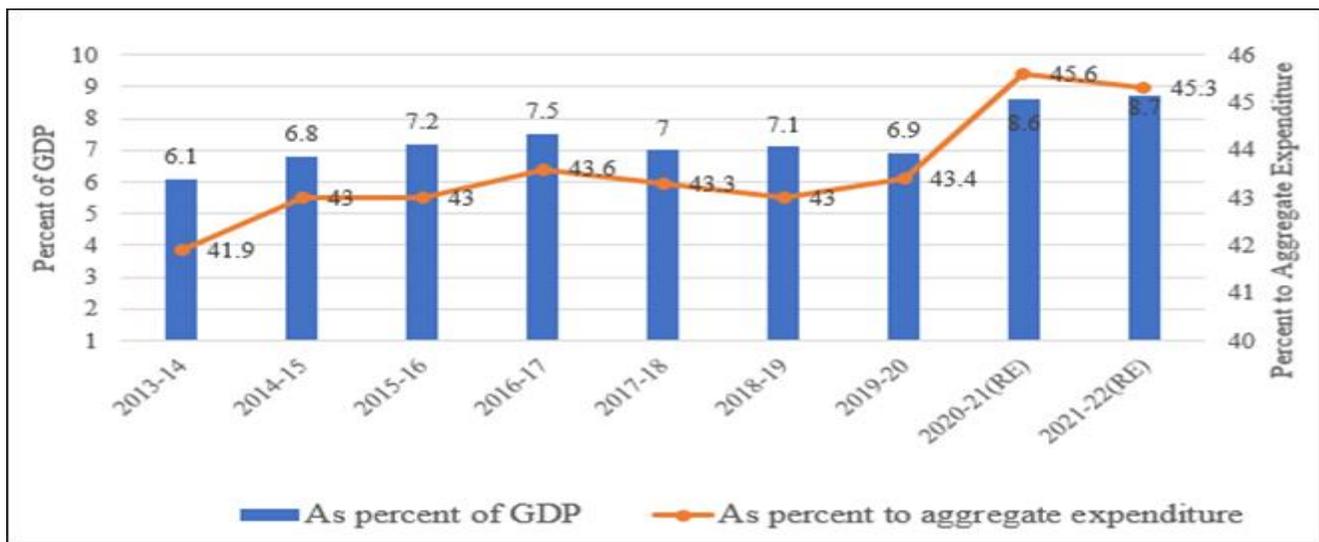




# The role of freebies in Indian politics

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**ABSTRACT:** India has a long history of nurturing a social welfare regime whereby material goods are distributed to the poor and vulnerable populations of the country, helping uplift their socio-economic condition. However, many of such welfare goods are often called 'hand-outs' or 'freebies' that are promised or delivered based on electoral considerations; they are widely viewed as manipulative, aimed only at influencing electorates. The mass distribution of all kinds of welfare goods also has costs to the public exchequer, especially in terms of trade-offs with long-term developmental initiatives; it can also disincentivize human agency and enterprise. This paper underlines the core issues in the ongoing freebies debate and offers a sound framework for analysing the impacts on the welfare policies of the Indian state. The role of freebies in Indian politics is a topic of much debate and discussion. Freebies, also known as populist welfare schemes or electoral giveaways, refer to the distribution of free goods or services by political parties to the electorate with the aim of gaining political support and securing votes. These freebies can range from essential commodities like food and clothing to more extravagant offerings like electronic appliances, farm loan waivers, and subsidized housing. While proponents argue that freebies help uplift marginalized sections of society and address socio-economic disparities, critics contend that they promote a culture of dependency, hinder economic growth, and undermine the principles of good governance and fiscal responsibility. In this essay, we will explore the various aspects and implications of freebies in Indian politics, considering both the positive and negative consequences. To begin with, it is important to acknowledge the historical context of freebies in Indian politics. India, as a diverse and populous democracy, faces significant challenges related to poverty, unemployment, and social inequality. Political parties, especially during election campaigns, often use freebies as a tool to appeal to voters and demonstrate their commitment to addressing these issues. The provision of free goods and services is seen as a means to alleviate the burden on the economically disadvantaged sections of society and garner their support. One of the main arguments in favor of freebies is their potential to uplift marginalized communities. In a country like India, where a significant portion of the population lives below the poverty line, freebies can provide immediate relief and improve the quality of life for those struggling to meet their basic needs. For instance, the distribution of free food grains or subsidized meals through schemes like the Public Distribution System (PDS) and the Mid-Day Meal Scheme has been successful in ensuring that vulnerable sections of society have access to adequate nutrition. Similarly, schemes like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) provide job opportunities and income support to rural households, reducing poverty and unemployment. Furthermore, freebies can also play a role in addressing social and gender disparities. Schemes like free education for girls or financial assistance for women entrepreneurs aim to empower women and bridge the gender gap. By removing financial barriers to education and entrepreneurship, these initiatives promote inclusivity and social mobility. Additionally, the provision of free healthcare services or medical insurance can improve the accessibility and affordability of healthcare, particularly for marginalized communities who may otherwise lack access to quality medical facilities. Another argument in favor of freebies is their potential to enhance political participation and democratic engagement. By offering tangible benefits to citizens, political parties can attract previously disengaged or apathetic voters to participate in the electoral process. This can lead to increased voter turnout and a more representative democracy. Freebies, in this context, are viewed as a means of empowering citizens and enabling them to exercise their democratic rights. However, it is important to critically examine the negative consequences and potential drawbacks of freebies in Indian politics. One of the primary concerns is the financial burden imposed on the state exchequer. The implementation of freebies requires significant financial resources, and the cost of these schemes can strain government budgets and lead to fiscal deficits. This, in turn, can hinder long-term economic growth and development. Critics argue that the funds allocated to freebies could be better utilized in areas such as infrastructure development, healthcare, education, and job creation, which have a more sustainable impact on socio-economic well-being. Moreover, the distribution of freebies can create a culture of dependency and entitlement among citizens. When individuals become accustomed to receiving free goods or services, they may develop a sense of entitlement without actively seeking ways to improve their own economic condition. This can lead to a reduction in individual motivation and productivity, as people rely on the state for their basic needs rather than striving for self-reliance and upward mobility. Critics argue that freebies perpetuate a cycle of dependency, undermining the principle of individual responsibility and hindering efforts towards long-term poverty alleviation. Another concern is the potential for freebies to be misused for electoral gains. Political parties may implement populist welfare schemes with the primary motive of securing votes rather than genuinely addressing socio-economic disparities. There have been instances where freebies were distributed selectively, based on political considerations or caste and religious affiliations, rather than objective criteria. Such selective distribution can deepen social divisions and reinforce identity politics, diverting attention from the broader development agenda. Furthermore, the implementation and monitoring of freebies can pose significant administrative challenges. Ensuring transparency, accountability, and efficient delivery mechanisms for freebies is crucial to prevent leakages, corruption, and the exclusion of deserving beneficiaries. Weak governance structures and inadequate infrastructure can undermine the effectiveness of freebie schemes, leading to inefficiencies and suboptimal outcomes.



The role of freebies in Indian politics is a complex and contentious issue that has garnered significant attention over the years. Freebies, also known as welfare schemes or populist measures, refer to the distribution of goods, services, or financial benefits by political parties or governments to the electorate with the aim of winning their support and votes. These freebies can range from essential commodities like food, clothing, and shelter to more extravagant items such as laptops, Smartphone, and even cash transfers. The practice of offering freebies in Indian politics has become increasingly prevalent in recent years, particularly during election campaigns. Political parties, across the ideological spectrum, have used freebies as a tool to attract voters and secure their loyalty. While proponents argue that freebies are a means to uplift marginalized sections of society and address their socio-economic needs, critics view them as populist measures that promote a culture of dependency and undermine the democratic process. To understand the role of freebies in Indian politics, it is essential to analyze the motivations behind their distribution, their impact on electoral outcomes, their implications for governance and fiscal discipline, and their long-term consequences for the country's socio-economic development. In this essay, we will delve into these aspects to gain a comprehensive understanding of the issue.

