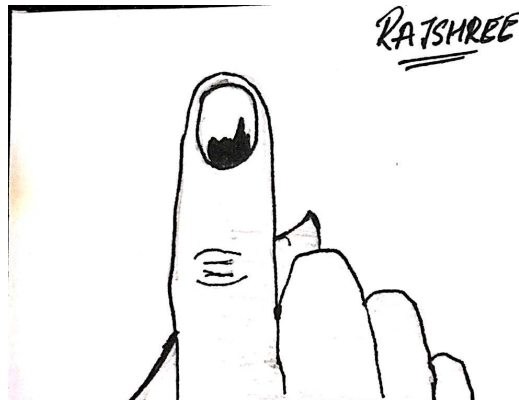


Experts Speak

THE IMPERATIVES OF ELECTORAL REFORMS IN INDIA

Concept Note

One of the bedrocks of a democratic polity is the conduct of free and fair periodic elections. India being the largest democracy in the world with 900 million voters casting their votes in one million polling stations to choose among 9,000 candidates from 464 political parties for 540 seats in the legislature is undoubtedly a daunting task.¹ In the process, many challenges are faced. Keeping in mind the challenges and issues that electoral system in India has faced over the years, in December 2016, the ECI itself has recommended “certain changes that need to be taken up expeditiously to amend certain provisions of law.”²

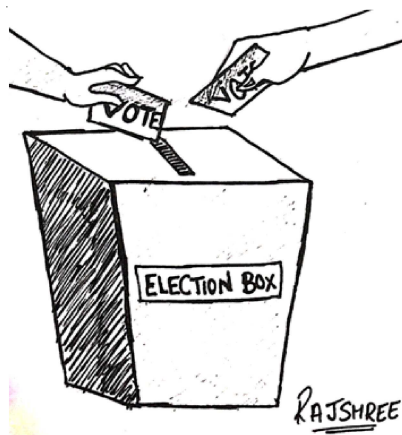


1. Manveena Suri and Swati Gupta, “The land of a million polling stations: India’s general election by the numbers”, <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/02/16/asia/india-election-numbers-intl/index.html>, 11 March 2019.
2. Election Commission of India, “Proposed Election Reforms”, <https://eci.gov.in/files/file/9236-proposed-election-reforms/>, December 2016.

During the 17th Lok Sabha election (2019) process, serious questions have been raised regarding the autonomy or independence of the Election Commission of India (ECI), its work ethics, and procedural challenges it faces in smooth conduct of the voting process. Many, therefore, propagate to initiate swiping reforms in the electoral process, methods, expenses, code of conduct, and the institution at large. If the challenges remain unattended, the trust and confidence of citizens in electoral system of the country can be affected.

The *Liberal Studies* journal invited experts in the domain to ponder over the imperatives and contours of electoral reforms needed in India at this juncture. **Dr Vivek Mishra** and **Ambar Ghosh** argue that despite palpable success in keeping the elements of procedural democracy intact, including the perpetual election cycle, Indian democracy is replete with a plethora of impediments which is indiscernibly enervating the substance that a democratic project entails. One such glaring shortcoming is the lack of internal democratic functioning of the political parties in India. They are doubtful if mere legal regulatory framework would be a sufficient condition to bring about a seismic transformation in the working of the political parties in India. As they rightly conclude, only when the electorate will be conscious enough to understand that democracy is much more than just passively voting in elections at periodic intervals, a holistic democratization of the political landscape in general and functioning of the political parties in particular would be possible.

Dr Shreesh Pathak, on the other hand, categorically views that the ‘election process is not a selection process’. In the selection process, a candidate must fulfill the eligibility criteria set by the selection authority, but in an election people elect their representatives as that suit to their needs at that time. But unfortunately election is slowly being converted as a big manufacturing unit and the political parties have converted themselves as election machines.



Given the magnitude and intensity of loopholes and challenges affecting the electoral process, India, now, cannot afford waiting for the any electoral reforms. Being such a vast country with such magnificent demographic diversity, India may not be able to hold the democratic values intact in the future, without making some serious efforts for bringing about electoral reforms.