

## Crisis of Succession and Decline of Congress Dominance (1964–1967)

### I. Introduction: Transition from Dominance to Uncertainty

- The Congress system, which had ensured political stability since independence, began to face **serious challenges during the 1960s**.
- Increasing political competition and internal factionalism weakened its earlier ability to **accommodate diverse interests**.
- The central question shifted from mere leadership succession to the **future of democratic stability in India**.

### II. Challenge of Political Succession after Nehru

#### A. Nature of the Crisis

- Nehru's death (1964) triggered dual concerns:
  - *Who will succeed him?*
  - More importantly: *Will Indian democracy survive?*
- The 1960s described as a **“dangerous decade”**, marked by poverty, inequality, and social divisions.

#### B. Smooth Transition: Nehru to Shastri

- Selection of Lal Bahadur Shastri through **consensus-building within Congress**.
- Demonstrated **maturity of democratic procedures**, disproving fears of instability.
- Shastri's leadership marked by:
  - Simplicity and moral accountability
  - Crisis management: food shortages, economic distress, and the **1965 Indo-Pak war**
  - Symbolism of *“Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan”*

#### C. Second Succession Crisis: Shastri to Indira Gandhi

- Sudden death of Shastri (1966) reopened succession struggle.
- Contest between Morarji Desai and Indira Gandhi resolved through **intra-party electoral process**.
- Indira Gandhi's victory signified:

- Internal democracy within Congress
- Continuity of constitutional governance

### III. Early Challenges Before Indira Gandhi

- Perceived as politically inexperienced and dependent on senior leaders.
- Faced:
  - Economic crisis (drought, inflation, food shortages)
  - Political instability
- Began consolidating authority by **asserting independence from party bosses**.

### IV. The Fourth General Elections, 1967: A Turning Point

#### A. Context of the Elections

- Economic decline:
  - Agricultural failure, industrial slowdown, rising prices
- Political unrest:
  - Protests, bandhs, dissatisfaction with governance
- Government's inability to interpret protests as **expressions of public distress** deepened alienation.

#### B. Rise of Opposition Unity: “Non-Congressism”

- Opposition parties overcame ideological differences to form **anti-Congress fronts**.
- Ram Manohar Lohia's theory:
  - Congress rule seen as **undemocratic and anti-poor**
  - Opposition unity necessary to restore democracy

### V. Electoral Verdict of 1967

#### A. At the National Level

- Congress retained majority but with **reduced strength and legitimacy**.
- Loss of prominent leaders signified weakening of party dominance.

#### B. At the State Level: Collapse of Congress Monopoly

- Congress lost power in **nine major states**.

- Emergence of:
  - Regional parties (e.g., DMK in Tamil Nadu)
  - Coalition governments

## VI. New Political Trends Post-1967

### A. Coalition Politics

- Formation of **Samyukta Vidhayak Dal (SVD) governments**.
- Ideologically diverse coalitions indicated:
  - Rise of pragmatic politics
  - Decline of single-party dominance

### B. Defections and Political Instability

- Frequent party-switching (“Aya Ram, Gaya Ram”) destabilised governments.
- Highlighted weaknesses in party discipline and ideological commitment.



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## VII. Conclusion: End of One-Party Dominance

- 1967 elections marked a **structural shift in Indian politics**:
  - Congress dominance challenged
  - Rise of competitive, fragmented party system
- However, no clear alternative system had yet consolidated power.

## Congress Split and Ideological Reorientation (1967–1969)

### I. Aftermath of 1967: Congress in Crisis

- Congress retained power at the Centre but:
  - Lost political authority
  - Faced internal divisions
- Opposition governments unstable → no immediate replacement of Congress system.

### II. Internal Power Struggle: Indira Gandhi vs. Syndicate

#### A. Nature of the Syndicate

- Informal group of powerful Congress leaders controlling organisation and policy.
- Expected Indira Gandhi to remain dependent on them.

#### B. Indira Gandhi's Strategy

- Gradually asserted independence by:
  - Selecting her own advisors
  - Sideling Syndicate leaders
- Transformed internal power struggle into an **ideological conflict**.

