ELECTIONS AS MECHANISMS OF ACCOUNTABILITY: MAINTAINING DEMOCRACY IN THE CONTEMPORARY AGE

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the interaction of democracy, elections and accountability. It asserts that the current world needs strong electoral programs to bring leaders to book. The author relates to the example of ancient Athens to the recent multi-party systems demonstrating that elections are not only a step to allow people select a representative, but also a vital instrument to facilitate the transparency, responsiveness, and ethical rule. The paper deeply emphasizes the problems of the electoral structure, through a blend of political theory, case studies of the world, and behavioural economics, such as voter apathy, gerrymandering and misinformation that undermine our sense of accountability. Moreover, paper critically examine the role of electoral institutions in promoting civic participation, campaign-finance reforms that make the participation fairly competitive, and digital technology and populist movements as bringing about new challenges. The study combines numbers of international ranking like Varieties of Democracy project with stories of countries going through a transition to democracy to conclude that greater accountability requires both institutional protections and cultural shifts towards an informed citizenry. For political accountability, elections take place on a regular basis, courts supervise the government, and other meaningful separation institutions, including the Comptroller and Auditor General. However, its structural weaknesses still persist. The Supreme Court overturned the obscure system of electoral bonds in 2024 due to its lack of transparency. However, campaign money is very unregulated and there is no cap on expenditure. Lastly, the study cautions that in case of lack of any strong electoral integrity, democracy can descend into oligarchy. Hence, it provides policy makers, researchers and activists with a step-by-step approach to reinvigorating these pillars. The

main point is that the true democratic vibrancy is based on incessant rearranging of the power by means of responsible elections.

KEYWORDS: Democracy, Elections, Political Accountability, Electoral Integrity, Voter Engagement, Governance Reforms.

INTRODUCTION

Global democracies have shown visible signs of democratic decay in recent years, that raising serious doubts about whether elections hold governments accountable. Elections remain an element of democratic governance, but their function of providing transparency, responsiveness, and credibility to the public is coming to a standstill. According to the report V-Dem 25, 42 countries have become autocratic in the last decade. This has led to a flagging electoral integrity process even in long-established electoral democracies like Hungary, Brazil, and India, demonstrating that simply holding elections is no longer sufficient to ensure democratic accountability.

These issues are particularly evident in debates about political financing and the fairness of the electoral process in India. However, in February 2024, the Supreme Court gave a major setback to the electoral bond regime, exposing the risks of unaccounted political funding. Since the scheme was introduced in 2018, more than 16,000 crores of rupees have been contributed to it without any public announcement, which can only lead to suspicions of corporate influence, as well as nepotism, and a loss of voter confidence. Perhaps, it was a judgment that was delivered in the context of the Lok Sabha elections of 2024 and reinforced the constitutional obligation to promote transparency and an informed vote in a democratic system.

However, modern democracies are grappling with falling voter turnout and rising populist politics alongside institutional problems. In keeping with this India's general election in 2024 had the lowest turnout, around 66 percent, compared with 67 percent in 2019, reflecting a growing level of voter apathy. Therefore, at the same time, social networks such as WhatsApp and X have become powerful tools for political communication and tend to be popular for spreading disinformation and polarizing content. These trends have radically changed the electoral landscape, rendering elections a less effective form of accountability.

Furthermore, the paper examines the concept of democracy, not only as a process of elected government, but also as a framework based on constitutional guarantees, civic participation and ethical governance. Though, using the platform of democratic theorists like Robert Dahl,

elections are seen as having two purposes, selecting political leaders and allowing citizens to scrutinize their performance. Apart from this, the political accountability works in vertical and horizontal mechanisms. Although, main mechanism is through elections, which citizens use to constrain leaders, institutions of checks within the democratic system are the courts, legislatures, elections and audit bodies. Thus, the strength and independence of these institutions as well as the political and social environment within which they are implemented determines the effectiveness of elections.

The arguments put forward in this paper are that, despite the importance of elections for democratic governance, accountability is increasingly vulnerable to problems such as secret political money, democratisation and manipulation, and lack of information coherence. Unless changes are made on a large scale, and a new commitment to democratic principles is offered, electoral democracy will fall into a new focus on elite control and diminished accountability.

