

AIR Spotlight: Remote Voting

AIR Spotlight is an insightful program featured daily on the All India Radio News on air. In this program, many eminent panellists discuss issues of importance which can be quite helpful in [IAS exam](#) preparation.

This article is about the discussion on: “**Remote Voting for Domestic Migrants**”.

Participants:

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Context - The ECI has proposed RVM (Remote Voting Machine)- a modified version of the time-tested model of M3 EVMs (Electronic Voting Machines) to enable voting at remote polling stations i.e., polling stations outside home constituency, for domestic migrants.

Need For Remote Voting -

Universal Adult Franchise, also known as General Suffrage or Common Suffrage grants the right to vote to all adult citizens (18 years and above) irrespective of caste, religion, colour, education and economic status. The system of Adult Franchise is the bedrock of a democratic system and is founded on the principle of equality.

- There has been a significant increase in voter registration over the past years. However, the stagnation of voter participation is the cause of the concern. In the general elections held in 2019, there was 67.4% voter turnout. Voter participation is comparatively high in India; yet, in 2019, one in three voters did not turn up.
- The Election Commission of India is concerned about the issue of over 30 Crore electors not exercising their franchise and also differential voter turnout in various States/UTs.
- Apart from urban apathy (people due not turn up to vote in cities), adult apathy, domestic migration is one of the important causes of lower participation in the election process which needs to be addressed.
- Domestic migration could be due to work, education, marriage. Approximately 85% of the internal migration is within the states.
- As per Census 2011, 45.36 Crore Indians (37 per cent) in India are migrants i.e., now settled in a place different from their previous residence, however, 75 percent of such migrations are on account of marriages and family related reasons.

- To make the election process more inclusive, and address the issue of domestic migration ECI has come up with the proposal of a multi- constituency remote electronic voting machine (RVM).

Remote Voting Machine (RVM)-

ECI, Election Commission of India has developed a prototype of a multi-constituency remote electronic voting machine for domestic migrants, a potentially landmark development that can boost voter participation and eliminate problems of travelling to home districts during polls for voting. The voter will have to register online or offline for a remote voting facility. This has to be done within a pre-notified time with the concerned Returning Officer of their home constituency.

- This is a modified version of the time-tested model of M3 EVMs (Electronic Voting Machines) to enable voting at remote polling stations.
 - EVMs started being used on a larger scale in 1992 and since 2000, have been used in all Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections.
 - The current EVM setup has a Balloting Unit (BU) which is connected to the VVPAT (Voter Verified Paper Trail Audit) printer, both of which are inside the voting compartment.
- RVM can handle up to 72 multiple constituencies from a single remote polling booth.
- RVM is similar to EVM in terms of security and voting experience.
- The commission has maintained that RVMs, developed by the public sector undertaking Electronics Corporation of India Ltd, will be a standalone device not connected to the internet.

Challenges Ahead -

RVM is a new technology and will be a transformational initiative for strengthening participation in electoral democracy. It is in its initial stage, (Chief Election Commissioner, Rajiv Kumar described it as “work in progress”) and there are legal, administrative and operational issues that need to be sorted out. Moreover, a consensus through deliberations and discussions needs to be built amongst the political parties to accept it.

- The challenges which the current EVMs are facing will persist with RVMs, since these have the same security systems.
- The challenges also include how voter registration will take place in remote locations, how names will be removed from the electoral rolls of the home constituency, how remote voting applications will be made transparent etc.
- Necessary changes in the RPA (Representation of Peoples Act).
- Defining a migrant who is eligible to vote remotely.