

**Title of the Research proposal:**

**“Democracy in Action : A Comparative Study of  
Electoral Systems in India and the USA”**

**Research proposal**

**presented at Jawaharlal Nehru University**

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## **# Introduction :**

Democracy is often regarded as the most inclusive form of government and elections are fundamental keystone to any democratic system which allow citizens to assert their right to select representatives who incorporates their beliefs, values and ambitions. The success of a democracy is heavily influenced by the structure and operation of its electoral system, which dictates how votes are transformed into political authority. Although electoral systems can vary considerably from one nation to another, their primary aim remains consistent: to uphold the democratic ideals of representation, inclusivity, and credibility. Elections are just not representative of leadership but it reflects the broader theme of democratic values of equality, representation and accountability.

India and the United States, both of which are among the largest and most significant democracies globally, function under markedly different electoral systems. In 2024 Lok Sabha elections a total number of 645 million voters have cast their votes out of 965 million registered voters. Similarly in USA, during 2024 US presidential elections around 155 million voters cast their votes making these two countries largest in terms of voters in an election in whole world. India employs a parliamentary framework with a First Past the Post (FPTP) voting method for selecting its legislative members for lower house known as Lok Sabha, while the United States utilizes a presidential model with an Electoral College for electing its president. These systems have developed over time, influenced by their unique historical, cultural, and constitutional backgrounds.

India's electoral framework has received praise for its capacity to conduct elections on an extraordinary scale, engaging a populace exceeding 1.4 billion. Nevertheless, it has been criticized for its propensity to marginalize smaller political factions and inadequately represent minority groups. In parallel, the U.S. electoral system is recognized for its federal structure, which seeks to balance representation among states, yet faces criticism for systemic challenges such as gerrymandering, voter suppression, and the contentious impact of the Electoral College on popular vote distortions. Several critics argue that presence of Electoral College gives benefit to some smaller states like Wisconsin in comparison to large states like California.

Also, what we do see nowadays in both USA and India there has been a lot of discussion going on the transparency of electoral process. As, in India there have been doubts raised on the

relevance of FPTP system to truly represent the voice of all and give space to minority, debates on EVMs and rolling back again to ballot paper system. In USA, the contention on the issue of Electoral College as the mechanism to elect President, the issue of gerrymandering and also the whole electoral process of counting votes which take a few hours in some states in some states to a few weeks in some other states. All this needs a fair investigation into the electoral processes of the world's two largest electoral democracies to better understand the mechanism of electoral system and its importance in any democratic setup.

This research, titled **Democracy in Action: A Comparative Study of Electoral Systems in India and the USA**, aims to explore the similarities and distinctions between these two electoral frameworks. By examining their structures, operations, and results, the study aspires to reveal how these systems affect democratic governance, political representation, and voter engagement in these countries. Furthermore, it will investigate the modern challenges both systems encounter and consider the potential insights they may provide to one another. Through this comparative approach, the research intends to enhance the wider conversation surrounding electoral reforms and the significance of electoral systems in reinforcing democracy. By pinpointing the best practices and addressing systemic weaknesses, this study seeks to offer practical recommendations for policymakers, academics, and practitioners dedicated to advancing democratic governance around the globe.

### **• Literature review :-**

The literature review for this research focuses on established studies and theoretical models that investigate electoral systems, their configurations, and their effects on democratic governance. It also emphasizes comparative analyses of electoral systems in various democracies, particularly focusing on India and the United States as case studies. It provides us with a comprehensive bulwark to focus on our comparative analysis of electoral systems of both countries.

Electoral systems are typically classified into three major parts as majoritarian, proportional representation, and hybrid types, each carrying unique consequences for governance and representation. Researchers such as **Arendt Lijphart (1999) in his book “Patterns of Democracy** have examined how electoral systems affect political results, including party dynamics, voter behavior, and government durability. **Maurice Duverger’s The Political Consequences of Electoral Laws (1954)** introduces the idea of “Duvergerian effects,” detailing how differing electoral regulations shape party structures, often leading to a two-party system in first-past-the-post (FPTP) arrangements and a multi-party system in proportional representation

contexts. These texts lay a foundational understanding of the operation of electoral systems and their significance in shaping democratic practices, which is vital for this study's comparative exploration of the electoral frameworks in India and the USA.

India's electoral system is frequently analysed for its capacity to facilitate large-scale elections within a diverse and populous democracy which is unparalleled in the world. Notable works in we can see are - **Why India Votes? By Mukulika Banerjee (2014)**, which investigates the socio-cultural aspects of voting in India, highlighting the symbolic significance of elections within Indian democracy. As elections is called democracy in action a true representation of voices of people from all walks of life. In his famous book, **"India After Gandhi by Ramachandra Guha (2007)"** offers a historical overview of the development of India's democratic institutions, encompassing its electoral framework. It shows how our experiences in past shape our present democratic institutions in taking shape. **"The Indian Parliamentary System" by Subhash Kashyap (1994)** describes the constitutional architecture of India's electoral mechanism along with its implementation challenges. It provides us with the challenges that are being faced by electoral process in India.

