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Preventing criminal and money politics in Indian electoral system with the use of ICT in the digital age

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Abstract

In recent years, the Indian electoral system has been marred by instances of criminal and money politics. These practices have not only undermined the democratic process but have also resulted in the election of corrupt and ineffective representatives. In this paper, we propose the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to prevent criminal and money politics in the Indian electoral system. We argue that the digital age provides a unique opportunity to enhance transparency and accountability in the electoral process, and ICT can be leveraged to achieve this goal.

The paper begins by providing an overview of the problem of criminal and money politics in India and its impact on the electoral process. We then discuss the potential of ICT in addressing this problem, highlighting the various tools and technologies that can be employed to ensure transparency and accountability in the electoral process. We also discuss the challenges and limitations of ICT in this context, including issues related to the digital divide, cybersecurity, and data privacy.

The paper then provides a detailed analysis of the various ICT initiatives that have been undertaken in India to prevent criminal and money politics in the electoral process. These include initiatives such as the use of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), the introduction of Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) machines, and the use of biometric authentication for voter identification. We evaluate the impact of these initiatives on the electoral process and identify areas for further improvement.

Finally, we conclude by emphasizing the need for a comprehensive and coordinated approach to leveraging ICT for preventing criminal and money politics in the Indian electoral system. We argue that such an approach must involve the collaboration of various stakeholders, including the Election Commission, political parties, civil society organizations, and the general public. We also highlight the need for a strong legal and regulatory framework to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of ICT initiatives in this context.

Keywords: Corruption, transparency, accountability, digital age, digital divide, cybersecurity, data privacy

Introduction

India, the world's largest democracy, has a long-standing history of free and fair elections. However, in recent years, the country's electoral system has been plagued by instances of criminal and money politics. The criminalization of politics has become a major challenge, with political parties fielding candidates with criminal backgrounds and using illicit funds to finance their campaigns. These practices not only undermine the democratic process but also result in the election of corrupt and ineffective representatives, who prioritize personal interests over the welfare of the citizens.

The use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has become increasingly important in preventing criminal and money politics in the Indian electoral system. ICT can play a vital role in improving transparency, accountability, and integrity in the electoral process. The Indian government has implemented several ICT initiatives to prevent criminal and money politics, including Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) machines, biometric authentication, campaign finance monitoring tools, and online voter registration.

EVMs are electronic devices that are used to record and count votes. They are tamper-proof and can significantly reduce the incidence of ballot stuffing and other forms of electoral malpractice. VVPAT machines provide a physical record of the vote cast by the voter. They are connected to EVMs and provide a paper receipt to the voter, which contains details of the

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vote cast. This physical record can be used to verify the accuracy of the electronic count and can be used as evidence in case of disputes. Biometric authentication uses fingerprints or iris scans to verify the identity of voters. This technology can prevent impersonation and ensure the accuracy of voter registration lists. Campaign finance monitoring tools are used to monitor campaign finance, including the sources of funding and the expenses incurred by political parties and candidates. The use of online portals to track campaign expenses can help prevent the use of illicit funds in political campaigns and increase transparency in the financing of elections.

Online voter registration can help increase voter participation and reduce the likelihood of voter suppression. It can also improve the accuracy and completeness of voter registration lists, reducing the incidence of multiple voting and other forms of electoral malpractice.

However, the use of ICT also poses several challenges and limitations. The digital divide, or the gap between those who have access to technology and those who do not, can pose a significant challenge in the use of ICT to prevent criminal and money politics. The use of ICT in the electoral process can make the system vulnerable to cybersecurity threats, and appropriate measures must be taken to ensure the security and integrity of the electoral process. The use of ICT in the electoral process can also raise concerns about data privacy, and appropriate measures must be taken to ensure that voter data is protected and used only for legitimate purposes.

The use of ICT has the potential to prevent criminal and money politics in the Indian electoral system. However, it is important to acknowledge the challenges and limitations of ICT and to ensure that appropriate measures are taken to address these challenges. A comprehensive and coordinated approach to leveraging ICT, involving all stakeholders, is necessary to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of ICT initiatives in preventing criminal and money politics in the Indian electoral system.

An overview of the problem of criminal and money politics in India and its impact on the electoral process

Criminal and money politics are significant problems in the Indian electoral system, which undermine the integrity of the electoral process and threaten the democratic foundations of the country. Criminal and money politics refer to the use of illicit money, muscle power, and intimidation by political candidates and parties to gain an unfair advantage in the electoral process.