#### **Motivations behind the distribution of freebies:**

- ❖ **Electoral gains:** The primary motivation behind the distribution of freebies is to secure electoral gains. Parties believe that by providing tangible benefits to the electorate, they can generate goodwill and ensure their support at the ballot box. Freebies are seen as a means to create a direct connection with voters and enhance their chances of winning elections.
- ❖ **Addressing socio-economic disparities:** Proponents argue that freebies serve as a necessary tool to address socio-economic disparities and uplift marginalized sections of society. By providing essential goods and services to those in need, political parties aim to alleviate poverty, reduce inequality, and promote inclusive growth.
- ❖ **Political populism:** Freebies often serve as a tool for political populism, where parties make unrealistic promises and offer short-term benefits to garner support. Populist measures can be appealing to voters who are swayed by immediate gratification rather than long-term policy considerations.

#### **Impact on electoral outcomes:**

- ❖ **Vote bank politics:** Freebies play a significant role in vote bank politics, particularly in a diverse country like India. Political parties target specific demographic groups or communities with tailored freebies to consolidate their support. This approach reinforces identity politics and can lead to a fragmented electorate based on caste, religion, or other social divisions.
- ❖ **Incentivizing vote buying:** The distribution of freebies can incentivize vote buying, where voters choose their representatives based on the benefits they receive rather than the candidates' merit or policy positions. This undermines the democratic process by prioritizing short-term gains over long-term vision and governance.
- ❖ **Shift in policy discourse:** The focus on freebies in election campaigns often shifts the policy discourse away from substantive issues such as development, good governance, and institutional reforms. Parties may prioritize populist measures to win elections rather than addressing pressing issues that require comprehensive and sustainable solutions.

#### **Implications for governance and fiscal discipline:**

- ❖ **Burden on public finances:** The distribution of freebies places a significant burden on public finances. The costs associated with implementing and sustaining these welfare schemes can strain state budgets and lead to fiscal deficits. Such financial burdens can impede the government's ability to invest in critical sectors such as healthcare, education, infrastructure, and job creation.
- ❖ **Distortion of resource allocation:** Freebies can distort resource allocation as funds are diverted from productive sectors to meet the demands of welfare schemes. This can hamper economic growth and hinder the development of infrastructure and industries that are vital for long-term progress.
- ❖ **Lack of sustainability:** Freebies are often implemented without adequate consideration of their long-term sustainability. While they may provide short-term relief to the beneficiaries, the absence of a comprehensive policy framework and financial prudence can render these measures unsustainable, leading to a vicious cycle of dependency.

#### **Long-term consequences for socio-economic development:**

- I. **Culture of dependency:** The distribution of freebies can foster a culture of dependency, where individuals become reliant on government handouts rather than seeking avenues for self-reliance and economic empowerment. This culture of dependency undermines the spirit of entrepreneurship, innovation, and individual initiative, which are crucial for long-term socio-economic development.

**II. Inequality and exclusion:** Freebies, despite their intention to address socio-economic disparities, can exacerbate inequality and exclusion. By targeting specific groups or communities, these measures may inadvertently exclude other marginalized sections of society, leading to feelings of resentment and social unrest.

**III. Lack of accountability:** Freebies can undermine accountability in governance. Political parties may use these measures as a tool to deflect attention from their failures in delivering quality public services and addressing systemic issues. By prioritizing short-term benefits, they may avoid addressing the root causes of socio-economic problems

There have been several academic papers, books, and journals that have explored the role of freebies in Indian politics. Here are a few references that can provide you with in-depth analysis and insights on the topic:

**IV. "Freebies in Indian Politics: A Critical Analysis"** by Dr. Y. Srinivas Rao and Dr. K. Prabhakar. This paper, published in the Journal of Social and Economic Development, discusses the impact of freebies on Indian politics, its implications for governance and economic growth, and the challenges associated with their implementation.

**V. "Electoral Competition, Party Strategies, and the Distributive Politics of Public Goods"** by M. Pandey and M. E. M. Sjöberg. This research article, published in the American Political Science Review, examines the relationship between electoral competition, party strategies, and the provision of public goods (including freebies) in Indian states.

**VI. "Freebies and Populist Policies in India"** edited by Narendar Pani and Virginius Xaxa. This book provides a comprehensive analysis of the politics of freebies in India, covering a range of topics such as historical perspectives, electoral dynamics, policy implications, and social impacts. It includes contributions from various scholars and experts in the field.

**VII. "Populism and Welfare Politics in India"** by Kenneth Bo Nielsen. This book explores the relationship between populism, welfare politics, and freebies in India. It delves into the historical context, ideologies, and strategies employed by political parties in implementing populist measures, including the provision of freebies.

**VIII. "The Politics of Freebies: A Study of Tamil Nadu"** by J. Jeyaranjan and K. C. Suriyakumar. This research paper examines the politics of freebies with a specific focus on the state of Tamil Nadu, which is known for its extensive welfare schemes. It analyzes the electoral dynamics, policy outcomes, and socio-economic implications of freebies in the state.

The role of freebies in Indian politics is a complex and multifaceted issue that has been a subject of debate and discussion for many years. Freebies refer to the various welfare schemes and benefits offered by political parties to the electorate during elections, such as free laptops, bicycles, televisions, smartphones, cash transfers, and subsidized or free food, among others. These freebies are aimed at garnering voter support and influencing electoral outcomes. In this essay, we will explore the various dimensions of the role of freebies in Indian politics, analyzing their impact on democracy, governance, economy, and society.

❖ **Historical Context:** The use of freebies in Indian politics is not a recent phenomenon. It has its roots in the tradition of populism and welfare politics, where political parties seek to appeal to the masses by promising immediate benefits and material gains. The practice gained prominence in the 1960s and 1970s with the advent of populist leaders like Indira Gandhi, who implemented schemes like Garibi Hatao (eradicate poverty) to win elections.

❖ **Populist Appeal:** One of the primary reasons behind the use of freebies in Indian politics is their populist appeal. India is a country with a significant proportion of the population living below the poverty line. Freebies, in the form of tangible benefits, have a direct impact on the lives of the marginalized sections of society. They create a sense of hope and expectation among the people, making political parties more attractive to voters.

❖ **Electoral Strategy:** Freebies have become an integral part of the electoral strategy of political parties in India. Parties use these welfare schemes as electoral bribes to sway voters in their favor. By promising immediate benefits, parties aim to secure votes from specific constituencies or demographic groups. Parties often tailor their freebies to target specific voter segments, such as farmers, women, or youth, depending on the prevailing political climate.

❖ **Vote Bank Politics:** Freebies also play a crucial role in the consolidation of vote banks in Indian politics. Parties design their welfare schemes to appeal to specific communities or caste groups, with the intention of securing their unwavering support. For instance, parties may promise reservations or special benefits to certain castes or religious groups, thereby creating a loyal vote bank. This form of identity-based politics can lead to the fragmentation of society along caste and religious lines.

