

## Important Vocab for the Editorial

1. **position** (noun) – advantage, pole position, advantageous position, the upper hand, the edge, the whip hand, primacy.
2. **boost** (verb) – improve, raise, uplift, increase, augment.
3. **State Election Commissioner (SEC)** (noun) – A state election commissioner is in charge of conducting polls to urban local bodies (municipalities, corporations) and rural local bodies (panchayats). (The Supreme Court of India has recently said State Election Commissioners (SECs) across the country should be independent, and not persons holding office with the central government or a state government).
4. **hold** (verb) – conduct, organize, preside over.
5. **elapse** (verb) – pass, go by, go past.
6. **self-contained** (adjective) – independent, separate, self-sufficient, self-reliant.
7. **tier** (noun) – grade, level, step, echelon.
8. **devolution** (noun) – decentralization, delegation, distribution.
9. **relative** (adjective) – corresponding, comparable, correlative, parallel.
10. **lack of** (noun) – absence, deficiency, scarcity, dearth.
11. **autonomy** (noun) – independence, freedom.
12. **facet** (noun) – aspect, feature, characteristic/nuance.
13. **beset** (verb) – trouble, bother, worry, anguish, embarrass (persistently).
14. **mar** (verb) – spoil, ruin, destroy, impair.
15. **arbitrary** (adjective) – whimsical, random, unpredictable, inconsistent, casual.
16. **delimitation** (noun) – an act of fixing boundary or limits.
17. **reservation** (noun) – a system of affirmative action in India that provides historically disadvantaged groups representation in education, employment, and politics.
18. **autonomous** (adjective) – independent, self-determining, self-sufficient.
19. **regime** (noun) – government.
20. **bureaucrat** (noun) – a powerful officer, public/government servant, office-bearer, civil servant, functionary, mandarin.
21. **partisan** (adjective) – biased, prejudiced, one-sided.
22. **delimit** (verb) – mark, determine, delineate, demarcate.
23. **mire in** (verb) – entangle, catch up, involve, mix up (a difficult situation).
24. **in mind** (phrase) – in someone's thinking.
25. **generalise** (verb) – make something applicable to all broadly/generally.
26. **in respect of** (phrase) – with respect to; concerning, regarding.
27. **man** (verb) – work (at a place); staff, crew, occupy.
28. **undeniable** (adjective) – unquestionable, undebatable, inarguable.
29. **as far as – is concerned** (phrase) – with regard to a particular person or situation.
30. **backdrop** (noun) – situation, scenario, context.
31. **salience** (noun) – an important quality.
32. **mockery** (noun) – insulting/absurd imitation of something; a false representation of something; travesty, farce, poor imitation, a poor substitute.
33. **mandate** (noun) – authority, endorsement, approval, authorization.

34. **invoke** (verb) – cite, refer to, adduce.
35. **extraordinary** (adjective) – remarkable, exceptional, amazing, phenomenal, unbelievable.
36. **Article 142 of the Constitution of India** (noun) – Article 142 of the Constitution of India empowers the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India to pass any decree or order necessary for doing "complete justice" in any matter pending before it.
37. **step down** (phrasal verb) – give up, stand down, abdicate, renounce.
38. **in practice** (phrase) – in reality, actually, practically.
39. **have a bearing on** (phrase) – have a relevance/relation to something.
40. **remain to be seen** (phrase) – used to mention the idea/view that something is not yet known.
41. **behold** (verb) – look at, see, observe, view, regard.
42. **secure** (verb) – obtain, acquire, gain, get.
43. **watchdog** (noun) – a person or organization that monitors/inspects/supervises others' activities/conducts. inspector/supervisor, observer, ombudsman.
44. **countermand** (verb) – revoke, rescind, reverse, undo, repeal.
45. **infraction** (noun) – breach, violation, transgression.
46. **in the course of** (phrase) – during, in the process of, in the time of.
47. **wake up** (to) (phrasal verb) – realize, become aware of, become heedful of.

Poll position: On SC order on local body elections

### **Supreme Court has boosted independence of SECs in holding local body elections**

Even though more than a quarter century has elapsed since the Constitution was amended to make urban and rural local bodies a self-contained third tier of governance, it is often agreed by experts that there is inadequate devolution of powers to them. This may somewhat explain their relative lack of autonomy. However, an entirely different facet of the way these local bodies function is that the manner in which their representatives are elected is often beset by controversies. Local polls are often marred by violence, and charges of arbitrary delimitation and reservation of wards. A key factor in any local body polls being conducted in a free and fair manner is the extent to which the State Election Commissioner, the authority that supervises the elections, is independent and autonomous. Unfortunately, most regimes in the States appoint senior bureaucrats from among their favourites to this office. In practice, SECs frequently face charges of being partisan. Routine exercises such as delimiting wards, rotating the wards reserved for women and Scheduled Castes and fixing dates for the elections become mired in controversy as a result, as the Opposition tends to believe that the exercise is being done with the ruling party's interest in mind. Even though this cannot be generalised in respect of all States and all those manning the position, it is undeniable that SECs do not seem to enjoy the confidence of political parties and the public to the same extent as the Election Commission of India as far as their independence is concerned.

It is in this backdrop that the Supreme Court's judgment declaring that a State Election Commissioner should be someone completely independent of the State government acquires salience. It has described the Goa government's action in asking its Law Secretary to hold additional charge as SEC as a "mockery of the Constitutional mandate". By invoking its extraordinary power under Article 142 of the Constitution, the Court has asked all SECs who are under the direct control of the respective State governments to step down from their posts. In practice, most States appoint retired bureaucrats as SECs. Whether the apex court's decision would have a bearing on those who are no more serving State governments remains to be seen. However, it is clear that these governments will now have to find a way to appoint to the office only those who are truly independent and not beholden to it in any manner. The verdict will help secure the independence of SECs in the future. More significantly, the Court has boosted the power of the election watchdog by holding that it is open to the SECs to countermand any infractions of the law made by the State government in the course of preparing for local body polls. Regimes in the States would have to wake up to the reality that they cannot always control the local body polls as in the past.

GUPTA CLASSES