POLITICAL PROCESSES IN INDIA

Electoral Process in India

By **Brajabandhu Mahanta** • July 5, 2026 • 12 min read

The **electoral process** is the cornerstone of India's parliamentary democracy. It provides a constitutional mechanism through which citizens elect their representatives to the **Lok Sabha**, **State Legislative Assemblies**, and the offices of the **President and Vice-President**. The Constitution ensures that elections are conducted in a **free, fair, transparent, periodic, and impartial** manner under the supervision of an independent **Election Commission of India (ECI)**.

Articles **324 to 329 (Part XV)** of the Constitution lay down the constitutional framework for elections, while statutes such as the **Representation of the People Act, 1950** and the **Representation of the People Act, 1951** regulate the conduct of elections.

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Constitutional Framework of Elections

Constitutional Provision	Description
Part XV (Articles 324–329)	Constitutional provisions relating to elections.
Article 324	Establishes the Election Commission of India (ECI) and vests it with the superintendence, direction and control of elections.
Article 325	One general electoral roll for every territorial constituency; prohibits exclusion on grounds of religion, race, caste or sex.

Constitutional Provision	Description
Article 326	Elections to Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies are based on **universal adult suffrage** (18 years and above).
Article 327	Parliament may make laws relating to elections.
Article 328	State legislatures may legislate on state elections where Parliament has not made a law.
Article 329	Courts cannot ordinarily interfere in electoral matters except through election petitions.
Article 329A	Repealed by the 44th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1978.

Salient Features of the Indian Electoral System

Feature	Explanation
Independent Election Commission	Ensures impartial conduct of elections.
Universal Adult Franchise	Every citizen aged **18 years or above** has the right to vote, subject to legal disqualifications.
Single General Electoral Roll	No separate electorates based on religion, caste or community.
First-Past-the-Post (FPTP)	Candidate securing the highest number of valid votes wins.
Secret Ballot	Ensures free and independent voting.
Periodic Elections	Elections are held every five years unless the House is dissolved earlier.
Judicial Review through Election Petitions	Election disputes are adjudicated by High Courts.

Election Machinery in India

1. Election Commission of India (ECI)

Constitutional Status

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- Established under **Article 324**
- Independent constitutional authority

Composition

- **Chief Election Commissioner (CEC)**
- **Two Election Commissioners**

Major Functions

- Conduct elections to:
  - Lok Sabha
  - Rajya Sabha
  - State Legislative Assemblies
  - President
  - Vice-President
- Prepare and revise electoral rolls
- Allot election symbols
- Enforce the Model Code of Conduct
- Monitor election expenditure
- Recognise political parties
- Conduct voter awareness programmes

2. Chief Electoral Officer (CEO)

Appointed For Each State/Union Territory.

Functions

- Supervises election work throughout the State.
- Coordinates between the ECI and district administration.

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- Oversees electoral roll revision.

3. District Election Officer (DEO)

Functions

- Conducts elections at the district level.
- Coordinates polling stations.
- Supervises election personnel.

4. Returning Officer (RO)

Functions

- Conducts elections in a parliamentary or assembly constituency.
- Receives nominations.
- Scrutinises nomination papers.
- Conducts counting.
- Declares election results.

5. Electoral Registration Officer (ERO)

Responsible for:

- Preparation of electoral rolls
- Revision and correction of electoral rolls
- Inclusion and deletion of voters

6. Presiding Officer

Responsible for:

- Managing polling stations
- Ensuring free and fair polling

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- Maintaining polling records
- Conducting mock polls before voting

7. Election Observers

The ECI appoints observers to ensure impartial elections.

Observer	Function
General Observer	Monitors overall election process.
Expenditure Observer	Tracks election expenditure of candidates.
Police Observer	Monitors law and order arrangements.
Awareness Observer	Supervises voter awareness and ethical election campaigns.
Micro Observer	Closely monitors polling at sensitive booths.
Assistant Expenditure Observer	Assists in expenditure monitoring.

Electoral Process in India

Stage 1: Delimitation of Constituencies

Before elections:

- Constituencies are delimited on the basis of population.
- Conducted by the **Delimitation Commission**.
- Delimitation orders cannot ordinarily be challenged in courts (Article 329).

Stage 2: Preparation of Electoral Rolls

- Electoral rolls are revised annually.
- Eligible citizens (18 years or above) are enrolled.
- Continuous updation allows inclusion of new voters and deletion of ineligible names.

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Stage 3: Announcement of Election Schedule

The Election Commission announces:

- Poll dates
- Nomination dates
- Scrutiny dates
- Withdrawal dates
- Polling dates
- Counting dates

Immediately after the announcement, the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) comes into force.

