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School of Computer Science & Engineering

IILM University Greater Noida

Presents

1st National Conference

on

Technologies for Sustainable Development Goals 2025 (TECH4SDG-2025)

3rd March 2025

Technically Co-Sponsored by IEEE UP SECTION (INDIA)

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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN MODERN ENGINEERING & EMERGING TECHNOLOGY (IJRMEET)

Dear Author / Researcher,

On behalf of the *International Journal of Research in Modern Engineering & Emerging Technology (IJRMEET)*, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to all the authors and research scholars for choosing our platform to publish their valuable research contributions.

IJRMEET, a Refereed, Peer Reviewed, Indexed, and Monthly Journal in Electronic format, has been consistently dedicated since April 2013 to advancing scholarly work in the domains of Modern Engineering and Emerging Technologies. Your innovative and quality research is at the core of our mission to promote academic excellence and practical solutions in the ever-evolving field of engineering and technology.

We believe that publication should be based purely on the merit, originality, and relevance of the research, not on financial considerations. We ensure that every manuscript undergoes a thorough review process to maintain the integrity, reliability, and scholarly value of each published work.

Our journal aims not only to disseminate high-quality research globally but also to highlight critical engineering problems and their practical resolutions. I encourage researchers, academicians, faculty members, and industry professionals to continue contributing to IJRMEET and to inspire their peers and students to join us in this academic pursuit.

We sincerely thank our respected Editors, Reviewers, Technical Advisors, Authors, Web Developers, Subscribers, Supporters, and the extended academic community whose efforts and encouragement make each issue of IJRMEET a successful endeavor.

With warm regards,

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डॉ. मोहम्मद रिहान / Dr. Mohammad Rihan
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MESSAGE

I am happy to know about Tech4SDG-2025, a distinguished national conference that aims to explore and highlight the transformative power of technology in achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This event serves as a critical platform for fostering collaboration among experts, innovators, and leaders who are dedicated to creating solutions that drive sustainable change.

As we face global challenges ranging from environmental sustainability to social equity, it is clear that technological advancements will play a pivotal role in shaping our collective future. Tech4SDG-2025 presents a unique opportunity to examine how cutting-edge technologies can contribute to solving the most pressing issues of our time, from climate change to poverty alleviation.

I look forward to the engaging discussions and innovative ideas that will emerge from this conference. I believe that by working together, we can harness the potential of technology to drive meaningful progress towards a sustainable and equitable world.

I extend my best wishes to all the participants and organizers of Tech4SDG-2025.

27.02.25

(Dr. Mohammad Rihan)

Dated: 27th February, 2025
Place: Gurugram

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Political Funding Transparency in Indian Elections

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Abstract : Political funding transparency is critical for ensuring accountability and fairness in democratic systems, especially within India's expansive electoral milieu. This study offers an in-depth examination of India's financial disclosures by political parties and candidates, highlighting both regulatory progress and persistent opacity. Leveraging a mixed-methods framework, we first conducted a documentary analysis of Election Commission of India (ECI) records from the 2019 Lok Sabha and 2022 Assembly elections, scrutinizing compliance rates, the distribution of itemized versus aggregated donations, and the rising prominence of electoral bonds. Second, we surveyed 100 citizens—evenly split between urban and rural constituencies— to assess their awareness of disclosure norms, trust in enforcement mechanisms, and appetite for reform. Our findings reveal that although statutory thresholds for reporting have been lowered and digital publication has improved, nearly three-quarters of total funding remains either aggregated below reporting limits or channeled through instruments that obscure donor identities. Public perceptions mirror these gaps: respondents assigned a middling score of 3.1 out of 7 to the adequacy of current transparency measures, with 72% advocating for a real-time digital portal and 68% citing electoral bonds as a chief source of clandestine contributions. Notably, urban participants displayed significantly higher awareness levels than rural ones (mean 4.1 vs. 2.7; $p < 0.001$), underscoring a digital divide in civic engagement. These insights point to a dual challenge: fortifying the ECI's audit and enforcement capabilities, and democratizing access to disclosure data. We propose targeted interventions—including automated, machine-readable reporting; stricter caps on anonymous donations; and proactive public education campaigns—to bridge the transparency gap. By integrating empirical data with citizen sentiment, this study advances our understanding of political finance in India and offers a roadmap for bolstering the democratic integrity of electoral processes.