❖ **Impact on Governance:** The use of freebies in Indian politics raises concerns about the impact on governance and policymaking. Political parties often prioritize short-term electoral gains over long-term developmental objectives. The focus on immediate benefits can divert attention from critical issues such as education, healthcare, infrastructure development, and job creation. Moreover, the implementation of freebies often requires significant financial resources, which may strain the state's exchequer and lead to fiscal imbalances.

❖ **Economic Implications:** The implementation of freebies has economic implications at both the macro and micro levels. At the macro level, the financial burden of funding these schemes can strain the government's finances, leading to increased borrowing and fiscal deficits. This, in turn, can have adverse effects on the overall economy, including inflationary pressures and a reduced ability to invest in long-term growth-enhancing measures.

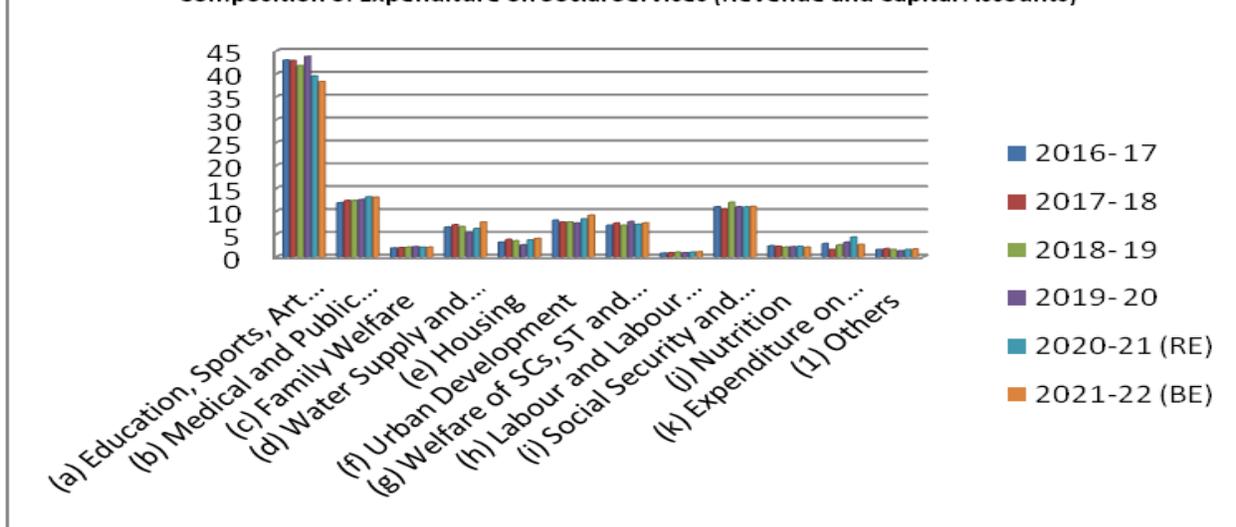
❖ **Ethical Concerns:** The use of freebies in politics raises ethical concerns regarding the fairness and integrity of the electoral process. Critics argue that the practice amounts to electoral populism, where parties exploit the vulnerabilities of the electorate for electoral gains. It can create a culture of dependency and entitlement among the population, undermining the principles of self-reliance and individual responsibility.

❖ **Impact on Democracy:** The use of freebies has both positive and negative implications for democracy. On the positive side, freebies can enhance political participation, especially among marginalized sections of society who feel neglected by the political system. By providing tangible benefits, political parties can empower individuals and communities, giving them a sense of agency and a stake in the political process.

## Composition of Expenditure on Social Services (Revenue and Capital Accounts)

	2016- 17	2017- 18	2018- 19	2019- 20	2020-21 (RE)	2021-22 (BE)
Expenditure on Social Services	100	100	100	100	100	100
(a) Education, Sports, Art and Culture	43	42.9	41.8	43.8	39.5	38.3
(b) Medical and Public Health	11.8	12.3	12.3	12.5	13.1	13
(c) Family Welfare	1.9	2	2.1	2.2	2.1	2.1
(d) Water Supply and Sanitation	6.5	7	6.6	5.3	6.2	7.6
(e) Housing	3.2	3.8	3.5	2.6	3.7	4
(f) Urban Development	8	7.6	7.6	7.4	8.3	9.1
(g) Welfare of SCs, ST and OBCS	6.9	7.4	6.9	7.7	7.1	7.4
(h) Labour and Labour Welfare	0.8	0.9	1	0.9	1	1.1
(i) Social Security and Welfare	10.9	10.4	11.9	10.9	10.9	11
(j) Nutrition	2.4	2.3	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.1
(k) Expenditure on Natural Calamities	2.9	1.6	2.6	3.2	4.3	2.7
(l) Others	1.6	1.8	1.6	1.3	1.6	1.7

## Composition of Expenditure on Social Services (Revenue and Capital Accounts)



On the negative side, the excessive use of freebies can erode the quality of democratic governance. When political parties rely solely on populist promises and immediate benefits, the focus shifts away from long-term policy planning and sustainable development. Moreover, the lure of freebies can lead to a culture of transactional politics, where voters prioritize personal gain over larger societal concerns, compromising the overall democratic fabric.

❖ **Alternatives and Solutions:** To address the challenges posed by the role of freebies in Indian politics, several alternatives and solutions can be considered:

**a. Strengthening Institutions:** Building robust democratic institutions, such as independent election commissions and regulatory bodies, can help monitor and regulate the use of freebies during elections. Strict enforcement of electoral codes of conduct can discourage the misuse of welfare schemes for electoral gains.

**b. Voter Awareness:** Promoting voter awareness and education can help voters make informed choices based on the long-term developmental agenda of political parties, rather than getting swayed by short-term benefits.

**c. Policy Focus:** Encouraging political parties to prioritize long-term policy planning and sustainable development over populist promises can shift the discourse from immediate benefits to broader developmental objectives.

**d. Transparent Governance:** Emphasizing transparency and accountability in the implementation of welfare schemes can help reduce corruption and ensure that the benefits reach the intended beneficiaries.

**e. Strengthening Social Security:** Instead of relying solely on freebies, the government should focus on strengthening social security mechanisms, such as robust healthcare and education systems, job creation, and poverty alleviation programs that address the root causes of social and economic inequalities.

In Indian politics, the term "freebies" refers to the distribution of various goods, services, or benefits by political parties or candidates to gain support and attract voters. These freebies are often offered during election campaigns as a way to sway public opinion and secure votes.

❖ The practice of providing freebies in Indian politics is not new and has been prevalent for several decades. The concept gained significant attention in recent years as parties started offering a wide range of incentives and promises to voters, especially during state assembly and general elections.

❖ Freebies can take various forms, including but not limited to:

❖ **Subsidized or free essential commodities:** Parties may promise to provide items such as rice, wheat, cooking gas, or other essential food items at subsidized rates or even for free to economically disadvantaged sections of society.

- ❖ Education-related benefits: Political parties may promise free or heavily subsidized education, such as free school uniforms, textbooks, laptops, or scholarships for students. Some states have also implemented schemes offering free education to girls or specific marginalized communities.
- ❖ Healthcare benefits: Parties may offer free medical services, health insurance coverage, or subsidized medicines and treatments. Some states have implemented schemes providing free healthcare for certain sections of the population.
- ❖ Financial assistance: Parties may promise financial aid, such as direct cash transfers, loan waivers, or subsidies, to farmers, small business owners, or other economically vulnerable groups.
- ❖ Housing and infrastructure benefits: Parties may offer affordable housing schemes, low-interest housing loans, or infrastructure development projects aimed at improving the living conditions of the population.
- ❖ The intent behind providing these freebies is to address the socio-economic needs of the population and uplift marginalized communities. However, critics argue that such practices can create a culture of dependency, distort market dynamics, and strain public finances.
- ❖ Political parties often include these freebies in their election manifestos to attract voters and gain a competitive advantage over their opponents. The effectiveness of these strategies in winning elections can vary depending on the socioeconomic context, voter preferences, and the overall political climate.
- ❖ It is important to note that the provision of freebies in Indian politics has been a subject of debate. Some argue that it helps address the immediate needs of disadvantaged sections of society, while others believe it promotes populism and undermines the long-term development and governance priorities. The impact and implications of freebies in Indian politics continue to be discussed and analyzed by policymakers, scholars, and citizens alike.

