



ELECTORAL REFORM: AN APPROACH TO EFFECTIVE DEMOCRACY

Genuine democratic elections are an expression of sovereignty, which belongs to the people of a country, the free expression of whose will provide the basis for the authority and legitimacy of a government.

INTRODUCTION

Elections are an **integral part of politics in a democratic system** of governance. While politics is the art and practice of dealing with political power, election is a process of legitimization of such power. Democracy can indeed function only upon this faith that **elections are free and fair** and not rigged and manipulated.

The heart of India's democratic system witnesses regular elections with the participation of the largest electorate in the world. In order to safeguard the **core values of fair and free elections**, the Election Commission of India (ECI) has always remained actively involved

in finding out ways through which the purity and integrity of the electoral process is preserved. However, challenges continue to plague the system of elections and every delay in bringing electoral reforms infringes the rights of millions of citizens.

In this backdrop, it is important to understand what are elections and what role do they play in a democracy? How did the electoral process evolve in India? What are the issues associated with election process in India? What reforms have been made by the government for the betterment of electoral process? What should be the roadmap to achieve the vision of free and fair elections? In this article, we will attempt to answer these questions.



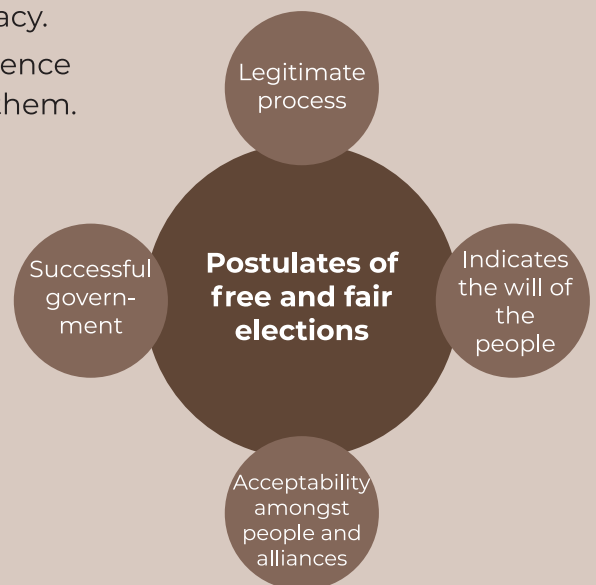
WHAT ARE ELECTIONS AND WHAT ROLE DO THEY PLAY IN A DEMOCRACY?

The word Election comes from the Latin word 'eligere', which means 'to choose, select or pick'. Election is the **process of voting to choose an individual** at regular intervals for holding public office through free will of the people in a representative democracy.

Through their **right to vote**, citizens get a chance to influence the decisions concerning their country and subsequently them.

Role of elections in a democracy

- ➔ **Make responsible and accountable government:** Elections enable voters to select their leaders and to hold them accountable for their performance in office.
- ➔ **Change of leadership:** Elections are a platform for the public to voice their resentment against a ruling party. By voting for other parties and helping elect a different government, citizens demonstrate that they possess the ultimate authority.
- ➔ **Political participation:** Elections open the door for new issues to be raised in public. If a citizen of India wishes to introduce reforms that are not the agenda of any of the parties, he or she is free to contest the elections either independently or by forming a new political party.
- ➔ **Self-corrective system:** Because elections are a regular exercise, occurring every five years in India, the ruling parties are kept in check and made to consider the demands of the public.



- ➔ **Continuation of democracy:** Possibility of controlling leaders by requiring them to submit to regular and periodic elections helps to solve the problem of succession in leadership and thus contributes to the continuation of democracy.
- ➔ **Facilitate social and political integration:** Like national holidays commemorating common experiences, elections link citizens to each other and thereby confirm the viability of the polity.
- ➔ **Taking ownership of the democratic process:** Voting gives people an opportunity to have their say and, through expressing partisanship, to satisfy their need to feel a sense of belonging. Even not voting satisfies the need of some people to express their alienation from the political community.
- ➔ **Symbolic of Nationalism and Patriotism:** Whatever the peculiar national, regional, or local variations, elections are events that, by arousing emotions and channelling them toward collective symbols, break the monotony of daily life and focus attention on the common fate.



Understanding the Election System in India

Articles 324 to 329 in Part XV of the Constitution deals with the elections. Following are the key features of Indian electoral system:



Elections are held on the basis of **Universal adult franchise**. Who is a citizen of India and not less than 18 years of age can register as a voter in electoral roll of India. There is **no discrimination on the ground of religion, race, caste, sex or any of them**.



There is a **provision for reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes (84 Seats) and Scheduled Tribes(47 Seats)** in Lok Sabha and Assemblies of State and Union Territories.



Constituencies are delimited with the help of a **delimitation commissions**. Areas/boundaries change from election to election, but the number of constituencies will not be changed up to the year 2026.

