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# Role of the Election Commission in Strengthening Democracy: An Analytical Study

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**ABSTRACT:** The Election Commission plays a vital role in ensuring the successful functioning of democracy by conducting free, fair, and transparent elections. In a democratic system, elections are the primary means through which citizens participate in governance and choose their representatives. The objective of this research paper is to analyze the role of the Election Commission in strengthening democratic values and maintaining the integrity of the electoral process.

In India, the Election Commission of India is an independent constitutional body responsible for administering elections at the national and state levels. The Commission performs various functions such as preparation of electoral rolls, supervision of elections, implementation of the Model Code of Conduct, and promotion of voter awareness. Through these functions, it ensures political equality, transparency, and accountability in the democratic process.

The study highlights that electoral reforms introduced by the Commission, including Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT), and voter awareness campaigns, have contributed significantly to strengthening democracy. At the same time, the Commission faces several challenges such as money power, criminalization of politics, fake news, and political pressure, which affect the fairness of elections.

**KEYWORDS:** Election Commission, Democracy, Free and Fair Elections, Electoral Reforms, Democratic Governance, Political Participation.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Democracy is regarded as one of the most effective and widely accepted forms of government in the modern world. It is a system in which the people participate directly or indirectly in the process of governance by electing their representatives. The success of democracy largely depends upon the conduct of free, fair, transparent, and impartial elections. Elections not only provide legitimacy to the government but also ensure political participation, accountability, and representation of the people. In this context, the role of an independent and impartial electoral body becomes highly significant.

In India, the Election Commission of India is entrusted with the responsibility of conducting elections and maintaining the integrity of the democratic process. Established under Article 324 of the Constitution of India, the Election Commission functions as an autonomous constitutional authority responsible for supervising, directing, and controlling elections to Parliament, State Legislatures, and the offices of the President and Vice-President. The framers of the Constitution recognized that democracy could survive only if elections were conducted in a free and impartial manner; therefore, they ensured constitutional protection for the independence of the Commission.

The Election Commission plays a vital role in strengthening democracy by ensuring political equality and protecting the voting rights of citizens. Through fair elections, it provides every eligible citizen an equal opportunity to participate in the governance process. It also acts as a safeguard against electoral malpractices such as booth capturing, bribery, intimidation, and misuse of government machinery. By enforcing electoral laws and the Model Code of Conduct, the Commission seeks to maintain transparency and fairness in the electoral process.

Over the years, the role of the Election Commission has expanded significantly. It is no longer limited only to conducting elections but has also become an important institution for electoral reforms and voter awareness. The introduction of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT), voter identification systems, and digital electoral services are examples of reforms aimed at improving transparency and efficiency in elections. In addition, the Commission actively promotes voter education and participation through awareness campaigns, particularly among youth, women, and marginalized communities.



Despite its achievements, the Election Commission faces several contemporary challenges. Increasing influence of money power, criminalization of politics, fake news, misuse of social media, and political pressure have raised concerns regarding the fairness and credibility of elections. The growing complexity of modern elections requires the Commission to adopt new strategies and reforms to maintain public trust in the democratic system.

The present study aims to analyze the role of the Election Commission in strengthening democracy with special reference to its constitutional position, functions, achievements, reforms, and challenges. The study also seeks to examine how the Commission contributes to democratic stability, political participation, and transparent governance. Thus, the Election Commission emerges as one of the most important pillars of Indian democracy, playing a decisive role in protecting democratic values and ensuring the effective functioning of the electoral system.

## II. CONSTITUTIONAL STATUS OF THE ELECTION COMMISSION

The Election Commission of India occupies a significant position in the constitutional framework of India. Recognizing the importance of free and fair elections for the successful functioning of democracy, the framers of the Constitution established the Election Commission as an independent constitutional authority. The constitutional provisions related to the Commission are primarily mentioned under Article 324 of the Constitution of India, which vests the “superintendence, direction, and control” of elections in the Election Commission. These provisions were incorporated to ensure that elections are conducted impartially and without political interference.

