



### Note on Electoral Reforms

The most important ingredient for the smooth functioning of any democracy is directly linked to the way political parties function and the way elections are conducted. While there are examples of some exemplary people in public life, the reverse of this is also true. The flawed electoral process also alienates the spirited citizens from the socio-political scenario – both in the context of contesting elections and also in participating in the electoral process.

It is often seen that in spite of change in the players i.e. elected representative, the game remains the same - there isn't much change in governance. This unfortunate state of affairs demands the referee (Election Commission) to change of the rules of the game to ensure better public representatives and in turn have a positive impact on development.

I would recommend the following reforms to restore and enhance our democratic processes.

#### A. Strengthening the EC and rebuilding the faith in the institution

##### **1) De-politicize appointments to EC**

The Election Commission is the Electoral Referee who ensures that elections are a free and fair game. There needs to be a mechanism established to appoint the officials of EC with consultation of the Chief Justice to ensure that people don't lose faith in this prime institution of democracy.

A provision debarring Election Commissioners to join Political Parties after retirement should also be put in place.



## **2) Strengthen the EC to form its own Laws**

To ensure the autonomous functioning of the Election Commission, a major shift is required – to give power to the Election Commission to form its own laws unlike the present scenario wherein the Election Commission has to wait for the elected representatives to approve its recommendations. Also, the EC should be allowed to have its own budget and final say over the expenditure.

## **3) Making it easier to De-Registering Political Parties**

Though the EC has a provision of registering parties, it doesn't have the provision to de-register them. A large amount of non-serious rogue parties are registered with the EC, who are misusing the platform either for monetary gains or for petty political gains. The EC should have a strict code of conduct for the political parties to ensure only serious players continue to be in the field. Also, a new norm of "de-registering" non serious players should be established at the earliest.

## **4) Make EVM's tamper proof and improve its Credibility**

There is an urgent need to address the issue of the Electoral Voting Machines (EVM). The credibility of the EVM has been on stake ever since a whistle-blower tried to expose the loophole on live television. The Government reacted by arresting the whistle-blower. This action on the part of the Government seems that the Government had something to hide. The EVMs do not have a cross-verification programme which further raises questions. The Election Commission should experiment using Ballot boxes along with EVMs to ensure cross checking. And if a problem is recognized in the EVMs then the EC should be shy of rolling back to Ballot paper.





## **B. Reforms in Electoral process**

### **1) Concurrent State and Central Elections**

To ensure that elections don't come in the way of governance consecutive state and center elections should be held. Political Stability will ensure good governance. Along with the issue of Governance, the concurrent elections will ensure that free and fair elections at minimal costs to the exchequer.

### **2) Recall Elections**

A provision to "Recall the Elected Representatives" should be provided to the electorate. This will act as a checks & balance and ensure non-performing representatives are shown the door.

### **3) None of the Above Option (49-O) on the Ballot**

The voters should get an option of "None of the above" (section 49-O) on the Ballot. This will help increase voter turn-out.

### **4) Elections should be conducted on the same day and not in phased manner**

A lot of heavy criticism came up during the last Lok Sabha elections for the manner in which the five-phased polls took place. To be honest it certainly did leave a mark of question over the selection of dates and the grouping of states. To ensure a fair election, the Election Commission should conduct elections on the same day.

### **5) Election results should be announced the same day**

There were a few allegations which came up during the last Lok Sabha which questioned the delay in announcing the results by questioning the decision to



keep the EVMs in security and putting additional pressure on the State machinery to keep it tamper-proof. If only EVMs are going to be used for the Electoral process, the results should be announced the very same day like in many western countries.

**6) Limit/monitor the Spending of a candidate**

For giving the common man a real chance at democracy, there should be a strict cap on election expenditure which should be strictly monitored.

**7) Regular annual audit of all mainstream parties by the EC**

An annual audit should be held for all the recognized national parties. A strict fine (like say banning from contesting elections or de-recognition of the said party) should be imposed if found guilty of irregularities.

**C. Increased Voter-Awareness**

**1) Increased Awareness of Participation in Democratic Process**

Have a once a year "Voting Enrollment Process." This activity should be conducted throughout the country (in every constituency) around the National Voter's Day and should be backed by advocacy/advertized awareness campaign.

**2) Giving EC a 4 month Budget before Elections to mobilize voters**

A 4-month pre-election budget should be ear marked by the EC to enable a smoother registration process, cross-check if there are mistakes in the Voter's list, etc. In short to encourage people to come out and vote and in turn increase the turnout.

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### **3) Easier & Simpler Registration Process**

The process of registration for a new voter is very tedious and discourages the young citizen from being a part of the democratic process.

### **4) Absentee Voting**

Many citizens are unable to exercise their "right to vote" because of the urgent or unavoidable work in spite of "wanting" to be a part of the electoral process. A provision of mobile voting/absentee voting will most importantly help

### **5) Voting Rights for Citizens Abroad**

The above reform should be looked in the broader perspective and citizens (having Indian passports) staying abroad should also get a chance to exercise their right to vote.

### **6) Compulsory Voting**

An incentive based approach is needed to encourage citizen participation in the electoral process. Along with providing an incentive to the voter, the opposite of that should be imposed on the non-voter. Compulsory Voting should be strictly complemented with "49-O" being made available on the EVM.

### **7) Increasing the number of polling booths to reach out more people and to reduce the long waiting queues**

One of the biggest problems which a common man faces while exercising his/her right is standing in long queues in scorching sun, travelling several kilometers for making one's count and so on. These shortcomings should be





curtailed by increasing the number of polling booths and also by providing proper waiting shelters at the booths.