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Building Institutions, Escaping Development Traps

Managing Elections in the World's Largest Democracy

India, the world's largest democracy, kicked off its national elections this week. Continuing until May 12th, the elections involve 814 million eligible voters who can cast their ballot at one of 930,000 polling stations. With a usual turnout of 60%, managing the electoral process and ensuring voter safety pose challenges. **Two ISS case studies** provide insights into efforts by the Election Commission of India to reform and improve the country's elections.

Implementing India's Electoral Code of Conduct

Negative campaigning and harassment were on the increase in 1990 when T.N. Seshan assumed control of the Election Commission of India. Seshan and his successor, M.S. Gill, used India's Model Code of Conduct, a voluntary code that had lain dormant since its creation 30 years earlier, to moderate the excesses of political parties during elections. By 2010, the code had become a way to reduce violence and help focus parties parties on policy. An **ISS case study** provides insights into how to build acceptance of standards like the Model Code of Conduct.

Using Vulnerability Mapping to Protect Polling Places

Before the 2009 elections, in an effort to prevent voter intimidation, vote-stealing, and election-related violence, the Election Commission of India introduced "vulnerability mapping." By classifying polling stations by their level of sensitivity to violence and using the rankings to inform the positioning of the police and paramilitary, elections officials were able to dampen physical conflict and increase voter turnout. An **ISS case study** describes how election officials piloted this mapping process in the 2009 elections.

Featured Interview

In an interview with ISS, **Shri Baijayant Jay Panda** discusses the role of the Elections Commission of India in shaping perceptions of Indian democracy over the last two decades. A Member of Lok Sabha, the Lower House of the Indian Parliament, Panda credits the Model Code of Conduct with enhancing the credibility of the Commission.

Share Your Feedback

The ISS web repository is an idea bank that enables scholars and practitioners to evaluate the pros and cons of reform strategies and to weigh the effects of context. ISS invites feedback on its cases, including suggestions of additional topics and questions to be considered, corrections, and how case studies are being used: **iss@princeton.edu**.

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Improving Government Accountability and Leading Reform

Innovations for Successful Societies (ISS) helps public servants, policy makers, and scholars share institution-building strategies that work in especially challenging contexts. Interview-based case studies facilitate these exchanges and provide a basis for scholarly research.

To date, ISS has published 120 case studies and 370 interviews, all of which are available for free on a web repository. Governments use the materials to learn from each other, inspire discussion in their ranks, and recall the steps they took to implement a reform. Universities and training programs use the case studies in the classroom to engage students in the operational and strategic aspects of public sector reform.

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