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Abstract

The presence of large number of candidates in Indian elections had often evoked extremely strong policy recommendations from different expert groups. The major policy tool to control candidate entry in India had, however, been electoral deposit. Using panel data on elections in different states and UTs, our study estimates the impact of electoral deposit on candidate entry. Results suggest that increase in deposit had a substantial short-term negative impact on candidate entry. The candidate structure in India, however, is fairly persistent due to feedbacks in political opportunity. For effective deterrence on continuous basis, regulators, therefore, need to change deposit frequently and keep it at a high level compared to the current international benchmark. We observe that the high deposit may not be an effective barrier against unethical practices like cloning, but could discriminate political participation of genuinely underprivileged groups. In contrast, the current level of signature requirement, a relatively unused policy tool for controlling candidate entry, is found to be low in India and could be easily increased further in order to be effective. We argue that given the high variation and lack of stability in candidate structure across regions and over time, a local approach on signature requirement -- as in the US -- could be an effective deterrent in India. Accordingly, we suggest that the Election Commission of India (ECI) should not only have the power to determine the deposit before each election, it should also have the power to change the minimum signature requirement across constituencies under certain pre-specified conditions.

Keywords: Candidate Entry, Electoral Regulation, Electoral Deposits, Signature Requirements, Indian Elections, Independent Candidates

Journal of Economic Literature Classification: D72

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Hyper-Plurality of Candidates, Effectiveness of Democratic Representation and Regulation of Candidate Entry in India

1 Introduction

Regular conduction of elections is one of the major achievements of post-independent India. These largely free and fair elections have given Indian democracy a lot of credibility among its citizenry.¹ Since independence, fifteen elections of the lower house of the parliament (*Lok Sabha*) had taken place in India. The time for the sixteenth election is approaching and the possibility of its occurring before the due date cannot be ruled out. Time is, therefore, propitious to identify and remove as many lacunae in the Indian electoral system as possible.

This paper is on a relatively un-discussed but worrying feature of Indian elections. Since 1980s, the total number of candidates in many *Lok Sabha* and *Bidhan Sabha* constituencies had been very high, in many cases crossing 50 and in a few, even 100.² Overwhelming majority of these candidates were either independents or belonged to small local parties. A large number of candidates may not be bad *per se* and may even indicate the vibrancy of a democracy. However, it is natural to identify the possible motives behind their participation.

The “non-serious” candidates may participate in elections not to win, but to influence the result. Worryingly, the root of the motive behind their electoral participation may lie in the authoritarian and manipulative nature of Indian political parties. The authoritarian nature manifests in the candidate selection process. A significant part of the top echelon of many Indian political parties consists of descendants, close relatives and cronies of the top leader whose authority cannot be challenged through intra-party elections. The local support bases of such parties, however, are often heterogeneous and are divided by many cleavages like caste, religion, region etc. (Kamath, 1985; Chhibber and Petrocik, 2002). The non-transparency in candidate selection process often leads to open fight among these factions during elections.³ Across political parties, the process of complex coalition formation at the central level might also lead to

¹ A pan-India survey of more than 8000 people conducted by Mitra (2010) revealed that more than 60 per cent people in India perceived the power to change government as an important ingredient of citizenship.

² During Parliamentary elections in 1996, Nalgonda constituency in Andhra Pradesh and Belgaum constituency in Karnataka had 480 and 456 candidates respectively. During the same year in the assembly election in Tamil Nadu, Modakurichi assembly constituency had 1033 candidates.

³ A simple Google search with strings like “rebel candidates” and “India” leads to too many newspaper and magazine reports indicating their presence, e.g., Times of India (April 6, 2009) describes the situation in Maharashtra in 2009 and Indian Express (January 17, 2012) describes the situation in case of the assembly election of 2012 in Punjab.

rebellion by local party units if the later are not ready to sacrifice for the “big picture”.⁴

More pertinently, it is well known that in a first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system (e.g., as in the *Lok Sabha* or the *Bidhan Sabha* elections), even a single vote can decide the fate of candidates in an election. Success in the political arena may, therefore, depend on the ability to divide the votes of rivals. The manipulative nature of Indian political parties manifests in fielding of clone candidates (“dummies”).⁵ When two or more political parties engage in such cynical maneuvers simultaneously, a prisoners’ dilemma type game unfolds, leading to a sharp rise in the number of candidates in a constituency (Bhattacharya, 2010).

The number of candidates in a constituency may also increase because major incumbents need to fudge electoral expenditure through fringe candidates. In fact, floating “dummies” could be a strategy to avoid rigorous financial audit because with fixed public resources in the short run, the more the “dummies”, the less will be the per-candidate time devoted for audit. Further, floating dummies may help political parties to have additional electoral agents in crucial situations.⁶

Obviously, rationality of electoral choice demands that political parties may not behave unethically in all the constituencies all the time. For example, if a political party is certain to win election, it has no incentive to unnecessarily engage itself in unethical practices. Therefore, such behavior may manifest in select constituencies and, in a time period when political competition or uncertainty is high. The extent of unsavory politics in that constituency would also depend on the financial strengths of the major political parties and the pay-offs associated with that election. A direct consequence of all these is not only an increase in the average number of candidates in elections, but also an increase in its variability – both across constituencies and over time. A good regulatory framework, however, must study the incentives of political parties in different places at different times and build firewalls accordingly.

⁴ For example, the Hindu (April 04, 2009) in an article on election in Andhra Pradesh observed: ‘Leaders of the Grand Alliance are worried over vote sharing and prospects of the official candidates in nine Assembly and two *Lok Sabha* constituencies with “unofficial” nominees not paying heed to their warnings to withdraw from the contest.’

⁵ Both the academic and the regulatory literature on voting have admitted the possibility of cloning for a long time. Tideman (1987), for example, proposed “independence of clones” as a criterion in deciding about “optimal” voting rules. Some other studies on this area are Zavist and Tideman (1989), Dutta et al (2001), Schulze (2003), Faliszewski et al (2009) and Elkind et al (2010). McKnight (1999) discusses the regulatory aspect of the problem.

⁶ Accusations of false voting by the parties in opposition are common in India. For example, during the parliamentary election of 2009, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) filed a complaint with the ECI, alleging that Delhi’s electoral roll had more than 1.1 million fake voters. (Indian Express, January 24, 2009). Support or objection of a “neutral” agent may convince electoral officers about identities of voters more than the agents of mainstream parties.

Unfortunately, regulatory agencies worldwide sometimes tend to arrive at policy positions without a proper theoretical framework. As a result, often these agencies advocate extreme positions like banning the entries of the so called “non-serious” candidates.⁷ Policy recommendations of different expert groups in India had also tended to be on the extreme side.

