ELECTION COMMISSION AND PROCESS IN INDIA

ALL HONOURS COURSES EXCEPT B.A. (HONS.) POLITICAL SCIENCE/BBA (FIA)/BMS

SEMESTER-VII

GENERIC ELECTIVE (GE) – POLITICAL SCIENCE

COURSE CREDIT-4

As per the UGCF - 2022 and National Education Policy 2020

READING NOTES

Generic Elective (GE)
Semester-VII

Political Science-Election Commission and Process in India

Credit distribution, Eligibility and Pre-requisites of the Course

Course title & Code	Credits	Credit distribution of the course			Eligibility criteria	Pre-requisite of the course
		Lecture	Tutorial	Practical/ Practice		
Election commission and Process in India GE-11	**4**	**3**	**1**	**-**	**NA**	**NA**

Course Objectives:

This course aims to provide an understanding of the structure, role, and functioning of the Election Commission and the election management process in India.This course has a comprehensive understanding of the constitutional framework, institutional structure, and operational processes of the Election Commission of India, while critically examining the administration of elections, challenges to electoral integrity, and the scope for democratic reforms in the Indian electoral system.

Learning Outcome

Elections uphold democracy by enabling citizen participation in governance. India's electoral system, guided by constitutional provisions, ensures fair representation and a transparent process. The Election Commission oversees elections, from constituency delimitation to result declaration. Political parties, media, and civil society shape the democratic landscape, while reforms aim to enhance integrity and accountability.

Syllabus of Course GE-10

Unit 1: Introduction to Election and Democracy

a) Importance of elections in a democracy
b) Electoral systems: Types and features
c) Universal adult franchise and representation and Acts
d) Evolution of the electoral process in India

Unit 2: Constitutional Framework and Election Commission of India

a) Articles 324-329 of the Constitution
b) Structure and composition of the Election Commission of India (ECI)
c) Powers and functions of ECI
d) Autonomy and accountability of ECI

Unit 3: Election Process and Administration

a) Delimitation of constituencies
b) Preparation and revision of electoral rolls
c) Nomination of candidates, scrutiny, and withdrawal Polling, counting, and declaration of results
d) Code of Conduct and its enforcement

Unit 4: Political Parties and Electoral Reforms

a) Registration and recognition of political parties
b) Election symbols and party system
c) Electoral malpractices and legal provisions
d) Role of media and civil society
e) Electoral reforms: Past, present, and recommendations

Essential/recommended readings

Unit 1

1. Katz, R. S. (1997). Democracy and elections. Oxford University Press.
2. Crisp, B. F., & Simoneau, W. M. (2018). ELECTORAL SYSTEMS. The Oxford handbook of electoral systems, 345.
3. Kundu, T. (2022). Equality Versus Excellence: Does Universal Adult Franchise Complement Democratic Values?. International Journal of Applied Ethics, 8.
4. SRIDHARAN, E. (2004). THE ORIGINS OF THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM. India's Living Constitution: Ideas, Practices, Controversies, 344.
5. McMillan, A. (2012). The election commission of India and the regulation and administration of electoral politics. Election Law Journal, 11(2), 187-201.

Unit 2

1. Manual on election law and procedure (ECI,2023)-Constitutional provisions.
2. Gopal Krishna (2021)-chapter on ECI structure and legal framework.
3. Second administrative reforms commission reports- Relevant
4. Constitution of India: Article 324-329(can be accessed Via India code website or PRS India

Unit 3

1. Manual on election law and procedure (ECI,2023)-procedural chapter.
2. ECI website and sveep portal- official guidelines and training videos
3. Palshikar et al.(2017)- chapters on electoral process challenges
4. .McMillan,A.(2012).The election commission of India and the regulation and administration of electoral politics. Election Law Journal,11(2),187-201

Unit IV

1. Suri,K.C.(2004). Democracy, economic reforms and election results in India.Economic and political Weekly,5404-5411.
2. Brass, P.R. (2019). Political parties and Electoral politics.In India Briefing,1989(pp.61-82). Routhledge.
3. Ziegfeld,A.(2012). Coalition government and party system change: Explaining.the rise of regional political parties in India.Comparative Politics,45(1),69-87.
4. Suri,K.C.(2013). Party system and party politics in India.Political science,2,209-252

Note: Examination scheme and mode shall be as prescribed by the Examination Branch, University of Delhi, from time to time.

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Introduction to Election and Democracy

1.1 Introduction

Elections stand as the bedrock of India's vibrant democracy, serving as the cornerstone of citizen participation and governance. With its rich tapestry of diversity, India embraces a robust electoral framework that ensures the voices of its diverse populace are heard. From the monumental first general elections in 1951-52 to the present-day electoral landscape, India's electoral journey has been marked by a commitment to democratic principles, enshrined in its constitution. The electoral processes in India, overseen by the independent Election Commission of India, reflect a dedication to fairness, transparency, and inclusivity, enabling millions of citizens to exercise their constitutional right to vote and shape the nation's destiny. Through a combination of territorial representation and proportional representation methods, India's electoral system ensures that the aspirations of its people are translated into effective governance, fostering a dynamic and participatory democracy unmatched in scale and diversity.

1.2 Elections in India

Elections in India are conducted through a multi-tiered process that involves various stakeholders. The various stakeholders are:

- **Election Commission of India (ECI):** The Election Commission of India is the apex body responsible for overseeing the conduct of elections in the country. The ECI is an independent constitutional authority entrusted with the task of ensuring free, fair, and transparent elections at all levels. It formulates policies, supervises the electoral machinery, and enforces the Model Code of Conduct to ensure a level playing field for all political parties and candidates.
- **Voters:** Voters are the backbone of the electoral process in India. Eligible citizens aged 18 and above have the right to vote in elections. Voters participate in the electoral process by casting their ballots to elect representatives at various levels of government, including the Lok Sabha, state legislative assemblies, and local bodies.
- **Political Parties:** Political parties play a crucial role in the electoral process by nominating candidates to contest elections. They campaign extensively to mobilise voters, articulate their policies and agendas, and seek public support for their candidates.
- **Candidates:** Candidates are individuals fielded by political parties or contesting independently to represent their constituencies. Candidates engage in campaigning activities, interact with voters, and present their vision and plans for governance if elected.
- **Election Officials:** Election officials are responsible for the administrative conduct of elections at various levels. They include Returning Officers, Presiding Officers,

Polling Officers, and other personnel involved in the management of polling booths, voter registration, ballot counting, and result declaration.

- **Security Forces:** Security forces, including central and state police forces, are deployed to ensure the maintenance of law and order during elections. They play a crucial role in providing security at polling stations, preventing electoral malpractices, and ensuring the safety of voters and election officials.
- **Media and Civil Society:** Media organizations and civil society groups play a vital role in disseminating information about the electoral process, raising awareness among voters, and monitoring the conduct of elections. They provide platforms for political discourse, analysis of election-related issues, and scrutiny of candidates and parties.