**Definition and examples of freebies:-** Freebies in Indian politics refer to the distribution of various goods, services, or benefits by political parties or candidates with the aim of attracting voters and gaining support. These freebies are often offered during election campaigns as a strategy to sway public opinion and secure votes. Here are some examples of freebies in Indian politics:

- ❖ **Subsidized or free essential commodities:** Parties may promise to provide items such as rice, wheat, cooking gas cylinders, or other essential food items at subsidized rates or for free to economically disadvantaged sections of society. This is done to address food security concerns and alleviate poverty.
- ❖ **Education-related benefits:** Political parties may offer free or heavily subsidized education as a means to attract voters. This can include providing free school uniforms, textbooks, laptops, scholarships, or even free education up to a certain level. Such promises are aimed at addressing educational inequities and improving access to quality education.
- ❖ **Healthcare benefits:** Parties may promise free medical services, health insurance coverage, or subsidized medicines and treatments. This can involve setting up free healthcare clinics, providing free health check-ups, or implementing schemes to cover medical expenses for specific sections of the population. The objective is to address healthcare disparities and make healthcare more accessible and affordable.
- ❖ **Financial assistance:** Parties may offer financial aid in the form of direct cash transfers, loan waivers, or subsidies. This can be targeted towards farmers, small business owners, or economically vulnerable groups. For example, parties may promise loan waivers for farmers to alleviate agricultural distress or provide subsidies for setting up businesses to promote entrepreneurship.
- ❖ **Housing and infrastructure benefits:** Parties may promise affordable housing schemes, low-interest housing loans, or infrastructure development projects aimed at improving the living conditions of the population. This can include constructing affordable housing units, improving access to basic amenities like water and sanitation, or upgrading transportation infrastructure.

#### **Historical context and evolution of freebies in Indian politics**

- ❖ **Early Years:** Freebies in Indian politics can be traced back to the pre-independence era when political leaders used promises of land reforms, agricultural support, and welfare measures to gain popular support. However, the focus on direct distribution of goods and services as freebies was not as prevalent during this period.
- ❖ **Mid-20th Century:** In the 1950s and 1960s, the concept of freebies gained momentum with the introduction of various welfare schemes by the central and state governments. These schemes aimed to address poverty, provide employment opportunities, and uplift marginalized communities. Examples include the Public Distribution System (PDS) for subsidized food grains, the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) for nutrition and health support, and the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) for rural employment.
- ❖ **Populist Measures:** In the late 20th century, there was a rise in populist measures as political parties started incorporating freebies into their election manifestos to attract voters. Parties began promising free or heavily subsidized goods and services to specific sections of society, such as free electricity for farmers, subsidized meals for school children, or free healthcare for certain groups.
- ❖ **Competitive Populism:** In recent decades, there has been a noticeable increase in the competitive nature of populism and the distribution of freebies among political parties. Parties across the ideological spectrum started offering a wide range of freebies to gain an edge in elections. This includes promises of free laptops, Smartphone, bicycles, and other tangible benefits to specific target groups.
- ❖ **Legal and Electoral Reforms:** Over the years, concerns have been raised regarding the impact of freebies on governance, fiscal sustainability, and ethical practices in politics. In response, the Election Commission of India has implemented measures to monitor and regulate the distribution of freebies during election campaigns. Some states have also introduced laws or guidelines to restrict or regulate the extent of freebies that can be promised or distributed...

**Popularity and Appeal of Freebies:** - Freebies in Indian politics have gained popularity and appeal for various reasons. Here are some factors that contribute to their popularity:

- ❖ **Voter Attraction:** Freebies serve as powerful tools to attract voters. Offering tangible benefits and immediate rewards appeals to the electorate, especially those belonging to economically disadvantaged sections. Freebies create a sense of personal gain and can sway voters' decisions in favor of the party or candidate providing them.

- ❖ **Addressing Socio-Economic Needs:** Freebies are often positioned as measures to address socio-economic challenges faced by specific sections of society. They are framed as solutions to poverty, unemployment, education gaps, healthcare disparities, and other pressing issues. Such promises resonate with voters who are looking for immediate relief or support.
- ❖ **Perceived Welfare and Development:** The distribution of freebies is often associated with the welfare of citizens and the development of communities. Political parties portray these initiatives as evidence of their commitment to improving the lives of the people. The provision of freebies creates an impression that the party or candidate is actively working to uplift society.
- ❖ **Leveling the Playing Field:** Freebies are seen as a means to bridge the socio-economic gap and provide equal opportunities. They are presented as a way to ensure that marginalized sections of society receive the benefits and support they need. Freebies are viewed as a means of social justice, empowering the underprivileged and creating a more equitable society.
- ❖ **Symbolic Value:** Freebies have symbolic value in politics. They represent a tangible manifestation of promises made during election campaigns. Offering freebies signals to voters that the party or candidate is willing to invest in their well-being and prioritize their needs. It establishes a direct connection between the voters and the party, fostering a sense of loyalty and support.
- ❖ **Populist Appeal:** Freebies have a populist appeal as they target immediate concerns and offer short-term relief. Populist leaders often use freebies as a way to mobilize and mobilize support from the masses. The promise of direct benefits resonates with the aspirations and aspirations of a significant portion of the electorate.

However, it is essential to note that the appeal of freebies can vary among different segments of the population. Some voters value long-term developmental policies and governance over short-term benefits, while others may be more influenced by the immediate gains offered through freebies. The effectiveness and sustainability of freebies as a political strategy continue to be a subject of debate and scrutiny.

**Reasons why political parties use freebies as an electoral strategy:** - Political parties in India use freebies as an electoral strategy for several reasons:

- ❖ **Vote Bank Consolidation:** Freebies help political parties consolidate their support base by targeting specific voter segments. Parties identify the needs and aspirations of different groups based on factors such as caste, religion, socioeconomic status, or regional considerations. By offering freebies tailored to these groups, parties aim to secure their loyalty and maximize their vote share.
- ❖ **Competitive Populism:** Freebies have become a part of competitive populism, where parties try to outdo each other in promising benefits and incentives to voters. Parties engage in a "populist race" to attract voters by offering more appealing or extravagant freebies compared to their opponents. This helps them gain an edge in elections and position themselves as the party that can deliver immediate benefits.
- ❖ **Emotional Connect:** Freebies create an emotional connect between political parties and voters. The distribution of tangible benefits fosters a sense of gratitude and loyalty among the recipients. Voters perceive parties that provide freebies as caring and responsive to their needs, leading to a positive association and increased support during elections.
- ❖ **Addressing Immediate Concerns:** Freebies address the immediate concerns and challenges faced by the electorate. Parties understand that voters often prioritize short-term relief over long-term development goals. By offering immediate benefits such as subsidized food, healthcare, or financial assistance, parties appeal to the urgent needs of the voters and position themselves as providers of immediate relief.
- ❖ **Mobilization and Turnout:** Freebies can serve as effective tools for mobilizing voters and increasing voter turnout. The promise of tangible benefits incentivizes voters, particularly those who may be disillusioned or disengaged from the political process, to actively participate in elections. Parties use freebies to generate enthusiasm, create buzz, and motivate their supporters to come out and vote.
- ❖ **Perception of Good Governance:** Freebies are often presented as a reflection of good governance and effective policymaking. Parties use these initiatives to project themselves as proactive and responsive to the needs of the people. By highlighting the distribution of freebies as evidence of their commitment to welfare and development, parties aim to build a positive image and gain the trust of the electorate.