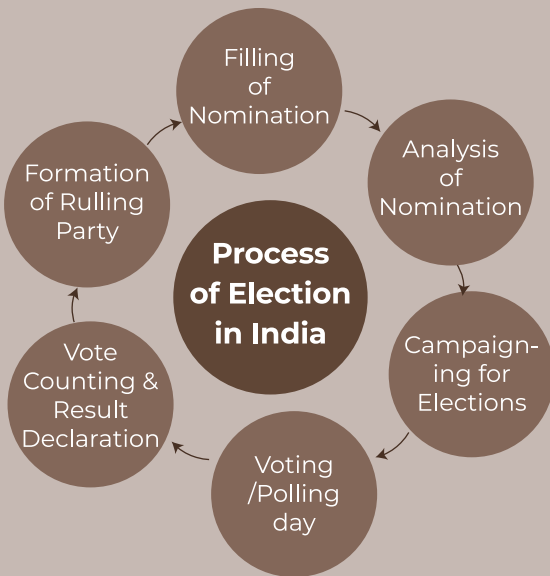


Voting takes place through **First past the post system (FPTP) in case of Lok Sabha Election** and through Proportional Representation (PR) in case of Rajya Sabha Election.



Political parties are an indispensable part of the electoral process.

Comparison of FPTP and PR system of Election



FPTP

The country is divided into small geographical units called constituencies or districts

Every constituency elects one representative

Voter votes for a candidate

A party may get more seats than votes in the legislature

Candidate who wins the election may not get majority (50%+1) votes

Examples: U.K, India

PR

Large geographical areas are demarcated as constituencies. The entire country may be a single constituency

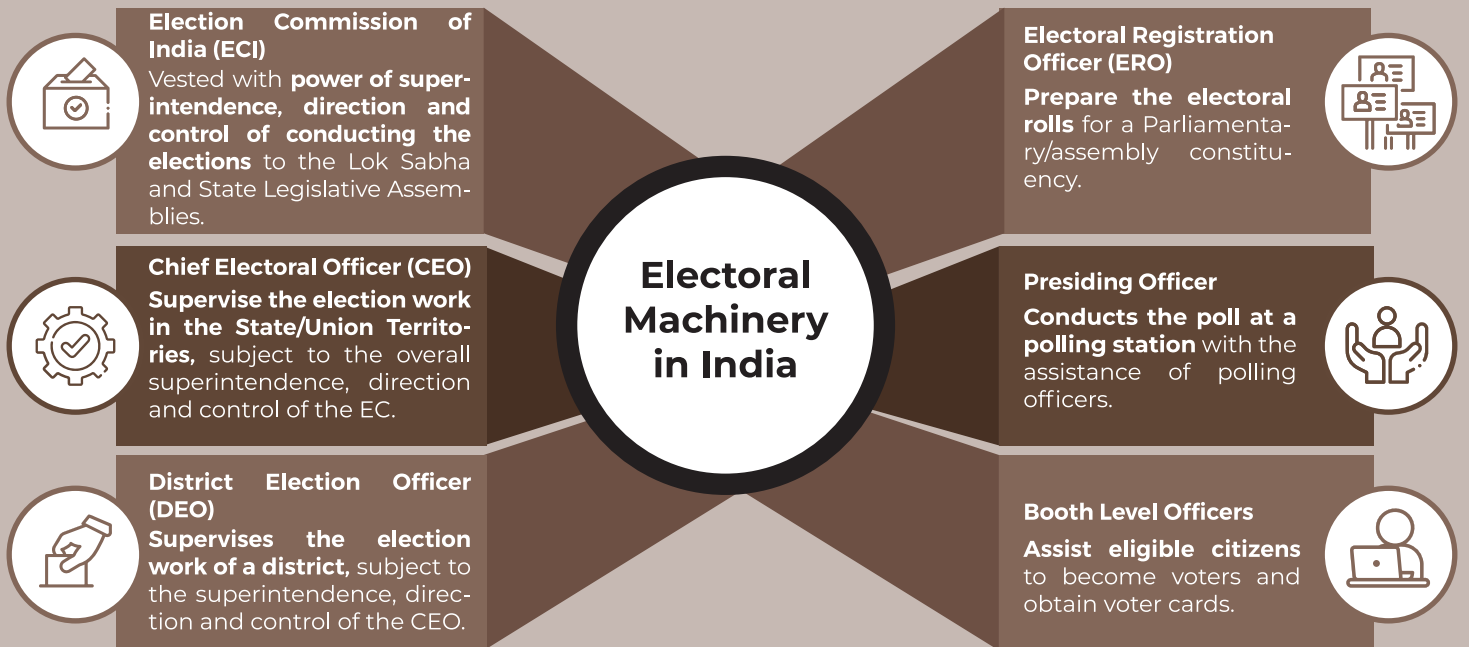
More than one representative may be elected from one constituency

Voter votes for the party

Every party gets seats in the legislature in proportion to the percentage of votes that it gets

Candidate who wins the elections gets majority of votes.

Examples: Israel, Netherlands



HOW DID THE ELECTORAL PROCESS EVOLVE IN INDIA?

Democracy existed in India since ancient times. Our scriptures dating back to the **Vedic age** provide graphic details of the people choosing their own heads, **ganapaties, of the great Vaishali ganarajya**, to lead them in times of peace and war. They were assisted by other wise men and nobles in their decision making, like the present council of ministers.



Did you Know?

The **ancient Greeks** were the **first to create a democracy**, around the **fifth century B.C.E.**

Greeks had a **"negative" election** i.e., each year voters, (mostly male land-owners; women, children, slaves could not vote), were asked to vote for the political leader or candidates they most wanted to be exiled for the next ten years.