Moreover, the paper analyses the changing relationship between elections and accountability using political theory, voter behaviour analysis, and a comparison of past and present case studies and empirical data, including the data provided by V-Dem. It also seeks to identify institutional and political changes and the mandatory requirement of a culture of informed and participatory citizenship as conditions for maintaining democratic accountability today.

Historical Background

Elections as a form of accountability had their origins in ancient Athens. In this case, the notion of democracy was not imposed by elections; it was a participatory system that focused on the direct participation and strict control of citizens. Athenian democracy (fifth-century BC, as described by Aristotle in The Constitution of the Athenians) was based on principles that emphasized equality and responsibility over elitism. However, elections played a limited role. Most public office positions were filled by sortition, a system of lottery among qualified citizens. This prevented corruption and guaranteed broad representation. This tendency towards faction and oligarchic capture has been reduced by sortition to institutions like the 500 (Boule) Council. Any male free citizen over the age of 18 was a potential servant.

Specialised jobs requiring professionalism (such as generals (strategies)) or financial control (financial overseers) could only be chosen. Although, voters of the Assembly chose the candidates on the basis of merit. The new institutions-imposed accountability through three new mechanisms: the vetting of candidates for office, which ensures that they have experience in moral and financial matters; the ostracism, which voted to banish influential

persons from public life at least once a year; the opportunity, a form of censure, which voted to banish powerful persons who are seen as an example of democracy.

Leaders recognized that their tenure would be based on popular approval, not just elections. Pericles's time is a case in point: his success in 15 elections as a strategist was due to his proven abilities, but there was still the Euthanasia, the guarantor of moral order. Though, voter behaviour is explained retrospectively on the basis of insights from behavioural economics, including the theory of prospectus developed by Kahneman and Tversky. Citizens perceived losses (e.g. corruption) as more important than gains, which was a driving force for responsible management.

Athenian democracy had horizontal accountability, or checks and balances between institutions, which is the antithesis of vertical accountability through elections. In the absence of safeguards, elections may exacerbate inequality. They didn't really represent women, slaves, and metiches (foreigners). The system failed when conquered by the Macedonians in 322 BC, which indicates a weakness. The divisions and corruption of the elites engendered a lack of confidence that primed autocracy.

On this basis, elections have become central pillars of representative democracy, as the transition to modern multi-party systems has progressed. The change has been adapted to larger and more diverse societies, where it is no longer possible to participate directly. The separation of powers was advocated by Enlightenment thinkers like Montesquieu and Madison to instil responsibility. The 1787 United States Constitution institutionalized elections as a means of ex post facto control. However, fixed terms of Congress and the presidency gave voters the opportunity to throw out such scoundrels as Joseph Schumpeter's 1942 model of democracy as competitive elitism. When government is in elections, it allows for a dynamic of principal to agent; voters (the people) give authority to leaders (the agents) and can punish them by re-electing them or by getting them out.

In keeping with this multi-party systems were accelerated after World War-II as a result of decolonisation. Election Commission in India, the constitution of 1950 established universal suffrage and periodic elections. The Indian system, drawing on British parliamentary practice, uses the Athenian-style scrutiny. The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) is the auditor of public expenditure in the same way as the Euthanasia Committee. But today's problems reproduce archaic vices. The saga of India's 2024 election bonds shows how donors, in this case 12,000 crores for the ruling party alone, prefer anonymity to competition, just as the Athenian elite sat in a sort of coalition.

Transitional democracies around the world are reflecting this change. In Tunisia, the 2011 constitution focused on multi-party elections as a system for electing leaders, with elections becoming more participatory, raising the V-Dem Electoral Democracy Index from 0.3 in 2010 to 0.7 in 2020. This has led to responsibility through responsive governance. Hungary under Viktor Orb, on the other hand, is helping to reverse the trend. Since 2010, multi-party competition has been diluted by gerrymandering and media ownership, which run counter to the deeper V-Dem tilt toward electoral autocracy.

Furthermore, new dynamics are also explained by modern behavioural economics. This lack of participation is due to voter apathy, which is due to limited rationality (Simon, 1957). In the US election of 2024, only 62 percent of eligible voters, according to Pew, means that incumbents can get away with it. The lack of information exacerbates this; voters are unable to assess performance on complex policies, and they resort to heuristic voting, including party loyalties, rather than merit.

