

Electoral Reforms in India: An Analysis of Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract:

Electoral reforms are a must for ensuring the integrity, fairness, inclusiveness and legitimacy of democratic governance. India has become the world's largest electoral democracy and has created a sophisticated electoral management system, characterized by universal adult suffrage, an independent Election Commission, electronic voting machines, voter registration drives, rules for candidate disclosures, and judicial oversight of the electoral process. Indian elections, however, still have significant issues including criminalization of the political, opaque political finance, over spending in political campaigns, misuse of state resources, lack of democracy within political parties, misinformation, distrust of technology, underrepresentation of women and marginalised groups, and pressure on institutional independence. This paper reviews the electoral reforms in India till October 2024. It reviews the history of electoral reform, looks at the challenges and assesses new opportunities following the Lok Sabha 2024 elections. The paper is based on the secondary data collected from Election Commission of India, Supreme Court Judgements, PRS Legislative Research, Association for Democratic Reforms, and other reliable sources. It believes that India's electoral systems have a good administrative strength and requires further legal, financial, technological and institutional upgradation. The Supreme Court in 2024 had given a huge opportunity for transparent political finance after dropping the electoral bond scheme. Likewise, discussion about the process of verification of EVM–VVPATs, simultaneous elections, candidate criminalisation and appointments to the Election Commission reveals a need for reforms that bring greater efficiency and public confidence. The paper calls for on-going electoral reform, which should be centered on transparency, accountability, inclusiveness and digital oversight and independence of electoral administration.

Keywords: electoral reforms, India, Election Commission, electoral bonds, EVM, VVPAT, criminalisation, political finance, democracy

Introduction

The core of representative democracy is elections. The citizens select their governments, hold political leaders to account and take part in public decision-making through the electoral process. Elections are of special importance in India due to the size of the state and its diversity, federal structure and social complexity. India has elections held for the Lok Sabha, state legislative assemblies, local bodies, the President and Vice-President and several by-elections. A large electoral system demands confidence, transparency, legal rules and good institutions.

India has progressed in the field of electoral administration to a great extent since independence. From the inception of the republic, universal adult franchise was adopted where every adult citizen, irrespective of gender, caste, class, religion and education is entitled to vote. It was an important democratic triumph. With time, the Election Commission of India made a few changes, including the introduction of voter identity cards, the use of electronic voting machines, voter-verifiable paper audit trails, model code enforcement, and expenditure monitoring and voter awareness programmes. These changes enabled India to hold elections on a mammoth scale.

But the demand for electoral reform has been constant. Regular elections are not the only aspect of electoral democracy. Elections should also be free, fair, transparent, inclusive and competitive. Democracy is undermined when candidates are elected due to influence of money, muscle, misinformation or unequal access to political funding. Electoral reform, thus, is not an isolated event, but an ongoing effort to improve electoral laws, institutions and practices.

These issues have come into stark relief during the 2024 Lok Sabha polls. At the start of the polls, India had the world's largest electorate over 96.88 crore registered voters (Election Commission of India, 2024a). The actual poll turnout at polling stations was 65.79% with mass electoral participation continuing as a significant feature (Election Commission of India, 2024b). Meanwhile, there were a number of debates and controversies over the election. These encompassed topics regarding electoral bonds, verification of EVM-VVPAT, election expenditure, misinformation, hate speech, violation of Model Code of Conduct, independence of the Election Commission, representation of women and criminalisation of politics.

This paper examines electoral reform in India in terms of opportunities and challenges so far as October 2024 is concerned. The central thesis is that although India has developed a competent electoral management system, greater reforms on political finance, selection of candidates, party regulation, technology transparency and institutional independence are necessary to improve the quality of electoral democracy.

Methodology

Qualitative and descriptive research method with secondary data sources are used in this paper. The study is based on documents, statutes, court rulings, election results, committee reports, and analysis of policy. They are important sources like Election Commission of India, Press Information Bureau, Association for Democratic Reforms, PRS Legislative Research, Supreme Court judgments, Law Commission of India and reports on simultaneous elections.

The paper does not carry out primary field research. It instead brings together existing data and literature to capture the trends in reform and review policy issues. Entries close on 20th October 2024. As such, any changes post October 2024 are not taken into account.