**Psychological and emotional appeal of freebies to voters:** - Freebies in politics have a strong psychological and emotional appeal to voters, tapping into various psychological factors that influence human behavior. Here are some key aspects of the psychological and emotional appeal of freebies:

- ❖ **Reciprocity:** The principle of reciprocity plays a significant role in the appeal of freebies. When voters receive a freebie, they feel a sense of indebtedness towards the political party or candidate providing it. There is a natural tendency to reciprocate the favor by supporting the party, either through votes or loyalty. This sense of indebtedness creates a psychological bond between the voters and the party, influencing their behavior.
- ❖ **Perceived Value:** Freebies are often perceived as valuable resources or benefits that voters can gain without significant effort or cost. This perception of value triggers a positive emotional response, as individuals feel they are receiving something of worth for free. The emotional appeal of getting something for nothing can create a sense of excitement, happiness, and gratitude among voters.
- ❖ **Sense of Belonging and Identity:** Freebies create a sense of belonging and identity among voters. By offering specific benefits to targeted groups, parties reinforce the notion that they understand the needs and aspirations of those communities. Voters who receive freebies may feel a sense of being recognized, valued, and included within a particular social or political group. This emotional connection strengthens their affiliation and support for the party.
- ❖ **Immediate Gratification:** Freebies offer immediate gratification, which resonates strongly with individuals' desire for instant rewards. Voters are more likely to be swayed by immediate benefits that directly address their pressing needs or desires. The emotional appeal of instant gratification can override long-term considerations and influence voting decisions.
- ❖ **Sense of Empowerment:** Freebies can create a sense of empowerment among voters. By providing tangible benefits, parties position themselves as catalysts for positive change in the lives of individuals. This emotional appeal taps into voters' aspirations for a better future and a belief that the party offering freebies can uplift their socioeconomic status. The sense of empowerment can strengthen their emotional attachment and support for the party.

❖ **Emotional Appeal of Compassion and Care:** Freebies are often framed as acts of compassion and care towards the less fortunate. Parties leverage the emotional appeal of empathy and social responsibility by positioning themselves as champions of the underprivileged. This emotional connection can evoke feelings of gratitude, trust, and admiration among voters, leading to increased support.

**Influence of freebies on voter behavior and decision-making:-** Freebies have a significant influence on voter behavior and decision-making. Here are some ways in which freebies impact voters:

❖ **Vote Choice:** The provision of freebies can sway voters' choices. When parties offer freebies that directly address the immediate needs or aspirations of voters, it can influence their decision to support that particular party or candidate. Voters may prioritize short-term benefits over long-term considerations, especially when the immediate gains are tangible and attractive.

❖ **Loyalty and Affiliation:** Freebies can foster loyalty and strengthen voters' affiliation with a particular political party. When voters receive freebies, they may develop a sense of gratitude and indebtedness towards the party providing those benefits. This emotional connection can lead to a long-term association with the party and a tendency to vote for them in subsequent elections.

❖ **Persuasion and Influence:** The promise of freebies can be persuasive and influential in swaying undecided voters or those who may have had no prior affiliation with a specific party. The appeal of receiving tangible benefits for free can be compelling and may tilt the decision-making process in favor of the party offering the freebies.

❖ **Voter Mobilization:** Freebies serve as effective tools for mobilizing voters and increasing voter turnout. The promise of immediate benefits can incentivize individuals, including those who are disengaged or apathetic towards politics, to participate in the electoral process. Parties use freebies as a means to generate enthusiasm, create a sense of urgency, and motivate their supporters to go out and vote.

❖ **Perception of Party's Intentions:** Freebies can shape the perception of a party's intentions and priorities among voters. When parties offer freebies, they are seen as taking direct action to address the needs and concerns of the electorate. Voters may view such initiatives as evidence of the party's commitment to their welfare, leading to a positive perception and increased support.

❖ **Strategic Voting:** The availability of freebies can influence strategic voting behavior. Some voters may strategically align their vote with the party or candidate that promises the most attractive or beneficial freebies, even if their overall ideological or policy preferences differ. Freebies can act as a deciding factor in situations where voters see little difference between parties in terms of their broader agendas.

#### **Impact on Electoral Politics:**

❖ **Freebies as a tool for vote bank politics:** - Freebies are often used as a tool for vote bank politics, which refers to the strategy of targeting specific voter groups or communities to secure their support. Here's how freebies are employed in the context of vote bank politics:

❖ **Targeted Distribution:** Parties identify specific voter segments based on factors such as caste, religion, socioeconomic status, or regional considerations. They design their freebie schemes to cater to the needs and aspirations of these target groups. By offering benefits that directly address the concerns of a particular community, parties aim to consolidate their support and secure their votes.

❖ **Identity Politics:** Freebies are used to strengthen the identity politics game. Political parties exploit the social, cultural, or regional identities of voters by offering freebies that align with their interests. This fosters a sense of affinity and solidarity among the targeted community, leading to increased support for the party. Freebies become a means to reinforce the identity-based narratives and create a sense of collective belonging.

❖ **Competitive Populism:** Parties engage in competitive populism, where they try to outdo each other in offering more attractive freebies to specific voter groups. This is done with the intention of gaining an edge over rival parties in vote bank politics. By offering more extensive or appealing freebies, parties aim to establish themselves as the preferred choice of the targeted community and secure their votes.

❖ **Reinforcing Electoral Alliances:** In the context of electoral alliances, parties may use freebies as a means to secure the support of their coalition partners' voter bases. By offering benefits that resonate with the interests of these communities, parties seek to strengthen the alliance and ensure the transfer of votes from their coalition partners' vote banks.

❖ **Mobilization and Turnout:** Freebies are employed to mobilize voters and increase voter turnout within specific vote banks. The promise of direct benefits serves as an incentive for targeted communities to actively participate in the electoral process. Parties leverage freebies to generate enthusiasm, create a sense of urgency, and motivate voters to turn out in large numbers.

❖ **Securing Long-term Support:** Parties may use freebies to establish a long-term support base within specific vote banks. By consistently providing benefits and addressing the needs of targeted communities, parties aim to build a loyal voter base that will continue to support them in future elections. Freebies act as a tool to cultivate a sense of loyalty and dependency on the party offering the benefits...

**Role of freebies in influencing voter turnout:-**Freebies play a significant role in influencing voter turnout, which refers to the percentage of eligible voters who actually cast their votes in an election. Here are some ways in which freebies impact voter turnout:

❖ **Incentive for Participation:** Freebies act as incentives for voters to participate in the electoral process. The promise of receiving tangible benefits motivates individuals, especially those who may be disengaged or apathetic towards politics, to make the effort to go out and vote. The appeal of immediate gains encourages eligible voters to exercise their democratic right and take part in the electoral process.

❖ **Overcoming Apathy and Disillusionment:** Freebies can help overcome voter apathy and disillusionment. In situations where voters feel disconnected from the political system or believe that their voices are not heard, the availability of freebies can create excitement and renewed interest in participating in elections. The prospect of receiving immediate benefits can reignite enthusiasm among voters who may have otherwise been disenchanted with the political process.