Thus, from the participative model of Athens to the modern forms of multi-party systems, elections have become not selective but all-encompassing instruments of accountability. Efficiency relies on combining vertical electoral pressure with horizontal institutions. Democracy, as Przeworski (1999) writes, survives only because those who have lost are willing to lose in the hope of winning again; today, democracy is under the strain of populism and inequality. This historical perspective suggests that the absence of reform can turn elections into sham contests that allow oligarchy rather than popular empowerment.

Theoretical Framework: Accountability and Elections

Elections are the instruments of accountability of the officials. They operate within a complicated theoretical realm that combines the politics and political philosophy, the institution building process, and human behaviour. Thus, the core concept of political accountability is that voters hold elected leaders to account by having them answer the questions concerning their actions. The possibility of punishments, particularly the loss of an election, makes them responsive. This is explained by the scholars with the use of the principal-agent theory. Hence, principals in that model are the voters. They are agents, who are given authority by them. However, with concealed information or conflict of interest's problems occur. Ferejohn (1986) said that elections are able to overcome such issues by allowing citizens to vote again. The electorate reviews previous output and decides to either retain a leader or displace him or her establishing better motivation towards good governance.

Democracy was reformed by Joseph Schumpeter's book Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy (1942). It was not a public-interest endeavour, but a selection procedure. From the elitist point of view of Schumpeter, elections look like markets. Parties and candidates compete for votes by having a set of policies. This competition leads to responsibility. The incumbent must perform to stay in power. The electorate insists on open information. To reduce accountability, Schumpeter warned that the majority of citizens were not better informed. This can be explained by behavioural economics. Kahneman and Tversky's (1979) theory of prospectus shows that human beings attach greater importance to losses than to gains, such as depression or a scandal. This has turned the electorate into very tough in bad times, but tolerant in good times.

The election according to the model proposed by Adam Przeworski (1999) is a non-binding election. Governance remains when leaders expect to win elections. Abuse of power is limited by this expectation. Przeworski used game theory to show that repeated electoral systems cause leaders to try to increase their chances of re-election. They respond to political requirements. But this requires wise citizens and good competition, which is often lacking. The 1994 multi-party elections in South Africa could not take place without the ANC having to reconcile the divisive issues of the past. Dominance, with time, gave you complacency. Since 2000, the V-Dem's approval rating has remained lower at 0.85, and has fallen to 0.65 in 2023, in the context of corruption scandals.

Bernard Manin's Principles of representative government (1997) distinguishes the idea of participatory democracy from previous models. He pointed out that the current election was not about debate and substance, but about image and the media. This is a trend that undermines accountability. Sometimes populist leaders use charisma as a tool to circumvent the rules. Vertical rules are reinforced by horizontal accountability-courts, auditors. As O'Donnell (1994) warned, with bad judges, citizens complete their term of office at the expense of bad leadership, which will govern freely in the interim, and this is what we call a representative democracy. In India, the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) provides horizontal oversight. However, in 2012, his 2G scam report revealed losses of 1.76 lakh crores, triggering a backlash against the UPA government in 2014. However, the case of the 2024 election bonds illustrates the corrosive effect of secret financing on vertical responsibility. The Supreme Court has pointed out this misdirected political motivation on the part of anonymous donors.

Behavioural economics helps us understand how we make choices. Spatial models were first developed by Anthony Downs in The Economic Theory of Democracy (1957): voters choose

parties that are similar in their preferences. But there is also disinterest, because when every vote seems meaningless, it is harder to educate. However, poor turnout (on average 42 percent in the EU elections in 2019) reduces the pressure on leaders. Suggestions include increased participation and accountability through the nudging theory (Thaler and Sunstein, 2008) and automatic voter registration. The bias toward confirmation makes voters listen only to what suits their ideology. In Brazil's 2018 election, misinformation on WhatsApp helped Jair Bolsonaro win. According to V-Dem, media freedom decreased by half in the same period.

