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## Evaluating Electoral Ethics: A Comprehensive Analysis of the Indian Democratic Landscape

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### **Abstract:**

*The essence of democracy lies in the collective voice of its citizens, expressed through free and fair elections. Central to this democratic process is the concept of ethical voting, wherein individuals exercise their franchise with integrity and conscientiousness. This study underscores the paramount importance of ethical voting as a cornerstone for upholding democratic values and ensuring the integrity of electoral processes. Democratic systems face challenges like ethical lapses in campaign financing, compromising fair representation, personality cults diverting attention, and concerns about misinformation and polarization on social media. Unchecked dissemination of false narratives can distort electoral processes and undermine trust in democratic institutions.*

*Furthermore, the conventional model code of conduct has proven insufficient in addressing emerging challenges such as the utilization of money and muscle power to sway electoral outcomes. Instances of ballot tampering and electoral fraud underscore the vulnerability of democratic systems to manipulation and malpractice. Considering these challenges, this research advocates for a comprehensive approach to fortify democratic processes. It calls for stringent regulations to curb unethical campaign financing practices and promote transparency in political funding. Furthermore, the influence of personality cults. Strengthening electoral mechanisms to prevent tampering of ballots and ensuring robust enforcement of electoral laws are also imperative steps in upholding the sanctity of democratic elections. This study evaluates the efficacy of key policies such as the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) and the Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) initiative under the Election Commission of India.*

**Keywords:** *Electoral Participation, democratic systems, collective voice, electoral processes, ethical voting, Model code of conduct, Election Commission of India, Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP), Ballot tampering, integrity, influence, Money, manipulation.*

### **1.0. Introduction:**

Elections are the cornerstone of democracy, representing the collective voice of the populace. However, the integrity of electoral processes can be compromised by ethical breaches, jeopardizing democratic governance. The independent election commission is crucial for maintaining electoral

ethics and integrity, especially in high-controversial domains, as it has the authority to exercise discretion. (C.S. Elmendorf, 2006) Electoral ethics are essential for maintaining fairness and ensuring impartiality in the process. Without adherence to ethical standards, elections become mere facades, perpetuating disenchantment, and eroding democratic ideals. Democracy relies on free, rational, and non-rigged elections to function effectively. These elections are not mere rituals, but actual instruments of ascertaining popular will, and without them, democracy cannot endure and maintain its legitimacy. (R. Kumar, 2019)

Ethical participation in elections is not just a moral obligation but a civic duty for every citizen. Ethical participation in the electoral process upholds democracy's principles and contributes to society's welfare. It involves informed decision-making, respectful discourse, and respect for the rule of law, fostering civic responsibility and democratic citizenship. Ethical participation empowers citizens to effect meaningful change and shape their nation's trajectory. The vote is a crucial aspect of democracy, representing individual preferences and collective aspirations. It represents the spirit of democracy, influencing social change, shaping public policies, promoting inclusive governance, and fostering social cohesion, transcending mere numerical value.

### **1.2. Background on India's Democratic System:**

India, the world's largest democracy, boasts a vibrant and diverse political landscape characterized by a multiparty system, regular elections, and universal suffrage. Since gaining independence in 1947, India has steadfastly upheld democratic principles, enshrining the right to vote and participate in governance in its constitution. With a population exceeding 1.3 billion people and encompassing various languages, cultures, and religions, India's democratic framework faces unique challenges and opportunities. The country's democratic journey has been marked by significant milestones, including the peaceful transfer of power through elections, the empowerment of marginalized communities, and the expansion of political participation at all levels of society.

### **1.3. Importance of Electoral Ethics:**

Electoral ethics form the bedrock of any democratic system, serving as the cornerstone of free and fair elections. In the context of India, where elections are monumental exercises involving millions of voters and numerous political parties, the importance of upholding electoral ethics cannot be overstated. Ethical conduct in elections ensures that the will of the people is accurately reflected, maintains public trust in the electoral process, and strengthens the foundations of democracy. By promoting transparency, accountability, and integrity, electoral ethics safeguard the rights of citizens to choose their representatives and contribute to the overall health of the democratic system.