Major milestones in evolution of Elections during the British Rule:



Indian Councils Act, 1892:

Introduction of indirect provision of election.

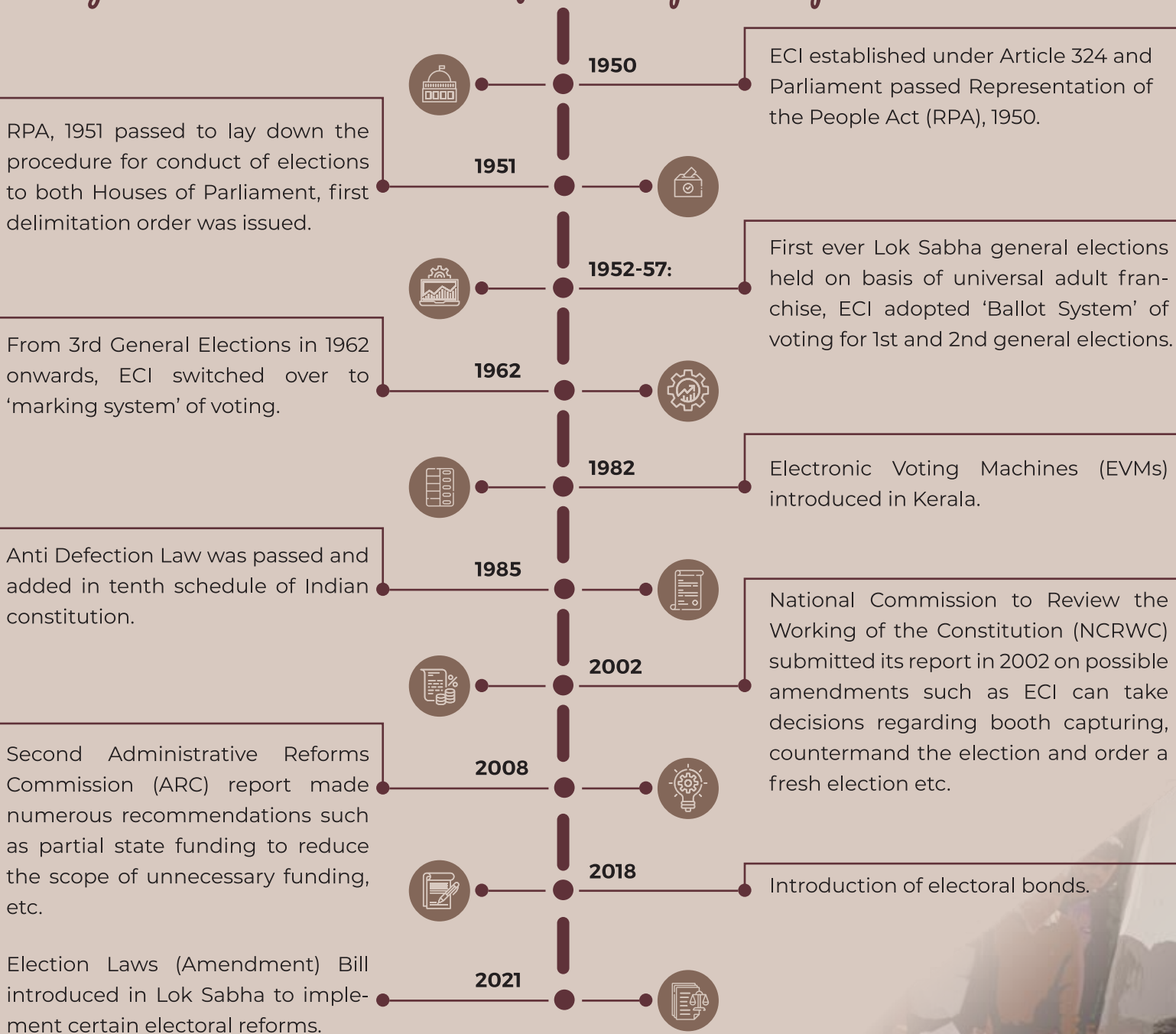
Government of India (GOI) Act, 1919:

Introduced Bicameralism and direct elections.

1930: General elections were held and boycotted by Indian National Congress (INC).

GOI Act, 1935: Extended franchise to 14 percent of the total population.

Major milestones in evolution of elections post-independence:



While the first three general elections (1952-62) in our country were by and large free and fair, a discernible decline in standards began with the fourth general election in 1967. Over the years, Indian electoral system has suffered from various infirmities and is criticised of being the progenitor of political corruption in the country.

WHAT ARE THE ISSUES ASSOCIATED WITH ELECTION PROCESS IN INDIA?