Article 324 empowers the Election Commission to conduct elections to the Parliament, State Legislatures, and the offices of the President and Vice-President of India. This constitutional status provides the Commission with authority and autonomy, enabling it to function independently from the executive and legislative branches of government. Unlike ordinary government agencies, the Commission derives its powers directly from the Constitution, which strengthens its institutional credibility and democratic significance.

The structure of the Election Commission has also evolved over time. Initially, the Commission functioned as a single-member body headed by the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC). However, with the increasing complexity of elections in a large and diverse country like India, it was later converted into a multi-member body consisting of the Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners. This collective structure aims to ensure balanced decision-making and greater administrative efficiency.

The Constitution also provides several safeguards to maintain the independence of the Commission. The Chief Election Commissioner enjoys security of tenure and can only be removed through a process similar to the removal of a judge of the Supreme Court. This provision protects the Commission from political pressure and arbitrary removal. In addition, the service conditions and salaries of the Election Commissioners cannot be altered to their disadvantage after appointment, thereby ensuring financial security and institutional independence.

Another important aspect of the Commission’s constitutional status is its power to issue directions and guidelines necessary for the conduct of elections. In situations where electoral laws are silent or inadequate, the Commission has exercised its constitutional authority to maintain fairness and transparency in the electoral process. This has enabled it to introduce various reforms and administrative measures aimed at improving electoral integrity.

The independence of the Election Commission is essential because elections often involve intense political competition and attempts to influence the electoral process. An autonomous electoral body acts as a neutral institution that protects democratic values and ensures equal opportunities for political parties and candidates. By maintaining impartiality and transparency, the Commission strengthens public confidence in the electoral system.

However, debates regarding the appointment process and institutional autonomy of the Election Commission continue in contemporary political discourse. Some scholars and experts argue that reforms are needed to make the appointment process more transparent and independent in order to further strengthen the credibility of the institution. Despite these concerns, the Election Commission remains one of the most important constitutional bodies responsible for safeguarding democracy in India.

Thus, the constitutional status of the Election Commission reflects the commitment of the Indian Constitution toward ensuring free, fair, and impartial elections, which are essential for maintaining democratic governance and political stability.



### **III. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE ELECTION COMMISSION IN INDIA**

The historical development of the Election Commission of India reflects the evolution of Indian democracy and the increasing importance of electoral management in a large and diverse country. After India attained independence in 1947, the framers of the Constitution recognized that the success of democracy would depend upon the conduct of free, fair, and impartial elections. As a result, the Election Commission was established on 25 January 1950 as an independent constitutional body under Article 324 of the Constitution of India.

Initially, the Commission functioned as a single-member body headed by the Chief Election Commissioner. Its primary responsibility was to organize and supervise elections in accordance with constitutional provisions. The first general elections held in 1951–52 marked a historic event in the democratic history of India, as millions of citizens participated in the electoral process despite widespread illiteracy, poverty, and administrative challenges. The successful conduct of these elections established the credibility of the Election Commission and strengthened democratic confidence in the newly independent nation.

During the early decades after independence, the Commission mainly focused on conducting elections and preparing electoral rolls. However, as Indian politics became more competitive and complex, the role and responsibilities of the Commission gradually expanded. Increasing electoral malpractices such as booth capturing, misuse of money and muscle power, and political violence created the need for stronger electoral regulation and reforms.

A major turning point in the development of the Election Commission came during the 1990s under the leadership of Chief Election Commissioner T.N. Seshan. He introduced strict enforcement of electoral laws and the Model Code of Conduct, which significantly improved electoral discipline and transparency. His tenure marked the transformation of the Commission into a more assertive and powerful institution capable of taking firm action against electoral malpractices. This period also strengthened public trust in the Commission's ability to conduct fair elections.

