



The Nexus of Electoral Reforms and Political Accountability in India: A Critical Assessment

Prof. (Dr.) Krati Sharma¹ & Dr. Ruchika S Rathi²

Abstract:

In the Indian political system, electoral reforms and political accountability are two inseparable terms, which is why it has not been fully studied and researched. With the largest democracy in the world still struggling to ensure that systemic issues such as criminalization of politics, secretive funding of their campaigns, loss of internal party democracy, and institutional limitations in electoral governance agencies, there is mounting pressure on the need to conduct wholesome and integrated reforms. The article is a critical reflection on the connection between the electoral reform activities and mechanisms of political accountability in modern India, especially in the context of recent developments such as the Election Commission Integrated Network (ECINET) digitalization, the One Nation, One Election initiative and the Constitutional 130th Amendment Bill (2025) on ministerial disqualification. This article presents an argument that any meaningful electoral reform needs to be anchored to institutional frameworks and emerging reform proposals through an analysis of the provisions of the constitution, institutional frameworks and emerging reform proposals with the aim of ensuring democratic integrity, the rule of law, and trust of the people in democracies. The article reports the most significant missing links between current frameworks and suggests a comprehensive reform agenda that steps up to incorporate electoral administration, transparency in campaign financing, criminal responsibility in political leadership and independence of electoral institutions.

Keywords: Electoral reforms, Political accountability, Election Commission of India, Criminalization of politics, Campaign finance

1. Introduction

The democratic regime of India with the largest number of citizens in the world is built on the purity of election procedures and the transparency of the political figures ruling the country. However, ironically, the

¹ Dept. of English and Soft Skills, Poornima Institute of Engg. & Technology Relations, Jaipur

² Additional Head & Assistant Professor, Dept of Political Science & International Relations, Jaipur, IIS (Deemed to be University), Jaipur



country has in the recent decades been subjected to an organized undermining of the electoral integrity procedures and the political accountability processes [1]. The 2024-2025 has seen a record pace of electoral reform manifest in 2024 with the new ECINET platform of the Election Commission, in 2024 the Ram Nath Kovind Committee recommendations of simultaneous elections, and the Constitutional 130th Amendment Bill on ministerial misconduct [2].

But electoral reforms without sound accountability measures are prone to turn into procedural exercises which lack any real democratic content. The intersection point of electoral reform and political accountability is essential since in democracies elections are the primary accountability tool the ultimate tool by which a citizen can punish and dismiss those who abuse power [3]. When the criminalization of elections, the power of money, and the weakness of the institutions are combined to make elections unfair, when elected officials are not subjected to any meaningful punishment in the event of breach of ethics, the electoral system as such comes into question.

This paper critically evaluates the enigma between electoral reforms and political accountability in India claiming that these two aspects should be combined, and should not be sought separately. The discussion relies on the provisions of the constitution, institutional structures, recent reform proposals, as well as comparative standards to find avenues to change the democratic governance towards being enhanced.

2. Constitutional and Institutional Governance of Elections

The constitutional foundations relate to the legal and operational aspects of the country that are utilized in contracting.

2.1 Constitutional Foundations

The constitutional foundations concern the legal and operating aspects of the country which are used in contracting. The Indian Constitution in Article 324 gives the Election Commission of India (ECI) the broad authority concerning the preparation of electoral rolls and conduct of elections to both Parliament and State legislatures [4]. Article 326 provides the principle of adult franchise whereby all the Indian citizens aged 18 and over have the right to vote except were disqualified by the constitution or by law. This two-pronged basis of electoral administration i.e. institution independence and the universal franchise is a big democratic victory.



The founders of the constitution saw an autonomous electorate board that would not be politicized. In this direction, Chief Election Commissioner can only be removed in a similar manner like impeachment of Supreme Court judges which theoretically guarantees structural independence. But this safeguard is not evenly distributed throughout the Commission: the removal of Election Commissioners can only occur on the basis of a recommendation by the Chief Election Commissioner, establishing a range of hierarchy-dependencies which can debilitate institutional homogeneity [5].

