



A Single Voters' List

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Why in News

The Prime Minister's Office held a meeting with representatives of the Election Commission and the Law Ministry to discuss the possibility of having **a common electoral roll** for elections to the **panchayat, municipality, state assembly and the Lok Sabha**.

Key Points

- **Types of Electoral Rolls in India:**

Each State Election Commissions (SEC) is governed by a separate state Act.

- Some state laws allow the SEC to borrow and use the Election Commission of India's voter's rolls for the local body elections.
 - In others, the state commission uses the EC's voters list as the basis for the preparation and revision of rolls for municipality and panchayat elections.
 - Few states have their own electoral rolls and do not adopt EC's roll for local body polls like those of Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Odisha, Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Odisha, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.
 - The distinction stems from the fact that the supervision and conduct of elections in our country are entrusted with **two constitutional authorities** – the **Election Commission (EC) of India** and the **State Election Commissions (SECs)**.
 - **Election Commission (EC) of India**: It was set up in 1950, the EC is charged with the responsibility of conducting polls to:
 - the offices of the **President and Vice-President of India**,
 - to **Parliament, the state assemblies and the legislative councils**.
 - **State Election Commissions (SECs)**: The SECs, on the other hand, **supervise municipal and panchayat elections**. They are free to prepare their own electoral rolls for local body elections, and this exercise does not have to be coordinated with the EC.
- **Reason for Demand for Common Electoral Roll:**
 - A **common electoral roll and simultaneous elections** as a way to save an enormous amount of effort and expenditure.

It is argued that the preparation of a separate voters list causes duplication of the effort and the expenditure.
 - **Earlier Recommendations:**
 - The **Law Commission** recommended it in its **255th report in 2015 for a single electoral roll**.
 - The EC too adopted a similar stance in 1999 and 2004.

The EC pointed out that it **adds to the confusion among voters**, since they may find their names present in one roll, but absent in another.

- **Implementation Process:**

- A **Constitutional Amendment** to Articles 243K and 243ZA is required.
 - **Articles 243K and 243ZA** deal with elections to panchayats and municipalities in the states. These give the power of superintendence, direction and control of preparation of electoral rolls and the conduct of these elections to the **State Election Commission (SEC)**.
 - The SECs are free to prepare their own electoral rolls for local body elections, and this exercise does not have to be coordinated with the EC.
 - The amendment would **make it mandatory to have a single electoral roll** for all elections in the country.
- **Persuading the state governments** to tweak their respective laws and adopt the Election Commission's (EC) voters list for municipal and panchayat polls.
- **Challenges in implementation:**
 - The boundaries of the EC's polling station may not necessarily match that of the wards.
 - The change would require a massive consensus-building exercise.

Way Forward

- Mature approach calls for the option of states adopting EC's voter list. This can be the guiding light. The change would require a massive consensus-building exercise between the states and the centre.
- So the EC's voters list has to be made in a way to fit the SEC's wards which is a tedious task but can be done by the use of technology.

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