These stakeholders collectively contribute to the conduct of elections in India, ensuring that the democratic process remains robust, inclusive, and reflective of the will of the people.

1.3 Types of Elections in India

India, the world's largest democracy, conducts a variety of elections to ensure the representation of its diverse populace at different levels of government. These elections are pivotal in shaping the country's political landscape and governance structure. Understanding the types of elections in India is essential for grasping the complexity and breadth of its democratic processes.

India’s electoral framework encompasses elections to the central government, state governments, and local bodies. The primary types of elections are the General Elections, State Assembly Elections, and Local Body Elections. Additionally, there are specific elections for the President and Vice President of India, as well as the elections to the Rajya Sabha (Council of States), the upper house of the Parliament.

1. **General Elections (Lok Sabha Elections):** Held every five years, these elections determine the composition of the Lok Sabha, the lower house of Parliament. Members of Parliament (MPs) are elected from single-member constituencies through a first-past-the-post system. These elections are organised and managed by the Election Commission of India.

   (Two-member or three-member constituencies in India in the first two general elections and were done away with in 1961 paving way for a system with reserved seats for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.)

2. **State Assembly Elections:** Conducted every five years to elect representatives to the Vidhan Sabha (State Legislative Assembly). Each state is divided into constituencies, with representatives elected using the first-past-the-post system.

3. **Rajya Sabha Elections:** Members of the Rajya Sabha, the upper house of Parliament, are elected by the elected members of State Legislative Assemblies and Electoral colleges of Union territories, through a proportional representation system using a single transferable vote.

4. **Presidential and Vice-Presidential Elections:** The President and Vice President of India are elected indirectly. The President is elected by an electoral college consisting of MPs and Members of Legislative Assemblies (MLAs) of states and Union territories. The Vice President is elected by an electoral college comprising members of both houses of Parliament.
5. **Local Body Elections:** These include elections to Municipalities (Urban Local Bodies) and Panchayats (Rural Local Bodies). They are crucial for grassroots governance and local self-administration. Conducted at varying intervals, these elections ensure public participation in local development and administration.
6. **Bye-Elections:** Held to fill vacancies that arise between general elections due to the resignation or death of a member of Parliament or a State Assembly.

In the above, the first four types of election are organised and managed by the Election Commission of India while the fifth type is organised and managed State Election Commissions. Depending on the type of bye elections, these elections are organised and managed either by the Central Election Commission or by the State Election Commissions.

These varied elections are fundamental to the functioning of India's democratic system, ensuring representation at multiple levels and enabling citizens to have a say in their governance. Through these electoral processes, India maintains its commitment to democratic principles, allowing for a dynamic and participatory political environment.

1.4 Electoral Process

Understanding the electoral process is fundamental for comprehending how democratic governance functions in India.

1. **Voter Registration**
   - **Eligibility:** Every Indian citizen aged 18 and above is eligible to vote in elections. The right to vote is a fundamental aspect of democratic participation and citizenship.
   - **Registration Process:** To vote, eligible citizens must register themselves in the electoral rolls or the voters list. This involves filling out a voter registration form, providing necessary identification and proof of residence, and submitting it to the local Electoral Registration Office (ERO) or fill up the online form on the ECI portal https://voters.eci.gov.in/ or Voter helpline app available on mobile phones. The registration process can also be completed online through the National Voters' Services Portal.
   - **Voters List:** Citizens can check whether their names have been included in the list through the mobile phone app or the website.
2. **Polling Booths**
   - **Setup:** On the day of the election, polling booths are set up across the country to facilitate voting. Each constituency has multiple polling booths to ensure that voters can conveniently access a nearby location to cast their votes.

- **Facilities:** Polling booths are equipped with necessary facilities to ensure a smooth voting process. This includes adequate lighting, voting compartments to ensure privacy, and facilities for the elderly and divyang voters.
- **Polling Officers:** A team of polling officers is assigned to each booth to manage the voting process, verify voter identities, and ensure compliance with election laws and procedures. Majority of the staff for polling duty is not a regular staff of ECI but drawn from various governmental agencies, who are trained and deputed for the election work.
- **Voting Process**: Voters visit their designated polling booths, where their names are checked against the electoral rolls. They are then directed to the voting compartment to cast their votes in privacy.

3. **Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) and Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT)**
   - **What are EVMs:** India employs Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) for the voting process. EVMs were introduced to improve the efficiency and accuracy of voting and vote counting. In 1982, the 70-Paravur Assembly Constituency in Kerala used electronic voting machines for the first time.
   - **How EVMs Work:** Each EVM has a list of candidates and their symbols. Voters cast their vote by pressing the button next to the symbol of their preferred candidate. This action registers their vote electronically.
   - **Advantages:** EVMs are user-friendly and reduce the chances of invalid or fraudulent votes. They also expedite the counting process and minimize human errors associated with manual vote counting.
   - **Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT):** To enhance transparency, EVMs are often used in conjunction with VVPAT systems, which provide a paper receipt to the voter as confirmation of their vote. Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) is an independent system attached to Electronic Voting Machines that allows voters to confirm that their votes were cast correctly.
   - **How VVPATs Work:** When a vote is cast, a slip is printed with the candidate's serial number, name, and symbol and is visible through a transparent window for 7 seconds. The printed slip is then automatically cut and placed in the VVPAT's sealed drop box.
   - **Advantages:** VVPAT (Voter-Verified Paper Audit Trail) provides the voters with the verification of their votes, though they have been cast, as intended and this system can work as an extra layer of protection from the manipulation or destruction of the votes.
4. **Counting of Votes**
   - **Post-Poll Process:** After the polling concludes, EVMs are sealed and transported to secure counting centers. The counting of votes usually begins under tight security and surveillance.

- **Counting Procedure:** Votes are counted electronically, which ensures a quick and accurate tally. Each EVM’s data is retrieved, and the total votes for each candidate are tabulated.
- **Declaration of Results:** The candidate with the highest number of votes in a constituency is declared the winner. The results are announced publicly, and the ECI certifies the election outcomes.
- **Transparency and Security:** The entire counting process is conducted transparently, with representatives from political parties, candidates, and observers monitoring the process to ensure its integrity.

The electoral process not only facilitates the expression of the people's will but also ensures that the transition of power is conducted smoothly and transparently, reinforcing the core values of democracy.

Constitutional Framework and Election Commission of India

2.1 Introduction to Election Commission of India

The Election Commission of India (ECI) stands as a beacon of impartiality, integrity, and efficiency in the world's largest democracy. Established under the provisions of the Indian Constitution, the ECI serves as a unique and independent constitutional body entrusted with the monumental task of conducting free, fair, and transparent elections across the vast expanse of the Indian subcontinent. What sets the Election Commission apart is its unwavering commitment to upholding the democratic ethos and ensuring the sanctity of the electoral process, making it a true guardian of democracy in India.