Over time, several electoral reforms were introduced to modernize the electoral process. The introduction of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) reduced the possibility of invalid votes and increased efficiency in counting. Later, the implementation of Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) enhanced transparency and voter confidence. The Commission also adopted digital technologies for voter registration, electoral roll management, and awareness campaigns.

The Commission's role in promoting voter participation has also expanded significantly. Through programs such as the Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) initiative, the Commission has encouraged greater participation among youth, women, and marginalized communities. These initiatives have contributed to strengthening democratic inclusiveness and electoral awareness.

Despite these achievements, the historical development of the Election Commission has also been accompanied by challenges. Political interference, rising campaign expenditure, fake news, and misuse of social media have created new difficulties for the Commission in maintaining electoral fairness. Consequently, the institution has continuously adapted itself to changing political and technological environments.

### **IV. FUNCTIONS OF THE ELECTION COMMISSION**

The Election Commission of India performs a wide range of functions that are essential for ensuring the effective functioning of democracy. As an independent constitutional authority, the Commission is entrusted with the responsibility of supervising, directing, and controlling the entire electoral process in India. Its functions are not limited only to conducting elections but also include maintaining electoral integrity, promoting voter awareness, and ensuring transparency and fairness in the democratic system.

One of the primary functions of the Election Commission is the conduct of elections to the Parliament, State Legislatures, and the offices of the President and Vice-President of India. The Commission prepares election schedules, supervises polling arrangements, appoints election officials, and ensures that elections are conducted in a peaceful and impartial manner. This responsibility is extremely significant in a country like India, where elections involve millions of voters and thousands of polling stations.



Another important function of the Commission is the preparation and revision of electoral rolls. Accurate and updated electoral rolls are essential for ensuring universal adult franchise and preventing electoral fraud. The Commission regularly updates voter lists by including eligible voters and removing ineligible entries. It also facilitates voter registration through both online and offline systems, thereby making the electoral process more accessible and inclusive.

The Election Commission is also responsible for recognizing political parties and allotting election symbols to them. Political symbols are particularly important in India due to linguistic and educational diversity, as they help voters identify parties and candidates easily. The Commission classifies political parties as national or state parties based on their electoral performance and ensures that electoral competition takes place within a regulated framework.

A major function of the Commission is the enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC). The MCC contains guidelines for political parties and candidates during elections to ensure fair campaigning and prevent misuse of government machinery, hate speech, bribery, and other unethical practices. The Commission monitors election campaigns and takes action against violations of the Code to maintain transparency and equality in the electoral process.

The Commission also plays a crucial role in voter education and awareness. Through various campaigns and initiatives such as SVEEP (Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation), it encourages citizens to participate actively in elections. These programs focus on increasing voter turnout, promoting ethical voting, and spreading awareness about electoral rights and responsibilities.

In addition, the Election Commission introduces electoral reforms and technological innovations to improve the efficiency and credibility of elections. The introduction of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT), and digital electoral services has modernized the electoral process and reduced the possibility of electoral malpractices.

The Commission also acts as an advisory body to the government in matters related to electoral laws and reforms. It recommends changes aimed at strengthening democratic governance and improving the electoral system. Through its constitutional authority, the Commission ensures that elections remain free from undue influence and reflect the true will of the people.

## **V. ROLE OF THE ELECTION COMMISSION IN STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY**

The Election Commission of India plays a vital role in strengthening democracy by ensuring that elections are conducted in a free, fair, transparent, and impartial manner. Since elections are the foundation of democratic governance, the effectiveness of democracy largely depends on the efficiency and credibility of the Election Commission. Through its constitutional powers and administrative functions, the Commission safeguards democratic values and promotes political participation among citizens.

One of the most significant contributions of the Election Commission is ensuring free and fair elections. By conducting impartial elections, the Commission provides equal opportunities to political parties and candidates, thereby maintaining political equality. Free and fair elections prevent the misuse of power, corruption, intimidation, and electoral fraud, which are major threats to democracy. Through strict enforcement of electoral laws and the Model Code of Conduct, the Commission ensures that the electoral process remains transparent and unbiased.