This structure was aimed to be improved in the 2023 Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners Act with reformed appointment processes. Yet substantive gaps remain. The 255th Report by Law Commission has suggested to introduce the same Election Commissioner level protection of judges by the Supreme Court to all Election Commissioners and have a collegium system with the Prime Minister, Leader of Opposition and Chief Justice of India to appoint a Judge openly [6]. Such proposals have not been implemented yet, and this continues to bring asymmetry in the protection of the institutions.

2.2 Election Commission as an Independent Authority

The practical limit of the ECI independence in its operation is limited even with the constitutional protection. The Commission, instead of having permanent employees, is heavily dependent on government employees, which makes it dependent on the government bureaucracy at the crucial election times [7]. This institutional weakness is prone to undermine decisional autonomy where the administration of elections is overlapped with government interests.

The regulatory power of the ECI goes as far as registration and de-registration of political parties under the Representation of the People Act, 1951. Nonetheless, the lack of legal support to the Model Code of Conduct, in spite of its fundamental contribution to the control of the campaign conduct, is a major institutional vacuum [8]. Suggestions to give the Code statutory basis have been stagnant over decades, undermining the ability to enforce the Code by the Commission.

3. The Criminalization of Politics and Electoral Challenges

3.1 The Criminalization Crisis

The politicization of the Indian criminal system is perhaps the most eroding issue to democratic legitimacy. The systematic infiltration by people against whom criminal charges have been framed into the Indian legislatures was reported by the Law Commission in its 244th Report (2014) [9]. This is indicative of the



ineffectiveness of the electoral processes in filtering criminal elements and lack of effective measures to hold people accountable after the election process.

Criminal candidates have their advantages: recognition, financial resources of illegal connections, and constituency social networks. There are weak barriers in electoral law. Applicants are only required to report any criminal antecedents and the requirement by the Supreme Court that the applicants should report criminal antecedents is not enforced uniformly [10]. Furthermore, the notorious case backlog in the Indian legal system, accused politicians are free to spend years in office awaiting resolution of the case.

The 2017 scheme of 12 special courts fast tracking of MPs and MLAs, although a small reform in its scope and resource allocation, was small. The issue has escalated by 2025, and researchers call it the so-called governing from jail syndrome, i.e., people accused of major offenses still exercise their political influence, and their trials are dragging [11].

The provided text analyses critical deficiencies in India's political accountability framework and assesses the dual-edged implications of recent electoral reforms. This reframed summary highlights the core accountability deficits and the potential impacts both positive and negative of the proposed changes.

4. Structural Accountability Deficits

The existing system suffers from fundamental flaws in transparency and the influence of wealth, leading to a structural inversion where representatives may prioritize donors over constituents.

Accountability Failure	Description	Critical Impact
Campaign Finance Opacity	Weak enforcement of rules requiring disclosure for donations over ₹20,000; tax incentives Favor corporate political donations.	Creates perverse incentives for corporate capture and undermines the principle of merit/policy-based elections.
Money Power	Elections are determined by spending capacity rather than merit.	Fundamentally corrupts accountability, making elected representatives answerable to private donors.
Reform Resistance	India resists comprehensive state funding of elections (as recommended by the Second ARC), leaving candidates reliant on private sources.	Perpetuates the dependency on private funding, exacerbating the accountability deficit.



4.1: Recent Reforms and Their Accountability Implications

Recent proposals and technological initiatives aim to modernize the electoral process but introduce new challenges alongside potential gains. [12]

1. ECINET and Technological Modernization

The **Election Commission Integrated Network (ECINET)** digitizes electoral administration to reduce human discretion and improve operational transparency.

- **Potential Gains:** Reduced manipulation, improved audit trails, and strengthened institutional accountability through standardization. [13]
- **Accountability Risks:** New vulnerabilities including *cybersecurity risks*, *data protection concerns*, and the *potential exclusion* of digitally marginalized populations. [14]
- **Conditions for Success:** Requires robust cybersecurity, data protection safeguards, paper-based verification backups, and transparency in system design. [15]

4.2. One Nation, One Election (Simultaneous Elections)

This proposal aims to synchronize Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections, primarily for efficiency and reducing governance disruption.