One of the most striking aspects of the Election Commission's uniqueness lies in its autonomy and independence from political interference. Unlike electoral bodies in many other countries, the ECI operates as a constitutional authority free from executive control, allowing it to discharge its duties with impartiality and integrity. This independence empowers the Election Commission to make decisions and implement policies in the best interests of the democratic process, safeguarding the rights of voters and ensuring a level playing field for all political parties and candidates.

Moreover, the Election Commission's role extends beyond the mere administration of elections; it serves as a custodian of electoral democracy, tirelessly striving to enhance the fairness, transparency, and inclusivity of the electoral process. Through innovative measures such as the introduction of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trails (VVPATs), and strict enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct, the ECI has revolutionised India's electoral landscape, modernising its electoral infrastructure and instilling confidence in the electoral process among stakeholders.

Furthermore, the Election Commission's commitment to inclusivity and voter participation is evident in its efforts to ensure the effective implementation of electoral reforms aimed at enhancing voter registration, accessibility, and inclusivity. By pioneering initiatives such as voter education programmes, the ECI has played a pivotal role in strengthening the foundations of India's democracy and fostering a culture of civic engagement and political awareness among its citizens.

In the U.S., elections are managed at the state and local levels, with each state having its own set of rules and procedures. This decentralised approach can result in significant variations in how elections are conducted, including differences in voter registration processes, ballot designs, voting technologies, and vote counting methods. These inconsistencies can cause confusion among voters and complicate efforts to ensure the integrity of the electoral process.

For example, US Commission on Civil Rights in its status report on Probe of Election Practices in Florida during the 2000 Presidential Elections observed that the lack of standardised procedures led to the infamous Florida recount, highlighting the problems of differing voting technologies and ballot designs. Similarly, during the 2020 election, the

diverse methodologies employed by various states led to widespread debates and legal challenges over the legitimacy of the results.

In contrast, the Election Commission of India ensures uniformity in the electoral process by issuing guidelines and conducting elections across all states and Union territories. This centralisation helps mitigate the risks of discrepancies and enhances the public's trust in the electoral system, ensuring that the democratic process is fair and credible throughout the country.

In essence, the Election Commission of India stands as a unique and exemplary institution, embodying the spirit of democracy and the principles of transparency, impartiality, and accountability. Through its steadfast dedication to upholding the democratic process and safeguarding the rights of citizens, the ECI continues to inspire trust and confidence in India's electoral democracy, serving as a shining example for electoral bodies worldwide.

2.2 Constitutional Framework and Election Commission of India

The framers of the Indian Constitution recognized that the legitimacy of a democracy rests on free, fair, and periodic elections.

To safeguard this core principle, the Constitution lays down a comprehensive framework for the conduct and supervision of elections in Part XV (Articles 324 to 329). These provisions provide the constitutional foundation for India’s electoral democracy.

2.2.1 Article 324 – Superintendence, Direction and Control of Elections

- Article 324 vests the **s**uperintendence, direction, and control of elections in an independent constitutional body known as the Election Commission of India (ECI).
- The ECI is responsible for elections to:
    - Parliament (Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha)
    - State Legislatures (Legislative Assemblies and Councils)
    - The offices of President and Vice-President of India.
- This Article ensures that elections are conducted **i**ndependently of the executive.
- It empowers the ECI to decide matters related to:
    - Electoral rolls
    - Recognition of political parties and allotment of symbols
    - Enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct
    - Supervision of election officials and polling process
- The Supreme Court in *Mohinder Singh Gill v. Chief Election Commissioner (1978)* held that Article 324 is a reservoir of power — allowing the ECI to act in areas where law is silent, to ensure the fairness of elections.

2.2.2 Article 325 - No Person to be Ineligible for Inclusion in Electoral Rolls

- Ensures universal and non-discriminatory electoral rights.

- There shall be one general electoral roll for every territorial constituency, and no one shall be excluded on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or any of them.
- This Article reflects the principle of political equality and prevents the creation of communal or sectarian electorates a practice that had divided pre-independence India.

2.2.3 Article 326 - Elections Based on Adult Suffrage

- Provides for universal adult franchise — the cornerstone of India's democracy.
- Every citizen of India who is 18 years or above (after the 61st Constitutional Amendment, 1988) and not otherwise disqualified, is entitled to vote.
- Disqualifications may include non-citizenship, unsoundness of mind, or criminal conviction, as determined by law.
- This Article ensures that sovereignty truly rests with the people, regardless of caste, class, gender, or education.

2.2.4 Article 327 - Power of Parliament to Make Laws Relating to Elections

- Empowers Parliament to legislate on matters concerning the preparation of electoral rolls, delimitation of constituencies, qualifications and disqualifications of members, and conduct of elections.
- Pursuant to this Article, Parliament enacted the Representation of the People Acts (1950 and 1951) forming the backbone of India's electoral laws.
- It ensures uniformity and consistency in electoral administration across the country.

2.2.5. Article 328 – Power of State Legislature to Make Provisions Relating to Elections

- Grant's similar powers to State Legislatures for elections to their respective State Assemblies and Councils, provided these laws do not conflict with those made by Parliament.
- This creates a federal balance, recognizing both central oversight and state-level autonomy in electoral matters.

2.2.6. Article 329 – Bar to Interference by Courts in Electoral Matters

- Ensures judicial non-interference in the electoral process while elections are underway.
- Courts cannot question the validity of any law relating to elections or halt the process.
- However, election disputes can be addressed after the declaration of results, through election petitions before High Courts.
- This prevents the derailment of the electoral process and ensures administrative continuity.

Points to Note:

- The Election Commission of India was established on January 25, 1950**,** under Article 324 of the Constitution.
- It is an autonomous constitutional authority, independent of executive control, tasked with ensuring free and fair elections.
- January 25 is celebrated every year as National Voters' Day to mark its founding and to encourage voter participation.

2.3 Evolution of the Election Commission of India

The Election Commission of India was set up on January 25, 1950, and initially functioned as a single-member body consisting solely of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC). For nearly four decades, the Commission operated in this manner and successfully conducted several national and state elections. However, with the expansion of the electorate and increasing complexity of elections, it was felt necessary to make the Commission a multi-member body. Accordingly, in 1989, two Election Commissioners were appointed, although their tenure was short-lived. Later, in October 1993, the ECI was reconstituted as a three-member body comprising one Chief Election Commissioner and two Election Commissioners, a structure that continues to this day. The multi-member design was intended to promote collegial decision-making and prevent concentration of authority in a single individual.

