

# A STUDY ON DEMOCRATIC AUDIT: A CONCEPTUAL TOOLKIT TO ADDRESS POLITICAL CORRUPTION IN INDIA

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## ABSTRACT

The democratic experience in India demonstrates that merely creating institutions does not ensure a democratically equitable political system. Procedures are regularly disregarded and frequently fail to bring the powerful to the level of justice. This highlights the need to search for an alternative framework where public participation may improve the current situation. This calls for a larger understanding of democratization so that democratic institutions become meaningful for both the elite and regular citizens. This is accomplished by thoroughly evaluating Indian democracy in light of specific, unambiguous democratic values and principles. This chapter aims to draw attention to the necessity of a thorough examination of Indian democracy, which, it will be claimed, is a requirement for any structural or legislative changes aimed at combating political corruption. The fundamental claim made in this chapter is that no reform would be effective until the problem's main causes were found, and democratic audit is one of the best ways to do this. The chapter stresses that a "pro-active" rather than "reactive" strategy is required to effectively combat political corruption.

**KEY WORDS:** *Democratic Audit, Toolkit, Unambiguous, Political Corruption.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Democratic audit, or examination of democracy, must be situated within the context of a broader commitment to democratic values and the failure of political institutions and leadership to effectively implement these objectives. The main focus of a democratic audit is to determine how democratic the system actually is. The first task of a democratic audit is to identify a defensible conception of democracy through which certain specific criteria of democracy assessment can be reached. The definition of democracy generally depends on the relationship between institutions and the values that these institutions should uphold.

Making the distinction between democracy and non-democracy as well as between less democracy and more democracy is consequently the main difficulty of democratic audit. This research makes an attempt to determine this assessment based on an evaluation of the level of political corruption, which is thought to be a sign of a democratic deficiency. The fundamental tenets of public control of government and political equality must be upheld in order to make such an evaluation, and in a representative democracy, these tenets are satisfied by others like accountability, responsiveness, and transparency. It is crucial to remember that these principles give rise to various institutional forms, and the goal of this thesis is not to select one institutional form over another but rather to research and develop a larger range of institutional forms.

Since democratic audit is carried out by local auditors who are citizens of the country being assessed, the judgment about the character and nature of democracy is a domestic one rather than one that is externally defined. There are various methods of evaluating democracy that are used in various countries, but democratic audit is distinct because it seeks to spark an internal discussion about the nature of political institutions and public life. A democratic audit is more thorough because it is based on the premise that the process of democratization is never finished and those even democracies that have been in place for a while still require rigorous evaluation. The research goes beyond just political institutions; it also examines issues of government transparency, accountability, and responsiveness. It also contains metrics for evaluating various facets of civil society and its interactions with the state. The goal of democratic audit is to assist in identifying the political characteristics of a nation that are more satisfactory from a democratic point of view and those that should raise concerns.

The goal of a democratic audit is to influence governance. It focuses on evaluating, comprehending, reporting, and ultimately improving a system's democratic functioning. A democratic audit ensures that the government operates with accountability and openness, which aids in the practical implementation of the goal of effectiveness and efficiency. In addition, democratic audit can be used as a tool to evaluate how well reforms are implemented in real-world settings. It could be useful from a comparative perspective to highlight issues that many nations have in common. It might also be useful for identifying creative approaches to issue solving. In short, democratic audit has the stated goal of having an impact on how democracy is practiced. It aims to increase participation, ensure inclusivity, accountability, responsiveness, and openness.

Social audit was developed in India with an objective that is somewhat similar to this one, and it is being utilized successfully to reveal the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of the government. However, because it was limited to the effects of the government's particular development programs, it hasn't shown to be useful in eliminating

political corruption. Social audit's procedures for addressing political corruption are thus flawed. Therefore, it is crucial to examine the issues with social audit in order to create a solid conceptual and methodological foundation for understanding the importance and necessity of democratic audit in combating political corruption in India.