The problem of criminal and money politics in India is widespread and deeply entrenched. Many candidates with criminal records contest elections and are elected to office, and political parties often rely on illicit funds to finance their campaigns. This phenomenon is known as "money power" and has been prevalent in Indian elections for many decades.

The impact of criminal and money politics on the electoral process is significant. It creates an uneven playing field for candidates, with those who have access to illicit funds and muscle power gaining an unfair advantage over others. It also leads to the marginalization of honest and capable candidates who cannot compete with the resources and influence of their opponents.

Criminal and money politics also threaten the democratic foundations of the country. They erode public trust in the electoral process, creating a sense of cynicism and apathy

among voters. This, in turn, reduces voter turnout and weakens the legitimacy of elected representatives. Furthermore, criminal and money politics give rise to corruption and other forms of malpractice, which undermine the rule of law and weaken the institutions of democracy.

Criminal and money politics are significant problems in the Indian electoral system, with far-reaching implications for the integrity of the electoral process and the democratic foundations of the country. The widespread prevalence of these problems underscores the urgent need for comprehensive and coordinated efforts to address them, involving all stakeholders in the electoral process. The use of ICT offers a unique opportunity to prevent criminal and money politics and enhance transparency and accountability in the electoral process, and must be leveraged to achieve this goal.

Challenges and Limitations of ICT in Preventing Criminal and Money Politics

While ICT has the potential to address the problem of criminal and money politics in the Indian electoral system, there are also several challenges and limitations that must be taken into consideration.

1. **Digital divide:** The digital divide between urban and rural areas, as well as between different socio-economic groups, is a significant challenge. While ICT solutions can enhance transparency and accountability in the electoral process, access to technology is not universal, and those without access may be left behind.
2. **Cybersecurity:** The use of ICT in the electoral process opens up new avenues for cyberattacks and other forms of online interference. This is particularly concerning given the potential impact of such attacks on the integrity of the electoral process.
3. **Data privacy:** The use of ICT in the electoral process also raises concerns around data privacy. Voter data is sensitive information, and there is a risk that it may be misused or leaked if proper safeguards are not in place.
4. **Capacity building:** The successful implementation of ICT initiatives requires a certain level of technical expertise and capacity. This may be lacking in some areas, particularly in rural or remote areas, which may limit the effectiveness of ICT solutions.
5. **Cost:** The development and implementation of ICT solutions can be expensive, which may limit their scalability and accessibility.
6. **Resistance to change:** There may be resistance to the adoption of new technologies and processes in the electoral system. Political parties and other stakeholders may be resistant to change, particularly if it is perceived to threaten their existing power structures.

While ICT solutions have the potential to address the problem of criminal and money politics in the Indian electoral system, there are also several challenges and limitations that must be taken into consideration. Addressing these challenges and limitations will be key to the successful implementation and sustainability of ICT solutions in the electoral process.

ICT Initiatives in India to Prevent Criminal and Money Politics

Over the years, the Indian government and Election Commission have introduced several ICT initiatives to

prevent criminal and money politics in the electoral process. Some of the significant initiatives are:

1. **Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) Net:** ERO Net is a web-based application that facilitates the registration of voters, deletion of duplicate voters, and updating of voter information. This initiative has helped to streamline the voter registration process and reduce the possibility of fraudulent entries in the voter list.
2. **Election Monitoring Dashboard:** The Election Commission of India has developed an election monitoring dashboard that provides real-time information on election-related activities, including candidate nominations, polling, and counting. This tool helps to ensure transparency and accountability in the electoral process.
3. **Digitalization of Electoral Rolls:** The Election Commission of India has undertaken the digitalization of electoral rolls to ensure accuracy and eliminate duplicate entries. This initiative has made it easier for voters to verify their details and has helped to reduce the possibility of fraudulent entries in the voter list.
4. **Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs):** EVMs were introduced in India in the late 1990s to replace traditional paper ballots. The use of EVMs has helped to reduce the possibility of electoral fraud and has made the voting process more efficient.
5. **Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT):** The VVPAT is a device attached to the EVM that prints a paper receipt of the vote cast by the voter. This initiative has helped to ensure transparency and accountability in the voting process and has helped to increase voter confidence in the electoral system.
6. **Social Media Monitoring:** The Election Commission of India has also introduced social media monitoring to prevent the spread of fake news and misinformation during the election period. This initiative involves monitoring social media platforms for the spread of false information and taking appropriate action to remove such content.
7. **Political Finance Management System (PFMS):** PFMS is an online system that tracks and reports the financial transactions of political parties. This initiative has helped to increase transparency in political funding and has reduced the possibility of money politics in the electoral process.