Empirically, this dynamic is reflected in indices such as the Electoral Democracy Index (EDI) and the Accountability Index, which are captured by a project like V-Dem. Increased EDI scores are linked to better governance. Hence, online coalitions and reactivations in the Nordic countries 0,92 EDI in Sweden. Leaders can be protected in majoritarian states like Britain. In 2019, the majority gave Boris Johnson immunity from immediate punishment after the backlash from the Brexit vote, despite the controversial circumstances.

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Finally, the framework lacks structural gaps. So, campaign finance corrupts competition. According to Gilens and Page (2014), since Citizens United (2010), unrestricted spending has become more tilted toward the rich. This is illustrated by the uncontrolled spending in India, where the parties spent 60,000 cr. in 2019. According to behavioural evidence, voters punish visible corruption through a loss aversion, while avoiding opaque systems.

Overall, the elections are seen as a mix of punishment, competition and checks to hold a person accountable. They also require reforms to address, where necessary, information asymmetries, biases and distortions. The following theories open the way for discussion of the current challenges as actual erosion tests their feasibility.

Challenges to Electoral Accountability in the Contemporary Era

The responsibility to vote is deeply compromised by current policies. Thus, structural, behavioural, and technological factors increasingly undermine elections which are supposed to enhance transparency, responsiveness, and ethical governance. The V-Dem report from

2025 shows that 45 countries are now autocracies (compared with 42 in 2020) and that 3.1 billion people (38 percent of the world) are now managers. This trend has continued unabated over the last 25 years, with 91 autocracies and 88 democracies, the first time in more than 20 years that the former is in majority control. So, liberal democracies have sunk to historic lows: the number of fully liberal countries is only 29, less than 12 percent of the world's population. These changes have exposed weaknesses in electoral systems and destabilized the basic relationship between voters and leaders.

In keeping with this the first barrier is voter apathy. However, low attendance and carelessness reduce the effectiveness of retroactive sanctions. The International Democracy Index (IDEA) shows that the average global participation in democracy is 65bene plus and has been declining over the decades. In the US election of 2024, 65.3 percent. A total of 70.75 people voted, compared to 70.75 in 2020, allowing presidential candidates to avoid more rigorous scrutiny. In the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, turnout in India was only 65.79 percent, compared to 67.4 percent in 2019, despite accusations of voter suppression and logistical problems in a country of 968.9 million eligible voters. Hence, the Downs (1957) approach explains this: voters are said to be rationally ignorant, to think that their vote is irrelevant when information is overwhelming, and so the costs of voting outweigh the benefits. Perhaps, inequalities exacerbate apathy; poorer and marginalised voters face various difficulties in identifying themselves and voting or polling stations. This is evident in Brazil's 2022 elections, where a combined turnout of 79 percent was enough to mask even the uneven participation (in terms of urban-rural disparities).

Gerrymandering is the distortion of responsibility through the drawing of districts that cushion leaders from voters' will by creating electoral competition that would eliminate or dilute that element. Rucho v. California Applies partisan redistricting in the United States federal court system. On the one hand, the Common Cause (2019) has created safe districts where primaries determine outcomes, thus encouraging extremism rather than reaction. As an example, gerrymandered maps in North Carolina in 2022 led to a 10-4 spread of seats in Congress, despite nearly equal voter turnout, destroying confidence and participation. However, the same strategy was used in Hungary, where Viktor Orban of the Fidesz party redefined the constituencies after 2010, allowing him to dominate the country and even to move toward electoral autocracy by 2018. So, prospective theory shows that apathy is exploited by such manipulation: voters in uncontested districts are convinced that there is nothing to be done, which increases apathy.

Moreover, digital issues and misinformation are the scourge of the modern world and threaten the informed citizenship that is the key to accountability. Social-media algorithms create echo chambers that allow for information gerrymandering: false news polarizes voters. According to the V-Dem 2025 report, government-sponsored disinformation is on the rise in 31 countries, polarization is on the rise in 45 (24 of them toxic) and media bias is on the rise in 31 countries. In India's 2024 election, Facebook and Twitter spread divisive content, including fake videos against the opposition, reaching millions of voters and causing electoral instability, as well as reports that free and fair elections are becoming increasingly rare in 25 countries. In Brazil's 2018 election, misinformation on the WhatsApp app helped Bolsonaro win, and reforms in 2022, such as fact-checking bots, helped some to mitigate the damage. Populist groups exploit these problems and are willing to change their agenda to focus on TV instead of politics; these cognitive biases (e.g. Confirmation bias (Kahneman, 2011) is used to manipulate voters into being more responsive to emotion than to facts.