The analysis has been structured around six key themes: the evolution of Electoral Reform in the past, the Institutional Function of the Election Commission, Criminalisation of politics, Political Finance, Election Technology and Opportunities for the future. The paper contains tables, graph data and image suggestions for the academic presentation.

Conceptual understanding of Electoral reforms

Electoral reform is a change in the laws, rules, institutions and practices that enhance the fairness, transparency and effectiveness of elections. Electoral reform can consist of electoral registration,

campaign finance, eligibility of candidates, party regulation, electoral technology, voting dates, voting dispute resolution, regulation and representation of marginalised groups, among other aspects.

In a democracy, the purpose of electoral reform is three-fold. First, they safeguard citizens' right to freely choose their election. Second, they guarantee fair and non-monopoly political competition, that is, competition not manipulated or distorted by money or violence. Thirdly, they boost public confidence in democratic institutions. Even if people vote formally, democracy has lost its legitimacy if voters think that elections are unfair.

Electoral reform may be of an administrative, legal, technological or political nature. Administrative reforms are related to the improvements in the electoral rolls, the management of polling stations and the education of voters. Legal reforms encompass constitutional, Representation of the People Act, Conduct of Election Rules and political finance laws. Technological reforms: EVMs, VVPATs, digital voter services, digital monitoring of the voting process. Political reforms relate to internal party democracy, ethical campaigning practices and voluntary transparency practices within parties.

The debate on electoral reforms in India is influenced by the conflict between 'scale' and 'quality'. India has a very successful electoral system which can elect hundreds of millions of citizens, but the quality of the election is subject to the ability to contest elections, whether there is fair and accurate information to voters, and whether parties compete fairly.

Electoral reforms have undergone significant changes over time in India

It was a historic experiment in democracy for India in the first general elections of 1951–52. At that time, the country had high illiteracy, limited infrastructure, deep social inequalities and massive administrative challenges. However, the timely and efficient functioning of elections had made democracy an integral part of the Indian republic. The Election Commission has been established under the provisions of Article 324 of the Constitution which confers upon it the authority of superintendence, direction and control of elections.

In the early decades, the reforms took place primarily on the aspect of organising elections, compiling electoral registers and managing the polling. As the years passed challenges arose. As money power increased, booth capturing, criminalisation and electoral malpractice put pressure on for more robust reforms. One important administrative change was the adoption of electronic voting machines. EVMs were incrementally scaled up and started to gain greater acceptance in general elections. The subsequent inclusion of VVPs was to be a measure of voter confidence and provide a paper slip to enable voters to check their votes.

There were electoral reforms proposed by several committees/commissions. Various committees such as the Goswami Committee, the Indrajit Gupta Committee, the Law Commission, the Election Commission and the Second Administrative Reforms Commission discussed various issues relating to electoral reform. The Law Commission, in its 255th Report on Electoral Reforms, recommended a comprehensive package of reforms to various aspects of political finance, candidate disclosure, criminalisation, paid news, opinion polls and strengthening the Election Commission (Law Commission of India, 2015). The recommendation indicates how debates over reform have been ongoing for decades, but have been only partially implemented.

Judicial intervention has been a significant factor as well. The Supreme Court caught up with the requirements for candidate disclosure, affirmed the voters' right to know a candidate's background, and affirmed key principles of electoral transparency. The Court in *Lily Thomas v. Union of India* struck down

the protection, which enabled the legislators to sit in an elected assembly after they had been convicted (Lily Thomas v. Union of India, 2013). People's Union for Civil Liberties v. Union of India (2013) informed the Court of the significance of the choice of the voters and the introduction of NOTA option. The Court's verdict in Association for Democratic Reforms v. Union of India, 2024, on electoral bonds further empowered the electorates' right to information in political financing.

Table 1- Major Electoral Reforms and Reform Debates in India

Period / year	Reform or development	Main significance
1950	Establishment of Election Commission under Article 324	Created constitutional authority for election management
1951	Representation of the People Act	Provided legal framework for elections
1990s–2000s	Expansion of EVM use	Improved speed and administrative efficiency of voting/counting
2002–2003	Candidate disclosure rules after Supreme Court intervention	Strengthened voter right to know
2013	NOTA introduced after Supreme Court decision	Expanded voter choice
2013	Lily Thomas judgment	Immediate disqualification after conviction
2019	Wider use of VVPAT verification	Strengthened audit and confidence mechanism
2023	CEC and EC Appointment Act	Created statutory appointment process but raised independence concerns
2024	Electoral bonds struck down	Major reform opportunity for transparent political finance
2024	EVM–VVPAT judgment	Reaffirmed EVM system while ordering safeguards
2024	High-Level Committee report on simultaneous elections	Opened debate on “One Nation, One Election”

Role of the Election Commission of India

The Election Commission of India is the central body to conduct election for Parliament, State Legislatures and offices of President and Vice-President. It has broad powers as per its constitutional powers in Article 324. The Election Commission's impartiality, efficiency and autonomy is crucial for the credibility of Indian elections.