In this paper, we argue that direct restrictions on electoral entry choke the voices of dissent. As a result, diversity of opinion — so necessary in a democracy — suffers at the cost of manageability. In case of two parties, political opinions — due to electoral constraints — sometimes converge to the “median”. In a heterogeneous population, such convergence of opinion could be harmful in the sense that major political parties then can behave like a cartel and block entries of other parties that could have brought a fresh perspective to different problems faced by the population.⁸ Impact of fringe candidates should not, therefore, be judged by their electoral success alone. The issues that they raise and fight for often ushers a lasting change in the electoral landscape (Brancati, 2008; Reiser and Holtmann, 2008; Bennett, 2009; Bolleyera and Weeks, 2009; Copus et al, 2009; Weeks, 2009).

Interestingly, some political scientists have also argued and demonstrated that direct restriction on electoral participation had generally not succeeded and been counter-productive in the long-run (Arora, 2002; Mateng’e, 2012). For example, despite many efforts by incumbents to block entry, the general population in both developed and new democracies in Europe seems to have been fed up with cartel politics. So far, the influence of fringe candidates have become more conspicuous only at the local elections (Reiser and Holtmann, 2008), and it is difficult to see whether this trend would continue.

Unfortunately, existing literature do not suggest to what extent policymakers should block entries of the so called “non-serious” candidates and how. Since we rule out direct restrictions, it is imperative on our part to suggest alternative policies that are indirect and softer in nature. Any such suggestion, however, cannot be free from subjective norms. In this paper, the normative position that we take is rooted to theories of political party formation.

Existing literature on party system generally offers three different approaches to explain candidate structure in elections in a country. The first approach is based on political opportunity (Pennings and Keman, 2003) and the second and the third are based respectively on changes in the cleavage structure (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Inglehart, 1997; Mitra and Singh, 1999; Chhibber, 1999) and institutional environment (Harmel and Robertson 1985; Hug 2000). We observe

⁷ For example, out of the 52 democracies in Brancati (2008), 18 explicitly restricted participation of independent candidates in national elections.

⁸ In case of the United States, Lem and Dowling (2006) observed that republicans and democrats might not agree with each other, but they agree to block entries of third parties. To characterize this type of behavior, political scientists like Bennet (2009) has coined the term Demopublicans.

that transformation of cleavages in a polity is a slow process. It, therefore, follows that if candidate structure is determined by cleavages, it should also change gradually.

So far, the focus of the existing literature on party system had been on the emergence of major political forces and their determinants. We stress at the outset that we do not attempt to explain what causes or determines the number of major political parties. Our focus is, rather, on the consequence of one particular aspect among the major changes in the political structure. We observe that in a first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system, when the number of “major” political parties increases beyond a critical level, political opportunity before the marginal players increases. If the cost of electoral participation is low then this process has a clear feedback – the more the increase in players, the more the political opportunity before those who remain and as a result the chance that there would be more players increase further. A major consequence of the feedback is that the number of candidates in a constituency could sometimes be very large within a short period. Academic studies on party systems have not highlighted the process of feedback in sufficient detail. In this study, we take the normative position that in a FPTP electoral system, a sudden large rise in the number of candidates in a constituency in an unchanged institutional environment reflects political opportunity and should trigger regulatory alarm. We also attempt to show that the feedback process, if unchecked through regulatory intervention, could be fairly persistent.

The plan of the paper is as follows: Section 2 discusses the relative merits and demerits of a few policy tools that regulate entry and summarizes the results of their applications in a few benchmark democracies. In Section 3, we analyze the actual and in some cases, potential impacts of these tools in the Indian context. The quantitative nature of the analysis also enables us to prepare certain scenarios. Despite obvious limitations, we carry out this exercise because of dearth of other alternatives and also because of the practical importance of the problem in the current context. Section 4 summarizes the paper and suggests policy recommendations.

2 The Analytical Framework

If electoral participation is costless, there could be too many “non-serious” candidates. Non-serious, tactical candidates tend to distort the representative character of democratic elections which are based on the assumption that candidates are policy driven and elections are meant to aggregate individual preferences into a social one. As such, effective elections should have rules to balance openness of entry with effectiveness of representation and accordingly institute appropriate restrictions on entry on candidature to ensure manageability.

To ensure manageability, democracies worldwide generally rely on two major types of indirect restrictions on candidate entries that increase the transaction cost of participation. These restrictions are imposed at the stage of filing of nomination papers. They are: (i) submission of an electoral deposit (“deposit” in short) which is not refunded if the candidate fails to obtain the minimum votes as per a pre-specified rule, (ii) provision of documentary evidence of support of a minimum number of electors in the constituency (“signature requirement” in short).

Interestingly, India has put in place these restrictions for a long time. Subsection 2.1 discusses the relative efficacies of these tools and their use in a few benchmark democracies. Subsection 2.2 reviews the Indian approach.

2.1 Indirect Tools to Control Candidate Entry: Relative Efficacies and Their Uses in Established Democracies

Clearly, a high deposit could act as an impediment in case of non-serious candidates. However, if it is too high, it discriminates the poorer section of a country. The amount of the deposit and the fraction of votes needed for refunding vary substantially across countries. The required deposit is GBP 500 in case of the UK, AUD 1000 in case of Australia, NZD 300 in case of New Zealand, CD 1000 in case of Canada. The fractions of votes needed for refund are generally less than or equal to 5.0 per cent of total votes in these countries. Like deposit, signature requirements also vary across democracies. For example, it is, only one in Canada, two in New Zealand and ten in the UK. In case of Australia, the signature required is fifty for candidates not endorsed by a political party. However, all incumbents need only one signature for nomination.

Importantly, unlike deposit, signature requirement does not discriminate the poor. Since people’s support is an essential ingredient in the democratic process, one may argue that this regulation reflects the spirit of democracy better compared to deposit. However, deposit increases the cost of participation of the candidates only. Signature requirement, in contrast, increases the costs of both the candidates and the regulators (because of associated transaction costs needed for verification of signatures). As a result, a high signature requirement necessitates relatively more public resources.

Policymakers can control entries of candidates by changing these requirements over time. It may be noted that inflation shrinks the real value of electoral deposit and growth in income increases its affordability over time. Therefore, one major limitation of deposit as a policy tool is that in a country with high income growth and high inflation, it requires near-continuous changes. One possibility to remove this limitation is to empower the electoral authorities to prescribe deposits before each election.

In relatively rare instances, both deposit and signature requirement could vary across population groups or across constituencies. India is an example of the first case where candidates belonging to scheduled caste (SC) or scheduled tribes (ST) have to pay half the deposit needed for general candidates.

Interestingly, in the United States (US) minimum signature requirements vary substantially across states and one can study its impact on candidate entry.⁹ Some such studies are: Ansolabehere and Gerber (1996), Stratman (2005), Burden (2007) and Drometer and Rincke (2008). Results reveal that increase in deposit affects entries of independent candidates significantly, as the non-serious free-riders among them drop out of the race. However, increase in deposit does not affect entries of minor parties because compared to independent candidates, these parties are in a stronger financial position. Comparing the two policy tools, studies like Stratmann (2005) and Lem and Dowling (2006) observe that signature requirement is likely to involve larger transaction cost than deposit.

