

Influencing Electoral Markets of India - Politics and Crime

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Anuraj Singh

Party-wise percentage of MPs who have pending criminal cases

Party	Percentage
BJP	38%
Congress	21%
Shiv Sena	82%
Samajwadi Party	39%
Janata Dal (United)	40%
Bahujan Samaj Party	29%
Biju Janta Dal	29%
Trinamool Congress	21%
Nationalist Congress Party	44%
AIADMK	44%
DMK	22%
Rashtriya Janta Dal	75%
Communist Party of India (Marxist)	19%

Party	Percentage
Rashtriya Lok Dal	40%
Janata Dal (Secular)	67%
Jharkhand Mukti Morcha	100%
Telugu Desam Party	33%
Marumalarchi DMK	100%
Majlis-e-Ittehad-ul Muslimeen	100%
Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi	100%
Shiromani Akali Dal	25%
Telangana Rashtra Samiti	50%
All India Forward Bloc	50%
Jharkhand Vikas Morcha	100%
Independent	11%

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Supply and Demand-Side Factors Influencing Electoral "Marketplace"

Vaishnav describes electoral politics as "functioning as a marketplace for politicians" in the third chapter, Criminal Enterprise: Why Criminals Joined Politics, and markets, this obviously includes both supply and demand elements. The author employs a market story to better understand why politicians with criminal and mafia ties continue to saturate the political landscape.

The author uses the notion of 'vertical integration' to express his argument to fully comprehend the supply and demand side of this equation. Vertical integration, in economic terms, is the merging of two or more enterprises to acquire a competitive advantage. In addition, when markets are operating efficiently, corporations have less need to rely on "internal supply to external contracts of goods and services." Firms are pushed to manufacture domestically during times of crisis, vertically integrating in the

process. This viewpoint could be used to analyse the rise in rich political candidates who have a criminal background. Politicians represent the supply factor in the political marketplace, seeking to sell their "wares" to voters, whereas people represent the demand factor, seeking goods and services from politicians.

Congress was virtually guaranteed victory in several states throughout the first two decades of independent India due to its electoral clout. According to the author, "political stability and predictability in electoral markets" typified this time. When it began to wane in the 1960s, however, it paved the door for more electoral rivalry and the establishment of regional parties. Unpredictability and uncertainty in electoral results resulted because of this. As a result, criminals could no longer rely on Congress to keep them safe. The lack of trust in Congress because of the fracturing of the party system provided a huge incentive for criminals to skip politicians and run for office directly. These criminals had amassed enormous social capital "as a result of their ethnic bona fides, access to resources, and roots within local communities" over the course of several years in the service of politicians. These were important considerations that aided criminals in their decision to enter politics on their own. As a result, when criminals decide to participate in elections, it is referred to as vertical integration. Vaishnav demonstrates how the economic idea of vertical integration may be used to explain India's electoral marketplace by employing Yogendra Yadav's three phases in India's party system hypothesis. As a result of this dynamic, the phenomenon of rich politicians with criminal backgrounds has emerged in Indian politics.

The Interplay of Wealth, Crime, and Politics

In the Indian context, a number of factors on both the supply and demand sides have an impact on the availability of rich political candidates with criminal backgrounds in the electoral marketplace.

On the supply side, rich applicants with a history of crime may have access to funding through their professional or social ties. For instance, Mukhtar Ansari, a candidate with a lengthy criminal history, reportedly spent more than Rs 30 crore on his campaign during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. Similar to this, it is well known that former Bihar MP Pappu Yadav, who is facing several criminal charges, spent a lot of money on his campaigns.

On the demand side, there could be those voters who are drawn to strongman politicians or who think that a candidate's criminal past proves their toughness and ability to get things done. For instance, the Bharatiya Janata Party ran more than 30 candidates in the 2017 Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections who had active criminal proceedings against them; some of these candidates won. This may be a result of the party emphasising a "law and order" platform.

Furthermore, a candidate's wealth or business expertise may be more important to certain voters than their criminal history. The Trinamool Congress ran a number of candidates with criminal histories who were also successful businesspeople in the 2021 West Bengal Assembly elections. For instance, the party ran Kalyan Banerjee, a successful attorney with a criminal past, and Madan Mitra, a former state transport minister with a criminal record.

Overall, a complex interaction of factors, including access to financial resources, views of toughness and capacity to rule, and an emphasis on money or business acumen, shapes the participation of affluent political candidates with criminal histories in the Indian electoral marketplace.

Can India Emulate the European Model?

In contrast to India, there are often fewer wealthy candidates with criminal records in the European electoral marketplace. European nations frequently have harsher laws and place more value on political integrity.

There are strong laws and rules that prohibit candidates with criminal backgrounds from running for office in several European nations. These rules are intended to protect the democratic system's integrity and bar those with dubious backgrounds from seeking public office.

Additionally, political openness and accountability are frequently prioritised in European nations, and there is a strong assumption that political candidates should have a spotless background. In Europe, voters often give more weight to a candidate's credentials, policy stances, and ethical standards than to their riches or connections.

Political parties in Europe are also very important for screening and choosing candidates. Usually, they have strict screening procedures for candidates, including background checks and codes of conduct. Associating with candidates who have a criminal history or a dubious reputation can harm a party's credibility and chances of winning an election, hence parties are frequently wary about doing so.

Overall, while no system is perfect, the political environment in Europe generally demonstrates stricter rules, a greater emphasis on political integrity, and a higher level of scrutiny when it comes to the selection of candidates with criminal backgrounds, resulting in a less frequent presence of such candidates in the electoral marketplace when compared to India. India can try to emulate a similar setup using given the local context, since no blanket policy can be effective but an emulation of the principles might do wonders for the largest democracy in the world.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the dynamics of the electoral marketplace in India, as described by Vaishnav in "Criminal Enterprise: Why Criminals Joined Politics," shed light on the presence of rich political candidates with criminal backgrounds. The author's use of the

market analogy, particularly the concept of vertical integration, helps us understand why politicians with criminal ties continue to saturate the political landscape. The supply side factors, such as access to funding through professional or social networks, and the demand side factors, including voter attraction to strongman politicians or perceptions of toughness, contribute to the prevalence of such candidates.

Contrastingly, the European electoral marketplace exhibits stricter rules, a focus on political integrity, and higher scrutiny when selecting candidates with criminal backgrounds. European nations prioritize political openness, accountability, and the belief that candidates should have a spotless reputation. Political parties play a crucial role in screening and choosing candidates, leading to a lower presence of wealthy candidates with criminal records.

Moving forward, India can consider emulating some of the principles observed in the European system while considering the local context. Stricter rules, enhanced scrutiny, and emphasis on political integrity could help mitigate the presence of candidates with criminal backgrounds in India's electoral marketplace, ensuring a healthier and more transparent democratic process.

It is crucial for India, as the world's largest democracy, to continue exploring strategies to strengthen its electoral system, foster public trust, and uphold the principles of integrity and accountability. By implementing measures that promote ethical standards, transparency, and responsible candidate selection, India can enhance its democratic institutions and pave the way for a more inclusive and representative political landscape.

Book - When Crime Pays: Money and Muscle in Indian Politics

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