

## **Electoral Reforms in India and Their Role in Promoting Good Governance**

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### **Introduction**

Sustainable electoral reforms in any democratic nation require good administration. Although it is frequently anticipated that democracy will result in the much-needed efficient governance, election systems' legitimacy has worked against the conversion of democracy into good governance. There needs to be more focus on the topic of electoral changes, which has only sometimes garnered attention. It determined the availability and degree to which election reforms support effective government and peaceful cohabitation. The study came to the conclusion that in order for electoral reforms to produce the desired results of good governance, they must be fully implemented, the nation's democratic institutions must be strengthened, and citizens' civic education about elections must be prioritized for good governance in India.

The centrality of elections to democratic process and political stability cannot be overemphasized. This is because elections remain the bedrock for democratic consolidation in any country. Conduct of elections has become a major criterion through which countries are rated and categorized. Free and fair elections go a long way in determining the continuous cohabiting of different groupings in any country with diverse culture. Also, elections that are characterized by massive and varying degree of frauds and malpractices have been discovered to be a threat to political stability. So many lives have been lost and many properties destroyed as a result of electoral frauds. The evils of electoral fraud are many. They range from instabilities, destruction of lives and properties, official irresponsibility, leadership ineptitude to corruption, mismanagement, political assassination, apathy, loss of interest in governance and challenges of legitimacy crises.

### **Electoral Reforms**

Changing electoral systems to improve the efficacy and efficiency of election administration is known as electoral reform (Butler, 2004). The goal of electoral reform is to increase participation in an open, competitive, and equal environment by changing every aspect of election administration. Improved impartiality of the electoral body and other institutions involved in election administration, such as the police, courts, etc., inclusivity, independence, and financial autonomy of the electoral body, transparency, expanded franchise and participation, and process integrity are all examples of electoral reform.

Electoral reform is a sine qua non to any virile democracy. Reforms either in election or any other sector for that matter is a matter of continuum because problems of democracy can only be solved with having more democracy, more democracy can only evolve if more and continuous reforms are pushed through.

### **Governance**

Mahatma Gandhi's liberation fight and the goals of the Constitution's founding fathers significantly influenced the idea of government. Every country is governed by a set of principles that both the populace and the government uphold. The content and caliber of governance are significantly influenced by the nation's devotion to these ideals. Nationalism, democracy, secularism, non-alignment, and a mixed economy were these ideals in the Indian setting at the time of the Republic's founding.

## **Good Governance**

Before defining good governance, it is appropriate to define governance. Keohane and Nye (1989) define governance as the “emergence and recognition of the principles, norms, rules and procedures that both provide standards of acceptable public behaviour, and that are followed sufficiently to produce behavioural irregularities”. Arowolo and Aluko (2010) define governance as “both processes and arrangements that ensure orderliness, acceptable standard of allocation of resources (both human and material) and a legal framework within which national behaviours are shaped and controlled”.

According to Kaufmann et al. (1999), there are three categories of governance: the rule of law, government efficacy, and voice and accountability. On its own, good governance is far more comprehensive, emphasizing the ability of the state and its institutions to create the necessary mechanisms to impose significant restrictions on the behavior of individuals and policy makers in order to ensure justice and guarantee individual rights through observance of the rule of law without discrimination, creating a space for participation and tolerating divergent viewpoints, and the state's ability to translate community will into tangible development. Good governance, according to Minogue (1997), is "a broad reform strategy and a specific collection of efforts to enhance the institutions of civil society with the purpose of making government more accountable, more open and transparent, and more democratic." The ability to create and carry out sensible policies, as well as the state's and citizens' respect for the organizations that oversee social and economic relations, are all components of good governance.

Weiss (2000) urges that the effectiveness of the electoral reforms is possible only if good governance structures are put in place. The existence of good governance borrows heavily from the presence and consolidation of democratic characteristics which advocates for effective electoral reforms . While good governance is correlated with the perception of a system of government that is legitimate, equitable in conduct, committed to the will of the people, assuring law and order and responsive to the needs of the people (Sharma, 2007), Cheema & Maguire (2004) argue that good governance comprises a broader spectrum of government accountability, legitimacy, public sector management, having a legal framework for development and appropriate timely and effective policies.

## **Democracy**

Good governance is not implied by democracy alone. It is a means to an end rather than an end in and of itself. It has been discovered that firmly established democracy in the form of liberalism, or what Cheema and Maguire (2004) refer to as "maximalist democracy," is capable of fostering effective governance. They claim that "many rights and liberties that have to be associated with a competitive and inclusive system of government" are included in maximalist democracy. In evaluating the maximalist approach to democracy, Diamond (1999) argues that democracy is a notion that guarantees credible and regular elections, expands political involvement, and permits fundamental human rights. Linz and Stepan (1999) propose five interconnected conditions that must be met for democracy to develop good governance: an institutionalized economic society, a relatively autonomous and valued political society, a free and active civil society, a functional state bureaucracy that can be used by the democratic government to deliver public good, and the rule of law to guarantee citizens' freedoms and independent associational life.