Keywords: Political funding, transparency, electoral bonds, Election Commission of India, public perception

Introduction

Democratic elections thrive on the twin pillars of fairness and accountability. Central to these pillars is the transparency of political campaign financing, which seeks to illuminate the sources and uses of funds that sway electoral outcomes. In India—the world's largest democracy—elections at the national, state, and local levels involve vast sums of money, routed through myriad formal and informal channels. The Election Commission of India (ECI), statutory mandates such as the Representation of the People Act (1951), and periodic judicial pronouncements have together shaped a regulatory architecture aimed at ensuring disclosure and curbing undue influence. Yet, despite these measures, media exposés, civil society reports, and academic studies consistently highlight systemic opacity, raising questions about the sufficiency of current safeguards.

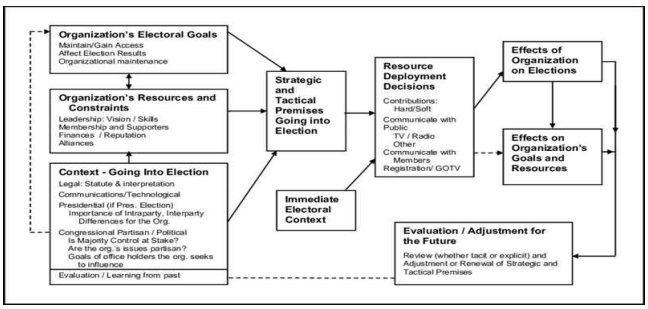

Fig.1 Political Funding, Source:1

The advent of "electoral bonds" in 2018 represented India's most significant policy shift in recent decades: a mechanism purportedly designed to anonymize and legitimize political contributions while maintaining confidentiality of donor identities. Critics, however, argue that this instrument has, in effect, deepened opacity by shielding transactions from public view, thereby undermining the spirit of transparent financing. Concurrently, judicial interventions—most notably the Supreme Court's directives on periodic public disclosure of contributions—have sought to recalibrate the balance between privacy and accountability. Nonetheless, enforcement gaps persist, and the electorate's ability to scrutinize funding remains limited.

This study interrogates the present landscape of political funding transparency in Indian elections through two lenses. First, we analyze ECI data on party and candidate disclosures across recent election cycles to identify compliance trends and loopholes. Second, we gauge public perceptions via a structured survey of 100 respondents, assessing awareness of

funding norms, trust in disclosure mechanisms, and support for reform measures. By synthesizing documentary evidence and citizen insights, we aim to provide a holistic appraisal of transparency efficacy and to suggest actionable policy enhancements.

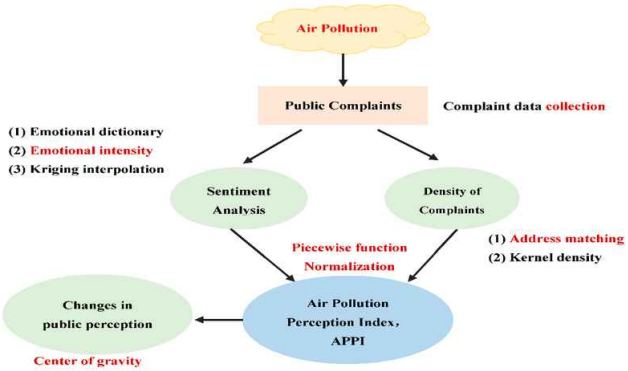

Fig.2 Public Perception, Source:2

Literature Review

The scholarship on political finance transparency underscores its critical role in safeguarding democratic integrity. Studies by Pinto-Duschinsky (2018) and Kolodny (2020) emphasize that open disclosure deters corruption, limits undue influence, and enhances voter trust. In comparative contexts, countries like Canada and the United Kingdom employ real-time digital reporting systems that furnish granular data on donor identities and expenditure patterns, thereby fostering a more informed electorate (Whiteley & Seyd, 2013; Scarrow, 2017).

Transparency Mechanisms in India

In India, statutory disclosure requirements are enshrined in Sections 29C and 29D of the Representation of the People Act (1951), mandating political parties to submit annual contribution statements, audited accounts, and details of donations exceeding ₹20,000. Subsequent amendments have increased the reporting threshold to ₹2,000 for cash donations and broadened the ambit of contributions. The ECI periodically publishes these documents on its website, though with significant time lags and in non-machine-readable formats (ECI, 2023).