The present composition of the Election Commission therefore includes the Chief Election Commissioner as the head, along with two other Election Commissioners. All three members enjoy equal powers and status, and decisions are made collectively. The CEC acts as the chairperson who presides over meetings and ensures coordination, but he or she does not hold overriding authority. In cases where opinions differ, matters are decided by majority vote, reflecting the principle of collective responsibility within the institution.

The appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners is made by the President of India, as provided under Article 324(2). They hold office for a term of six years or until they attain the age of sixty-five years, whichever is earlier. The Commissioners can resign at any time by addressing their resignation to the President. The Chief Election Commissioner can be removed from office only through a process similar to that of a Judge of the Supreme Court, that is, by impeachment on the grounds of proved misbehaviour or incapacity. The other Election Commissioners can be removed only on the recommendation of the CEC. These constitutional safeguards provide the ECI with a high degree of security of tenure and independence from political pressures, ensuring that it can function without fear or favour.

The Election Commission of India has a permanent secretariat headquartered at Nirvachan Sadan in New Delhi, which assists in the day-to-day functioning of the Commission. The secretariat is staffed by officers and employees drawn from various government services. At

the state level, the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), appointed by the Election Commission in consultation with the respective State Government, supervises the conduct of elections. Below the state level, District Election Officers (DEOs) and Returning Officers (ROs) are responsible for managing elections in individual districts and constituencies. This multi-tiered structure enables the Commission to maintain coordination between the central, state, and local levels of election administration, ensuring uniform standards and procedures across the country.

In terms of its decision-making process, the ECI operates on the principle of collective responsibility. Important matters relating to election conduct, enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct, recognition of political parties, and allotment of symbols are decided jointly by all members. The system of majority voting in case of differences ensures fairness and transparency in decision-making. This collegial functioning also enhances public trust in the neutrality of the institution.

A recent and significant development in the composition of the Commission occurred through the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service, and Term of Office) Act, 2023. This law established a new Selection Committee for the appointment of the CEC and other Election Commissioners, comprising the Prime Minister (as Chairperson), the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, and a Union Cabinet Minister nominated by the Prime Minister. The Act replaced the earlier system suggested by the Supreme Court in 2023, which had included the Chief Justice of India as part of the selection committee. The change has generated considerable debate regarding the extent of executive influence over the appointment process and the potential impact on the Commission's independence. Nevertheless, the ECI continues to command public confidence as a key institution of India's democratic framework.

The structure of the Election Commission plays a vital role in ensuring the independence, impartiality, and efficiency of the electoral process. Its multi-member composition encourages balanced deliberation, while constitutional protections against arbitrary removal ensure autonomy. The existence of a well-organized administrative apparatus at the central and state levels allows it to effectively conduct the world's largest elections with credibility and professionalism. Over the years, the Commission has evolved into a symbol of democratic integrity, maintaining the faith of citizens in the electoral process.

In conclusion, the structure and composition of the Election Commission of India embody the constitutional vision of an independent and neutral electoral authority. By combining constitutional safeguards, collective functioning, and administrative efficiency, the ECI has upheld the sanctity of India's democratic process for more than seven decades. As the nature of elections continues to evolve with technological and social change, the Commission's structure provides the institutional strength necessary to ensure that the sovereignty of the people, expressed through the ballot, remains supreme.

Election Process and Administration

The election process and administration form the operational core of India's democratic system. Conducted under the supervision of the Election Commission of India (ECI), elections ensure that the will of the people is freely and fairly expressed through an orderly, transparent, and credible procedure. From the delimitation of constituencies to the declaration of results, each stage of the process is designed to uphold the principles of equality, fairness, and representation enshrined in the Constitution.

3.1 Delimitation of Constituencies

The delimitation of constituencies is the first and foundational step in the electoral process. It involves fixing the boundaries of electoral constituencies so that representation in Parliament and State Legislatures reflects the distribution of population. The objective of delimitation is to ensure that each constituency has, as far as possible, an equal population, thereby giving every citizen's vote equal value. The Delimitation Commission, established under the Delimitation Acts of 1952, 1962, 1972, and 2002, is an independent body headed by a retired judge of the Supreme Court, with members including the Chief Election Commissioner and State Election Commissioners. Its orders have the force of law and cannot be challenged in court. At present, delimitation is frozen until 2026 under the 84th Constitutional Amendment, which seeks to maintain a balance between states with high and low population growth. Delimitation is therefore essential for ensuring fair and effective representation and forms the geographic framework within which the electoral process unfolds.

3.2 Preparation and Revision of Electoral Rolls

The next vital step is the preparation and periodic revision of electoral rolls, which determine who is eligible to vote. Under the Representation of the People Act, 1950, the ECI is responsible for preparing a comprehensive list of all citizens entitled to vote in a constituency. Every Indian citizen who is 18 years of age or above, is ordinarily resident in that constituency, and is not otherwise disqualified (for reasons such as unsoundness of mind, non-citizenship, or conviction for certain offences) is eligible to be included in the electoral roll. The rolls are revised annually and before each general election to ensure accuracy. They are also continuously updated to include new voters and delete names of deceased or migrated individuals. Technological initiatives like the National Voters' Service Portal (NVSP), online registration, and linkage with Aadhaar have made the process more transparent and citizen-friendly. Accurate and up-to-date electoral rolls are crucial for the credibility of elections, as they ensure that every eligible citizen can exercise the right to vote and that no fraudulent voting occurs

3.3 Nomination of Candidates, Scrutiny, Withdrawal, Polling, Counting, and Declaration of Results

Once the constituencies and electoral rolls are finalized, the process of candidate nomination begins. Candidates wishing to contest elections must file their nomination papers with the

Returning Officer (RO) within the period specified by the Election Commission. They must also submit a security deposit, a declaration of assets, liabilities, and criminal antecedents (if any), as part of transparency norms. After the last date of filing nominations, the scrutiny of nomination papers is carried out by the RO to ensure that all legal requirements are met and the candidate is qualified under the Constitution and the Representation of the People Act, 1951. Following scrutiny, candidates are allowed to withdraw their nominations within the prescribed time, after which the final list of contesting candidates is published.

The next stage is polling, during which eligible voters cast their votes in secret using Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), supplemented by Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) devices to ensure transparency and verifiability. Polling is conducted under strict security and administrative supervision, ensuring free participation without intimidation or coercion. The Model Code of Conduct (MCC) remains in force during this period to regulate the behaviour of political parties and candidates. After polling concludes, the counting of votes is carried out under the supervision of the Returning Officers in the presence of candidates or their representatives. EVMs are opened, votes are tallied, and results are compiled constituency-wise. Once counting is complete, the Returning Officer formally declares the result, and the Election Commission notifies the elected members in the Official Gazette of India.

The process from nomination to result declaration exemplifies the institutional strength and procedural integrity of India's election system. It ensures that every stage—from voter registration to vote counting—adheres to the principles of fairness, transparency, and public accountability.