Incidentally, if ruling political parties extract substantial rents, a high deposit is unlikely to be an effective barrier. If the financial auditing process is not rigorous, political parties can afford to float dummies without hitting their unaccounted budget constraint. Further, the huge expected pay-off relative to the deposit may entice rebels to take financial risk and be candidates. Signature requirement as a policy tool does not carry that risk. In some countries, an elector in a constituency can sign the nomination paper of only one candidate in that constituency. If the minimum signature requirement is high and all signatures should be unique, political parties must have at least that many supporters in that constituency.¹⁰

It may be noted that besides the two major restrictions, there are a few others e.g., age restrictions, restrictions on electoral participation of certain professionals like top bureaucrats, army officials, judges etc.¹¹ We observe that these restrictions are either not relevant or would not play an important role in the current context.

2.2 The Indian Approach to Control Candidate Entry

The electoral deposit for general candidates in *Lok Sabha* election was Rs.500/- in 1951.¹² The deposit was increased to Rs.10,000/- after the huge influx of candidates in the 1996 parliamentary election. On recommendations from expert

⁹ For example, in Alabama an independent candidate or a new party would need signatures equal to 3 percent of the previous gubernatorial vote, translating to 39,536 votes in the 2002 election. In contrast, in New Jersey the requirement was static and was only 800 signatures. (Lem and Dowling, 2006).

¹⁰ In case of Russia, there is evidence that a high signature requirement imposed by the ruling elite forced the non-incumbents to “purchase” signatures (Bennett, 2009).

¹¹ Bhattacharya and Mitra (2012) discuss these regulations and their implications in detail.

¹² Unless mentioned explicitly, by “deposit”, we shall mean the required deposit from general candidates in *Lok Sabha* elections.

groups, it was further increased to Rs.25,000/- since 1 February 2010. Interestingly, deposit required to be a candidate in a national election is about one third of annual per-capita income in current prices in India, whereas in countries like the UK, Canada and Australia, it is typically less than two per cent of the same. Regarding signature requirement, the Indian rule is similar to that of Australia, albeit less stringent. In India, currently national and state party candidates need only one signature, while others require ten. Interestingly, as a proportion to average number of electors in a constituency, the signature requirement in India appears to be on the lower side among established democracies.

From regulatory perspective, the problem of large number of candidates and the consequent malpractices bothered Indian electoral authorities for a long time.¹³ The ECI had time and again articulated the possibility that major political parties had surreptitiously floated fringe candidates for their own gain. The diagnosis of the problem by the Law Commission of India (LCI), and the National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (NCRWC) was similar. LCI (1999) observed that in order to “mislead the masses”, quite a few persons of the name “V. K. Malhotra” stood as independent candidates against the “real” V. K. Malhotra, one of the BJP candidates in Delhi in a *Lok Sabha* election (Para 3.3.3). NCRWC (2002) in this context observed that most of the so called independent candidates were “dummy candidates or defectors from their parties on being denied party tickets” (Vol-I, Para 4.20.3).

Despite these observations, apparently, the strategy of cloning was pursued with impunity by the major political parties in India. For example, in the Arakkonam constituency in Tamil Nadu in 2004, where the main fight was between “Velu, R” of PMK and “Shanmugam, M” of ADMK, there were 4 independent candidates with name “Velu” and 2 independent candidates with name “Shanmugam” (Bhattacharya, 2010). Recently, in cases where it found evidence, the ECI had started to take action against “dummies”. For example, finding that several independent candidates in Kadapa *Lok Sabha* and Pulivendula assembly constituencies were canvassing on behalf of major political parties in the by-elections scheduled on May 8, 2011, the ECI decided to crack the whip.¹⁴

In so far as policies are concerned, LCI (1999) recommended that independent candidates should be debarred from contesting *Lok Sabha* elections (Para 3.3.4). Subsequently, NCRWC (2002) suggested *inter alia* that: (i) if any independent candidate fails to win five percent of the vote or more, he should be debarred from contesting for the same office for six years (Vol-1, Para 4.20.4), and, (ii) an independent candidate who loses election three times consecutively for the same

¹³ Verma (2009) provides a review of unethical practices and their prevention during elections in the Indian context. Kumar (2002) reviews the history of electoral reforms in India in brief.

¹⁴ “We will withdraw the security given to them, take back the vehicles and deny them access to polling booths. And if they do not give a proper response to our notices, we will prevent them from contesting,” said chief electoral officer Bhanwar Lal (Times of India, May 1, 2011).

office should be permanently debarred from contesting election to that office (Vol-1, Para 4.20.4). These recommendations are in line with the views emanated from the ECI, but tend to fall on the extreme side. To control candidate entry in India, different expert groups (e.g., the ECI, the NCRWC, the LCI etc) in the past had also recommended an increase in the security deposit of candidates.¹⁵ Some of these recommendations got reflected in an amendment of the Representation of the People Act in India. Unfortunately, the changes were not backed by a rigorous analysis of the possible impact of the policy tools on candidate entry.

3 Influence of Policy Tools on Candidate Entry in India

The data for this paper have been downloaded and compiled from the Election Commission of India (ECI) website [<http://www.eci.gov.in>]. In this study, we cover all *Lok Sabha* and *Bidhan Sabha* elections between the years 1962 and 2012.¹⁶ The reference period covers 13 national level and 294 state-level elections.¹⁷ We exclude all by-elections because once the government is formed, the political milieu changes sharply from the time of a general election – whether at the national or at the state level. Sometimes *Lok Sabha* elections in a few states in India were postponed due to charged atmosphere and were held subsequently (e.g., Punjab and Assam in 1985 and Punjab in 1992). We also omit these elections because they are conceptually similar to by-elections.

Our analysis is based on aggregated information on each *Bidhan Sabha* election and information on each *Lok Sabha* election for different states and Union Territories (UTs). We, therefore, have an unbalanced panel data set. In case of *Lok Sabha* elections, the panel is unbalanced because of creation of new states and reorganization of the old ones. In case of *Bidhan Sabha* elections, the panel is unbalanced because the election cycles of different states are different. Overall, we have 389 observations for *Lok Sabha* elections and 294 for *Bidhan Sabha* elections.¹⁸

The plan of this section is as follows: Subsection 3.1 carries out a descriptive analysis of candidate structure and identifies its major determinants other than policy tools. Subsection 3.2 identifies the determinants of candidate structure . Subsection 3.3 specifies and estimates a few panel regressions involving Indian electoral data. Finally, Subsection 3.4 discusses policy implications of the results obtained.

¹⁵ NCRWC (2002), in fact, recommended a separate deposit scheme for independent candidates (Vol-1, Para 4.20.4).

