



Remote Voting for Migrants

Prelims: ECI, VVPAT, Remote Electronic Voting Machine, e-SHRAM portal, EVM, Supreme Court.

Mains: Remote Voting for Migrants and Associated Concerns.

Why in News?

Recently, the [Election Commission of India \(ECI\)](#) has proposed a new **Remote Electronic Voting Machine (RVM)**, which will allow domestic migrants **to vote in national and regional elections**.

- The EC proposed using this in a State Assembly election **as a pilot so internal migrants** within a state can cast their ballots.

Why the Need for Remote Voting?

- **Decrease in Voting Turnout:**
 - In 2019 general election, **over 91% of its eligible citizens were registered with 67% of them coming out to vote**, which is the highest voter turnout in the nation's history.
 - It is, however, worrying that a third of the eligible voters, a whopping 30 crore people, do not vote.
- **Internal Migration:**
 - One of the reasons for less voter turnout remained the internal migration **that took electors away from their home constituencies**.
 - Electors can have their names **added to the electoral rolls of the constituency they ordinarily reside in, but many chose to retain the Voter ID from their home constituencies** for various reasons.
- **Supreme Court's Direction:**
 - Hearing a petition on the alleged denial of voting opportunities to migrants, the [Supreme Court \(SC\)](#) had in **2015 directed the EC to explore options for remote voting**.
- **Increasing Registrations of Unorganised Workers:**
 - There are nearly 10 million migrant workers, which is for the unorganised sector, registered with the government's [e-SHRAM portal](#). If the remote voting project is implemented, it will have far reaching ramifications.

What is the Current Proposal for Remote Voting?

- **RVM:**
 - **RVM** is a modified version of the existing Electronic Voting Machine (EVM).
 - The **special remote polling booths** would be set up in different states when elections are on in the home state of migrants.
 - The RVM can handle multiple constituencies from a single remote polling booth.
 - For this, instead of a **fixed ballot paper sheet**, the machine has been modified to **have an electronic dynamic ballot** display which will present different candidate lists corresponding to the constituency number of the voter read by a constituency card reader.

▪ **Security:**

- The system would **have a device similar to the so voters can verify their votes.**
- The units will save the number of votes for each candidate for each of the constituencies, to be tallied on counting day.
- The results would then be shared with the home **RO (Returning Officer).**
 - A returning officer is responsible for overseeing elections in one or more constituencies.

How do Existing EVMs Work?

- EVMs have been used **on a large scale in India since 1992** and have been used in all Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections since 2000.
- The latest iteration of the machine is the **M3 model, which has been manufactured since 2013. In 2010**, multiple political parties approached the ECI to develop a mechanism to verify that the EVM had recorded the vote correctly.
- As a result, the ECI developed the **Voter Verified Paper Trail Audit (VVPAT) machine**, which has become universal in elections since mid-2017.
- The current EVM setup includes a Balloting Unit (BU), which is **connected to the VVPAT printer and is located inside the voting compartment.**
- The VVPAT is connected to the Control Unit (CU), which sits with the Presiding Officer (PO) and totals the number of votes cast.
- The VVPAT prints a slip with the **poll symbol and candidate name** once the voter presses the key on the BU, **which is visible to the voter for seven seconds before being dropped off in a box** inside the VVPAT.

What are the Concerns and Challenges Ahead?

- The Multi-Constituency RVM for migrant voting **will have the same security system and voting experience as the EVM.** This essentially means that the challenges with regard to the current **EVMs will persist when it comes to the RVMs.**
- Besides machine related concerns, remote voting will also face logistical and administrative challenges. These include questions on how voter registration will take place in remote locations, how names will be removed from the electoral rolls of the home constituency, **how remote voting applications will be made transparent etc.**
- The current **VVPAT system is not voter verified** in its full sense, meaning, while the voter sees their vote slip behind the VVPAT's glass for seven seconds, it does not mean they have verified it. That would happen if the voter got the printout in their hand, was able to approve it before the vote was finally cast, and was able to cancel if there was an error.
- Under the current system, if the voter disputes what they have seen behind the screen, **they are allowed a test vote in the presence of an election officer**, and if the outcome of the test vote is correct, the voter can be penalized or even prosecuted. The same may persist with remote voting.

Way Forward

- For the voting process to be verifiable and correct, it should be **machine-independent, or software and hardware independent**, meaning, the establishment of its veracity should not **depend solely on the assumption that the EVM is correct.**
- The "voter should have **full agency to cancel a vote if not satisfied**; and that the process to cancel must be simple and **should not require the voter to interact with anybody**".
- It is important that any system of remote voting has **to take into account the confidence and acceptability of all the stakeholders** of the electoral system - **voters, political parties and election machinery**, the officials are learnt to have informed the committee while political consensus is the way forward to introduce remote voting.

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Q. Right to vote and to be elected in India is a (2017)

- (a) Fundamental Right
- (b) Natural Right
- (c) Constitutional Right
- (d) Legal Right

Ans: (c)

Exp:

- **Right to Vote is implicit in Article 326** of the Constitution, which states that the elections to the House of the People and to the Legislative Assembly of every State shall be on the basis of adult suffrage. Every person who is a citizen of India and who is not less than eighteen years of age and not disqualified under the Constitution or any law made by the appropriate Legislature on the ground of nonresidence, unsoundness of mind, crime or corrupt or illegal practice, shall be entitled to be registered as a voter at any such election.
- Right to be elected is implicit in the Constitution in a way that it provides for the minimum qualifications required to be the Member of Parliament (Article 84), Member of State Legislatures (Article 173), President and Vice-President. Article 84 provides that a citizen of India who is not less than thirty years of age is eligible to fill a seat in the Council of State (Rajya Sabha) and a person who is not less than twenty-five years of age is eligible to fill the seat in the House of the People (Lok Sabha).
- **Therefore, option (c) is the correct answer.**

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