The problem is exacerbated by the distortions of campaign finance, in which elections have become an auction where the rich gain by capturing the voice of voters. Lack of control over finance creates plutocracy. According to Gilens and Page (2014), billions of dollars have flowed to super PACs in the US since Citizens United (2010), which have given to the interests of the elite. In 2024, India's Supreme Court ruled against the abolition of the election bonds, a relatively new type of election financing that has injected about $2 billion in anonymous contributions into the system, as opaque, except in so far as they allowed unlimited spending. According to the Centre for Media Studies, parties had expenditures of over 100,000 crores in 2024. This creates cronyism and dilutes the horizontal accountability institutions as the CAG. Though, strict limits of 22.5 in France make the competition fairer and compel greater participation of 75 per cent participation in the 2022 presidential contests but without regulation as in India, which has an opposition less autonomous.

In transition democracies, weak institutions increase the risk, and these problems overlap. The V-Dem Electoral Democracy Index in Tunisia rose to 0.7 in 2020, following reforms in 2011, followed by another self-coup by President Saeed in 2021, which has put Tunisia back on the path of more autocratic elections with repression of protests and the press. In Eastern Europe, the PiS party was re-elected in Poland in the 2023 elections, but the country is showing signs of democratization with a 0.180 LDI, while the country's stability is threatened by gerrymandering and disinformation.

Empirically, the data on V-Dem attribute the erosion of accountability to poor governance. Increased accountability scores are also correlated with improved transparency performance,

with Nordic countries (EDI 0.92) and autocratic countries such as India (LDI 0.29) falling below 0.29 after 2008. According to behavioural economics, incentives such as automatic registration and digital literacy can break the apathy, but structural changes are still needed on a large scale.

Overall, it is clear that elections have been transformed in the current situation, from an instrument of accountability to a spectacle, with the threat of oligarchic drift. They require solutions in the form of cross-disciplinary approaches, as discussed below.

Institutional and Reform Pathways to Strengthen Accountability

Unless the institutions are reformed, civic participation is enhanced, and new challenges are addressed, electoral accountability will be established at many levels. It is based on the electoralcollege. They ensure participatory, fair and competitive elections. One such organization is the Indian Election Commission. The Electoral College, established under Article 324 of the Constitution, will exercise the electoral powers, codes of conduct and logistics of 968 million voters in 2024. It is effective, but political interference can make it worse, as with the delay in publishing turnout figures for 2024.

Thus, strong reforms are under way in South Africa's independent Electoral Commission (IEC). After apartheid, the level of trust was increased as the audits carried out by the International Energy Commission became transparent. The electoral integrity index developed by the V-Dem party improved to 0.85 in 2025, from 0.6 in 1994. The most important reforms were the statutory independence, the different system for appointing Commissioners and the digital tools to fight fraud. Fair redlining is important to avoid gerrymandering. The line is designed using algorithmic tools and citizen input, where independent commissions such as the California Citizens Redistricting Commission (established in 2008) use algorithmic tools and citizen feedback to develop lines.

However, the Princeton Gerrymandering Project reported that it led to a 20-40 percent increase in competitive districts and a 5-7 percent increase in turnout. In Hungary, the reforms required by the EU can be a brake on autocracy; the 0.2 score based on simulations suggests that this would increase the index of liberal democracy. So, behavioural economics shows that the sense of injustice is reduced by removing feelings of loss aversion and increasing turnout. The failure of Tunisia in 2021 shows the importance of constitutional constraints, which mean that the authorities cannot dominate the boundary-drawing process.