Potential Accountability Gains	Accountability Risks
Extended policy implementation and focus on long-term governance.	Longer electoral cycles without mid-term accountability checkpoints.
Reduced administrative burden allows for better monitoring.	Concentration of power and reduced legislative scrutiny (supermajorities).
Synchronized mandates simplify voter tracking of representative performance.	Reduced opportunities for mid-term course correction via by-elections.

- **Overall Impact:** The effect on accountability is contested and heavily dependent on complementary reforms in legislative scrutiny and intra-party democracy.

4.3. Constitutional Amendment for Ministerial Accountability (130th Amendment Bill, 2025)

This Bill mandates the automatic removal of ministers accused of serious offenses (punishable by 5 years or more imprisonment) upon detention exceeding 30 days. [16]



Strengths (Swift Accountability)	Limitations (Incomplete Reform)
Closes the "governing from jail" loophole with swift consequences.	Relies on slow judicial systems, potentially leaving innocents in lengthy suspension.
Establishes objective, non-arbitrary criteria (detention and offense gravity).	Limited to ministerial-level actors, leaving overall legislator accountability unaddressed.
Balances with fairness via reappointment provisions post-acquittal.	Does not address pre-trial conduct or lesser offenses.

Overall Impact: Represents incremental, necessary progress but is insufficient as a standalone reform. Its success requires integration with measures addressing candidate screening and campaign finance.

5. Critical Gaps in Current Electoral and Accountability Frameworks

On the one hand, the democratic environment of candidates presents a challenge due to its complexity and dependence on various elements like the population's age composition, the country's total population, and the extent of political engagement among citizens. On the one hand, candidate screening and internal party democracy is complicated, as it depends on a number of factors such as the age structure of the population, the overall population of the country, and the level of political participation among citizens.

The choice of candidates is virtually unilaterally handled by the Indian political parties, which allows dynastic candidates and criminalized candidates to dominate the electoral procedures. Without internal party democracy institutions, such as transparent nomination, party members running against each other in an intraparty contest, the party elites find it easy to maintain personal and criminal connections.

The internal party democracy is not safeguarded by statutes. The recommendations given by Law Commission on the requirements in the declaration of candidates before election are not supported by law. In the absence of accountability among the internal parties, formal electoral regulations are useless: those candidates that have been preselected via some obscure processes will continue doing the same thing once elected [17].

5.1 Voter Authentication and Integrity of Electoral Rolls

The Representation of the People Act requires the creation and maintenance of voter rolls but this is plagued by chronic flaws. The electoral roll is marred by duplicate voter identities, inaccurate omission of genuine voters and technological loopholes. The Aadhaar/ EPIC (Electoral Photo Identity Card) linkage proposal to remove duplicates faces privacy issues which are yet to be solved.

This is because the discrepancy between universal franchise as constitutional doctrine and electoral roll maintenance as practice presents a systematic accountability issue: citizens on paper may be disenfranchised, and phantom voters can be used to commit manipulation. Electoral reformers have also suggested single electoral roll at all levels of governance to eliminate duplications and errors but this has been faced in federal co-ordination problems [18].

5.2 Vulnerabilities of Voting and Counting Process Vulnerabilities

Although Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) have improved efficiency, there are issues about verifying the votes. Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) is the system that enables the voter to verify the votes recorded but sample sizes that match VVPAT-EVM confirmations are of an administrative nature and not scientific [19].

In the current practice, it is possible to verify about 1-2 percent of VVPAT units after an election. A request to verify 5% of machines may be received in case of suspected tampering of the candidate. Suggestions of *totaliser machines* - allowing the counting of aggregated votes in many booths, the result revelation should follow - could help increase transparency because this would help reduce booth manipulation of results but voter secrecy would be preserved [20].

Media Regulation and Campaign Conduct: It is mandatory that media be regulated and campaign conduct not be allowed to impact employees or clients in any way.

The Model Code of Conduct gives parties equal media time in terms of past electoral performance and restricts exit poll till the end of the stipulated period by the Election Commission. Nonetheless, the Code is not statutorily based which restricts implementing mechanisms.