### **2.0. Methodology:**

The investigation begins by understanding the importance of electoral ethics to uphold democratic values, scrutinizing mechanisms ensuring fair representation, assessing the inclusivity of

diverse communities and interests in the electoral process. It then examines the integrity of polling procedures, from voter registration to result dissemination, evaluating measures aimed at curbing malpractices and enhancing transparency. Ethical participation is explored, considering the roles of candidates and voters, and the impact of civic education on fostering responsible engagement.

The analysis extends to the examination of the MCC's influence on election campaigns, scrutinizing its implementation and effectiveness in maintaining ethical standards and a level playing field. Additionally, the study evaluates the SVEEP initiative's role in informing voters, enhancing turnout, and facilitating informed electoral choices. Expected outcomes include a comprehensive understanding of India's electoral landscape, highlighting strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement in policy implementation. The research aims to offer recommendations to existing mechanisms and practices, with the goal of enhancing electoral integrity and ethical participation.

### **3.0. Purpose and Scope of the Research:**

The purpose of this research is to critically evaluate the state of electoral ethics in the Indian democratic landscape. Through a comprehensive analysis of various dimensions such as campaign finance, fair representation, voter manipulation, transparency, and accountability, this study aims to assess the strengths and weaknesses of India's electoral system. By examining past trends, current challenges, and prospects, the research seeks to provide insights into ways to enhance electoral integrity, strengthen democratic institutions, and foster greater citizen participation. The scope of the research encompasses a wide range of factors influencing electoral ethics, including legal frameworks, institutional mechanisms, societal norms, and technological advancements. Through rigorous inquiry and evidence-based analysis, this research endeavours to contribute to scholarly discourse, policy development, and public awareness regarding the importance of electoral ethics in sustaining India's democratic ethos.

### **4.0. Literature review:**

#### **4.1. Overview of Campaign Finance Regulations in India:**

Campaign finance regulations in India are governed by various laws and guidelines aimed at promoting transparency, curbing corruption, and ensuring a level playing field for political parties and candidates. Candidates in each constituency spend millions on campaign expenses, including conveyance and publicity. In recent years, election expenses have increased beyond restrictions due to political parties' desire to outstrip rivals in the race. (R.Kumar, 2019)

The primary legislation governing campaign finance is the Representation of the People Act, 1951, supplemented by rules and regulations prescribed by the Election Commission of India (ECI). These regulations mandate disclosure of campaign expenses, limit the sources and amounts of donations, and establish mechanisms for monitoring and enforcement. Corruption in India is primarily due to electoral politics, with black money being a significant source of corruption. In

2009, the Lok Sabha reported Rs. 11.2 billion in election expenditure, but unofficial expenses, including unaccounted money and private sector contributions, were two to three times the official figure. (Chatterjee, 2012)

The primary legislation governing campaign finance is the Representation of the People Act, 1951, supplemented by rules and regulations set forth by the Election Commission of India (ECI). These regulations mandate the disclosure of campaign expenses, limit the sources and amounts of donations, and establish mechanisms for monitoring and enforcement. However, corruption in India's electoral politics remains pervasive, with black money serving as a significant source of illicit funds. One of the key provisions of the Representation of People Act, 1951, allows political party leaders to spend without restrictions on transportation expenses for disseminating messages. However, political parties and their leaders are exempt from maintaining accounts of expenditure for propagating official programs and messages. Despite mandates for disclosure, unofficial expenses, including unaccounted money and private sector contributions, often remain undisclosed.