¹⁶ Although *Bidhan Sabha* elections of Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh were held in 2012, detailed results of these elections were not disseminated in the ECI website till 31 December 2012. Hence, they are not covered in the study.

¹⁷ Although data on parliamentary elections for the year 1951 and 1957 are available in the public domain, these two elections did not follow first-past-the-post electoral rule for all constituencies.

¹⁸ Records corresponding to *Lok Sabha* are more because in case of UTs, there are no *Bidhan Sabha* elections.

3.1 A Descriptive Analysis of Candidate Structure

Figure 1 presents the trends in the number of candidates per constituency for *Lok Sabha* and *Bidhan Sabha* elections. In Figure 1, the average number of candidates is calculated over a five-year window, e.g., the figures corresponding to 1970 indicate the average candidates between 1966 and 1970.

Figure 1 reveals four important aspects of Indian elections. First, the number of candidates per constituency rose sharply during the 1980s and early 1990s. Second, average number of candidates in national and state level elections reveals similar patterns, the simple correlation between the two series in Figure 1 being 0.97. Third, since early 1980s, the average numbers of candidates in assembly elections are lower than the parliamentary elections in the same period since the 1980s. The lower number could be due to factors like smaller constituency sizes, lower pay-off associated with state-level elections etc. Given that the vertical differences between the two series in Figure 1 are not large, apparently an important implication could be that the pay-off in an election, rather than the size of electors, could be the dominant factor behind entry of candidates. Fourth, the values corresponding to 2010 and 2015 of *Bidhan Sabha* series in Figure 1 would carry some of the impact of the latest increase in electoral deposit since 1 February, 2010. One can observe a marginal increase in average number of candidates in *Bidhan Sabha* elections between 2010 and 2015 despite an increase in electoral deposit. For the *Lok Sabha* series in Figure 1, the effect of the latest change in deposit is not yet known.

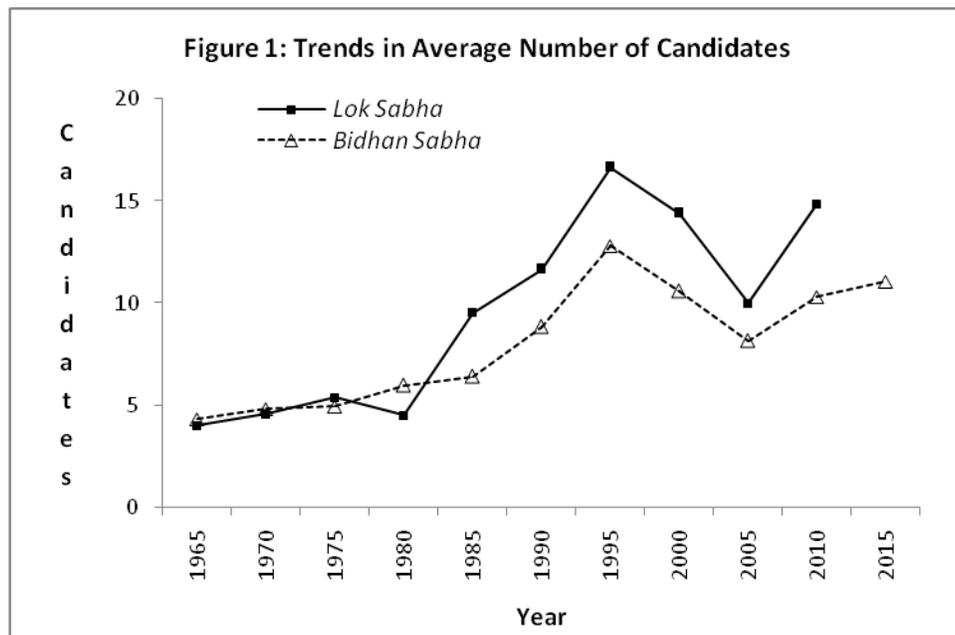


Figure 2 presents the proportion of constituencies having ten or more candidates over a five year window for *Lok Sabha* and *Bidhan Sabha* elections. Once again, the two series in Figure 2 reveal similar trends. Like in Figure 1, *Bidhan Sabha* series remains consistently below *Lok Sabha* series since the early 1980s. Interestingly, the nature of movements of the two series in Figure 1 and Figure 2 are similar. Coincidentally, the correlation between these two series in Figure 2 is, like in Figure 1, 0.97.

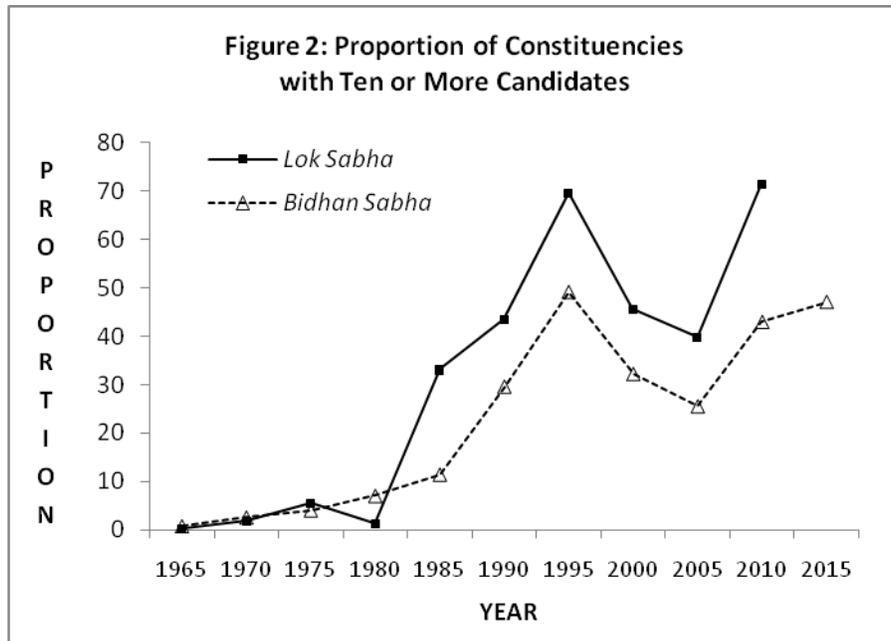


Figure 1 and Figure 2 do not reveal the wide variation in number of candidates across regions. Table 1 presents decade-wise movements in the average number of candidates per constituency for major states, separately for *Lok Sabha* and *Bidhan Sabha* elections. Table 1 reveals wide regional variation in candidate structure. States like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana, had consistently averaged 10 or more candidates since the 1980s. In contrast, average number of candidates in some other large states like Orissa, West Bengal, and Kerala, number of candidates per-constituency had been consistently less than 10 during the same period. In general, small states (e.g., Himachal Pradesh, Goa, Sikkim and all North Eastern states other than Assam) and Union Territories did not have high number of candidates, occasional exceptions being Chandigarh and Pondicherry.