These studies illustrate the adaptability of India's FPTP system to its multi-ethnic and multi-religious landscape while also critiquing its drawbacks, such as the marginalization of smaller parties and the phenomenon of vote-bank politics. But in all these discussions there has been a literature gap to comparatively understand the electoral process in a whole for better understanding of its pros and cons.

The United States' electoral framework, especially the Electoral College, has been widely analysed and debated. In his book, **"Democracy in America" by Alexis de Tocqueville (1835)**, which, despite its historical context, provides valuable perspectives on the foundational democratic principles that have shaped the U.S. electoral system. Electoral college has been developed as a practice of federalism to give space to some smaller states in comparison to big ones. **"Why Elections Matter by Steven" E. Schier (2000)**, which critiques the design of the American electoral system, particularly focusing on how the Electoral College distorts popular voting outcomes. It gives us the background of how a candidate can lose the popular votes but still can win through electoral college and become president of USA. **"Electoral Dysfunction" by Victoria Bassett (2012)**, which investigates systemic challenges such as voter suppression, gerrymandering, and disparities in access within the U.S. electoral framework. These writings highlight the advantages of the U.S. system in promoting federal representation while addressing its obstacles, such as unequal voter power across states and the polarization it may create. In his book **"Electoral Systems: A Comparative Introduction by David Farrell" (2001)** provides a thorough overview of electoral systems globally, including their design and effects on democracy. **"Comparing Democracies by Lawrence Leduc, Richard Niemi, and Pippa Norris (2014)"** features case studies on India and the USA, investigating how electoral systems shape voter behavior and political results.

Although there is considerable research on the electoral frameworks of India and the USA separately, studies that compare the two are scarce. Most evaluations concentrate either on the technical features of the systems or their historical development, but seldom investigate their wider effects on democratic representation and voter behavior. This research aims to address this shortcoming by performing a comparative study that combines institutional design, voter dynamics, and current challenges. The existing literature lays a strong comprehensive groundwork for comprehending the electoral systems of India and the USA. Nonetheless, there is a necessity for additional comparative studies to examine how these systems maintain democratic values within their own environments. This research will expand upon prior work while tackling recognized gaps, providing new perspectives on the connection between electoral systems and democracy.

### **• Research Objectives :-**

The study aims to explore the following objectives : -

- It aims to investigate the design, architecture, and operation of the electoral systems in India and the United States through comparative analysis.
  - It delves deep to explore the historical, political, and cultural frameworks that have influenced the development of these electoral systems in both India and USA.
  - It attempts to assess how these systems affect voter engagement, inclusiveness, and political representation, particularly with respect to minorities and marginalized communities.
  - It tries to pinpoint and analyze challenges such as gerrymandering, voter suppression, electoral fraud, and the influence of technology on electoral processes in case of India and USA.
  - It also attempts to offer suggestions for enhancing electoral mechanisms to bolster democratic governance in both countries by focusing on inhibited strengths and potential flaws.
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### **• Research Questions :-**

To fulfil the aforementioned objectives, the following research questions will be framed :-

- How do the electoral systems in India and the United States operate, and what foundational principles support their structures in contemporary times?
- What role has been played by historical and cultural elements in development of these robust electoral framework thorough out history in both countries?
- How do electoral processes affect voter participation, representation, and inclusiveness in each country by studying them through comparative analysis?
- What kind of systemic obstacles do these electoral systems encounter in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Are they similar or different in context of India and USA?
- Is it possible to adapt aspects of one system to enhance the effectiveness of the other? What can be a probable solution in strengthening of electoral system in both India and USA?

### • **Research Methodology :-**

The research methodology employed in this study aims to take a comparative qualitative approach, incorporating both primary and secondary data to gain a comprehensive insight into the two electoral frameworks to provide us with better understanding.

### ✓ **Methods of Data Collection:-**

- First of all, the primary source of data collection would be the documents and reports from the Election Commission of India and the Federal Election Commission of the USA, official electoral data and statistics for comparative analysis along with this we need declarations and rulings from constitutional authorities or courts pertaining to electoral matters.
- To supplement the primary data we need secondary source data by having scholarly books and journal articles focused on comparative politics and electoral frameworks in context of both India and USA. We need detailed study of historical narratives of elections in India and the USA that shape their electoral process in contemporary times. News articles and analyses concerning previous elections would be helpful too.

### ✓ Comparative Analysis :-

- We need to begin with studying institutional frameworks and electoral governance in both countries through comparative analysis. Then we need to focus on election methodologies, including voter registration, ballot design, voting techniques, and result announcement. We also look into comparative analysis of proportional representation compared to majoritarian systems.

### ✓ Case studies :-

For this purpose we need to look up for some time frame which is :-

India: General elections (e.g., 2004 to 2024) to examine large-scale electoral phenomena.