The Commission also strengthens democracy by protecting the voting rights of citizens. Universal adult franchise is one of the most important democratic principles, and the Election Commission ensures that every eligible citizen has an opportunity to vote without discrimination. Through continuous revision of electoral rolls and voter registration drives, the Commission promotes inclusiveness and political participation, especially among women, youth, and marginalized communities.

Another important role of the Commission is maintaining public confidence in the democratic process. Transparent electoral practices and effective monitoring of elections increase trust among citizens regarding the fairness of elections. The use of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT), and digital electoral services has further strengthened transparency and efficiency in elections. These reforms have reduced electoral malpractices and enhanced voter confidence in the electoral system.



The Election Commission also contributes to democratic stability by regulating political competition. It ensures that political parties and candidates follow democratic norms and ethical standards during elections. Through the enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct, the Commission discourages hate speech, communal politics, bribery, and misuse of government machinery. In this way, it helps maintain peace, discipline, and fairness during elections.

In addition, the Commission promotes democratic awareness and civic responsibility among citizens. Voter awareness campaigns encourage people to participate actively in elections and understand the importance of ethical voting. By educating voters about their rights and duties, the Commission strengthens democratic culture and political consciousness in society.

The role of the Election Commission has become even more important in the contemporary era due to the increasing influence of money power, criminalization of politics, and digital misinformation. In such circumstances, the Commission acts as a guardian of democratic values by monitoring electoral activities and taking corrective measures against violations of electoral laws.

Despite facing various challenges, the Election Commission has succeeded in preserving the integrity of the electoral process and ensuring peaceful transfer of political power in India. Its contribution to strengthening democracy is therefore not limited only to election management but extends to promoting accountability, transparency, political participation, and constitutional governance.

## **VI. ELECTORAL REFORMS AND INITIATIVES**

The Election Commission of India has introduced several electoral reforms and initiatives to improve the transparency, efficiency, and credibility of the electoral process. These reforms have played a significant role in strengthening democratic governance and ensuring free and fair elections in India. As the nature of elections has evolved over time, the Commission has continuously adapted itself to modern challenges by adopting technological innovations and administrative improvements.

One of the most significant electoral reforms introduced by the Commission is the use of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs). Before the introduction of EVMs, elections were conducted through ballot papers, which often led to invalid votes, booth capturing, and delays in counting. The adoption of EVMs simplified the voting process, reduced electoral fraud, minimized human error, and accelerated the declaration of results. It also made the electoral process more efficient and environmentally friendly by reducing the use of paper ballots.

To further enhance transparency and voter confidence, the Commission introduced the Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) system. VVPAT allows voters to verify that their votes have been correctly recorded by displaying a printed slip for a few seconds after casting a vote. This reform has increased public trust in the electoral process and strengthened accountability in electronic voting.

Another important reform is the modernization of voter registration and electoral roll management. The Election Commission has introduced online voter registration services, digital correction facilities, and electronic electoral databases to make the process more accessible and transparent. Citizens can now register, update, and verify their voter details through digital platforms, thereby improving electoral participation and administrative efficiency.

The Commission has also undertaken major initiatives to promote voter awareness and participation. Through the Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) program, the Commission conducts awareness campaigns aimed at educating citizens about the importance of voting and democratic participation. Special emphasis has been placed on encouraging participation among youth, women, rural voters, and marginalized communities. These initiatives have contributed significantly to increasing voter turnout in many elections.

In addition, the Election Commission has implemented stricter measures to regulate election expenditure and monitor campaign activities. Expenditure monitoring teams, surveillance mechanisms, and reporting systems have been introduced to reduce the influence of money power in elections. The Commission also closely monitors social media and digital campaigning to prevent the spread of fake news, hate speech, and misinformation during elections.

