Q.1) In recent years, social media platforms have emerged as powerful informal pressure groups, shaping political discourse and influencing policy decisions in India. Examine their role and compare them with traditional formal pressure groups. (150 words, 10 marks)

Introduction

Pressure groups are **organized entities** influencing policy without contesting elections. Social media, as an informal pressure group, represents a decentralized **"third sector"** force that mobilizes public opinion and builds **social capital** to impact governance.

Body

Definitions

- **Formal Pressure Groups:** Structured organizations like unions or lobbies that influence government decisions.
  Example: **Bharatiya Kisan Union** during the farm laws protest.
- **Informal Pressure Groups:** Unstructured collectives that influence discourse through social movements or digital platforms.
  Example: Social media on **Manipur violence** brought national attention to the issue.

Role of social media as an informal pressure group

1. **Agenda setting:** Social media brings overlooked issues into public debate.
   Example: **Goa forest campaign** led to public hearings.
2. **Mobilization:** It gathers public support rapidly across regions.
   Example: **Student protests online** got exams postponed during **COVID**.
3. **Accountability tool:** Posts often force swift action from authorities.
   Example: Complaint about broken roads led to repair by officials.
4. **Empowering voices:** It amplifies the concerns of ignored groups.
   Example: Women shared harassment stories, prompting internal probes during **Me Too movement.**
5. **Policy pressure:** Public outrage online can reshape official drafts.
   Example: Digital rules were softened after online criticism.

Comparison with traditional formal pressure groups

1. **Structure:** Social media is loose and spontaneous, unlike formal, organized groups.
2. **Reach:** It includes diverse voices, while formal groups focus on specific interests.
3. **Methods:** Social media uses campaigns; formal groups prefer negotiation and petitions.
4. **Impact style:** Social media uses fast pressure; formal groups work through dialogue.

Ill-effects of social media as a pressure group

1. **Spreads misinformation quickly and triggers mass panic.**
   Example: **Vaccine rumours** online caused fear during COVID.
2. **Leads to short-lived outrage without long-term change.**
   Example: **Hathras** outrage faded with no major outcome.

3. **Encourages mob justice and deepens polarisation.**
   Example: Election-time hate campaigns increased social divide.

In this regard, **IT Rules 2021** aim to regulate platforms, ensure responsibility, and offer grievance redressal.

Conclusion

Social media, if guided by ethical norms and digital literacy, can complement traditional pressure groups in **strengthening democracy** and **policy responsiveness**.

Q.2) Discuss the grounds for disqualification of elected representatives under the Representation of People Act, 1951. Do you think these provisions are sufficient to ensure political accountability? (150 words, 10 marks)

Introduction

The Representation of the People Act, 1951 lays down the legal framework for **free and fair elections** in India. It includes provisions to disqualify elected representatives to uphold integrity and accountability in public office.

Body

Grounds for Disqualification under the Act

1. **Conviction for certain offences:** Includes crimes like corruption, terrorism, and serious financial fraud **(Section 8)**.
   Example: **Lalu Prasad Yadav** was disqualified after conviction in the fodder scam.
2. **Corrupt practices in elections:** Includes bribery, undue influence, or booth capturing **(Section 123)**.
   Example: A candidate found guilty of bribing voters can face disqualification.
3. **Failure to lodge election expenses:** Not submitting account details within prescribed time **(Section 10A)**.
4. **Holding office of profit:** Occupying positions that may lead to a conflict of interest **(Section 9A)**.
   Example: **Jaya Bachchan** was disqualified for holding an office of profit.
5. **False declarations:** Hiding criminal background or submitting misleading details in affidavits.

Concerns about Sufficiency of Provisions

1. **Delayed judicial process:** Cases often take years, allowing convicted leaders to continue in office.
2. **Inadequate ethical coverage:** Hate speech, communal rhetoric, or abuse of position often go unpunished.
3. **Ambiguity in discretionary powers:** Decisions on disqualification and deregistration of parties lack clarity.

4. **Misuse of government machinery:** Ruling parties exploit public funds and vehicles during elections with little consequence.
5. **False disclosures remain unchecked:** Candidates often provide incomplete affidavits with no automatic consequence.

Recommendations
1. **Implement Law Commission's 255th Report:** Enable faster trials and stringent action on false affidavits.
2. **Disqualify candidates with serious charges:** Those framed by a court at least six months before elections.
3. **Grant financial and staffing autonomy to ECI:** For independent and efficient functioning.
4. **Implement SC's suggestion for lifetime bans:** Prevent convicted politicians from contesting elections again.

Relevant Supreme Court Cases
- **Lily Thomas v. Union of India (2013):** SC struck down the provision allowing convicted MPs/MLAs to continue in office if they filed an appeal.
- **Public Interest Foundation v. Union of India (2018):** SC urged Parliament to frame laws barring candidates facing serious criminal charges.

Conclusion

Elections are the **lifeblood of democracy**, and strengthening the **Representation of the People Act, 1951** through timely reforms is vital to uphold electoral integrity and ensure true political accountability in India.