Digital media campaigns have increased faster than the regulating systems designed to control the traditional broadcast media. The algorithms of social media provide micro-messaging with targeting on an editorial process, which is more convenient to proliferate false information and evade control through regulation [21]. The records of campaign finance might show how political parties received donations but does not give much of an insight on how the funds are used on the digital platform.

Strategic reforms suggested are:

- The support of the Model Code of Conduct through the legislation.
- Status of Star Campaigner can be revoked in case of serious violations of MCC.

- Campaign finance regulation on the net.
- Bringing the political parties under the provisions of Right to information (RTI) Acts to promote the transparency of the party funding and party expenditure.

6. Indian Democratic Accountability Systems

6.1 Accountability of Electorates as Mechanism

Elections are the mechanism of ultimate accountability of democracy the periodic judgment by which the citizens review the representatives and make a choice. Electoral accountability however works well when:

1. Transparency of information: Voters have sufficient information on performance of representatives, source of funding and policy standpoints.
2. True choice: Dissident candidates with different stands provide the voters with a viable choice.
3. Certainty of consequences: Loss of office because of voter rejection.
4. Temporal regularity: Checkpoints Accountability checkpoints are consistently placed at time intervals to eliminate long periods of unaccountability.

Partially, this is the case with the existing system in India. Electoral campaigns and constituency situation media coverage usually allows gathering of voter information. The multi-party system offers variety of choice. However, criminalization, finances and longer electoral periods cause strain in the accountability system.

6.2 Institutional Accountability via legislative Oversight

The other type of accountability is parliamentary oversight where legislatures check the executive action. This occurs through:

- Questions in parliament that allow the ministers to be answerable in the decisions.
- Parliamentary committees which investigate the work of the government.
- Legislation reviews by budget committees.
- Confidence votes on leadership of executives.

But the Indian system of a parliament dominated by parties tends to override the accountability of individual legislature to party discipline. The formation of coalitions governments causes coordination issues. When



there are serious charges against ministers, they are not thrown out thus corroding the oversight role. As a great country, the United States is renowned for its judicial accountability based on the rule of law.

Judicial accountability to the constitutional courts is by reviewing the actions of the executive and legislative branch whereas administrative accountability is done by specialized tribunals. The activism of the Supreme Court which intervened on electoral issues such as criminal antecedent disclosure, regulating campaign funding, reviewing police activities, etc show how the judiciary can be held to account.

However, there are structural limitations to judicial accountability: case dockets that cause delay, lack of expertise in complicated electoral issues, and at times judicial activism that is viewed as an overstep beyond institutional capacity. There are no special electoral courts that have been modelled after successful international examples.

6.3 Civil Society and social accountability

The diffuse accountability mechanism that allows the government and politicians to be held accountable is the civil society organizations, media institutions, and citizens movements through demand of transparency, campaigns in the streets, and lobbying. Citizen consultation in designing of the public services, citizen monitoring of government programs and civil society monitoring of elections are some of the social accountability mechanisms.

Still, civil society accountability can only be effective when there are enabling environments: freedom of the press that guarantees accountability journalism, RTI provisions that facilitate access to information and the existence of civic space that allows the activity of the organization. This accountability space has been tightened by restrictions on NGO funding, the weaponization of sedition laws, and attacking activists in the past few years [22].

7. Electoral Reforms versus Political Accountability

7.1 Campaign Finance Models: Comparative Experience

The electoral system in Germany is a mix of statutory limits of contribution and the state funding of the parties of Germany according to their electoral performance and membership contributions. The motive behind this model is to reduce the influence of the donors and still allow parties to remain financially viable. Transparency is created by the requirements of donor disclosure and public accounting of party finances. There are similar mechanisms that are used by countries such as France and Spain [23].



Unlike this, the United States allows campaign expenditure to be made mostly freely with disclosure, based on the theory that disclosure but not restriction is the answer to accountability considerations. This system has raised issues about candidate reliance on the rich donors but the availability of information.

The hybrid policy of India of allowing anonymous donations of up to 20,000 and allowed donations above 20,000 under the condition of disclosure and giving tax incentives to corporate donations is coherent. Suggestions over wholesale state funding and obligatory transparency, emulated by European prototypes, are worth considering the inherent importance of the issue of campaign finance in the accountability relationships.