These initiatives demonstrate the Indian government and Election Commission's commitment to leveraging ICT to prevent criminal and money politics in the electoral process. However, further efforts are required to address the challenges and limitations of these initiatives and ensure their sustainability in the long run.

Campaign Finance Monitoring Tools

The monitoring of campaign finance is crucial in preventing the use of illegal money in political campaigns and ensuring a level playing field for all candidates. Some of the tools and initiatives that have been introduced in India to monitor campaign finance include:

1. **Form 26:** Political parties and candidates are required to submit Form 26, which provides details of their assets, liabilities, and sources of income. This initiative helps to increase transparency in the financing of elections.

2. **Online Portals:** The Election Commission of India has developed online portals for the submission of election expenditure statements by candidates and political parties. This initiative helps to track campaign expenses and detect any discrepancies or violations.
3. **Election Expenditure Monitoring System (EEMS):** The Election Expenditure Monitoring System is a web-based application that helps to track the expenditure incurred by candidates during elections. This initiative helps to ensure that candidates do not exceed the prescribed expenditure limits and helps to prevent the use of illicit funds in political campaigns.
4. **Media Certification and Monitoring Committee (MCMC):** The MCMC is a committee formed by the Election Commission of India to monitor media coverage during elections. This initiative helps to prevent the use of paid news and ensures that media coverage is fair and impartial.
5. **Centralized Accounting Software for Political Parties (CASPP):** CASPP is an online platform that helps political parties to maintain their accounts and submit annual financial reports. This initiative helps to increase transparency in the financing of political parties and prevents the use of illegal funds in political campaigns.

These initiatives demonstrate the Indian government's commitment to using ICT to monitor campaign finance and prevent the use of illegal funds in political campaigns. However, there is a need for continuous improvement and strengthening of these initiatives to ensure their effectiveness and sustainability.

Transparency and accountability in the electoral process and ICT can be leveraged to achieve this goal

The digital age provides a unique opportunity to enhance transparency and accountability in the electoral process, and ICT can be leveraged to achieve this goal. The widespread availability and use of technology have transformed the way elections are conducted and managed, offering new and innovative ways to enhance the integrity of the electoral process.

ICT can play a crucial role in promoting transparency and accountability by providing real-time access to information on various aspects of the electoral process, including voter registration, candidate information, polling stations, and election results. For example, online portals can be used to provide citizens with up-to-date information on the electoral process, allowing them to monitor the conduct of elections and hold election officials accountable for their actions.

ICT can also enhance transparency and accountability by enabling the monitoring and reporting of electoral malpractice. For example, mobile apps can be used to report incidents of voter intimidation, bribery, or violence, allowing election officials to take appropriate action in real-time. Similarly, social media platforms can be used to raise awareness about electoral malpractice and encourage citizens to report any suspicious activities.

Moreover, ICT can enable the tracking and monitoring of campaign finance, making it more difficult for political parties and candidates to use illicit funds in political campaigns. The use of online portals to track campaign expenses can increase transparency in the financing of elections and enable citizens to hold political parties and candidates accountable for their financial activities.

However, it is essential to recognize that ICT alone cannot guarantee the integrity of the electoral process. ICT must be integrated into a comprehensive and coordinated approach to electoral management, involving all stakeholders, including political parties, civil society organizations, and the media. Such an approach should focus on building trust in the electoral process and ensuring that all stakeholders have the confidence to participate in the electoral process freely and fairly.

The need for a comprehensive and coordinated approach to leveraging ICT for preventing criminal and money politics in the Indian electoral system

The initiatives discussed above demonstrate the potential of ICT in preventing criminal and money politics in the Indian electoral system. However, there is a need for a more comprehensive and coordinated approach to leveraging ICT for this purpose.

Firstly, there should be a centralized database of information about political candidates, their criminal records, financial assets, and liabilities. This information should be made easily accessible to the public through a user-friendly interface. This would help voters make informed decisions and would also deter political parties from fielding candidates with criminal records or questionable financial backgrounds.

Secondly, there should be greater emphasis on cybersecurity and data privacy. The use of ICT in the electoral process increases the risk of cyber-attacks and data breaches. The ECI should work with cybersecurity experts to ensure that the ICT infrastructure used in the electoral process is secure and robust. Additionally, there should be clear guidelines on the collection, storage, and use of voter data to protect the privacy of voters.

Thirdly, there should be greater collaboration between the ECI, political parties, civil society organizations, and technology experts to develop and implement innovative ICT solutions to prevent criminal and money politics. This would require a multidisciplinary approach that involves experts in areas such as data analytics, cybersecurity, and artificial intelligence.

