



## Increasing Voter Turnouts

This editorial is based on the [“Steps to increase voter turnout in elections”](#) which was published in The Hindustan Times on 11/09/2023. It talks about increasing Voter Turnout in elections in India.

**For Prelims:** [Election Commission of India \(ECI\)](#), Turnout Implementation Plan (TIP), [Systematic Voter Education and Electoral Participation \(SVEEP\)](#), Voter Helpline App, [Electoral Rolls](#), [Remote Voting](#), [One Nation One Election](#),

**For Mains:** Turnout Implementation Plan (TIP), Voter Turnout in India: Advantages, Challenges and Way Forward

The past few months have been dominated by speculation about the scheduling of the next general elections.

But what has gone relatively unnoticed is an ambitious new strategy launched by the [Election Commission of India \(ECI\)](#), called the **Turnout Implementation Plan (TIP)**, the latest in a series of interventions by the poll watchdog that began with the [Systematic Voter Education and Electoral Participation \(SVEEP\) programme](#) in 2010 that resulted in India creating a turnout record in Lok Sabha elections of 2014.

In 2009, the voting percentage stood at 58%, which went up to 66.4% in 2014, and 67.6% in 2019. Now, the [ECI](#) hopes to push it past 70%.

### What is the Election Commission’s Turnout Implementation Plan (TIP)?

- It is a targeted voter outreach initiative to enhance voter turnout in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. The **TIP aims to push the voter turnout past 70%** by focusing on four key areas:
  - **Voter Registration:** A rigorous revision of the [electoral rolls](#) and [remote voting](#) that can empower millions of internal migrants.
  - **Voter Awareness:** A comprehensive voter education campaign that covers all aspects of electoral participation, such as how to register, how to verify, how to vote, and how to report any issues or grievances.
  - **Voter Facilitation:** A user-friendly and accessible ICT platform that provides various services and information to voters, such as online registration, polling station location, voter helpline, etc.
  - **Voter Feedback:** A feedback mechanism that collects data and insights from voters, election officials, civil society organisations, and media on various aspects of electoral processes and outcomes.
- It **focuses on 10 large states and around 250 constituencies** where the voter turnout was below or slightly above the 2019 national average.
- It **involves District Election Officers (DEOs)** pinpointing reasons for low voter turnout and

addressing local causes.

- It also **emphasises the need for specific communication efforts to counter voter apathy** and engage apathetic groups such as the youth and urban electors.
- It **involves a comprehensive profiling of booths with low turnout** and **tailoring solutions** to the unique characteristics of each booth.

## What are ECI's Earlier Programs to Increase Voter Turnouts?

- [Systematic Voter Education and Electoral Participation \(SVEEP\) Program](#): Launched in 2009, it is a flagship program of the ECI for voter education, spreading voter awareness and promoting voter literacy in India.
  - The **SVEEP program** is based on multiple general as well as targeted interventions that are designed according to the **socio-economic, cultural and demographic profile of the state** as well as the history of electoral participation in previous rounds of elections and learning thereof.
- **Voter Helpline App**: It was launched in 2019 and is a mobile application that provides a single point of service and information delivery to voters across the country.
  - The app allows voters to **verify their name in the electoral roll, register online, apply for corrections, download voter ID cards**, get election-related information, lodge grievances, and get real-time voter turnout data.

## What are the Challenges to Increasing Voter Turnout in India ?

- **Voter Apathy**: A significant portion of the eligible Indian population remains disinterested or apathetic towards politics and elections.
  - India's urban citizens are often accused of being the bystander in its electoral process — interested but not involved.
  - They may be discouraged from voting due to perceived corruption, lack of responsiveness from elected officials, and disillusionment with the political system.
- **Logistical Challenges**: India's vast geographical expanse and diverse population present logistical challenges in ensuring that all eligible voters can access polling stations easily.
- **Lack of Awareness and Literacy**: Many eligible voters, especially in rural areas, lack awareness about the importance of voting, their rights, and the electoral process.
  - High illiteracy rates in some regions also make it difficult for voters to understand the candidates, their manifestos, and how to cast their votes accurately.
- **Inconvenient Election Dates**: Elections often take place during inconvenient times, such as extreme weather conditions, festivals, or agricultural harvest seasons, which can discourage voter turnout.
- **Security Concerns**: Security issues in certain regions may deter voters from going to polling stations, particularly during tense periods or in areas affected by conflict or insurgency.
  - Additionally, instances of voter suppression, such as intimidation and violence in some regions, discourages voter turnout.
- **Migration**: Millions of internal migrants in India face challenges in voting due to their transient nature and difficulties in updating their voter registration.
- **Technological Challenges**: While technology can facilitate voter registration and improve the electoral process, challenges related to access to technology and concerns about digital security can hinder its adoption.
- **Political Parties and Candidates**: Political parties and candidates may not always focus on issues that resonate with the electorate, leading to voter disinterest.
- **Voter Identification**: Ensuring accurate identification of eligible voters, while preventing duplication and fraud is a complex task. Exclusion of Eligible voters from the list also results in a lower voter turnout.