3.4 Model Code of Conduct (MCC) by the Election Commission of India (ECI)

The Model Code of Conduct (MCC) is a crucial set of guidelines issued by the Election Commission of India (ECI) to ensure free, fair, and transparent elections. The MCC is aimed at regulating the behaviour of political parties and candidates during elections, maintaining the integrity of the electoral process, and ensuring a level playing field for all contestants.

The MCC is designed to maintain the decorum and propriety of the electoral process. It comes into effect from the date the election schedule is announced by the ECI and remains in force until the election process is completed.

Some key aspects of Model Code of Conduct (MCC) are,

- **General Conduct:** Political parties and candidates are required to avoid activities that could cause tension between different communities. Inflammatory language is prohibited.
- **Meetings:** Parties and candidates must inform local authorities of the time and place of meetings and rallies to enable them to make necessary arrangements for maintaining peace and order. Loudspeakers and other such devices are to be used without causing disturbance to the public, adhering to prescribed decibel levels and timings.
- **Rallies and Processions:** The MCC regulates the conduct of rallies and processions to ensure that they do not hinder public life and traffic. Prior permission must be obtained

from the local authorities, and routes should be planned to minimise inconvenience to the public.

- **Polling Day Conduct:** Candidates and parties are prohibited from canvassing or distributing liquor beginning from 48 hours till the end of polling on voting day.
- **Polling Booths**: Political parties must not set up booths within 200 meters of polling stations to assist voters. Only one vehicle per candidate is allowed to be parked at each polling station, and voters are to be transported without any coercion or influence.
- **Party in Power:** The MCC imposes special restrictions on the party in power to prevent misuse of official position. Ministers and other authorities must not use official machinery or personnel for electioneering work. Announcement of new projects, policy decisions, or financial grants likely to influence the voters in favour of the ruling party is prohibited.
- **Advertising, Expenditure and Media:** The ECI monitors all political advertisement and also keeps a track on the expenditure of both individual candidates as well as the expenditure of the political parties.
- **Ban on Exit Polls:** The Election Commission of India (ECI) has implemented a ban on exit polls during elections to ensure the integrity and fairness of the electoral process. This prohibition aims to prevent the undue influence of exit poll results on voters and the election outcome. Several times political parties wrongly influence the exit poll numbers to favour them. Early predictions may sway undecided voters or demoralise supporters of certain candidates or parties.
- **Violations and Penalties:** The ECI has the authority to take action against parties or candidates violating the MCC. The ECI can also order the transfer of officials or restrict the deployment of government resources to ensure compliance with the MCC.

The Model Code of Conduct is instrumental in maintaining the sanctity of the electoral process in India. By enforcing these guidelines, the ECI strives to ensure that elections are conducted in a manner that is just, equitable, and transparent, thereby reinforcing the democratic foundations of the country.

Political Parties and Electoral Reforms

4.1 Introduction

In the vibrant democratic landscape of India, political parties have a pivotal role to play. They are the building blocks of democracy, serving as the connection between the citizens and the government. Political parties aggregate and articulate interests, mobilise voters, contest elections, and shoulder the responsibility of governing. They are the vehicles through which citizens participate in the democratic process, influencing policymaking and shaping the future of the nation.

India's political system is characterised by a multi-party system, a reflection of the country's immense diversity. This system accommodates the existence of numerous national and regional parties, each catering to different ideologies, regions, and communities. The multi-party system ensures that no single party can dominate the political discourse, fostering a culture of negotiation and compromise. It allows for a more inclusive representation of the populace by ensuring the voices of different fragments of society are heard and their interests addressed.

National parties like the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Indian National Congress (INC) and others have a pan-Indian presence. They strive to represent collective aspirations of all the people of India. On the other hand, regional parties like the All-India Trinamool Congress (AITC/TMC) in West Bengal, All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) in Tamil Nadu, Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, and Apna Dal in Uttar Pradesh, and, to name a few, cater to regional interests and sentiments. They too play a crucial role in India's policymaking, often influencing national policies.

4.2 Meaning of Political Party

According to Giovanni Sartori "A political party is defined as a political group that is officially recognised as being part of the electoral process and who can support (put forth) candidates for elections (free or not) on a regular basis."

Encyclopedia Britannica defines political party, as "a group of persons organized to acquire and exercise political power."

Schwartz & Lawson define political party as "an organisation that nominates candidates to stand for election in its name and seeks to place representatives in the government."

Political parties are organised groups of people who have similar political views and work together to influence government policy and actions. They play a crucial role in a democratic system as they represent the interests of different sections of society, mobilize voters, contest elections, and form the government. Political parties provide a platform for public participation in governance and decision-making processes. They help in shaping public opinion and provide a structured pathway for individuals to ascend to public office. The existence of multiple political parties ensures a competitive political environment, fostering accountability and transparency in governance. They are dynamic entities, constantly

evolving in response to societal changes, public sentiment, and political culture. Understanding political parties is essential for students of political science as it provides insights into the functioning of the democratic system, the process of policymaking, and the dynamics of power distribution.

4.3 Role of Political Party

The role of political parties is essential in nurturing and upholding India's democracy, acting as a vital link between the government and its citizens. Political parties serve as institutions through which individuals engage in the legislative process by electing party candidates to legislative bodies.

Through elections, parties aim to win enough seats in the legislature to form a government and exercise power. Once in power, they implement their policies and programmes, influencing the direction of governance and societal development. They also encourage people to get involved in politics, which helps to solve the issues that people have. Political parties are therefore essential to democratic political systems.

Based on the above definitions, the characteristics of a political party are as follows:

i. **Political Education and Shaping Public Opinion**: Parties play a significant role in shaping political education and shaping public opinion. Parties highlight issues, mobilise their members, and sometimes launch movements to address societal problems.

ii. **Policies and Programmes**: Parties propose different programmes and policies, which are presented to the voters in their manifestos. They condense a wide range of opinions into a few basic positions which guide their actions if they come to power.

iii. **Contesting Elections**: Political parties contest elections through their voluntersm leaders and office-bearers as candidates for elections. The candidates propagate their party agenda and seek election.

iv. **Form and Run Governments:** Parties form and run governments. The political executives, who make significant policy decisions, come from these parties. Parties appoint important members as ministers to run the Government in accordance with the ideology and programme of the party.

v. **Link between Government and People:** Parties provide people with access to government machinery and welfare schemes. They are a bridge between government and the citizens, making it easier for ordinary people to access government services.

vi. **Role in Law-making**: Parties play a crucial role in the law-making process. Whether in power or as an opposition they debate, amend and pass laws or acts in the legislature, shaping the legal framework of the land.

vii. **Keeping Government in Check:** Parties also play a crucial role as the opposition. Parties that do not form the government serve as the opposition, scrutinizing the government's actions and policies. They hold the government accountable, questioning its decisions and proposing alternatives. This role is essential for

maintaining checks and balances in a democracy, ensuring that power is not concentrated or misused. The opposition's constructive criticism and vigilance contribute to the health of a democracy.