## **2. SOCIAL AUDIT IN INDIA: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL**

On ways to minimize corruption, various academics and professionals have made various recommendations. Some advocate for proper oversight and sanctions, while others want for greater participation at the local level. One such effort that appears to be a confluence of these two methodologies is the Indian government's adoption of the social audit method. It operates under the tenet that corruption may be decreased by community and government involvement as well as greater public understanding of individual rights. "Social audit is a tool that government departments can use to plan, manage, and measure non-financial activities as well as monitor the internal and external effects of the department's or organization's social and commercial operations. It is a tool for social accountability for a company. In other terms, a social audit is a thorough examination and analysis of how any public utility functions in relation to its social relevance.

A social audit is a technique for observing and assessing how a plan was developed and carried out by the general public in collaboration with the government. It aids in fostering accountability in individuals responsible for carrying out government programs. But the real question is: to what extent can social audit support accountability? The challenge social audit faces is that it has not been able to address the issue of hierarchy. It is crucial to recognize that accountability can be imposed when there is some level of hierarchy. Social audits are unable to meet the minimum requirement of imposing a standard on the implementers because of the weekly hierarchical relationship between the auditors and those who carry out the programs and policies. This, in turn, affects the possibility of imposing sanctions against the corrupt officials. These numerous complications serve to emphasize the conceptual and practical issues with social audit.

An ideal social audit comprises engaging the community who are impacted by government policies so they may report the policies' flaws, placing these complaints within the formal regulations, holding officials responsible, and enforcing sanctions within the framework of the rule of law.

The goal of a social audit is to evaluate an organization's performance in relation to its social, environmental, and community goals, not to criticize specific employees. It is a tool to gauge how well an organization adheres to the common values and goals it has set for itself. Based on the opinions of its stakeholders, it offers an assessment of

the impact of an organization's non-financial objectives through systematic and frequent monitoring. The foundation of social audit is the idea that democratic local governance should, to the greatest extent feasible, be carried out with everyone's permission and understanding. This makes it a process rather than an event.

Both a government audit and a people's audit are used in a social audit. Government auditors perform all audits on behalf of the government; no other parties are involved. On the other hand, a people's audit incorporates individuals and also examines the results of various government programs. However, one of the issues with the people's audit is that the government does not acknowledge its results. As it is carried out jointly by the government and those impacted by the scheme being audited, a social audit seeks to address the flaws of both of these audits. "In an ideal social audit, the community is involved in the process of verification, outcomes (substantive goals of the scheme) are examined rather than just outputs (i.e. compliance with procedures), and its conclusions are expected to be enforced by the government."

People must have access to information in order for social audit to function. It is crucial that everyone involved with the project knows about the social audit and takes part in its meetings. A survey carried out in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh amply demonstrates the challenges involved in carrying out a social audit. It was discovered that over half of NREG (National Rural Employment Guarantee) participants (60%) and non-participants (63%) did not attend a public meeting in Rajasthan. Nearly 80% of respondents claimed to be unaware of social audits. Similar events took place in Madhya Pradesh as well. The study found that only important village members, whose involvement was required, knew about the social audit and showed up to the sessions. Thus, the survey shows that even the bare minimum necessary to ensure public awareness for the success of social audit is frequently not met.

Participation barriers are a major issue in the Indian political system, and perhaps it is because of these barriers that India makes a good test case for democratic theories. But how can this democracy assessment be done? What ought to serve as the assessment's foundation? Should an objective standard be used to evaluate the situation? It is crucial to discuss some popular democracy assessment frameworks in order to be able to give satisfactory answers to these concerns and make definitive statements about the solutions most suited for the Indian situation.

### **3. POPULAR DEMOCRACY ASSESSMENTS: AN OVERVIEW**

Since it was mentioned earlier in this chapter that conducting a democracy assessment is crucial for combating political corruption in India, it is pertinent to discuss a few of these assessments in order to get a better