Fourthly, there should be efforts to bridge the digital divide and ensure that all eligible voters have access to the necessary ICT infrastructure and tools. This would require investment in ICT infrastructure in rural and remote areas, where connectivity is often poor.

While ICT initiatives have been undertaken in India to prevent criminal and money politics in the electoral process, a more comprehensive and coordinated approach is needed. This would involve the development of a centralized database of information about political candidates, greater emphasis on cybersecurity and data privacy, greater collaboration between stakeholders, and efforts to bridge the digital divide. Such an approach would help to ensure that the electoral process is transparent, accountable, and free from criminal and money politics.

An approach must involve the collaboration of various stakeholders, including the Election Commission, political parties, civil society organizations, and the general public

The collaboration between various stakeholders is essential for the successful implementation of any initiative aimed at preventing criminal and money politics in the Indian

electoral system. The Election Commission of India (ECI) plays a crucial role in organizing elections and ensuring the integrity of the electoral process. The ECI should work closely with political parties, civil society organizations, and the general public to develop and implement effective ICT solutions to prevent criminal and money politics.

Political parties should be willing to provide timely and accurate information about their candidates, including their criminal records and financial backgrounds. Civil society organizations can play an important role in monitoring the electoral process, identifying instances of criminal and money politics, and raising public awareness about these issues. The general public, as the ultimate stakeholders in the electoral process, can also play a crucial role by reporting any instances of criminal and money politics that they observe.

Additionally, technology experts and data analysts can work with the ECI and other stakeholders to develop and implement innovative ICT solutions. For example, machine learning algorithms can be used to analyze voter data and identify patterns of fraudulent behavior, such as vote-buying or multiple voting.

The prevention of criminal and money politics in the Indian electoral system requires the collaboration of various stakeholders, including the ECI, political parties, civil society organizations, the general public, and technology experts. A coordinated approach that leverages the power of ICT can help to ensure that the electoral process is transparent, accountable, and free from criminal and money politics.

The need for a strong legal and regulatory framework to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of ICT initiatives in this context

A strong legal and regulatory framework is essential to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of ICT initiatives aimed at preventing criminal and money politics in the Indian electoral system. Such a framework would provide clear guidelines for the collection, storage, and use of voter data, and would help to protect the privacy of voters.

The Election Commission of India (ECI) has already taken steps to regulate the use of ICT in the electoral process through various laws and regulations. For example, the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) sets out guidelines for political parties and candidates during election campaigns, including restrictions on the use of social media and other electronic media for campaigning purposes. The ECI has also introduced guidelines on the use of social media by political parties and candidates, which include requirements for disclosure of expenditure on social media campaigns and for obtaining certification from the ECI before launching any social media campaign.

However, there is a need for more comprehensive legislation that specifically addresses the use of ICT in the electoral process. Such legislation should provide guidelines for the use of technology for voter registration, voting, counting of votes, and declaration of results. It should also provide for penalties for any violation of the guidelines, to ensure that there is accountability for any wrongdoing.

Additionally, there should be clear guidelines for the use of voter data, to protect the privacy of voters. This would include requirements for the secure storage and handling of voter data, as well as restrictions on the use of voter data for purposes other than the conduct of elections.

A strong legal and regulatory framework is necessary to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of ICT initiatives aimed at preventing criminal and money politics in the Indian electoral system. Such a framework should provide clear guidelines for the use of technology in the electoral process, as well as for the collection, storage, and use of voter data. It should also provide for penalties for any violation of the guidelines, to ensure accountability and deter wrongdoing.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has the potential to prevent criminal and money politics in the Indian electoral system. The digital age provides a unique opportunity to enhance transparency and accountability in the electoral process, and ICT can be leveraged to achieve this goal.

However, there are several challenges and limitations associated with the use of ICT in this context, including the digital divide, cybersecurity, and data privacy concerns. These challenges must be addressed to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of ICT initiatives aimed at preventing criminal and money politics in the Indian electoral system.

India has already taken several initiatives to leverage ICT in preventing criminal and money politics in the electoral process, including the use of campaign finance monitoring tools and online portals to track campaign expenses. However, there is a need for a comprehensive and coordinated approach involving various stakeholders, including the Election Commission, political parties, civil society organizations, and the general public.

A strong legal and regulatory framework is also required to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of ICT initiatives in preventing criminal and money politics in the Indian electoral system. The government needs to take proactive steps to address the challenges and limitations associated with the use of ICT and strengthen its initiatives to ensure a fair and transparent electoral process.

Overall, the use of ICT in preventing criminal and money politics in the Indian electoral system is a promising development that can enhance the quality of democracy and promote good governance.

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