Stage 4: Election Notification

The President (Lok Sabha) or Governor (State Assembly) issues the election notification, formally initiating the election process.

Stage 5: Filing of Nominations

Candidates submit nomination papers to the Returning Officer.

Requirements include:

- Prescribed nomination forms
- Security deposit
- Affidavit declaring criminal antecedents, assets, liabilities and educational qualifications
- Oath or affirmation

Stage 6: Scrutiny of Nominations

The Returning Officer verifies:

- Eligibility

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- Age
- Citizenship
- Qualification
- Proper documentation

Invalid nominations are rejected.

Stage 7: Withdrawal of Candidature

Candidates may withdraw within the prescribed period after scrutiny.

After withdrawal, the **final list of contesting candidates** is published.

Stage 8: Election Campaign

Political parties and candidates campaign through:

- Public meetings
- Roadshows
- Door-to-door campaigns
- Digital campaigns
- Social media
- Election manifestos

Campaigning ends **48 hours before polling**, known as the **Silence Period**.

Model Code of Conduct (MCC)

The MCC is a set of guidelines issued by the Election Commission to ensure free and fair elections.

Objectives

- Ensure a level playing field.
- Prevent misuse of government machinery.

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- Avoid hate speech and communal appeals.
- Regulate election expenditure.
- Maintain peace during elections.

Although the MCC is **not legally enforceable**, violations may attract action under existing laws.

Stage 9: Polling

Polling is conducted at designated polling stations.

Procedure

1. Verification of voter identity.
2. Marking of indelible ink.
3. Authentication by polling officials.
4. Casting of vote using an **Electronic Voting Machine (EVM)**.
5. Generation of **VVPAT slip** for voter verification (without taking it home).

Electronic Voting Machine (EVM)

An **Electronic Voting Machine (EVM)** is used to record votes electronically.

Components

- Ballot Unit (BU)
- Control Unit (CU)
- Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT)

Advantages

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Advantage	Explanation
Faster counting	Results declared quickly.
Eliminates invalid votes	No rejected ballot papers.
Environment friendly	Saves paper.
Cost-effective	Reduces printing and logistics costs.
Secure	Stand-alone, non-networked device.

Stage 10: Counting of Votes

Counting is conducted under the supervision of:

- Returning Officer
- Election Observers
- Counting Supervisors

After counting:

- Candidate securing the highest number of valid votes is declared elected.
- Returning Officer issues the certificate of election.

Stage 11: Declaration of Results

The Election Commission officially declares:

- Constituency-wise results
- Party-wise performance
- Final composition of the House

The President (Lok Sabha) or Governor (State Assembly) convenes the newly elected House.

Electoral System: First-Past-the-Post (FPTP)

India follows the **First-Past-the-Post (Plurality System)**.

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Features

- Single-member constituencies
- Candidate with the highest number of votes wins
- Absolute majority is not required

Advantages

- Simple and easy to understand
- Stable governments
- Quick counting
- Strong constituency representation

Limitations

- Vote-share and seat-share may not correspond
- Smaller parties are underrepresented
- Possibility of minority governments
- Encourages strategic voting

Election Petitions

Election disputes are resolved through **Election Petitions**.

Aspect	Provision
Jurisdiction	High Court
Appeal	Supreme Court
Constitutional Basis	Article 329(b)
Statutory Basis	Representation of the People Act, 1951

Grounds include:

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- Corrupt practices
- Improper acceptance or rejection of nominations
- Improper counting of votes
- Electoral malpractice

Recent Electoral Reforms

Reform	Year	Description	Significance	Challenges / Limitations
Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT)	2013 (phased); nationwide in 2019	VVPAT enables voters to verify that their vote has been correctly recorded in the Electronic Voting Machine (EVM). A paper slip displaying the selected candidate's name and symbol is visible for about seven seconds before being stored securely.	• Enhances transparency and voter confidence.• Provides a physical audit trail.• Assists in verification during disputes and recounts.	• Demand for wider VVPAT verification.• Slightly increases counting time and logistical complexity.
NOTA (None of the Above)	2013	Introduced following the Supreme Court judgment in *People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) v. Union of India (2013)*, NOTA allows voters to reject all contesting candidates while maintaining ballot secrecy.	• Strengthens freedom of choice.• Encourages political parties to nominate better candidates.• Enhances democratic participation.	• NOTA has no electoral consequence; the candidate with the highest valid votes still wins.
Electoral Photo Identity Card (EPIC)	1993 (expanded in recent years)	Every registered voter is issued a unique photo identity card for authentication at polling stations.	• Prevents impersonation and bogus voting.• Improves the accuracy of electoral rolls.• Strengthens electoral integrity.	• Errors in voter lists and difficulties in updating voter details may still occur.
cVIGIL Mobile Application	2018	A mobile-based citizen reporting platform that enables voters to report violations of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) using photographs or videos with geo-tagging.	• Promotes citizen participation.• Enables quick action against MCC violations.• Improves election monitoring and accountability.	• Depends on digital literacy, internet connectivity, and timely verification of complaints.

