



Remote Voting Facility

For Prelims: Remote Voting Facility, Blockchain Technology, Election Commission of India, Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System (ETPBS), e- SHRAM Portal

For Mains: Remote Voting Facility, Need for Remote Voting.

Why in News?

Recently, the Union government in the Supreme Court said it is considering [Remote Voting Facility](#) for [Non-Resident Indians \(NRI\)](#), especially migrant laborers, to **cast their votes remotely** while ensuring the **integrity of the electoral process**.

What is the Background?

- In 2020, the [Election Commission officials proposed the idea of using blockchain technology](#) to enable remote voting. The aim is to overcome the geographical hurdles in voting.
 - The Commission has been considering the possibility of remote voting which will allow people to cast the ballot from their place of work.
- The **Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill of 2017** had proposed the removal of an **“unreasonable restriction”** posed by **Section 20A** of the [Representation of the People Act, 1951](#) requiring overseas electors to be physically present in their electoral constituencies to cast their votes.
 - The Bill was later passed in 2018, but lapsed with the dissolution of the **16th Lok Sabha**.
- Currently, only the following voters are allowed to cast their votes through [postal ballot](#):
 - Service voters (armed forces, the armed police force of a state and government servants posted abroad),
 - Voters on election duty,
 - Voters above 80 years of age or Persons with Disabilities (PwD),
 - Voters under [preventive detention](#).

What is Remote Voting?

- Remote voting may take place in **person somewhere other than an assigned polling station** or at another time, or votes may be sent by post or cast by an appointed proxy.
 - There have been demands from various political parties that the EC should ensure that migrant workers, [NRIs \(Non-Resident Indians\)](#) who miss out on voting, as they cannot afford to go home during elections to exercise their franchise, **should be allowed to vote for their constituency from the city they are working in**.

Why is there a Need for Remote Voting?

- **Unfavorable Conditions:**
 - Voters migrate from the place of their registration to cities and other places for education, employment and other purposes. It becomes **difficult for them to return to their**

registered polling stations to cast their vote.

- It was also noted that in villages like Dumak and Kalgoth in Uttarakhand, about **20-25% of registered voters are unable to cast their vote in their constituencies as they are required to move out of their village/state** broadly on account of their jobs or educational pursuits.

▪ **Decrease in Voting Turnout:**

- During the 2019 General elections, **nearly 300 million citizens out of a total of 910 million** electors didn't cast their votes.

▪ **Concerns Regarding Metropolitan Areas:**

- The ECI also noted the **concern about low voter turnout in some of the metropolitan/city areas** despite the fact that polling stations are set up within 2 km for any voter in urban areas. The need to address voting apathy in urban areas was felt.

▪ **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.

▪ **Health Concerns:**

- The health concerns of **mainly the senior citizens** also need to be discussed as they're also becoming the main deliberation. In this context, the remote voting facility will result in increasing the voting percentage in urban areas as well as in rural areas.

What are the Issues Related to Remote Voting?

▪ **Security:**

- Any new technology systems, including those based on blockchain technologies and others, **are vulnerable to cyber-attacks and other security vulnerabilities**.
- Technology-based voting systems may also entail privacy risks and concerns.

▪ **Veracity and Verification:**

- Furthermore, a [voter verification system](#) that uses biometric software, such as facial recognition, could lead to false positives or negatives in voter identification, thus facilitating fraud or disenfranchising citizens.

▪ **Internet Connection & Malware Security:**

- There is a dependency on **voters having a reliable internet connection**. Internet penetration and availability and use of e-government services in some countries are limited.
- Software errors or malware on voters' devices may also affect vote casting.

▪ **Privacy/Secrecy:**

- Elections always require a high level of security in order to protect voter privacy and the integrity of final results. Meeting the security needs of elections means online voting technology must overcome barriers that can invade the voter's privacy.

▪ **Preferred Environment:** It is also possible that voting takes place in an uncontrolled environment. It is difficult to ensure that the person votes freely and without coercion.

- There is the risk that another person votes on behalf of the voter so, it is difficult to identify the voter.

What is the Current Voting Process for NRIs?

- It was through the **Representation of the People (Amendment) Act, 2010**, eligible NRIs who had stayed abroad beyond six months were allowed to vote, but only in person at the polling station where they have been enrolled as an overseas elector.
 - Prior to 2010, an Indian citizen who is an eligible voter and was residing abroad for more than six months, would not have been able to vote in elections. This was because the NRI's name was deleted from electoral rolls if he or she stayed outside the country for more than six months at a stretch.
- An **NRI can vote in the constituency in which his/her place of residence**, as mentioned in the passport, is located.
- He/She can only vote in person and will have to **produce her passport in original** at the polling station for establishing identity.

Way Forward

- An online voting system must be able to **provide verification that it has successfully maintained election integrity** and that no manipulation had occurred during the voting or tallying processes.
- 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.
- Even with all of the proper legal frameworks in place, using an online voting system would be pointless if the government or general public were not confident in its security, integrity, and accuracy.
- A postal ballot mechanism that allows for proper authentication of the ballot at designated consular/embassy offices and an effective postal system **should ease this process for NRIs**, but rules must be **clearly framed for eligibility** on the basis of time spent away from the country.

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question

Prelims

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.**

Mains

Q. "There is a need for simplification of procedure for disqualification of persons found guilty of corrupt practices under the Representation of Peoples Act". Comment. (2020)

Source: [TH](#)

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