Table 1 does not reveal variations in candidate structure *within* states. Table 2 presents the maximum number of candidates in major states in each decade. Figures in Table 2, when juxtaposed with those in Table 1, can reveal the extent of intra-state variation in candidate structure.

Bhattacharya and Mitra (2012) observed that in case of Lok Sabha elections, there had been 47 cases in India where the total number of candidates in a constituency was greater than 50. All such cases occurred between 1989 and 1996, a period reflecting political fragmentation and uncertainty in India.

**Table 1: Number of Candidates Per Constituency across States and UTs
[Lok Sabha (LS) and Bidhan Sabha (BS) Elections]**

State / Union Territory	Maximum Number of Candidates in a Constituency across Decades										
	60 – 69		70 – 79		80 -- 89		90 -- 99		00 -- 09		10 --
	LS	BS	LS	BS	LS	BS	LS	BS	LS	BS	BS
Andhra Pradesh	3.7	3.5	4.5	4.4	6.6	6.1	16.3	9.1	10.1	9.4	---
Assam	3.4	3.9	4.2	5.9	3.5	6.8	9.3	11.6	9.8	7.6	7.8
Bihar	5.2	5.6	7.1	7.8	12.2	11.2	17.0	23.2	14.2	11.4	14.5
Chhattisgarh	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	12.7	10.5	---
Delhi	6.2		7.5	4.6	28.3	6.9	44.8	15.2	20.6	12.1	---
Gujarat	3.2	3.5	4.6	4.8	8.4	5.8	12.5	10.2	10.0	6.2	---
Haryana	7.4	5.4	5.9	6.2	22.0	13.4	18.7	25.0	18.5	11.7	---
Jammu and Kashmir	2.5	2.5	5.1	5.0	7.8	6.8	15.5	6.3	13.7	11.9	---
Jharkhand	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	15.4	17.8	---
Kerala	3.0	3.7	3.3	3.9	7.7	6.1	8.4	7.2	9.9	5.7	6.9
Karnataka	3.5	3.3	3.7	4.5	9.1	7.7	15.2	8.6	10.7	8.8	---
Maharashtra	4.0	4.5	4.8	5.4	10.5	6.5	13.4	12.1	12.8	10.8	---
Madhya Pradesh	4.6	4.9	4.2	5.5	10.4	7.0	16.8	10.9	12.5	9.7	---
Orissa	2.9	4.3	3.6	5.0	5.7	5.2	8.1	7.9	6.1	6.7	---
Punjab	5.2	5.1	6.2	5.2	14.4	6.7	12.3	5.4	13.8	8.4	9.2
Rajasthan	5.0	5.0	4.8	5.3	11.6	7.3	15.9	11.6	10.6	9.3	---
Tamil Nadu	3.5	3.6	3.9	4.6	8.3	7.9	12.0	16.8	17.9	9.5	11.7
Uttar Pradesh	5.6	6.6	5.8	8.3	13.1	13.1	21.1	17.4	15.7	14.4	17.0
West Bengal	3.3	3.7	4.5	4.5	6.9	4.6	8.2	6.7	8.6	5.7	6.1
Small States and UTs	3.8	3.8	4.4	4.4	7.2	4.7	8.6	4.9	8.5	5.8	7.3

Notes:

- (1) In this study, results for old states like Mysore and Madras are shown under Karnataka and Tamil Nadu respectively. Similarly, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh include the results for Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Uttarakhand respectively.
- (2) Small states and UTs are those having less than or equal to five parliamentary seats. They are: Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Goa, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, Andaman and Nicobar, Lakshadweep, Chandigarh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Daman and Diu and Pondicherry.

Interestingly, other than 6 cases (viz., Palani in Tamil Nadu; Hyderabad, Secunderabad and Nalgonda in Andhra Pradesh; Belgaum in Karnataka; and, Nagpur in Maharashtra), all the remaining 41 were from the extended Hindi belt (e.g., including Delhi, Chandigarh and the state of Haryana). Except Palani in 1989, the remaining five occurred in 1996. Also, other than six constituencies – all in the metropolitan region of Delhi (e.g., New Delhi, South Delhi, Outer Delhi, East Delhi, Chandi Chowk and Delhi Sadar) – none of the remaining constituencies in India had more than fifty candidates twice between 1962 and 2009. In fact, except six constituencies (South Delhi, Outer Delhi, East Delhi, Chandni Chowk, Delhi Sadar and Indore), no other constituencies among the 47 had more than 30 candidates in each of the two preceding elections.

**Table 2: Maximum Number of Candidates in a Constituency across States and UTs
[Lok Sabha (LS) and Bidhan Sabha (BS) Elections]**

State / Union Territory	Maximum Number of Candidates in a Constituency across Decades										
	60 – 69		70 -- 79		80 -- 89		90 -- 99		00 – 09		10 --
	LS	BS	LS	BS	LS	BS	LS	BS	LS	BS	BS
Andhra Pradesh	7	7	16	16	25	29	480	39	32	25	---
Assam	6	10	8	15	4	21	18	29	16	25	25
Bihar	10	15	15	32	33	47	67	87	25	33	31
Chhattisgarh	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	32	29	---
Delhi	11	---	15	9	50	19	122	47	41	25	---
Gujarat	7	8	9	12	19	16	33	37	27	15	---
Haryana	12	12	12	17	122	38	43	76	38	28	---
Jammu and Kashmir	4	8	9	16	24	24	40	14	26	34	---
Jharkhand	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	32	53	---
Kerala	5	9	7	13	16	21	20	20	20	11	13
Karnataka	8	12	14	13	31	301	456	30	37	31	---
Maharashtra	9	15	16	17	29	18	60	62	36	28	---
Madhya Pradesh	9	19	11	29	39	24	76	49	28	33	---
Orissa	6	9	6	13	13	13	19	22	13	22	---
Punjab	9	13	9	19	30	22	36	14	30	18	16
Rajasthan	11	16	14	23	29	23	52	49	25	28	---
Tamil Nadu	9	8	9	13	51	90	43	1033	43	26	31
Uttar Pradesh	14	21	15	24	47	41	79	77	41	35	34
West Bengal	6	10	10	17	32	17	28	23	15	16	14
Small States and UTs	10	11	11	17	39	24	55	17	17	24	23

Notes: Same as in Table 1.

In case of *Bidhan Sabha* elections, the total number of cases with candidates greater than 50 is 39. Interestingly, distribution of these appears to be more dispersed in terms of regions, time and number of candidates. Across regions, Bihar and UP top the list with 12 cases each, followed by Tamil Nadu (6), Haryana (5), Maharashtra (2), Karnataka (1) and Jharkhand (1). The time span varies between 1984 (Tamil Nadu) and 2005 (Jharkhand). The range of number of candidates vary between 51 (Sitamarhi of UP in 1995) and 1033 (Modakurichi in Tamil Nadu in 1996). Like in case of *Lok Sabha* elections, there appears to be few repetitions of constituencies in this list.