The Election and Other Related Laws (Amendment) Act, 2003, mandates political parties' treasurers to prepare annual financial reports detailing donations received exceeding a specified threshold. Non-compliance with this requirement can result in the party's disentanglement from tax relief under the Income Tax Act, 1961. The Companies Act, 1956, regulates corporate funding for political parties, limiting contributions to a certain percentage of a company's net profits.

The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 1976, amended in 2010, prohibits political organizations from receiving foreign contributions. However, the lack of clear guidelines for defining "political nature" poses challenges in implementation. The Income Tax Act, 1961, allows deductions for contributions to political parties but requires annual audited account submission.

### **Recent ruling of the supreme court on campaign finances:**

The Supreme Court has declared the Electoral Bonds Scheme as unconstitutional, citing donor anonymity as a key feature. The scheme, which has been criticized by transparency activists, was an important means of funding political parties since 2018. The scheme allowed citizens or companies to buy electoral bonds in denominations of ₹1,000, ₹10,000, ₹1 lakh, ₹10 lakh, and ₹1 crore and donate them to political parties. The State Bank of India was the bank authorized to issue and encash these bonds. The Finance Act 2017 amended the Income Tax Act to make an exception for contributions through electoral bonds, and the Representation of the People Act (RPA) 1951 amended to exclude contributions through electoral bonds from the report. The Companies Act required companies to disclose details of contributions to a political party, but after the amendment, only the total amount given to parties in a financial year was required. The government defended the scheme, arguing that it allowed for legitimate funding and helped prevent unregulated contributions through cash. The Supreme Court ruled that the amendments to the IT Act and RPA were

unconstitutional, as the government was unable to establish that the scheme was the least restrictive means to balance informational privacy and political contributions.(VENKATARAMANAN, 2024)

#### **4.2. Relevance of Model code of Conduct (MCC) with social media platforms:**

The Model Code of Conduct (MCC) in the Indian electoral process is crucial for ensuring fair play and a level playing field for all political parties and candidates. The 48-hour period before polling day is essential for campaign ceasefire, preventing last-minute influence, levelling the playing field, maintaining peace and order, and facilitating election administration. The MCC mandates that campaigning cease 48 hours before the scheduled polling time, allowing voters to reflect before casting their votes. This prevents last-minute attempts to influence voters through means that may not allow for fair competition. The 48-hour window also allows election authorities to focus on administrative tasks, such as security personnel deployment and logistical arrangements. The Model Code of Conduct (MCC) in India has been enforced on internet platforms for the first time, aiming to increase transparency in campaigning and curb misinformation and hate speech by candidates. However, the ECI has not made any attempts to enforce the MCC, and the current measures are based on voluntary commitments made by four major platforms: Google, Facebook, Twitter, and ShareChat. The Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) is working on a code of ethics for internet platforms, but the ECI is likely to provide feedback before finalizing the guidelines. The new guidelines have prompted some parties to switch to WhatsApp and smaller platforms, where there are no restrictions.(Live Mint, 19 Mar 2019)

#### **4.3. Social media—implications forwarded messages:**

Commonly used messenger platforms like WhatsApp forwards can significantly impact electoral politics by spreading misinformation, rumours, and fake news during campaigns. These messages can distort facts, manipulate public opinion, and influence voter perceptions about political parties, candidates, and issues. WhatsApp groups often consist of like-minded individuals, leading to the creation of echo chambers where false information is circulated without scrutiny. This reinforces existing biases and beliefs among voters, making it difficult to counteract misinformation once it has spread within these closed networks.

The political impact of social media, particularly WhatsApp, is a contentious issue in democracies worldwide. With over 500 million users, WhatsApp has been used by political parties and politicians to reach voters, yet its influence on the democratic process remains unclear.(Carney, 2022)

WhatsApp misinformation mostly consists of visuals, while Facebook misinformation mostly consists of links to sensationalist, extremist, and conspiracy-related news sites and visuals.(Narayanan, 2019)

Forwarded messages can amplify social and political polarization by disseminating divisive

content targeting specific communities or groups, exploiting religious, ethnic, or caste identities to incite tensions and deepen societal divisions. The rapid spread of WhatsApp forwards makes it challenging for fact-checkers and authorities to effectively debunk false information, allowing it to influence many voters before corrective measures can be taken.