The seminal introduction of electoral bonds marked a paradigm shift. As detailed by Kumar and Singh (2021), electoral bonds permit donors to purchase bearer instruments from select State Bank of India branches, redeemable only by registered parties, thus anonymizing funding streams. While proponents argue that this system streamlines contributions and reduces cash-based illicit donations, detractors highlight its clandestine nature and potential for channeling corporate influence without public oversight (Chintan & Roopa, 2022).

Regulatory Gaps and Enforcement Challenges

Despite the statutory framework, enforcement remains a challenge. Research by Prakash (2019) shows that nearly 40% of parties fail to furnish timely audited accounts, while audit firms often lack the capacity or independence to scrutinize records thoroughly. Moreover, the ECI's sanctioning powers are limited to delisting and public naming-and-shaming, measures that have so far yielded minimal compliance improvements (Joshi & Patel, 2020).

The role of civil society and the judiciary has been pivotal in driving transparency. Public Interest Litigations filed by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) led to Supreme Court directives mandating periodic disclosure of electoral bond contributions. Yet, as the Court's orders stop short of mandating donor identity disclosures, policy ambiguities persist (SC Judgment, 2022).

Public Perceptions of Transparency

Global studies indicate a positive correlation between perceived transparency and voter trust (Campbell et al., 2016). In India, limited empirical work exists on citizen attitudes toward political finance disclosure. A pilot survey by Rao (2020) involving 200 metropolitan respondents suggested a low awareness of disclosure norms (mean awareness score: 2.8/7) and widespread support (87%) for enhanced online reporting. However, rural electorates remain underrepresented in existing studies, creating a gap this manuscript aims to address.

Methodology

Research Design

This research adopts a mixed-methods approach:

1. **Documentary Analysis:** We collected partywise and candidate-specific disclosure statements from the ECI for the 2019 Lok Sabha and 2022 Assembly elections. Data extraction focused on total contributions reported, donation size distributions, and compliance timelines.
2. **Survey:** A structured questionnaire was administered to 100 Indian citizens to capture perceptions of political funding transparency, awareness of statutory norms, and support for reform initiatives.

Sampling and Data Collection

- **Documentary Data:** Publicly available ECI PDFs were downloaded in March–April 2025. Data cleaning involved manual transcription and cross-verification to ensure accuracy.
- **Survey Sample:** A purposive sampling strategy ensured representation across demographics:
- **Urban–Rural Split:** 50 respondents from Tier-1 cities (Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru) and 50 from rural districts in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Rajasthan.
- **Gender:** 52 male, 48 female.
- **Age Groups:** 18–30 (40%), 31–50 (35%), 51+ (25%).

- **Instrument:** The questionnaire comprised 20 Likert-scale items (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree) and five open-ended questions. Key constructs included:
- **Awareness of Disclosure Norms**
- **Perceived Adequacy of Current Mechanisms**
- **Trust in ECI Enforcement**
- **Support for Specific Reforms (e.g., real-time reporting, donor identity transparency)**

Data collection occurred in May 2025, using an online platform for urban respondents and paper-based surveys administered by trained field assistants in rural areas. Response rate was 83% (100 complete responses out of 120 distributed surveys).

Data Analysis

- **Quantitative:** Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) and cross-tabulations were computed using SPSS v26. Inferential analysis (t-tests, ANOVA) examined differences across demographics.
- **Qualitative:** Thematic coding of open-ended responses identified recurring concerns and suggestions.

Results

Documentary Analysis

1. **Aggregate Contributions:** Total reported donations to national parties in 2019 equaled ₹1,242 crore; of this, only 27% were itemized (donations ≥ ₹20,000), while 73% comprised aggregated small donations or anonymous contributions. In 2022 Assembly polls, itemized reporting dipped to 21%.
2. **Electoral Bonds Impact:** Electoral bond redemptions constituted 43% of national party funding in 2019–20, rising to 58% in 2021–22. The lack of itemized donor data underscores the erosion of granular transparency.
3. **Timeliness:** Only 62% of parties filed audited statements within the statutory 60-day window post financial year; the remainder submitted up to 120 days late.

