I am given to understand that election atlases are available internationally. However, we do not seem to have such a comprehensive and voluminous atlas with all historical electoral information at one place pertaining to Parliamentary elections since 1952.

I can visualize challenges that may have been faced by the editorial team in accessing, compiling, analyzing and presenting wide ranging voluminous electoral information of 65 years.

The atlas, between the covers, depict a journey of progression of Parliamentary elections in the context of changing socio-political and demographic scenario with many more new electoral parameters and aspects hitherto unavailable at one place.

The atlas uses statistical data collected and collated at various levels about electors, candidates, gender and marginalized sections in terms of electoral participation and many other consequential factors related to elections. These new parameters and aspects are depicted in the form of impressive graphs, charts and thematic maps based on GIS technology with tremendous clarity. Atlas also highlights historical data about bye elections in PC and alteration in constituencies following the delimitations and also during reorganization of states.

On reading the atlas, I also noted that it is not merely an atlas. It has many interesting stories built around one common thread of electoral participation and narrated in the form of data and information. These thematic stories will be edifying to the stakeholders and provide an in depth insight to readers into the evolution of Indian electoral system. I do hope that the atlas besides being a rich source of information, will also serve as ready reckoner to academicians, researchers, advocates of democracy and also election functionaries. The editor has rightly given explanatory notes and disclaimer at the end of the compilation.

I congratulate Dr. R.K. Thukral, Editor, and his editorial team for bringing out very useful data oriented publications on Indian elections.

I wish Election Atlas of India all success.

Dr. Nasim Zaidi

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