A QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF THE ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA

MY VOTE MATTERS

August 2021 | Volume III | Issue 1

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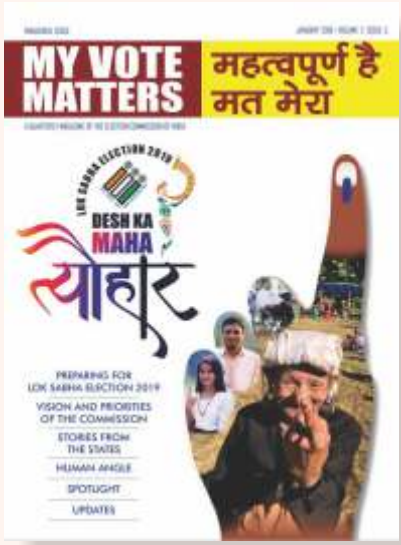
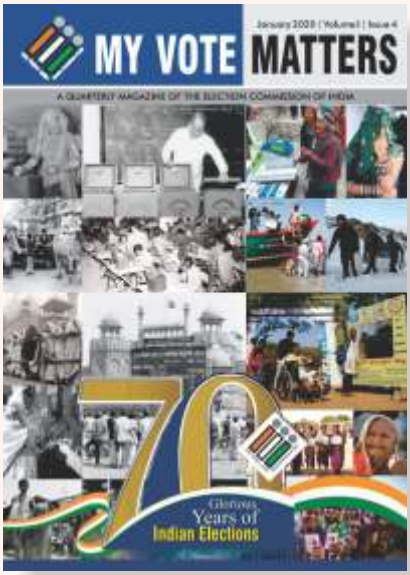
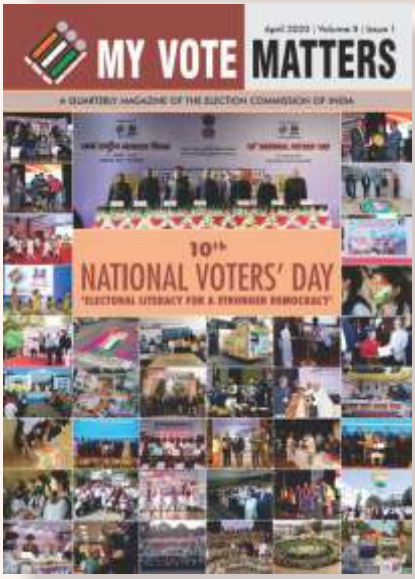
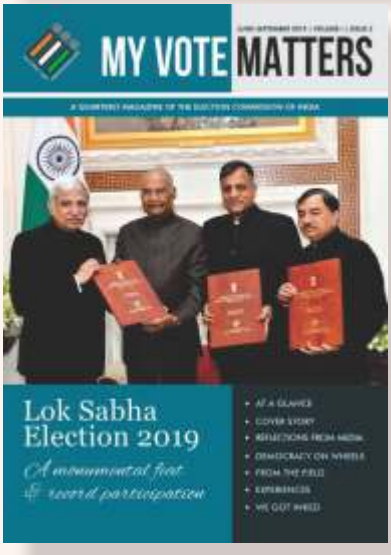
Journey of
My Vote Matters









From the Chief Election Commissioner of India

It gives me pleasure to share with you the next issue of 'My Vote Matters'. The recent elections to Legislative Assemblies of Assam, Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal were conducted successfully with utmost security and safety ensured to our voters.

Conducting elections in 824 constituencies with 2,66,712 polling stations for 18.74 crore electors, spread over March 27th, 2021 to April 29th, 2021, was one the biggest electoral exercise in the world amidst pandemic. Committed to ensure safe & accessible elections, Election Commission of India had issued broad guidelines, in consultation with all stakeholders & health authorities, to conduct elections with COVID safety measures and ensure facilitation for the senior citizens and PwDs. All COVID-19 precautions were adhered to in the field and those means developed confidence of the voter to come out and vote fearlessly. Despite the numerous challenges, polling in each state/ U.T. witnessed high voter turnout.

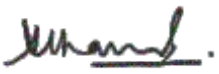
In terms of scale and complexity, the Indian election is a massive management exercise. It involves comprehensive and meticulous planning down to the level of each and every polling station. The virtual tour, during International Election Visitors Programme, of different polling stations on the poll day (6th April 2021), witnessing the polling arrangements and taking a live feedback from the voters and officials at the polling booths, was a great success where more than 100 delegates from all over the world watched Indian elections in process.

It is a source of immense satisfaction that the elections of 2021 were delivered to the nation in a free, fair, peaceful, inclusive, accessible, participative, safe and ethical manner. From formulating COVID safety guidelines to ensuring the training of polling officials, the entire election machinery across the country worked in tandem, beating the challenges of global pandemic as well as geo-climatic adversities with a deep commitment to the constitutional mandate of ensuring a credible election.

The Commission thanks the voters particularly of the recent poll gone states who came out to exercise their right to franchise following the requisite COVID norms of social distancing and sanitization and reposed their faith in ECI despite obvious health concerns. We also thank all the stakeholders, the entire election machinery including security personnel who worked with tremendous dedication and devotion to duty and made the recently concluded elections a grand success. I am delighted to present to you this issue of 'My Vote Matters' that celebrates this achievement.

Moreover, I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome Sh. Anup Chandra Pandey, who recently joined as the Election Commissioner of India, as a new member in the ECI family. With his vast field experience and varied exposure, I am sure he would be able to contribute immensely in all our endeavours.

It is indeed heartening to see the contributions to the magazine from across the country and from our colleagues at the ECI as they bring to you the real life experiences of the elections. The narration and the pictures are very informative, educative and inspiring. I compliment Sh. Umesh Sinha, Secretary General, ECI and the Editor-in-Chief of the Magazine and his entire team for the magnificent work done in bringing out this issue.



Sushil Chandra
Chief Election Commissioner of India

From the Editor-in-Chief

Dear Reader,

It is a matter of great privilege for me to present the latest issue of 'My Vote Matters'. This issue highlights the recently-held State Legislative Assembly Elections in 4 states namely Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and one union territory viz Puducherry. Conducting elections amidst a pandemic is yet another milestone in consolidation of democratic polity of the country.

This magazine includes the electoral information and good practices adopted by all four states and Puducherry in the conduct of recent elections. In addition to informative articles on core subjects, this issue includes new initiatives and topics of concurrent interest in elections, electoral processes and practices with the objective of developing a larger connect and interface with all stakeholders. A case study on cVigil in Kerala Assembly Elections and Postal Ballot Facility in Chhattisgarh in the recent by-elections make an interesting read.

The virtual International Election Visitors Programme, held on April 5-6, 2021, witnessed participation of more than 100 delegates from 26 Election Management Bodies (EMBs) and three international organizations. The programme, providing an overview of Indian electoral process and also a virtual tour of various polling stations in 5 states to show polling in process, is included in the magazine. Stories from the field and updates on Electoral Literacy Clubs further enrich the content available to the reader.

The National Voters' Day 2021 was held in the virtual presence of Hon'ble President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind. The theme for this year's National Voters' Day was 'Making Our Voters Empowered, Vigilant, Safe and Informed. 'Hello Voters', a 24*7 online web radio on ECI website,

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and e-EPIC was launched. National Awards 2020-21 for Best Electoral Practices were presented for excellence, proficiency and innovation in election processes and procedures. The national celebration as well as the state celebrations of NVD 2021 and the winners of National Awards have been included as a separate section in this issue. I congratulate all awardees on their exemplary work in the field of elections.

I express my deep gratitude towards Sh. Sushil Chandra, Chief Election Commissioner, and Sh. Rajiv Kumar, Election Commissioner whose valuable guidance was paramount for developing this magazine. I welcome Sh. Anup Chandra Pandey as Election Commissioner and look forward to his support in making this magazine a comprehensive platform for electoral knowledge and voter education.

I thank all my colleagues from the Commission, Chief Electoral Officers and all other contributors who strived to curate this informative issue. I urge them to keep contributing in the future issues proactively in order to strengthen our bond with all the stakeholders and the voters at large. Let us all work towards our collective vision of strengthening democracy.

Umesh Sinha
Secretary General, ECI

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Salient Features of recent elections conducted during the pandemic

Assembly Elections in Assam, Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu & West Bengal

First things first: Acknowledging our Resilient Voters

As the world's largest democracy, India is characterized by a robust and rich democratic culture marked by faith of Indian people in the electoral process. The strength of a democracy lies in conducting free and fair elections at regular periodic intervals.

In order to uphold the sanctity of our democracy, the Election Commission of India resolved to conduct elections in the country amid a pandemic with strict adherence to health and safety guidelines. Starting with the Rajya Sabha Elections in 2020, the Commission went on to conduct elections to the Legislative Assembly in Bihar and recorded a major feat in voter participation.

Henceforth, Election Commission of India announced the dates of poll to the Legislative Assemblies of Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Puducherry on February 26, 2021 at a press conference in New Delhi. An aggregate number of 824 Assembly Constituencies were bound for polls between March 27 and April 29, 2021. Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry were scheduled for single-phase polls on April 06, 2021. A three-phased polling was scheduled in Assam on March 27, April 01 and April 06, 2021. West Bengal elections were spread out in eight phases on March 27, April 01, April 06, April 10, April 17, April 22, April 26 and April 29, 2021 with the counting being scheduled on May 02, 2021.

Conducting elections in 824 constituencies across 2,66,712 polling stations with an electorate size of 18,74,11,544 electors in the five states/ UT was one of the biggest electoral exercise in the world amidst the pandemic. Despite the numerous challenges, polling in each State/UT witnessed high voter turnout. While the Union Territory of Puducherry recorded a turnout of 83.42%, West Bengal followed with 82.06% voter turnout. The northeastern state of Assam was close behind with 82.03% turnout. Moreover, Kerala recorded 74.06% turnout and Tamil Nadu witnessed 73.51% turnout.

This was a great achievement by Election Commission of India and it was possible only due to the untiring efforts of election officials on the field that built confidence of the voter to come out and vote fearlessly as well as the determination and faith of the Indian voters in the electoral process.

Strict COVID protocols:

The COVID safety protocols were required to be followed as strictly as in the previous year. The Commission on August 21, 2020 had issued guidelines which were followed during the General Election to Legislative Assembly of Bihar. It was then stipulated that these guidelines would be followed during the conduct of Elections to Legislative Assemblies of the five States/UT. Nodal Officers for COVID-19 were designated for each State, District and Constituency to oversee COVID related measures. The Chief Electoral Officers of the five States/UT were directed to make comprehensive State Election Plans following the guidelines relating to arrangement and preventive measures, in consultation with Nodal Officers for COVID-19.

The basic protocols include:

- Every person to wear a face mask during all election related activities.
- Earmarking circles for 15-20 persons of 2 yards (6 feet) for standing in queue.
- As far as practicable, large halls to be identified for election related activities i.e trainings/ polling/ counting etc.
- At the entry of hall/ room/ premises used for election purposes- (a) Social distancing to be maintained (b) Thermal Scanning of all persons to be carried out (c) Sanitizer to be made available at all locations.
- Hand gloves to be provided to the voter for signing on the voter register and pressing button of EVM for voting.
- Electors with above normal temperature in two consecutive testing to vote at the last hour of poll with strict COVID-19 preventive measures.
- Polling time increased for one more hour so that COVID-19 patients who are quarantined are allowed to cast their vote at the last hour of the poll day at their respective Polling Stations, under the supervision of health authorities strictly following COVID-19 related preventive measures.

- Anybody violating instructions on COVID-19 measures liable to proceedings as per the provisions of Section 51 to 60 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005, besides legal action under Section 188 of the IPC, and other legal provisions as applicable.

It was imperative to increase the number of polling stations and counting halls, to enforce the social distancing norms. Thus every single booth, where the number of electors was found exceeding one thousand, was compulsorily split into two. Moreover, adequate number of vehicles were to be mobilized for movement of polling personnel, security personnel etc. to ensure compliance of COVID-19 guidelines. This exercise included efficacious logistic support in terms of men, materials and infrastructure and with this, the election machinery was prepared for conducting not only free, fair, inclusive and transparent election but also a 'safe' election.

This was not all. COVID-19 protocols were followed to ensure the safety and security of election officials too. As a precautionary measure, the Commission sought the vaccination of all polling officials beforehand.

Excellent job done by the Observers & Special Observers

Election Observers are one of the most important torchbearers of Election Commission of India. With the commitment of the ECI to ensure empowered, vigilant, well-informed and safe voting – the role of Observers is always paramount in ensuring proper direction to field-level officers so that ECI's constitutional mandate is scrupulously fulfilled.

The evidentiary value of Observers' Reports becomes a key factor for ECI to base their judgment for further directions. Observers need to be conversant with all legal provisions and instructions as well as the latest circulars of ECI for effective implementation on the ground. Hence a briefing meeting was organized on March 03, 2021 for Observers to be deployed for the General Election 2021 to the Legislative Assemblies of Assam, Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal.

Officers from the IAS, IPS, IRS and other Central Services were deployed as Observers, which included 529 as General Observers (polling), 167 as Police Observers with 277 additionally appointed as Counting Observers.

Moreover, Special Observers were appointed by the Election Commission. Special Observers are usually appointed for specific problems of law and order and unlawful money distribution, among other issues, during polls. Special Observers are usually of the seniority of either a sitting Chief Secretary or an officer who has retired as either a Director General of police or a chief secretary. A briefing for the Special Observers for the General Election 2021 to the Legislative Assemblies of the five states/UT was

organized on March 04, 2021.The Special Observers who had worked during the previous elections apprised the Commission of the issues and challenges they had faced based on their past experiences.

These elections witnessed 15 Special Observers being appointed to supervise the deployment of forces and their randomization for poll duties. As part of their duties, the Special Observers visited their assigned States/UTs to supervise and monitor poll preparedness by State and District-level officials. Additionally, they met with the General and Police Observers deployed in the field to ensure all preparations were going ahead as planned.

With measures such as web casting of all vulnerable booths and the appointment of upright and efficient senior officers - a free, fair, transparent and safe election was being worked towards steadily.

Democracies across the world virtually witness our polling process

International Election Visitor Programme (IEVP 2021) was organized on April 05-06, 2021 with over 100 delegates from 26 countries and 03 international organizations joining in virtually to witness the live polling process at the polling stations during the Assembly elections being conducted in five states/ UT.

On April 06, 2021, the delegates of IEVP were given a live snapshot on electoral process on the polling day through a virtual tour that included familiarization with the electoral process, polling station arrangements, facilitation of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) and senior citizens at the polling station. The world watched as a live virtual tour to polling stations on poll day demonstrated the polling day arrangements adhering to COVID-19 precautions, such as social distancing, thermal scanning and sanitization being followed diligently. Moreover, live feedback from the DEOs, the Election Observers, Special Observers and the voters from different polling booths, showcased the efforts by election officials in the field and the faith of Indian voter in the electoral process to the world.

Saluting our senior citizens and PwD Voters

The senior citizens are the sentinels of our democracy. Besides arrangements of transportation and facilities like ramp, wheelchair, volunteer and separate queue at the polling station, now Postal Ballot facility is also provided to senior citizens who are above 80 years and PwD voters. As a special provision for the recent Assembly elections and By-elections conducted amidst the pandemic, a COVID suspected/infected person too could avail the Postal Ballot facility after certification from the approved health authority.

Every senior citizen above 80 years of age and all PwD voters have the option to cast their vote at the polling booth or opt to cast their vote from home by informing the BLO. On being registered as a postal ballot voter, a team of election officials arrives on the scheduled notified day and time before the poll day. The voter is provided with a ballot paper, that is marked by him as per his choice and sealed before handing it back to the election team. To ensure the transparency and secrecy of vote, the entire process is video-graphed.

Extending the Postal Ballot facilty as well as ensuring facilities at the polling booth has led to a tremendous increase in polling by the PwD voters and senior citizens above 80 years of age. As evident from the table on the number of postal ballots in each state/UT in these elections, Kerala witnessed the highest number of postal ballot votes followed by West Bengal and Tamil Nadu.

Postal Ballot Votes (casted) In Legislative State Assembly Elections 2021:

State/ UT	PwD	Sr Citizens
Assam	12,850	58,924
Kerala	51,466	2,94,077
Puducherry	1,546	2,929
Tamil Nadu	28,167	1,03,281
West Bengal	40,170	2,15,019

Charting the Way Forward

Election Commission of India, in furtherance for continuing the process of reforms has set up a Core Committee to identify learning experiences, shortcomings and best practices from recently poll-gone States of Assam, Bihar, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and UT of Puducherry.

The committee, comprising of Deputy Election Commissioners, Election Commission of India and the Chief Electoral Officers (CEOs) of recent poll-gone States and few select Special Observers and Observers, is tasked to identify short-comings or gaps in ECI regulatory regime, if any and the gaps in implementation and enforcement at the level of CEOs/District officials. In addition to this, the Committee is evaluating measures to further strengthen the expenditure management regulation for inducement free election, as well as strengthen the offices of electoral machinery at the State level namely the offices of CEOs, DEOs and ROs.

The Committee is also taking inputs from State Nodal Officers of different divisions like Police, Expenditure, Health Authorities as well as from numerous officials identified by CEOs which include District Election Officers (DEOs), Superintendent of Police (SPs) Officers, Returning Officers (ROs), Polling officials and BLOs about the issues and challenges faced at the grass root levels.

Additionally, the Committee is also examining the recommendations of the nine Working Groups that were set up post Lok Sabha Elections 2019 in light of experiences in the poll-gone States. The Commission continues to strive for free, fair, accessible, ethical and safe elections based on its motto, 'No Voter to be Left Behind'. It is expected that several valuable inputs or recommendations will emerge out of these deliberations and the forthcoming elections will benefit from the recommendations of the Core Committee.

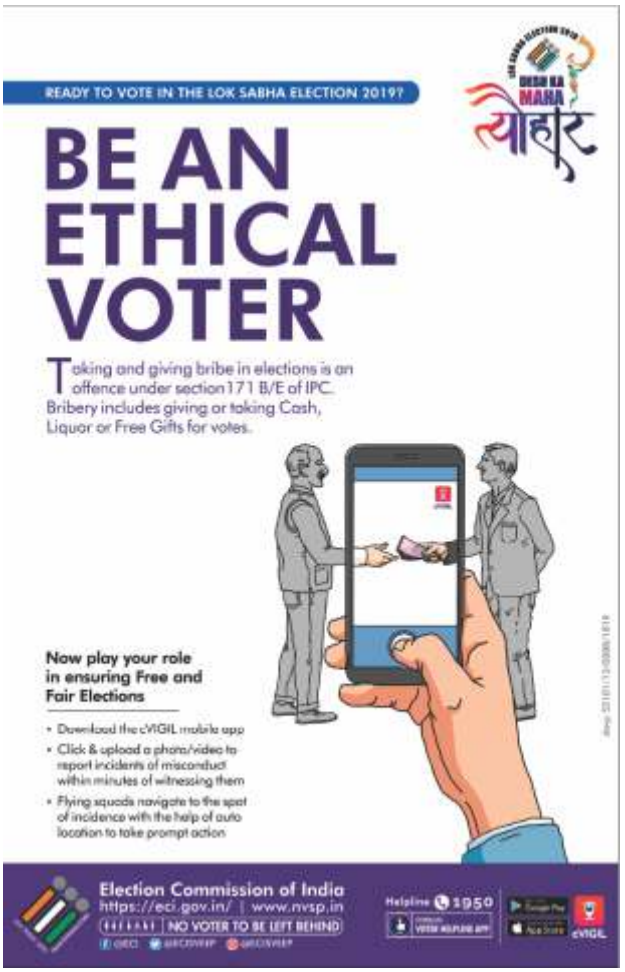
Umesh Sinha
Secretary General, ECI

A panacea for fair elections in Kerala

A case study on cVigil

Technology plays a big role in elections in India. Electoral rolls have been digitised; polling booths are mapped through GPS software; voting takes place through EVMs, and the aggregation of votes is an electronic process. Now, the Election Commission of India (ECI) is trying to engage citizens in the electioneering process much before the day of voting through a smart phone App developed by it and named, cVIGIL. It is a great leap of faith by the ECI to give an opportunity to the common citizen to police and supervise the means and methods deployed by each candidate and political party to woo the voters. Established a day before the Constitution was adopted and India was declared a 'Republic' in 1950, ECI has come a long way to fulfil its mandate to conduct free, fair and participative elections. Late T.N. Sheshan may have given the ECI a place in the popular public discourse in the 1990s and created awareness of the constitutional and statutory powers that vest in the ECI. Yet, it is the institutional and individual empowerment through digital technology that has given real teeth to the ECI.

The ECI has sought to curb malpractices in elections through strict compliance of the Model Code of Conduct(MCC), which has the consensus of the political parties to back it. The local muscle power is counterbalanced by a deployment of central para-military forces; flying squads are positioned to follow leads of misuse of money or power, check posts at jurisdictional boundaries of taluks, districts and states are erected to curb the free flow of money and liquor, and expenses by the candidate and the political parties are contemporaneously examined during the election process. These are predominantly administrative measures - through cVIGIL, ECI has made an endeavour to rope in observant and diligent citizens to supervise, monitor, and report any infringement of the MCC.



In essence, cVIGIL is watchfulness by the citizens. A real-life incident would illustrate a typical use of this tool; it is one of the 56 such events reported by the citizens in the Kerala Assembly Elections, 2021. Anita (name changed) notices a loud political gathering in her locality's garden beyond 10pm. She believes such

Sl. No.	Nature of the complaint	Number of complaints	Found correct on inquiry and action taken	Percentage of complaints found correct
1	Campaigning during ban period	306	248	81%
2	Campaigning within 200m of the election booth	496	496	100%
3	Display of firearms or intimidation	385	346	89.9%
4	Property defacement	15720	15574	99%
5	Posters/ banners without permission	130430	128125	98.2%

a gathering is not permitted by law. She photo records the meeting and transmits it through the App on her smartphone. The flying squad, dispatched by the Control Room in the D.M.'s office, affirms Anita's video. A violation of the MCC is registered against the candidate and the political party. Anita's complaint could not be ignored. The permanent digital imprint ensures that any deviation from the set norms of action could potentially lead to administrative action against the erring official; the App records the time and the recipient's details. The default setting of the App ensures anonymity of Anita. It is a safeguard to protect her against any potential retribution by the aggrieved person or party.

cVIGIL has already caught the fancy of citizens in Kerala. A more educated electorate, a wider penetration of the smartphone network among the voters, and mobilisation of the masses through various party cadres are possible reasons for cVIGIL's ready acceptability in Kerala. The potential of cVIGIL in bringing out violations of the law as well as the best practice enunciated in the MCC can be gauged from the following data from the Assembly Elections in Kerala in April, 2021.

In a robust democracy, citizen participation in the electoral process goes beyond voting and it is articulated in many types of engagement. S. Birch and R. Dean postulate that it ranges from choice and voice on one hand to arbitration and oversight on the other extreme. The choice and voice type of engagement activities give power and influence to the citizens, without imposing large participation costs in terms of time and money. cVIGIL is an excellent example of choice and voice collaboration between citizens and the ECI. Citizens like Anita are conscientious and willing to expend some energy and time to report an infringement of the MCC. She doesn't wish to confront the wrongdoers, and trusts in the fairness of the state enforcement machinery to act on her lead. The ECI is confident that as more and more violators are brought to book through cVIGIL, many more such Anitas would come forward to report malpractices in the elections, and cVIGIL would become an effective tool to ensure fairer and more transparent elections.

H. R. Srinivas
CEO, Bihar

Postal Ballot Facility

Ensuring COVID-safe and Inclusive Elections

The Election Commission of India has conducted several by-elections during the COVID-19 pandemic, striving to uphold our constitutional democracy. The facility of Postal Ballot was also extended by the Commission to safeguard the voting rights of one and all. Simply put, Postal Ballot is a method developed by the Commission which allows PwD voters and senior citizens who are above 80 years, the option to cast their vote from their home. Electoral officials reach the houses of these registered voters with the voting machines so voters can cast their vote. In order to utilize this facility, one has to inform their BLO beforehand and ensure they are on the list of Postal Ballot voters.

Now, with the elections conducted amidst pandemic, the Commission decided to extend this facility of Postal Ballot to COVID affected/suspected persons as well. This step was initiated during the election to the Bihar Legislative Assembly in 2020 and has remained applicable in all the state and by-elections conducted during COVID-19 pandemic. With this measure, the Commission reiterated their motto of 'No Voter to be Left Behind'.

Postal Ballot for elderly in Rajasthan

Rajasthan witnessed peaceful polling in 1145 polling stations spread across the three Assembly Constituencies on April 19 in Sahara (Bhilwara), Rajsamand (Rajsamand) and Sujangarh (Churu). The facility of Postal Ballot was introduced in these by polls for voters above 80 years of age, the differently abled and the COVID suspected/affected voters. Chief Electoral Officer Praveen Gupta had said efforts were made by the ECI and election department to leave no voters behind.