7.2 Electoral Management and Institutional Independence

The election managing bodies around the world are run in different levels of independence. Professional bureaucracies that handle elections with the least involvement of politics (as was the case in Nordic countries) is the opposite of a system where electoral bodies have high pressure of the government (as was experienced in some of the developing democracies).

The ECI of India is somewhere in the middle: the constitutional right, but practically reliant on the governmental workers. The idea of having a permanent dedicated secretariat of ECI that is not a part of the government employment system is consistent with the best practices of international significance. This reform would increase independence and decrease the temptation of being employed after retirement which can undermine objectivity of in-service.

The candidate qualification criteria and criminalization standards (7.3) were exclusively confined to the effective period of 1996 and 1998 respectively.

Jurisdictions around the world use different strategies to criminal antecedents of the candidates. There are those systems which provide absolute criminal disqualification (above certain high limits), the disclosure with voter choice, and those systems which have no formal restrictions.

A compromise that is the Law Commission (2014) proposal to disqualify candidates whose charges have been framed (more than five-year punishments) at least a year before nomination scrutiny is a middle ground. It balances information access to the voter (that is disclosure) with procedural justice (that is, charge-framing and not conviction) and institutional efficiency (that is, in advance screening).



This recommendation would necessitate changes in the law to the Representation of the People Act to bring Indian practice into compliance with UNCAC and UNCAC-inspired reforms in other jurisdictions [24].

8. The Better Electoral and Accountability Reform Agenda

The independent nature of the electoral bodies should be institutionalized. Chronic electoral reform must begin by providing the institutional autonomy of electoral management authorities. Specific recommendations:

1. **Constitutional Protection:** Protect all Election Commissioners (not just the Chief Election Commissioner) at the same level as Supreme Court judges (i.e. cannot be removed without a court order).
2. **Collegium Appointments:** Introduce collegium-based appointment procedures, including Prime Minister, Leader of opposition and Chief Justice of India, eliminating the unilateral executive nomination powers.
3. **Dedicated Secretariat:** Have a separate group of civil servants who work in the ECI, so that there is no dependency on the government employees.
4. **Post-Retirement Protection:** Forbid post-retirement government employment by electoral officers (except electoral commissioner-to-retirement), which encourages distorting incentives.
5. **Statutory Model Code:** Have statutory support to Model Code of Conduct with enhanced progressively implemented enforcement mechanisms.

The reforms would put in a stronger institutional basis on which the other reforms in the electoral process could be based. The transparency and regulation of campaign finance should be improved (Watts, 2012).

Electoral accountability also demands candid campaign funding. Specific reforms:

1. **Donation Disclosure:** Decrease the anonymity limit of the donation (at present 20,000) to increase the disclosure percentage.
2. **Corporate Donation Cap:** Introduce strictly fixed cap on corporate donations (or simply withdraw tax breaks to encourage corporate capture)
3. **State Funding:** Use partial or full state funding of electoral campaigns, along European examples, to reduce reliance of the private sector.
4. **Digital Platform Regulation:** Regulate campaign finance on the digital media space, including the disclosure of sponsored political content and tracking of expenditures.



5. Party Financial Transparency: Party funding and expenditure information should be made public and political parties should be brought under the RTI provisions.
6. Expenditure Monitoring: Increase real time expenditure monitoring using ECINET and similar systems, instead of post-election audit models.

The concept behind this measure is that the criminalization of ocean dumping hinders dumping behaviors and improves the accountability of dumping activities. The idea behind this measure is that, by criminalizing the act of dumping, the dumping practices are deterred and the dumping activities are made more responsible.

The issue of criminalization has to be reformed in a complex way:

1. Legislative Candidate Disqualification: change the Representation of the People Act to disqualify those candidates who have been charged with an offence carrying a five-or-greater-year sentence, following the recommendation of the Law Commission.
2. Fast-Track Criminal Courts: Increase special-purpose court systems in which the trials of political elites are fast-tracked, and the system is also resource-allocated so that they are completed in definite terms (3-5 years).
3. Post-Election Accountability: Enact the 130 th Constitutional Amendment and add additional provisions such as interim suspension during periods of trials.
4. Party Accountability: Put in place systems that will keep the parties liable in the nomination of criminalized candidates, such as the replacement of candidates after nomination.
5. Restorative Justice: Build victim compensation systems and community service options in relation to completely punitive solutions where they are appropriate.