❖ **Mobilization and Awareness Campaigns:** The distribution of freebies is often accompanied by extensive mobilization and awareness campaigns. Parties use these campaigns to spread the message about the availability of freebies and the importance of voting. Such campaigns create buzz, generate public interest, and serve as reminders for voters to turn out on Election Day, thus influencing voter turnout.

❖ **Targeting Marginalized or Underrepresented Groups:** Freebies are often targeted towards marginalized or underrepresented groups in society. By offering benefits that directly address the needs and concerns of these groups, parties aim to mobilize and encourage

their participation in the electoral process. Freebies can serve as a tool to empower and engage these communities, leading to increased voter turnout within these segments.

❖ **Creating a Sense of Ownership:** Freebies create a sense of ownership and stake in the political process among voters. When individuals receive tangible benefits, they feel a personal connection to the party or candidate providing those benefits. This sense of ownership can enhance their commitment to the democratic process and motivate them to exercise their voting rights.

❖ **Peer Influence and Social Pressure:** The availability of freebies can also lead to peer influence and social pressure to vote. When individuals know that their peers or community members are receiving benefits, they may feel compelled to participate in the electoral process to avoid missing out or facing social exclusion. The influence of social networks and community dynamics can contribute to higher voter turnout due to the presence of freebies.

**Relationship between freebies and electoral outcomes** The relationship between freebies and electoral outcomes can vary depending on various factors, including the context, the nature of the freebies, and the electorate's perception and response to them. Here are a few points to consider: Offering freebies or benefits to voters can potentially attract their support and influence their voting decisions. This strategy is often employed by political parties or candidates to appeal to specific demographics or win over swing voters. Freebies can range from tangible goods such as food, clothing, or household items, to services like healthcare or education subsidies. Freebies are often associated with populist policies, which aim to address immediate needs and concerns of the electorate. Populist leaders or parties may promise and deliver freebies as a way to gain popularity and build a loyal voter base. However, the long-term sustainability and impact of such policies are subject to debate. In some cases, freebies can be targeted at specific vote banks, which are groups of voters sharing common interests or characteristics. For example, a party may promise free electricity or water supply to a particular community or region to gain their support. This approach aims to secure votes from targeted groups while potentially neglecting broader developmental issues. Offering freebies can have implications for public finances and the overall economy. Implementing such policies requires budget allocations, which may strain government resources and potentially lead to fiscal deficits. The economic feasibility and sustainability of freebies are crucial considerations, as their long-term impact on the economy can influence electoral outcomes. The way voters perceive freebies and their impact plays a vital role. Some voters may view them as genuine efforts to address social and economic inequalities, while others may consider them as mere political gimmicks. The level of voter awareness and understanding about the consequences of freebies can influence electoral outcomes. It is important to note that the impact of freebies on electoral outcomes is complex and can vary across different political contexts, cultures, and countries. Additionally, there are other significant factors such as governance, leadership, ideology, and prevailing socio-economic conditions that also contribute to electoral outcomes.

**Economic Implications** Cost of implementing freebies and its burden on the economy, **Impact** on fiscal deficit and public debt. Distortionary effects on resource allocation and market dynamics implementing freebies can have significant economic implications, particularly in terms of the cost incurred and its burden on the economy. While freebies may be appealing to the recipients, they often require substantial financial resources to implement, which can strain the government's budget and overall economy. One of the key concerns is the impact on the fiscal deficit. Fiscal deficit refers to the shortfall that occurs when the government's expenditure exceeds its revenue. Implementing freebies typically involves additional government spending, which can contribute to an increase in the fiscal deficit. This can be problematic as a high fiscal deficit can lead to a range of issues, including inflationary pressures, reduced investor confidence, and a higher cost of borrowing for the government. Furthermore, implementing freebies can also contribute to an increase in public debt. Public debt refers to the cumulative borrowing by the government to finance its expenses over time. When the government needs to fund the cost of freebies, it often relies on borrowing, issuing bonds, or accumulating debt. A higher public debt burden can lead to increased interest payments, which can further strain the government's finances and limit its ability to invest in other critical areas such as infrastructure, education, or healthcare. Another economic implication of implementing freebies is the distortionary effects on resource allocation and market dynamics. When certain goods or services are provided for free or at heavily subsidized rates, it can disrupt market forces and distort the allocation of resources. For example, if the government provides free healthcare services, it may discourage private investment in the healthcare sector, leading to a shortage of quality healthcare facilities and reduced competition. Similarly, if the government offers free education, it may discourage private investment in the education sector, potentially compromising the quality of education available. Distortions in resource allocation can have long-term consequences for the economy. They can discourage entrepreneurship, hinder innovation, and create market inefficiencies. Moreover, the cost of providing freebies is often borne by taxpayers or through increased government borrowing, which can lead to higher taxes or reduced public investment in critical areas such as infrastructure development or research and development. In summary, while freebies may have short-term benefits for the recipients, they can have significant economic implications. The cost of implementing freebies can strain the government's budget, contribute to fiscal deficits and public debt, and distort resource allocation and market dynamics. It is crucial for policymakers to carefully consider the long-term economic consequences before implementing such measures.

❖ **Governance and Public Service Delivery:** Diversion of government resources towards freebies, Neglect of essential public services and infrastructure, Long-term implications for governance and development the implementation of freebies can have implications for governance and public service delivery, particularly when it diverts government resources away from essential services and infrastructure. Here are some key points to consider: Diversion of government resources: Providing freebies often requires allocating significant financial resources. This can lead to a diversion of funds away from essential public services such as healthcare, education, infrastructure development, and social welfare programs. As a result, the quality and availability of these critical services may suffer, impacting the overall well-being of the population. Neglect of essential public services and infrastructure: When resources are redirected towards freebies, the government may face challenges in adequately maintaining and improving essential public services and infrastructure. For instance, if a significant portion of the budget is allocated to providing free goods or services, there may be limited funding available for investments in healthcare facilities, educational institutions, transportation networks, or water and sanitation systems. This neglect can have long-term consequences for the development and well-being of the society. Long-term implications for governance and development: Neglecting essential public services and infrastructure can hinder the overall development of a nation. Adequate provision of services like healthcare and education is crucial for human capital development, which is essential for economic growth and social progress. If freebies take precedence over these fundamental aspects, it can have long-term implications for governance, as the government may struggle to

meet the needs and aspirations of the citizens. This can result in a lack of trust in public institutions and dissatisfaction among the population. Economic implications: As mentioned earlier, the diversion of resources towards freebies can strain the government's budget, contribute to fiscal deficits, and increase public debt. These economic challenges can further impact the government's ability to provide efficient and sustainable public services in the long run. Insufficient investment in essential sectors can hamper economic development and create disparities within society. In summary, the implementation of freebies can lead to the diversion of government resources away from essential public services and infrastructure, resulting in neglect and potential long-term implications for governance and development. It is essential for policymakers to strike a balance between providing short-term benefits and ensuring the sustainable delivery of essential services for the overall well-being and progress of the society.