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Reform	Year	Description	Significance	Challenges / Limitations
Suvidha Portal	2019	A single-window online platform through which candidates and political parties can obtain permissions for rallies, meetings, loudspeakers, and campaign-related activities.	• Increases transparency.• Reduces administrative delays.• Promotes efficient election management.	• Digital access may be limited in remote areas.
Accessible Elections Initiative	2018 onwards	Initiative to make elections inclusive for Persons with Disabilities (PwDs), senior citizens, and other vulnerable groups through ramps, wheelchairs, Braille-enabled EVMs, volunteers, transport facilities, and accessible polling stations.	• Promotes inclusive democracy.• Improves voter turnout among vulnerable groups.• Ensures equal voting opportunities.	• Infrastructure and accessibility gaps remain in some polling stations.
Home Voting Facility	Expanded from 2024 General Elections	Eligible **senior citizens aged 85 years and above**, **Persons with Benchmark Disabilities (PwBDs) with 40% or more disability**, and certain **essential service voters** can vote from home under prescribed procedures and safeguards. *(Earlier pilot provisions covered some categories including 80+ voters.)*	• Makes voting more inclusive.• Increases participation among elderly and disabled voters.• Reduces physical hardship.	• Requires strict safeguards to maintain secrecy, transparency, and prevent undue influence.
Digital Electoral Roll Management	Ongoing	Voters can register online, correct details, change addresses, and verify electoral information through digital platforms such as the **National Voters' Service Portal (NVSP)** and the **Voter Helpline App**.	• Faster voter registration.• Better accuracy of electoral rolls.• Reduces paperwork and administrative burden.	• Digital divide, cybersecurity concerns, and data accuracy remain important issues.
Voter Helpline Mobile App	2019	Provides voter registration, polling station information, election schedules, candidate affidavits, election results, and grievance redressal through a mobile application.	• Improves voter awareness and accessibility.• Simplifies electoral services.• Encourages informed participation.	• Effectiveness depends on public awareness and smartphone access.

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Reform	Year	Description	Significance	Challenges / Limitations
National Voters' Service Portal (NVSP)	2015	A comprehensive online portal for voter registration, correction of voter details, tracking applications, and downloading electronic EPIC (e-EPIC).	• Promotes digital governance.• Simplifies electoral services.• Improves citizen convenience.	• Requires continuous updating and robust cybersecurity measures.
e-EPIC (Electronic Electoral Photo Identity Card)	2021	A digitally signed PDF version of the EPIC that can be downloaded and stored on mobile devices.	• Convenient digital identity for voters.• Reduces dependence on physical cards.• Supports Digital India initiatives.	• Requires internet access and digital literacy.
Booth Level Officer (BLO) Digital Initiatives	Ongoing	Digital applications assist Booth Level Officers in voter verification, electoral roll management, and field reporting.	• Improves accuracy and efficiency in electoral roll preparation.• Reduces manual errors.	• Requires regular training and reliable digital infrastructure.

Challenges to the Electoral Process

- Money power in elections
- Criminalisation of politics
- Hate speech and misinformation
- Fake news and deepfakes
- Misuse of social media
- Low representation of women
- Paid news
- Electoral violence in some areas
- Declining inner-party democracy
- Rising election expenditure

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Challenge	Explanation	Impact on Democracy	Measures / Way Forward
1. Money Power in Elections	Elections have become increasingly expensive. Candidates and political parties spend enormous amounts on campaigns, rallies, advertisements, social media, transportation, and voter outreach. Despite statutory expenditure limits for candidates, unofficial and unaccounted spending remains high.	Creates an uneven playing field, encourages corruption, promotes influence of wealthy individuals and corporate interests, and reduces opportunities for honest candidates.	Strengthen campaign finance transparency, mandate real-time disclosure of donations, strictly enforce expenditure limits, regulate political funding, and enhance auditing by the Election Commission.
2. Criminalisation of Politics	A significant number of candidates contest elections despite facing serious criminal charges. Political parties often nominate such candidates because of their financial resources or local influence.	Weakens public trust in democratic institutions, affects the quality of governance, and undermines the rule of law.	Fast-track courts for criminal cases involving politicians, stricter disclosure norms, electoral reforms to discourage candidates with serious criminal charges, and greater voter awareness.
3. Hate Speech and Misinformation	Political campaigns sometimes exploit religious, caste, linguistic, or regional sentiments through inflammatory speeches and misleading information.	Increases social polarisation, disturbs communal harmony, and prevents voters from making informed decisions.	Strict enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC), legal action under relevant laws, rapid fact-checking mechanisms, and public awareness campaigns.