The Commission has further strengthened transparency by making electoral information publicly accessible through digital platforms and mobile applications. Voters can access details regarding candidates, polling stations, election



schedules, and voter services online. Such initiatives have enhanced public engagement and improved communication between the electoral authority and citizens.

Despite these reforms, several challenges still remain, including criminalization of politics, misuse of social media, and increasing campaign expenditure. Therefore, the Election Commission continues to recommend further reforms aimed at improving electoral integrity and democratic accountability.

## **VII. CHALLENGES BEFORE THE ELECTION COMMISSION**

Despite its significant contributions to strengthening democracy, the Election Commission of India faces several challenges that affect the fairness, transparency, and credibility of the electoral process. With the growing complexity of elections and rapid political and technological changes, the Commission has to continuously adapt itself to protect democratic values and maintain public trust in elections.

One of the major challenges before the Election Commission is the increasing influence of money power in elections. Political parties and candidates often spend enormous amounts of money during election campaigns, which creates inequality among contestants and affects the principle of fair competition. The use of black money, vote-buying, and illegal campaign financing weakens democratic ethics and creates obstacles to free and fair elections. Although the Commission has introduced expenditure monitoring mechanisms, controlling excessive election spending remains a difficult task.

Another serious challenge is the criminalization of politics. A significant number of candidates contest elections despite facing criminal charges. The involvement of individuals with criminal backgrounds in politics undermines public confidence in democratic institutions and affects the quality of governance. The Election Commission has repeatedly emphasized the need for electoral reforms to address this issue, but legal and political limitations continue to restrict its effectiveness.

The misuse of social media and the spread of fake news have emerged as major contemporary challenges. Digital platforms are increasingly being used to spread misinformation, hate speech, propaganda, and communal messages during elections. Such activities influence voter behavior and threaten the fairness of the electoral process. Monitoring online content and regulating digital campaigns have become difficult tasks due to the rapid expansion of technology and communication networks.

Electoral violence and malpractice also remain significant concerns in certain regions. Intimidation of voters, booth capturing, communal tensions, and misuse of administrative machinery affect the integrity of elections. Ensuring peaceful elections in a country as large and diverse as India requires extensive administrative arrangements and security measures, which pose continuous challenges for the Commission.

Political pressure and questions regarding institutional independence also create difficulties for the Election Commission. Since elections involve intense political competition, the Commission often faces criticism and allegations of bias from political parties. Debates regarding the appointment process of Election Commissioners and the need for greater institutional autonomy have intensified in recent years. Such concerns highlight the importance of strengthening the independence and credibility of the Commission.

In addition, logistical and administrative challenges are also significant due to the large size of the Indian electorate. Conducting elections for millions of voters across geographically diverse regions requires enormous resources, coordination, and manpower. Managing polling stations, updating electoral rolls, and ensuring accessibility for all voters remain complex administrative tasks.

Another challenge is voter apathy and declining ethical standards in politics. In some areas, low voter turnout and lack of political awareness weaken democratic participation. The Commission has therefore been focusing on voter education and awareness programs to encourage responsible and informed voting behavior.

## **VIII. CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE**

In the contemporary era, the role of the Election Commission of India has become more significant than ever before due to rapid political, technological, and social changes. Democracy today faces numerous challenges such as political



polarization, digital misinformation, misuse of money power, and declining public trust in institutions. In such circumstances, the Election Commission acts as a guardian of democratic values by ensuring transparency, accountability, and fairness in the electoral process.

One of the major reasons for the contemporary relevance of the Election Commission is the increasing complexity of elections in modern democracies. Elections are no longer limited to traditional campaigning methods; they now involve digital platforms, social media, electronic communication, and data-driven political strategies. While technological advancements have improved communication and voter outreach, they have also created new challenges such as fake news, online propaganda, cyber manipulation, and hate speech. The Election Commission therefore plays an important role in monitoring digital campaigns and maintaining the integrity of elections in the digital age.