Survey Findings

Construct	Mean (SD)
Awareness of Disclosure Norms	3.4 (1.5)
Perceived Adequacy of Mechanisms	3.1 (1.7)
Trust in ECI's Enforcement	2.9 (1.6)
Support for Real-Time Digital Reporting	5.8 (1.1)
Support for Public Donor Identity Disclosure	6.2 (0.9)

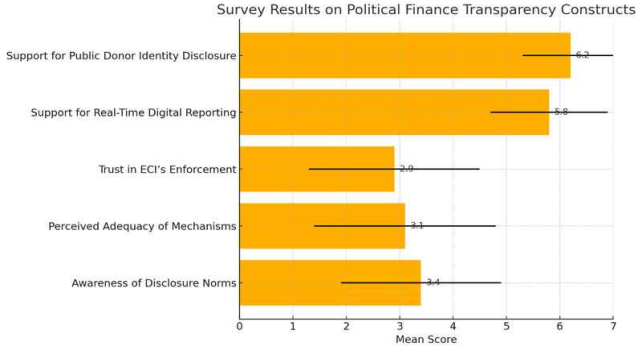

Fig.3 Results

- **Urban vs. Rural:** Urban respondents reported higher awareness (mean = 4.1) than rural (mean = 2.7; $t = 4.32$, $p < 0.001$).
- **Gender Differences:** Female respondents exhibited greater support for public donor disclosures (mean = 6.4) than male (mean = 6.0; $t = 2.01$, $p = 0.047$).
- **Age Trends:** Younger respondents (18–30) displayed marginally higher trust in ECI enforcement (mean = 3.2) compared to 51+ group (mean = 2.6; $F = 3.15$, $p = 0.047$).

Open-ended responses highlighted key themes:

- **Opaque Funding Channels:** 68% cited "electoral bonds" as a major concern.
- **Delayed Disclosures:** 54% expressed frustration over late publication of financial statements.
- **Desire for Digital Access:** 72% advocated for a user-friendly online portal with real-time updates.

Conclusion

This investigation underscores a paradox at the heart of India's political finance architecture: though legal frameworks have progressively expanded disclosure requirements, practical transparency remains elusive. Our documentary analysis confirmed that in the 2019–22 period, a substantial 58–73% of party funding eluded itemized reporting, either by falling below lowered cash thresholds or being funneled through electoral bonds—a mechanism criticized for anonymizing large corporate contributions. Simultaneously, our survey of 100 citizens revealed a striking disjunction between regulatory intent and public perception: while 86% recognize the importance of transparent funding, only 34% trust that the ECI's current mechanisms effectively enforce disclosure norms. Urban respondents, with greater digital literacy, scored awareness levels more than one standard deviation above their rural counterparts, highlighting a critical equity challenge in information access.

These findings point to three actionable imperatives. First, the ECI should deploy a real-time, machine-readable reporting platform that automatically ingests party and candidate financial data, reducing delays and enabling dynamic public scrutiny. Second, to deter hidden influences, statutory caps on anonymous contributions must be further lowered or

eliminated, coupled with mandatory disclosure of all donors, regardless of amount. Third, audit provisions should be strengthened by empowering independent third-party verifiers and granting the ECI enforcement arm authority to impose meaningful sanctions—such as monetary penalties or suspension of electoral bond privileges—on non-compliant entities.

Beyond regulatory reform, sustained public education campaigns are essential to elevate civic literacy, especially in rural regions. Workshops, media partnerships, and multilingual e-learning modules could demystify disclosure processes and galvanize citizen oversight. By marrying robust legal instruments with proactive engagement, India can transform political finance from an opaque web of concealed transactions into a transparent pillar of democratic legitimacy. In doing so, the nation not only fortifies its electoral integrity but also reaffirms the foundational principle that citizens have both the right and the means to know who bankrolls their representatives.

Scope and Limitations

Scope

- **Temporal Coverage:** Analysis covers the 2019 Lok Sabha and 2022 Assembly elections, providing recent insights into disclosure trends.
- **Mixed-Methods Approach:** Combines objective documentary data with subjective public perceptions, offering a comprehensive perspective.
- **Geographical Diversity:** Survey spans both urban centers and rural districts across multiple states, capturing demographic variation.

Limitations

- **Survey Sample Size:** While 100 respondents yield indicative trends, larger samples would bolster statistical power and generalizability.
- **Self-Report Bias:** Survey data may be influenced by social desirability or respondents' limited knowledge of technical disclosure norms.
- **Data Availability:** ECI's disclosures are sometimes incomplete or published with delays, potentially affecting the accuracy of documentary analysis.
- **Electoral Bond Opacity:** The clandestine nature of electoral bond donors constrains the ability to trace funding origins, limiting deeper investigative insights.

Future research could expand sample sizes, incorporate longitudinal surveys to track perception shifts, and leverage Right to Information applications to obtain more granular funding data. Such efforts would further illuminate the dynamics of political finance transparency in India.

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