- ➔ **Financing of elections:** The **gap between the expenses incurred in elections and legally permitted is increasing** over the years. It leads to all round **corruption** and contributes to the **generation of black money**.
- ➔ **Muscle Power:** Violence, pre-election intimidation, post- election victimization, riggings, booth capturing have become the tool in the hands of political supporters to win the elections. These are prevalent in many parts of the country (including Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra etc.) and slowly spreading throughout India.
- ➔ **Misuse of Government Machinery:** During election times, the party in power often inappropriately uses the **official machinery to promote the electoral prospects of its party candidates**, that gives an **unfair advantage to ruling party** leading to misuse of public funds.
 - ★ It takes different forms, such as **issue of advertisements at the cost of government and public exchequer** highlighting their achievements, use of government vehicles for canvassing etc.
- ➔ **Criminalisation of Politics and Politicization of Criminals:** Candidates with criminal records contest elections and get elected to the parliament, state legislatures and other representative bodies. Political parties on the other hand, tap criminals for fund and muscle power and in return provide them with political patronage and protection. This happens due to increasing nexus between politicians and criminals.
 - ★ According to the **Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR)**, 233 MPs in the current Lok Sabha are facing criminal charges.
- ➔ **Dummy Candidates in Political Parties:** In recent years there has been a **steady increase in the number of independent/non serious candidates** in elections with no intention of winning. These non-serious candidates are largely floated either to **cut sizeable portion of votes of rival candidates** or to have **additional physical force at polling station** and counting centers.
 - ★ The multiplicity of candidates causes inconvenience to election authorities in the management of elections and voters also feel difficulty in identifying the right candidates **affecting the sanctity of elections**.
- ➔ **Casteism:** To win support of different caste groups in their favour, many political parties determine policies, programme as well as the nomination of electoral candidates on caste considerations at all the levels. Therefore, candidates are selected not in terms of accomplishments, ability and merit but on the basis of caste, creed and community.



- ➔ **Communalism:** With the emergence of India as a secular state, **politics of communalism and religious fundamentalism** has led to **clashes and conflicts between secularist and communalist** in various states and regions of the country at times of election.
- ➔ **Influence of social media:** Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp have become central in election campaigning and have become key for political parties.
- ★ **Fake News:** Political fake stories or hoaxes are created on social media to deliberately misinform or deceive the voter with a purpose to either influence voter's views or push a political agenda. E.g., a **Wall Street Journal investigation in 2020** showed that Facebook had knowingly allowed hateful content from members of a political party in India to stay on its platform causing a serious threat to public life.
- ➔ **Low voter participation in elections:** Voter Participation is an essential barometer for the legitimacy of an electoral process. But nearly 40% of the Indian population does not cast their vote during elections due to a variety of reasons including lack of faith in the process as well as in political parties.

In Conversation!

How important is it to cast our vote in elections?



Vini: Hi Vinay! Who did you vote for in the last election?

Vinay: I didn't vote. Since the voting day was a holiday, I was out-of-station for some work. Infact, I never vote!

Vini: How can you skip voting!?

Vinay: What's the use of voting? In any case government works only for the poor and rich. The middle class is there to do hard work and pay taxes. Even votes of poor people are purchased through money or liquor these days.

Vini: I think it's important to vote in elections. And, it is our constitutional right to elect who we want, and the right to make the change.

Vinay: Yes, I know that it's our right. But, my vote will hardly count. Even if I don't vote, then what, others will vote. After all, what's the point in standing under the hot sun if my vote doesn't matter.

Vini: Every citizen's vote is counted in the polling process. If the people are equally divided between two candidates, one single vote can be a game-changer and a decisive factor.

Vinay: Yes Vini. You're right. But, I don't like any of the candidates! Whom should I vote for?

Vini: You can still vote for None of the Above (NOTA) option and voice your opinion.

Vinay: Yes, that is there. But I don't think that makes any difference. Government will still get formed and will remain corrupt as usual.

Vini: But if **you are not voting, then you lose the right of complaining as well.** Voting gives us the power to make governments accountable, and only after exercising your power, you can expect things to change.

Vinay: Yes Vini, I think you are right. Our vote is our voice and an opportunity to contribute to the common good. I will surely vote in the upcoming elections. Thank you!



WHAT REFORMS HAVE BEEN MADE BY GOVERNMENT FOR THE BETTERMENT OF ELECTORAL PROCESS?

Several steps were taken in recent times to ensure free and fair elections:

➔ Promoting Transparency:

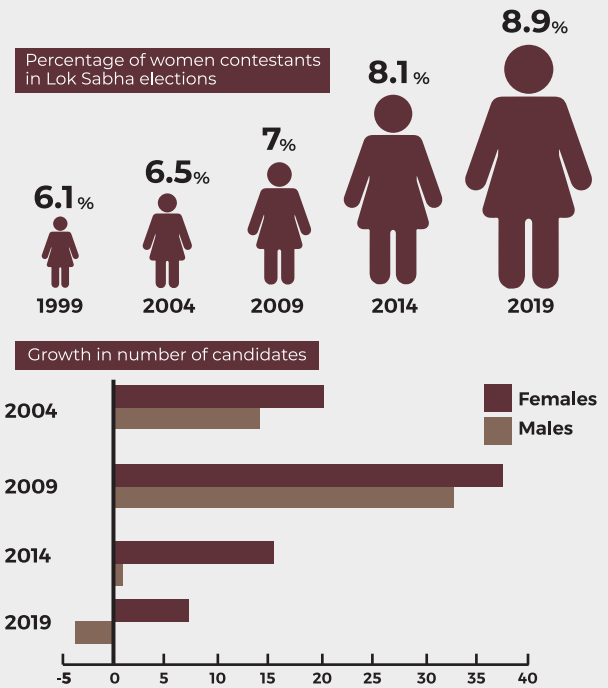
- ★ **Introducing electoral bonds** (2018) to ensure enhanced accountability, to defeat the growing menace of black money and promote transparency.
- ★ **Mandatory declaration of income sources:** In 2018, Supreme Court declared that candidates have to disclose their sources of income and that of their family members in order to qualify for contesting elections.
- ★ **Full disclosure:** In Union of India versus Association of Democratic Reforms 2002 case, Supreme Court directed that all the contesting candidates have to furnish all personal information, including the criminal record at the time of filing nomination papers.