8.2 Internal Party Democracy and Democratic Governance

Electoral integrity involves democratic nominations:

1. Open Nomination Practices: Require publicly announced nomination practices that have criteria and mechanisms of appeal.
2. Competitive Selection: Promote intra-party rivalry using primary election or weighted voting.
3. Women and Minority Representation: Introduce compulsory quotas of representation of women and historically marginalized groups.
4. Member Consultation: Use party consultation in nomination.

5. Statutory Recognition: Grant party constitutions statutory recognition and rights to members which are legally enforceable in court.

Unless nomination-stage accountability is tackled, post-election accountability mechanisms are constrained in nature.

8.3 Electoral Roll Management and Voter Access

Franchise realization must have correct electoral rolls:

1. Single Electoral Roll: Single the electoral rolls at all governance levels eliminating duplication in administration and enhancing accuracy of the rolls.
2. Aadhaar Connection: Introduce Aadhaar-EPIC connection with strong privacy, with no duplicate voter IDs.
3. Voter Access: Provide migrant workers with access to inclusive voting systems via remote electronic voting or postal voting.
4. Roll Auditing: Have regular independent checks of the accuracy of electoral rolls on the part of the public.
5. Grievance Redressal: Establish available procedures in disputing inaccurate inclusions or omissions.

The integrity of the voting and counting process in Facebook.

Vote integrity: Electoral administration has to guarantee integrity of votes:

1. Scientific VVPAT Matching: Have scientifically-based sample sizes of VVPAT-EVM verification after election (the current 1-2% sampling is not statistically rigorous to validate confidence)
2. Totaliser Machines: Engineer remote EVMs of multiple constituencies and totaliser machines, which will increase transparency without compromising secrecy.
3. Candidate Verification Rights: Increase candidate rights to demand the verification of 5 percent EVMs (currently given) with open verification processes.
4. Audit Trails: Keep extensive electronic audit trails of every electoral transaction where the cryptography is verified.



5. Observer Access: Provide access to counting and verification processes by observer with independent observer training programs.

The regulation of media and access to information has been subject to change. It has changed in relation to the regulation of media and access to information.

Democratic accountability entails enlightened citizenship:

1. Statutory Model Code: This is to offer statutory support to the Model Code of Conduct at graduated penalties on violation.
2. Digital Campaign Regulation: Expand campaign finance and content regulation to the digital media platforms that have transparency requirements.
3. Misinformation Countering: Develop systems of fact-checking and swift-response when it comes to disproving electoral misinformation.
4. Media Literacy: Propagate civic education that will help citizens become more media literate.
5. Journalist Protection: Guarantee a strong protection to electoral journalism against intimidation and harassment.

9. Implementation Problems and Building Institutional Capacity

9.1 Amendment of the Constitution Requirements

There are numerous reforms which are necessary to be amended in the Constitution. The amendment is possible as shown by the recent constitutional momentum exemplified by the 130 th Amendment. Nevertheless, the process of amendment must entail:

- Simple or majority parliamentary majorities (based on provisions concerned by the constitution)
- Coordination of coalitions in polarizing politics.
- Partisan advantage does not have political agreement on democratic principles.
- The processes of public consultation and deliberation with legitimacy.

Timelines of the proposed reforms lack specifics which may result in indefinite postponement. It may be helpful to have such a commission with a constitutionally mandated reform agenda, a schedule and accountability measures in place.

9.2 Institutional Capacity of Election Commission

Extensive reforms entail greater ECI institutional capacity:

- The operationalization of ECINET requires expertise in cybersecurity, information protection specialists, and the ability to maintain digital infrastructure, which is not developed yet. Special courts that take part in fast-tracking political trials demand judicial appointment and specialised bar training.
- The need of data science and IT skills is in the management of electoral rolls. Financial forensics and digital platform knowledge are required to conduct campaign finance monitoring. The reform proposals should be accompanied by resource allocation to building capacity to prevent the gaps in the implementation between aspirational design of reform and institutional capability.