## What are the Advantages of a Higher Voter Turnout?

- **Enhanced Government's Legitimacy**: When more people vote, the election results better

reflect the will of the whole population. The elected representatives have a stronger mandate to govern and the government's legitimacy is enhanced.

- **Increased Accountability:** When more people vote, the elected officials are more accountable to the voters. Politicians are more likely to be responsive to the needs and concerns of their constituents when they know that a large portion of the population is engaged and watching.
- **Political Stability:** When more people vote, the political stability is increased by reducing the chances of contentious or disputed elections. When elections are seen as fair and inclusive, it lowers the potential for protests, unrest, or challenges to the legitimacy of the government.
  - Moreover, when more people vote, the **policies are more likely to reflect a broader consensus of the population.**
  - Elected officials are more likely to pursue policies that balance various interests when they know they must appeal to a larger and more diverse electorate.
- **Civic Engagement:** When more people vote, civic engagement and a sense of civic duty are fostered. People who participate in elections are more likely to be engaged in other aspects of civic life, such as community organisations and local government activities.
- **Informed Decision-Making:** When more people vote, there is a **greater incentive for candidates and political parties to engage in substantive debates and provide clear policy proposals.** Voters are more likely to make informed decisions when they have access to quality information and robust debates.
- **Reduced Extremism:** When more people vote, the **influence of extremist or fringe groups is diminished.** Moderate candidates and policies tend to appeal to a broader cross-section of the population, so when more people vote, it can moderate the overall political discourse.
- **Diverse Representation:** When more people vote, the **diversity among elected officials is increased, including more women, ethnic minorities, and individuals from different socioeconomic backgrounds.** This diversity can lead to policies that are more inclusive and reflective of the population's needs.

## What can be done to Increase Voter Turnout in India?

- **Voter Education:** Given that India embraced voter education relatively late, continued and intensified efforts in this area are crucial. Voter education campaigns should focus on informing citizens about the importance of voting, the electoral process, and the impact of their votes on governance.
  - These campaigns can be conducted through various mediums, including TV, radio, social media, and community outreach programs.
- **Revision of Electoral Rolls:** Regular and rigorous revision of electoral rolls, especially closer to the election date, is essential. Removing dead, absent, or duplicate names from the voter list and adding eligible citizens ensures that the voter base accurately reflects the population. Technology can play a significant role in streamlining this process.
- **Accessibility and Ease of Voting:** Improve the ease of voting by addressing issues related to the physical accessibility of polling stations, reducing wait times, and making the voting process more convenient for citizens. The use of technology can also help streamline the voting process.
- **Remote Voting:** Implementing **remote voting options to empower internal migrants who face logistical and financial barriers to voting.** This is particularly beneficial in a country as vast and diverse as India.
  - Political consensus and investment in secure and accessible **remote voting** technology are necessary for this to become a reality.
- **One Nation One Election:** Addressing voter fatigue by reducing the frequency of elections, as mentioned in the context of **"One Nation One Election"** could help sustain voter enthusiasm. Streamlining elections could lead to more focused and engaged voter participation.
- **Campaign Quality:** Enhance the quality of election campaigns to make them more engaging and informative.
  - Political parties should present compelling agendas and candidates to motivate voters. This can include debates, town halls, and discussions on pressing issues.
- **Promote Accountability:** Emphasise the importance of higher voter turnout in holding lawmakers accountable. Encourage citizens to understand that their votes directly impact the performance of elected officials and the overall governance of the country.
- **Youth Engagement:** Target youth engagement and encourage young voters to participate actively in the electoral process. Engage schools and colleges to educate students about their

voting rights and responsibilities.

- **Community Mobilisation:** Encourage community leaders and organisations to play a role in mobilising voters within their communities. Grassroots efforts can be particularly effective in increasing turnout.

## Conclusion

Half the countries in the world — including India — fall within the 60%-79% voter turnout band. At a time when India has made rapid strides in establishing itself as a preeminent economic and diplomatic power, it should also aspire to get into the elite club of countries that see 80% turnout in democratic elections.

### Drishti Mains Question:

The voter turnout in India has been consistently low, despite the efforts of the Election Commission to increase it. What are the factors that affect voter turnout? Suggest some measures to improve voter participation in elections.

## UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

### Prelims

#### **Q. Consider the following statements: (2020)**

1. According to the Constitution of India a person who is eligible to vote can be made a minister in a State for six months even if he/she is not a member of the Legislature of that State.
2. According to the Representation of People Act, 1951, a person convicted of a criminal offence and sentenced to imprisonment for five years is permanently disqualified from contesting an election even after his release from prison.

#### **Which of the statements given above is/are correct?**

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Answer: (d)**

#### **Q. Consider the following statements: (2017)**

1. The Election Commission of India is a five-member body.
2. Union Ministry of Home Affairs decides the election schedule for the conduct of both general elections and bye-elections.
3. Election Commission resolves the disputes relating to splits/mergers of recognised political parties.

#### **Which of the statements given above is/are correct?**

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 3 only

**Answer: (d)**

### Mains

**Q.** 'Simultaneous election to the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies will limit the amount of time and money spent in electioneering but it will reduce the government's accountability to the people' Discuss. (2017)

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