➔ Increasing Voter Participation:

- ★ **Lowering of Voting age:** 61st Constitution Amendment Act, 1988 reduced the minimum age of voting in elections to the House of the People and Legislative Assemblies of States to 18 years from 21 years.
- ★ **Voting through postal ballot:** In 2013, the ECI decided to expand the ambit of postal ballot voting in the country to 6 new categories of voters.
 - Previously, only Indian staff in missions abroad and defence personnel in a limited way, could vote via postal ballots.
- ★ **Election Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021: Reforms to link electoral roll data with the Aadhaar ecosystem,** bring gender neutral provisions, and provides four qualifying dates for preparation or revision of electoral rolls.

More Women Are Contesting Election Now

A look at the growth in the number of women entering the political fray over the past 20 years



Can e-voting be an option in future?

A significant portion of the population is not able to exercise their vote as it is difficult or inconvenient for them to reach polling stations.

As a solution to this, the **Telangana government is implementing a first-of-its-kind e-voting or electronic voting solution** in the country using **Blockchain Technology**.

Developed by **Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (CDAC)**, India, it is currently being piloted in the Khammam district of Telangana.

Usage of Blockchain ensures that the **issue of fake IDs and duplication of voting is eliminated**. If this pilot project becomes successful, **voter participation could be significantly increased** at national, state and even local level elections (which are often outside the attention span of the voter).

➔ **Leveraging technologies to strengthen voting process:**

★ **Introducing Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) and Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) machines** to reduce electoral fraud and the costs of conducting elections.

★ **Introducing NOTA** option on EVM to enable electors who do not wish to vote for any of the candidates.

➔ **Preserving the sanctity of elections:**

★ **Enactment of Anti Defection Law** to prevent party hopping, and providing greater stability to the government.

★ **Increase in the number of proposers and the security deposit** to prevent non-serious candidates.

★ **Prosecution of politicians:** In 2014, Supreme court directed to set up special courts to dispose off the criminal cases against lawmakers and politicians so that trials are expedited and completed in one year.

➔ **Creating a level playing field:**

★ **Model code of conduct:** In 1996, Election Commission enforced the model code of conduct for the first time. This includes restrictions on new project announcements, inaugurations or financial grants by ruling party, monopoly on government infrastructure, ban on exploiting sentiments of the voters on basis of caste, religion, language etc.

■ **cVIGIL App:** It was launched by ECI to enable citizens to report on violation of election code of conduct.

★ **Ceiling on election expenditure:** ECI has put a cap on individual candidates' spending. For the Lok Sabha elections, it is Rs. 50 – 70 lakh (depending on the state they are contesting the Lok Sabha seat from), and Rs. 20 – 28 lakh for an assembly election.

★ **Restriction on exit polls:** The EC issued a statement before the 2019 Lok Sabha elections that exit poll results could be broadcast only after the final phase of the elections

were over. This was done **to avoid prospective voters being misguided or prejudiced** in any manner.

Aadhaar-voter ID linking and the major concerns over the move

The project of mapping Aadhaar with voter ID cards or EPIC (Electoral Photo ID Card) to 'purify' electoral rolls was started in 2015, with the **National Electoral Roll Purification and Authentication Programme (NER-PAP)**. The fallout of the project was seen in 2018 Telangana Assembly elections, when lakhs of voters were unable to cast their votes as their names were missing from the electoral rolls without obtaining informed consent.

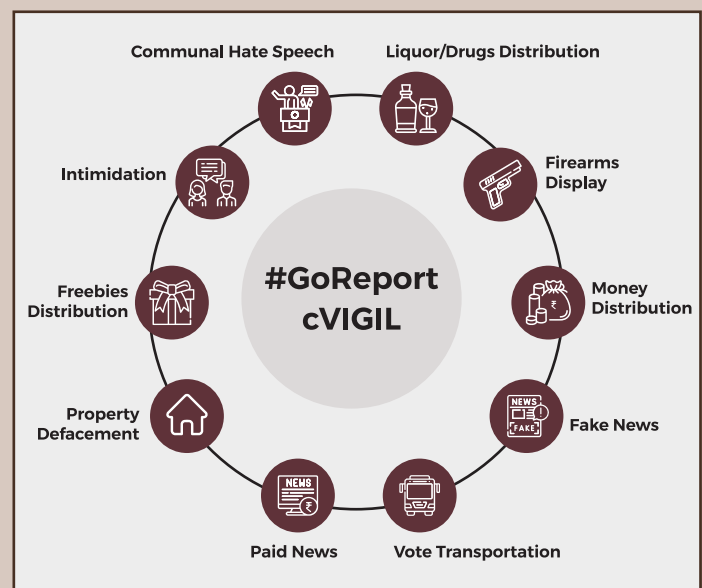
Some of the concerns associated with usage of Aadhaar in the bill are as follows:

➔ Aadhaar is **not meant to be a citizenship proof** but only a **digital identity for all residents**. Residence of 182 days can make even a non-citizen eligible for an Aadhaar ID.