It was a challenging task to bring voters above 80 years and PwD voters to the booth. As per a report by a prominent daily, Gupta said a total of 29,180 voters in the three assemblies are either aged 80 or above, PwD or COVID affected.

The success of Postal Ballot in Marwahi By-Election

Marwahi By-Elections 2020 in the state of Chhattisgarh was unique in all aspects; it gave a unique insights and a life long experience of conducting elections. In pursuance of letter issued by Election Commission of India dated Sept 17, 2020, CEO Chhattisgarh office made a special arrangement for voting through postal ballot by absentee voters falling into the category of senior citizens, PwDs and COVID-19 suspected or affected persons during Marwahi By- Elections 2020.

During by-elections, a special advertisement campaign was run to create awareness amongst the absentee voters of above mentioned category who filled & submitted form 12 D, opting for casting their vote through postal ballot. A total of 1104 postal ballots were issued out of which 1068 exercised this option. These included one COVID Patient, 505 Persons with Disabilities and 562 elderly citizens aged above 80 years.

In order to maintain transparency and confidence of the voters, DEO Marwahi ensured all security arrangements. Moreover videography and photography of the entire process was also taken up. Further to maintain the confidentiality and sanctity of the voting right of the voters, a separate postal ballot booth was created within the house premises of the voter. After a successful conduct of Marwahi By-Elections 2020 (77.89%), the initiative to understand the success ratio and to know the feedback of the above voters who availed this facility was taken in to account.

SVEEP team was sent out to randomly select and visit the absentee voters who availed this facility. The team visited & interacted with the absentee voters and gathered the feedback. The gist of collected feedback is very encouraging and voters gave thumbs up to this facility and wished that this continues in future as well. All the senior citizen voters showered their blessings on ECI for such facility. Following is the account of the interaction with the senior voters, all of whom are residents of Marwahi constituency in Chhattisgarh.

Interview with voters who voted through postal ballot option

Rambati Bai Rajput
88 Years

Q : Can you please tell me when did you vote for the first time and what was your age at that time?

A : I can't recall precisely, however it was around 15-20 years ago when I had gone for casting my vote for the first time.

Q : You have been casting your vote at the polling station. This time you voted through postal ballot at your residence itself. Can you please share something with us about this experience?

A : The facility of voting from my home is nice and convenient because it relived me from the burden of walking to the polling station as well as rescued me from standing in the queue.

Q : You are the senior most member of your family. Do you have any message for the youth of your home, family, village and society so that they could be motivated to participate in electoral process?

A : The entire youth should come forward and participate in the election process. All members of the family should get their names registered in the voter's list and must cast their votes.

Q : Can you recall the last election you went for voting?

A: Prior to Marwahi by-election, I voted in the 2018-19 election.

Q: You used to go to the polling station to cast your vote. How much time did it use to take on an average for it to be your turn to come?

A: It used to take time and I had to stand in queue. This was difficult due to my age. However, the facility of voting from home provided this time was very good.

Shyamla Shastri
86 Years

Dukhuram
81 Years

Q : If a comparison is to be drawn between voting at the polling booth and voting via postal ballot from your residence, which do you find more suitable and convenient?

A : The facility of voting from home provided this time is very convenient as I didn't have to go to the polling station and stand in the sun or rain.

Q : You are the elderly member of your family. Do you have any message for the youth of your home, family, village and society?

A : Everyone should value their power to vote. They should make an informed and ethical decision, after all future of our nation depends on it.

Q : When did you vote for the first time and what was your age then?

A : I was around 28-29 years old.

Q : How was the experience of Postal ballot?

A : The voting from home process is better and much more convenient for elderly citizens like us.

Q : You are the elderly member of your family. Do you have any message for the youth of your home, family, village and society?

A : We used to vote regularly and so should they. They should cast their votes as per their understanding. They must not sell out their votes for the greed of money.

Ramnath
87 Years

Reena Babasaheb Kangale
CEO, Chhattisgarh

Enrollment to Elections amidst pandemic

An indomitable spirit!

COVID-19 brought the entire world to a standstil! The pandemic had disrupted every aspect of human life; the disruption is still continuing, with varying intensity! What it could not deter was the spirit of Indian democracy. The Election Commission of India took a 'Leap of faith', and announced and conducted elections amidst the pandemic, in Bihar in November 2020 and in Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Kerala, Assam and Puducherry in early 2021. The 'faith' is an integral value for human survival. It's faith which compels human beings to continue their march in the stages of civilization, and so the ECI in the conduct of Indian Elections!

As the entire world was following social distancing to curb the pandemic spread further, maintaining and ensuring such distances in Indian elections was a herculean task. The entire process of enrollment to voting to counting and announcement of results has multiple touch points and human congregation among other aspects of human proximities. It was a challenging task for ECI to fulfill demands of COVID protocols. A meticulous planning, training and capacity building, sensitization programmes, development of COVID protocols and inclusion of the same under Assured Minimum Facilities (AMF) at polling stations, reliance on technological advancements with an undeterred 'leap of faith', led to the smooth, participative, inducement free and fair conduct of world's largest elections amidst pandemic.

Vaccination drive for Election machinery, issuance of 'Broad Guidelines for Conduct of General Election/Bye-election during COVID-19' and their strict compliance on the ground, usage of COVID materials like PPE kits, sanitizers etc, SVEEP activities finetuned to build the confidence of voters to cast their vote winning over their own fear of pandemic, utilizing the potential of new age communication technologies, regular media briefings on COVID safety guidelines and COVID sensitization sessions for representatives of various political parties, among other measures, led to many successes during these elections, for the world to emulate! An inducement free elections with a record seizure of inducements of over Rs 1000+ crore, near violence free elections, with strict vigil ensured by all authorities and the biggest ever democratic exercise with high voter turnout amidst pandemic, which was close to previous assembly elections and at places more than earlier elections, are few noteworthy feats achieved by the Election Commission of India. 57.28% voter turnout was seen during Bihar Assembly elections, 2020, which was better than the earlier count of 56.88% of 2015 assembly elections.

The innovation of postal ballot for 80+ age groups, PwDs and COVID infected/suspected patients under quarantine, led to an all accessible election for those who could have missed polling, otherwise. Further, the pandemic led lockdown and thus the challenge of migration led registration in the electoral roll was addressed appropriately by the election machinery on the field, through special registration drives and online facilities extended through Voter Helpline App. To review and learn from the experiences of the poll-gone states/ UT, a virtual SVEEP Nodal Officer's (SNO) Conference was organized on June 24, 2021. Each election gone state was asked to present their successful endeavours with an aim to educate other states/ UTs, so as to empower them to emulate suitable initiatives in the upcoming elections.

It was witnessed that in view of COVID safety protocols, emphasis was laid on virtual awareness campaigns by each State/ U.T, by effective involvement of social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp and messaging apps. Tamil Nadu pioneered with educating on voting and safety precautions through virtual reality initiatives. Online competitions such as quiz, logo making and mascot designing witnessed high participation from all age groups in Tamil Nadu. 'Coffee with R.O.' programme on different platforms and animated films by West Bengal were appreciated by all. Moreover, West Bengal designed a web portal as a one-stop solution for all voters opting for Postal Ballot.

SVEEP activities following COVID safety protocols (mask, social distancing and sanitization) targeted at various groups like youth, women, PwD, Senior citizens, migrants and marginalized groups etc too were adopted. Besides the usual reachout mediums, Puducherry used LED Digital Boards and conducted T-20 matches. Tamil Nadu set up EPIC kiosks at central locations and also sent 'Meghdhoot postcards' to all electors in collaboration with postal department. West

Bengal spread awareness by decorating trams with election related messages and both West Bengal and Kerala promoted eco-friendly polling stations. An eco-friendly miniature replica of Model Polling station using coconut shells and palm leaves made by an Electoral Literacy Club of a Government school at Puducherry was showcased internationally in a virtual tour of polling stations on the poll day to the delegates of International Election Visitors Programme 2021.

New procedures related to conduct of elections and election officials too were adopted during these elections. Assam developed an online portal - The Learning Management System (LMS) to assess the learning of each election official after the election training. Further, Puducherry adopted of Real Time Poll Monitoring System (RTPMS) and Polling Personnel Management System (PPMS) called 'Therthal Pani' for effective election monitoring and management.

Elections held in the wake of the pandemic, helped in evolution of a sustainable Election process and re-establishing the faith of people, in the 'indomitable spirit' of Election Machinery in India. No great feat could be achieved without taking a well thought out, risk. ECI showed the world, how an institution should carve out its path, overcoming all hurdles on the way, to fulfill its democratic duty!

With Great Power comes Great Responsibility!

Santosh Ajmera
Director SVEEP, ECI

Madras High Court upholds Postal Ballot

Towards inclusive democracy

Postal ballot facility for voters with disabilities, senior citizens and COVID affected/suspected voters, announced by the Election Commission of India (ECI) was challenged by a political party from Tamil Nadu at the Madras High Court vide a writ petition in 2021, about a month before the General Elections to the State Legislative Assembly Elections 2021 in the States of Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala & the Union Territory of Puducherry. The writ petition challenged the constitutional validity of Section 60(c) of the Representation of the People Act of 1951, which empowers ECI to notify a class of voters such as those above 80 years of age, the physically challenged, those under quarantine due to COVID-19 and people involved in essential services who can choose to cast their votes through postal ballot instead of visiting the polling stations (Dravida Munnetara Kazhagam vs The Union of India, The Election Commission of India & The Chief Electoral Officer, Tamil Nadu).

The Judges observed that the move of the Election Commission of India was nothing but to make the election process inclusive for Persons with Disabilities. If the process is made inclusive without compromising on either the secrecy of the ballot or the fairness in the conduct of elections, it would be a greater cause to celebrate and compliment the conducting body. The move of Election Commission of India is to afford Persons with Disabilities their basic right to participate in the democratic process. The honorable Court thereby dismissed the petition, declaring that it is well within the plenary powers of the Commission to issue guidelines to facilitate the elections for Persons with Disability through postal ballot.

This verdict was a great relief to many voters with high support needs while it was considered to be beneficial for all Persons with Disabilities during the current crisis of COVID-19 pandemic, as they experience extreme level of exclusion & vulnerability as emphasised by various international agencies such as the United Nations and WHO. Civil Society Groups also opined that postal ballot provides safeguard from environmental health hazards for voters having health disabilities specified in the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 such as hemophilia, thalassemia, sickle cell disorder, acid attack victims, multiple sclerosis, parkinson's disease, muscular dystrophyet etc.

Most voters with disabilities who successfully voted through the postal ballot option in the recently held State Legislative Assembly Elections 2021 had just one thing to say, that the facility was very helpful and had been the best way by which they were included in the process of democracy. Murali Krishnan T M, a person with more than 90% disability due to multiple sclerosis expressed his happiness in exercising postal ballot, saying that only because of this facility, he was able to vote after many years. This lecturer of Electronics at Institute of Human Resource Development, Kasargod, Kerala, who had been unable to attend his work since 2008 June due to his degenerating health condition is overwhelmed to have exercised the secret ballot with dignity at his own residence.

Preethi Sreenivasan, Founder, Soul Free, a person with spinal cord injury & Election Icon for Tiruvannamalai district, Tamil Nadu, sent the following message to the DEO Tiruvannamalai, appreciating the initiative of postal ballot after exercising the same:

"Namaste Sir, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to you, and the entire team of government officials who are working day and night for the election process to be completed successfully. Today, I was able to cast my vote with full dignity from within the comfort of my own home through the Postal Ballot method. I'm so grateful to the entire team that has worked to ensure that this could happen. Every safety and privacy consideration was provided to me and I'm thoroughly satisfied. Thank you so much!"

As per Section 60(c) of The Representation of the People Act, 1951, the Election Commission of India, in consultation with the Government, can notify any person belonging to a class of persons to give his/ her vote by postal ballot at an election. According to changes made in Conduct of Election Rules, 1961 by Election Commission in consultation with the Government and brought in Conduct of Elections (Amendment) Rules, 2019, Persons with Disabilities are

included in the category of persons entitled to vote by postal ballot.

Whereas, it is imperative to note that the suggestions for remote voting such as postal ballot and online voting was proposed by primary stakeholders with disabilities at the national consultation and workshop conducted by ECI in 2018 and 2019 respectively; same suggestions also emerged from district and state level consultations with persons with disabilities facilitated by Chief Electoral Officers & District Electoral Officers respectively. The Commission being sensitive in understanding the reasonable needs of Persons with Disabilities, after complying with all the legal requirements, executed the option of voting through postal ballot for voters with disabilities and senior citizens of 80 years and above age as a pilot in 7 constituencies in the State Legislative Assembly Elections for Jharkhand in November 2019 and thereafter in the entire State of Delhi held in February 2020. Furthermore, with a consideration of including many people affected by COVID during the pandemic, the facility was extended additionally to voters who were affected by COVID-19 in the State Legislative Assembly Elections to Bihar conducted in October 2020 by incorporating all essential safe guards; same processes were followed in the recent Assembly Elections held in 2021 as well.

The fact that the Commission has engaged and will continue to engage more personnel and equipment to execute the postal ballot at the residence of voters, who opted for the same, ensuring the experience of a safe secret ballot equal to that of a polling station is highly commendable. Moreover, the Commission having consciously retained the choice of postal ballot with the voters, providing full freedom to opt for the same purely based on their preference, authenticates the Commission's respect for voters.

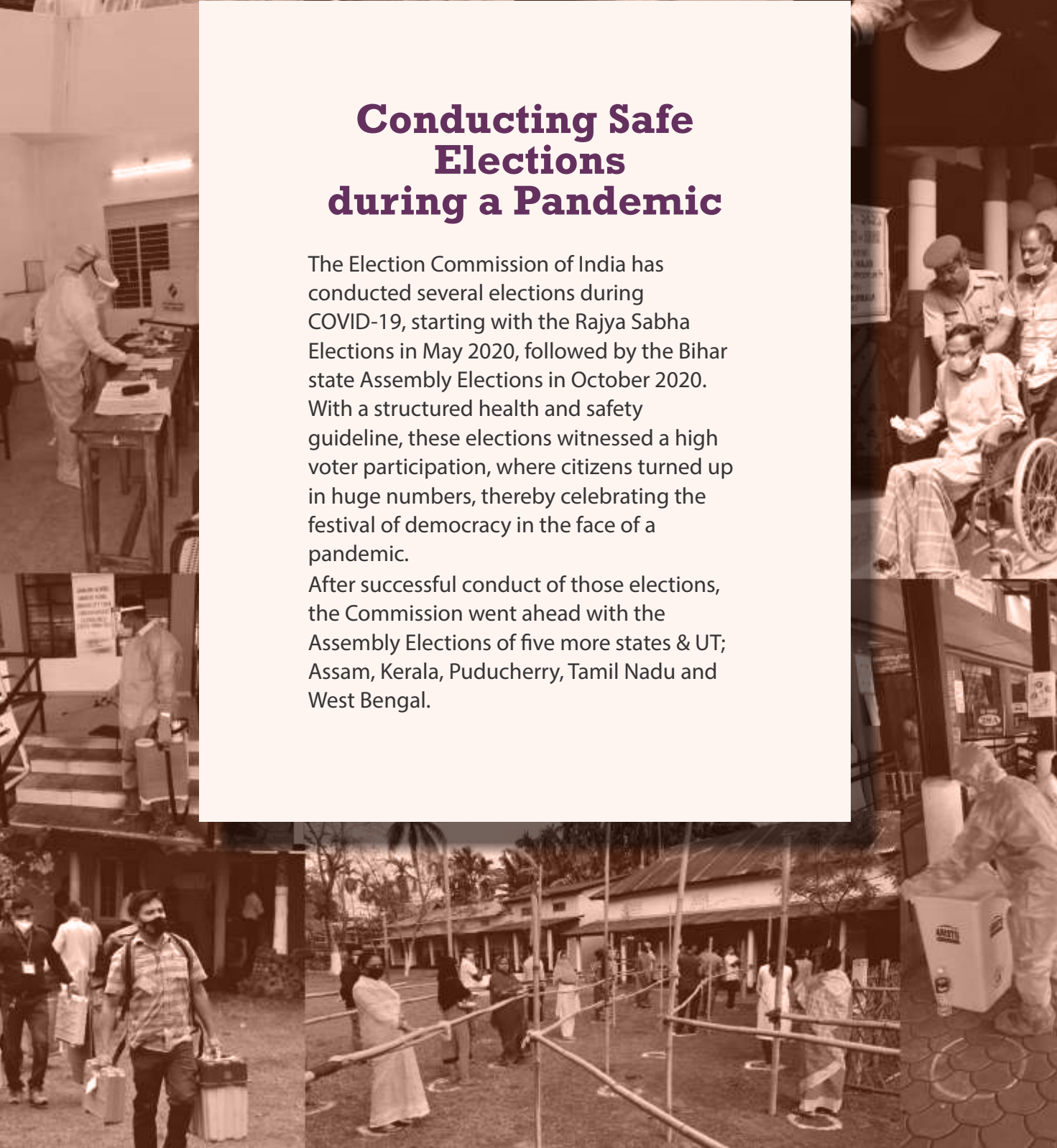
It is evident that ECI continues to attempt to enhance the electoral process to be more accessible and socially engaging for voters with disabilities on the ground, in lines with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016; This provides further hope that more innovative solutions are lined up to address any gaps that may exist or arise within the electoral process and the motto of ECI, No Voter to be Left Behind, is as certained vibrantly across the country.

Smitha Sadasivan
Accessibility Consultant, ECI

Conducting Safe Elections during a Pandemic

The Election Commission of India has conducted several elections during COVID-19, starting with the Rajya Sabha Elections in May 2020, followed by the Bihar state Assembly Elections in October 2020. With a structured health and safety guideline, these elections witnessed a high voter participation, where citizens turned up in huge numbers, thereby celebrating the festival of democracy in the face of a pandemic.

After successful conduct of those elections, the Commission went ahead with the Assembly Elections of five more states & UT; Assam, Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal.



Assam

Election in the state of Assam, which has 126 Assembly seats, was conducted in three phases. The dates of the three phased polls were March 27, April 02 and 06, 2021. In the first phase, election was carried out in 47 Assembly Constituencies, the second phase was of polls was held across 39 Assembly Constituencies and the third phase was conducted in the remaining 40 Assembly Constituencies. The electoral battle witnessed candidates contesting for the 126 seats. Over 2 crore citizens were eligible to vote in the election and choose from the contesting candidates. The state witnessed a massive voter participation of 82.03%

The Commission ensured meticulous planning and preparedness of the election conducted during COVID-19. Every health guideline was strictly adhered to, to ensure the safety of the voters. The Voters' Guide was abundantly distributed across every household in the state so that the voters were aware of the preparedness set out.

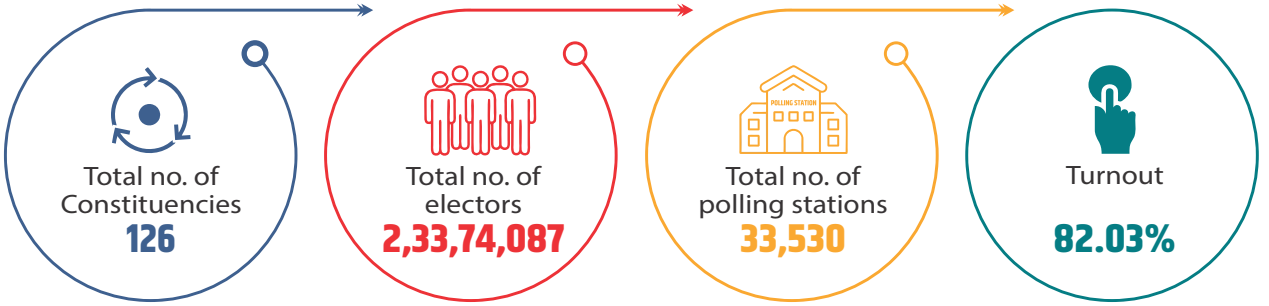
A look at the best practices taken up in Assam to cheer the spirit of democracy

1 State Election Icon, Rakesh Banik, who is one of India's leading paracyclist, inspired voters across all categories to fulfill their democratic duty and cast their votes. His initiative aimed at creating awareness among voters in rural areas of Goalpara election district near Guwahati, Assam

2

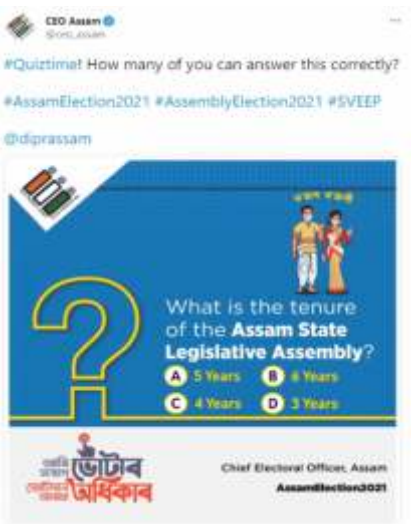
Another major feat of best practices was achieved at Kakoijana reserved forest located near Abhayapuri in Bongaigaon district of Assam on April 2, 2021. In the spirit of the theme 'Grow with Democracy', this special initiative led to a record breaking plantation drive, wherein a whopping 32,000 saplings were planted as part of a SVEEP activity.

3 A Model Polling Station in Mirza Girls High School in Palasbari, Kamrup district was dedicated to COVID-19 warriors. A wall with murals of doctors, nurses, police, sanitization staff and all other essential frontline workers was set up as a token of gratitude towards their effort.



Assam's Digital Outreach to enhance voter awareness

The state of Assam was vigorously active on its social media platforms to engage with the voters and encourage them to step out and cast their vote and democratically choose their representatives. From SVEEP activities to enhance voter education to on field arrangements to ensure COVID-safe elections, the Commission guided the functioning of the state level preparedness.



Field Outreach to enhance voter participation

Fool-proof plans were ideated to conduct safe and secure elections amid a pandemic. The entire electoral machinery of the state was carefully involved in every step of the election process to ensure free, fair, safe, inclusive and participatory elections.

CEO & Jt CEO monitoring poll process in CEO Control Room through webcasting

Tableau flagged off by state CEO to raise voter awareness

Transgender voters in New Goalpara, who were felicitated with traditional gamosas and Japi brooch

New mother, holding her baby, after casting her vote in Palashbari

Cutouts of Election Mascots placed outside polling station

Cyclathon for Democracy organised by Assam State SVEEP team

Kerala

With a population of nearly 3.5 crores, the people of Kerala voted to choose their representatives in the 15th Legislative Assembly of the state on April 6, 2021. The Legislative Assembly has 140 seats and the election was concluded in one phase. Kerala has a unicameral house of legislation, Niyamasabha, consisting of members elected for a period of five years, unless dissolved earlier. The tenure of the members of the 14th Legislative Assembly in the state ended on June 1, 2021.

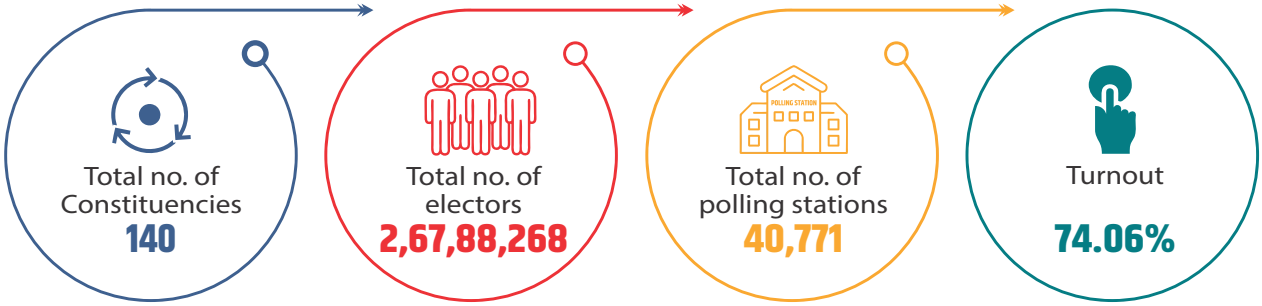
Interestingly, Kerala has higher number of female voters than male voters. There were roughly 1,32,83,724 male voters and 1,41,62,025 female voters in the state. The state witnessed a voter participation of 74.06%. COVID healthcare guidelines like wearing of masks, sanitization and social distancing among others, were strictly followed in the state which ensured safe and secure polling.

A look at the best practices taken up in Kerala to ensure healthy and safe elections

1. Green Polling Stations established in different districts across Kerala to encourage eco-friendly and sustainable practices.

2. As part of voter awareness programme, Cochin Port Trust released a hot air balloon for SVEEP at COPT Avenue Walkway in Willingdon Island, Cochin, in association with Ernakulam District Administration.

3. EVM-VVPAT sensitization for Maancheri Tribal Voters was undertaken in Malappuram.



Digital Outreach to enhance voter awareness

Kerala's social media and digital media were actively used to send voter awareness and participatory messages. To strengthen our democracy, voters were encouraged to cast their vote and fulfil their constitutional duties.

Field Outreach to enhance voter participation

On-field officers meticulously planned the outreach programmes to conduct safe and secure elections amid the pandemic. The electoral machinery of the state was carefully involved in every step of the election process to ensure free, fair, safe, inclusive and participatory elections.