Perhaps, reform of campaign finance will level the playing field by reducing the plutocracy's effects. France limits the contributions and expenditure of each presidential candidate to 7500

and 22.5 million euro, respectively. Publics who give large numbers of votes are rewarded. In 2022, corruption scandals were minor, and the turnout was 75 percent. Germany combines aspects of less state funding with transparency requirements, with a V-Dem responsibility score of 0.91. However, the post-2024 India is also not very safe, owing to the Supreme Court's ruling on electoral bonds. There are no limits to the amount of expenditure by the parties: it has been estimated that by 2024, spending will amount to around USD 1.35 billion (16 billion). These measures may take the form of policy decisions: (1) statutory limits on party expenditure (e.g. (2) full disclosure on digital portals; (3) vote-based state funding, as proposed by the 2017 Legislative Commission; and (4) a ban on corporate donations over 7.5 trillion dollars, identical to the US pre-Citizens United limits. So, the 2015 ban on corporate donations in Brazil reduced representation inequality, boosting the V-Dem's equity of democracy index by 0.15 points by 2023.

Digital technology presents challenges as well as opportunities. The solution to misinformation lies in implementing fact-checking and algorithmic openness on platforms. The EU Digital Services Act (2022) requires risk assessment of large platforms and provides for a possible penalty of up to 6 percent of revenues in case of breaches. Hence, this has helped to combat election disinformation in the European elections of 2024. In India, the ECI and Google collaboration has identified over 100,000 infringements in 2024, but gaps remain. Estonia has been testing a blockchain voting system since 2005, which improves security and accessibility and will increase diaspora participation to 44 percent by 2023. Populist tendencies can be reformed through participatory methods: Switzerland, with 0.88 V-DEM EDI, is participatory through a combination of direct democracy referenda and elections. The default registration push and the gamified civic applications, both as behavioural nudges, increased youth participation by 10 percent in pilot studies in the US.

Horizontal accountability is strengthened by broader institutional support. A great judicial system such as the Supreme Court of India serves as a check on the executive. Its election bond settlement for 2024 required the payment of returns and disclosures, which provided an important model. In keeping with this, the prosecution powers should be conferred on the auditors, i.e. the Court of Auditors, in the United Kingdom, as the National Audit Office, to be able to refer to anti-corruption bodies. Reforms emphasise education: Finland has compulsory media literacy curricula based on low vulnerability to misinformation and V-Dem media index O.95. A cultural transformation is rooted in grassroots activism; organizations like ADR in India monitor government spending on voter-registration organizations that monitor candidate statements using apps.

Furthermore, multilateral reforms have demonstrated their effectiveness as shown by global indices. According to V-Dem statistics from 190 countries, countries that implement deep reforms, including the restoration of judicial independence in Poland in 2023, see a 0.18 increase in accountability and a 0.18 increase in local development aid. The consistent democratisation of Uruguay since 1985 through proportional representation and fiscal constraints has produced results in terms of good governance, as reflected in the 73-point score of the Corruption Perceptions Index for 2025.

A step by step model of reforms to policymakers:

1. Check for vulnerabilities through audits and benchmarks (e.g. V-Dem Guidelines).

2. Establish institutional safeguards: establish independent institutions and establish fair redlining.

3. Adopt financial transparency: establish expenditure ceilings and online reporting.

4. Make good use of technology: introduce fact-checking and consider electronic voting.

5. Support civic education and promote cultural systems of accountability. Scientists should conduct longitudinal studies on behavioural interventions. Activists can engage in campaigns that mobilize these groups, which are likely to be apathetic. These ways restore elections as a form of accountability, and prevent oligarchic risks in a rapidly changing world through cultural transformation and institutional enrichment.

Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

Today, with democratic dilution undermining the basic feeling of self-government, elections are the most important instrument for political accountability. However, their integrity is not strong. So, starting with this paper, we will see that, from the ancient Athens system of elections, where voting and choosing leaders was preserved by a system of sortition and euthanasia, to the modern multi-party system, which is becoming increasingly autocratic, the election of leaders is not a hollow ritual, but a living synthesis of transparency, the rule of law, and the empowerment of citizens. However, this can be explained by the Schumpeter competition model and the Przeworski sanction theory model. Modern problems such as voter apathy, gerrymandering, disinformation, and uncontrolled campaign financing threaten this role. The V-Dem report from 2025 shows that there are more autocracies than democracies, as there were a few decades ago.

