

List out some of the recent electoral reforms suggested by the Election Commission of India and Law Commission. Examine how they will enable better functioning of India's electoral democracy.

The Election Commission of India is conceived by the Indian Constitution as a strong and independent constitutional body under Article 324 to supervise and oversee all the major tasks with respect to conduct of elections to legislative bodies at the state and central level.

As the practice of electoral politics has evolved, a number of reforms have been both implemented and proposed by the ECI and Law Commission of India to ensure conduct of free and fair elections in the country. Some of the recent electoral reforms suggested by the two bodies include:



- One of the important reforms suggested to improve voters' reach is replacing all the forms for various voter services, including registration of new voter and change of address, with one single form.
- Another recommendation was to start online registration facilities at the school or college-level for all prospective voters at 17 years of age so they can be enrolled in the electoral roll as soon as they become eligible at 18.
- The ECI also proposed to give out electronic versions of the voter ID card – EPIC – for convenience of voters.

- The Commission has already implemented one-way online transfer of postal ballots for service and implemented the same for the whole country in 2019. ECI is exploring the idea of extending the same service to migrant workers to help them cast their votes easily.
- For political parties, the recommendations included online nomination of candidates and a cap on the spending allowed by parties. Currently, individual candidates are allowed a limited expenditure on campaigning.
- Another recommendation was to impose a "silence period of 48 hours" before polling on social media and print media. Campaigning on electronic media in the last 48 hours before polling is prohibited currently.

The Law Commission of India submitted its 244th report on decriminalisation and disqualifications in 2014 and 255th report titled Electoral Reforms to the ministry of law in 2015:

- The Law Commission has proposed a wide range of reforms, including limitations on candidate spending, paid news and political advertisements.
- Recommendations concerning paid news are in three parts: defining the two phenomena, paid news and political advertising; consequences for those who indulge in these; and the institutional framework for dealing with these two evils.
- Part IV-C for RPA, which is titled Regulation of Political Parties to ensure intra-party democracy. The LCI highlighted the need to promote financial and electoral accountability, reduce corruption, and improve democratic functioning of the country as a whole.

India is the world's largest democracy. In a democratic system of governance, elections are the most vital and important component of politics. Only when elections to positions of authority are held in a free and fair way can true democracy function.

- The Election Commission's planned electoral reforms will promote democracy and bring about fundamental changes by increasing openness in political party operations, controlling spending, and initiating decriminalisation of politics.
- A well-defined legal structure to address concerns like paid news and candidates providing fake affidavits with their nomination papers. In this setting, the media has the potential to mobilise public opinion in favour of political reform.
- Improving electoral processes will improve the democratic setup's impartiality, inclusion, transparency, integrity, and correctness.
- There is also need to ensure legislative might behind MCC to ensure its application.

The need for reforms becomes particularly important given India's fall in democracy rankings. In the aftermath of 2021 assembly elections the ECI formulated a core committee to further suggest electoral reforms. In the wake of the proposed paradigmatic shift, relevant adjustments in RPA 1951, election rules, instructions, and processes will all need to be amended.