Q.3) "Farmers' protests have brought renewed attention to agrarian pressure groups in India. Analyze the effectiveness of their methods in influencing public policy and political narratives." (150 words, 10 marks)

Introduction

Pressure groups are **organized interest-based collectives** that seek to influence policy without contesting elections. Agrarian groups like the **Samyukta Kisan Morcha** exemplify this, using mass protests to bring farmers' issues into political and legislative focus.

Body

Farmers' Protests
- The **2020–21 farm law protests** mobilised lakhs of farmers across states, triggering a national debate.
- The protests lasted over a year, involved over **500 farmers' unions,** and ultimately led to the repeal of the three contentious farm laws.

Methods Used by Agrarian Pressure Groups

1. **Mass Mobilisation and Protests:** Persistent protests across state capitals and national highways amplified demands.
   Example: **2020–21 Delhi border blockade** led to prolonged government negotiations.
2. **Narrative Building Through Media:** Use of local radio, community WhatsApp groups, and farmer YouTube channels countered mainstream media narratives.
3. **Electoral Signalling:** Boycotts and campaigns influenced voting patterns, particularly in Haryana and Western UP.
4. **Cross-Regional Coordination:** Platforms like All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee **(AIKSCC)** enabled collective bargaining across states.
5. **Engagement with Civil Society:** Collaborations with artists, lawyers, and academicians brought credibility and widened public engagement.

Effectiveness of These Methods

1. **Policy Impact:** Contributed to repeal of three central farm laws—one of the rare rollbacks of major legislation.
   Example: The government withdrew the laws after over a year of protest.
2. **Narrative Domination:** Shifted focus to Minimum Support Price (MSP) and farmer distress on national platforms.
   Example: **MSP demands** featured in multiple state election campaigns post-2021.
3. **Political Recalibration:** Parties including Congress and AAP reoriented manifestos around agrarian guarantees.
4. **Democratic Participation:** Revitalised peaceful protest culture as a legitimate democratic instrument in rural politics.

Concerns and Limitations

1. **Fragmented Leadership:** Divergent demands between large farmers and marginal groups reduce cohesion.
   Example: Differences between Punjab unions and other state bodies created friction.
2. **Urban-Rural Disconnect:** Limited empathy or sustained support from urban middle classes and mainstream media.
3. **Symbolic Outcomes:** Repeal of laws did not translate into lasting structural reforms in agriculture.
4. **Politicisation Risk:** Association with regional political movements raises questions on neutrality and agenda.
   Example: Accusations of political backing during **Punjab elections** affected perception.

Conclusion

Despite limitations, agrarian pressure groups significantly shape public discourse and policy. Their active role strengthens **participatory democracy** by ensuring rural voices remain integral to national decision-making.

Q.4) The Representation of the People Act, 1951 has served India's democracy for over seven decades, but growing political and legal complexities demand its reform. Critically examine the major challenges associated with the Act and suggest a roadmap for its overhaul." (250 words, 15 marks)

Introduction

The Representation of the People Act, 1951 provides the statutory foundation for **free and fair elections** in India. Yet, evolving political practices and legal loopholes necessitate reforms to sustain the credibility of India's electoral democracy.

Body

Key Provisions of the RPA, 1951
1. **Disqualification on Conviction:** Bars candidates convicted under offences like corruption, terrorism, and rape from contesting elections under **Section 8**.
2. **Mandatory Disclosure:** Requires candidates to file affidavits detailing criminal antecedents, assets, liabilities, and educational qualifications under **Section 33A**.
3. **Spending Limits:** Imposes ceilings on electoral expenditure to ensure fairness, as mandated under **Section 77**.
4. **Definition of Corrupt Practices:** Outlines specific offences such as bribery and communal appeals as corrupt electoral practices under **Section 123**.
5. **Party Registration:** Enables the Election Commission to register and monitor political parties as provided under **Section 29A**.

Key Challenges and Gaps in the RPA, 1951
1. **Criminalisation of Politics:** Candidates with serious charges can still contest elections.
    Example: **43% of 2019 Lok Sabha MPs** declared criminal cases (ADR).
2. **Weak Disclosure Enforcement:** No strict penalty for false or misleading affidavits.
3. **Expenditure Loopholes:** Actual campaign costs often exceed declared limits.
    Example: Lavish roadshows and digital ads are run without accounting under **Section 77**.
4. **Limited EC Powers:** ECI cannot deregister parties violating norms.
    Example: Repeated MCC violations saw only warnings issued, not de-registration.
5. **Identity-Based Appeals:** Caste and religion still drive electoral campaigns.
    Example: Caste-based rhetoric was visible in **2022 UP state elections**.
6. **MCC Not Legally Binding:** Violations carry no statutory consequence.
    Example: Pre-poll promises like **freebies** continue despite EC censure.
7. **Opaque Political Funding:** Lack of transparency in donations undermines accountability.
    Example: **Electoral Bonds** enabled anonymous high-value donations to parties.

Impacts of These Challenges
1. **Voter Distrust:** Credibility of electoral process is weakened.
2. **Unlevel Playing Field:** Honest candidates face unfair disadvantages.
3. **Judicial Overload:** Courts struggle with pending election-related cases.