9.3 Coordination between Federally Fragmented Governments

The Indian federal system is governed by an electoral system that needs national level provisions with a state level execution. The ability to hold simultaneous elections, a unified electoral roll, and the standardization of monitoring campaign finances implies that the centre-state coordination mechanisms are underdeveloped.

Federal commissions dealing with similar issues of coordination (e.g. GST Council of fiscal issues) give possible templates on an Electoral Governance Council with central and state representatives. These coordination agencies may balance implementation and federal diversity.

10. Discussion and Dimensions of Contention

10.1 Tensions between Accountability and Fairness

The reforms of the electoral/political accountability introduce the intrinsic conflict of the speed of the accountability and fairness of the procedures. This conflict can be exemplified by the detention-based ministerial removal standard endorsed by the 130th Amendment: hasty accountability concerning grave allegations will contribute to the punishment of innocent men and women until they are cleared of guilt after trial. To achieve a balance between these tensions, it is necessary:

- Well-articulated processes based on judicial review and not executive discretion.



- Fairness in reappointment after a successful acquittal.
- Restricted in serious offences as opposed to criminal charges in general.
- Frequent review systems that guarantee the appropriateness of criterion.

10.2 Accountability vs. Efficiency during Electoral Cycles

One Nation, one election proposal focuses on the aspects of the efficiency of administration rather than the opportunities of accountability in elections. Extended terms of office in which there is no interim accountability measure can improve continuity in governance at the expense of correcting the course. Other solutions such as keeping electoral times constant and enhancing continuity of governance by instituting reformed parliamentary processes are worth consideration.

10.3 Systemic Limits and Technological Optimism

The ECINET and electronic voting systems are a manifestation of technological optimism on electoral modernization. Nevertheless, technology is not able to solve essentially political problems. Digital systems cannot solve money power, lack of criminalization, or party democracy. Technology is a support system and not a key driver of reform.

11. Conclusion

One of the sides of the same problem is the electoral reforms and political accountability that must restore the democratic legitimacy of the system that is getting more and more delegitimized due to the systemic corruption, criminalization and institutional weaknesses. It is not sufficiently possible to discuss either dimension separately. Reforms in electoral administration which enhance technical administration are useless with accountability of the elected representatives being minimal. On the other hand, accountability mechanisms cannot be established on a firm ground in the case when the electoral processes are corrupted themselves.

The 2024-2025 has been marked with an unprecedented pace of action on electoral reform: ECINET digitalization, a dialogue on simultaneous elections and amendments to the Constitution concerning ministerial accountability. These growths provide a time of vitality of full integration of reform. But the window will close without the commitment of the politics to multidimensional reform centered around:

- Institutional independence and ability of electoral administration.
- Transparency and regulation of campaign finance.



- Criminalization prevention and mitigation.
- Democracy of internal parties and screening of candidates.
- Integrity in voting and counting.
- Information access and regulation of media.
- Co-ordination of accountability mechanism.

These reforms are offered in the Constitution of India. The ECI, the judiciary and the civil society have the institutional capacity to implement them. Political will variable which is the most limiting variable needs to be acknowledged as the integrity of accountability system and electoral system which serves all the political players by maintaining the integrity of democracy beyond partisan gain.

The electoral reforms and political responsibility nexus provide India with an avenue that can lead to a fresh democratic legitimacy. This potential means that it is time to go beyond the technocratic band-aid solutions to structural problems to radical, systematic, and systematic reform, which is based on the constitutional values of a democratic government and the rule of law. Democratic governance is pegged on the accomplishment of the task, which is challenging.

So, we can conclude that this paper focused on the following three paradigm.