91 Years old Dharmini Amma voted via postal ballot facility in Thiruvananthapuram

Polling officials travelling with equipments to Malakkapara, Thrissur

Safe polling amid pandemic at Thiruvananthapuram

Pink Polling Booth set up by women for women voters

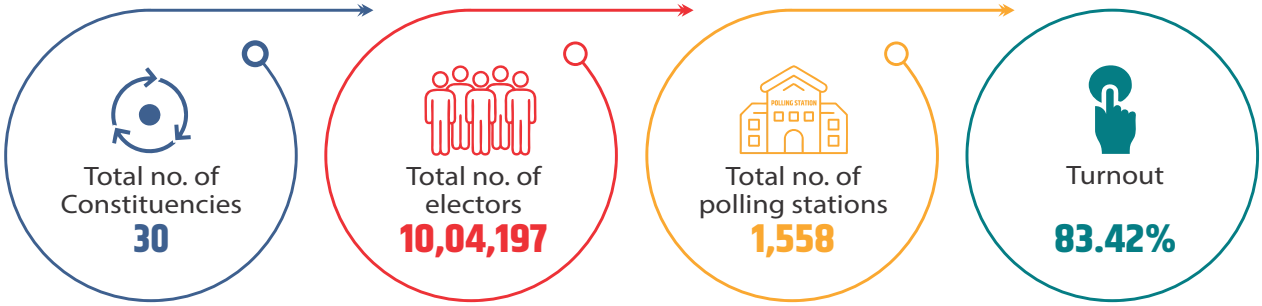
EVM-VVPAT awareness drives underway in Kerala

Pre-Poll preparations from Wayanad District, Kerala

Puducherry

The Election Commission of India conducted election to the Legislative Assembly of Puducherry and its outlying regions of Karaikal, Mahe and Yanam on April 6, 2021. The Legislative Assembly has a total of 33 seats, of which 5 are reserved for candidates from Scheduled Caste and 3 members are nominated by the Government of India. 30 out of 33 members are elected directly by the people on the basis of universal adult franchise.

In Puducherry, 289 male and 35 female candidates are contesting in the election. A total of 10,04,197 electors decided the electoral fortune of the 324 candidates in the fray.



A look at the best practices taken up in Puducherry to ensure healthy and safe elections

1. The Commission flagged off a Mobile Awareness Vehicle equipped with EVM-VVPAT which toured the entire region of Puducherry.

2. T20 Cricket Tournament for Persons with Disabilities was organized by SVEEP Cell of Puducherry, Election Dept.

Digital Outreach to enhance voter awareness

Digital media was extensively used by the Chief Electoral Office of the Union Territory to reach out to the voters, educate them about the electoral process, and motivate them to participate in the polls. All the voters were also informed regarding the mandatory COVID safety protocols like wearing of masks, sanitization and social distancing among others.

Field Outreach to enhance voter participation

Conscientious planning involved extensive field outreach programmes of Puducherry to conduct safe and secure elections amid the pandemic.

Collection of Biomedical wastes as per COVID safety protocols 3766 electors successfully casted their vote via postal ballot.

Sanitising the booths before polls

Signature Campaign in Manakula Vinayagar Institute of Technology, Puducherry

Third gender voters displaying their inked finger

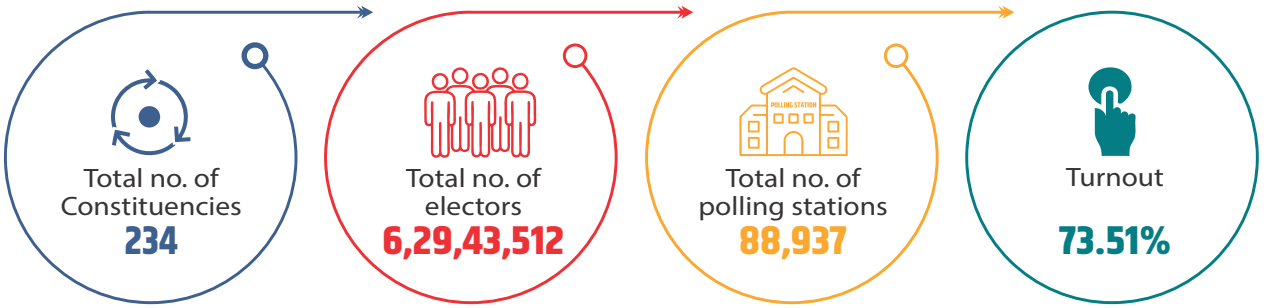
College students of Puducherry braving the summer heat for a bike rally to raise voter awareness.

A Miniature Model Polling Booth made by school students from eco-friendly materials like coconut shells, palm leaves, and coco pith to familiarize first-time voters with the voting process.

Tamil Nadu

The Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly is the unicameral legislature of the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu. It has the strength of 234 members who democratically elected using the 'First-past-the-post' system. The sixteenth legislative assembly election of Tamil Nadu was held on 6 April 2021.

62.9 million citizens were eligible to vote in Assembly elections in Tamil Nadu. Sholinganallur assembly has the highest number of eligible voters with 694,845 voters. Tamil Nadu is another state where the female participation was higher than male voter turnout.



A look at the best practices taken up in Tamil Nadu to ensure healthy and safe elections

1. Special awareness programme organized in Tamil Nadu by District Administration, in which voters pledged in sign language. EVM VVPAT familiarisation drive was also organised in sign language.

2. A marathon for democracy organised in Tamil Nadu to encourage youth to come forward and cast their vote in Legislative Assembly Elections.

Digital Outreach to enhance voter awareness

The social media and digital media of the state of Tamil Nadu were actively used to send voter awareness and participatory messages. To strengthen our democracy, voters were encouraged to cast their vote and fulfill their constitutional duties.

Field Outreach to enhance voter participation

With a structured health and safety guideline, the entire electoral machinery of the state was carefully involved in every step of the election process to ensure free, fair, safe, inclusive and participatory elections.

Exclusive booth for PwD voters facilitating their right to vote

Participation remained brisk at the pink polling booth of Srivilliputhur constituency setup at Mamsapuram

Bharat Scouts and Guides spreading awareness as part of SVEEP outreach programmes

West Bengal

The state of West Bengal has 294 seats in the Legislative Assembly, for which elections are conducted every five years to elect a fresh set of legislators! The tenure of current West Bengal Legislative Assembly ended on May 30, 2021.
To elect a new government in the state, the Election Commission of India conducted elections to the Legislative Assembly of West Bengal. Across the state, election was held in eight different phases which ran between March 17 and April 29, 2021. Counting of votes was to be held on May 02, 2021.

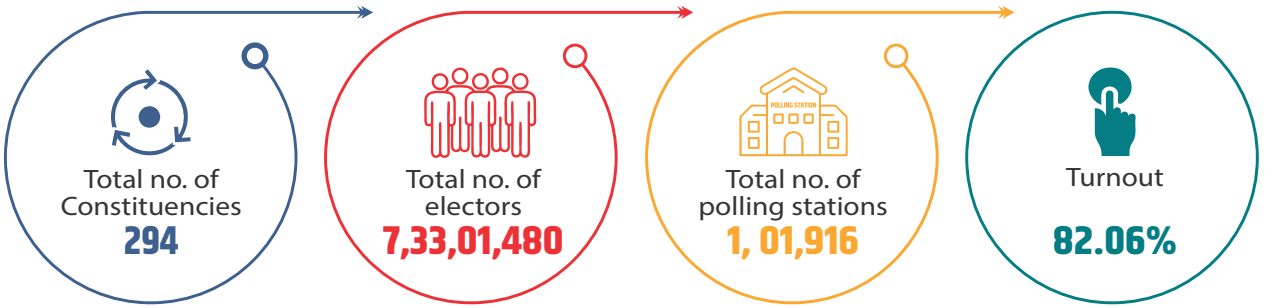
A look at the best practices taken up in West Bengal to ensure healthy and safe elections

1. Rapid Antigen Test organized for the Counting Agents and Journalists to ensure they are safe to carry out their duties.

2. Social Distancing is a prime protocol to break the chain of COVID virus dissemination. In every polling booth, the poll workers ensured that the voters maintained strict social distancing.

3. Thermal scanning is another important protocol to ensure that nobody with a temperature (who might be affected/ suspected of COVID) enters a public area. Every voter and poll worker in every polling booth were tested with a thermal scanner. Only those with a normal body temperature range were allowed to cast their vote.

4. Sanitisation of polling booths and counting centers at regular intervals ensured the venues were safe and COVID free. Rigorous santisation instilled a sense of faith in the minds of the people that the elections were indeed, COVID safe.



Digital Outreach to enhance voter awareness

ECI and Chief Electoral Office used digital media extensively to educate the voters about the mandatory COVID health and safety protocols. Messages of social distancing and wearing of masks was clearly sent out via social media platform, to spread awareness.

Field Outreach to enhance voter participation

Electoral machinery on ground meticulously planned the outreach programmes to conduct safe and secure elections amid the pandemic. They were carefully involved in every step of the election process to ensure free, fair, safe, inclusive and participatory elections.

Precautionary COVID guidelines strictly followed

Disposal of Biomedical wastes at Alipurdas district

Cycle rally with mascot Delfi organised by SVEEP at Murshidabad dist.

Senior Citizens walking with pride and courage to vote

Socially distanced set up for polling agents

International Election Visitors Programme 2021

Global knowledge sharing is an important aspect of effective election administration and management. Apart from providing the opportunity to understand and adopt good practices, it allows Election Management Bodies (EMBs) across the world to learn the nuances of cross-cultural challenges and devise efficient solutions for the same.

As the EMB that conducts the world's largest democratic election in terms of scale and magnitude, the Election Commission of India has always sought to expand the scope of knowledge sharing through initiatives such as the International Election Visitors Programme.

In the past, ECI has organized International Election Visitor Programmes (IEVP) for EMBs/Organizations in 2014 Lok Sabha elections; elections for a few State Assemblies in Feb/March 2017; Lok Sabha Elections in May 2019 and International Election Visitors Programme 2020 during Bihar Assembly elections.

	Assam	Kerala	Tamil Nadu	West Bengal	Puducherry	Total
Total Phases	3	1	1	8	1	-
Number of Electors	23 million	26 million	62 million	73 million	1 million	**187 million**
Service Electors	62,134	56,759	72,853	1,12,642	303	**3,04,691**
Overseas Electors	11	90,709	3,243	210	352	**94,525**
Total No. of Polling Stations	33,530	40,771	88,937	1,01,916	1,558	**2,66,712**
Total No. of Assembly Constituencies	**126**	**140**	**234**	**294**	**30**	**824**

The purpose of IEVP is to familiarize fellow EMBs/Organisations across the world with our electoral system and best practices adopted in the world's largest democracy.

On April 5-6, 2021, the International Election Visitors Programme (IEVP) 2021 was hosted by the Election Commission of India for Election Management Bodies from 26 countries and three International Organisations during the elections to Legislative Assemblies of Assam, Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal. These elections, conducted in the month of April and May 2021 collectively had an electorate of over 187.2 million spread over 824 Assembly Constituencies - one of the largest in the world to vote so far amid the pandemic and one that poses formidable challenges and necessitates intensive preparations in addition to unique initiatives taken to conduct a COVID safe election.

With more than 100 delegates from 26 countries in attendance, the two day event hosted virtually, presented a good experience of Indian poll process, best practices and experience of conduct of our polls as well as steps taken to mitigate the effect of pandemic.

The delegates included members from 3 international organizations namely International IDEA, International Foundation of Electoral Systems (IFES) and Association of World Election Bodies (A-WEB) along with representatives from EMBs of Afghanistan, Australia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Cambodia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Republic of Korea, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Mongolia, Nepal, Panama, Philippines, Romania, Russia, South Africa, Suriname, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Zambia. Besides these, the Ambassadors of Georgia and Uzbekistan, Acting High Commissioner of Sri Lanka and other members of Diplomatic Corps were also in attendance to witness the poll preparedness and conduct of elections to the Legislative Assemblies in these states.

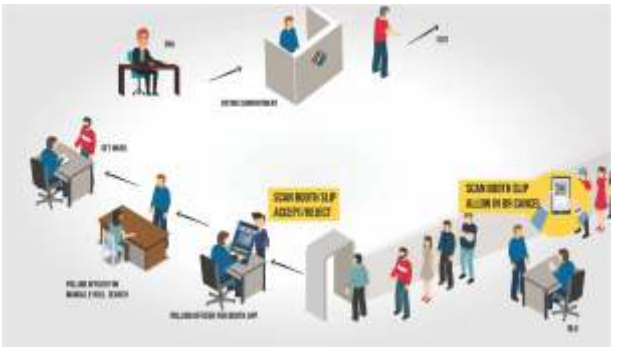
The Programme for IEVP 2021 comprised of a comprehensive set of sessions online that provided the participants an overview of the large canvas of Indian electoral process. Secretary General, Umesh Sinha headed the session with an outline of the most important aspect of conducting elections in current times – preparations and protocols for COVID-19 safety and the manner in which large scale voter awareness and education took place amid COVID-19 under SVEEP.

The programme also included a session by H. R. Srinivas, CEO Bihar who provided his insights on held recently administered the Bihar Legislative Assembly Election in 2020. This election served as a pioneer in conducting elections amid COVID-19 as it was the first major election held amid a pandemic. This, coupled with the situation of aftermath of floods and extremist groups, made the election in Bihar an extremely challenging one.

Challenges to Bihar Legislative Assembly Election 2020

- **Procurement of COVID-19 Safety Kits**
  - For 73,4,85,968 Electors
  - 0.531 million Polling Personnel
  - 180 thousand Security Personnel
- **Disposal**
  - Used COVID-19 Safety Related kits at 106515 polling stations and Election Activities
  - PwD Electors: 666,438
- **Ensuring Compliance by Political Parties**
  - COVID-19 Protocols during Campaign by Political Parties
  - Senior Citizens (80+): 1,085,852
- **Improvement in Health of Electoral Roll**
  - Elector Population Ratio
  - Gender Ratio
  - Registration of 18 to 19 years age group electors
  - PwDs Electors
  - Electoral Participation
- **Extending Postal Ballot Facility to Absentee Voters**
  - Form 12D collection in a span of 5 days
  - Arranging separate team of polling officers
  - Training
  - Briefing of Electors
  - Transparency
  - Security

The numerous challenges were effectively mitigated with stringent COVID-19 guidelines for political parties and candidates, polling stations, and election related activities. Furthermore, strengthening of infrastructure and manpower, intensive capacity building measures, postal ballot facility for absentee voters, purification of electoral roll, ICT interventions and inclusion of migrant labourers led to encouraging outcomes such as increase in polling percentage in 10 out of 14 flood hit districts despite all odds and a higher voter turnout of 57.34% as compared to 56.88% in Bihar Legislative Assembly of 2015.



Deputy Election Commissioner, Sudeep Jain highlighted the security measures such as randomisation and multiple mock polls that ensured transparency and strengthened voter's faith in EVM-VVPAT machines. In addition to this, the development of IT applications by ECI had facilitated easier access to information for voters, candidates, political parties and civil society organisations alike. Apps such as ERONET, ENCORE, Voter Helpline App, as well as the National Helpline Number 1950 have gone a long way in empowering citizens to access information about the electoral process at easily.

Sushil Chandra, the present Chief Election Commissioner, in his address to the attendees present virtually - spoke of the importance of ensuring voting rights to all and the multifarious measures taken up by the Commission to ensure free, fair, safe, and ethical elections. The new initiatives taken by ECI on voter facilitation, transparency and accessibility of electoral system; enhanced use of Information and Communication Technology to strengthen citizen participation and transparency as well as ECI's response to the changing needs of training and capacity building and the new formats necessitated by COVID-19 were paramount in further developing the strategy for conducting elections to Legislative Assemblies of Assam, Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal. Through a global knowledge-sharing programme such as IEVP, it is hoped that these

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Bihar Assembly elections | Can't remain silent spectator to situations, says EC Chandra about polls amid COVID-19

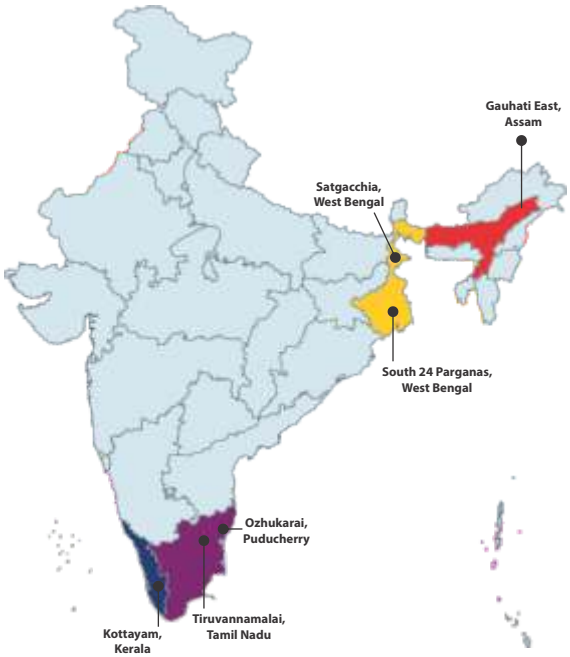
measures and interventions may be of assistance to democracies worldwide.

The then Chief Election Commissioner, Sunil Arora spoke of how the pandemic had led to an unprecedented disruption in election schedules all over the world and while the challenges for conducting elections were numerous, it also has presented an opportunity that brought Election Management Bodies together to share and learn from each other's best practices. Election Commissioner, Rajiv Kumar highlighted the technological interventions that were undertaken to ensure that the pandemic did not disrupt the election schedule and that the election process could be made smoother and more accessible to all voters.

On the sidelines of IEVP 2021, the erstwhile CEC also released the maiden issue of A-WEB India Journal of Elections. This academic journal aims to bridge the gap between academics and practice in electoral landscape and carries research papers, articles, book reviews and more from eminent writers, experts, researchers and practitioners from the A-WEB Community and from across democracies of the world in the area of Elections and Electoral Democracy.

On April 6, 2021, the delegates of IEVP were given a live snapshot of how elections are conducted at selected polling stations through a virtual tour that included familiarization with the electoral process, polling station arrangements, facilitation of Persons with Disabilities and senior citizens.

Virtual Tour Showcasing Polling in Process



The attendees were first taken virtually to the North Eastern State of Assam at a polling station **Gauhati East.** At Polling Station Number 84, General Observer Suparna took the virtual visitors through an overview of the COVID safety precautions and protocols undertaken to ensure safety of voters.

As they were taken around the polling station to see arrangements made - a voter, Vishvajeet spoke of sanitization protocols and how no voter was allowed to touch the EVM and VVPAT machines without gloves. Such stringent measures were put in place across all Assembly Constituencies and were paramount to ensuring voter safety.

The next polling station visited was in **South 24 Parganas** in West Bengal where the virtual attendees were explained the polling process in detail. Given the guidelines issued by the Commission, the polling process had expanded to accommodate thermal temperature checks, mask and sanitization protocols, and extension of poll timings as well as last hour polling for COVID positive voters.

The attendees were then taken to a tour of a polling station in **Satgacchia,** West Bengal.

A unique initiative for PwDs in this district was the 'Ability Express'. A van that was designed to give Persons with Disabilities a virtual tour of the polling station as well as to understand how to cast their vote on EVM-VVPATs (Braille available on each EVM).

It is the constant endeavour of the Commission to make the voting process more inclusive to include women voters. To ensure this, all women polling stations were instituted. This, coupled with safe travel to and from polling stations, a dedicated helpline, voter assistance booth, and crèche facility were highly instrumental in encouraging a high women voter turnout.

Kottayam in Kerala had deployed three lakh polling officials.

The attendees were taken through the process of waste disposal at the polling station since biomedical waste disposal, post casting of votes is a matter of utmost importance to avoid spread of possible infection. The polling officials showcased the manner in which all biomedical waste was discarded and disposed off.

General Observer, Panthari Yadav gave a comprehensive overview of Postal Ballot facility made available to PwDs, senior citizens, and COVID positive voters and the IEC measures that were implemented under SVEEP to promote safe and secure voting. John, a voter present at the polling station remarked, "The voter guide was really helpful. Even though I was skeptical of coming forward to cast my vote – Voter

Guide explained the polling process and all the arrangements. And of course, seeing the safety measures on ground gave a further boost to my confidence to come forth and celebrate democracy."

At **Ozhukarai** Assembly Constituency in Puducherry, the District Magistrate Poorva Garg showcased the electoral roll, explaining the process of Summary Revisions to maintain the purity of the roll.

Ozhukarai, Puducherry

Police Observer Umesh Chandra Datta highlighted the intricacy of the security plan drawn up and other measures to prevent vulnerability in district. General Observer Krishna Gupta toured the Polling Station and the EVM Dispatch Centre to showcase the security arrangements put into motion.

At **Tiruvannamalai** in Tamil Nadu, the local PwD icon visited the PwD Manned Polling Station to encourage Persons with Disabilities to come forth and cast their vote.

Tiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu

A Special Helpline, Braille enabled voter guides, sign language boards, as well as transport arrangements 'made polling process accessible' and barrier free for PwDs.

As they traversed the great expanse of India virtually, the attendees witnessed in detail the COVID-19 safety protocols put into place such as social distancing, thermal screening, mask and sanitization, Assured Minimum Facilities, disposal of biomedical waste, last hour polling for COVID positive voters, and more. The virtual tour arranged for them allowed them to interact with Polling Officials, all of who had been vaccinated prior to being enrolled for poll duty, and witness firsthand the large scale and magnitude of the Indian election management system.

A short film on the glimpses of ongoing elections in the states of Assam, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Kerala and UT Puducherry and also on the A-WEB India Journal was showcased to the delegates.

In the current world scenario, with drastic socio-political changes and challenges to global health – Election Management Bodies are bound to face constraints in effective electoral management and administration in terms of human resource, logistics, bureaucratic reforms, and more. It is therefore, our collective prerogative to strive forward and devise sustainable solutions for unpredictable problems to fulfill the democratic mandate vested with us. As the world's largest Election Management Body, the Election Commission of India has, since its inception, led the way in effective electoral management practices. Through knowledge-management platforms such as IIIDEM, India AWEB Centre and International Election Visitors Programme (IEVP) it is ECIs aim to share good practices and on ground insights to EMBs and Organisations working for the fulfillment of democracy for all.

Dr. Aarti Aggarwal
Sr. Consultant, ECI

Your Vote makes your Future

They just talk

They happily vote

In which category are you?

Vote is not just your right,
but It is also your Duty !

Do cast your Vote, Fearlessly

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Facilities at Polling Stations

Facilities for PwDs & Senior Citizens

- Ramp & Wheel Chair
- EVM with Braille
- Sign Language
- Special Volunteers
- Transport Facility
- Voter Assistance Booth
- Signage
- Priority Access to PwDs & Senior Citizens

COVID-19 Related Facilities

- Mask, Face shields & Gloves
- Thermal Scanning for all persons
- Sanitiser, Soap & Water
- Social Distancing
- Token system to avoid queues
- Optional Postal Ballot facility

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National Voters' Day 2021

Celebrating Indian Democracy

National Voters' Day is celebrated all over the country on January 25 every year since 2011 to mark the Foundation day of Election Commission of India, which was established on this day in the year 1950. The main purpose of the NVD celebration is to encourage, facilitate and maximize the enrollment, especially for the new voters. Dedicated to the voters of the country, the Day is observed to spread awareness among voters and to encourage informed participation in the electoral process.

the event in personas the guest of honour. The then Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora, Current Chief Election Commissioner Sushil Chandra and Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar along with Secretary General Umesh Sinha received the dignitaries on the occasion. This year, due to COVID-19, NVD celebrations all over the country were a combination of both physical and virtual events.

The theme for NVD 2021 was 'Making Our Voters Empowered, Vigilant, Safe and Informed.' This is a

India celebrated the 11th National Voters' Day with commendable zeal and gusto on January 25, 2021. The national-level event, held in Hotel Ashoka in New Delhi, was graced by the President of India Ram Nath Kovind in a virtual, online mode. Ravi Shankar Prasad, Union Minister for Law and Justice, Communications and Electronics and Information Technology, attended

reiteration of the commitment of the Election Commission of India (ECI) to conduct COVID-safe elections, as well as to make each voter informed, ethical and vigilant.