Misinformation spread through WhatsApp can influence electoral outcomes by shaping voter attitudes, preferences, and behaviour. Regulation of the spread of misinformation on WhatsApp poses significant challenges due to its end-to-end encryption and decentralized nature. Ethical concerns arise regarding transparency, accountability, and responsible use of technology in democratic processes. The implications of forwarded messages on WhatsApp for electoral politics highlight the need for comprehensive strategies to address misinformation, promote digital literacy, and uphold democratic norms and values in the digital age.

#### **4.4. Paid news:**

Indian media is facing challenges such as corporatization, paid and fake news, partisanship, and biased news, which negatively impact elections and national interests. The complementarities between free and fair media and free and fair elections are crucial for democracy to survive and thrive. Good media results in good elections, while bad media leads to bad elections and pseudo-democracy. Vigilant and lively media is essential for democracy to deepen its roots. (Kumar Ravinder, 2019)

The Election Commission of India, an independent agency, regulates India's elections, but the Indian news media is not regulated. This irony in Indian democracy hinders informed choices and encourages "manufactured choices" for the news audience. The Election Commission accepts a definition from the Press Council of India in 2010, which defines paid news as any news or analysis appearing in any media for a price in cash or kind as consideration. This stifles the ability of the news audience to differentiate between their sources and the quality of news content. (Ravindran, 2017)

The rise of paid news, fuelled by the expansion of private TV channels and print media, has led to a biased view of the media, affecting the electoral system and democratic governance. The EC has proposed an amendment to the Representation of People Act, 1951, making publishing and abetting "Paid News" for a candidate's election an electoral offense with a minimum two-year imprisonment. The role of some TV channels and print media in recent elections has been deemed objectionable and contrary to media ethics. (Dalal, 2016)

#### **4.5. Money and Muscle Power in Indian electoral Politics:**

India is a vibrant and diverse nation, but it also faces the challenges of money and muscle power. Money power refers to the influence exerted by financial resources in electoral campaigns, candidate selection, and policy formulation. The high cost of elections to Parliament and State

Legislatures is widely attributed to corruption in India, making the criminalization of politics and corruption in public life the largest threat to the world's largest democracy.(Choudhary, 2017)

Limiting election funding is challenging, and citizens demand transparency and accountability in the election process. Key reforms include state funding for elections, reducing political expenditure, improving disclosure and audit mechanisms for candidates and parties, and adopting a proportional representation system.(Rai Prince Prateek, 2013)

Muscle power, on the other hand, involves the use of physical force, intimidation, and coercion to influence electoral outcomes and maintain control. This may entail the involvement of criminals in politics, the use of violence to influence voters, or even the influence of law enforcement. The implications of muscle power include erosion of democracy, criminalization of politics, and social unrest. The criminalization of Indian politics and the subsequent cult of the gun pose the greatest threat to Indian democracy today.(Choudhary, 2017)

Out of the 763 Indian MPs, 40% have declared criminal cases against themselves, according to a report by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) and National Election Watch (NEW). The data was extracted from affidavits filed by MPs before their last elections. Over one quarter of these MPs have reported major offenses, including as crimes against women, kidnapping, murder, and attempted murder.

The state of Kerala has the highest percentage of MPs with criminal cases, at 73%, followed by Bihar, Maharashtra (57%), and Telangana (50%). Having 50% of its MPs accused of severe crimes, Bihar leads the category of states that have many MPs with criminal cases.

Party-wise data revealed that 36% of the 385 MPs from the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) have declared criminal cases against themselves. The Congress has 53% of its 81 MPs facing similar charges, while 39% of the Trinamool Congress MPs and 75% of the Communist Party of India MPs have declared criminal cases. The Aam Aadmi Party has 27% of its 11 MPs facing such charges, while 42% of the YSRCP MPs and 38% of the Nationalist Congress Party MPs also have criminal cases.