➔ **Aadhaar was only meant to be an identity proof but not an address proof.** In contrast, the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960 (formulated under RPA 1950) clearly stipulates address to be a key index for electoral rolls.

➔ There are **no publicly available audit reports** either on the efficacy of Aadhaar deduplication or on the authenticity of the Aadhaar database.

➔ Maintenance of the voters' lists is a primary responsibility of the ECI, which is an independent constitutional body, whereas Aadhaar is a government instrument and UIDAI is under government control. Since the **ECI has no control on either enrolment or deduplication in Aadhaar**, it appears inappropriate and a **potential conflict of interest** to use Aadhaar for electoral rolls.



➔ **International cooperation outreach:** ECI, has been making incremental efforts to promote bilateral and multilateral cooperation generating innovative ideas and practices to respond to the emerging challenges in election management.

★ For instance, The Indo-US Joint Declaration signed in 2010 also pledged to explore cooperation in support of strengthening election organization and management in other interested countries.

The above measures although commendable remain inadequate. Even after decades of Independence, India continues to be haunted by issues including gender inequality, illiteracy, lack of progress in research and innovation among others. With such issues still prevalent, there is an urgent need for quality public representatives to emerge from an inclusive democracy.

Can Elections be Credible During a Pandemic?

The main objective of electoral processes is to deliver credible electoral results. **Credible elections are characterized by inclusiveness, transparency, accountability, and competitiveness.**

The COVID pandemic is causing an unprecedented disruption in elections worldwide. To ensure the credibility of electoral processes while maintaining public health, **various steps are being taken by ECI** such as restricting the number of voters per booth, providing postal ballot facility, restricting door to door campaigning etc. At the same time political parties and civil society organizations are conceiving new ways such as **virtual campaigning on social media** to engage voters.

However, despite these efforts, **low voter turnout, unequal campaign conditions, and limited domestic or international observation** threaten to cast a shadow on the legitimacy of elections.

The unfolding **political consequences of these widespread disruptions** and new innovations are enormous such as:

➔ **Undermining the Legitimacy:** Lack of public events dampens voter participation, giving incumbents an edge. At the same time, reduced voter turnout could erode the legitimacy and governing mandate of the person/party getting elected.

➔ **Results are not truly representative:** Unfair restrictions are placed on certain segments of the society such as older age groups or those with underlying health conditions leading to their uneven participation.

➔ **Absence of a level playing field:** An election in the time of a pandemic could advantage the incumbent, who may benefit from leading a major crisis response, over the opposition candidates, who may have fewer resources but also need to adjust to new campaign methods.

➔ **Impediments on Transparency:** Conventionally, elections are monitored by international observer groups to ensure the integrity of electoral processes and verify that they meet international standards. The absence of international observers due to COVID restrictions places greater importance on the role of domestic election observers such as civil societies. However, their monitoring is also presently restricted to the polling stations' implementation of public safety measures.



So, should elections be postponed during COVID times?

A decision to postpone an election **suspends political rights**, and as such **undermines the social contract** between a government and its citizens.

The move is further being criticised on the grounds that incumbents are using delays to prolong and further consolidate their power.

What is the middle path?

In the current context, following things need to be taken into consideration while conducting elections:

- ➔ **Governments need to provide additional budgetary support** for the effective administration of elections.
- ➔ **Electoral bodies must invest in voter education campaigns** with the support of civil society, outlining both public safety measures and changes to registration and voting methods.
- ➔ **Engage in more robust recruitment and training efforts** for poll workers and domestic observers and avoid introducing untested technology wherever possible.
- ➔ **Learning from Best Practices:** New Zealand for instance provides alternative voting arrangements like online telephone dictation voting service; proxy voting etc. South Korea on the other hand established special polling stations for COVID patients, process of postal voting etc.

Elections can be credible during a pandemic, and while a delay may assure a more credible outcome, it is not a guarantee. The above investments are therefore essential for reducing the pandemic's disruptive impact on elections and helping Indian democracy stay on track in this unusually challenging time.

WHAT SHOULD BE THE ROADMAP TO ACHIEVE THE VISION OF FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS?

- ➔ **Participatory democracy:** There is an urgent need to overcome hinderances to voter participation like youth indifference, gender gap, urban apathy and enrolling the weaker sections.
- ➔ **Youth participation: Increase the representation of youth in the institutional structures** of electoral management bodies (EMBs) to enhance youth participation in policymaking and promote the institutional mainstreaming of youth in the electoral administration etc.
- ★ **Women representation:** Women representation in Lok Sabha has never touched 12 percent since Independence despite the fact that they constitute 48 percent of India's population according to Census 2011 data.

State funding of elections

The State funding of political parties or their election campaigns has been the subject-matter of debate by political scientists as well as the leaders of political parties in several countries of the world from time to time.

The question is often asked whether the state should subsidize directly or indirectly the funding of elections or monetarily contribute to policy development of political parties and assist in the development of their manifesto policies. Below, are the arguments in favour of and against it.