understanding of how democracy is evaluated and how Indian democracy should be evaluated in order to conceptualize the nature and scope of political corruption. The many democratic measurement techniques can be divided into maximalist and minimalist conceptualizations. Maximalist procedures are typically satisfactory in terms of their measurement validity while minimalist approaches typically have good reliability. Minimalist measures are a reflection of Schumpeter's belief that democracy is a means of decision-making since they concentrate primarily on the rules regulating party competition for public office and place a narrow focus on a few important benchmarks. The benefit of a minimalist approach is that it promotes the development of transparent coding decisions, clear and unambiguous operational definitions, reliable and consistent classification techniques, and clear and unambiguous empirical indicators. Focusing on fewer benchmarks increases the risk of leaving out some crucial liberal democratic benchmarks, even as it lowers the risk of including irrelevant qualities and measures. For instance, spartan definitions might not be able to capture the quality of democratic performance, such as the degree of inclusive representation, leader accountability, freedom of expression, and participation equity, among other things. Therefore, the main drawback of the minimalist approach is that it might overlook some crucial facets of democracy.

The work of Robert Dahl, who believed that democratic regimes are characterized by the presence of key institutions like elected officials, free and fair elections, inclusive suffrage, the right to run for office, freedom of expression, alternative information, and associational autonomy, has had a major influence on maximalist approaches to defining and measuring democracy as opposed to the minimalist approach. Thus, contestation and participation are the two key components of liberal democracy, in Dahl's opinion. Recent democracy assessments that use a maximalist approach have expanded the definition of contestation and participation by using, in addition to other indicators, criteria for evaluation that takes into account freedom of expression for all religions, academic freedom, equality for men and women, restrictions on the authority of the executive branch, openness in executive recruitment, and participation regulation. These "thicker" conceptualizations of democracy make an effort to take into account all pertinent contestation and participation factors in order to create thorough scales for classifying regimes.

It is crucial to note from the outset that there is no one best measure of democracy that can be used for all purposes before examining various measurements of democracy assessments. However, it is crucial to talk about several democratic assessment metrics since they offer a solid foundation for developing a comprehensive assessment framework for conceptualizing political corruption in India. The democracy assessment metrics that are mentioned below were selected for this study because they evaluate democratic elements including accountability,

political rights, electoral participation, and the rule of law that are pertinent to and crucial to comprehending political corruption. They are significant because each one focuses on a different aspect of democracy, with Freedom House being an index of liberal democracy, Polity IV being a measure of constitutional democracy, Vanhanen's index based on participatory democracy, Przeworski and others' index based on contested democracy, and the IDEA (Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance) assessment framework offering a general scale to evaluate various facets of democracy.

#### **4. FREEDOM HOUSE'S DEMOCRACY ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK**

One of the best and most generally used indicators of liberal democracy is the Gastil Index of Civil Liberties and Political Rights, which is annually issued by Freedom House. Even though it began analyzing political trends in the 1950s, it didn't begin a thorough study titled "Freedom in the World" until 1972. Using the survey method, Raymond Gastil rated the degree to which each nation state's political and civil liberties were free, somewhat free, or not at all.

The Freedom House index examines the existence of political rights in relation to electoral procedures, political plurality, and governmental operation. Civil liberties are determined by the presence of the right to free expression and association, the rule of law, and individual rights. The research is based on many information sources, which in turn are based on various inquiries, some of which expressly focus on the status of civil liberties while others separately examine the existence of political rights. Based on the availability of institutional checks and balances through various mechanisms, such as the existence of a representative and inclusive legislature, an independent judiciary, the existence of political rights and civil liberties, and free and fair elections, the judgment is made. This measure is appropriate for evaluating liberal democracies since it stresses ideals that are fundamental to liberal democracy.

However, this measure has come under fire for being inadequate on a methodological level. In this regard, several academics have suggested that Freedom House's methods are opaque, making it impossible to cross-check the accuracy and consistency of coding choices. It is further suggested that unclear measures result from the questions used to generate the index typically having two or three different items within each sub-category. Critics contend that the concepts of freedom and democracy are not the same. In this regard, they contend that while indicators of human rights, such as freedom of religion and the absence of economic exploitation, may be significant, valid indicators of democracy are not. As a result, democracy is less useful as an analytical tool for decision-makers.