The then Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora reinforced the Commission's determination to conduct safe and secure elections, which has been lauded by

> भारत में गणतांत्रिक प्रणाली का समृद्ध इतिहास रहा है। स्वाधीनता प्राप्ति के बाद, भारत के संविधान के माध्यम से रोपे गए लोकतंत्र के पौधे की जड़ें, लगभग ढाई हजार वर्ष पुरानी गणतंत्र की मिट्टी से पोषण प्राप्त कर रही हैं। संभवत: इसीलिए, आज पूरी दुनिया में जब लोकतांत्रिक संस्थाओं के कमजोर होते जाने की आशंकाएं व्यक्त की जा रही हैं, तब भारत में लोकतंत्र मजबूत होता जा रहा है। वैशाली, कपिलवस्तु और मिथिला की परंपरा से भारत ने यह सीखा है कि शासन पर, समाज के किसी एक वर्ग या वंश का एकाधिकार नहीं होता है। लोकतंत्र में 'लोक' यानि जनता की इच्छा ही सर्वोपरि होती है। गांधीजी के 'ग्राम स्वराज' से प्रेरित हमारे संविधान के 'पंचायती-राज' में, भारत की इसी परंपरा की सहज अभिव्यक्ति देखी जा सकती है।
>
> - Excerpts from the speech by the President of India at NVD National Function

democracies across the world. He took note of the tireless efforts of the election machinery, which ensured that the facility of the postal ballot was extended to Persons with Disabilities (PwDs), senior citizens above 80 years, and those quarantined due to COVID-19, effectively ensuring that no voter is left behind. As the Commission prepared for upcoming elections in four States and one Union Territory in 2021, the importance of the ECI's commitment towards redefining election management in a pandemic was emphasized.

Two unique digital initiatives were unveiled at the event. The Commission rolled out digital voter identity cards or e-EPICs, which will be downloadable on mobile phones or in a self-printable form on the computer, after logging into the Voter Helpline Mobile App, the Voter Portal (www.voterportal.eci.gov.in) or the National Voters' Service Portal (www.nvsp.in/).

The President of India launched a noteworthy new initiative – 'Radio Hello Voters' – a 24x7 online digital radio service accessible on the Election Commission of India website, which will stream voter awareness programmes. Radio Hello Voters has been envisaged to provide information on electoral processes through various creative forms, including songs, drama, discussions, podcasts, spots, parodies, among others, in Hindi, English and other regional languages from all over the country.

In his address, President Ram Nath Kovind said that we should always respect the valuable right to vote. The right to vote is not a simple right; people around the world have struggled a lot for this. Since Independence, our Constitution has given equal voting rights to all citizens without any discrimination on the basis of merit, religion, race, caste. For this, we are indebted to the makers of our Constitution. The President said that the chief architect of the Indian Constitution, Dr B.R. Ambedkar, considered the right to vote as paramount. Therefore, it is the responsibility of all of us, especially our youth, who get the right to vote for the first time, to exercise their franchise with the utmost sincerity, and inspire others too to do so.

Praising the Election Commission of India for conducting successful and safe elections in Bihar last year even as the COVID-19 pandemic raged, the President said that it is an extraordinary achievement of our democracy. He was happy to note that the ECI has taken a number of innovative and timely measures to conduct smooth, inclusive and safe elections.

The guest of honour, Ravi Shankar Prasad, hailed the profound vision of India's founding fathers that, despite the overwhelming odds, created a framework that would empower every single Indian. Speaking about the launch of digital voter cards, he appreciated the efforts of the ECI in the field of cutting-edge information technology. He said that the officers of ECI, along with civil and police administrations, have played a vital role in ensuring free, fair, and peaceful election during the challenging times of COVID-19.

In his remarks present Chief Election Commissioner Sushil Chandra said that the 11th NVD was celebrated with a view to enhance electoral participation of voters, especially the new voters of the country, and empower them as informed, ethical and vigilant

voters. He said that elections in India are a gigantic exercise conducted under the superintendence, direction and control of the Commission. The exercise has its own challenges in terms of sheer scale, size, diversity and complexity besides logistics, with the aim of free, fair and transparent elections. Timelines demand strict compliance and leave little room for any delays and mistakes. That is what makes our elections sacrosanct and a model for others.

Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar welcomed the august gathering of dignitaries and award winners to the national celebration of 11th National Voters' Day. His remarks also highlighted the scale and vastness of Indian elections. He said that despite the complexity of Indian elections, they are conducted meticulously and on schedule. He especially welcomed women voters, Persons with Disability and senior citizens on the important occasion.

The guest of honour Ravi Shankar Prasad presented five new voters with their digital voter ID cards. While only newly enrolled electors with unique mobile number during SSR 2021 could download e-EPIC from January 25 to January 31 January, 2021 – this facility was extended to all other electors from February 1, 2021 onwards.

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Theme : NVD 2021
Making our Voters Empowered, Vigilant, Safe & Informed

The Election Commission of India envisages active and participative voters during elections whilst focusing on ECI's commitment towards conducting elections safely during the COVID-19 pandemic. Each aspect of the logo emphasises our collective endeavour to make elections free, fair, transparent and participatory for all voters alike.

On this occasion, the President conferred the National Awards for the Best Electoral Practices virtually to officers for their outstanding performance in different spheres in the conduct of elections. In addition, awards were also conferred on CSOs, government departments and media houses for their outstanding contribution in the field of voter awareness and outreach. Representatives from political parties also attended the national function.

Three publications were launched by Union Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad: the first book, Conducting Elections during Pandemic–A Photo Journey encapsulates the challenging journey of conducting elections amidst a pandemic; the second, SVEEP Endeavours: Awareness Initiatives during Lok Sabha Election 2019 provides a detailed insight into voter awareness interventions, innovations and initiatives during the 17th General Election conducted in 2019; and finally, Chalo Karen Matdaan is a comic book that aims at voter education in a fun and thought-provoking way, targeting young, new and future voters.

'Hello Voters'-Web Radio of ECI, launched on 11th National Voters' Day (January 25, 2021) by Hon'ble President of India, is an innovative, cost-effective and impactful medium to promote ethical and informed voting among the voters and spread awareness on the electoral processes. This 24x7 online web radio streams voter awareness programs online on the Election Commission of India website.

A webcasting based service transmission format has been adopted to provide the open-to-everyone electoral process infotainment through programs such as songs, radio-dramas, interviews and narration of true stories with well qualified professionals as speakers on wide ranging topics such as Registration, NOTA, polling process. These objectives have been facilitated in a creative and interactive manner with each program catering to a different section of voters such as women, senior citizens, youth, Persons with Disability (PwDs) etc. Songs in regional languages developed locally motivate and entertain listeners across the country. Moreover, ingenious characters like 'Voter Aunty' and 'Matdata Dost' add entertainment value in different segments like: EPIC Adda, Wah Election Wah, Lok Tantra Express etc.

Hello Voters - web radio of ECI, strives to ensure that each voter is well conversed with electoral process and can effectively and freely exercise his/her right to vote in an informed and ethical manner.

Tanishk Shyamya
Executive, SVEEP

मतदान की कहानी

कभी एक था राजा
कभी एक थी रानी
यह कहानी अब हुई पुरानी !
आओ सुनें मतदान की कहानी !
अब ना कोई राजा
अब ना कोई रानी
आम आदमी की अब ये कहानी !
लोकतंत्र का जमाना है
जन-जन ने अब ठाना है
करेंगे मतदान , छोड़ो बातें पुरानी !
जागरूक बनें , तकनीक को जानें
हर वोट जरूरी इसको पहचानें
सुनेंगे सब अब "हेलो वोटर्स" की जुबानी !
प्रलोभन से अब ना बहकेंगे
सही मत से उम्मीदवार चुनेंगे
कोई मतदाता न छूटे , कहे हर हिंदुस्तानी !
ई - एपिक का यह जमाना है
सी - विजिल को अपनाना है
सशक्त बन सच की राह अपनानी !
मेरा देश महान है
मेरी इससे पहचान है
रचेंगे नवयुग सब ने मिलकर ठानी !
आओ सुनें मतदान की कहानी !
सुनेंगे सब अब **"हेलो वोटर्स"** की जुबानी !

डॉ. सुधीर सोनी
स्वीप सलाहकार

Your Vote is your Future

YOUR VOTE IS IMPORTANT

YOUR SAFETY IS EQUALLY IMPORTANT

All Covid related and other safety measures are in place for YOU at each polling station!

You are Welcome to Cast your Vote fearlessly.

Facilities at Polling Stations

Covid safety/ precautions at polling station

- Mask, Face shields & Gloves
- Thermal Scanning for all persons
- Sanitiser, Soap & Water
- Social Distancing
- Token system to avoid queues
- Optional Postal Ballot facility

Facilities for PwDs & Senior Citizens

- Ramp & Wheel Chair
- EVM with Braille
- Sign Language
- Special Volunteers
- Transport Facility
- Voter Assistance Booth
- Signage
- Priority Access to PwDs & Senior Citizens

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The Festival of Democracy | State Celebrations of NVD 2021

The 11th National Voters' Day (NVD) on January 25, 2021 was celebrated around the country with characteristic fervour and commitment to the voter and the right to vote.

Andhra Pradesh

National Voters' Day was celebrated in Vijaywada, with the Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan gracing the occasionas the chief guest for the State-level NVD function. He felicitated the newly enrolled voters and distributed the Best Electoral Practices Awards to the District Election Officers (DEOs) and the Electoral Registration Officers (EROs), among others.

Memonto presented to H.E. Governor of Andhra Pradesh by Chief Electoral Officer, Andhra Pradesh

Felicitation of newly enrolled electors

Distribution of awards to young ELC members

Rangoli competitions

Arunachal Pradesh

In Arunachal Pradesh, National Voters' Day (NVD), 2021 was celebrated at the NIT Auditorium, Yupia, with the theme 'Making our Voters Empowered, Vigilant, Safe and Informed'. Addressing the state level NVD celebration as the chief guest, State Election Commissioner (SEC) Hage Kojeen appealed to the voters to realize the importance of voting rights. Kojeen emphasized the creation of more awareness on the voter enrollment process and the rights and duties of voters. He also administered the voters' pledge to all those present on the occasion.

Chief Election Officer D.J. Bhattacharjee highlighted the importance of e-EPIC. He informed the audience that the voters who registered during the special summary revision 2020 could download their e-EPIC between January 25 and January 31, and thereafter all general electors could download their e-EPIC from February 1 onwards.

The main attractions of the day included an awareness programme on e-EPIC issuing of EPIC to newly enrolled voters by the SEC, presentation of certificates, mementoes and awards to the winners of essay, drawing and crafts competitions, and the felicitation of eight outstanding booth level officers (BLOs).

Assam

The 11th National Voters' Day was widely celebrated at state, district and booth levels, with special emphasis on the initiatives and technological interventions undertaken by the Election Commission of India towards smooth delivery of electoral services, especially against in of the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic. Mukesh Sahu the Divisional Commissioner of Barak Valley Division, graced the occasion as the chief guest.

The theme of the NVD 2021was suitably displayed across the state to encourage voters to participate in the electoral process. A range of awareness events – flash-mob dance, folk dances and cycle rallies, among others, were organized to persuade all eligible voters to come to the polling stations to exercise their franchise without fail in the following Assembly election.

Special focus was on the e-EPIC facility for new voters as well as registered voters. An appeal was also made to eligible citizens to enroll themselves in the electoral roll. The information about the Voter Helpline Number–1950 was also suitably disseminated to resolve any query raised by citizens. Additionally, ceremonial distribution of certificates at the state and the district levels was carried out among the newly enrolled voters.

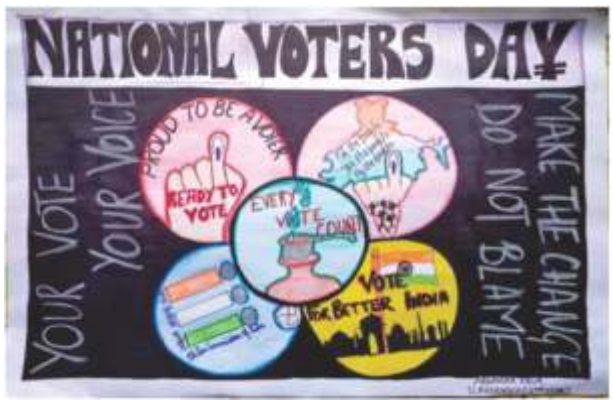
Bihar

NVD celebration in Bihar was organised at Adhivishen Bhawan, Patna where Chief Secretary Deepak Kumar graced the event as the chief guest.

Chandigarh

In Chandigarh, Mandip Singh Brar, who is both the Additional Chief Electoral Officer and the Deputy Commissioner, was the chief guest at the State-level function. Electoral Registration Officer Kuljit Paul Singh Mahi, PCS; Joint Chief Electoral Officer Jagjit Singh; and the electoral officers of Chandigarh Parliamentary Constituency were also present.

The function featured a vibrant cultural programme presented by the students of the P.G. Government College for Girls. The officers and the people present pledged their faith in democracy and their determination to vote in every election fearlessly and without being influenced by religion, race, caste, community, language or any inducement. The chief guest launched e-EPIC and informed the audience about it. He also felicitated the young, first-time voters by distributing new Electors Photo Identity Cards. He awarded the winners of online poster-making competitions and the outstanding performers who worked on the Special Summary Revision 2021 and Electoral Literacy Clubs (ELC).



Chhattisgarh

National Voters' Day was celebrated at all the polling stations and at every district headquarters of Chhattisgarh. The State-level NVD programme was organized at the Indira Gandhi Agricultural College, Raipur, with a focus on voter awareness. The event was graced by the Justice T.P. Sharma, Chief Lokayukta, Chhattisgarh, and chaired by Thakur Ram Singh, State Election Commissioner. Dr. Satish Patil, the Vice Chancellor of the Indira Gandhi Agricultural University attended as a distinguished guest. State-level awards were distributed, and EPICs and badges were given to new voters.

Events were organized in different districts across the State, keeping in mind the special categories of voters. Districts Kabirdham and Korba celebrated NVD in the presence of a large number of women, with a view to targeting women voters. In District Raipur, National Voters' Day was dedicated to spotlight PwDs, while the celebrations of District Rajnandgaon, Narayanpur and Bastar were dedicated to service voters.

Himachal Pradesh

In Himachal Pradesh, Apoorv Devgan, Addl Deputy Commissioner and Addl. Chief Electoral Officer, Dalip Negi emphasized that Election Commission is committed to ensuring the greater participation of voters in the country. He further emphasized on the need to spread awareness among all sections voters regarding effective participation in the electoral process to make our democracy strong and vibrant.

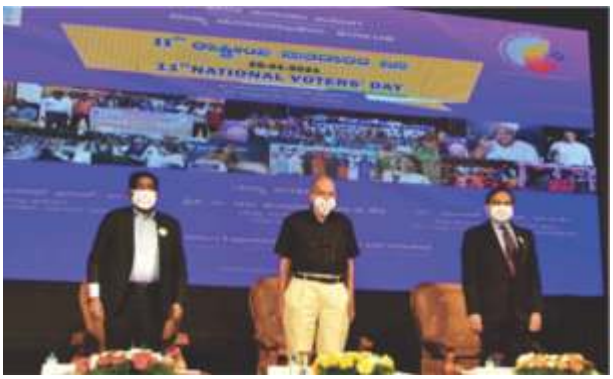
Jharkhand

The State-level NVD celebrations were observed in Ranchi, where the Governor, Draupadi Murmu, was present as the chief guest of the function. In her address to the audience, she appealed to them to elect their representative using their discretion, reiterating that elections are the first step to democracy and that voters must exercise their democratic right freely and fairly.

Karnataka

The State-level function saw P. Ravi Kumar, Chief Secretary to the Government of Karnataka, as the chief guest. Dr. Sanjiv Kumar the Chief Electoral Officer of Karnataka welcomed the august audience followed by the distribution of EPICs to young, first-time voters, PwDs and tribal voters. The best performers in the electoral process were identified and honoured. The State-level winners of essay and collage-poster making competitions. And the best performing ELCs were awarded a certificate and books as prizes by the chief guest. ELCs that enrolled more than 30 young voters were identified and given incentives as motivation to carry out more innovative SVEEP activities.

The meticulously arranged function conveyed strong electoral messages to the young voters and all the participants in the function. It once again reconfirmed the power of every vote.



Manipur

As part of the 11th NVD celebrations in Manipur, State Awards were given to one District Election Officer, six Electoral Registration Officers and 60 Booth Level Officers in recognition of their exemplary performance during the Special Summary Revision, 2021. Further, six State Icons were also felicitated for their continuous support in creating awareness among the general public.

L.M. Khaute, the DGP of Manipur, graced the event as the chief guest. State Election Commissioner, Nungshitombi Athokpam, was the guest of honour and P.K. Singh, who is the Chief Electoral Officer, Manipur, presided over the function.

The District Election Officers and Electoral Registration Officers emphasised the objective and purpose of celebrating National Voters' Day to the newly enrolled electors. The young, first-time voters were felicitated and administered the Voters' Pledge. Besides distributing e-EPICs, the DEOs and EROs appealed to the young citizens to participate actively in the electoral process and exercise their franchise in a free, fair and transparent manner.

Meghalaya

Consistent with the current overarching NVD theme of 'Making Voters Empowered, Vigilant, Safe and Informed', the 11th National Voters' Day celebrations in Meghalaya were conducted across the state in all the 11district headquarters and four Sub-divisions, spread over 60 Assembly Constituencies. Polling-station-wise EPIC distribution functions were organised at all the polling stations for all the newly registered voters in Meghalaya. The State-level NVD function was held at the Raj Bhavan, Shillong, and was graced by the Governor of Meghalaya, Satya Pal Malik, as chief guest.

Earlier in the morning the DEO, East Khasi Hills District, flagged off the 'Wheels of Democracy' Cycle Rally, with the aim to spread awareness about NVD and its current themes. It commenced from the State ELC Corner at Meghalaya Bharat Scouts & Guides, Shillong, travelled across various important localities of the capital city and finally culminated at the Raj Bhavan premises to join in the State-level NVD, 2021 events.

Puducherry

The state level function was presided by the Chief Secretary to Government, Ashwani Kumar, The occasion was graced by the Chief Electoral Officer, Puducherry, Shurbir Singh and several other government dignitaries, and EROs, AEROs and other Government Officials.

As a part of the 11th National Voters' Day celebrations, the officials who have contributed in practice of best electoral process were honored. Prizes were given away to the winners of the pre-NVD competitions. Further, e-EPIC was launched on the occasion of NVD, in the State Level function.

Visit to a village by students of Puducherry University, Karaikal Campus

Punjab

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the 11th National Voters' Day was celebrated at the State and district levels in the State, as per the guidelines of Election Commission of India (ECI). In addition, the NVD was also celebrated at the level of Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) in all Assembly Constituencies (117) and at all the polling booths (23,213) in Punjab.

Various festivities marked the event. On this occasion, mobile vans were used at district headquarters in all the 22 districts of Punjab. Projected as 'SVEEP Jhankis', these mobile vans covered all the prominent places of the district headquarters with great fanfare, disseminating the messages of voter awareness. In a cultural extravaganza, district SVEEP icons were engaged to reach out to all stakeholders through performances of folk songs, and dances like Giddha, and Bhangra.

CEO Punjab released two books published by the department: a coffee-table book on SVEEP, which captures the challenging and exciting journey of conducting SVEEP activities amidst the pandemic; and a compilation of 'Boliyan' –couplets sung in Punjab, often accompanying folk dances such as Bhangra and Giddha–curated through a competition for women electors and Anganwadi workers held at the district level.

Film actor and State icon Sonu Sood shared a video message on voter awareness, which was shown at State-and district-level functions as well as in all the 'SVEEP Jhankis'.

Rajasthan

NVD 2021 was organized with full gusto in Rajasthan, albeit on the virtual mode. The Governor of the state, Kalraj Mishra, was the chief guest and participated from the Raj Bhavan. He administered the Preamble of the Constitution and the Fundamental Duties to all, thus reminding every citizen of the concurrent value of rights and responsibilities.

The message of the CEC was aired and he heralded the beginning of a new decade full of hope, healing, recovery and faith. He emphasised the theme of this year NVD which is to make our Voters 'SIVE' – Safe, Informed, Vigilant and Empowered. The remarkable initiative of e-EPIC was highlighted as was the Election Commission of India's web radio: 'Hello Voters' – a first-of-its-kind online digital radio service, which is expected to be the emerging nerve centre of voter awareness and information sharing.

The Governor launched the thematic poster of the NVD and administered the voters' pledge to all. The new voters also marked their presence with short awareness video clippings.

Outstanding achievers in electoral processes from various districts were appreciated and recognised for their efforts and were awarded for their distinguished services; these included DEOs, ADEOs, EROs, Supervisors and BLOs. The programme was a resounding success with special words of appreciation from the Governor for its meticulous and flawless planning as well as execution.

Tripura

NVD was celebrated in all polling stations, Assembly Constituencies, Sub-divisions, and districts and State headquarters, while observing all the guidelines related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Awareness activities such as a quiz competition and a play, among others, were organized by the DEOs and EROs.

At the State-level NVD function Ramish Bais, Governor of Tripura, graced the occasion as chief guest and inaugurated the events of the NVD, 2021. The 'Election Awareness Calendar 2021' was released by the Governor. Samir Barman, the State Icon for PwDs, administered the Voters' Pledge to newly enrolled electors. Thereafter, all the dignitaries distributed the EPICs among the newly enrolled electors of adjoining polling stations. The winners of State-level Online Election Quiz Competition were given prizes in a fitting conclusion.

NATIONAL AWARDEES 2021

In the Service of Democracy

Binod Kumar served as DSP in various districts including Aurangabad, Sitamarhi, Rohtas, Bagaha and East Champaran. After being promoted to the IPS he was assigned to the 2001 batch in which he served as SP in the Supaul and Muzaffarpur Rail districts, as DIG in Darbhanga range, Special Branch (Security) and STF, and as IG in Bhagalpur. After the reconstitution of various ranges and zones in the police setup he joined as the first IG of the Purnea Range on August 20, 2019.

He was known for being an outstanding officer, with a calm and composed demeanour. His exceptional services earned him the Police Medal for Meritorious Service in 2008 and the President's Police Medal for Distinguished Service in 2013.

In the course to the Bihar Assembly Elections 2020 he was thoroughly reviewing the election related preparations of all the districts of the Purnea Range. He was instrumental in getting arms licences verified in the thorough follow-up of the execution status of various warrants and attachments. He had policing experience of more than thirty years, serving in various capacities as a professional police officer and in various leadership roles. By sharing his experience in everyday policing he was able to guide young officers on various dimensions of the work.

Late Binod Kumar
IPS (2001), IG Purnea Range

During his official discharge of duty, he got infected with COVID-19, which led to his untimely death on October 18, 2020 at AIIMS, Patna. He was 59 years old and was scheduled to superannuate on October 31, 2021. He is survived by his wife and two daughters.

In the words of the DGP, Bihar S.K. Singhal he would be remembered for the 'ease and success' with which he discharged his duties. The Commission salutes the hard work and efficiency of Late Binod Kumar and his service to the nation.

Towards an Inclusive Paradigm

Padmashri Dr. Niru Kumar has worked extensively with thought leaders and transnational corporations to bring about a transformation in the society. Having trained more than 15,000 professionals across industries, her areas of expertise include Diversity Strategy, Policies, Assessments and Analytics, covering areas of Gender, Generation, LGBTQ, Disability and Bias. She has been invited to share her thoughts in august and diverse gatherings and diversity across the world. She has been a participant in various research projects. No wonder that she is the recipient of several prestigious awards and recognitions. Having overcome the challenge of a significant physical disability herself, Dr. Niru Kumar brings enormous passion and inspiration to her work.

The Election Commission has been working towards more accessible and inclusive elections. And scaling up its efforts to reach out to various marginalized sections, including Persons with Disability (PwD), third gender voters, and other disadvantaged and under served groups. Our outreach and facilitation spans the full spectrum of election-related activities, including registration, verification and the actual casting of votes.

Padmashri Dr. Niru Kumar
National Icon, ECI

Dr. Niru Kumar's experience helped fine-tune and augment our strategies to engage with underprivileged groups, in ECI's quest to ensure that no voter is left behind. Her vast experience and insights have helped strengthen the Commission's efforts towards accessible and inclusive elections in India. Besides helping us in strategic planning for accessible elections, her rich experience in training and coaching will assist in the development of suitable training pedagogy and modules, scaling up our efforts, and implementing ECI's vision of accessible elections, on the ground in India.

Doctor for Democratic Rights

Dr. Satendra Singh, a polio survivor, is a professor at the University College of Medical Sciences and GTB Hospital, Delhi.

A leading light on the issues of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs), Dr. Singh has created a paradigm shift in how we view disability and often underestimate the abilities of people with disabilities. During the General Elections 2019, this exemplary doctor stepped up as a role model by volunteering to be a Presiding Officer of a PwD booth in South Delhi, manned entirely by Persons with Disabilities– in the first ever such initiative in Delhi.

In January, 2020, prior to the elections, he contributed as an active member of the State Steering Committee on Accessible Elections to help chalk out the strategy for inclusive election, stood up for the voting rights of people with intellectual and psycho social disabilities, and urged politicians to avoid conscious or unconscious disability slurs in election campaigns.