Among the criminal cases declared by the MPs, 32 have cases of 'attempt to murder' (IPC Section 307), indicating serious charges. Alarmingly, 21 sitting MPs have declared cases related to crimes against women, and out of them, 4 MPs have declared cases related to rape (IPC Section 376).

The average assets of MPs in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha are ₹38.33 crore, with higher assets for those with declared criminal cases at ₹50.03 crore and no criminal cases at ₹30.50 crore.(Priyankar, 18 Oct 2023)

The Supreme Court has ordered the Commission to mandate candidates to provide a statement of their assets, liabilities, and criminal antecedents along with their nomination papers, and

to bar MPs and MLAs convicted of two years or more in a criminal case from contesting elections.(Dalal, 2016)

Vacancies and unavailable affidavits highlight the need for greater transparency and accountability in the country's political system. The disparities in wealth among MPs from different states and political parties underline the diverse landscape of Indian politics.

To combat money and muscle power, electoral reforms, strengthening laws related to campaign finance and enforcing transparency in political funding, strengthening institutions like the Election Commission and law enforcement agencies, and raising voter awareness about the detrimental effects of money and muscle power can help curb their influence.(School of politics , August 18, 2023)

#### **4.6. Bribing voters, distribution of liquor and money before elections:**

The distribution of liquor and money before elections in India has significant implications for election results and ethical concerns. Direct vote buying, where individuals are incentivized to vote for a particular candidate or party in exchange for material benefits, can skew election results by influencing voter behaviour. Offering liquor or money can also influence voter turnout, especially in marginalized or poor communities. This can lead to an unfair advantage for candidates or parties with access to greater resources, undermining the democratic principle of fair competition.

Ethical concerns in the electoral process include corruption, exploiting vulnerable populations, undermining democratic values, and eroding trust. To address these issues, legal frameworks should be enacted, monitoring mechanisms strengthened, voter education campaigns should be launched, and broader political reforms should be advocated. This has significant implications for electoral integrity, democratic principles, and the ethical conduct of politicians and parties. A multi-faceted approach involving legal, institutional, and societal measures is needed to promote transparency, fairness, and accountability in the electoral process.

For instance, in 2023 Telangana Assembly election has seen a significant seizure of cash, liquor, gold/silver, and other valuables worth ₹130.26 crore, surpassing the total seized during the 2018 and 2014 elections. The seizure of these items has been a significant increase from the previous year, when a total of ₹111 crore was seized. The seizure of drugs/narcotics also increased, with gold/silver and other precious metals rising from ₹33.62 crore to ₹40.08 crore.(RAJEEV, 2023)

#### **4.7. Personality cult above democracy:**

Personality cults in Indian elections involve political parties or leaders creating a strong, often exaggerated, public image around a single individual. This can have several effects on election results and ethical concerns. Emotional appeals can be used by leaders to sway voters, while vote consolidation can be achieved through loyalty to the leader. However, personality cults can marginalize opposition voices and distort the electoral landscape.



Ethical concerns include undermining democratic principles by concentrating power excessively in one individual, fostering an environment where dissent is suppressed, and accountability is diminished. Overemphasis on a single personality can weaken democratic institutions and processes, eroding checks and balances. Societal divisions can be exacerbated by fostering a polarized political environment where supporters view the leader as infallible and opponents as enemies.