## **Political Participation**

Political participation is sine qua non to good governance. Political participation, which includes citizens' involvement in the decision making process, contribution to public debate on national issues and voting, needs to be encouraged. Wider political participation naturally endows policies that emanate from that process with legitimacy, as people feel sense of belonging and can lay claim of ownership to such policies. Policies are more likely to be sustainable when they receive popular understanding and support, most especially when women, youths and minorities have input into governmental decisions and also be provided with mechanism through which unfavourable policies are contested and protested against. The purpose of broad inclusion of citizens in the policy making arrangement is to create sense of belonging and awareness necessary for the sustainable of policy even if it is a short-term painful policy that will provide long-term reward. This public participation model is potent enough to consolidate democracy and engender good governance.

According to Diamond (2005), good governance occurs when sovereignty and governmental power ultimately belong to the people and are responsive to them. As a matter of welfare policy, the government and its institutions must support the human development of all citizens and be pro-poor. Three characteristics set democracy apart from other types of authoritarianism, according to Robert Dahl (1989): the democratic process fosters both individual and collective freedom; it advances human development; and, despite its imperfections, it is the most effective means for people to defend and further their shared interests and goods.

The beauty of good governance stems from its tendencies to empower citizens the opportunities to use their discretion and provides with opportunities of self-fulfillment and self-actualization by deliberately enhancing the capacity of individual citizen, who will in turn transform other factors of production into productive purposes for national development. Human development is the means through which other forms of development are achieved. Good governance must indeed democratize the process of decision making in a way to guarantee the involvement of the groups for which decisions are being made. For example, wealth creation programme can only be potent and sustainable only if the affected group is involved at all levels of decision making process.

Regulations should be applied to both the wealthy and the underprivileged in society; governance is good when it is non-discriminatory and tends to treat every member of society according to the established norms. Everyone should have unrestricted access to justice, regardless of their social standing, ethnicity, or gender, and the judiciary should act as an arbitrator in an impartial, unbiased, and effective manner. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that excellent governance is possible in an environment that upholds the rule of law. To promote progress, good governance should prioritize outcomes above procedures. The government's delivery inputs should be used to measure it. In other words, good governance is about real achievement and its good intentions rather than budgetary provisions. In addition to being essential for development, good governance should be able to employ resources efficiently to generate wealth, stimulate economic growth, and promote sustainable development.

Citizens all the world over look up to the nation-state and its organs for high quality performance. When good governance is guaranteed, citizens go about their personal business and pursuits with enhanced expectations. On the other side of the spectrum, bad or indifferent governance not only restricts opportunities of success but it can even degenerate into sectarian conflicts and civil wars. In such an atmosphere personal accomplishments as well as social

achievements get severely restricted. Good governance helps create an environment in which sustained economic growth becomes achievable. Conditions of good governance allow citizens to maximize their returns on investment.

Good governance is not an accident. Citizens must demand it, and the nation state must publicly and intentionally support it. Therefore, it is essential that citizens be able to completely, freely, and openly engage in the democratic process. Citizens must be able to form political parties, run for office, and exercise their civil liberties and fundamental rights. Therefore, responsible political leadership, smart policymaking, and a civil service with a professional character are all linked to good governance. Good governance requires a robust civil society, which includes an independent court and a free press. What does "excellent" government mean in India? Social development is the main obstacle to good governance. Jawaharlal Nehru described this issue as the eradication of poverty, ignorance, illness, and opportunity inequity in his well-known "tryst with destiny" address on August 14, 1947. Expanding social possibilities and eradicating poverty must be the goals of good administration.

### **Failure of Electoral Reforms - Challenges to Good Governance Criminalization of Politics**

The Criminalization of the political process and the unholy nexus between politicians, civil servants, and business houses are having a baneful influence on public policy formulation and governance. Political class as such is losing respect. The Indian State is facing a serious challenge to its authority from lawless elements. The jihadi terrorism in Jammu & Kashmir and its ad hoc but frequent spread to other parts of India, the insurgency in the North-East, and rapidly expanding base of naxalite movement in mainland India constitute grave challenge to democratic governance. Fortunately, one sees national consensus against jihadi terrorism and it is for the Indian State to deal firmly with this menace. Insurgency in India's North-East is largely confined now to Nagaland, Manipur and Assam and these are being tackled by democratically elected state governments with full support from the Centre. Of late, one sees a political resolve to deal with naxalites as well. Dialogue process alone would provide the final answer but in every eventuality the State has to be continually firm in order that it discharges its basic responsibility of protecting life and property of its citizens.