In the Delhi legislative elections of February, 2020, as a PwD Election Icon for the Central District, Delhi, he built a team of employees with disabilities, and mentored and trained them to set up a second successive PwD-manned polling booth at Chandni Chowk. He motivated voters with disabilities during various voter awareness programmes in the Central District. At all the venues, ramps were created as he, along with the district magistrate, briefed voters. This highlighted the Election Commission of India's commitment to inclusive elections and proved to voters that they would be treated exactly like role models with complete access and facilitation to all venues on polling day. Dr. Singh handed the EPIC card to first-time voters with disabilities, some of whom were wheelchair users. Galvanising his social media presence, he created awareness on various disability-relevant issues and their solutions provided by the ECI: availing postal ballot facilities for absentee voters among PwD and senior citizens above 80 years; the use of form 12D; the pick-and-drop facility for PwDs to access polling stations; and registration via the PwD mobile app. He also participated in the training programme for election officers, specifically those pertaining to disability etiquette, reconfirming his message and his motto: 'Nothing can compare to the joy of participating actively in the festival of democracy at polling booths'.

Dr. Satendra Singh
Doctor for Democratic Rights

Ensuring Secure Election in Delhi

Every fair and transparent election is founded in it being secure and foolproof. The security arrangements for the General Elections for the Legislative Assembly of Delhi 2020 were thus planned after taking cues from past experiences including those in the recently concluded General Elections for Lok Sabha in2019. The several challenges were effectively handled to ensure safe and secure elections.

Around the time of the state elections, protests against the implementation of CAA and NPR were being held throughout the NCT of Delhi with some incidents of violence in North-East and South-East Delhi, and New Delhi District. Tactful handling of protestors and effective deployment of security measures prevented any untoward incidents during these protests.

The incumbent chief minister of the NCT of Delhi was one of the contesting candidates from the New Delhi Assembly Constituency. The meetings held by him attracted large crowds and required special planning for sabotage or other unlawful activities by antisocial elements.

Further, the area of New Delhi District has within its jurisdiction important sites such as the Parliament House, the Rashtrapati Bhavan, the Supreme Court of India, the High Court of Delhi and the residences of Members of Parliament, among others. The management of security and traffic here remains a day-to-day challenge, more so during the process of elections. The election events, however, proceeded without any major law and order problem due to informed anticipation and proper planning.

Eish Singhal, DCP
Delhi Police

The EVMs for the entire New Delhi Parliamentary Constituency were stored in the area of New Delhi District. In view of complaints about the tampering of EVMs, strict security was deployed round the clock at the place of storage. Subsequently, the premises where the EVMs were stored was converted into counting centres and arrangements were ensured to prevent any possibility of sabotage during the process. Many of the polling stations had VVIP voters on the electoral roll. In order to prevent crowding by curious members of the public and supporters of the VVIPs at the polling station, these VVIPs were facilitated by coordination with their PR teams to stagger their presence at the polling stations and prevent any inconvenience to the public and the VVIP alike.

The route management for the visiting VVIPs, including the President and the Prime Minister, was done with a view to avoid any clash. To prevent any inconvenience to other government officers when the contesting candidates came to file nominations at the offices of the respective Returning Officers, the areas around the offices were cordoned off for up to 50 metres, with a separate entry and exit to the offices of the Returning Officers.

These 360-degree security arrangements, based on anticipation, information and experience, ensured a safe and secure election process.

Lending a Hand to the Hearing Impaired

The Election Commission of India has very sincerely executed its mandate of 'No Voter to be Left Behind', specifically by making sure that Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) are facilitated to exercise their franchise. In this context, an important milestone was the Meghalaya Sign Bank App, which was developed locally by National Informatics Centre (NIC) Meghalaya and Office of the Commissioner of Disability as a technological aid and facilitation tool for hearing-impaired voters. The app was aptly launched on December 3, 2018, on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. Notably, the Office of CEO Meghalaya effectively leveraged this opportunity by dissemination and deployment of this application among polling officials in the state Assembly Elections 2018 and the Parliamentary Elections 2019.

F.R. Kharkongor
CEO Meghalaya

As many as 114 prioritized electoral terms were shared by office of CEO Meghalaya with the NIC and the Office of the Commissioner of Disabilities and these were duly incorporated in the app. Each electoral term was accompanied by a short video clips, painstakingly and carefully created and inserted by members of the Meghalaya Deaf Association, which helped to highlight and explain with clarity each of the electoral terms in sign language. Basic sign language trainings were undertaken by the Office of the CEO in collaboration with the Meghalaya Deaf Association for all district election officials (DEOs) across the state in the recently held elections.

The Sign Bank was extensively used and deployed in trainings and contributed to greater empathy, sensitivity and understanding among polling officials regarding the tangible and intangible issues of PwDs, especially the concerns of the hearing-impaired, vis-a-vis electoral terms and other related challenges.

Elections Amid Communal Unrest

The Central District is one of the most sensitive districts of Delhi due to its constituent localities, such as the Walled City. Besides, most of the sites designated for public protests, such as the Ramlila Ground, and important sites such as Rajghat, Delhi the Delhi Secretariat, the Police Headquarters, the University Grats Commission, the Civic Centre fall under its jurisdiction.

The Delhi Legislative Assembly Election, 2020 were announced for February 8, 2020. The announcement coincided with major ongoing law and order problems in the jurisdiction of the Central District. However, tactful handling combined with the excellent rapport of senior police officials with the communities in the area helped a lot in handling the law and order situation and maintaining peace.

The enactment and implementation of National Register of Citizens and Citizenship Amendment Act by the Central Government added to the sensitive situation in the Walled City. All appropriate committees, such as the Aman Committee and the Nagrik Suraksha Samitis, were activated well in advance and involved the locally respected members of both the committees to create awareness amongst the residents. This went along way in maintaining peace and harmony in the area.

Meanwhile, the required arrangements for the Delhi Legislative Assembly Elections were undertaken. The area of the Central District falls in 09 Assembly Constituencies. A total number of 91 candidates were contesting in the elections in these constituencies. There were 705 polling booths in 206 polling premises, out of which 59 polling premises were critical. Besides, the area of PS Hauz Qazi was declared vulnerable due to communal reasons.

Mandeep Singh Randhawa
DCP, Delhi (Central)

The situation demanded a high degree of initiative and leadership on the part of all the officers deployed coupled with prompt responses to all situations. It was ensured that all incidents with political and communal overtones were intimated to the Deputy Commissioner of Police Mandeep Sigh Randhawa and attended to personally by concerned SHOs/SDPOs without delay. Vigorous checking of all the hotels and guest houses was conducted as the district is a hub of such accommodations. Verification of domestic help and tenants was also intensified and legal action was taken against violators.

All the field staff posted in the Central District had undergone the workshop specially aimed to sensitize them about the model code of conduct and the dos and don'ts to be strictly followed during the polling process. All the directions and guidelines of the Election Commission of India were complied with in letter and in spirit. The permission for organising public meetings, padyatras, processions and rallies during canvassing was given to the political parties in a well planned manner to avoid the possibility of confrontation between rival groups. Special attention was given to the security of the candidates and VIPs/VVIPs.

After meticulous and thorough planning, a comprehensive police arrangement was issued by the Deputy Commissioner of Police. As a result, the entire election process proceeded peacefully with no untoward incident reported in the Central District.

Accessible Elections for All

The Election Commission of India pursues the mission of inclusive and accessible elections for Persons with Disabilities (PwDs). In the elections to the Delhi Legislative Assembly 2020, there were 50,471 registered PwD voters. Specific arrangements were made to ensure that a large number of PwDs would participate in the elections and cast their vote.

Accessible Elections

All the polling stations were facilitated with firm ramps to roll in wheelchairs and 3,875 wheelchairs were allocated to the polling stations. To assist the PwD voters and senior citizens, 9,997 volunteers were deployed, primarily in collaboration with the Directorate of Education. Sign-language interpreters were also assigned at 80 different locations that had a higher number of voters with hearing impairment. Braille voter slips, Braille EPIC, Braille dummy ballot sheet and Braille voter assistance guide were provided to all visually impaired voters.

During the Assembly elections in February 2020, the Chief Electoral Office had decided to provide pick-and-drop facility to PwD voters and octogenarians. In order to use this facility, the voters were given four options to register themselves for the facility:

1. Dial 1950- Voter helpline number.
2. Register on CEO Delhi website
3. Send an SMS with the EPIC number
4. Mobile app: CEO Delhi Pick and Drop

A total of 719 electors registered for the facility and 597 of them actually used it on poll day. The service was constantly monitored through the Pick & Drop App on a real-time basis.

Inclusive Elections

With the motto of 'No Voter to be Left Behind', the Election Commission of India had laid special emphasis on the inclusion of centenarians, third-gender electors, PwDs, homeless women and first-time voters in the electoral process.

Third Gender Voters

Special camps and programmes were organized to motivate and enroll them in the electoral roll. There was an impressive increase in the turnout of transgender voters in these elections, from 157 in the Lok Sabha Elections in 2019 to 340 in the Delhi Legislative Assembly Elections in 2020.

Homeless Voters

Meetings of various stakeholders were held by the CEO Delhi and followed by focused efforts by field officers to bring this group into the fold. As a result of the efforts, the enrolment of homeless voters increased from 62 in 2019 to over 10,000 in 2020.

Dr. Ranbir Singh
CEO, Delhi

Women Voters

3017 polling booths managed completely by women polling staff were set up. Every polling station had the facility of crèche services for children accompanying the women voters.

First-time Voters

The CEO Delhi took various steps to encourage young voters to enrol and cast their vote. To motivate young voters, 1,305 Electoral Literacy Clubs in schools and 197 Electoral Literacy Clubs in colleges were established.

Centenarian Voters

An initiative to honour the centenarian voters of Delhi pioneered during the Lok Sabha Elections 2019 was perfected in the Delhi Assembly Elections 2020. For the first time, octogenarians (voters aged 80+) were given the option to cast their vote via the Postal Ballot system. Eventually, 6 centenarian voters cast their vote in these elections. Apart from the Postal Ballot facility, the centenarians who wished to go to the polling booth were specially escorted by the Liaison Officer and were assisted for priority voting.

Your Vote Matters

The demographic profile of District South East poses enormous challenges, particularly in terms of electoral roll management, since 5 out of 7 Assembly Constituencies – AC-49 (Sangam Vihar), AC-51 (Kalkaji), AC-52 (Tughlakabad), AC-53 (Badarpur) and AC-54 (Okhla) – are predominantly resettlement colonies. The inhabitants of these settlements are mainly factory workers/labourers, or engaged in other unorganised work. They have migrated from other States and live in rented accommodations without their families, due to which inter-district and intra-district migration is very high, thereby affecting the gender ratio, E.P. ratio, 18-19- year-old voters and the voters turnout.

However, in the run-up to the Delhi Legislative Assembly Elections 2020, the most serious challenge came from Shaheen Bagh area, located in AC-54 Okhla Assembly Constituency.

Though its ramifications in term of law and order were way beyond the geographical boundaries of the Assembly Constituency, the situation in Shaheen Bagh area was very fragile regarding holding peaceful elections.

Multifarious activities were conducted as part of confidence-building measures in the days preceding the Assembly elections. Many initiatives were taken to encourage votes to cast their votes–the message was spread through rallies, street plays, signature campaigns and by creating selfie points in public places. This served as a great tool in lifting the mood of voters in District South East and motivated them to come out and vote. On polling day, senior voters and PwD voters were facilitated with pick-and-drop service and dedicated volunteers for such voters and polling stations.

Harleen Kaur
DEO, South East Delhi

A series of review meeting were held by the District Election Office with law enforcement authorities. ECI observers and CEO Delhi also visited the area with the District Election Officer to take stock of the situation at the ground level regarding holding of peaceful elections. Alternative routes were identified for poll day to avoid problematic areas.

Due to the untiring focus on motivating voters and the meticulous attention to all areas of poll management regarding law and order, District South East was able to deliver peaceful and incident-free elections not only in AC-54 (Okhla) but in the entire South East District. The voter turnout in Shaheen Bagh bore testimony to the fact that people came out to vote without any fear and or intimidation. There were three polling station locations very close to the protest site. The voter turnout in these polling stations is evidence that people came out to exercise their franchise with utmost confidence.

Proud Guardians of Democracy

The Legislative Assembly Elections of 2020 in Delhi was held while there was massive unrest in the national capital due to the students' movement. Electioneering by political parties was intense. Amidst this, the Delhi Police performed commendably by making advance and adequate preparation.

A Special Commissioner of Police, Crime & EOW during Delhi Legislative Assembly Election the 360-degree effort required careful planning and management of available resources, due diligence and meticulous compliance with the guidelines and rules for all election related activity. It was also essential to keep all senior officers abreast of all directions and instructions received from the Commission and the Chief Electoral Office of Delhi.

In order to ensure that security and law and order were not affected adversely, Delhi Police initiated many innovative measures such as:

- Google mapping of all booths and polling stations for easy movement of forces
- Geo-fencing of PCR vans and motorcycles for effective patrolling
- Installation of additional CCTV cameras outside sensitive booths, in consultation with DEOs
- Web cameras at border pickets to monitor border checking from the DCP's office
- Spreading awareness for higher voter turnout through a social media campaign
- Assistance to senior citizens at polling stations

State Security Deployment Plan

One of the most challenging tasks was to prepare a fool-proof security deployment plan as per the requirement of the ECI. All security activities such as flying squads, Static Surveillance Teams were given due attention.

Resource Planning and Mobilisation

A manpower audit was done in order to make optimum use of available manpower. The deployment plan was prepared keeping in mind the availability of the force and without compromising the security component, because with Delhi being the national capital, other factors also needed to be adequately addressed.

Praveer Ranjan
Special CP (Crime & EOW), Delhi

Implementation of MCC

By issuing the necessary directions, it was ensured that the provision of the MCC was implemented meticulously. A mechanism was set in motion to collect information regarding cases registered relating to the violation of the MCC; cases under various provisions of the People's Representation Act; violations of expenditure; and the compilation of all figures to then be disseminated seamlessly to CEO Delhi.

Interstate coordination

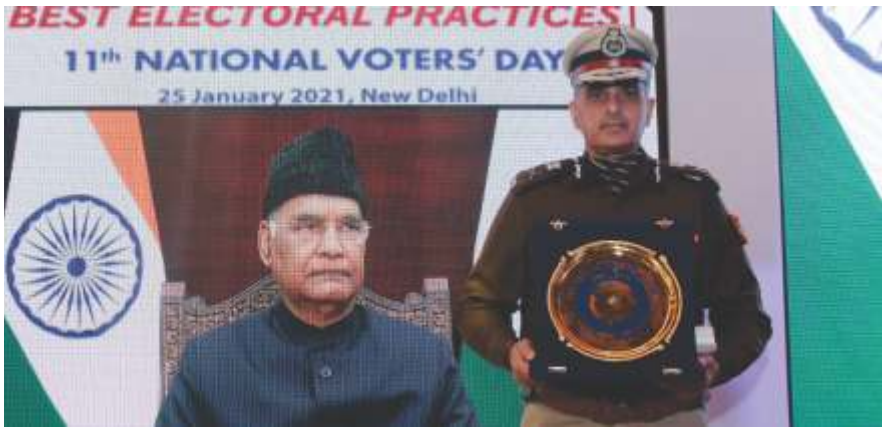
- Stringent preparations were made, along with the neighbouring states, for adequate security deployment at borders and for conducting checks for the supply of liquor and arms.
- Security at Storage-cum-Counting Centres
- Strong security arrangements were planned and implemented at the 21 counting centers to ensure uninterrupted and smooth counting of votes.
- Seizure of Cash, Arms and Liquor
- A huge number of unlicensed arms and ammunition, cash and liquor were seized during the campaigning and electioneering period.

The successful conduct of the Delhi Legislative Assembly Election 2020 was achieved due to critical and smooth coordination at all levels from the CEO to the field-level functionaries involved in the election process.

Safe Elections, Secure Elections in Delhi

The election process includes the pre-polling campaign, polling, storing of electronic voting machines (EVMs) and counting of votes, and culminates in victory processions. The General Election to the Legislative Assembly of NCT of Delhi 2020 remained quiet sensitive and vulnerable due to the protests against CAA and NRC and there were a number of places where the protests were going on continuously. It was a challenging task to make a foolproof security plan for the Delhi districts of South, South East, West, Dwarka, Outer, New Delhi and South-West as per the requirements of the Election Commission of India.

To start with, a well-organized election machinery of the district police was put in place. Elaborate plans



were made for ensuring the security and law and order during the entire electioneering process, and effectively implemented on ground. Hands-on guidance and supervision was facilitated for all administrative levels of the district in the preparation and meticulous execution of police arrangements during the entire election process. Senior officers carried out field visits and interacted with other officials and men on the ground to motivate them and to ensure that they carried out their duties effectively, professionally and in a fair manner.

A special mention must be made for the arrangements made for the election related security and law and order arrangements made in the areas seriously affected by agitations. Apart from the thorough planning, deployment of manpower, and the optimum use of technology such as CCTV cameras and video cameras, very intensive community outreach efforts were also made so as to allay the fears of the general public about the peaceful conduct of the election. Seamless coordination was maintained with the Election Commission Observers including the Special Observer for exchange of important information and plugging of the gaps, if any. Visits of senior officers at the police premises and in these areas were continuously maintained to instill a sense of confidence among the electorate and the election officials. The interstate borders, where there were chances of smuggling of liquor, musclemen and money, were under effective surveillance in coordination with the adjoining districts of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana. Due to this strict vigil at the borders, large amounts of illicit liquor was seized.

R. S. Krishnia
Spl CP (L&O), South Delhi

A constituency-wise mapping of polling booths was also carried out to ensure the smooth movement of polling materials. Geo-fencing in some of the polling stations and premises was also done through Google for checking and monitoring the movement of people and vehicles. CCTV cameras were installed at border pickets. Akharas and gyms operating in the bordering districts of Delhi and the neighbouring three districts were also monitored to prevent any movement of lawless elements in Delhi. Considerable action was also taken against antisocial individuals and desperate criminals who could have played a mischievous role during the election. The EVM storage cum counting centres were also covered with triple-layer security measures and an efficient access control mechanism was put in place.

Due to the measures taken and the effective implementation of all the schemes of security and law and order, despite the sensitive scenario prevailing in the city, no untoward incident was allowed to take place during the day of polling and post polling. The security planning of the entire election process was pivotal in establishing high electoral benchmarks, contributing to making the General Election to the Delhi Legislative Assembly 2020 historic, in more ways than one while also displaying outstanding professionalism.

A Leap of Faith in Bihar Election 2020

From the beginning of 2020, the world was caught in the tentacles of COVID-19 pandemic, which caused unforeseen miseries to people, especially the poor and the lower middle economic strata. Conducting elections in Bihar in these unprecedented conditions made the task a gigantic challenge.The difficulties were aggravated when massive floods hit the state.

Come what may, the election machinery and personnel of the State were committed to conducting timely free, fair, peaceful, transparent, participative, inclusive, accessible and safe elections. For this purpose, strategies were formed, and an action plan worked out and followed meticulously. These strategies included extensive measures extending from the CEO's office to polling stations, including preparation of EVM machines and other arrangements at polling stations to prevent any hindrance in the process from COVID-19.

Extensive basic facilities were made available via the Health Departmentat all polling stations, keeping the pandemic in view. Right from the procurement of a whopping 13 lakh COVID kits, the formulation of related guidelines and SOPs, packaging were all challenging tasks. A standard protocol for COVID-19 biomedical waste management was also formulated.

Emphasis was laid on Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation Programme (SVEEP) to reinforce a 360-degree awareness approach to inform electors about COVID-19 prevention preparedness at various stages of the elections and motivate voters to step out to vote on the poll day.

A total of 16.65 lakh electors were added in the electoral roll, which included new registration of 230812 migrants who had returned home due to COVID-19 lockdown in the country. Postal Ballot facilities were extended to Persons with Disabilities, senior citizens above 80 years and those quarantined due to COVID-19.

H.R. Srinivasa
CEO, Bihar

For the first time in India, candidates were provided with the online nomination facility and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) applications such as Sugam, Suvidha and Samadhan. A digital 'RO Handbook Reference' was launched to provide requisite information to election officials at their fingertips. An 'ex-gratia payment' portal was developed and used for tracking and monitoring ex-gratia payment to the polling/security personnel in case of an unfortunate death or a permanent disability.

Meticulous use of information technology (IT) tools such as the Matdan app and web portals, among others, was made to collect and keep updated information about postal ballots, grounds/buildings for election campaigning, candidates' criminal antecedents, and other significant matters.

Around 5.31 lakh polling personnel were engaged in different capacities in addition to 1.8 lakh security personnel deployed for ensuring free and fair elections. Extensive training was imparted to all personnel, mostly through the virtual mode and also through the classroom mode while observing COVID-19 protocol. As many as 75,720 women polling personnel were deployed, the first time that such a large-scale deployment of female personnel was made in the history of elections in Bihar.

Despite all odds, under the guidance, superintendence and monitoring of ECI, the election machinery in Bihar managed to successfully conduct the Bihar Assembly Elections 2020 while involving over 73 million electors and recording a higher voter turnout compared to the 2015 Assembly Elections. Moreover, the entire exercise was conducted taking every precaution to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

The proper steps taken at every level led to a seamless conduct of elections in Bihar, with the State receiving the best State award from the Election Commission of India at the 11th National Voters' Day, 2021 celebrations.

Ensuring Equality through Accessibility

The Election Commission of India's mandate of inclusive elections is seen best in its interface with stakeholders, including NGOs in relevant fields, to ensure that no voter is left behind.

Action for Ability Development and Inclusion (AADI) is one such non-profit body, which envisions creating a world in which people with disability are an integral part of society, participating in the community and living life to the fullest, with equitable access to opportunities and services. The focus of their work is to facilitate enabling environments in the best interest of the child and the adult, thus ensuring equitable, accessible, quality-assured services using a lifespan approach.

As a member of the National Steering Committee and State Steering Committee, AADI provided inputs in creating guidelines for accessible elections. The following initiatives were undertaken in this regard:

- A meeting was held at AADI with NGO representatives of different districts of Delhi, District Social Welfare Officers (led by Dr Madhavi), Sector Officers, Nodal Officers, Planning from the CEO's office, to discuss the roles and responsibilities for ensuring access to voters with disabilities.

Access Audit of polling booths

- AADI, in collaboration with the Social Welfare Department, Delhi, created training modules for the Muncipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) and polling booth officials to inform and train them on the needs of voters with disabilities.
- The AADI team audited the polling booths in Dera Village, Bhatti mines and Fathepur Beri, and subsequently submitted a report to the office of the CEO.
- Active citizens from the theatre club of AADI performed an educative street play to raise awareness on accessible elections, urging diverse voters especially people with disabilities to cast their vote.
- AADI conducted training of 80 officers, and executive and assistant engineers, to apprise them of polling booth accessibility features and information regarding Assured Minimum Facilities. Relevant information was disseminated far and wide among related and relevant organisations, PwDs and their families.

G. Syamala
Executive Director, AADI

In a significant initiative to add to inclusion efforts the Election Commission of India announced the postal ballot facility for absentee voters to ensure larger and more inclusive voter participation. Significantly, for the first time, the postal ballot facility offered to absentee voters included Persons with Disability (PwD) and senior citizens above 80 years, who could vote at their homes using the facility. Two PwDs, Darsana and Sheel, who are sisters cast their votes at their residence in Panchsheel Enclave and endorsed the facilitation, saying, 'The staff from the ECI who visited us was very helpful and cooperative. They used a three-sided screen to ensure the secrecy of ballot. We were able to stamp our vote using ink after which they immediately sealed our vote in an envelope.'

Training of polling booth officials by the AADI team

Street play by AADI on raising awareness on accessible elections at Dilli Haat

Managing Polls amid a Pandemic

Bihar's Purnea district went to poll for the State's Legislative Assembly with 3,098 polling stations and a deployment of 12,300 security personnel. Managing security to ensure free, fair, and participative election was a herculean task. A detailed Comprehensive Security Management plan was prepared in consultation with all the stakeholders and with the due approval of the Observers.

A total of 463 hamlets were identified as vulnerable and 1,236 people were identified as probable troublemakers with respect to these vulnerable hamlets. In all, 769 flag marches were carried out continuously in these vulnerable hamlets for confidence building using the CAPF and district police forces, and preventive actions were ensured against all the identified trouble makers. Chowkidaars, who form the backbone of rural policing, were sensitised and an information network up to the village level was put into operation by motivating them. Institutionally, information was gathered by the Officer-in-charge of the police station via frequent chowkidaari parades.

For further confidence building, CAPF forces were stationed Assembly-wise and utilised for area domination and pre- poll flag marches. Furthermore, their locations were mapped in the force deployment application; duty assignment was done in the same assembly segments for the poll day. Force deployment application was utilised for randomisation of the police forces before deployment in poll duties. Dedicated Quick Reaction Teams were formed Assembly-wise and they were rigorously used on the poll day in the event of any contingency or information verification without disturbing the polling centre deployment or affecting any other election-related deployment.

Continuous monitoring of Facebook and other social media as well as WhatsApp groups was done via a dedicated CCSMU (Cyber Crime and Social Media Unit) and Cyber Senani WhatsApp groups. Confidence-building measures like flag marches and positive actions of the police was continuously shared via the district Facebook Page, which is liked and followed by more than 12,000 active members, leading to a high social media reach.