The Commission is also highly relevant in protecting democratic stability and constitutional governance. In a country as diverse as India, elections often involve intense political competition and social tensions. By conducting impartial and peaceful elections, the Commission ensures the smooth transfer of political power and prevents instability or conflict. This strengthens public confidence in democratic institutions and reinforces the legitimacy of elected governments.

Another important aspect of the Commission's contemporary relevance is its contribution to electoral inclusiveness and political participation. Through voter awareness programs, digital registration systems, and accessibility initiatives, the Commission has worked to include marginalized groups, women, youth, senior citizens, and differently-abled voters in the democratic process. Such initiatives strengthen participatory democracy and promote equality in political representation.

The Election Commission has also become increasingly important in promoting ethical politics and transparency. By enforcing the Model Code of Conduct and monitoring election expenditure, the Commission seeks to reduce corruption, misuse of government resources, and unfair political practices. In an era where public trust in political institutions is often questioned, the Commission acts as an important mechanism for maintaining accountability and democratic discipline.

In addition, the Commission's role in introducing electoral reforms has enhanced its contemporary significance. Reforms such as Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT), online voter services, and digital monitoring systems have modernized the electoral process and improved administrative efficiency. These innovations have contributed to faster, more transparent, and more reliable elections.

The contemporary relevance of the Election Commission is also linked to the global importance of democratic governance. Around the world, many democracies face challenges related to electoral manipulation, authoritarian tendencies, and weakening democratic norms. In this context, the functioning of an independent electoral body like the Election Commission of India serves as an important example of democratic resilience and institutional stability.

However, the growing influence of technology, media, and political competition also requires continuous reforms and institutional strengthening. The Commission must remain adaptable, transparent, and independent in order to effectively respond to emerging challenges and maintain public trust in elections.

## **IX. CONCLUSION**

The study clearly demonstrates that the Election Commission of India plays a fundamental role in strengthening democracy by ensuring free, fair, transparent, and impartial elections. As elections are the foundation of democratic governance, the effectiveness of democracy largely depends upon the independence, credibility, and efficiency of the Election Commission. Through its constitutional authority and administrative functions, the Commission has successfully protected democratic values and maintained public confidence in the electoral system.

The Election Commission has made significant contributions to democratic governance by conducting regular elections, protecting voting rights, enforcing the Model Code of Conduct, and promoting political participation. Electoral reforms such as Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT), digital voter services, and voter awareness campaigns have modernized the electoral process and enhanced transparency and efficiency. These initiatives have strengthened democratic participation and reduced various forms of electoral malpractice.

The study also reveals that the Commission plays a crucial role in maintaining political equality and constitutional stability. By regulating political competition and ensuring peaceful transfer of power, it acts as a safeguard against



authoritarianism and electoral corruption. In this way, the Commission not only manages elections but also contributes to strengthening democratic culture, accountability, and good governance.

