



Postal Ballots and EVMs

For Prelims: [Electronic Voting Machines \(EVMs\)](#), [Postal Ballots](#), [Election Commission \(EC\)](#), Returning Officer (RO), [Voter-Verifiable Paper Audit Trails \(VVPATs\)](#), [Chief Electoral Officers](#), Booth Level Officers (BLOs).

For Mains: The need for safety and security of [Electronic Voting Machines](#) and [Postal Ballots](#) in ensuring a robust, free and fair electoral process.

[Source: IE](#)

Why in News?

Recently, the Madhya Pradesh political parties filed a complaint with the state [Chief Electoral Officer](#), accusing manipulation of [postal ballots](#) in the strong room and questioning the efficacy of [Electronic Voting Machines \(EVMs\)](#).

- However, District Election Officer explained that the strong room was opened by the **assistant returning officer** with prior notice to representatives **for ballot sorting, not counting**.

What are the Postal Ballots and Journey of EVMs?

- **Postal Ballots:**
 - Postal ballots serve as a voting option for service voters, absentee voters (**such as those above 80 years, individuals with benchmark disabilities, or those affected by Covid-19**), voters on **election duty**, and electors under **preventive detention**.
 - Eligible individuals, after completing necessary forms, receive postal ballots from the **Returning Officer (RO)** through **the mail or, in the case of election duty voters, at a facilitation center**.
- **EVM's Journey from Checks to Storage:**
 - The EVMs undergo a process before reaching polling stations. After the completion of first-level checks and randomization exercises, **the machines are handed over to the ROs** while following guidelines outlined in the [Election Commission's \(EC's\) latest manual issued in August, 2023](#).
 - After voting is over, EVMs and [Voter-Verifiable paper audit trails \(VVPATs\)](#) are escorted back to collection or reception centres where **they are stored in strong rooms**.
 - As per the EC manual, **all candidates have to be informed of this** and are allowed to send their representatives to oversee the security arrangements.
- **Security Measures and Storage of EVMs:**
 - The journey of EVMs involves **stringent security measures**, including **armed escort and storage in air-conditioned strong rooms**.
 - These strong rooms **serve as a secure location for EVMs until polling day, ensuring the integrity and confidentiality of the voting process**.
 - Political party representatives play a role in overseeing this storage process, **adding an extra layer of transparency to the electoral system**.

What is the Procedure for Postal Ballots and Absentee Voters ?

- **Postal Ballots' Procedures:**
 - According to EC instructions, the facilitation centre in-charge handling postal ballots is required to **open the drop box daily in the presence of party and candidate representatives.**
 - Each constituency's ballots are placed in a large envelope or cotton bag and then **sent to the RO at the end of each voting day.**
 - The RO assumes custody of these bags, **storing them securely in a designated "special strong room."**
- **Absentee Voters:**
 - For absentee voters, **Booth Level Officers (BLOs)** deliver **ballot form** to the electors' homes. **BLOs return within five days** of the election notification to collect the filled-in forms, submitting them daily to the ROs.
 - Essential services personnel among absentee voters can utilize special postal voting centres, **conducting voting for three consecutive days before polling day.** The packets of postal ballots from these centres are sent to the RO at the end of each day.
- **Secure Handling and Counting Preparations for Postal Ballots:**
 - In cases **where votes are to be counted at a location other than the RO's headquarters,** a day before counting, the postal ballots are transferred to another strong room at the counting centre.
 - This meticulous process ensures the **secure handling, documentation, and eventual counting** of postal ballots in adherence to electoral guidelines.

Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail

- VVPAT is an independent verification printer machine and is attached to electronic voting machines. It allows voters to verify if their vote has gone to the intended candidate.
- When a voter presses a button in the EVM, a paper slip is printed through the VVPAT. The slip **contains the poll symbol and name of the candidate.** It allows the voter to verify his/her choice.
- After being visible to the voter from a glass case in the **VVPAT for seven seconds,** the ballot slip will be cut and dropped into the drop box in the VVPAT machine and a beep will be heard.
- VVPAT machines can be accessed **by polling officers only.**

What are the Different Measures to Secure EVMs?

- **Functional Check:** The machines are **cleaned and earlier results are cleared.** Switches, buttons, cables and latches are inspected for damage.
- **Random Check:** A mock poll is **conducted on 5% of the total number of EVMs to be used for a poll.** About 1,000 votes are polled and the result printouts are shared with representatives of various political parties.
- **Throwing the Dice:** EVMs are **randomly placed in the constituencies and booths** and it is difficult to know which machine is kept where. During the first, EVMs are allocated at random to a constituency. In the second round, **they are randomised and allocated to a polling booth.**
- **A Dry Run:** Before the start of the actual poll, **a mock poll is conducted with at least 50 votes in the presence of candidates or their agents.**
 - The mock poll is then closed and the results are displayed. **On poll day, various checks are conducted by polling agents,** observers and central paramilitary forces.
- **Safe and Secure:** EVMs are placed in their carrying cases and sealed. **The machines are transported back to the reception centres** under armed escort and kept in the strong room.
- **Increasing the Existing VVPAT Verification Rate:** The order of the [Supreme Court](#) on increasing the existing VVPAT verification rate from **one to five random EVMs per Assembly constituency or segment,** tries to reassure those sceptical about the integrity of counting by means of EVMs.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims

Q. Consider the following statements: (2017)

1. The Election Commission of India is a five-member body.
2. The 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

Ans: (d)

Mains

Q. Discuss the role of the Election Commission of India in the light of the evolution of the Model Code of Conduct. (2022)

PDF Reference URL: <https://www.drishtiias.com/printpdf/postal-ballots-and-evms>

