

# How to reform a democracy, to make it worthy of 21<sup>st</sup> century?

In early August 2024, Bangladesh erupted in violence, leading to a complete breakdown, overthrow of a “democratically elected” government, dissolution of parliament and the fleeing of a prime minister.

What does this episode tell us? Outsourcing power to political parties via a carte blanche that the once-in-four/five-years vote has now become, is a colossal mistake that will exact a very high price.

That price will be in the form of abuse of power, subversion or devitalizing of institutions and far-reaching, life-altering decisions, rules or laws for which the government may not have received people’s mandate in the first place.

Vote as a carte-blanche is an idea that has outlived its utility and become anachronistic, dangerous and counter-productive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It should have no place in society when better means and methods are available to make democracy more consultative, scientific, sensible, effective and truly representative.

**Numbers (data/statistics/figures) tell a story, don't they?** On July 5, 2024, in the UK, Nigel Farage's Reform Party got a staggering 14.3 percent of votes, but won just four seats, while LibDems with just 12.2 percent of the total votes polled, won as many as 71 seats.

Tories’ vote-share is down by almost 20 percent, to get only 23.7 percent of the total votes polled, while Labour gained just 1.6 percent to get 33.7 percent. (*See chart below.*)

But in terms of number of seats won, you get a totally distorted picture where Labour gets a landslide!

This shows just how flawed modern democracies (India, the UK, the US, Canada, Ireland, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and other countries) really are. The concepts of simple majority, ‘first past the post’, and ‘winner takes all’ are anachronistic in this high-tech age, when more scientific forms of governance, aided by big data and better methodologies, are possible to make democracies truly representative and consultative, relative to the proportions of votes secured.

Here are eight simple steps to start with, to reform modern democracies:

- 1.** Ensure proper representation -- a country like, say, India probably needs a 10,000-seat “e-Parliament”. Each seat (constituency) should represent no more than 1 lakh (100,000) people. No need for a physical Parliament. Or, a physical Parliament can be complemented by an e-Parliament online, for remote access. COVID has shown remote work and hybrid work are possible. Winners merely have the highest weighting proportional to votes secured in a say.
- 2.** Proportional weighting: Each constituency’s top 10 candidates should have a say in decision-making and parliamentary voting, as per percentage of votes secured in poll. In a constituency contested by fewer than 10 candidates, all of them should have a say, according to the percentage of votes secured.
- 3.** All major decisions (barring self-evident national security threats) should be taken only after proper voting and consultations. No more midnight surprises/shocks and unilateral f\*ck-ups like India’s demonetization, moves for which the government was not given any mandate in the first place.
- 4.** Ban horse-trading, switching of sides, opportunistic post-poll alliances/coalitions (India’s Maharashtra state has been a disgrace, a subversion of democracy).
- 5.** Monitor legislators' performance using high-tech data...attendance, value brought to constituency, quality of speeches and interventions on the floor / e-floor of the house, consultations among candidates, parties and voters, how funds were spent, bills introduced, personal income earned during the term, how time was spent during the term. Let all this data be in the public domain for evaluation, review and assessment.
- 6.** Ensure vote-counting is fool-proof. Eliminate vote-buying and other malpractices using tech. Ensure polling is low-expense affair. That's it. To make governance and expenditure transparent, use tech again, publish all data in the public domain in real time or on a weekly basis, with all relevant explanatory notes. As you can see, using tech, democracy can be made squeaky clean in one fell swoop. Not a rocket science.
- 7.** As for other reforms, introduce e-voting... any citizen should be able to vote from anywhere, anytime, during the poll period (say a one-week window) using secure authentic app. Make voting mandatory. Those who don't vote should contribute 250 hours of community service. Career absentees who do not vote at all in three successive elections in spite of the availability of e-voting, should be fined heavily and their passports cancelled.
- 8.** Ban immediate family members (spouse, offspring) as well as extended family members (parents, in-laws, first-cousins) of legislators/MPs from contests and from holding public office. There should be a 10-year gap between two family members contesting an election and holding a public office. No legislator/MP/lawmaker should be allowed more than three terms / 15 years.

**These eight simple steps could be a beginning but can go a long way.**

## Vote share and change