The Election Commission has made a number of administrative changes. They comprise electoral photo identity cards, model polling stations, raising public awareness, special summary revisions of electoral registers, expenditure monitoring, observers and web-casting and digital provision of electoral services to voters. The Commission has issued updated electoral registers, in which 96.88 crore voters were registered, prior to the 2024 general elections (Election Commission of India, 2024a). Indians' elections are huge in their administration.

But now independence of the Election Commission has emerged as a priority reform. In *Anoop Baranwal v. Union of India*, the Supreme Court ruled that the executive cannot arbitrarily appoint the Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners, and established an interim body comprising the Prime Minister, the Leader of Opposition and the Chief Justice of India to select the office holders till Parliament makes a law (*Anoop Baranwal v. Union of India*, 2023). Later, the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners Act, 2023, was passed by Parliament. This is a law, according to which the President appoints the Speaker of the Lok Sabha (House of the People) based on the recommendations of a committee of three members, including the Prime Minister, a Union Cabinet Minister and the Leader of Opposition or the Leader of the largest opposition party in the Lok Sabha (PRS Legislative Research, 2023).

The government's involvement in the selection committee is controversial as it has two members in it. This could undermine the Commission's credibility, critics say. Supporters believe that the law offers a formal statutory process. The bigger question of reform is whether election commissioners should be picked from a more balanced commission that has less executive control.

Criminalisation of Politics

Criminalization of politics is one of the most serious problems of Indian democracy. It means that more candidates and elected leaders are charged with crime. This is a legal, moral and political issue. A weak public trust in legislatures is created when candidates with significant criminal records are elected.

Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) has analysed self-sworn affidavits of all the 543 candidates who won in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls. It said 251 winners (46%) had announced criminal cases, and 170 winners (31%) criminal cases of serious nature. The likelihood of winning was also higher for candidates who had declared and had criminal cases compared to those who had no criminal cases (Association for Democratic Reforms, 2024). This demonstrates that having a criminal record doesn't have to be a disadvantage to being elected.

There are many factors contributing to criminalisation. In order to get elected some candidates rely on muscle power, local dominance and patronage network. Political parties are inclined to nominate such candidates as they are deemed “winnable.” Voters might select them due to caste loyalty, community pressure, limited capacity of the state to provide services, and lack of good alternatives. The slow judicial process also means that cases can be outstanding for many years.

Reform of the law is needed, but it will be hard. As it stands, under the law, there are primarily two ways that candidates can be disqualified: after conviction, not after charges are framed. This ensures protection for the candidate against political cases that may be filed; however, it also means that potentially serious cases can be left pending as candidates continue to challenge. The Law Commission (2014) in its 244th Report had recommended for more stringent disqualification provisions in some serious cases in which charges have been framed by a court. Reform, however, has to be balanced with the democratic rights, presumption of innocence and need to purify politics.

One possible remedy might be fast-tracking courts for cases involving elected representatives, and making party disclosure of the underlying reasons for nominating candidates with criminal cases mandatory. Also, introducing penalties for false affidavits and incentives for public funding for parties that nominate criminal-free candidates.

Table 2- Criminalisation and Wealth in the 2024 Lok Sabha

Indicator	2024 Lok Sabha winners
Total winners analysed	543
Winners with declared criminal cases	251 / 46%
Winners with serious criminal cases	170 / 31%
Crorepati winners	504 / 93%
Winners with cases related to crimes against women	15
Winners with hate speech cases	43

Note. Based on ADR analysis of 2024 Lok Sabha winning candidates.

Political Finance and Electoral Bonds

Political finance is at the heart of electoral reform. But money is needed in elections, and money that is not regulated can corrupt democracy. Political parties require resources to campaign, organise, travel, advertise and communicate with voters. But when political funding is opaque, voters cannot be sure of who funds parties and if donors get anything in return for their funding, in terms of policies.