**Social Impact: Redistribution of wealth and reduction of poverty. Potential for creating dependency and entitlement mentality.**

Effect on social cohesion and equality implementing freebies can have significant social impacts, both positive and negative. Here are some key points to consider: Redistribution of wealth and reduction of poverty: Freebies can be designed to redistribute wealth and reduce poverty by providing necessary goods or services to those who are economically disadvantaged. For example, free healthcare, education, or social welfare programs can help alleviate financial burdens on low-income individuals and improve their well-being. This can contribute to a more equitable society and help address socio-economic disparities. Potential for creating dependency and entitlement mentality: While freebies can initially provide immediate relief, there is a risk of creating dependency and fostering an entitlement mentality among recipients. When individuals become reliant on free goods or services, they may lose motivation to work or pursue self-sufficiency. This can hinder personal growth, limit economic mobility, and perpetuate a cycle of dependency on government support. Effect on social cohesion: The provision of freebies can impact social cohesion within a society. If the implementation is perceived as unfair or favoring certain groups, it can lead to social divisions and resentment. It is important to ensure that the distribution of freebies is transparent, equitable, and based on genuine need, in order to maintain social harmony and foster a sense of collective responsibility. Impact on equality: While freebies can address immediate needs and reduce poverty, they may not address the root causes of inequality. True equality requires systemic changes and opportunities for socio-economic mobility. Overreliance on freebies without addressing underlying structural issues may perpetuate inequality in the long term. It is important for governments to complement freebies with policies that promote inclusive growth, access to quality education, and economic empowerment. Balancing social benefits with fiscal sustainability: While freebies can have positive social impacts, their implementation should be carefully balanced with fiscal sustainability. Governments must consider the long-term financial implications and ensure that the provision of freebies does not compromise the overall economic stability or burden future generations with excessive debt. In summary, the social impact of implementing freebies is complex and multi-faceted. While they can help redistribute wealth, reduce poverty, and improve social well-being, there is a need to address potential issues such as dependency, entitlement mentality, social cohesion, and long-term equality. A balanced and comprehensive approach is crucial to ensure that freebies contribute to sustainable social progress without undermining individual motivation, social cohesion, and economic stability.

**Criticisms and Challenges:** Critiques of freebies as a populist and short-sighted approach. Inadequate targeting and leakage of benefits, Potential for corruption and misuse of resources The implementation of freebies often faces criticisms and challenges, particularly regarding its populist and short-sighted nature, inadequate targeting and leakage of benefits, and the potential for corruption and misuse of resources. Here are some key points to consider: Populist and short-sighted approach: Critics argue that freebies are often used as a populist strategy by politicians to gain popularity and secure short-term electoral gains. Such approaches may prioritize immediate benefits over long-term sustainable development. Critics contend that this can lead to policy decisions that are not based on careful analysis or consideration of their long-term economic and social impacts. Inadequate targeting and leakage of benefits: One of the challenges associated with freebies is ensuring that the benefits reach the intended recipients. Inadequate targeting can result in leakage, where individuals who are not truly in need of assistance end up receiving the freebies. This can reduce the effectiveness of such programs and divert resources away from those who genuinely require support. Potential for corruption and misuse of resources: The implementation of freebies can create opportunities for corruption and the misuse of resources. There is a risk that individuals or officials responsible for distributing the freebies may engage in corrupt practices, such as favoritism, bribery, or embezzlement. This can result in the intended benefits not reaching the intended beneficiaries, further exacerbating inequality and undermining public trust in the government. Lack of sustainability and long-term planning: Critics argue that freebies often lack sustainability and long-term planning. They may be implemented without considering the financial implications, potential budget constraints, and the need for gradual phasing out or transitioning to self-sustaining models. This can result in a heavy burden on government finances and limit the ability to allocate resources to other critical areas of development. Opportunity cost and unintended consequences: Critics also highlight the opportunity cost associated with freebies. The financial resources allocated to freebies could have been used for investments in areas such as education, healthcare, infrastructure, or social welfare programs with a broader and more sustainable impact. Additionally, unintended consequences, such as market distortions or disincentives for private sector investment, can arise from the implementation of freebies. In summary, criticisms of freebies focus on their populist nature, short-sightedness, inadequate targeting, potential for corruption, and lack of sustainability. Addressing these challenges requires careful planning, robust targeting mechanisms, transparency, and accountability in the implementation process. Additionally, policymakers need to consider the opportunity costs and unintended consequences associated with freebies to ensure a balanced approach to public policy and resource allocation.

Alternatives and Reforms: Policy measures to address the negative aspects of freebies, Emphasizing sustainable development and long-term benefits, Strengthening social welfare schemes and inclusive growth to address the negative aspects of freebies and promote sustainable development, several policy measures and reforms can be considered. Here are some alternatives and reforms that can help mitigate the challenges associated with freebies:

1. **Targeted and means-tested approach: Instead of providing freebies universally,** a targeted and means-tested approach can be adopted. This involves identifying the most vulnerable and economically disadvantaged individuals or groups and providing assistance specifically to them. By focusing resources on those in genuine need, the effectiveness and impact of the programs can be enhanced. Strengthening social welfare schemes: Rather than relying solely on freebies, governments can strengthen existing social welfare schemes and safety nets. This involves designing comprehensive programs that provide support in areas such as healthcare, education, housing, and

income support. These schemes should be well-targeted, efficient, and promote self-sufficiency and economic empowerment. Promoting inclusive growth: Governments can prioritize policies that promote inclusive economic growth. This includes investing in sectors that generate employment opportunities and provide sustainable livelihoods. By fostering economic empowerment, individuals and communities can be lifted out of poverty and reliance on freebies can be reduced. Skills development and education: Emphasizing skills development and quality education can help individuals acquire the necessary tools to succeed in the labor market. Governments can invest in vocational training programs, promote entrepreneurship, and improve the quality of education to ensure individuals have the means to secure sustainable livelihoods. Gradual phasing out and transitioning: If freebies have become deeply entrenched, policymakers can consider a gradual phasing out approach that allows individuals and communities to transition to self-sufficiency. This can involve providing support for skill development, job creation, and access to opportunities while reducing reliance on freebies over time. Transparent and accountable governance: Ensuring transparency and accountability in the implementation of programs is crucial. This includes effective monitoring mechanisms, regular audits, and reporting on the utilization of resources. Such measures help mitigate the risks of corruption and ensure that benefits reach the intended beneficiaries. Balancing short-term relief with long-term benefits: Policymakers need to strike a balance between addressing immediate needs and promoting long-term sustainable development. This requires careful planning, considering the broader socio-economic implications of policies, and investing in areas that have long-term benefits, such as infrastructure development, healthcare systems, and education. In summary, alternatives and reforms to address the negative aspects of freebies involve adopting a targeted approach, strengthening social welfare schemes, promoting inclusive growth, investing in education and skills development, ensuring transparency and accountability, and balancing short-term relief with long-term sustainable development. By implementing these measures, governments can mitigate the challenges associated with freebies and promote more inclusive and equitable societies.

**International Perspectives:** Comparison of freebies with similar practices in other countries, Lessons and experiences from international examples Freebies or similar practices are implemented in various forms across different countries. Here are a few examples of international perspectives on the implementation of freebies and their lessons and experiences: Universal Basic Income (UBI) - Finland: Finland conducted a two-year UBI experiment from 2017 to 2018, providing a monthly basic income to a randomly selected group of unemployed individuals. The experiment aimed to assess the impacts of unconditional income on employment and well-being. While the results showed no significant employment effects, it highlighted potential positive impacts on mental health and well-being. The experiment demonstrated the importance of carefully designing and evaluating such programs to understand their implications fully. Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) - Brazil: Brazil's Bolsa Familia program is a widely recognized example of a successful conditional cash transfer program. It provides financial assistance to low-income families, but with certain conditions, such as ensuring children attend school and receive regular healthcare check-ups. The program has contributed to poverty reduction, increased school enrollment, and improved health outcomes. The lesson from Brazil's experience is the importance of combining financial assistance with conditions that promote human capital development and break the cycle of poverty. Healthcare Access - Canada and the United Kingdom: Countries like Canada and the United Kingdom have implemented free or heavily subsidized healthcare systems. While these systems face challenges such as long waiting times and resource constraints, they demonstrate the importance of providing essential services to citizens regardless of their ability to pay. The lesson here is that universal access to healthcare can contribute to better population health outcomes and reduce disparities. Education - Germany: Germany offers free higher education to both domestic and international students in its public universities. This policy aims to increase access to higher education and promote social mobility. By eliminating tuition fees, Germany has opened up educational opportunities for a broader range of students. The experience from Germany highlights the potential of free education policies to address barriers to higher education and support skill development. Subsidized Housing - Singapore: Singapore has implemented a system of heavily subsidized public housing to address the housing needs of its population. The government provides affordable rental and ownership options to ensure citizens have access to decent housing. The experience from Singapore emphasizes the role of government intervention in addressing housing affordability and ensuring adequate housing for all. These international examples provide insights into different approaches to freebies and their impacts. Lessons can be drawn from the careful design, targeting, conditions, and evaluation of such programs. It is crucial to consider the specific context, societal needs, and available resources when implementing similar policies, adapting them to suit the local environment.