4. **Democratic Dilution:** Faith in electoral democracy suffers systemic damage.

Suggested Reforms

1. **Pre-Conviction Disqualification:** Bar candidates with serious charges at the framing of charge stage, as also recommended by the Law Commission.
2. **Legal Status to MCC:** Codify Model Code to enable enforceability, as proposed by the **Goswami Committee**.
3. **Strengthen ECI Autonomy:** Empower the EC with more regulatory authority, in line with **NCRWC** suggestions.
4. **Time-Bound Adjudication:** Establish **fast-track courts** for swift disposal of electoral offences.
5. **Transparent Funding Mechanism:** Mandate real-time disclosure of political donations to curb opacity.

Relevant Supreme Court Judgments

• **Association for Democratic Reforms (2023):** Held electoral bonds unconstitutional for violating citizens' right to information on political funding.

• **Public Interest Foundation (2018):** Urged Parliament to curb criminalisation of politics through stricter candidate disqualification norms.

Conclusion

Despite limitations, the RPA anchors India's democratic process. Reforming it in tune with judicial insights and institutional recommendations will ensure cleaner elections and strengthen trust in electoral democracy.

Q.5) "The Model Code of Conduct (MCC) plays a vital role in ensuring free and fair elections, yet it lacks statutory backing. Critically examine whether the MCC should be given legal status, highlighting its advantages and potential pitfalls." (250 words, 15 marks)

Introduction

Rooted in **Kerala's 1960 elections** and backed by **Article 324,** the MCC guides electoral conduct. However, its non-statutory nature raises concerns over enforceability, prompting debate on whether it should gain legal status.

Body

Key Provisions of MCC

1. **Political Decency:** Bans personal attacks and divisive appeals during campaigning
2. **Avoidance of Public Fund Misuse:** Restricts use of government resources for electoral advantage.
3. **Neutrality of Bureaucracy:** Prohibits ministers from using official machinery for campaigning.

4. **Regulated Campaign Practices:** Controls public rallies, advertisements, and slogans to avoid disruptions.
5. **Polling Booth Ethics:** Prohibits canvassing near polling stations and the misuse of loudspeakers.

MCC's Vital Role in Free and Fair Elections
1. **Creates a Level Playing Field:** Prevents misuse of incumbency by regulating conduct of ruling parties.
   Example: Lok Sabha election in **Vellore (2019)** was cancelled due to cash-for-votes scandal.
2. **Guides Political Behaviour:** Offers ethical benchmarks and pushes parties to self-regulate.
   Example: Candidate nominations were dropped following MCC violations on communal speech.
3. **Quick Disciplinary Action:** Allows ECI to take immediate steps like bans and advisories.
   Example: ECI banned leaders from campaigning in **2014 for hate speeches.**
4. **Public Trust in Process:** Enhances credibility of elections by curbing excesses in real-time.
   Example: Strict enforcement in Northeast assembly polls improved voter turnout and safety.

Why Legal Status Should Be Given
1. **Improves Enforceability:** Statutory backing enables defined punitive measures for violations.
   Standing Committee on Law and Justice has recommended making MCC legally binding.
2. **Reduces Discretionary Use:** Legal codification standardises enforcement across regions and parties. **Law Commission's 255th Report** suggested integrating MCC with electoral laws.
3. **Addresses Emerging Threats:** Legal backing is essential to tackle misinformation on digital platforms. Recent **ECI directives on social media** conduct show current MCC lacks digital teeth.
4. **Graded Penalties Framework:** Legal status could enable tiered punishments, improving deterrence.
   Example: Bans on campaigning, followed by disqualification for repeated violations.

Arguments Against Legalisation
1. **Flexibility Would Be Lost: ECI** observes that the legal rigidity may hinder it's ability to respond adaptively. Current system allows swift, situation-specific decisions during polls.
2. **Delays in Enforcement:** Court proceedings may outlast election cycles, diluting their relevance.
3. **Consensus-Based Strength:** Moral adherence by all stakeholders ensures better compliance than coercion.
   Example: MCC's voluntary acceptance makes it **politically and morally binding** without legal confrontation.
4. **Already Covered by Existing Laws:** Provisions overlap with IPC, RPA, IT Act, reducing need for duplication.
   Example: **Section 123(4) of RPA** punishes publication of false statements during elections.

Judicial Observations

- **Harbans Singh Jalal v. Union of India (1997):** Upheld ECI's authority to enforce MCC throughout election period.
- **ECI v. State of Haryana (1998):** Affirmed binding nature of ECI's directions under **Article 324** during elections.

Way Forward

1. **Graded Penalties:** Introduce a tiered system of punitive measures with increasing severity for repeat violations.
2. **Time-Bound Enforcement:** Ensure swift action, ideally within **72 hours**, with standard operating procedures.
3. **MCC Modernisation:** Update the code to tackle challenges from **AI, digital misinformation, and deep fakes**.

Conclusion

While MCC significantly contributes to ethical elections, **its legalisation must be balanced** with retaining its **moral and flexible nature** to ensure both accountability and timely electoral interventions.