## 5. DEMOCRACY ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK OF POLITY

The most recent iteration of the project Ted Robert Gurr began in the 1970s is known as Polity IV. It offers country-year-formatted annual time series data. It defines democracy in terms of three components: the existence of institutions and processes that allow people to select among various alternative policies and leaders, the existence of institutional restraints on the authority of the executive, and the protection of civil liberties for all citizens. The focus is on institutional characteristics. For instance, the selection of the executive's leadership through popular vote is measured. Similar to this, the openness of hiring for the position of chief executive is evaluated in terms of people's ability to hold the office legally without the use of hereditary succession, coercive power grabs, or military coups. On the other hand, autocracies are viewed as systems that stifle competitive political involvement, where the president is chosen from from the political elite and, once in office, these leaders are not subject to any checks on their authority. The competitiveness of political participation, the competitiveness of executive recruiting, and the limits on chief executive are some examples of metrics used in this method to measuring democracy. As a result, it offers distinct indices that aid in separating out various components. However, this measure is also criticized for lacking reliability and openness.

## 6. VANHANEN'S MEASURE OF DEMOCRACY ASSESSMENT

The degree of electoral rivalry and the level of electoral participation are the two parameters used to measure democracy in Tatu Vanhanen's more straightforward manner. The former is determined by the number of votes the largest party received in the national legislature, while the latter is determined by the total number of voters that participated in the national legislative election. The benefit of this metric is that empirical data can be quickly gathered, and the measures or indicators utilized are simple to calculate. Vanhanen contends that a nation's democratic health is determined by the proportion of total valid votes to the population of citizens who are of voting age (Vote / VAP). Vote-VAP ratio also shows how many adults cast ballots, which can reveal how many adults did not vote. This information can be used to determine which states prevent some adults from exercising their right to vote.

However, the reliability of this measure may be questioned. Scholars contend that focusing just on voter participation may be inaccurate when attempting to measure democracy since it ignores other factors, such as socioeconomic status of individuals, which are crucial for fair and meaningful democratic competition.

## **7. PRZEWORSKI, ALVAREZ, CHEIBUB AND LIMONGI'S MEASURE OF DEMOCRACY ASSESSMENT**

Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub, and Limongi created a different metric for measuring democracy. By this standard, democracy is characterized as the capacity of the populace to overthrow their government in competitive elections. It is argued that regular elections give citizens the chance to punish their leaders since the fear of losing power forces them to take the needs of the people into account. Effective party competition can ensure the legitimacy of this danger. Parties are required to organize a wide range of citizen organizations and interest groups, choose and prepare political leaders and legislators, give voters a choice of ruling teams and policies, and, if elected to office, organize the legislative process and hold themselves jointly responsible for their actions in subsequent elections. Due to all of these factors, political parties are the foundation of a democratic society and perform a unique function not performed by any other institution.

Przeworski (and others) contend that the foundation of democratic nations is the availability of regular electoral possibilities for overthrowing the ruling class. Regular elections should feature multiple parties running, and the opposition should have a chance of winning so that the results are never completely assured. It is crucial that the ruling party vacates its position when it loses an election. The important thing to keep in mind is that by meeting these requirements, the parties in power can be held accountable for their deeds. Przeworski (and others) believe that specific institutional norms are what define a democratic state. For instance, if the lower house of the legislature and the chief executive are elected and there are many parties, the regime is deemed democratic; yet, if none of these traits exist, the system is deemed authoritarian. Even though a state possesses these democratic characteristics, an authoritarian regime is one in which the ruling party has never lost an election.

By concentrating on simple and concise norms, this measure advanced the field of democratic assessment. The fundamental flaw in this metric, though, was that it neglected to consider several crucial elements of liberal democracy, such as the significance of widespread involvement. It doesn't take into account whether elections are place under circumstances that guarantee adult suffrage. Even while some adult population groups will always be denied the right to vote in every state, universal adult suffrage is nevertheless fundamentally important for democracy, and contestation without it could lead to limited competition among oligarchs.

