



Study of main issues in electoral politics in India and major reforms since 2002

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Introduction : The EC's proposals could broadly be divided into three categories. One, reforms to cleanse the electoral system (debaring criminally-tainted politicians from contesting, checking money power, empowering the EC to deregister defunct and dubious parties); two, reforms to make the EC stronger and more independent (appointment of election commissioners through a collegium, their elevation to CEC on the criterion of seniority and their protection from removal only through impeachment as available to the CEC and; three, reforms to make the electoral system more efficient (like the introduction of totaliser machines to prevent disclosure of polling patterns in a polling booth).

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Main issues in electoral politics of india –

The elections at present are not being held in ideal conditions because of the enormous amount of money power and muscle power needed for winning the elections. In addition there are many other factors on the basis of which election is fought like poverty, casteism, communalism, criminalization of politics, poll violence, booth capturing, non-serious independent candidates, unemployment, etc

Money power– In each constituency, a prospective candidate has to spend millions of rupees towards campaigning, transport, publicity etc .The gap between the expenses incurred and legally permitted is increasing over the years.

Muscle Power– use of Violence, pre-election intimidation, booth capturing are mainly the products of muscle power and are prevalent in many parts of the country like Bihar, Western UP etc. and is slowly spreading to south India.

Criminalisation of politics and politicization of criminals– are like two sides of the same coin and are mainly responsible for the manifestation of muscle power at elections.



Politicization of criminals: criminals enter into politics to gain influence and ensure that cases against them are dropped or not proceeded with. Also, The political parties field criminals in elections for fund and in return provide them with political patronage and protection

Misuse of Government Machinery: It is generally complained that the government in power at the time of election misuse official machinery to improve their candidates election prospects . The misuse of official machinery takes different forms, such as use of government vehicles for canvassing ,advertisements at the cost of government and public exchequer highlighting their achievements, disbursements out of the discretionary funds at the disposal of the ministers, etc. which gives an unfair advantage to the ruling party at the time of elections.

Non serious Independent candidates -.Non-serious candidates are largely floated by serious candidates either to cut sizeable portion of votes of rival candidates or to split the votes on caste lines or to have additional physical force at polling station and counting centers

Casteism: there are cases of certain castes lending strong support to particular political parties. Thus political parties make offers to win different caste groups in their favor and caste groups also try to pressurize parties to give tickets for its members elections, . Caste based politics are eroding the „unity“ principle in the name of regional autonomy. Thus caste as become a prime factor in winning elections and Candidates are selected not in terms of accomplishments, ability and merit but on the appendages of caste, creed and community

Communalism: the politics of communalism and religious fundamentalism during post independence has led to a number of separate movements in various states and regions of the country. Communal polarization has posed a serious threat to the Indian political ethos of pluralism, parliamentarianism, secularism and federalism.

Lack of Moral Values in Politics: Gandhian values of selflessness service to the people and self sacrifice have been destroyed systematically over the years and both the politicians and political parties have lost their credibility,.

Reforms since 2002



- In 2002, SC directed that all the contesting candidates will have to furnish all personal information, including the criminal record at the time of filing nomination papers
- In 2013, SC held that under Sec 8(4) of RPA, 1951 – A legislator shall be disqualified automatically from being a member of the house, if he is convicted and sentenced for 2 or more years of imprisonment in a court of law < Appeal to higher court will not provide relief to legislator, which was the case earlier >
- In another judgment in 2013, SC gave the citizens – ‘Right to negative vote‘ during elections, which came to be known as NOTA (None of the above)
- In 2014, SC directed the trial court to dispose off the criminal cases involving MPs and MLAs/MLCs within 1 year, after the charges are framed by court of law
- So, let’s revisit the recent issues related to electoral reforms, which were making headlines in the country in the recent past:
- State Funding of Elections : It basically means that govt. extending financial assistance (cash/kind) to political parties (partly/fully) for contesting elections. The objective is to control and eliminate outside pressure over govt. policies and functioning by vested interests. It will also help in controlling the flow of unaccounted money and muscle power during elections and control the levels of corruption in public life.
- Compulsory Voting : The voting in elections to Lok Sabha and Assembly are optional in India, but it is compulsory in 33 countries of the world including Brazil, Australia, Egypt, etc
- The Gujarat Local Authorities Law (Amendment) Act 2009, has made voting compulsory in local bodies election.
- Bringing Political Party under RTI Act : In 2013, Central Information Commission (CIC) held that National Political Parties (NPP) are public authorities within the meaning of Sec 2(h) of RTI Act and directed them to appoint public information officer to provide necessary information as required by the citizens. However, all the 6 NPP had defied the direction of CIC on the ground that they are not public authorities within the meaning of RTI Act.



- Financial Restriction on Spending : The basic rationale behind imposing the official limits on expenditure is to provide a level playing field. This is criticized as the resources are limited, candidates are not able to convey their message and thus voters are not able to make informed choice. The bigger problem is that candidates rely almost completely on unaccounted cash from undisclosed donors. This also negates the transparency initiatives of the EC.
- Voting Rights for Prisoner's : According to a SC judgment, prisoner's are second-class citizens and therefore it is necessary to exclude their polluting influence from the sanctity of democratic process. It is criticized on the account that there is no-offence/ sentence based classification. It does not distinguish between prisoners, under-trials and those in lawful custody.
- Use of Aadhaar : The Aadhaar no. has the potential to resolve the issue of migration and thus avoiding duplication < It makes possible to enrol a person in one polling station and simultaneously remove his name from a different polling station. Currently, this process is very cumbersome, giving rise to multiple voter cards for a single person
- Paid News : It is basically the commercialization of news content for revenue generation by print/electronic media. It is essentially a advertisement which is disguised as professional news and published in media with the purpose of misleading the general public. EC wants the paid news to be made electoral offence with not less than 2 years of imprisonment so that such individuals are disqualified from contesting elections.

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