Favour	Against
Limits the influence of wealthy people and rich mafias, thereby purifying the election process.	Encourages status quo that keeps the established party or candidate in power and makes it difficult for the new parties.
Demand for internal democracy in party, representations of women, weaker section can be encouraged.	Increases the distance between political leaders and ordinary citizens as the parties do not depend on the citizens for mobilization of party fund.

- The bill to reserve 33 percent seats for women in Parliament and state legislatures should be expedited.

➔ **Financial transparency:** There should be a **ceiling on expenses** that can be incurred by political parties during the election period. They should maintain proper accounts and such accounts should be audited by auditors recommended and approved by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG), and made available for the information of the public.

★ **Public scrutiny:** Political parties should be open for public scrutiny under the provisions of the Right to Information Act, 2005.

★ **State funding:** The Report “Ethics in Governance” of the Second Administrative Reforms Commission recommended that a system for partial state funding should be introduced to reduce the scope of illegitimate and unnecessary funding of expenditure for elections.

➔ **Inner party democracy:** There should be intra-party democracy in the political parties and candidates should be selected democratically. This may include mandatory secret ballot voting for all elections for all inner party posts and selection of candidates by the registered members, overseen by Election Commission of India.

★ **Regulatory framework:** The 1999 Law Commission Report strongly recommended the introduction of a regulatory framework for **governing the internal structures and inner party democracy** of the political parties. Even, a draft Political Parties (Registration and Regulation of Affairs) Act, 2011 was submitted to the Ministry of Law.

➔ **Decriminalization of Politics:** Election Commission proposed to disqualify candidates accused of an offence punishable by imprisonment of 5 years or more even when trial is pending, given that the Court has framed charges against the person.

➔ **Adjudication of election dispute:** The National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (NCRWC), recommended that special election benches designated for election petitions only should be formed in the High Court.

★ **Election Tribunals** can also be constituted at the regional level under article 329B of the Constitution to ensure speedy disposal of election petitions and disputes within a stipulated period of six months.

➔ **Review anti defection law:** The NCRWC recommend that the power to decide on questions as to disqualification on ground of defection should vest in the Election Commission instead of in the Chairman or Speaker of the House concerned.

Ordinary citizens cannot be expected to contribute much to the political parties. Therefore, the parties depend upon funding by corporate and rich individuals. This ensures a level playing field for poorer political parties.	Political parties tend to become organs of the state, rather than being parts of the civil society.
Increases transparency in party and candidate finance, thereby helps to curb corruption.	Taxpayers are forced to support even those political parties or candidates, whose view they do not subscribe to.



➔ Conduct and Better Management of Elections:

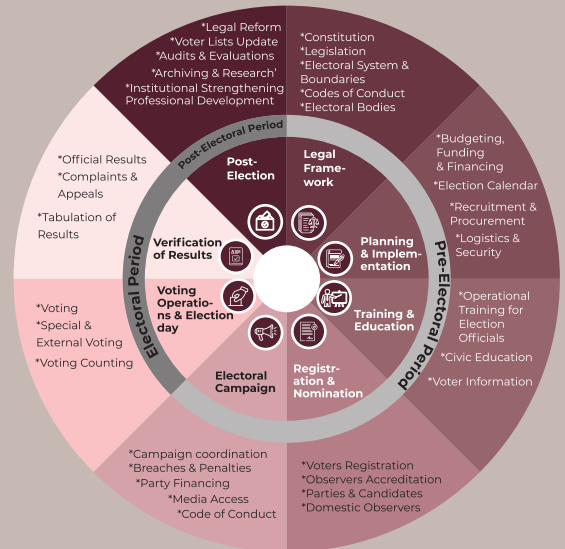
- ★ **Restriction on opinion polls:** The Election Commission had recommended that there should be provision in the law putting restrictions on publishing the results of opinion polls and exit polls for a specified period during the election process.
 - In 2010, restrictions were imposed only on exit polls through the introduction of Section 126(A) in the RPA, 1951.
- ★ **Powers to ECI:** ECI should be authorized to de-register parties which do not contest elections as there are more than 1600 political parties registered with the ECI, however, only a few ever contest elections.
 - **The authority for recognition and de-recognition of parties** and for appointing the body of auditors should be the Election Commission. The decisions of the ECI should be subject to review only by the Supreme Court of India.
 - **Budget of ECI** should be “charged” on **Consolidated fund of India**.
- ★ **Introduction of Totalizer machines** to prevent disclosure of polling patterns in a polling booth.

Making the Electoral Process Sustainable

Electoral Cycle Approach: A valuable learning tool for electoral officials

The electoral cycle approach was developed by **International IDEA (Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance), European Commission and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** as a visual planning and training tool that could help development agencies, providers of electoral assistance and electoral officials to understand the cyclical nature of the various challenges faced in electoral processes.

It is a key instrument to **facilitate understanding of the interdependence** of different electoral activities, helping **Electoral Management Body (EMB) to plan and allocate resources for specific activities** in a more-timely manner. In particular, it places an important **emphasis on the post-electoral period** as a significant moment of institutional growth, and not just as a vacuum between elections.



In Conversation!

Does India Need to Change its Electoral Voting System?



Vinay: Hello Vini!

Vini: Hey!

