

## AIR Spotlight - Election Commission of India and the Democratic Process

AIR Spotlight is an insightful programme featured daily on the All India Radio Newsonair. In this program, many eminent panelists discuss issues of importance which can be quite helpful in [IAS exam](#) preparation. In this article, the topic of discussion is the Election Commission and the democratic process in India.

### Participants

1. Sushil Chandra: Chief Election Commissioner, Election Commission of India (ECI).
2. Anand Chaturvedi, AIR Correspondent.

### Context:

The Chief Election Commissioner has discussed aspects of elections in India and various efforts made by the [Election Commission of India](#) in conducting free and fair elections.

### Introduction:

India is the largest democracy in the world and the first step in ensuring democracy is a free and fair election. ECI is the independent constitutional body entrusted with conducting elections at the centre and state levels.

### Preparation in conducting elections:

- ECI faces many issues in conducting elections both at the national and the state levels. Preparation for the election starts six months before conducting actual elections. India has 93.76 crore voters and many languages. Managing elections at such a level is a very huge task.
- ECI ensures that no voter should be left behind. Each and every eligible person should be able to vote, especially women, elderly people, and the disabled.
- Officials take special care to ensure that these groups should not have any problem in casting their votes.
- Some booths are exclusively reserved for women and are managed by women personnel.

### Processes in conducting elections:

- Polling booths are set up at various locations and required facilities are made available.
- Then election observers are deployed to oversee the elections.
- CAPF personnel are there to protect the polling stations.
- Security arrangements are made for the transport of [EVMs](#).
- In the recent assembly elections held in five states, the postal ballot system was used extensively to ensure that senior citizens, COVID patients, and PWDs could cast their votes smoothly. In total, 13.4 lakh postal ballots were used.
- In these assembly elections, ECI had also ensured door-to-door voting for those who could not come to polling stations. Videography was done to ensure transparency.

### Revision of electoral rolls:

- It is one of the most important tasks of ECI. Officials conduct intensive registration drives for eligible voters by going to colleges, villages, and through door-to-door campaigns.
- On 25th January, which is also National Voter's Day, the Election Commission started 'e-EPIC' (Electronic Electoral Photo Identity Card), a non-editable and secure PDF version of the electoral photo identity card (EPIC) to increase voter's registration. Over 90 lakhs of e-EPIC cards were issued.

#### **Electronic voting machines (EVM):**

- EVMs have been used all over the country since 2004 although they were introduced in 1982. In 2013, VVPAT was introduced. Now, voters can see and verify the vote that they have cast.
- Since 2004, 132 assembly elections and 4 Lok Sabha elections have been conducted and EVMs have proved efficient in conducting elections. EVMs cannot be manipulated or hacked.
- As per the directions of the [Supreme Court of India](#), votes of 5 EVMs are matched with VVPAT in every constituency to ensure transparency.

#### **Use of technology in elections:**

- Technology has proved to be a great enabler of the election process. ECI has harnessed the power of technology in many ways.
- ECI has set up a voter registration centre and a voters' helpline to facilitate voter registration.
- Now, nominations for elections by candidates can also be filed online.
- EVM gives results in a quick time and the election process is over in a minimum time period.
- ECI is using the [Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System \(ETPBS\)](#) to conduct postal voting for armed forces who are spread along in different locations.
- ECI is also working on remote voting so that NRIs, migrants can cast their votes.

#### **Steps taken by ECI to increase voter turnout:**

- Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation program (SVEEP) is the flagship program of the Election Commission of India for voter education, spreading voter awareness, and promoting voter literacy in India.
- Officials also do door-to-door campaigns and inform people about the right as well as the duty of people to vote in elections.
- ECI also employs pick-up facilities for senior citizens and PWDs to ensure that they can vote.
- Exclusive polling booths for women are also set up.

#### **Conclusion:**

It is the fructification of efforts made by ECI that voter turnout has increased from 45% in 1951 to 85% in three states and 74% in the other two states, in the recently concluded assembly elections in five states. ECI has played a pivotal role in ensuring free and fair elections in India.