The more subtle danger to India's democratic administration comes from the large number of criminals and musclemen who are joining state legislatures and the national parliament. It appears that a political culture is emerging in which serving in state legislatures and Parliament is seen as a means of pursuing personal benefit and financial gain. These factors have also been present in the Council of Ministers, and at a time of coalition politics, a prime minister or chief minister cannot take decisive action that could bring down the government. Gandhian ideals of selfless service to public causes and a humble lifestyle are quickly disappearing. The rule of men is intended to take the role of the maxim "no matter how high, the law is above you." It is true that neither the public nor the media are passive observers of this phenomenon. Several lawmakers and ministers have been imprisoned as a result of the legal accountability process. However, new techniques have also been developed to tamper with legal procedures. Criminals who are prosecuted are released on bail and may even escape punishment. The doctor always discovers a significant illness that allows the accused to avoid the discomforts of jail by being admitted to a five-star hospital while their bail petition and trial are being considered.

The question staring all of us is how to close the gate of the portals of democracy for criminals. At the behest of the Election Commission, the Indian Parliament has enacted certain laws that make it obligatory on the candidate contesting an election for Parliament or State Assembly to declare as to whether he is accused for any offence punishable under law for two years or more, for which charges have been framed. Candidates would also have to disclose whether he has been convicted for any offence in which the punishment has been awarded for one year or more for the information of the voter. All these have created a favorable environment for curbing criminalization of politics. But it is necessary to move further to debar criminals from contesting elections. It is imperative, therefore, to amend Section 8 of the Representation of the People's Act 1951 to disqualify a person against whom the competent judicial authority has framed charges that relate to grave and heinous offences and corruption.

### **Corruption**

Many people believe that India's high level of corruption is a significant barrier to raising the standard of governance. Although individual avarice is undoubtedly a contributing factor to corruption, India's increasing graft curve is also a result of institutional incentives and a weak enforcement mechanism. Corruption in India has been encouraged by a complicated and opaque structure of command and control, the government's monopoly as a service provider, an inadequate legal framework, a lack of knowledge, and a poor understanding of citizens' rights. It would be necessary to implement a deliberate campaign to increase public awareness while also empowering the current anti-corruption organizations. One of the biggest changes in public administration has been the statutory right to information. A robust national framework for public awareness campaigns is provided under the Right to Information Act. Corruption occurs in a frame. Therefore, fundamental changes to file management, laws and regulations, and the availability of public expenditure reviews could give concerned citizens the information they need to hold service providers responsible. This would guarantee that people's resources are spent appropriately.

### **Corruption and Electoral Reforms**

The hitherto laissez-faire system of funding of elections is the biggest countervailing factor in the emergence of democratic India as an honest state. It is widely agreed that state funding of elections/parties will provide a certain degree of financial independence to parties and their candidates and that in turn will help reduce the incentives to raise party/election funds through corrupt means. Public financing holds great promise because it levels the playing field and gives candidates an incentive to accept spending limits. With public financing, poorer candidates can challenge well-funded ones, enlivening the debate and opening up the system. Public financing should be accompanied by free media space. The state funding of elections regime should be accompanied by strict accounting procedures including rules to internally democratize parties. All these will improve the image of political parties in the eyes of the public and help create a virtuous cycle of democratic competition within political parties for election nominations in which candidates exposed to be corrupt can expect to be weeded out over time. It will also encourage honest persons from various walks of life to join the electoral battlefield. The state funding of elections in India would also go a long way in reducing the clout of religious, ethnic and some business houses on the government.

### **Conclusion**

The people are the most powerful group in a democracy. The informed and responsible use of the right to vote is ultimately what determines the integrity and viability of democratic

administration. Even in the face of a historically corrupt and criminalized political climate, democracy can flourish if citizens refuse to support politicians who are dishonest, have criminal tendencies, or try to influence voters with money and physical force. Even while the Election Commission of India (EC) has been working hard to guarantee free and fair elections through regulations, stringent oversight, and reforms, its efforts cannot secure clean elections on their own. Equally important are the collaboration and moral dedication of political parties, candidates, and voters. Voters must understand their duty to elect representatives who preserve democratic values rather than give in to temporary inducements, and political parties must recruit candidates with integrity. Additionally, there needs to be a strong, efficient, and well-equipped system in place to stop, identify, and penalize election irregularities. To hold offenders accountable, this entails strict enforcement of the law, efficient oversight of campaign tactics, and vigorous citizen engagement. Democracy can only thrive and retain its legitimacy via shared accountability, moral political conduct, and robust institutional support.

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