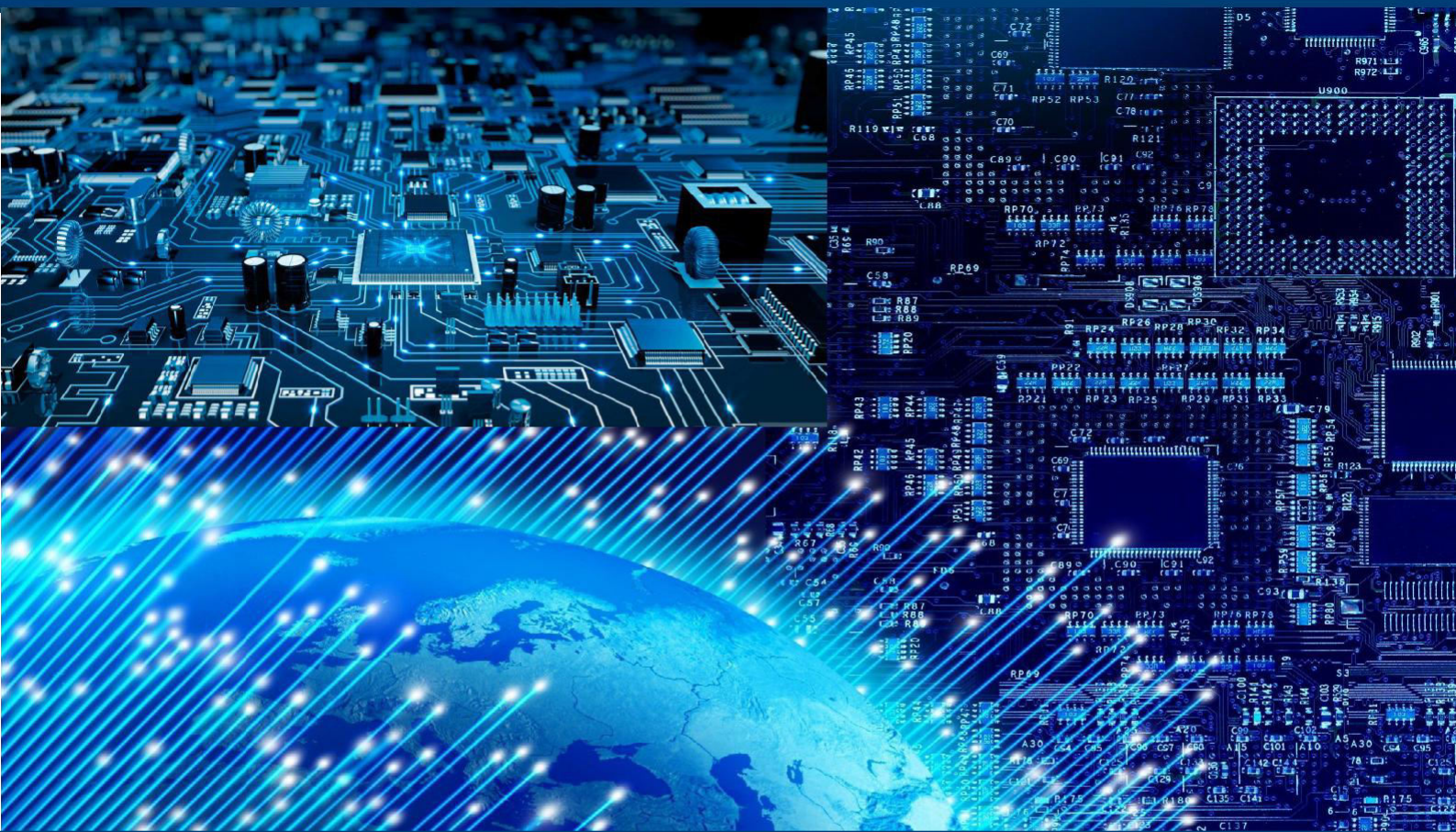
However, despite these achievements, several challenges continue to affect the functioning of the Election Commission. The increasing influence of money power, criminalization of politics, fake news, misuse of social media, and allegations regarding institutional independence have raised concerns about the fairness and credibility of elections. These challenges indicate the need for continuous electoral reforms and stronger institutional safeguards.

To further strengthen democracy, it is necessary to provide greater autonomy and transparency to the Election Commission. Reforms in the appointment process of Election Commissioners, stricter regulation of election expenditure, stronger control over digital misinformation, and improved voter awareness programs are essential for enhancing electoral integrity. Additionally, cooperation among political parties, civil society, media, and citizens is equally important for ensuring ethical and democratic elections.

In conclusion, the Election Commission remains one of the most important pillars of Indian democracy. Its role extends beyond the administration of elections to the protection of democratic principles, constitutional governance, and citizens' political rights. A strong, independent, and efficient Election Commission is therefore indispensable for preserving democratic stability and ensuring the continued success of democracy in India.

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