

Periodical Elections and the Role of the Election Commission of Sri Lanka

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Elections are fundamental to the functioning and healthy representative democracy, ensuring the government is accountable, responsive, and representative of the people's will. This supports the stability and progress of the process of governance. Within this context, the Election Commission plays a crucial role in maintaining the integrity, fairness, and transparency of the electoral process. For this to be effective, the Election Commission's independence is vital. Independence refers to the Commission's ability to operate free from political pressures and external interference, which significantly influences public perception of electoral integrity. Thus, assessing the role of the Election Commission is essential for strengthening democracy. Although provision for the Election Commission existed since 2001, it was constituted for the first time only in 2015. However, events from that period raise questions about the actual role of the Commission. The Commission remained silent on the government's arbitrary election delays, resulting in nearly three years without local government elections and the postponement of Provincial Council Elections since 2018. The government cited financial constraints, delimitation needs, and an economic crisis as reasons. The public now eagerly anticipates parliamentary and presidential elections this year following the 2022 people's struggle. This paper examines the independence of the Election Commission as crucial for ensuring regular elections, focusing on factors like tenure security, appointment procedures, decision-making autonomy, expenditure control, regulation proposals, and the right to announce results without interference. It argues that Sri Lanka's Election Commission has failed to maintain its independence. The study uses a qualitative, desk-based approach and further study intends to respond to the literature gap as the institution is very young.

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