Thus, the role and responsibility of a political party is not limited to capturing power and governing. Even when not in power, parties contribute significantly to the democratic process by serving as a vigilant opposition. This understanding is crucial for understanding the role and function of political parties in a democracy as India.

Parties are dynamic and evolve with the changes in political dynamics, public sentiments, and voting behaviour. This dynamism contributes to the growth and development of some political parties while causing decay in others.

4.4 Types of Political Parties

India practices multi-party democracy. According to the Election Commission of India, as of February 2024 there are 2846 registered political parties in the country.

Understanding the various types and categories of political parties is crucial for grasping the complexities of India's political landscape. Each type of a political party plays a unique role in representing the interests and aspirations of different fragments of the population, contributing to the vibrant and diverse democracy that India is known for. As students of political science, it is essential to understand these dynamics to gain a comprehensive understanding of Indian politics.

Roughly speaking, political parties in India can be classified as national, regional, local based on their area of reach and operations or identity-based and issue-based as per the policies, programmes and issues of the political parties.

National Party: These parties have a nationwide presence and influence. They participate in elections across the country and have a broad ideological platform that appeals to a wide cross-section of the population across the country.

For example: Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Indian National Congress (INC)

Regional Party: These parties primarily operate within a specific state or a small group of states. They often represent regional interests and cultural identities (including language). Their impact is mostly confined to one or a couple of states.

For example: Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) in Assam and Telugu Desam Party (TDP) in Andhra Pradesh.

Local Party: These parties are active at the district or municipal level. They focus on local issues and their influence is limited to a specific locality or region or a small group of regions within a state.

For example: Mithilanchal Vikas Morcha in Bihar and Vidarbha Rajya Aghadi in Maharashtra

Identity-based Party: These parties are typically formed around a particular social, ethnic, or religious identity. They aim to represent and advocate for the interests of the specific group

they identify with. Their influence can be seen at local, state, or national levels, depending on the size and distribution of the group.

For example: All India Majlis-E-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) and Bharatiya Tribal Party

Issue-based Party: These parties are formed around a specific issue or set of issues. They aim to bring attention to these issues and advocate for policies that address them. Their influence can be seen at local, state, or national levels, depending on the relevance and scope of the issues they focus on.

For example: Telangana Rashtra Samiti (TRS) later renamed as Bharatiya Rashtra Samiti (BRS) had creation of separate state of Telangana as its single agenda for the longest time.

4.5 Classification of Political Parties

Even though political parties are classified based on their area of reach and operations or policies and programmes, the Election Commission of India (ECI) recognises political parties as National Parties and State Parties along with recognising the remaining set as Registered Unrecognised Political Parties (RUPP).

National Parties: Any political party is recognized as National Party by the ECI if it fulfils any one of the following criteria:

- It secures at least 6% of the valid votes polled in any four or more states, in a general election to the Lok Sabha or Legislative Assembly; and, in addition, it wins at least 4 seats in a general election to the Lok Sabha from any state or states.
- It wins at least 2% seats in a general election to the Lok Sabha (11 seats) from at least 3 different states.
- If it receives at least 8% of valid votes cast in a general election to the Lok Sabha or Legislative Assembly of a state in four or more states.
- It is recognised as State Party in at least four states.

As of 2024, there are 06 parties which are recognise as National Parties. They are Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Indian National Congress (INC), Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), Aam Admi Party (AAP), Communist Party of India (Marxists) or CPI (M), and National People's Party (NPP)

State Parties: A political party is recognised as a State Party by the ECI if it fulfils any of the following criteria:

- It secures at least 6% of the valid votes polled in the state at election to the Legislative Assembly; and, in addition, it wins at least 2 seats in the Legislative Assembly of the state concerned.
- It secures at least 6% of the valid votes polled in the general election, to the Lok Sabha; and, in addition, it wins at least 1 seat of the Lok Sabha of the State concerned.
- It wins at least 3% (3 out of 100) of the total number of seats or at least 3 seats in the Legislative Assembly, whichever is more.

- It wins at least 1 seat in the Lok Sabha for every 25 seats, or any fraction thereof allotted to that State.
- It has at least 8% of total valid votes in the last assembly election or the Lok Sabha election from the State.

As of 2024, there are 76 State Parties across all states in India. Some of them are Maharashtraadi Gomantak Party (MGP) in Goa, Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) in Punjab, Communist Party of India (CPI) in Kerala, Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party (YSRCP) in Andhra. Some parties are recognised as State Parties in multiple states. For example, Janata Dal (Secular) is recognised as a State Party in Karnataka, Kerala and Arunachal Pradesh while All India Trinamool Congress (AITC or TMC) is recognised as a State Party in West Bengal, Tripura and Meghalaya. The Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) is recognized both Maharashtra and Nagaland.

Registered Unrecognised Political Parties (RUPP): Apart from the National and State parties, there are numerous other parties that are registered with the ECI but have not achieved recognition as either National or State parties. These parties are referred to as Registered Unrecognised Political Parties.

As of 2024, there are 2764 Registered Unrecognised Political Parties (RUPP) in India

4.6 Advantages if being a Recognised Political Party

Being recognised as a National Party or State Party by the Election Commission of India (ECI) comes with some advantages which are,

- **Reserved Party Symbols:** Recognition as National Party ensures that the election symbol of that party can't be used by any other political party in polls across India and in terms of State Party it can't be used by any political party in the state where it is recognised. This helps in maintaining the party's unique identity and aids in voter recognition.
- **Star Campaigners:** Star campaigners are prominent figures nominated by political parties to campaign during elections. A political party which is recognised as either National or State Party can designate up to 40 star campaigners, while an unrecognised political party can designate only up to 20. The advantage of having more star campaigners is that the cost associated with the campaigning activities of these star campaigners is not included as a part of the election expenditure of the candidate, thereby providing the candidate with more flexibility for spending.
- **Nomination Filing:** Recognised National Parties and State parties require only one proposer to file nominations, which simplifies the election process for them while candidates of Unrecognised Political Parties require 10 proposers to file nominations.
- **Land Allotment:** Recognised National Parties receive land from the government for constructing their own offices.
- **More Airtime on National Television and Radio:** National parties are entitled to more airtime on television and radio for election campaigning.

These benefits not only provide logistical and financial advantages but also enhance the party's visibility and reach, thereby aiding in their electoral performance. It's important to note that these privileges are subject to change according to the Election Commission of India's regulations and policies.

4.7 Party System

In political science, a party system refers to how political parties operate within a democratic country. It is the arrangement where these parties manage the government, enjoy consistent support from the public, and establish internal rules for managing finances, information, and candidate selections.