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Challenge	Explanation	Impact on Democracy	Measures / Way Forward
4. Fake News and Deepfakes	Artificial Intelligence (AI) has enabled the creation of deepfake videos, manipulated audio, and fabricated content that spread rapidly through digital platforms.	Misleads voters, damages reputations of candidates, influences electoral outcomes, and threatens electoral integrity.	Strengthen digital regulations, collaborate with social media platforms, deploy AI-based detection tools, promote media literacy, and impose penalties for deliberate dissemination of false information.
5. Misuse of Social Media	Political parties increasingly use social media for targeted advertisements, political propaganda, micro-targeting, and data-driven campaigns. Some campaigns spread misinformation or violate election silence periods.	Influences voter behaviour unfairly, reduces transparency, and enables manipulation through algorithms and undisclosed advertisements.	Mandatory disclosure of political advertisements, greater transparency in digital campaigning, stronger regulation of online platforms, and enhanced monitoring by the Election Commission.
6. Low Representation of Women	Although women constitute nearly half of the electorate, their representation in Parliament and State Legislatures remains relatively low due to social, economic, and political barriers.	Limits inclusive governance and reduces gender-sensitive policymaking.	Effective implementation of the **Women's Reservation Act (106th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2023)** after delimitation, internal party quotas, financial support for women candidates, and leadership development programmes.

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Challenge	Explanation	Impact on Democracy	Measures / Way Forward
7. Paid News	Media organisations or individuals publish favourable news reports disguised as objective journalism in exchange for money or other benefits without proper disclosure.	Misleads voters, distorts public opinion, violates ethical journalism, and undermines free and fair elections.	Strengthen monitoring committees, impose strict penalties on offenders, improve media regulation, and encourage independent fact-checking institutions.
8. Electoral Violence	Certain constituencies witness intimidation, booth capturing, clashes between rival political groups, destruction of polling materials, and violence against voters or election officials.	Discourages voter participation, particularly among vulnerable groups, and threatens free and fair elections.	Deploy adequate security forces, identify sensitive polling stations, install CCTV surveillance, strengthen intelligence gathering, and ensure prompt legal action against offenders.
9. Declining Inner-Party Democracy	Candidate selection and party leadership are often controlled by a small group of leaders, limiting transparency and participation of ordinary party members.	Weakens democratic functioning within political parties and reduces accountability and political competition.	Mandate internal party elections, enhance transparency in candidate selection, strengthen internal governance, and encourage democratic decision-making within political parties.

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Challenge	Explanation	Impact on Democracy	Measures / Way Forward
10. Rising Election Expenditure	The overall cost of conducting elections has increased significantly due to extensive campaigning, technology, logistics, media advertisements, and security arrangements. India now conducts some of the world's most expensive elections.	Creates financial barriers for new entrants, encourages dependence on large donors, and increases the influence of money in politics.	Explore partial state funding of elections, reduce campaign duration, strengthen expenditure monitoring, encourage digital campaigning, and improve transparency in political finance.

Way Forward

- Strengthen campaign finance transparency.
- Decriminalise politics through speedy trials.
- Regulate digital campaigning and AI-generated misinformation.
- Increase women's political representation.
- Enhance voter awareness through continuous civic education.
- Strengthen internal democracy within political parties.
- Expand the use of technology while ensuring transparency and privacy.
- Continue electoral reforms based on recommendations of expert committees and the Election Commission.

Previous Year UPSC/UGC NET Focus Areas

- Constitutional provisions relating to elections (Articles 324–329)
- Powers and functions of the Election Commission of India
- Universal Adult Franchise
- First-Past-the-Post System

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- Model Code of Conduct (MCC)
- Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) and VVPAT
- Election Petition
- Delimitation Commission
- Electoral Roll
- Role of Election Observers
- Representation of the People Acts, 1950 and 1951
- Electoral reforms and challenges

Quick Revision Table

Topic	Key Fact
Constitutional Provisions	Articles 324–329 (Part XV)
Election Commission	Article 324
Electoral Roll	Article 325
Adult Suffrage	Article 326
Parliament’s Power	Article 327
State Legislature’s Power	Article 328
Election Disputes	Article 329
Voting Age	18 years
Electoral System	First-Past-the-Post (FPTP)
Voting Method	EVM with VVPAT
Election Disputes Heard By	High Court
Election Law	Representation of the People Acts, 1950 & 1951
Campaign Silence Period	48 hours before polling

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