Bhattacharya and Mitra (2012) have argued that this observed lack of stability in candidate structure at the constituency level cannot be explained in terms of typical slow evolution of cleavages, as articulated by Chhibber (1999) and Mitra and Singh (1999). Nor can these cases be explained in terms of institutional environment which, in India, often did not change much between two successive elections. The observed sharp jump in the number of candidates can only be explained in terms of opportunistic entries, often in the form of rebel and clone candidates. This observation has important implications in designing appropriate regulatory policies in the Indian context.

In so far as policies are concerned, we observe that the increase in deposit since 1 February 2010 did not seem to affect the candidate structure in states where elections have taken place after this change. International evidence seems to suggest that a rise in deposit affects the free-riders most (Ansolabehere and Gerber, 1996; Stratman, 2005, Burden, 2007 and Drometer and Rincke, 2008). Therefore, one may hypothesize that the proportion of the so called “free riders” among fringe candidates could be small. Once again, this observation has important implications in policy design.

3.2 Determinants of Candidate Structure

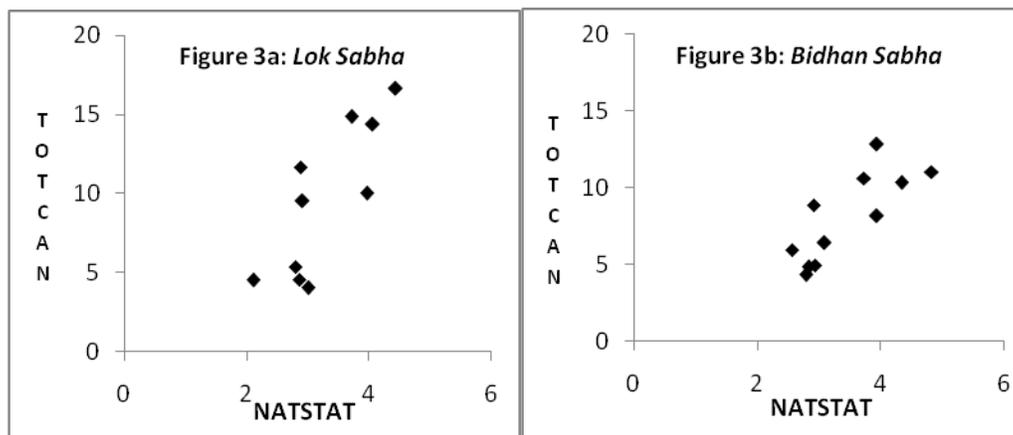
The average number of candidates in a region has many determinants. As per theory, political opportunity, cleavage structure and institutional environment are major factors that influence the number of candidates in a region. Empirically, some of these determinants could be political fragmentation, the timing of the election (e.g., whether it is a mid-term election) and policy tools like electoral deposit and signature requirement. In addition, we observe that the average number of candidates in a region may also be persistent and such persistence can be measured by correlations with its own past.

Political fragmentation in a region is measured in this study by the number of national and state parties per constituency (NATSTAT). We are reluctant to use *ex post* measures of political fragmentation like those in Holbrook and Van Dunk (1993) or the effective number of political parties as used by Chhibber and Kollman (1998) because these measures are based on vote shares. At the time

of the decision of electoral participation, exact vote shares are unknown to the candidates. *Ex post* measures implicitly assume perfect foresight which is unlikely to be met in reality. Therefore, despite limitations, we prefer to use *ex ante* measures of political fragmentation as defined above.

It may be noted that we take emergence of major political forces as an exogenous variable and do not attempt to explain what causes that emergence. There are several studies on party system that attempt to do so and they are quite successful. Our study is on the consequence of political fragmentation. We attempt to show that when such fragmentation increases, political opportunity of fringe players also increase and a feedback effect sets in.

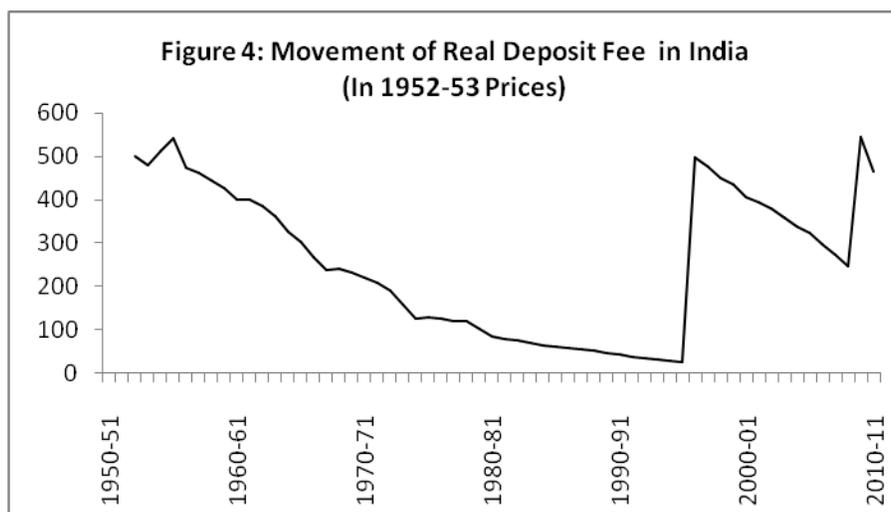
Figure 3: Relationship between Number of Candidates per Constituency (TOTCAN) and Number of Candidates of National and State Parties per Constituency (NATSTAT)



Figures 3a and 3b juxtapose the aggregated movement of the measures of fragmentation (NATSTAT) with TOTCAN over five-year windows (e.g., as in Figure 1 and Figure 2), separately for *Lok Sabha* and *Bidhan Sabha* elections. Both Figures 3a and 3b reveal a positive relationship between political fragmentation and electoral participation, with a higher slope in case of *Lok Sabha* elections.

In this study, we examine the possibility that the number of candidates in mid-term elections could be different from normal ones. This is because the political uncertainty during a mid-term election may spur many fringe players to participate more freely compared to a regular election. On the other hand, mid-term elections typically come with a short notice. As a result, the practice of floating clones may suffer because of lack of availability of sufficient time. This may be compounded by the additional factor that in mid-term elections, due to political realignments, many incumbents could be replaced. It is not clear which effect would be dominant without carrying out empirical analysis of data.

In so far as movements in policy variables are concerned, Figure 4 presents the movement of electoral deposit in India in real terms. “Real” deposit is calculated as the nominal deposit deflated by the wholesale price index (WPI). WPI data for such calculation has been collected from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) website (<http://www.rbi.org.in>). WPI series for different base years had been converted to a common base of 1952-53 for such calculations. Figure 4 highlights that when the first change in deposit took place in 1996, it had shrunk to about (1/20)-th of its real value in 1951. Interestingly, the two changes in deposit in 1996 and 2010, attempted to restore it near its original level in 1951.