USA: Presidential elections (e.g., 2004 to 2024) to investigate the workings of the Electoral College and voter disputes.

We will also conduct comparative analysis to discern differences and similarities in results such as voter behavior, inclusivity, and legitimacy. To look into content analysis to decode legal and institutional documents related to elections. To use statistical methods to assess voter participation and demographic trends.

### • Significance of the study :-

The proposed research, **“Democracy in Action: A Comparative Analysis of Electoral Systems in India and the United States”**, carries considerable academic, practical, and international significance. From an academic perspective, it adds to the expanding domain of comparative politics by offering an in-depth examination of two of the world’s leading democracies, the largest ones. Although there is extensive research on electoral systems in isolation, comparative analyses between India and the United States are relatively scarce which this study seeks to explore by bridging the gap by investigating the operation of their electoral frameworks and the effects these systems have on political representation, voter engagement, and governance.

On a practical level, the findings will provide crucial insights for policymakers in both countries. India’s First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral system has frequently been criticized for promoting the over-representation of major parties while marginalizing smaller political factions. Similarly, the U.S. Electoral College faces criticism for misrepresenting the popular vote and creating disparities in representation among states. By assessing the advantages and shortcomings of these electoral systems, this research will offer practical recommendations for reform. For example, strategies from India’s centralized electoral management could enhance voter

accessibility and mitigate systemic inequities in the U.S., whereas India could learn from the U.S. federal structure to tackle regional representation imbalances.

Additionally, this study has broader implications for democracies globally. As newly established democracies seek guidance from established systems, comprehending the intricacies of India's and the U.S.'s electoral frameworks can provide a blueprint for creating inclusive and effective electoral mechanisms. The research also contributes to ongoing worldwide dialogues on democratic consolidation and electoral reform, addressing pressing matters such as voter suppression, gerrymandering, and the influence of technology in elections. Ultimately, in a time when democratic institutions are encountering increasing challenges, this study highlights the essential role of electoral integrity in fostering public confidence and political stability. By investigating how electoral systems influence citizen engagement and governance results, the research reaffirms the pivotal role of elections within the democratic framework. It offers a guide for fortifying democratic institutions by ensuring that electoral systems are inclusive, transparent, and representative. Therefore, this study is not only timely but also vital for promoting the conversation on democracy and its practices in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **• Tentative Chapterisation :-**

This research will be organized into the subsequent chapters to deliver a thorough comparative analysis of electoral process between India and USA.

#### **△ Chapter 1 : Introduction –**

- Significance of Electoral Systems in a Democratic context
- Aims of the Research with following research questions
- Methodological Approach and Constraints of the Study

#### **△ Chapter 2 : Theoretical Framework and Literature Review –**

- Summary of Electoral System Theories: Majoritarian, Proportional, and Hybrid Frameworks
- Core Concepts: Representation, Inclusivity, and Democratic Accountability
- Assessment of Previous Studies on Electoral Systems in India and the United States
- Identified Gaps in Literature and Rationale for Comparative Examination

#### **△ Chapter 3 : Historical Development of Electoral Systems –**



- Evolution of India's Electoral Framework: Colonial Legacies and Constitutional Structure
- Transformation of the U.S. Electoral System: Foundational Ideals and the Electoral College
- Comparative Perspectives on the Historical Advancement of Democratic Institutions

#### **△ Chapter 4 : Structure and Design of Electoral Frameworks –**

- India: The First Past the Post (FPTP) Model and Parliamentary Governance
- USA: Presidential Elections and the Function of the Electoral College
- Election Commission of India vs. Federal Election Commission
- Electoral Procedures: Voter Registration, Voting, and Counting Processes in Both Countries

#### **△ Chapter 5 : Electoral Systems and Political Representation –**

- Representation of Minorities and Underrepresented Groups in India and the USA
- Inclusivity in Political Frameworks: Gender, Ethnicity, and Socioeconomic interests
- Regional and Federal Representation: Balancing Local and National Interests

#### **△ Chapter 6 : Challenges in Electoral Frameworks –**

- India: Vote-Bank Politics, Underrepresentation, and Electoral Irregularities
- USA: Gerrymandering, Voter Suppression, and Critiques of the Electoral College
- Common Challenges: Influence of Technology, Media, and Misinformation

#### **△ Chapter 7 : Comparative Examination of Electoral Systems –**

- Notable Similarities and Differences Between India and the USA

- Strengths and Limitations of Each Framework
- Consequences of Electoral Design on Political Stability and Governance

#### **△ Chapter 8 : Policy Suggestions –**

- Recommendations for Reform in India's Electoral Framework
- Proposed Enhancements for the U.S. Electoral Process
- Insights and Best Practices for Emerging Democracies

#### **△ Chapter 9 : Conclusion –**

- Recap of Principal Findings
- Reflections on the Influence of Electoral Systems in Democratic Consolidation

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- List of references used:-

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