The electoral bond scheme, which was launched in 2018, enabled people and companies to buy bonds from the State Bank of India and then donate them to political parties. The stated goal was to decrease cash donations and move cash into the banking stream. But it was a scheme that safeguarded anonymity of donors from the general public. This could diminish the ability of voters to know what was going on and might give rise to unequal access to information about the donors, particularly if the government can gain access to donor information via the banking system, critics argued.

The Supreme Court in February 2024 declared the electoral bond scheme unconstitutional. In *Association for Democratic Reforms v. Union of India, 2024*, the Court ruled that anonymous political funding infringes on voters' right to information and transparency in political funding is crucial for democratic accountability. This was one of the most significant electoral reforms developments before the general elections in 2024.

This judgment provided a huge opportunity for political finance reform. But the banning of electoral bonds is insufficient. There is a need for a clear, transparent and comprehensive political funding system in India. A system should provide disclosure of large contributions, cap corporate contributions, disclose beneficial ownership, independent auditing of party funds, and tougher penalties for the Election Commission on third-party spending.

Campaign Expenditure and Money Power

The issue of money continues to be a problem in Indian elections. Candidates and parties are paying huge amounts on campaign mobilisation, workers, social media, advertising, campaign materials, rallies and transport. While there are caps on the expenditures that a candidate may make, the same type of restrictions does not exist for political party expenditures. This leaves a loophole in that money can be spent by parties to promote candidates.

Too much spending on the campaigns can lead to imbalanced competition. Candidates and parties with a lot of money to contribute have an extreme advantage. Poor candidates, independent candidates and small parties have difficulty competing. This is bad because electoral democracy is supposed to be based on popular support, not financial resources.

Association for Democratic Reforms' (2024) data on Lok Sabha winners for 2024 reveals that 93 percent of the winners were crorepatis, thereby reflecting the relationship between wealth and electoral success. It does not mean that good money is bad money, but rather that there are obstacles for ordinary citizens to access political power. Electoral costs can exclude the social majority, leading to the appearance of “electoral democracy”. When elections are too costly, they become socially exclusive, and the result is “electoral democracy”.

A number of proposals to reform the system are under consideration, such as partial state funding, tougher party expenditure disclosure, independent auditing of party expenditure, tracking political advertising on the internet, and tougher penalties on unrecorded spending and public disclosure of campaign consultants and third-party campaign organisations.

With EVMs, VVPATs and Technology Trust.

Technology has made Indian elections more efficient, but also raised new challenges to trust. In a country where a large portion of the population is unable to read and write, EVMs have helped to lower the number of votes that are cast invalid, to count votes more quickly and to make polling easier. According to the Election Commission of India, EVMs are a system made of two units, the control unit, and the balloting unit (Election Commission of India, 2024c). The VVPATs were added to enable voters to confirm that their vote was counted properly.

Nevertheless, some activists, citizens and parties continue to criticize the EVMs, despite all these protections. Issues such as transparency, source code, machine handling, storage, verification and public understanding are of concern. The Supreme Court, in its judgment on the EVM-VVPAT in 2024, did not call for a complete ban on paper ballots or the counting of all VVPATs but did take steps to protect the EVMs, including sealing of symbol loading units and verification of burnt memory/microcontroller in some cases after results (Association for Democratic Reforms v. Election Commission of India, 2024).

The question of reliability asked about the EVMs is not enough; it is whether the system is transparent enough to allow public trust. Election technology must be technically sound and must build public confidence. Hence, future reform should involve improved public education on how EVMs work, improved audit procedures, a clear chain of custody, and public verification data and independent technical review, which would be accessible under secure conditions.

The course is designed to answer these questions and more

Digital campaigning has transformed Indian Elections. Parties and candidates are leveraging social media platforms and groups, targeted ads, influencers, data analytics and campaign consultants. While digital tools have the potential to enhance voter outreach and political communication, they also pose potential risks of misinformation, hate speech, deepfakes, communal polarization, and secret campaign donations. Misinformation can affect the fairness of elections by misinforming voters. In the days leading up to an election, rumours about people, voting methods, precincts and election results can spread rapidly. This issue becomes more problematic with deepfakes and AI-generated video content. Existing election legislation was written with posters, speeches and print media in mind, and doesn't work as well with digital manipulation.