Bhattacharya and Mitra (2012) observe that due to inflation, the real value of deposit shrunk and due to growth in per-capita income, its affordability increased substantially during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Thus, the reason behind the sharp rise in the number of candidates in India during the late 1980s and early 1990s was not just due to political opportunity, but also due to the financial opportunity during that period. The negative relationship between political participation and deposit is clearly visible when one juxtaposes Figures 1 and 2 with Figure 4.

Finally, It may be noted the positive relationship between NATSTAT and TOTCAN may have long-lasting consequences in the presence of feedback. Once political fragmentation sets in, total number of candidates increases because of increase in opportunity to the fringe players. A history of the presence of fringe players may motivate others to join in the next election, especially if some of these fringe players can successfully influence the result. One way to study the feedback mechanism in the candidate structure is to examine the relationship between average number of candidates per constituency with its own lag. We find that in case of *Lok Sabha* elections, the correlation of TOTCAN with

the its first two lags are 0.46 and 0.17 respectively. In case of *Bidhan Sabha* elections, the corresponding figures are 0.65 and 0.47 respectively. These figures indicate a moderate to good degree of persistence.

3.3 Emergence of Candidates: Regression Models

To study the impact of real deposit, we specify and estimate a few regression equations.¹⁹ The dependent variable in all regression equations is TOTCAN, the average number of candidates per constituency in a state or UT in a given election. Independent variables specified are NATSTAT (number of candidates belonging to national and state parties per constituency in that state or UT), REALDEP (electoral deposit in real terms), and MIDTERM (dummy variable that takes the value unity for mid-term elections and zero otherwise). NATSTAT and REALDEP are proxies respectively for political and financial opportunity. To examine persistence, we estimate these regressions both with and without the first lag of the dependent variable [denoted as TOTCAN(--1)].

Since we include all states and UTs in our sample, initially we specify a fixed-effect type panel data model. In initial specifications, we include dummies for all states and UTs separately. It may be noted that the variable NATSTAT varies sharply across regions and would explain a substantial part of regional variation in TOTCAN. The regional dummies are expected to capture the type of variations not explained by NATSTAT. We do not include time dummies because their inclusion might underestimate the true impact of real deposit.

To have parsimony, we also experiment with combinations of states or UTs that have similar political or cultural characteristics. For example, we include two dummies for broad regions comprising states and UTs, viz., HINDIBELT (combining dummies corresponding to Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, New Delhi and Haryana) and SMALL (all small states and UTs which have less than or equal to five *Lok Sabha* constituencies, e.g., Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Andaman and Nicobar, Lakshadweep, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Daman and Diu, Chandigarh and Pondicherry). The two dummies reflect the extreme cases in terms of relevance to Indian politics. Politics in the so-called Hindi belt often shapes and characterizes pan-India politics. The small states and the UTs, in contrast, play a marginal role.

Since the population sizes of different states in India are different, all regression equations are estimated by weighted least squares (WLS) technique, with the

¹⁹ Bhattacharya and Mitra (2012) have discussed a few conceptual problems and their solutions in estimating the impact of electoral deposit on entry of candidates.

number of electors (ELECTORS) in each state in each election as weights.²⁰ The modeling strategy adopted in this study is a general to specific one, in which backward stepwise regressions are used to identify the final specification. Such regressions were estimated for different periods separately (not reported in the paper). Interestingly, we find that partial correlations of regional dummies with TOTCAN are not very high. Further, these correlations are not stable and vary substantially across periods. This is not surprising because political opportunity in a region could change abruptly within a short period. This impact might not have a contagion effect and its impact could be confined within that particular region itself, leading to strong interaction effect. A major objective of this study was to have a simple and parsimonious model that can explain a substantial portion of the variation in the candidate structure. In the final analysis, we drop the regional dummies to have parsimony, with the final specifications being simple WLS models.

Table 3: Regression Results Reflecting the Impact of Real Deposit

Variables (1)	Dependent Variable: TOTCAN			
	<i>Lok Sabha</i>		<i>Bidhan Sabha</i>	
	Model 1 (2)	Model 2 (3)	Model 3 (4)	Model 4 (5)
Intercept	--3.944 (-3.80)#	--2.708 (-2.74)#	0.178 (0.27)	0.134 (0.23)
NATSTAT	5.627 (20.73)#	4.511 (15.77)#	3.362 (20.16)#	2.404 (13.47)#
REALDEP	--0.018 (-11.02)#	--0.020 (-12.88)#	--0.013 (-10.65)#	--0.013 (-11.51)#
MTERM	--1.141 (-2.12)@	--2.194 (-4.31)#	--0.771 (-1.58)	--1.858 (-4.21)#
TOTCAN(--1)	---	0.342 (9.90)#		0.414 (10.58)#
N	389	354	294	264
R ²	0.59	0.68	0.61	0.71
\bar{R}^2	0.59	0.68	0.60	0.71

Note: The bracketed numbers are t-statistics. Here, #, @ and \$ indicate significance at 1, 5 and 10 per cent respectively. "Eq" in this table stands for equations.

²⁰ Due to population growth, recent elections will have higher weights in this approach. Since the estimated equations are used to prepare policy scenarios, this could be considered as a desirable characteristic. Choice of weights, however, is unlikely to affect point estimates.

Table 3 presents the estimated equations. All the major explanatory variables in Table 3 appear with expected signs. Also, all equations reported in Table 3 have moderate to good explanatory power. Among the independent variables, NATSTAT and REALDEP turn out to be highly significant in all equations. Taken together these results imply that cutting across regional differences, political and financial opportunity for participation jointly can explain the evolution of the number of candidates in Indian elections well. Mid-term elections were found to have, on an average, one to two candidates less than normal elections. The mid-term effect was, however, not as strongly significant as other explanatory variables.

It may be noted that the estimated equations in Table 3 can be used to find the structural relationship between the number of independent candidates and other small parties with the same set of explanatory variables. Let the number of such candidates per constituency in a region be denoted by OTHCAN. Since, $TOTCAN = NATSTAT + OTHCAN$, one can easily obtain the structural relationship between OTHCAN and NATSTAT from the estimated equations in Table 3 by using standard results of regression.

Estimates based on Table 3 suggest that when real deposit is close to zero, a fight between two major political parties in a *Lok Sabha* constituency in most large Indian states will typically have about seven to eight candidates, while that corresponding to an average *Bidhan Sabha* seat will typically have six to seven. In a three-way fight, however, these numbers increase to about thirteen and ten respectively. However, a *ceteris paribus* rise of Rs. 100/- in real deposit (in 1952-53 prices e.g., approximately Rs. 5,880.80 in March 2012) reduces about two candidates on an average for *Lok Sabha* and about one for *Bidhan Sabha*.

Equations in columns 3 and 5 of Table 3 explain the variation in candidate structure substantially more due to the inclusion of the lag terms. The persistence seems to be more in case of *Bidhan Sabha* elections. This is because Lok Sabha elections carry the impact of changes in all regions. The political party structures in states, in contrast, are more stable.