Furthermore, elections are at the core of a democracy that promises responsibility and is prone to systemic failure. This is explained by behavioural economics; the lack of awareness of rational and psychological biases allows distortions to occur, and institutional weaknesses, such as the opacity of Indian funding before the Supreme Court ruling of 2024, contribute to

the conflict between managers and their agents. International case studies in Tunisia (the short-lived success of the Arab Spring) and Hungary (the outcome of an autocratic election) show that accountability declines as quickly as it can without such safeguards. But there are red flags in other countries, including Poland (recoveries in 2023) and Estonia (e-government efforts), which could revive the system.

First, strengthen institutional safeguards against election fraud. Perhaps, consider the priority of independent control bodies, including the possibility for the electoral commissions to veto any change in the boundaries. According to the Brennan Center, the California redistricting board could be expanded nationwide to minimize gerrymandering and increase the number of competitive seats by as much as 30 percent. Apart from these, transitional democracies should have international assistance linked to constitutional reforms that embrace the separation of powers, including judicial review of government action. However, researchers can create the necessary artificial intelligence tools to perform real-time fairness audits in neighbourhoods, and activists can organize petitions, as in the case of the 2024 ADR campaign in India.

Second, eliminate campaign funding, levelling the playing field. Reduce party expenditure and make it public; India could follow the recommendations of the Legislative Commission in 2017, limiting party expenditure to 100100 billion rupees per state and banning anonymity of donations. This can help to remove cronyism and replicate the successful model of France's 75 electoral results and the participation rate in the presidential elections, which is now capped at 22.5 million. In Germany, public funding based on prior votes would give opposition parties a more legitimate approach.

Comparative research with V-Dem data should be carried out to quantify impacts, e.g. Caps that are associated with a 15-20 percent increase in the score for responsibility. Transparency dashboards allow activists to expose violations and identify pressure on legislators, as with the Open Secrets initiative in the US.

Third, prevent misinformation and voter apathy through information and digital control. Responsibility of the Embargo Platforms Algorithmic auditing and fact-checking should be covered by the EU Digital Services Act. According to an analysis of the EU elections in 2024, this would halve the disinformation. The Indian Election Commission could also work with technology companies to detect malicious information in real time, based on the deletion of 100,000+ posts in 2024. As behavioural incentives to reduce apathy, introduce automatic registration and compulsory civic education in schools, Finland's programs have shown success in increasing media literacy and participation. However, these interventions can be

assessed by randomised interventions by researchers, with grassroots workshops on digital literacy by activists, which can increase this participation by 1015 percent, as in the case of Estonian learners.

Fourth, foster a culture of informed active citizenship. For Ostrom, standards of civic virtue transcend institutions. Make voting or paying for public services more credible, and also introduce referenda in hybrid systems. Switzerland's high V-Dem score (0.88 EDI) is due to mechanisms that involve responsibility in everyday life. Anthropological studies based on civic norms in transition societies can be carried out and published in journals such as Democracy Journal for policy information. Campaigns to mobilize voters should be led by activists, and media watchdogs should develop a vigilant voter, one who challenges populist emotionality with facts.

Fifth, measure progress through global indices and adaptive feedback loops. Calculate benchmarks using the granular data offered by V-Dem annually; Member States will set up national task forces to monitor the metrics offered by the EDI and Accountability Index. In India, the CAG could include V-Dem indicators in its audits, which would clearly indicate the decline to the Parliament. Long-term analysis can be used to predict the threat of autocracy, and activists use it to advance their cause, sharing stories of countries that have succumbed to it, and seeking solidarity.

This plan is practical because it is based on both evidence and theory. Its implementation requires political commitment, cross-sectoral cooperation and continuous monitoring, which are not easy but have delivered success, as shown by Uruguay, which has implemented continuous reforms since 1985 and achieved a Corruption Scoreboard of 73.100 by 2025.

Finally, in concluding part- the health of democracy depends on a permanent realignment of power through accountable elections. Without a high level of electoral integrity, society degenerates into oligarchic systems in which the elite gains privilege at the expense of the many. Yet hope remains. The Supreme Court's ruling on India for 2024, the restoration of democracy in Poland, and global activism are all signs of resistance. With these reforms, we can transform elections into a permanent guarantee of accountability, into a reality of living responsibility. As Athens taught a thousand years ago, democracy is at its best when citizens are willing to challenge power, and that is a lesson the modern world should heed if it is to save its democratic soul.

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