### III. Shift Towards Left-Oriented Policies

- Adoption of **Ten-Point Programme (1967)**:
  - Social control of banks
  - Nationalisation of insurance
  - Land reforms and redistribution
  - Public distribution system
- Reflected attempt to build **pro-poor image and mass support base**.

### IV. Presidential Election of 1969: Turning Point

#### A. Conflict Over Candidate

- Syndicate supported N. Sanjeeva Reddy
- Indira Gandhi supported V.V. Giri (independent candidate)

#### B. Political Strategy

- Called for “conscience vote” → defied party discipline

- Announced populist measures:
  - Bank nationalisation
  - Abolition of privy purse

### C. Outcome

- Victory of V.V. Giri → defeat of Syndicate
- Marked **decisive assertion of Indira Gandhi's authority**

### V. Split in the Congress (1969)

- Congress divided into:
  - Congress (Organisation) – Syndicate faction
  - Congress (Requisitionists) – Indira Gandhi faction
- Indira Gandhi framed split as:
  - **Socialists vs conservatives**
  - **Pro-poor vs pro-rich**

### VI. Ideological and Political Significance

- Shift from organisational politics to **leader-centric politics**
- Rise of populism as a key political strategy
- Weakening of internal party democracy

### VII. Abolition of Privy Purse: Symbolic Politics

- Reflected commitment to **equality and social justice**.
- Became a major political issue mobilising public support.
- Demonstrated use of **policy as political instrument**.

### VIII. Conclusion: Transformation of Congress

- Congress was no longer a broad-based consensus party.
- It became:
  - Centralised
  - Ideologically sharper
  - Dependent on leadership charisma

### Restoration of Congress Dominance and Its New Character (1971–Early 1970s)

#### I. Context Leading to 1971 Elections

- Congress split reduced government to minority.
- Continued through **issue-based support from other parties**.
- Indira Gandhi sought fresh mandate to:
  - Strengthen position
  - End dependence on allies

### II. The 1971 General Elections

#### A. Nature of the Contest

- Opposition formed **Grand Alliance** (anti-Indira coalition).
- Lacked coherent ideology or programme.

#### B. Indira Gandhi's Strategy

- Presented clear ideological agenda:
  - *"Garibi Hatao"* (Remove Poverty)
- Focus areas:
  - Public sector expansion
  - Land reforms
  - Redistribution of wealth
- Targeted support from:
  - Poor, landless labourers, Dalits, minorities, women, youth

### III. Electoral Outcome

- Massive victory for Congress (R):
  - 352 seats, ~44% vote share
- Grand Alliance decisively defeated.
- Congress re-established as **dominant political force**.

### IV. Consolidation of Power (1971–1972)

- Success in Bangladesh crisis and war enhanced legitimacy.
- Victory in 1972 state elections restored Congress rule nationwide.
- Indira Gandhi emerged as:
  - Popular mass leader
  - Strong nationalist figure

### V. Nature of the "Restored" Congress System

#### A. Differences from Old Congress System

- Earlier system:
  - Broad coalition of interests

- Strong organisational structure
- New system:
  - Leader-centric
  - Weak internal factions
  - Limited accommodation of diverse views

### B. Social Base of Support

- Shift towards:
  - Marginalised groups
  - Economically weaker sections

### VI. Limits and Contradictions

- Despite electoral success:
  - Reduced space for democratic dissent
  - Growth of popular unrest
- Centralisation weakened institutional functioning.

### VIII. Conclusion: Transition to a New Political Phase

- Indira Gandhi successfully:
  - Overcame internal and external challenges
  - Re-established Congress dominance
- However:
  - The transformed system carried seeds of future crisis
  - Led to tensions between **popular mobilisation and democratic institutions**



### VII. Critical Evaluation

- Restoration was not revival but **reinvention**:
  - Congress regained dominance
  - But changed its nature fundamentally
- Politics became:
  - More populist
  - Less institutional
  - More dependent on charismatic leadership