The Indian electoral system is inadequate. The electoral system of India is weak. It must involve whether or not political advertising should be required to be disclosed, whether or not there should be archives of political ads at the platform level, clear labelling for AI-generated content, speed of takedowns for harmful

misinformation, independent fact-checking partnerships, and improved policies regarding data privacy. Digital regulation, however, must not limit freedom of speech either. The goal should not be a censorship but transparency, accountability and protection from manipulation.

Model Code of Conduct & Misuse of State Resources

The Model Code of Conduct is an important instrument of the electoral law in India. It influences the actions taken by political parties and governments in the election period. It seeks to stop ruling parties exploiting state power, public goods, formal institutions or policy announcements for an unfair advantage in the elections.

The Model Code of Conduct is not a law, however. It relies very much on the esteem and trust of the public and the authority of the Election Commission. Some critics say enforcement is not always uniform and/or timely. In election years, incidences of community appeals, welfare announcements and misuse by elected officials come up, along with allegations of hate speech.

Reform may be the provision of statutory authority for specific aspects of the Model Code whilst allowing for administrative flexibility. Confidence in the public could be enhanced by clearer timelines for action, and public disclosure of complaints and reasoned orders from the Election Commission. Political parties should also be obligated to have internal ethics committees on the conduct of the parties.

Representation and Inclusion

Electoral reforms should also seek to tackle inclusion. A fair electoral system should allow for meaningful engagement of women, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, minorities, persons with disabilities, migrants, elderly and young voters. Steps taken to ensure inclusiveness of voters in the electoral roll, easy access to polling stations and awareness campaigns have helped India make progress in this regard. Prior to the 2024 election, the Election Commission emphasised on the progress made in registration of women, youth and persons with disabilities (Election Commission of India, 2024a).

Representation is still unequal, however. Women make up almost 50% of the electorate but are only represented as candidates and lawmakers by about 30%. The Constitution (One Hundred and Sixth Amendment) Act, 2023 mandates one-third reservation for women in Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, while the process of census and delimitation remains to be finalised for the implementation of the provision. Thus, as of October 2024, it is not yet a driver of legislative representation.

Accessible voting is needed for those with disabilities and old people. There are barriers for migrant workers as they can reside distant from their registered constituencies. There have been suggestions of remote voting – but this needs to be carefully protected. Electoral reform should allow voters to vote more easily, while maintaining voting privacy and security, and strengthen representation by constituency.

Concurrent Elections: opportunity or risk?

In 2024, the concept of simultaneous elections, also known as “One Nation One Election,” gained prominence as a subject of debate for reform. The former President, Ram Nath Kovind, is the Chairperson of the High-Level Committee, which was submitted its report in March 2024. The Committee suggested the synchronisation of Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections which were to be followed by elections to local bodies (High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections, 2024).

Supporters say simultaneous elections will help to save election cost, minimize the extra burden of the Model Code of Conduct, minimize administrative burden and enable the government to concentrate on governance. They also believe that they give rise to policy delays and ongoing campaigning.

Critics say that simultaneous elections can have a negative impact on federalism, diminish the significance of the state-level issues and favour larger national parties. They also highlight the fact that in India, the parliamentary system of government allows the government to fall before they have completed their term. Major constitutional changes would have to be made to allow for synchronisation of elections and complicated procedures for early dissolutions, no-confidence motions and mid-term elections.

Hence, special care should be taken when conducting simultaneous elections. It can provide administration benefit, but not undermine federal democracy or voter choice. The autonomy of the State and the accountability of the Parliament and the independence of voters in assessing the performance of governments at various levels must be preserved.

Table 3- Challenges and Opportunities in Electoral Reform

Reform area	Main challenge	Opportunity
Political finance	Opaque donations and money power	Transparent donation disclosure and audited party accounts
Criminalisation	Candidates with serious pending cases	Fast-track courts and stricter disclosure
Election Commission independence	Executive influence in appointments	Balanced selection committee and administrative autonomy
EVM–VVPAT trust	Public suspicion and technical complexity	Stronger audits and public education
Digital campaigning	Misinformation and hidden ads	Political ad transparency and AI-content labelling
Inclusion	Barriers for women, PwDs, migrants and youth	Accessible voting and leadership reforms
Simultaneous elections	Federal and constitutional concerns	Reduced cost if designed with safeguards

Graph 2: Criminal Cases Among Lok Sabha Winners

A useful second graph for presentation can be created with the following data:

Election year	MPs with declared criminal cases
2009	30%
2014	34%
2019	43%
2024	46%

Interpretation: The data show a steady increase in the proportion of Lok Sabha winners with declared criminal cases. This trend demonstrates why decriminalisation remains one of the most urgent areas of electoral reform.