**Conclusion:** Summary of key points discussed, Balancing the pros and cons of freebies in Indian politics. Importance of a comprehensive and sustainable approach to governance In conclusion, the key points discussed regarding freebies in Indian politics are as follows: Freebies can have both positive and negative impacts on the economy and society. They can redistribute wealth, reduce poverty, and provide immediate relief to the vulnerable. However, they can also strain government finances, contribute to fiscal deficits and public debt, distort resource allocation, and create dependency. Challenges associated with freebies include inadequate targeting, leakage of benefits, the potential for corruption and misuse of resources, and the neglect of essential public services and infrastructure. It is essential to address these challenges to ensure effective governance and sustainable development. Alternative approaches and reforms can help mitigate the negative aspects of freebies. These include a targeted and means-tested approach, strengthening social welfare schemes, promoting inclusive growth, investing in education and skills development, ensuring transparency and accountability, and balancing short-term relief with long-term benefits. International experiences provide valuable lessons and insights into the implementation of freebies. Examples such as universal basic income, conditional cash transfers, subsidized healthcare, education, and housing highlight the importance of careful design, evaluation, and balancing the short-term and long-term impacts of such policies. Balancing the pros and cons of freebies in Indian politics requires a comprehensive and sustainable approach. Policymakers should carefully consider the economic and social implications, ensure proper targeting and accountability, and prioritize investments in essential public services and infrastructure. A comprehensive and sustainable approach to governance is crucial. It involves addressing the root causes of poverty and inequality, investing in human capital development, promoting **inclusive growth, and ensuring transparent and accountable governance practices.**

While freebies may provide immediate benefits, it is important to consider their long-term implications. A balanced and comprehensive approach that addresses the challenges and fosters sustainable development is crucial for effective governance and the well-being of the society. Freebies are extended utilizing taxpayers' money and may push the State towards "imminent bankruptcy", the Supreme Court said

on Friday, as it directed that the pleas against the practice of political parties promising pre-election handouts be listed before a three-judge bench. **Supreme court Case law on freebies** Observing that issues raised before it require an "extensive" hearing, the top court said though all promises cannot be equated with freebies as they relate to welfare schemes or measures for the public good, fiscal responsibility cannot be dispensed with under the guise of electoral promises. It said these schemes are not only part of the Directive Principles of State Policy but are also a responsibility of the welfare state. "Freebies may create a situation where in the State Government cannot provide basic amenities due to lack of funds and the State is pushed towards imminent bankruptcy. In the same breath, we should remember that such freebies are extended utilizing taxpayers' money only for increasing the popularity of the party and electoral prospects," a bench headed by Chief Justice N V Ramana said. The court order on Justice Ramana's last day in office comes against the backdrop of the freebies versus welfare scheme debate that has sparked a political slugfest in recent weeks. The Supreme Court said that there can be no denying the fact that in an electoral democracy, the true power ultimately lies with the electorate. "It is the electorate that decides which party or candidate comes to power, and also judges the performance of the said party or candidate at the end of the legislative term, during the next round of the elections." "This Court has generally stayed its hand when confronted with issues relating to a policy or fiscal matters concerning the State, as the same falls outside the ambit of the Court's jurisdiction," the bench, also comprising Justices Hima Kohli and C T Ravikumar, said. The top court said the issues raised by the parties require an "extensive hearing" before any concrete orders can be passed. It noted there are certain preliminary issues that may be needed to be deliberated upon in these petitions. The issues included the scope of judicial intervention with respect to the reliefs sought in these pleas, whether any enforceable order can be passed by this court in these writ petitions and whether the appointment of a commission/expert body by the court would serve any purpose. The bench said it was argued before it that the 2013 judgment delivered by a two-judge bench of the Supreme Court in the matter of S Subramaniam Balaji vs. The Government of Tamil Nadu and others required reconsideration. "Looking into the complexities of the issues involved and the prayer to overrule the judgment rendered by a two-judge bench of this court in Subramaniam Balaji, we direct listing of the set of petitions before a three-judge bench after obtaining the orders from the Chief Justice of India," it said. In its 2013 judgment, the Supreme Court had noted that after examining and considering the parameters laid in section 123 of the Representation of People Act (RPA), it arrived at a conclusion that the promises in the election manifesto cannot be read into section 123 for declaring it to be a corrupt practice. The top court on Friday said the pleas would be listed after four weeks. The bench was deliberating on pleas including the one filed by advocate Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay opposing promises of freebies by the parties during polls. The petitions wanted the Election Commission to invoke its powers to freeze the election symbols of these parties and cancel their registration. While hearing the matter on August 23, the top court had observed that all political parties were in favour of freebies and due to this a judicial attempt has been made to deal with it. "On this issue, I can say all political parties are on one side including BJP. Everybody wants freebies. That is the reason we made an attempt," the bench had observed

The role of freebies in Indian politics is a complex issue with multiple dimensions. While proponents argue that they serve as a means to uplift marginalized sections of society and address socio-economic disparities, critics highlight their potential negative impact on electoral outcomes, governance, fiscal discipline, and long-term socio-economic development. Striking a balance between addressing the immediate needs of the vulnerable and ensuring sustainable and inclusive growth requires a comprehensive approach that considers the broader implications of freebies on India's democratic fabric and socio-economic landscape. The role of freebies in Indian politics is a complex and multifaceted issue. While they can provide immediate relief to marginalized communities and address socio-economic disparities, their implementation and long-term implications must be carefully evaluated. Freebies should be seen as a temporary measure rather than a sustainable solution to the underlying socio-economic challenges faced by India. It is crucial to strike a balance between welfare-oriented policies and long-term development strategies, focusing on investments in education, healthcare, skill development, and infrastructure to create an enabling environment for inclusive growth. Additionally, efforts should be made to ensure transparency, accountability, and equitable distribution of resources, minimizing the potential for misuse and fostering a culture of self-reliance and active citizen participation. Ultimately, the role of freebies in Indian politics should be guided by a comprehensive understanding of their benefits and limitations, with a strong emphasis on sustainable and inclusive development. The role of freebies in Indian politics is a complex issue with wide-ranging implications. While they have the potential to uplift marginalized sections and enhance political participation, the excessive reliance on freebies can undermine the quality of democratic governance, divert resources from essential sectors, and create a culture of entitlement. Striking a balance between welfare politics and long-term development goals is crucial to ensure that freebies do not become a substitute for sustainable and inclusive growth. By adopting a holistic approach that addresses the root causes of socio-economic inequalities, India can chart a path towards a more equitable and prosperous future.

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