Battling COVID-19

Specific pro-active measures were taken in view of the pandemic.

Vishal Sharma
SP, Purnea

- A dedicated COVID-19 action plan for CAPF and security forces was prepared for facilitating COVID-19 management.
- A district-level Nodal Police Officer was notified for COVID-19 co-ordination.
- Planning was done in advance by identifying dedicated hospitals and isolation centres for COVID-19 treatment of CAPF personnel and other forces.
- AC-wise and district-level nodal officers and nodal police officers for COVID-19 were also notified to avoid any end-time confusion and chaos.
- Detailed COVID-19 SOP and guidelines for CAPF were also prepared to avoid any confusion and to sensitise them to the situation.
- Timely distribution of COVID-19 safety kits was carried out to all security personnel for their safety and with strict adherence to the COVID-19 safety protocol.
- As a result of the meticulous planning on the COVID-19 front, there were no major infections that might have caused disruption of election work or process.
- Timely issue of COVID-19 safety kits and dissemination of SOP and guidelines led to an increase of confidence among the security personnel about their safety.

As a result of these efforts and initiatives, elections were conducted peacefully without any major incident (restrictions on meetings in public spaces due to COVID-19 and rigorous preventive policing led to a decrease of election-related offences (20) during 2020, which decreased by around 82% as compared to (110) offences during Assembly Elections, 2015 or any major COVID-19 outbreak among security personnel in the district of Purnea. Such detailed and comprehensive security management created a secure environment for conducting free, fair, and participative election with particular focus on vulnerable sections against the challenging backdrop of COVID-19.

Boosting Voter Turnout in Challenging Circumstances

During the election to the Legislative Assembly of Bihar, the district of Kaimur in Bihar achieved the same gender ratio of 920 in the electoral roll as in the census 2011. The voter turnout also witnessed a rise by percentage of 3.49 to 4.41– this was no mean feat not just because of COVID-19 but also other reasons such as urban apathy, and law and order challenges arising because of Naxal activities and intimidation of voters.

Increasing voter turnout was a challenge and several strategies were devised and implemented to generate awareness among the voters. Booths that have historically recorded low voter turnout were identified and special teams of senior officers were sent for confidence-building measures to targeted areas. Extensive voter awareness campaigns were launched in the vulnerable pockets as well as low voter turnout areas.

As a result, 38,000 new and first-time voters were added in the electoral roll and EPIC was distributed to these voters. This was accompanied by an appeal from the DEO to vote and to generate awareness among to at least 50 people in their locality to vote.

An innovative initiative called 'Kartavya Rath' was launched. 'As part of this initiative, Master trainers with EVMs were deployed for each block, and they visited each panchayat to spread awareness among voters. Motivation campaigns for the electors to cast their vote were shared extensively on various print and electronic media, social media, audio and video messages as well as text messages on social media and WhatsApp groups. Demo Booths were set up at all major places of all ACs of the district, which offered hands-on information and experience to electors about how EVM and VVPAT function.

Nawal Kishor Choudhary
DEO Kaimur

COVID-19 management was given special attention by taking the following steps:

1. Pre-poll arrangements;

a. COVID-19 awareness campaign;

b. Arrangement of dummy booths at various locations; and

c. Following COVID-19 protocol during nomination, public campaign by leaders, and enforcement of social distancing through marking of public grounds.

2. During Poll:
   a. Awareness about COVID -19;
   b. Placement of proper signage;
   c. Following all the measures of COVID like social distancing, hand washing, thermal screening;
   d. Proper disposal of biomedical waste; and
   e. Adequate arrangements at EVM collection centre.

As a result, Kaimur earned the distinction of becoming the district displaying the lowest COVID-19 infection rate before as well as after election. Not even a single incident of law and order took place. In spite of all the difficulties and the fear of COVID-19, the voter turn out increased by 4 percent.

A Strong Health Protocol for Voters

In view of the Bihar Assembly Elections, extensive arrangements were made at all polling stations keeping the COVID-19 pandemic in mind through the Health Department to ensure that the elections were conducted in a safe and secure manner.

Detailed guidelines were prepared and circulated for compliance during randomization of EVMs, management of strong rooms, training of polling personnel, dispatch of polling and police personnel, poll day management, and the collection and disposal of biomedical waste. A Nodal Health Officer was appointed for the State, for each Assembly Constituency, and each district. A team of experts was constituted for preparing detailed guidelines for all the stages of elections with respect to COVID-19. Guidelines were also prepared for COVID-19 positive electors and electors with more than 100.4 degree Fahrenheit body temperature during thermal scanning.

Pratyaya Amrit
Principal Secretary Health, Bihar

All these steps ensured that the voters were able to participate in the elections safely without fear of infection.

Ensuring Safe & Secure Polling

The Bihar Assembly Election was held in three phases and preparations to ensure peaceful, free and fair elections included several activities undertaken under the leadership of the Nodal officer.

All election-related cases registered during is 2019, 2014 and AE 2015 were monitored and disposed of. Speedy trials of charge sheeted cases were done on a priority basis. Border co-ordination meetings with states and Nepal were carried out on PS, sub-division, district and headquarter levels for checking of inflow of black money, illicit arms, liquor and for taking action against anti-social elements. Preventive action under 107 Cr was taken against 6,05,075 persons, out of which 3,63,372 persons were bound down.

Besides the above measures, a detailed deployment plan for CPF/SAF was designed to ensure an election without any law and order incidents. All polling station locations were covered with CPFs. Detailed Guidelines were issued and training sessions conducted for sensitization of security forces against the threat of landmines, counter-attacks on police pickets and counter-measures against LWE threats. The deployment of 1,200 Coys of CPFs from across the country was managed efficiently, including their logistics as well as operational management. In all, around 1,80,000 security personnel were deployed in every phase of election. Their timely transport, deployment and de-induction were ensured efficiently. Arrangements for protection against COVID-19 were also implemented effectively, with the result that the visiting CPFs did not require any hospitalization or other medical treatment related to the pandemic during the course of the entire election.

Jitendra Kumar
ADG of Police-cum- State Nodal Police Officer, Bihar

Proper Planning, Successful Polls

Serving as the District Election Officer of Patna during the elections to the Bihar Legislative Assembly 2020, Kumar Ravi was awarded Best Electoral Practices Awards at NVD 2021 for his outstanding contribution in the execution of safe, secure, free and fair elections. He took several initiatives to ensure Sahaj, Sugam and Surakshit elections even amid a pandemic. His measures lead to several positive outcomes.

After new guidelines to restrict the maximum number of voters to 1,000 for any polling station, the number of polling stations increased significantly from 4,620 to 7,034 in Patna district. With this increase of 52% in the number of polling stations, meticulous planning was required for their perfect function in. Plans with regard to COVID-19 were prepared at the district, AC and booth levels to ensure proper adherence to pandemic-related guidelines issued by the ECI and the Ministry of Family and Health Welfare.

As the number of polling personnel was increased, more than 10,000 female polling personnel were also trained in advance to meet the increased personnel requirement. In sum,3,944 thermal scanning staff, 4,820 hand sanitizer staff, and 255 sector medical officers and 102 ambulances were deployed to prevent any COVID-related issues. Polled EVM reception arrangements were made at a single premise, AN College, where 30 counting halls were also prepared. EVMs were stored by creating vertical storages using temporary racks. 263 receptions counters were created with the deployment of around1,000 trained personnel to receive EVMs of 7,034 polling stations.

Overall, there was a 0.12% increase in polling percentage over the 2019 Lok Sabha Election despite COVID challenges, which was definitely a commendable achievement.

Kumar Ravi
DEO Patna

Reaching the Last Mile

What could be more effective than using local, grassroot strength to power election-related initiatives for the voters? One such shining example is of JEEViKA. The objective of JEEViKA is to provide right and equal opportunities for livelihoods for the rural community.

JEEViKA devised a multi-pronged strategy to ensure that SVEEP activities reach the last mile and influence maximum voter turnout in the Bihar Legislative Assembly Election 2020. The key components included awareness to increase the voting percentage specifically among women and among other voters in general, and ensuring safe voting practices amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Widespread awareness activities were undertaken by the Self Help Groups of women to enhance the turnout of voters, especially the women in the rural areas. Ten different awareness activities were organized, using locally available resources, by village organizations across all the 534 blocks of the State. Regular reviews were carried out and block-wise reports on the activities were collected periodically to assess and expedite the awareness campaign. The overwhelming response helped in achieving the required outreach. These activities were also shared widely on social media platforms.

Awareness activities were also taken up to sensitise voters in geographically adverse (flood-affected) and remote areas (hilly, hard-to-reach tracts) such as Chautham (Khagaria), Nauhatta, Tilhoutu (Rohtas) districts.

Balamurugan
CEO, JEEVIKA

Women from Self Help Groups actively participated in the electoral process not just as voters but also acted as safeguards to ensure a safe and sterile electoral process, by supplying masks at the polling stations to the officials. They also helped the voters in sanitization and proper maintenance of social distancing in both pre- and post-electoral activities.

Polling Station Activities and COVID Precautions

- Deployment of SHG women and JEEViKA Didis to supply masks and sanitizers to officials and voters.
- To ensure maximum voter participation, JEEViKA Did is also encouraged people to come out of their homes and go to the polling stations to cast their vote on poll day.
- Ensuring COVID-19 protocols and measures are implemented; SHG women members were deployed for temperature screening, sanitization, mask usage and maintaining of physical distancing at the polling stations.

During the effort that lasted over four months with the onset of SVEEP activities till the closure of phase-wise voting, SVEEP activities and JEEViKA's contribution was well received.

National Media Awards

Media plays an important role in the course of elections, and the Dainik Jagran, Patna, took centre stage in the Bihar Assembly Elections, supporting the efforts being made to conduct safe and fair elections in the challenging backdrop of COVID-19.

The Dainik Jagran, Patna, publicized ECI initiatives for COVID-safe elections as well as covered online registration using IT Facilitation, polling station facilitation for safe elections, Assured Minimum Facilities for Persons with Disabilities and Senior Citizens under its 'Matdaan Gyan' segment, thus spreading election-related information in the interests of the voter.

दैनिक जागरण

Dainik Jagran
Patna, for Voter Education and Awareness

In support of ECI's mandate of 'No Voter to Be Left Behind', Radio Mirchi disseminated election-related messages to listeners possible in Delhi. This awareness-raising initiative included conversations about voting by popular RJs, using interesting promos and shows. The radio station not only publicized messages about voting and elections to its listeners but also extended awareness over social media platforms like Facebook and YouTube.

98.3 FM RADIO MIRCHI It's Hot! www.radiomirchi.com

Radio Mirchi
Delhi, for Voter Education and Awareness

FROM THE FIELD

COVID-19 Challenges

Bihar

Procurement, Management and Disposal of Safety Items

In view of the difficult circumstances posed by the COVID-19 pandemic during the Bihar Assembly General Elections 2020, extensive arrangements were facilitated at all polling stations by the Health Department. Apart from procurement procedures, implementing guidelines and SOPs for packaging and dispatch of COVID kits was a challenging task, especially due to the very large number of kits and materials, and the logistics involved in their transportation.

Formulation of Guidelines and SOPs

Several rounds of meetings were conducted by the Chief Secretary of the state with the Principal Secretaries of heath, disaster management and election departments for devising additional measures to safeguard the health of voters and election officials, while ensuring strict adherence to COVID-19 guidelines during the conduct of the Bihar Legislative Assembly Elections 2020.

A team of experts was constituted for preparing detailed guidelines for all the stages of the election process, with respect to COVID-19. Detailed guidelines were prepared and circulated for compliance during randomization of EVMs, management of strong rooms, training of polling personnel, dispatch of polling and police personnel, poll day management, an collection and disposal of biomedical wastes.

The Director in Chief (Disease Control) was appointed as the Nodal Health Officer for the State, the Civil Surgeon-cum-CMO officiated as the Nodal Health Officer for the District, and there was one Medical Officer as Nodal Health Officer for each Assembly Constituency.

A strategic plan was worked out for the procurement, custody, handling, use and disposal of COVID-19 safety equipment.

Procurement, Packaging and Dispatch of Protective Equipment

A meeting was held under the chairmanship of the Chief Secretary to assess the requirement of protective equipment for polling personnel, police personnel and electors. The Bihar Medical Services and Infrastructure Corporation Limited (BMSICL) was authorised to carry out procurement and packaging of materials and the general manager of the BMSICL was appointed as the Nodal Officer, Procurement. This ensured that procurement was done in record time by BMSICL. Daily monitoring at the level of the Department of Health and BMSICL was done to ensure that supplies were fulfilled within the timeline.

The process of packaging was carried out centrally by the BMSICL at three locations–Patna, Muzaffarpur and Purnia. Women volunteers from Jeevika SHG, Integrated Child Development Services Anganwadi Workers and ASHA were involved in preparing COVID kits. Packaging centres were sanitized three times a day. Health department officials worked over time to complete the gargantuan task of packaging and dispatch of whopping 13 lakh COVID-19 kits, provisioning reserves of 20 percent for the election staff.

Safety Equipment and materials Procured by the Health Department, Bihar

For Voters

- 29 lakh hand sanitiser units
- 18 lakh face shields
- 7.21 crore single-use hand gloves

For Central Police

- 5.63 lakh hand sanitiser units
- 11.26 lakh 3-ply masks
- 5.63 lakh face shields
- 11.26 lakh hand gloves

For State Police

- 67,830 hand sanitiser units
- 4.06 lakh 3-ply masks
- 2.03 lakh face shields
- 4.06 lakh hand gloves

For Polling Personnel

- 7.66 lakh hand sanitisers units
- 46 lakh 3-ply masks
- 7.66 lakh face shields
- 23 lakh hand gloves
- 1.06 lakh hand-held IR thermometers

Each carton consisted of six COVID kits for polling personnel and one thermal scanner, six 500ml hand sanitiser units and 600–800 hand gloves for use of voters during voting at the polling station. Every COVID packet for polling personnel, in turn, consisted of six 3-ply face masks, two pairs of hand gloves, one 100 ml hand sanitiser unit and one face shield. Every security personnel kit consisted of one pair of face masks, one pair of hand gloves, a face shield and a 100 ml sanitiser unit. The women volunteers were also provided with face shields, masks, hand gloves and sanitisers for safe and clean packing of the materials.

Biomedical Waste (BMW) Collection and Disposal

In order to reduce the danger of spreading infection, a standard protocol for COVID-19 biomedical waste management was formulated. Such waste, generated from polling stations, collection centres, and warehouse was in Category C and D. EVMs and counting centres was collected in yellow-coloured dustbins/buckets of 100 litre capacity with liners. The bins and liners were labelled with the 'Bio-Hazard' symbol. The transportation of biomedical waste was carried out by closed dedicated vehicles. Adequate vehicles and waste handlers were tagged to 1,06,515 polling stations. The waste handlers were also equipped with proper protective gear (PPE).

With the aim to ensure foolproof disposal of biomedical waste, the ELETRACES app designed by National Informatics Centre (NIC), Bihar was used to track the movement of vehicles tagged for collection and transportation of waste to designated disposal centres.

The waste collected was deposited at the nearest assigned healthcare facility from where it was collected by the concerned Common Biomedical Waste Treatment Facilities (CBWTF) of that healthcare facility and disposed as per the standard protocol across the State.

- 11 districts were attached to Synergy Waste Management Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi, located at the Jawahar Lal Nehru Medical and Hospital, Bhagalpur and six districts were attached to the Anugrah Narayan Magadh Medical College and Hospital, Gaya.
- 15 districts were attached to the Medicare Environmental Management Pvt. Ltd, located at Bella Industrial Area, Muzaffarpur.
- Six districts were tagged with Sangam Mediserve Pvt. Ltd, Prayagraj, located at the Indira Gandhi Institute of Medical Science (IGIMS), Patna.

Bio-Medical Waste Management (Collection and Disposal)

Biomedical waste was collected and disposed by the above four CBWTFs across the districts attached to them in line with provisions under the Biomedical Waste Management Rules, 2016.

The data related to COVID-19 biomedical waste was also updated in COVID-19 biomedical mobile application developed by the Central Pollution Control Board (CBCB).

The whole process of the management, collection and disposal of biomedical waste was carried out under the overall supervision of the COVID Nodal officer of the district, assisted by the COVID Nodal officer of the Assembly Constituency. The collaborative efforts of the Election Department, Health Department and district administration resulted in a judicious and effective utilisation of available resources and bolstered the safe and smooth conduct of the entire election process in the State.

Office of CEO
Bihar

Including the Marginalised in India's Democracy

Delhi

Article 326 of the Indian constitution extends Universal Adult Franchise to every citizen of the country. The bedrock of democracy –- a government 'of the people, for the people, and by the people'– is formed when every citizen can exercise their right to vote in a free and fair manner. Voting allows people to make their voices heard to their elected representatives for accessing adequate and high-quality public services and social protections.

There are large numbers of sections in our society that remain marginalized from the democratic process. This community comprises transgenders, sex workers and homeless people.

The Election Commission of India, in its committed pursuit of its goal of 'No Voter to be Left Behind' has encouraged them to participate in the electoral process. To ensure maximum participation, the Office of CEO Delhi organized special camps for the registration of these marginalized sections of our society.

At the Centre for Holistic Development (CHD), it is the mission to work towards the inclusion of these marginalized communities as rights-bearing and entitled voters of the Republic of India.

Thereafter, we requested the Chief Electoral Office, Delhi to organize a special camp for the inclusion of sex workers as voters of Delhi, which was facilitated and conducted on December 12, 2020 at Swami Shradhanand Marg. With the help of the National Sex Worker Welfare Network, a total of 58 commercial sex workers have received their voter ID cards to date from the Voter Registration of the Matia Mahal, Delhi.

Since 2013, CHD has been assisting ECI, Chief Electoral Office, Delhi and Shelter Management Agencies (SMAs) in running voter enrolment camps at the urban homeless shelters in Delhi. In Delhi, around 200 shelter homes, including shelters for families and women run by DUSIB, and around 10,000 homeless residents participated in the voter enrolment camp in April 2019. According to the data received by SMAs, half of

the homeless residents already had their voter cards, while the remaining three-fourth got enrolled in these camps.

These camps were located close to every shelter home in Delhi such as Yamuna Pushta, Sarai Kale Khan and Bangla Sahib, among others, but some shelters were still not covered. Due to this, some homeless residents could not reap the due benefits of this camp. To cover the entire swathe of homeless residents and to enroll them as voters of India, more such camps need to be organized at specific locations.

The main problem our project seeks to address is to conduct a prior information/awareness of voting rights and their importance, along with the procedure for the registration of a homeless voters. Through this programme, this problem is being addressed in a focused way by working as a team in an inclusive manner. The issue regarding the address (proof) of the homeless people was a challenge as some failed to remember or recall their previous address. Thereby, volunteers and their collective efforts with the BLOs were important and were coordinated accordingly to achieve the primary objective.

The collective efforts of the ECI, civil society organizations, government institutions and other stakeholders for the welfare of marginalized people demonstrate best practices for others to emulate. These efforts also help to strengthen the trust between the marginalized and government institutions.

Sunil Kumar Aledia
Executive Director, Centre for Holistic Development

When Students Show the Way

Electoral Education Programmes Among Tribes in Kerala

Kerala

The inhabitants of remote tribal hamlets in Attappadi experienced several physical and social constraints to turnout to vote. The community intervention programmes led by the school students of the Electoral Literacy Club (ELC) in collaboration with Students Police Cadets (SPCs) resulted in a surge in voter turnout in these areas in the elections to the 2019 Lok Sabha and 2021 Kerala Legislative Assembly Elections. The participatory electoral education activities of the students succeeded in ensuring the participation of tribes in the electoral process.

Electoral Literacy Clubs

Electoral Literacy Clubs were created in India in 2018 to promote electoral literacy among new and future voters in educational institutions through classroom activities and hands-on experiences. ELCs in schools targeted future voters, i.e., students in the age group of 14 to 17 years. Similarly, in colleges the target group is new voters in the age group of 18 to 21 years. The objectives of ELCs are to educate the target groups about voter registration and other electoral processes, familiarize them with EVMs and VVPAT, teach them the value of their votes, harness their potential for carrying electoral literacy to communities, facilitate voter registration and develop a culture of electoral participation. Elected representatives from students are encouraged to run the ELC under the guidance of the nodal officers who are teachers from the humanities department of the schools. Classrooms became the major venue for the activities of ELC. The Election Commission proposed activities such as preparation of wall magazines, film screening, card games on voting, visit to panchayats, school plays, contests, hands-on experience on EVM and VVPAT, social media campaigns and election simulation.

Classroom activities of the ELC in Government Higher Secondary School, Agali, Kerala, also helped students to learn key lessons of political socialization. But the ELC members in Agali did not limit their activities to their school. They went out of their school boundaries to visit tribes in remote forests in Attappadi and started to teach electors about why and how they should vote. The Attappadi model redefined the functional scope of ELCs. The successful engagement of Student Police Cadets (SPCs) in electoral education campaigns in Attappadi also drove authorities of SPCs to broaden their functional scope to include electoral awareness programmes for target groups. Activities of the ELC and SPCs in the Attappadi model shows the critical role students can play in community intervention programmes.

Critical Challenges

Research brought up many issues in the region in the context of voting. If an elector in the remotest tribal hamlet in Attappadi decided to vote, he or she had to travel around fourteen kilometers to reach the nearest polling station. First they had to walk six kilometers through forest areas and then eight kilometer by jeep, if available, through a narrow forest path. They were compelled to begin their journey early morning in order to reach back by forenoon. Elephant infestation in the afternoon is common on this forest path. This threat to life from wild animals forced people to

ELC members conducting an electoral awareness campaign in a tribal hamlet in Attappadi

ELC Nodal officer Sathyan bringing electors from Kinattukara tribal hamlet to the polling booth by crossing the Bhavani River.

abstain from voting. Their movement to polling booths is obstructed by lack of transportation and other infrastructural facilities. People from some tribal hamlets had to cross the Bhavani River to reach a polling booth. Physical barriers were the major reason for lower voter turnout in these areas.

Election campaigns of major political parties hardly take place in these tribal hamlets. Most of the electors therefore think that governmental authorities and political parties routinely fail to address their livelihood and developmental issues effectively. They also believed that political leaders had failed to fulfill the promises made to them in previous elections. Some tribal hamlets like Thadikkundu and Murugala in Attapapdi in the past decided to boycott previous elections as a protest against the pathetic state of infrastructure. Most of them perceived that voting in elections is a futile exercise and started to disown it. Their sense of alienation from and lack of motivation for political participation were psychological barriers for electoral participation.

Some incidences of armed training of Maoists also were reported in the past. Four Maoists were killed in Attappadi forest area in 2019. Inhabitants of tribal hamlets and tribal chiefs recognized the presence of Maoists near the tribal hamlets. There was a pervasive climate of fear in forest areas of Attappadi after the Maoist encounter in 2019.The climate of fear and covert counter-ideologies might have created a psychological barrier to political socialization of some inhabitants of tribal hamlets in Attappadi.

Interventions

The students members of ELC and SPC in Government Higher Secondary School, Agali, in Attappadi jointly conducted electoral awareness programs in the tribal hamlets of remote ares in Attappadi to address the problem of voter turnout. They had started their activties before the General Election to the Lok Sabha in 2019. Together, these two student clubs, along with Election Commission, Police personnel, Departments of Forest, Education and Tribal Welfare, and the Parents and Teachers Association (PTA) at school, conducted electoral awareness classes in each tribal hamlet. During their holidays and stay-back after school, students taught tribes why they must vote and taught them how to do it.

ELC members explaining the voting process to an elector in Attappadi

The activities of the students were not confined to structured electoral awareness campaigns. Regular messages on the importance of electoral participation were imparted through the large school assembly of Agali Higher Secondary School where around 60% among 2,600 students belong to the category of Scheduled Tribes. These students were urged to spread the same message to their parents.

The ELC also assisted people in registering in the electoral roll. They sent messages in multiple tribal languages to the young people in tribal hamlets and taught them how to register their vote. Students also created a video message of veteran singer Nanji Amma from the community to educate tribes on the importance of casting their vote. During the pandemic, ELC used social media platforms to spread voice messages on the importance of electoral participation. Students also made short films and documentaries to communicate the importance of voting to electors in an interesting way. Students of ELC and SPC carried posters and notices to the remotest tribal hamlets in Attappadi and explained the content to tribes in their tribal languages. Students also innovated new ways to communicate the messages to electors during the pandemic period–for instance, pictorial messages on electoral participation were circulated even through printed masks.

Members of ELC and SPC identified senior citizens and Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) from tribal hamlets and helped them to utilize the new facility of postal ballot. They also ensured their assistance to those who wished to vote directly on the polling day.