At current scenario The Modi cult, originating in Gujarat, gained national following in 2014 through the chanting of 'Har Har Modi'. Prime Minister Modi targeted a large Hindu constituency, focusing on development and aggressive nationalism. Despite economic misadventures like demonetisation, he managed to overcome negative consequences. The cult's narrative included Hindutva, sovereignty, national security, terrorism, Pakistan, Kashmir, secularism, and the 'Khan Market gang'. The cult thrived with the support of the RSS, which believed that the rise of the Modi cult would help Hindutva hegemony by bringing diverse social groups to the Sangh's fold.(Kanungo, 2019)

While personality cults may have short-term electoral benefits, they pose significant long-term risks to democratic governance, institutional integrity, and societal cohesion. Addressing these concerns requires a concerted effort to promote democratic values, strengthen institutions, and foster a culture of informed and engaged citizenship.

#### **4.8. Malpractices and ballot tampering:**

India's Election Commission is responsible for overseeing elections and ensuring fairness and transparency. To prevent tampering and address irregularities, the Commission employs several measures. These include scrutinizing and monitoring the voting process, introducing Voter Verified Paper Audit Trails (VVPATs) to enhance transparency and accountability, providing legal recourse for candidates or parties aggrieved by returning officers' conduct, and ensuring public scrutiny and media coverage of elections. In the recent mayoral elections in Chandigarh citywitnessed returning officer (RO)who is supposed to look after the fair counting of results, admitted to tampering with ballots, the Apex Court is reportedly concerned about horse trading.

However, allegations of results tampering, or electoral malpractice may still surface from time to time. To address these challenges, ongoing vigilance, transparency, and accountability are required from electoral authorities, political stakeholders, and civil society organizations. Thorough investigation of tampering allegations, holding those responsible accountable, and taking steps to strengthen the electoral process are essential.

#### **4.9. Pre-poll surveys in shaping public opinion:**

Pre-poll surveys can significantly influence election results, but they also raise ethical concerns. where voters gravitate towards perceived frontrunners based on survey results, can

undermine informed decision-making, and distort voter preferences. Overwhelming survey predictions can suppress voter turnout, diluting the democratic principle of every vote counting and disenfranchising voters who feel their participation is futile. Strategic voting, where voters react to survey predictions by casting ballots to maximize the perceived chance of their preferred outcome, can also distort electoral outcomes and compromise the democratic process. Critics argue that opinion polls can be manipulated as "paid surveys" by political parties to shape voter expectations about electoral prospects. They claim that these polls may be commissioned with predetermined outcomes, influencing public perception, and potentially swaying undecided voters or impacting voter turnout. This manipulation undermines the democratic process by distorting the public's understanding of genuine electoral sentiment and potentially leading to outcomes that do not accurately reflect voter preferences. As a result, there are calls for increased transparency and regulation in the conduct and reporting of opinion polls to mitigate the risk of political manipulation. (Kumar, August 2016) Promoting transparency in polling methodologies, educating voters about survey limitations, and fostering critical thinking skills can help mitigate these ethical concerns and uphold democratic governance principles.

## **5.0. SVEEP (Systematic Voter's Education and Electoral Participation)**

### **ECI's Initiative to confront electoral issues.**

The Election Commission of India (ECI) has implemented SVEEP (Systematic Voter's Education and Electoral Participation) initiatives to enhance voter participation in elections. The initiative ensures every eligible Indian is on the electoral roll and every vote counts. ECI has quickly adapted to technological changes, including computerizing photo electoral rolls and electronic voting machines.

The SVEEP initiative was launched in response to declining voter turnout and increasing apathy among specific groups of people in India. In 2010, the ECI chose the theme "Greater Participation for a Stronger Democracy" to tackle issues like urban apathy, women's participation deficit, and youth indifference to the electoral process. The data indicates that 85% of self-help groups SHG members in focused group discussions post-elections confirmed their electoral awareness and participation in electoral awareness campaigns at the CBO level. This increase in women participation in the 17th Legislative election in Bihar (2020) is attributed to the effectiveness of awareness drives conducted by CBOs under SVEEP. SVEEP activities resulted in the addition of 5% new voters, contributing to the increased women participation percentage. However, the impact of COVID-19 may have negatively impacted this increase. (Prakash, 2023, December)

To address these challenges, the ECI started reaching out to eligible citizens to understand what was stopping them from registering in the electoral rolls and voting. This led to the creation of SVEEP, which has grown into a strategic, scientific, systematic, and synergistic program with a well-

structured framework at national, provincial, and grass root levels.