Image Suggestions

Image 1: EVM–VVPAT demonstration at a polling station.



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Caption: EVM–VVPAT technology has become central to India's election administration and public trust debate.

Caption: *EVM–VVPAT technology has become central to India's election administration and public trust debate.*

Image 2: Voters standing in queue outside a polling station.



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Caption: High voter participation remains one of the strongest features of Indian democracy.

Caption: *High voter participation remains one of the strongest features of Indian democracy.*

Image 3: Election Commission office or election staff managing polling material.



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Caption: The Election Commission plays a critical role in managing India's large and complex electoral process.

Caption: *The Election Commission plays a critical role in managing India's large and complex electoral process.*

Discussion

The analysis reveals two opposite aspects of the electoral system in India. India has excellent administrative ability on the other hand. Needs large-scale technology and polling in challenging terrain, conducts elections for nearly a billion registered voters. The opposite side of that is that Indian elections suffer from serious structural issues regarding money, criminality, misinformation, and institutional trust. There were positive and negative elements in the 2024 election. There was a high attendance, indicating ongoing public involvement. EVMs and VVPATs helped in the large-scale voting and counting. But issues with campaign finance, "criminal" candidates, misinformation and institutional neutrality were present. The Supreme Court's judgment on electoral bonds was a significant democratic corrective as it reinserted transparency as a constitutional value into the area of political funding. However, this reform will take place only with the establishment of a new transparent funding model by Parliament.

Electoral reform is the political will to reform. There are numerous reforms that impact the interest of political parties. Parties may be possible in principle to support reform, but may be opposed to changes that diminish their financial benefit or flexibility of candidates. Civil society, courts, the media, and voters and independent institutions thus provide an important way to keep pressure on for change.

Recommendations

India must have an overarching electoral reform policy. First, transparency of political finance needs to be created. All donations, especially big ones, should be revealed in a timely fashion, party accounts should be audited separately and corporate donations should be better controlled. Second, fast-track courts should dispose of criminal cases of candidates and elected representatives of fixed timelines. Third, the Election Commission must be more independent by having the Chief Justice of the India or another neutral constitutional body as part of the body.

Fourth, transparency of EVM–VVPAT should be enhanced by conducting better audits, chain of custody transparency and educating voters. Fifth, digital campaigning should be subject to regulation via political campaign archives, disclosing sponsors and labelling AI-generated content. Sixth, political parties must adopt internal democracy, and undergo regular organisational elections and ensure the transparency of candidate selection processes. Seventh, the political representation of women needs to be enhanced through the early implementation of the women's reservation law and voluntary party quotas prior to the formal implementation. Last but not least, the concept of simultaneous elections should be discussed at length and adopted only if it strengthens federalism and the accountability of the political system.

Conclusion

The reforms of elections are a must for a better democracy in India. The country has made great strides in conducting large-scale elections and peacefully transferring power. But the extent of participation in electoral democracy is not only a matter of size but also of fairness, transparency and equality. The Electoral System in India was grappling with huge issues related to political finance, criminalisation, expenditure limits, digital misinformation, confidence in EVMs, independence and electoral inclusion of the Election Commission till October 2024.

The coming years of the 2024 electoral cycle offered opportunities. Supreme Court's electoral bonds verdict paved the path for transparency in political funding. The EVM–VVPAT judgment fostered

technological confidence with protection in place. The issue of simultaneous elections brought forth issues related to cost and governance and federalism. This was a testament to the strength of democratic participation by the large electorate, particularly women and young voters.

Political will and institutional courage are critical for electoral reform in India. Reforms should not be partial and symbolic. They need to tackle the institutional factors that contribute to electoral imbalances. A democratic election can only be meaningful when the voter is informed, the candidate is held accountable, the party is transparent, the institutions are independent, and all citizens have an equal opportunity to vote. India is capable of hosting the world's largest elections, but now we need them to be more transparent, inclusive and trustworthy.

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