The party system idea was first offered by European scholars studying the United States, such as James Bryce, Giovanni Sartori, and Moisey Ostrogorsky. They eventually extended their study to include other democracies across the globe. Factors such as the degree of political division, the impartiality of the conversion of votes into seats, and the simplicity of political competitiveness can be used to classify party systems.

4.8 Evolution of Party System in India

India's electoral history, spanning from the first general elections to the Lok Sabha held in 1951-52 after gaining independence to the 2024 elections for the eighteenth Lok Sabha, can be broadly categorized into four distinct electoral orders, according to the consensus among political analysts and scholars.

In an article Congress Decline and Party Pluralism in India, Chrisopher Candland (1997) wrote, "Throughout South Asia, the national political parties that led independence movements tended to dominate government in the formative years of independence only to give way to increasingly agrarian, confessional, regional and vernacular political parties."

India was no exception to the phenomenon. Since its inception in 1885, the Indian National Congress (INC) has wielded significant influence over the country's political landscape. As India transitioned into a republic and conducted its inaugural general election in 1951-1952, the INC maintained its stronghold over electoral politics for many years thereafter. The first two party systems as, from 1952 to 1967 and 1967 to 1989, were marked by the dominance of the Indian National Congress.

INC dominated India's political landscape beginning with the first elections held in 1951-52. The Congress was such a powerful force that in 1952, 1957, and 1962, it won sizable majorities in practically every election to the Lok Sabha and state assemblies (except for 1957 Kerala state assembly elections). The extent of the INC or the Congress party's dominance was such that renowned political scientist Rajni Kothari, in his influential work "The Congress System in India" published in 1964, characterised the Indian party system as the "**The Congress System**". Rajni Kothari in the same paper also labelled this period as the "One-Party Dominant System or OPDS".

In the 1957 election, the Indian National Congress (INC) experienced its first setback in a state assembly election. However, it was the 1967 election that dealt a significant blow to the party, resulting in losses in seven assembly elections. This marked the beginning of the

second party system with the emergence of other parties especially formation of non-congress governments in various states. During this time, other parties like Jan Sangh, Communist Party of India, RPI, Swatantra Party, Akali Dal, DMK, etc., were trying to become strong opposition forces against the Indian National Congress.

Between 1967 and 1989, **a second-party system emerged**. During this period, except for a short span from 1977 to 1978, the Indian National Congress remained at the helm nationally, but it faced tough challenges from various parties at the state level and lost several state assembly elections. However, it took almost ten years of unpredictable alliances and minority governments, from 1989 to 1998, for India's multi-party tendencies to shape **into a new party system**.

The Indian National Congress's hegemony was being challenged by the Bharatiya Janata Party. Following the 1998 elections, the Bharatiya Janata Party emerged as the largest party and declared its intention to lead a coalition of parties under the National Democratic Alliance to establish the government. The mandate was for the either National Democratic Alliance, led by the Bharatiya Janata Party, or the United Progressive Alliance, led by the Indian National Congress, to form governments in 1999, 2004, and 2009. For over two decades (1998-2014), India experienced bi-nodal party system.

In May 2014, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) secured the first single-party majority in the lower house of India's parliament (the Lok Sabha) in thirty years. Led by prime ministerial candidate Narendra Modi, the BJP's triumph sparked a discourse among political analysts and scholars on whether the country's electoral landscape was undergoing a fundamental change. Between 1989 and 2014, Indian politics was characterised by coalition governments, a departure from the Congress Party's prolonged dominance at the national level. During this period, no single party managed to attain a parliamentary majority independently, necessitating alliances with numerous pre- and post-election partners to form governing coalitions. Though this period was also marked with a stark rise in the electoral fortunes of BJP.

The 2014 Lok Sabha elections signaled a break from the previous pattern and the start of a new era in India's party system: the domination of the BJP. Milan Vaishnav and Jamie Hintson (2019) wrote a paper titled "**The Dawn of India's Fourth Party System**" which studied the reasons for the dominance of the BJP and justified BJP's domination as the emergence of the fourth party system in India.

According to Pradeep Chhibber, a dominant party system is characterised by the prolonged electoral dominance of a single party, which becomes central to the functioning of the political system. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the Bharatiya Janata Party outperformed itself. From 2014 to 2019, the party increased its victory margin, going from winning 282 seats with a total vote share of 31.34% in 2014 to 303 seats with a total vote share of 37.76%. The BJP also won several state assembly elections, prompting media and political observers like Suhas Palshikar to refer to this as beginning of a new party system and the emergence of India' second dominant party system.

4.9 Electoral Reforms in India

Electoral reforms play a pivotal role in enhancing the integrity, fairness, and inclusivity of the electoral process in India. Over the years, successive governments and the Election Commission of India (ECI) have undertaken significant reforms aimed at modernising India's electoral framework and addressing emerging challenges.

- **Lowering the Voting Age:** The 61st Amendment Act to the Constitution reduced the minimum voting age from 21 to 18 years.
- **Contesting Constituencies:** A candidate cannot contest from more than two constituencies. Previously, there was no such restriction. In 1991, Devi Lal, Haryana's deputy chief minister, contested for three Lok Sabha seats: Sikar, Rohtak, and Ferozepur, as well as the Ghirai assembly seat. (Eventually he lost from all four seats)
- **Anti-Defection Law:** Members of Parliament (MPs) or State Legislatures (MLAs) can be disqualified if they voluntarily give up their party membership or disobey their party's directives on a vote. If a faction within a political party wants to break away, the law allows it under specific conditions. For a split or a merger of the party to be considered legitimate and not subject to anti-defection penalties, at least two-thirds of the elected members of that party must support the split or the merger. This high threshold ensures that splits are substantial and representative of a significant portion of the party, rather than being driven by a small, possibly opportunistic group.
- **EPIC or Voters ID:** Nation-wise Electors Photo Identity Cards (EPIC) were introduced in 1993. This helped officials identify the voters ensuring there was no duplication of vote.
- **Introduction of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs):** Introduction of EVMs revolutionised the voting process, replacing traditional paper ballots with secure electronic voting machines. EVMs have reduced the time taken for counting votes, minimized electoral fraud, and increased the accuracy of results.
- **Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trails (VVPATs):** Implementation of VVPATs ensures transparency and integrity in the voting process by providing voters with a physical paper trail of their vote which id destroyed on the spot. VVPATs enable voters to verify that their vote has been cast correctly, enhancing confidence in the electoral process.
- **Campaign Finance Reforms:** Implementation of campaign finance reforms aimed at curbing the influence of money in elections, introduction of expenditure limits for candidates and political parties, mandatory disclosure of campaign finances, and stricter enforcement of financial regulations. The upper limit for campaign finance spending for Lok Sabha elections is 95 lakhs and 75 lakhs respectively while for Vidhan Sabha 40 lakhs and 25 lakhs respectively.
- **Candidates Declaration:** Declaring of criminal antecedents, assets, etc. by the candidates along with spouse (and minor children) is required and declaring false information in the affidavit is now an electoral offence punishable with imprisonment up to 6 months or fine or both.