Additionally, through the Young India campaign, ELC and SPC members taught young electors in the tribal hamlets to use mobile applications of the Election Commission like cVIGIL and the Booth App. Young people were also taught to utilize online services available on the National Voters Service Portal. A help desk for young people was also opened in the school. A football competition conducted by the district administration also attracted the attention of young

Student police cadets assisting a physically challenged voter to arrive at polling booth

people to their political socialization initiatives. Students used all means possible to educate people on the importance of participating in elections. They even requested priests to appeal to people to cast their vote. This earned good results in Mele Mulli and Keezhe Mulli, tribal hamlets on the Kerala-Tamil Nadu border.

Students of ELC and SPC continued their efforts to increase political participation on polling day. They assisted people from remote tribal hamlets to cast their votes democratically without fear or favour. They helped tribal people, senior citizens and PwDs to commute and vote and arranged transportation facilities to all tribal hamlets inside the forest. They also arranged wheelchairs and ambulances for those who needed them, and set up a help desk for them. Further, at the polling booths, they assisted the Election Commission in offering refreshments to voters from the remote areas. Students also helped voters to follow COVID protocols on polling day.

Impact

Continuous initiatives, activities and electoral education programmes of ELC and SPC in Attappadi significantly increased voter turnout in the elections to the 2019 Lok Sabha and the 2021 Kerala Assembly. A significant 14% increase happened to mark the highest ever voter turnout (73.08%) in the 2019 Lok Sabha election as compared to previous elections at the Chindakki booth where tribal electors were in a majority. The ELC and SPC campaign for mandatory registration to the electoral roll resulted in the increase in the number voters among tribes.

Vote vandi: a SVEEP initiative to introduce EVM touring in tribal hamlets of Attappadi

Voter turnout crossed 80% in all tribal hamlets in Attappadi where electoral socialization programs were conducted by ELC and SPC. The success of the electoral education programmes in 2019 encouraged students to expand the scope of their activities into tribal hamlets of three panchayaths during the election to the Kerala Legislative Assembly in 2021. Tribal hamlets of Varkamabadi, Vellakulam, Vechypathy, Nallasinka, and Chavadiyur in Sholayur panchayat on the Kerala-Tamil Nadu border responded positively to the activities of the young brigade. Students also visited a number of tribal hamlets in Agali and Pudur panchayats such as Kottamedu, Narassimukku, Pattimalam, Chalyur, Elachivazhi, Cheerakadav, and Padavayal. More than eighty percent electors turned out to vote in all tribal hamlets where the electoral socialization programs of ELC and SPC were effective.

ELC and SPC also showed swiftness in responding to micro situations. During the 2019 Lok Sabha election, electors in Murugala did not turn out to vote till afternoon. The team led by ELC nodal officer Sathyan went to their hamlet and brought them to the booth by crossing the Bhavani River by foot! Another significant impact of the intervention for electoral participation was from Thadikkundu hamlet. Electors in this hamlet had decided to boycott the Lok Sabha election in 2019, but members of ELC and SPC persuaded and convinced them. As a result, 98% of the electors from Thadikkundu turned out to vote in that election. Electoral education classes and other political socialization activities yielded considerable results in the tribal hamlets in Attappadi.

Motivating Factors

Irular, Mudhukar, and Kurumbar are the three major

tribal groups living in Attappadi. ELC and SPC at Government Higher Secondary School also have good number of students from the tribal hamlets they engaged with. One of the attractions of SPC is its khaki-coloured uniform similar to a police officer. The activities of ELC in tribal hamlets were carried out in SPC uniforms. Even their Political Science teacher Sathyan who was in charge of both SPC and ELC at the school accompanied the students in uniforms. Voter education programmes carried out by their own children in uniforms, with support from police officers and district authorities, created a sense of privilege in the minds of the inhabitants of tribal hamlets in Attappadi. Electors in the tribal hamlets could not reject the emotional appeal of their children to participate in electoral process.

The students also ensured the cooperation of the tribal chiefs of each tribal hamlet in the electoral education programmes. The commands of tribal chiefs in favour of electoral participation also moved people to vote. Another important factor for the success of the Attappadi model was language. Electoral education classes in each hamlet were led by the ELC member from the same hamlet in their respective tribal language. Teachers who know native languages also helped students to lead classes. The classes in tribal languages converted inhabitants of tribal hamlets from passive recipients to active participants.

People started to clarify doubts and asked students to repeat instructions they could not understand in these classes. Voice messages through social media to young electors were also in their tribal languages. Language was an important motivating factor in the Attappadi model.

Conclusion

The success of Attappadi model emanated from its participatory nature. It teaches policy makers that any inititaive seeking the participation of people should be sensitive to their cultural, political, social and economic needs. In order to consistently achieve higher voter turnout it is important to respond effectively to the social and developmental needs of tribes in Attappadi.

Dr. Biju Lekshmanan, Sathyan T. & Dileep P. Chandran

Epic Downloads of e-EPIC

The Election Commission of India (ECI) continuously pursues its mission of 'No Voter to Be Left Behind'. In the same direction, as a part of process simplification for the voters, the ECI announced two technological interventions on National Voters' Day. These were aimed towards ensuring smooth delivery of electoral services, especially amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

To make the electoral process more efficacious, penetrative and accountable, ECI launched e-EPIC and 'Hello Voters' which are two novel initiatives, on January 25, 2021.

Rajasthan, in its characteristic way, took up the task of e-EPIC on a mission mode. E-EPIC, which was rolled out to provide ease of information to voters, is a downloadable document on a mobile or in a printable form on the computer. The e-EPIC has a unique feature of two QR codes.

Adopting a structured step-up strategy, as a part of the preliminary exercise, user-friendly training material for e-EPIC was prepared in Hindi and subsequently all the 33 DEOs and 200 EROs were trained through a very crisp video conference conducted on January 19, 2021 and January 28, 2021.

The e-EPIC exercise was carried out on a war footing by the Chief Electoral Officer, who percolated it down as the prime thrust area, with the message to strive for the utopian target of 100% e-EPIC downloads. With the entire team working with greater zeal and enthusiasm, substantial groundwork was executed wherein e-ROLLS data was downloaded from ERO-NET. This data was then filtered and then re-filtered for New Added Electors having unique mobile numbers. Thus, a part-wise list of data was prepared and provided to all BLOs through the EROs, in view of the fact that BLOs play a pivotal role in connecting with voters on a one-on-one basis.

For any achievable goals, it is imperative to have a detailed target analysis. A total of 10,45,102 new electors were added as a part of SSR. Out of these, electors with unique mobile numbers are 2,14,901, which was the holistic target to be achieved by the CEO office.

For sound execution of the plan, a 360-degree approach was adopted for preparedness. All the BLOs were trained by their EROs/DLMTs and ALMTs regarding the process of downloading the e-EPIC. The above data of 2,14,901 electors with unique mobile numbers was divided part-wise and allocated to concerned BLOs (total 29,300). Ensuring the use of ELC as the linchpin for effective support and to provide a perfect ecosystem for the smooth rollout of the e-EPIC download process, the ELCs were roped in.

Rajasthan has Nodal Officers for School as well as College ELCs in place along with the District Nodal Officer for PwDs. A series of webinars was conducted with these Nodal Officers along with Bharat Scouts and Guides, NSS and NCC officers. For any initiative to succeed, it is imperative to remove any lacuna in policy framing and implementation and it was sought to plug all loopholes and information gaps with dialogues and webinars with these officers. The mission was spearheaded at the State level and was taken down in a cascade form to the district level.

It was a matter of critical priority which was incorporated for environmental building at various facades. The momentum was set in motion with NVD celebrations wherein a creative, short movie received from ECI was made viral on official social media platforms of the CEO office. The print and electronic media carried press notes from the CEO as well as DEOs. The concept of e-EPIC was made visible and conspicuous everywhere, so much so as to become the 'talk of the town'.

Further, a multimedia campaign strategy was derived and executed under the SVEEP umbrella. Special camps were conducted on March 6 and 7 for downloading e-EPIC and the voters could seek BLO assistance in these special camps. Bulk SMSes were sent to the public at large for these camps which was duly publicised.

As a result of the multipronged, consistent, comprehensive and penetrative approach led by the team, Rajasthan has downloaded a total of 1,67,530 to Date, which is an achievement of 77.96%.

Office of CEO
Rajasthan

Online Quizzing to test your Voter Quotient

The State of Tripura has always witnessed a high percentage of voter turnout compared to rest of the country, and the voting percentage of Assembly polls surpasses the Lok Sabha polls. The electorate of the State are very eager for large-scale participation in enrolment as well as voting.

A continuous effort is always on to sensitize citizens to electoral values, and encourage them towards enrolment in the electoral roll and participate in the voting process without getting influenced by inducements. But in the year 2020, due to the pandemic, there was a curb on conducting SVEEP activities. In such a scenario, the Office of the CEO conceived the idea of launching an online quiz portal to create awareness about democratic processes among the people, based on the experience over the years that quizzes have been the best medium to channel information especially to the youth and the student community, all comprising future voters.

In the run-upto National Voters' Day, 2021 the Online Election Quiz portal was launched on January 18, 2021 by the Chief Electoral Officer, Tripura in the presence of Umesh Sinha, Secretary General, Election Commission of India. A part of SVEEP efforts, the quiz is open for all stakeholders, including the general public, school and college students, booth level officers, BLO supervisors and assistant electoral registration officers (AEROs). Gradually, it will be expanded to other categories through a separate portal.

This online quiz is an effort to make the voters and the student community aware of the democratic processes and enhance their knowledge about the various issues involved. Within the limited time period, 1,198 persons registered on the portal and 468 persons participated. The winners of the competition at the State level were felicitated in the State-level NVD function and the same was done at the district and subdivision levels too.

This Quiz Portal is proposed to be open throughout the year to continue this learning activity. Participation in the Election Quiz Competition will make common citizens aware about democratic process in online mode without having the fear of health hazards during this pandemic situation. Attractive prizes will be given on National Voters' Day every year. The Quiz portal link is **http://ermstripura.nic.in/quiz.**

Office of CEO
Tripura

Journey of Indian Elections (5)

Elections require advance planning and all processes follow the well-designed path as per advance plans. However, the Fifth General Elections were a different story altogether as they were held a year in advance and consequently the time available was much shorter. It was an exercise in planning under uncertainty in polity. The Election Commission met the challenges through strategic planning and delivered all the due elections with perfection in a timely manner as per its Constitutional mandate. This was a demonstration of the resilience and strength of the electoral processes evolved by the Commission. General Elections to many of the state assemblies became due and were held only in 1972. The General Elections, hitherto held simultaneously for the Lok Sabha and the State Legislative Assemblies, witnessed a change in the calendar for times to come.

The Fifth General Elections to the Lok Sabha were conducted in the early part of 1971 and the General Elections to the Legislative Assemblies of 18 States and Union Territories a year thereafter. The notification for the Fifth General Election to the Lok Sabha was issued on January 27, 1971 and February 3, 1971, poll taken between March 1, 1971 and March10, 1971, followed by counting on March15, 1971. The Fifth General Elections to the State Assemblies of 18 States and the Union Territories were held a year later in 1972.

It may be recalled that the notifications for the Fourth General Elections were issued on January 13, 1967 and January 16, 1967, poll was taken on February 15, 1967 and February 28, 1967 and the Lok Sabha constituted on March 4, 1967. Under normal circumstances, the Lok Sabha would complete its five year term in 1972 and the election to the fifth Lok Sabha would have been held together with the General Elections to the State Legislatures in 1972. However, it did not happen thus.

We need to look at contours of the Indian polity post the 1967 General Elections. True, the 1967 General Elections were held simultaneously with the Lok Sabha and the State Legislatures as in the earlier three General Elections. However, the period after the Fourth General Elections of 1967 was a period of tremendous significance and import in the chronicle of Indian polity as discussed in the Report of the Election Commission of India on Fifth General Elections 1971-72. The following excerpt from the above report indicates the nature of the issue:

In 1968-69, mid-term General Elections were held in a number of States such as, Bihar, Haryana, Kerala, Nagaland, Orissa, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh

> *"In the 1967 General Elections the Indian National Congress lost its overwhelming majority in the House of the People which it had hitherto enjoyed in that House and could form a government at the Centre with what might be regarded as a slender majority; it also failed to form government in a number of States because it failed to win any majority at all. This was followed in a number of States by the formation of coalition governments known variously as United Front or SVD (Samyukta Vidhayak Dal) governments and a period of instability, governmental, administrative and political and a spell of President's rule."*

and West Bengal, though it did not help much in bringing the requisite stability in the polity. President's rule had to be imposed in some of the states. The House of the People, the Lok Sabha, was dissolved by the President on the advice of the Council of Ministers in December, 1970 much before its normal term of five years.

The General Election to the State Legislative Assembly in Kerala was held in September, 1970. The General Elections to the State Legislative Assemblies of Orissa, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal were held along with the General Elections to the Lok Sabha in 1971. The Fifth General Elections to the Legislative Assemblies of 18 States and Union Territories and the Metropolitan Council of Delhi were held during the first quarter of 1972. The States and the UTs that went to the polls for constituting new Legislative Assemblies in 1972 were:

1. Andhra Pradesh
2. Assam
3. Bihar
4. Gujarat
5. Haryana
6. Himachal Pradesh
7. Jammu and Kashmir
8. Madhya Pradesh
9. Maharashtra
10. Manipur
11. Tripura
12. Meghalaya
13. Mysore
14. Punjab
15. Rajasthan
16. West Bengal
17. Goa, Daman and Diu
18. UT of Mizoram

The above information explains the emergence of a new era in the Indian electoral democracy. The practice of simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and the State Legislative Assemblies was lost.

General Elections to the Fifth Lok Sabha 1971

Elections, especially the General Elections, are a planned activity where the work starts sufficiently in

advance. Advance planning has been an integral part of our electoral system from the very inception. Under this premise, the Commission would have started planning in 1970-71 for the revision of electoral rolls, men, materials and all logistical support for the conduct of elections in first half of 1972. But conducting elections in 1971 at a rather short notice came as very big responsibility and a challenge. Delay in elections would mean serious complications. The Commission, as such, had been alert to the ongoing political developments, and had developed strategies and plans for the timely conduct of elections.

A little over one year before the dissolution of the Lok Sabha, the Commission had organized a conference of all the Chief Electoral Officers of the States and the UTs in November, 1969 and directed them to complete the revision of electoral rolls with January 1, 1970 as the reference date. This was an unprecedented step in the electoral history of India as previously the process of preparation or revision of the electoral rolls took a much longer time. The Chief Electoral Officers did take up the work in right earnest with all the resources at their disposal. It goes to the credit of the CEOs and their staff that they were able to finish the work by the target date of January 15, 1970 in a commendable manner. The Election Commission was, thus, in a state

of readiness by end January, 1970, to take up the challenge of holding elections at a short notice.

By August, 1970 the Electoral Roll comprising the following components was kept ready:

(i) One integrated roll incorporating the basic roll and all supplements including those prepared in the revision of the electoral rolls in 1970, or

(ii) One basic roll plus the integrated list of all the supplements up to and including those prepared in the general revision of 1970.

Constituency-wise information was also consolidated about the number of copies available and directions given for printing of additional copies wherever required.

The Lok Sabha was dissolved in December, 1970. The Election Commission was confident of holding the general election well in time by March, 1971. Whenever a general election is held during the first quarter of a year, the rolls prepared or revised with reference to January 1 of the preceding year can be only option. It is physically impossible to hold and complete any general election by March of a year by preparing or revising the electoral rolls by reference to January 1 of that very year. The law provides for the inclusion of names up to the last day of nomination through standard procedure subject to eligibility.

Every opportunity to the eligible citizens was given by the Election Commission for inclusion in the electoral rolls as per law. Directions to all the Electoral Registration Officers throughout the country were issued by the Commission to entertain the applications for inclusion and make orders for inclusion in the electoral rolls before the last date for filing nomination papers. A detailed press note on the subject was issued on January 14, 1971 by the Election Commission. Effective and wide publicity was given to the Commission's directions in this respect to the Electoral Registration Officers. The cut-off date for filing such applications however, was fixed as January 18, 1971, especially in view of the time-bound nature of the work.

The final count of electors in the country stood at 27,43,33,925 at the end of the exercise. as against 25,03,12,239 on the rolls in the year 1967, representing an increase of about 9.6%. Women electors constituted 47.6% of the total electorate.

Writs and Programme for the General Election

The Commission recommended three different dates for the issue of writ notifications calling upon the Parliamentary constituencies of the country to elect members for 518 seats for constituting the new House of the People. On January 17, 1971 the Chief Election Commissioner himself handed over a letter to the President, recommending the issue of writ notifications. Three draft writ notifications were sent to the Ministry of Law, Legislative Department, for necessary action. The writ notification under section 14(2) of the RP Act, 1951 were issued as follows:

- January 27, 1971: Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Nagaland, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh,

Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Laccadive, Minicoy and Amindivi Islands and Manipur.

- February 1,1971: Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir,, Mysore, Orissa, Punjab, Chandigarh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Delhi, Goa, Daman and Diu and Pondicherry.
- February 3, 1971: West Bengal and UT of Tripura

Detailed programme notifications under Section 30 of the RP Act, 1951 were issued by the Commission. The entire election process was scheduled to be completed by March 15, 1971 barring the states of Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir.

Nominations to Withdrawals

The total number of persons who filed nomination papers was 4,451. In all 1,589 candidates withdrew their nomination under section 37 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951. In all, 78 nomination papers were rejected and consequently 2,784 candidates were left in the field as contesting candidates for a total of 518 parliamentary constituencies. Only one candidate was returned uncontested under section 53 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.

Strategic Readiness of materials

At th Fifth General Elections poll was taken at 3,42,944 polling stations. 67 items of polling materials were made available to polling parties/polling stations for the proper conduct of poll. The procurement of polling materials and distribution of the same is a challenging process and takes time.

The Commission took another strategic initiative of planning under uncertainty as early as July, 1970. Steps were taken to ensure that all the items of materials for the General Election to the House of the People and to the State Legislative Assembly are kept in a state of readiness in case the elections are conducted at short notice.

The CEOs were directed to keep ready the forms, ballot boxes, lists of polling stations, the estimate of the requirement of ballot papers, both pink and white which might be necessary, symbol blocks, marking instruments, cloth or canvas bags for wrapping sealed ballot boxes, thin wire for securing the window cover of the ballot box, estimate of requirements for indelible ink and stamping pads, and intimation in good time for these to the firms of Mysore Lac and Paint Works Ltd, Mysore, Kores and Bharat Carbon and Ribbon Manufacturing Co., New Delhi. But for these timely precautionary steps, it would not have been possible to hold the countrywide Fifth General Elections to Parliament within a period of about two months after the date of dissolution of the Lok Sabha.

Ballot Papers

The printing of the requisite number of ballot papers was completed with precision and perfection in a secure and efficient manner under the overall supervision and control of the Chief Electoral Officers of the respective States at 46 Government Printing Presses during the period from the finalization of the list of candidates to the dispatch of polling parties. A total of 28,24,76,786 ballot papers was printed for the General Elections to the Lok Sabha and 5,78,46,300 for the simultaneous elections to the State Legislative Assemblies of Orissa, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal. The paper used was of special category,i.e., 11.1 kg per ream and special colour cream wove or white wove, manufactured only for election purposes.

Polling Stations

As a healthy practice for free and fair elections, polling stations should be made as numerous as possible so that a voter need not walk a long distance from his house to reach the polling station to cast his/her vote.

At the Fourth General Elections of 1967, the maximum distance from a voter's residence to the nearest polling station was three miles. In 1968 elections, the distance was reduced to two miles. It was further reduced to 1.24 miles during the Mid-term General Elections in 1969 and the measure continued at the time of the Fifth General Elections to the Lok Sabha in 1971. In effect, the total number of polling stations set up at the time of the Fifth General Elections to the Lok Sabha in 1971 was 3,42,944 as compared to 2,67,555 at the time of the Fourth General Elections in 1967.

Polling Personnel

An increase in the number of polling stations has a direct bearing on the number of polling personnel required for the conduct of elections. The electoral exercise, the biggest in the world at that time, was spread over 518 constituencies and 3,42,944 polling stations. For each polling station, the minimum number of polling personnel was four, comprising one

presiding officer and three polling officers. In some States like Kerala, the number was generally five—one presiding officer and four polling officers. There were returning officers for the 518 constituencies and five, six or seven assistant returning officers to aid and assist the returning officers in each constituency. As such, the number of officers engaged in the conduct of elections to the Lok Sabha and the State Legislative Assemblies of Orissa, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal in 1971 was over 17,69,802 with 16,91, 954 non-gazetted employees and 77,848 gazetted employees. Instructions were also given by the Commission to include only female personnel in the polling parties for polling stations set up exclusively for female voters specially where *purdanashin* women voters were present in a large number.

Voter Education, Publicity: Mass Media

In a vast country like India, with the largest electorate, it was really challenging to connect with the electorate. The vast electorate could only be reached by means of the available mass media for communication. There was no television, no internet, no helplines or social media at that time. The only means of community connect was the radio or transistor. One could often see people on bicycles moving around with a transistor hanging from their shoulder. Therefore, broadcasting played an important role in educating the electorate on election participation besides the objects, policies, programmes and promises of different political parties and the candidates. However, the political parties could not come to a consensus about the utilisation of broadcast time.

During the campaign period for the 1971 General Election, the Commission took a number of steps to give wide publicity to important matters relating to election. The Films Division, the Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity (DAVP), and the All India Radio extended full cooperation to the Election Commission in the matter of publicity by different means and methods.

The Chief Election Commissioner also addressed the electorate on February 17, 1971. The broadcast carried an appeal for 'Peaceful, Free and Fair Elections'.

Postal Vote

Under section 60 of the RP Act, 1951 Act, the following categories of persons were allowed to exercise their franchise by voting by postal ballot, viz.

- members of the armed forces of the Union;
- members of any force to which the provisions of the Army Act, 1950 have been made applicable whether with or without modifications;
- members of an armed police force of a State who are serving outside that State;
- persons who are employed under the Government of India in posts outside India;
- the wives of the aforesaid persons provided they are ordinarily residing with their respective husbands; and
- persons subjected to preventive detention under any law for the time being in force.

The persons mentioned against items 1 to 5 however, were to be registered as voters in the electoral rolls of their respective home constituencies. In addition to the above six categories of persons, two other categories of persons could vote by postal ballot, viz., (i) special voters, and (ii) voters on election duty. Special voters generally included the constitutional authorities. EDC facility was given to officials engaged in election duty.

Election Expenditure

The ceilings for the maximum amount of expenditure that could be incurred by a candidate for the

Two documentary films "Your Vote" and "Voting—Doing It Right" were produced by the Films Division.

Cinema slides with the following captions were prepared by the DAVP :

- Vote without fear. Your vote is secret;
- Don't accept any bribe or inducement in casting vote;
- Your polling station is nearby. Do not use transport provided by the candidate or his/her agent;
- It is your sacred duty to vote. Your vote elects your Government.

The DAVP and AIR also arranged press advertisements and commercial radio broadcasts in relation to the following:

- All arrangements are being made to ensure that polling in the General Elections is peaceful, free and fair; Intimidation of voters and impersonation in voting will be severely dealt with;
- Exercise your right to vote without fear or favour. Your vote is secret;
- Do not accept any bribe or inducement in casting your vote;
- Your polling station is near your residence. Do not use transport provided by the candidate or his/her agent;
- Remember, as an adult citizen, it is your sacred duty to vote.

Further, an appeal was made by the Chief Election Commissioner to the People of India. This was given the widest possible publicity through various mass media including newspapers. The appeal was as follows:

"An Appeal

To,

The People of India
by
The Chief Election Commissioner of India

My fellow citizens,

The Fifth General Election to the House of the People is now near at hand. At this time a heavy responsibility lies upon you because it is at the time of a general election that you get an opportunity to take a direct part in the government of the country by casting your vote in favour of the candidate of your choice. By your vote you elect the members of the House of People and out of the members of the House of the People, our Rashtrapati-ji appoints the Prime Minister of India and other Ministers. Thus, in a very real sense, you are the ultimate rulers of this vast and great Ancient Land of Bharat. As a humble servant of yours, I, therefore, make the following appeal to you:—

(I) do not fail to give your vote;

(ii) give your vote in favour of the candidate of your own choice without any fear or favour;

(iii) do not be afraid of any intimidation or coercion or any threat of intimidation or coercion;

(iv) if somebody dares to offer you any bribe or other illegal gratification, then take courage to drive that man away, however powerful he may be because he is a morally weak man; by offering you bribe or other illegal gratification, he insults you as a man, as a self-respecting citizen of India;

(v) do not go to the polling booth in any vehicle offered by any person because the polling booth is only within one and one fourth of a mile (two kilometres) from your residence. Each one of us can easily walk this small distance. If by your vote you elect proper persons, then our National Parliament will consist of worthy sons and daughters of the land, and our Government also will be a truly good Government dedicated to the service and well-being of the People of India.

Sd/-
(S.P. Sen-Varma)
Chief Election Commissioner Of India

New Delhi
January 17, 1971

parliamentary constituency or an assembly constituency were revised in January, 1971 before the elections. The amount varied from State to State, from a minimum of Rs 15,000 in Nagaland to a maximum of Rs 35,000 in large states such as Andhra Pradesh, UP and West Bengal. Similarly, the ceilings for the assembly constituencies varied from Rs 2,500 in states like Manipur, and Tripura to Rs 13,500 in Uttar Pradesh.

