



Importance of Voting

 drishtiias.com/printpdf/the-big-picture-importance-of-voting



Recently, India celebrated its **9th National Voters' Day on January 25**. It was celebrated in over six lakh locations covering about ten lakh polling stations all over the country. President Ram Nath Kovind was the chief guest at the main function, organised by the Election Commission of India in New Delhi. **'No voter to be left behind' is the chosen theme for this year's celebration.**

Voting Stats in India

- In **2014, India had voting percentage of 66.44** as compared to **58.21% in 2009**.
- **Increase in Women voters:** Women lack behind only by 1.4% as compared to Men's turnout in 2014. Also, there are many states now, where women outnumber men in terms of turnout.

- In 2014, India saw a **huge increase in Youth Turnout** as compared to previous elections.
- **Abraham Lincoln's** idea and philosophy of Democracy i.e. Democracy is the government **of the people, by the people and for the people**, can be translated to **reality only through voting**.
- **Sense of Empowerment:** Through voting, people have a sense of **'ownership of government'**.
- To make government more **responsible and accountable:** Indian voters have brought revolutionary changes, in that regard, through voting e.g. in 1967, when Congress Government was not working as per the aspirations of the people, people brought the Congress Government to very thin majority at the center and almost half of the State Governments were given to non-congress parties.
- By voting, people can **decide the direction of change and development**.
- To **express oneself** i.e. Voting helps people in expressing their thoughts on a country, local constituency or about a candidate through the ballot box.

Recent Reforms

- **Scientific Approach:** Voting is not a homogeneous entity. All the people who vote or not vote, don't have a same reason. ECI has developed a scientific base to research on voting behaviour of people.
E.g. in Jharkhand, two elections back, when certain people didn't vote, a survey was conducted to find the reason.
- **Addition of 'NOTA'** option has further enabled the people to realise importance of their vote in elections. By choosing NOTA, voters have right to not to choose any nominated candidate.
- **National Voters' Day:** To ensure that new voter or the 18+ who gets registered, finds a way to understand that 'voting is an important responsibility, and at certain point of time, s/he has to go to vote.
- ECI is continuously taking care to ensure the **access to polling station to Divyangs**, people in far-off places and for distant remote placed voters.
- **Model Polling Booths** have been developed to facilitate women, children and old people.
- **Systematic Voter's Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP):** To fill the gaps in the areas where people do not participate, fail to participate or don't come and join enthusiastically. The program is basically, to educate voters and to ensure their effective participation in elections.
- **Ensuring flexibility in Indian Election System:** Whenever people or political parties have a complaint regarding anything, ECI always have a solution for that. Recently, when transparency in EVMs was in question, ECI introduced VVPAT machines.
- **For decriminalization of Indian Elections,** ECI and the Court has ensured together

that the candidates declare their criminal record and any cases, pending or not.

Way Forward

- Some challenges like **financing of elections, unfair use of social media** in elections and proxy voting for NRIs are yet to be addressed.
- Something should be done to **facilitate inter-migrants** to vote in the place, where they are living.
- Political class and ECI need to come together to find the **ways and means to decriminalize the elections**. Entry of the criminals into politics should be taken in more serious manner.
- Examining the relevance of **alternative kind of methods like Proportional Representation System in Indian Elections**.
- **Electoral Reforms** should be introduced to handle coalitions.
- Indian Democracy will get strengthened, when all political parties, stakeholders including media take their responsibility seriously and help each other in strengthening democratic institutions like Electoral System.