- **Introduction of NOTA (None of the Above):** Introduction of NOTA option on ballot papers and EVMs, allowing voters to express their dissatisfaction with the candidates contesting in their constituency. NOTA empowers voters to reject all candidates if they find them unsuitable, promoting accountability among political parties and candidates.
- **Vote from Home:** A noteworthy new electoral reform in India involves polling officials visiting the homes of senior citizens and People with Disabilities (PwD) to facilitate a smoother voting process. This initiative aims to make the electoral process more inclusive by addressing the mobility challenges faced by these groups. From 2024 General elections, over 14.14 lakh registered voters aged 85 plus and 13.89 lakh People with Disabilities (PwD) voters in 102 parliamentary constituencies can now vote from their homes.
- **Use of Technology for Voter Registration and Electoral Management:** Leveraging technology for voter registration, electoral roll management, and voter outreach initiatives. Introduction of online voter registration portals, mobile apps for voter education, and digital initiatives for election monitoring and management.
- **Promotion of Voter Education and Awareness:** Launch of voter education and awareness campaigns to promote informed and responsible voting behaviour. Collaboration with civil society organisations, media, and educational institutions to enhance voter literacy and civic engagement.
- **Electoral Bonds:** The introduction of electoral bonds is a reform aimed at increasing transparency in political funding by allowing individuals and organisations to donate to political parties through a banking instrument. These bonds ensured that donations are made through legal and accountable channels, reducing the reliance on unaccounted cash contributions. Electoral bonds were introduced in 2017 and eventually struck down by the Supreme Court in February 2024.

In conclusion, electoral reforms in India are aimed at modernising the electoral framework, promoting transparency and integrity, and ensuring greater participation and representation in the democratic process. While significant progress has been made, continuous efforts and vigilance are essential to address evolving challenges and uphold the principles of democratic governance.

Election reforms are an ongoing process aimed at enhancing the fairness, transparency, and efficiency of the electoral system. Despite significant advancements, there are still areas needing improvement, such as campaign finance transparency, online voting, and better provisions Indian citizens who are not residing in their home states and those who are abroad.

Some of the proposed reforms are,

- **Transparency in Campaign Funding and Electoral Bonds:** Introduce stricter regulations to ensure transparency in campaign funding and political donations. Implement measures to disclose the identity of donors contributing through electoral bonds, thereby enhancing accountability and reducing the potential for anonymous funding.

- **Online Voting:** Explore the feasibility of introducing online voting mechanisms to facilitate greater participation, especially among urban populations and overseas Indian citizens. Develop robust cybersecurity measures to safeguard against potential threats to the integrity and security of online voting systems.
- **Voting in Foreign Countries/Embassies:** Facilitate voting for Indian citizens residing abroad by setting up polling stations in foreign countries or embassies and consulates. - Streamline the absentee voting process to enable eligible overseas voters to cast their ballots conveniently and securely.
- **Easy Transfer of Constituency:** Introduce provisions for voters to easily transfer their voting constituency in case of relocation or change of residence. Simplify the process of updating voter registration details to ensure that citizens can exercise their franchise without logistical barriers.
- **Right to Recall:** Consider the implementation of the right to recall provisions, allowing constituents to recall elected representatives who fail to fulfil their electoral promises or meet performance benchmarks. Establish clear guidelines and thresholds for initiating and conducting recall elections to prevent misuse and ensure fairness.
- **Enhanced Voter Education and Awareness:** Launch comprehensive voter education campaigns to raise awareness about electoral processes, voting rights, and the importance of civic engagement. Collaborate with educational institutions, civil society organisations, and media platforms to disseminate accurate information and encourage informed participation.
- **Decriminalisation of Politics:** Enact legislation to disqualify candidates with criminal records from contesting elections, thereby promoting integrity and accountability in public office. Strengthen enforcement mechanisms to expedite the disposal of pending criminal cases against elected representatives.
- **Reforms in Election Commission Powers:** Enhance the Election Commission's powers and autonomy to ensure more effective oversight of the electoral process and enforcement of electoral laws. Grant the Election Commission authority to regulate political advertising, monitor campaign spending, and penalise violations of electoral guidelines.
- **Promotion of Youth and Women's Participation:** Implement measures to encourage greater representation of youth and women in electoral politics, including quotas and incentives for political parties to field younger and female candidates. Foster a conducive environment for youth and women to actively participate in political leadership and decision-making processes.

These proposed reforms aim to address key challenges and enhance the integrity, inclusivity, and effectiveness of India's electoral system, fostering a stronger democratic culture and ensuring that the voices and choices of citizens are truly heard and respected.

Conclusion

In conclusion, political parties are the backbone of a democratic system like India's. They represent a wide array of ideologies and interests, reflecting the country's diverse socio-political landscape. The existence of national, state, local, identity-based, and issue-based parties underscores the multi-faceted nature of Indian politics.

The classification of parties into National Party, State Party, and Registered Unrecognised Political Party made by the Election Commission of India is a testament to the vibrant multi-party democracy in India. It encourages healthy competition among parties, thereby strengthening the democratic process.

In a multi-party democracy like India, political parties play a crucial role in representing the collective-will of the people, shaping public policy, and ensuring good governance. They are instrumental in mobilising voters, facilitating political participation, and fostering democratic values among citizens. Thus, understanding the meaning, types, and classification of political parties is fundamental to comprehending the understanding of Indian politics.

This unit has provided a comprehensive overview of elections and the electoral processes in India, equipping students with a fundamental understanding of the principles and procedures that underpin the democratic framework. By exploring the intricacies of voter registration, the functioning of polling booths, and the use of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), students can now articulate the critical steps involved in conducting elections in the world's largest democracy.

The role of the Election Commission of India (ECI) has been highlighted as pivotal in ensuring free, fair, and transparent elections. Through its regulatory and oversight functions, the ECI upholds the integrity of the electoral process, addressing challenges and implementing measures to improve efficiency and public trust.

Reforms such as the Anti-Defection Law, the introduction of electoral bonds for transparent political funding, and the potential increase in the number of Election Commissioners reflect the dynamic nature of India's democracy. These reforms aim to mitigate issues such as political instability, corruption, and administrative inefficiencies, ensuring that the electoral process remains inclusive and equitable.

The system's ability to conduct peaceful transitions of power is a testament to its stability and effectiveness. Additionally, the extensive voter outreach and education programs help in increasing voter awareness and participation, which is essential in a diverse and populous country like India. The availability of voter registration mechanisms and the implementation of measures to make voting accessible for senior citizens and persons with disabilities further enhance the inclusiveness of the electoral process.

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