Some theorists disagree with this measure's methodology since it ignores additional factors that might be just as crucial for the meaningfulness of party competition. For instance, "parties cannot effectively compete for electoral

support without the protection of human rights, freedom of the press, free and fair elections, and civil freedoms, and voters cannot evaluate government performances and party programs to make an informed decision at the ballot box." Aside from this, having multiple parties does not ensure that each one has an equal chance of winning elections. Finally, critics contend that categorizing governments as either democratic or autocratic is difficult because the transition to democracy frequently takes place gradually, with different stages being experienced by different regimes. The processes that governments go through to become democratic are referred to as the "democratization process." Both progressive and degenerative processes can result in more democratic regimes or more autocratic governments.

## **8. KAUFMANN-KRAY INDICATOR OR THE WORLD WIDE GOVERNANCE INDICATOR**

One of the most popular metrics for measuring good governance is the set of indicators created by Kaufmann and colleagues. It comprises the opinions of experts, survey participants, and individuals on many governance-related issues and bases its measurement on six dimensions of governance. The first component of governance is "Voice and Accountability" that measures the ability of citizens to participate in selecting their government. It also assesses freedom of expression, freedom of association and free media. "Political Stability and Absence of Violence," the second dimension, examines the potential for an unconstitutional overthrow of a government. The third factor, "Government Effectiveness," assesses the standard of public and civil services as well as the degree to which they are free from political interference. It also looks at the quality of policy creation and implementation. The "Regulatory Quality" metric gauges the government's capacity to control the growth of the private sector. The fifth dimension, "Rule of Law," gauges how strictly people adhere to the law in a community, especially in the case of government officials. Finally, "Control of Corruption", investigates the extent to which public power is used for private gain. It also examines the role of elites in the creation of governments.

The fundamental flaw in this approach is that it tests various facets of democracy without offering a thorough interpretation of its results, reducing it to a fact-checking exercise.

## **9. INTERNATIONAL IDEA ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK**

The International IDEA (Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance) Assessment Framework was created with the fundamental goal of increasing public awareness of the nature of democracy and public discourse about the standards of performance that people should expect from their government. It is used to evaluate the democratic condition of any country. A list of institutions and practices to be evaluated against predetermined

norms is included in the framework. The International IDEA Assessment Structure has gained widespread acceptance due to its unique characteristics, including its flexible design, thorough framework, and clear principles. The framework is built on two key tenets: equality of all citizens with regard to public decisions and the control of public decision-makers by the general populace. The assessment framework's strength is that it is founded on unmistakable democratic ideals that can be used wherever. Other detractors have said that concentrating solely on two principles leaves out some crucial facets of democracy, such as socioeconomic equality.

The many assessments of democratic measures that have been addressed place a strong emphasis on institutional characteristics and base their conclusions on the presence or absence of those characteristics. The best that these measurements can do is identify whether political corruption and accountability in terms of these institutional traits are present or absent. Even the International IDEA Assessment Framework, which attempts to encompass practically all facets of democracy and is heavily referenced in this report, does not offer a strong framework for combatting corruption. These frameworks overlook the fact that the goal is to determine the cause as well as the fact, not just the fact itself. India has a pervasive culture of corruption, and the challenge is to eradicate it. To do this, the Indian democracy must be properly assessed using reliable indicators of political corruption that can effectively address the shortcomings of the previously mentioned indicators of democracy assessments. As the public perception of political corruption is incomplete or distorted, which results in ineffective and inefficient problem handling processes, assessing democracy is crucial because it will aid in conceiving the issue in a holistic approach. As was previously said, the goal of a democratic audit is to increase public understanding of the nature and scope of democratic challenges in order to develop appropriate solutions.

## 10. CONCLUSION

The purpose of research article was to highlight the value and importance of democratic audit in order to combat political corruption in India. The chapter defines democratic audit, discusses its function in the process of democratization, and emphasizes how democratic audit can contribute to the creation of an efficient and open government. The goal of democratic audit is to guarantee accountability and openness in how the government operates. Finding out where and what kinds of reforms would be most effective is crucial for developing any kind of effective and efficient reform process. This can be done, as is argued, through democratic audit, which is one way to evaluate the benefits and drawbacks of democracy's operation and can aid in locating the system's flaws. To examine how democracy is rated globally, some well-known democracy assessments are addressed. The goal

of this research article was to lay a solid foundation for the develops an audit framework for evaluating India's democracy.

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