At the national level, the SVEEP Division formulates policies, plans interventions, and monitors implementation, while continuing discourse with voting publics, civil society groups, and media. At the district level, the District Collector plays a key role in election management and oversees the implementation of the SVEEP programme. Since 2006, the ECI has introduced Booth Level Officers (BLOs) to maintain the Electoral Roll and connect with citizens.

The Information, Motivation and Facilitation (IMF) strategy for voter registration and participation in India consists of various systematic interventions. The strategy involves a systematic assessment of electoral data, socio-cultural and economic factors, and survey agencies to understand reasons for non-participation. Targeted interventions are carried out to improve voter participation, targeting gender gaps, urban apathy, and youth disconnect.

Partnerships and collaborations are crucial for the strategy, as any implementation requires input and support from various agencies and departments. The Election Commission collaborates with educational institutions, youth organizations, Central and State Government Departments, and private media to increase voter awareness and voter registration.

Various media and communication methods are employed to reach potential voters, including mass media, print, mid media, social media, inter-personal communication, local and folk media, and innovative collaterals. The National Voter Service Portal (NVSP) provides information and services to citizens, and social media is used at district and state levels to enhance voter awareness and increase polling percentage.

Motivation is essential for greater electoral participation, and renowned individuals from various fields are appointed as ECI's National Icons to motivate voters. Physical events and activities, such as drawing, debates, declamations, quizzes, local and folk-art competitions, song writing competitions, rock festivals, sporting events, mass mobilization events, pledges to vote, entertainment shows, flash mobs, celebrity endorsements, online quizzes, and mock polls, are effectively used to engage people.

The SVEEP strategy aims to increase public participation in elections by making the process and procedures voter friendly. Popular facilitation measures include voter facilitation centres, online registration, name search facilities, SMS-based services, and information on election laws and rules. Voters' Facilitation Centres provide citizen-friendly services for electoral roll issues and EPIC cards. Registration forms are available at prominent places, and special registration camps are held ahead of elections. Poll hours are extended to 11 hours in most regions and assured minimum facilities (AMF) are provided at every polling station. Model Polling Stations (MPS) are established to provide additional facilities to voters. Separate queues for men and women at polling stations are provided, and volunteers assist senior citizens and infirm voters. Braille facilities and tactile signages are also

available for visually challenged voters. Alternate photo identity documents are announced ahead of poll day, and voter guides and photo voter slips are delivered at residence. Voters' Facilitation Centres assist voters and provide information about voting, while search facilities are available on national and CEO websites and through SMS. Awareness Observers are deployed during the election period to monitor the implementation of the program.(Padma Angmo, 2016)

### 5.1. Conclusion and recommendations:

Ethical voting is essential for supporting democratic values and ensuring electoral integrity. Challenges like unethical campaign financing, personality cults, social media, and electoral manipulation highlight the fragility of democratic systems. Proactive measures, such as strengthening regulations to combat unethical campaign financing, promoting transparency in political funding, and fostering policy debates, can enhance electoral credibility and combat these issues. Regulating social media platforms to prevent misinformation and ensuring robust electoral law enforcement are also vital for maintaining democratic elections integrity.

Recommendations include enhancing transparency in campaign financing, promoting public awareness and education about ethical voting, strengthening electoral oversight mechanisms, regulating social media, fostering civic engagement and participation through voter education programs, community forums, and grassroots campaigns, and strengthening international cooperation among democratic nations. Implementing these recommendations can strengthen societies' commitment to democratic principles, guaranteeing elections reflect the people's will, and preserving democratic governance for future generations.

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