Interestingly, Table 3 also reveals that the difference between short and long-term impact of a change in deposit could be substantial due to the persistence in candidate structure. All coefficients for REALDEP in Table 3 reflect the short-term impact. As expected, these impacts should be same irrespective of whether a lagged dependent variable is present in the regression. Model 2 for *Lok Sabha* and Model 4 for *Bidhan Sabha*, however, can be used to estimate the long-run impact. Table 3 reveals that in the long-run, a *ceteris paribus* increase of approximately Rs.6,000/- in deposit in March 2012 prices can reduce about three candidates for *Lok Sabha* and about two for *Bidhan Sabha*, while in the short-run these figures are about two and one respectively.

3.4 Policy Implications

Table 4 presents some scenarios that are based on the equations in Table 3. In Table 4, the required deposit is obtained by using the estimated regression equations as formula. In Table 4, the scenarios are for regular elections (e.g., not mid-term elections) for which $MTERM=0$. For equations without lagged dependent variable, it fixes the value of $TOTCAN$ equal to 10 and solves for the value of the real deposit in 1952-53 prices. Using the WPI series, the real deposit is then converted to March 2012 prices, the multiplication factor being 58.8080. For equations with lag, the process of estimation is similar, the only difference being in Table 4, the estimates are based on a steady state of ten candidates (e.g., both current and previous elections had exactly ten candidates).

Table 4 reveals that in case of a direct fight between two major parties, if the regulators want to control total number of candidates in constituencies up to ten, then there may not be any need for deposit requirement. If, however, due to fragmentation in polity, the major party candidates increase to four, one would need a deposit of more than Rs.25,000/- in case of *Lok Sabha* and more than Rs.15,000/- in case of *Bidhan Sabha*. In case of five candidates of major parties, the estimated deposit for *Lok Sabha* election is close to Rs.40,000/- and for *Bidhan Sabha*, it is close to Rs.30,000/-.

Table 4:
Electoral Deposit (in Rupee) Needed to Control Total Number of Candidates within Ten for Given Number of Candidates of National and State-Level Parties

Type of Election	Given Number of National and State Parties							
	Equation without Lag				Equation with Lag			
	2	3	4	5	2	3	4	5
<i>Lok Sabha</i>	---	9596	27980	46364	---	12482	25746	39010
<i>Bidhan Sabha</i>	---	1194	16403	31612	----	6722	17597	28472

It may be noted that the ECI had formally proposed that it be given the power to prescribe deposit before each election. Looking forward, it is easy to show that at an average annual rate of inflation of 5.0 per-cent (which is close to the current actual annual rate of inflation in India), the real values of Rs.25,000/- in 2014, 2019 and 2024 would be Rs.19,588/-, Rs.15,348/- and Rs.12,025 respectively. Clearly, if prices and income increase at a high rate without concomitant changes

in the deposit, the later would cease to be an effective barrier to candidate entry. To that extent, there is a case in changing the electoral law to delegate the power of imposition of deposit to the ECI.

These scenarios suggest that until a stable two-party system in India emerges, (and that stability could be far-away due to the persistence in candidate structure) to regulate candidate entry, policymakers would need to keep the deposit consistently at a high level compared to the current international benchmark. This highly discriminatory electoral deposit may restrict the entry of the poorer section of the society in the electoral process, but it would neither block entries of rich rebels nor stop unethical practices like cloning. Interestingly, the other policy tool of increasing the signature requirement has not been considered as a major option by various expert groups in India. The US experience, in this context, suggests that it could be an effective tool in controlling the number of candidates, especially in a large and a heterogeneous country like India.

4 Conclusion

The presence of large number of candidates in Indian elections had often evoked extremely strong policy recommendations from different expert groups. This paper argued that that in the Indian context one could tackle this “headache” through softer options. The traditional policy tool to control candidate entry in India had been electoral deposit. Using panel data on elections in different states and UTs, our study estimates the impact of electoral deposit on candidate entry in India. Our empirical analysis suggests that an increase in deposit had a significant negative impact on candidate entry in India. However, candidate structure in India is fairly persistent because political opportunities unleash a process of feedback in its movement over time. Because of this reason, for effective deterrence on continuous basis, India needs to sustain deposit at a very high level compared to the current international benchmark. The high level of deposit would not be an effective barrier against unethical practices like cloning, but could discriminate political participation of genuinely underprivileged groups. Further, reliance on deposit alone would require frequent changes in it.

In contrast to deposit, we observe that the current level of signature requirement is low in India and can be easily met by a candidate from his or her own family and close circle of friends. A further increase of the signature requirement -- at least to the level in Australia where all non-incumbents need at least fifty signatures -- would not increase the transaction cost of conducting elections substantially. Further, the US experience suggests that a local approach on signature requirement could be an effective tool in controlling electoral entry.

In this context, we suggest two policy options. Consistent with our norm stated in the introduction, the suggested policy options would come into force if the

number of candidates in a constituency exceeds a certain cut-off limit (say, 30). As per the first option, the ECI should then have the power to change the minimum signature requirement up to a pre-specified limit (say, 100) for all candidates other than those of recognized national and state parties. As per the second policy option, the minimum signature requirement for fringe candidates could be a pre-specified multiple of the number of candidates (say, 20 times the total number of candidates). It may be noted that between the two options, the first one is easy to implement and understand. The second one, in contrast, is likely to increase the transaction cost of ECI, but could be a more stringent restriction on candidate entry compared to the first option beyond a certain threshold.

Since collection and verification of signature requirement would take time, candidates in constituencies where this policy would apply may be given some more time (say, 7 days) to fulfill the additional signature requirement failure of which would lead to cancellation of their nomination. To make the process further rigorous and prevent its manipulation by political parties, an elector may be allowed to sign in support of only one candidate. Obviously, regulatory authorities would need more time and resources for signature verification. For example, a stringent verification process might also include physical parading of the supporters in front of the electoral authorities and other witnesses. If any of these recommendations are to be implemented, the timeline of the electoral process in India should, therefore, be adjusted accordingly.

India has so far not experimented much with signature requirement. Signature requirement, in contrast to electoral deposit, is more in line with the spirit of democracy as it does not discriminate the poor. While extremely high signature requirements can lead to cartelization of politics, a further increase in India up to a certain level could only have a positive side-effect. It could oblige candidates to acquire local roots or at least get them to keep closer relations with the local electors and through this process deepen local democracy and accountability.

Obviously, strengthening this requirement would need a change in the Representation of the People Act. The crucial question is: whether the change would take place at all. Interestingly, even major Indian political parties sometimes realize that their cynical maneuvers are not only hurting their rivals, but also themselves. In the past, they came together to enact tough anti-defection laws precisely because it was in their own interest to do so. One can only hope that they will behave sensibly one more time.

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