Vinay: You know after reading through all the issues above and the dire need for electoral reforms, I strongly believe that the root cause of the problem lies in the type of voting system in India. The first-past-the-post (FPTP) system of voting should be changed now. What do you think?

Vini: No Vinay, I don't think so. It is considered to be the simplest electoral system. It is easy to understand, the choices for the voters are clear, and the counting is also simple and straightforward. And for a country like India, it is the most viable model to follow.

Vinay: But you know the model is fraught with serious problems. In 2014 general elections for example, the Bahujan Samaj Party—which was the third-largest party in terms of the national vote share, did not get a single seat in the Lok Sabha. On the other hand, despite winning just 3.9 percent of the votes, the Trinamool Congress won 34 seats!

This system **results in the lack of legitimacy of political parties**. Also, it rewards parties who target and treat preferentially specific segments of the electorate, rather than **the majority of electors**. It therefore **promotes divisive electoral strategies and encourages parties to field tainted candidates**.

Vini: Yes, that happens! But I still believe that there is no alternative system of elections suitable to India.

Vinay: You know **some critics advocate for the proportional representation (PR) system of voting** in which every party gets a share of seats proportional to the share of votes it secures. It is in fact the most popular model around the world as per International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.

Vini: Yes, but the system requires all candidates to be nominated by a political party and does not allow for independent candidates. The system guarantees that influential party members get easily elected. In such a system, candidates would perhaps focus on wooing their party leaders instead of the voters.

Vinay: Yes, that is true. I think a mixed model that combines the advantages of both systems can be of consideration! What do you think?

Vini: What is the mixed model? Does any country follow this?

Vinay: Yes! In 1949, **Germany adopted the mixed-member proportional system** of voting. Every voter casts two votes—one for a candidate in the constituency and the other for a party. A slightly different model known as Parallel System is also in use in Nepal. Here, voters effectively participate in two separate elections for a single chamber using two different systems.

Vini: That's fascinating!

Vinay: Yes, but experts say that these model will require a change in the strength of the parliament, or the demarcation of constituencies for applicability in India.

Vini: India could invent its own mixed model, which would fit its political and cultural specificities. After all what matters most is that electoral systems ensure the will of the voters and the legitimacy of the leaders.



CONCLUSION

Abraham Lincoln's idea and philosophy of Democracy i.e. **Democracy is the government of the people, by the people and for the people**, can be translated to reality only through voting.

And electoral reforms are necessary for healthy democracy, and establishment of a responsible government.

But at the same time, it needs to be understood that mere periodic holding of elections is not enough. The underlying democratic foundations have to be strengthened by reformation of the political system in India if the larger societal expectations from India's democracy are to be realized.

TOPIC AT A GLANCE

Word Election comes from the Latin word 'eligere', means 'to choose, select or pick'. Election is the process of voting to choose an individual at regular intervals for holding public office through free will of the people in a representative democracy.

ROLE OF ELECTIONS IN A DEMOCRACY

- ➔ **Make responsible and accountable government**
- ➔ **Change of leadership**
- ➔ **Participation of political parties**
- ➔ **Continuation of democracy**
- ➔ **Symbolic of Nationalism and Patriotism** by bringing focus on common fate.
- ➔ **Self-corrective system** by keeping check on ruling parties who are made to consider the demands of the public.
- ➔ **Facilitate social and political integration** by linking citizens to each other and thereby confirm the viability of the polity.
- ➔ **Taking ownership of the democratic process** through expressing partisanship and alienation from the political community.

ISSUES ASSOCIATED WITH ELECTION PROCESS IN INDIA

- ➔ **Financing of elections**
- ➔ **Muscle power**
- ➔ **Misuse of Government Machinery**
- ➔ **Criminalisation of Politics and Politicization of Criminals**
- ➔ **Dummy Candidates in Political Parties**
- ➔ **Casteism**
- ➔ **Communalism**
- ➔ **Influence of Social-Media**

REFORMS FOR THE BETTERMENT OF ELECTORAL PROCESS

- ➔ **Promoting Transparency**
 - ★ Electoral Bonds
 - ★ Mandatory declaration of income sources
- ➔ **Increasing Voter Participation**
 - ★ Lowering of Voting age
 - ★ Voting through postal ballot
 - ★ Election Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021
- ➔ **Leveraging technologies to strengthen voting process**
 - ★ Electronic Voting Machines
 - ★ NOTA option
- ➔ **Preserving the sanctity of elections**
 - ★ Enactment of Anti Defection Law
 - ★ Prosecution of politicians
- ➔ **Creating a level playing field**
 - ★ Model code of conduct
 - ★ Ceiling on election expenditure
 - ★ Restriction on exit polls

ROADMAP TO ACHIEVE THE VISION OF FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS

- ➔ **Participatory democracy:** Increase the representation of youth and women in the institutional structures of EMBs.
- ➔ **Financial transparency** by incorporating public scrutiny and partial state funding.
- ➔ **Intra-party democracy** in the political parties and candidates should be selected democratically.
- ➔ **Decriminalization of Politics**
- ➔ **Adjudication of election dispute**
- ➔ **Review anti defection law**
- ➔ **Conduct and Better Management of Elections** by putting restriction on opinion poll, proliferation of candidates, introducing the totalizer machines etc.