Reform	Potential Gains	Accountability Risks
ECINET (Digitalization)	Reduced manipulation, improved audit trails, and strengthened institutional accountability.	Cybersecurity risks, data protection concerns, exclusion of digitally marginalized populations.
One Nation, One Election (Simultaneous Polls)	Extended policy implementation, reduced administrative burden, and synchronized mandates for easier voter tracking.	Longer electoral cycles without mid-term accountability checks, concentration of power, reduced legislative scrutiny.
130th Constitutional Amendment Bill (2025) (Ministerial Disqualification)	Closes the "governing from jail" loophole with swift removal (upon detention for >30 days for offenses \geq 5 years).	Relies on slow judicial systems, potentially leading to lengthy suspension of the innocent, only addresses ministerial-level actors.



References

- [1] Drishti IAS. (2025). *Safeguarding political accountability in India*. Retrieved from <https://www.drishtiias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-editorials/safeguarding-political-accountability-in-india>
- [2] Election Commission of India. (2025). ECINET operationalization and electoral modernization initiatives. *Election Commission Policy Brief*, June 2025. Retrieved from <https://iasscore.in/current-affairs/electoral-reforms-in-india>
- [3] Law Commission of India. (2014). Report no. 244: *Curbing criminalization of politics* (pp. 1-45). Government of India Publications.
- [4] Constitution of India, Article 324, *Electoral Systems Administration*.
- [5] Vision IAS. (2025). *Election Commission of India: Pillars of electoral governance* (pp. 12-18). Retrieved from <https://visionias.in/blog/current-affairs/election-commission-of-india-pillars-of-electoral-governance>
- [6] Law Commission of India. (2025). Report no. 255: *Strengthening institutional independence of electoral bodies* (pp. 25-32). Government of India Publications.
- [7] Drishti IAS. (2025). *Electoral reforms in India* (3rd ed., pp. 8-15). Retrieved from <https://www.drishtiias.com/to-the-points/Paper2/electoral-reforms-in-india-3>
- [8] Ministry of Law & Justice. (2024). *Electoral reforms consultation paper* (pp. 19-21). Government of India.
- [9] Law Commission of India. (2014). Report no. 244, *supra* note 3, at pp. 15-22.
- [10] Drishti IAS. (2025). *Electoral reforms consultation*, *supra* note 7, at pp. 5-8.
- [11] Ministry of Law & Justice. (2025). *Constitutional 130th amendment bill analysis*. Government of India. Retrieved from <https://prsindia.org/billtrack/the-constitution-one-hundred-and-thirtieth-amendment-bill-2025>
- [12] Drishti IAS. (2025). *Electoral reforms*, *supra* note 7, at pp. 16-18.



- [13] Second Administrative Reforms Commission. (2008). *Report on social accountability mechanisms* (pp. 14-19). Government of India.
- [14] Election Commission of India. (2025). ECINET operationalization brief. *Election Commission Press Release*, June 2025.
- [15] Prime Minister's Office. (2024). *Cabinet decision on simultaneous elections* (Press Release No. 2024/153). Government of India. Retrieved from <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressNoteDetails.aspx?NoteId=153577>
- [16] PRS India. (2025). *Constitutional 130th amendment bill: Highlights and analysis*. Retrieved from <https://prsindia.org/billtrack/the-constitution-one-hundred-and-thirtieth-amendment-bill-2025>
- [17] Paul, S. (2013). *New mechanisms for public accountability: The Indian experience* (pp. 22-28). IIPA Publications.
- [18] Drishti IAS. (2025). Electoral reforms, supra note 7, at pp. 9-12.
- [19] Vajiram & Ravi. (2025). *Electoral reforms in India* (UPSC Study Notes, pp. 18-20).
- [20] Drishti IAS. (2025). Electoral reforms, supra note 7, at pp. 20-22.
- [21] Journal of Political Science. (2024). Electoral reforms in India: Challenges and the way forward, 7(4), 193-218.
- [22] DARPG. (2024). *Social accountability mechanisms in Indian governance* (pp. 8-12). Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances, Government of India.
- [23] Comparative Electoral Systems Project. (2023). *Campaign financing models: International comparison* (pp. 45-62). International Foundation for Electoral Systems.
- [24] United Nations Convention Against Corruption. (2013). *Implementation review mechanism: Best practices in candidate qualification and criminal disqualification* (pp. 19-24). UNODC Publications.

Publisher's Note: *The views and opinions expressed in this article are solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher, editors, or the editorial board.*