A total amount of Rs 14,43,04,626.48 was spent on the preparation and revision of the electoral rolls, and the conduct of elections.

Counting

The polling period, which had started on March 1, 1971, ended with the polling in West Bengal on March 10, 1971. Counting of votes was started on that day at 8 a.m. everywhere in the country except West Bengal. A new practice of mixing of the ballot papers was started for the first time to ensure the secrecy of the vote. At that time All India Radio and the press were the only media available, and a special request had been made to them to ensure that no trends or results would be announced before 5 p.m., with a view to obviate any influence on voting trend in West Bengal.

Counting of votes was done by permanent officers of the Government. On no occasion is any temporary employee in the service of the Government or any employee of any local authority or any commercial or business undertaking ever employed for the counting of votes.

A new procedure was introduced for counting under which ballot papers of all the ballot boxes used at polling stations in an assembly constituency were put in a big receptacle and mixed up before sorting, scrutiny and actual counting. Different stakeholders expressed apprehension about the new procedure. However, the Commission felt that was necessary to do so to ensure the secrecy of the vote and avoid any type of intimidation of voters. Comprehensive instructions for maintaining high standards of the

process in terms of efficiency, correctness and integrity of counting were also given by the Commission.

Counting and declaration of results was completed by March 15, 1971. The Election Commission of India issued the notification under Section 73 of the Representation of People Act, 1951 as to the newly elected members for reconstitution of the House.

Voter Turnout and Woman Voters

In all 15,14,93,463 votes were polled; 49,19,738 votes were rejected; and the overall voter turnout stood at 55.22%. The percentage of men voters to men electors stood at 61% and percentage of women voters to women electors was 49.15%.

Innovations and Improvements

Every election brings new experiences in terms of issues and challenges. Invariably, it is followed by detailed analysis, the identification of weaknesses in the system, and subsequent improvements and strengthening of the system besides enhancing integrity of electoral process. After the Fourth General Elections of 1967, a comprehensive analysis led to introduction of innovations, and improvements in election practice and procedure as briefly mentioned below:

- Tying of ballot boxes with a silk ribbon after the close of the poll, sealing the knots thereof and thereafter putting the ballot boxes in strong gunny or cloth bags. They were then stitched and sealed by the presiding officers and the candidates or their agents present at the polling stations;
- Signatures in full on the back of the ballot papers by the presiding officers before such papers are issued to voters;
- Reduction of distance between the voter's residence and the polling station where he is required to go to cast his vote;
- New marking instruments by which voters are required to mark the ballot papers in the screened compartment of the polling station;
- Mixing of ballot papers contained in ballot boxes at all the polling stations within an assembly constituency before the commencement of scrutiny of the ballot papers and counting of votes;
- Issuance of secret seals by the Commission to the Returning Officers for sealing the packets of used and unused ballot papers, packets of counterfoils of ballot papers and packets of other important election papers after the declaration of the results;
- Ballot papers with counterfoils; and
- Revision of the electoral rolls in accordance with the system of "electoral cards".

General Election to the Fifth Lok Sabha, 1971 at a Glance

Total Number of Voters	27,43,33,925
Votes Cast	15,14,93,463
Number of valid votes polled	14,65,78,675
Votes Rejected	49,19,738
Percentage of votes Polled	55.22%
Voter turnout men	61%
Voter turnout women	49.15%
Percentage of votes Rejected	3.24%
Number of Polling Stations	3,42,944
Number of Parliament Seats	518
Total amount spent on Elections	Rs. 14,43,04,626.48
Number of Contesting Candidates: Parliamentary elections	2784
Date of Counting of vote and Declaration of Results	March 15, 1971

S. D. Sharma
Senior Fellow, ECI

Sushil Chandra takes over as the 24th CEC of India

Sushil Chandra has been serving in the Commission as Election Commissioner since February 15, 2019. He is also Member of Delimitation Commission since February 18, 2020 looking after Delimitation of Jammu Kashmir UT. Having held several posts in the Income-Tax Department for nearly 39 years, Sushil Chandra had also been CBDT Chairman from November 1, 2016 – February 14, 2019.

In his tenure as Chairman CBDT, Chandra has played an active role in unearthing illegal money often used during Assembly Elections. With his continuous monitoring the seizures of cash, liquor, freebies, narcotics have increased substantially in recent elections. He has constantly emphasized the concept of 'Inducement-Free' elections and it has become an important aspect of monitoring the electoral process in all ongoing and forthcoming elections. Process of focused and comprehensive monitoring through deployment of Special Expenditure Observers, activating the role of many more enforcement agencies in the process of Election Expenditure monitoring, more exhaustive and frequent reviews of observers and other agencies are few of the aspects of electoral management encouraged by him. His contributions are also reflective in systemic changes like the Form 26 that has now become an integral part of essential paperwork. As Chairman CBDT, he took special efforts in the area of verification of affidavits filed by the candidates before elections. In 2018 he was instrumental in evolving a uniform format of sharing details of all assets and liabilities not mentioned in the affidavits of the candidates. Facilitation through innovative IT applications in Election systems have been a unique contribution of his to the 17th Lok Sabha Elections and the Legislative Assembly Elections held since in Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Odisha, Sikkim, Haryana, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Delhi.

Holding of elections to State Assemblies of Bihar, Assam, Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal amidst COVID concerns and making processes such as nomination and filing of papers online, extending option of postal ballot to the specific categories of senior citizens, Persons with Disabilities, essential services personnel as also COVID patients/suspects, has seen Chief Election Commissioner Sushil Chandra lead from the front with an iron will to work despite challenges.

ECI bids farewell to Sunil Arora

The ECI family bid a warm farewell to outgoing Chief Election Commissioner, Sunil Arora on April 12, 2021. After a fulfilling tenure of nearly 43 months in Commission and nearly 29 months as CEC, Sunil Arora demitted office having successfully steered the 17th Lok Sabha election in 2019 and elections to 25 State Assemblies since joining ECI in September 2017.

Bidding farewell to him, Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar recalled various initiatives taken up by the Commission during his tenure like providing optional postal ballot facility to senior citizen and PwD electors, setting up of India A-WEB Centre, and Voluntary Code of Ethics. He said that the erstwhile CEC has laid special emphasis on ensuring inclusive and accessible elections during his term and that he would continue to be a source of strength to the entire ECI family.

Sunil Arora in his farewell remarks thanked all the members of the Commission and wished for the successful conduct of all future elections. He recalled that while every election presents unique challenges, conducting elections to the 17th Lok Sabha and the decision to conduct Bihar assembly elections during a pandemic was the most difficult. He congratulated all the officials involved in the exercise for their meticulous planning and hard work to ensure the smooth and successful conduct of these elections.

Anup Chandra Pandey takes over as the new Election Commissioner

Anup Chandra Pandey assumed charge as the new Election Commissioner (EC) of India on June 9, 2021. He joined the Election Commission of India as second Election Commissioner in a three-member body headed by Chief Election Commissioner Sushil Chandra and Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar.

Anup Chandra Pandey has been a 1984 batch Indian Administrative Service Officer. During the span of about 37 years of distinguished Government of India service, he has worked in various Ministries & Departments at the Centre and his state cadre of Uttar Pradesh.

He holds a Bachelor's Degree in Mechanical Engineering from Punjab Engineering College and a Master's degree in Materials Management from Panjab University. He also has a keen interest in the study of history and holds a Doctorate of Philosophy in Ancient Indian History from Magadh University.

Anup Chandra Pandey, superannuated as Chief Secretary, Government of Uttar Pradesh in August 2019. Prior to joining the Election Commission of India, he served as a Member National Green Tribunal Oversight Committee, Uttar Pradesh.

Prior to this, he served as Industrial Development Commissioner of the state and successfully organized a mega Investor's Summit at Lucknow in 2018. He also introduced various policy reforms in the industries and business sector including single window Nivesh Mitra Portal.

As Additional Chief Secretary (Finance), Government of Uttar Pradesh, his endeavours led to successful designing, planning and implementation of Uttar Pradesh Farm Loan Waiver Scheme.

He has held diverse portfolios during his deputation with the central government. He served as Additional Secretary, Ministry of Defence and Joint Secretary, Ministry of Labour & Employment, Government of India where he represented the country at various international forums like G20 and International Labour Organization. He was also Director in the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare and Department of Consumer Affairs.

He has a keen interest in writing and has authored a book titled 'Governance in Ancient India' which explores the evolution, nature, scope, functions and all related aspects of ancient Indian Civil Service from the Rig Vedic period to 650 AD.

ECI pushes for wide ranging reforms

Election Commission of India in furtherance for continuing reforms process has set up a Core Committee headed by Secretary General, ECI to identify learning, experiences, shortcomings from recently Poll-gone States of Assam, Bihar, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and UT of Puducherry.

The committee is broadly tasked to identify:

1. Shortcomings in ECI regulatory regime, if any and the gaps in implementation and enforcement at the level of CEOs/District officials.
2. Need for Strengthening legal/regulatory framework enabling ECI to more effectively ensure compliance of guidelines including the Covid norms;
3. Measures to ensure discharge of responsibility, like enforcement of covid protocol by the authorities mandated under respective regulatory regime to do so irrespective of and in addition to ECI guidelines;
4. Gaps, if any in the guidelines or at implementation level in MCC or regulatory regime leading to avoidance or non-compliance by the Candidates or Political parties' stakeholders;
5. Measures to further strengthen the expenditure management regulation for inducement free election;
6. Shortcomings in existing framework in providing protection to electoral machinery from possibility of reprisal after elections;
7. Measures required for strengthening the offices of electoral machinery at the State level namely the offices of CEOs, DEOs and ROs;
8. Issues related to Electoral Roll, Voter List and delivery of EPICs;
9. Gaps in Communication strategy, if any.

The Committee is collating informations, analyse experiences, best practices across States/UT suggest way forward and further reforms required.

DECs of the ECI and CEOs of recent poll-gone States and a few select Special Observers and Observers are members of the Committee. The Committee will also take inputs from State Nodal Officers of different divisions like Police, Expenditure, Health authorities as well as from some DEOs, SPs & ROs identified by CEOs, Polling officials, BLOs about the issues and challenges faced at the grass root levels.

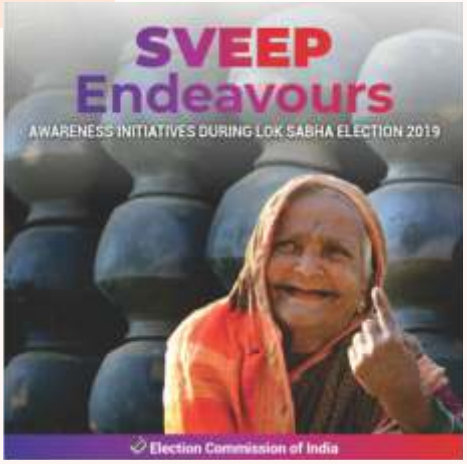
In addition to this, the Committee is examining the recommendations of the nine Working Groups which were set up post Lok Sabha Elections, 2019) in light of experiences in the Poll gone States.

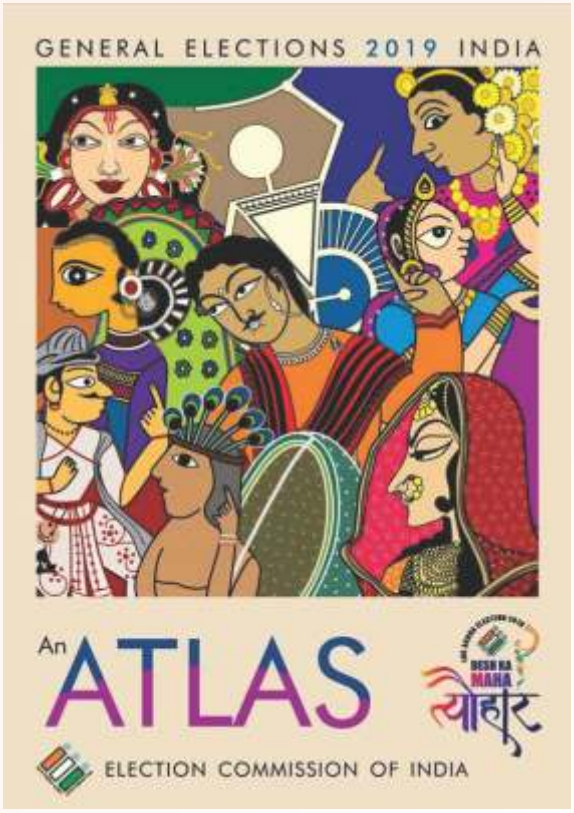
Conducting Election During Pandemic- A Photo Journey

This photo book encapsulates the challenging journey of conducting elections amidst a pandemic in Bihar. The Commission successfully conducted several elections in the country, beginning with the Biennial Election to the Rajya Sabha. This was followed by Legislative Assembly Elections in Bihar, one of the biggest such exercises throughout the World during the pandemic.

This book provides a detailed insight into voter awareness interventions, innovations and initiatives during the 17th General Election, conducted in 2019. It documents the spirit of 'Desh Ka Mahatyohar', the biggest festival of democracy celebrated across the nation cutting through the barriers of gender, caste, creed and religion.

SVEEP Endeavours Awareness Initiatives During Lok Sabha Election 2019





General Elections 2019 An Atlas

General Elections 2019 - An Atlas is a comprehensive document that incorporates data and statistical figures pertaining to 17th General Elections to Lok Sabha 2019. Through maps, graphical and tabular representation, this Atlas seeks to present an exhaustive set of information received from States and UTs across the country.

A-WEB India Journal of Elections

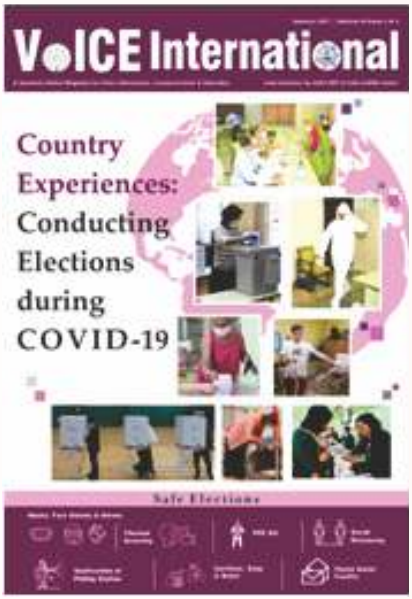
The maiden issue of the A-WEB India Journal of Elections (AWI-JOE) released in March 2021 is a one-stop source of knowledge sharing on peer reviewed Research Papers, Articles, and Opinions from renowned writers, scholars, practitioners and experts of the A-WEB Community. The Journal also carries news and views, information on latest initiatives and trends, challenges and developments in electoral practices and processes.

Chalo Karen Matdaan

This is a comic book which aims at voter education in a fun and thought-provoking way. Targeting young, new and future voters, this comic contains interesting and relatable characters like a grandmother who is a retired teacher, her students and grandchildren besides other acquaintances, who engage as also educate on electoral processes.

VoICE International

This issue of VoICE International carries a global outlook of elections during a pandemic. With contributions from countries such as Argentina, Bangladesh, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Belarus, Lesotho, Malawi, Russia, Moldova, India etc., along with global election updates and reports on webinars from international expert organizations like A-WEB, International IDEA, IFES and ICPS - this magazine is an exhaustive document of the global outlook towards democracy in COVID-19.



My Vote Matters

This issue showcases the preparations for and the conduct of elections amidst a global pandemic, starting with the Rajya Sabha elections in June 2020. This was followed by an overview of the Bihar Legislative Assembly election, which was one of the largest elections ever conducted amidst a global pandemic. The issue also carries several interesting stories from the field and a new section called 'Voters Speak' which includes personal experiences of voters in form of stories, poems and cartoons.

Electoral Literacy Clubs

Future of Indian Democracy : The Punjab Experience

As young and future voters constitute a sizeable part of India's democratic polity and its future, it is essential to focus on making them electorally vigilant, electorally literate and actively enthusiastic to participate in the whole electoral process. Evidence based on international practices suggests that electoral literacy imparted through education at a young age helps in confident, informed and ethical electoral participation.

Electoral Literacy Clubs have been designed to disseminate information in an engaging manner. At ELCs, learning meets fun - setting aside the lecture format of imparting knowledge, ELCs focus on participatory activities, games, films, etc to engage ELC members, familiarize students with the electoral process, instil the idea of ethical and informed voting and ultimately ensure wholesome citizenship development.

Through ELC, Election Commission of India aims at strengthening the culture of electoral participation in secondary and senior secondary schools, universities and colleges as well as in 1 million polling stations across India.

ELCs in Schools: Targets students studying in classes IX – XII. The ELCs will require only 3-5 hours annually in each grade. The learning under ELCs for School is spread over 4 years in a systematic manner.

ELCs in Colleges: Targets new and young voters in the age group 18 – 25 years. ELCs in colleges will be managed by the students themselves.

ELCs in Communities: Termed Chunav Pathshalas, it targets those outside the formal education system. Although these ELCs in communities will focus on 14-17 year olds, it will cover community members of all ages.

ELCs in Organizations: In organizations, the ELCs named as Voter Awareness Forums (VAFs) and setup in all government & non-government organizations as well as in private institutions.

In Punjab, a three-pronged approach has been planned and activities are conducted for:

I. Electoral Literacy

II. Enrolment of voters

III. Voting and volunteering on the day of poll

To achieve the above-mentioned objectives, all year round SVEEP activities as planned are held and maximum participation is ensured by way of involving all stakeholders. Active use of social media especially Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube are used to reach out to ELCs and encourage conversation and deepening of understanding of elections. Cash prizes, gifts, mementos etc. are given to the winners thereby promoting a healthy competition and urge to learn and participate.

ELCs (Punjab)	No. of ELCs
ELC Future Voters (in School)	2,402
ELC New Voters (in collages/University)	599
Chunav Pathshalas (at Polling Station level)	18,491
Voter Awareness Forums	1,328

The beginning

The 'pilot' Electoral Literacy Club (ELC) was established at Department of Political Science, Punjab University, Chandigarh on October 24, 2017 under the 'Mainstreaming of Electoral Literacy through Educational Institutions, Organizations and Communities in India: Electoral Literacy Clubs' and SVEEP programme of the Election Commission of India. The underlying concept of the Club is to educate young voters about electoral participation through interaction, engagement and hands on experience.

Around 180 students of Masters Programme and Research Scholars had joined the club during the interactive meetings on themes related to electoral literacy. All students were a-political and non-partisan.

Then the ELCs were established further in other institutions. The entire resource material has been translated in Punjabi and distributed in sufficient quantity to all ELCs in the state of Punjab. A total of 3,75,115 ELC books have been translated for schools, colleges and for BLO level. This includes 28,926 ELC resource material each for IX, X, XI, XII and Wah Election Wah; 23,089 ELC resource books for Chunav

Pathshala, 584 for colleges and 52,599 ELC FAQ booklets that has been provided to all schools, colleges and Chunav Pathshalas.

Activities held

In view of COVID-19, the Office of Chief Electoral Punjab initiated few of activities involving ELCs with a major shift in campaign strategy towards utilization of digital & electronic media.

1. **Gandhi Jayanti (Quiz competition on Mahatma Gandhi and Elections)**

On the occasion of Gandhi Jayanti, an online quiz competition was conducted for ELC members, nodal officers of ELCs, and BLOs. The event was a resounding success with 5,970 people participating in it. A Facebook live event was held to announce the winners.

2. **Campaign for Electoral Literacy on Constitution based approach to Democracy**

CEO, Punjab embarked on an insightful campaign with an attempt to facilitate citizenry to open eyes to new insights and hearts to a stronger democracy. 27 articles were published on social media under this series and later videos were posted for better understanding. Subsequently, quiz competitions were organised to a great success with participants numbering in thousands comprising of ELC members, ELC nodal officers, besides general public taking part in these.

3. **Quiz Competition (Open for all)**

An online quiz competition on Constitution based approach to democracy was organized on November 25, 2020. The contest was open for all and a total of 2,977 persons participated in it.

4. **Quiz Competition for ELC members**

An online quiz competition was held on December 14, 2020 for all students. A total of 2,113 students participated in it.

5. **Quiz Competitions for Campus Ambassadors**

In continuation with the series, 'constitution based approach to democracy', a quiz competition was organised for 938 campus ambassadors based on the videos from Rajya sabha TV. These informative videos deal with brief history of general elections to Lok Sabha starting from first one in 1951-52 up to general elections in 2014. In addition, these videos covered debates on foundation of democracy and centre-state power equation.

6. **Quiz Competition on Model Code of Conduct (MCC) for colleges/universities**

A state level online quiz competition was conducted on Model Code of Conduct (MCC) in two phases. In the first phase, competitions were held at district level and subsequently, winners competed at the state level competition.

7. **Quiz Competition for ELC Nodal officers**

In one of its kind initiative, a quiz competition based on the legendary filmmaker – Shyam Benegal's TV series on Rajya Sabha TV – 'Samvidhan' was conducted. The ten-episode series brings to life the story of how India's Constitution was framed. The competition was conducted for ELC nodal officers.

8. **Poster Designing and Mehndi competitions**

Poster making and mehndi competitions on themes of elections, voter participation and democracy were organised in all 22 districts in the state of Punjab.

Ongoing activities

1. Election Star (e-EPIC)

Campus Ambassadors are encouraged to download maximum number of e-EPICs among youth. Campus Ambassadors downloading the maximum number of e-EPICs in a month is adjudged as the Election Star of the month. As a reward to Election Star, video call is arranged with one of the State/District icons.

A sibling duo Yuvraj Singh and Rainsi from Mehr Chand Polytechnic, Jalandhar were adjudged first joint Election Star for downloading 306 e-EPICs. As a reward, a live video conference was arranged with state icon and film actor Sonu Sood, which was also streamed live on Facebook.

Subsequently, live video conference was arranged with the district icon and Punjabi folk singer, Master Saleem for the joint winning duo of the second month.

2. Election Star (enrolment of new voters)

Expanding the ambit of Election Star campaign, ELC members of the colleges and universities shall be motivated to ensure maximum enrolment of new voters. In lines to the campaign for download of e-EPIC, the ELC member ensuring maximum number of enrolment in the state shall be adjudged as Election Star of the month.

3. Audio visual creatives

ELCs are encouraged to use various videos for awareness campaign e.g., demonstration videos explaining various electoral processes, motivational videos of SVEEP icons with message for registering and downloading EPIC etc.

Planned activities

A calendar of activities under SVEEP activities are chalked out every year and ELCs are encouraged to take initiative on their own. In view of ensuing assembly elections 2022, the office of Chief Electoral Officer, Punjab has devised an action plan to streamline the functioning of ELCs and ensuring maximum participation and support of ELC members in terms of facilitation of voters and carrying out SVEEP activities. The office of Chief Electoral Officer, Punjab intends to disburse a fund of Rs. 1000/- per ELC for conducting various activities/competitions. ELC shall be asked to draw out a strategy before disbursing the amount. The activities planned in the future are:

1. **Promoting Mobile Apps**

   Today's tech savvy younger generation is completely exposed to technological revolution, giving rise to the term 'digital natives' to youth. In view of youth' familiarity with mobile technology and apps, it has been decided to engage ELC members (particularly colleges & universities) in promoting election apps. Videos to demonstrate the working of these mobile applications have been prepared and ELCs will be asked to promote apps utilizing social media platforms and by conducting virtual meetings. Their performance shall be monitored by setting quantifiable criteria in terms of generating maximum reach on social media, conducting maximum number of virtual meetings and follow-up. ELC members shall be incentivized at both district level and state level.

   Links to mobile apps are as follows:

   Voter Helpline App: https://bit.ly/3w2jVCp

   c-VIGIL App: https://bit.ly/3zaf2sP

   PwD App: https://bit.ly/3puVD1n

   Garuda App: https://bit.ly/3w2rEA9

2. **'Chon Muqabla'**

   In lines of Youth festival in Colleges/Universities, 'Chon Muqabla' shall be organized for ELC members of colleges & universities. Election related online quiz competitions like quiz, debate, singing, poster designing etc. shall be organized.

   Level of Competition:

   - District level
   - Divisional level
   - State level

   Winners at each level shall be felicitated with cash prize and certificates.

3. **Competition among ELC clubs for enrolment**

   Competition shall be held among ELC clubs in colleges and universities for enrolling maximum number of voters till December 31, 2021. District level winners shall be felicitated during NVD.

4. **'Chon Mitr' (Election Buddy)**

   To be selected among ELC members (colleges/universities), 'Chon Mitr' shall act as a facilitator for enrolment and as a resource person for promoting ethical and informed voting. Special training will be given at the state level along with the district SVEEP Nodal Officers and hand-holding will be done by the district SVEEP Nodal officers. 'Chon Mitrs' shall also be encouraged to mobilise a team volunteers for poll day. Cash reward shall be given to them along with certificates for their services.

5. **Poll Volunteers**

   ELC members shall be encouraged as poll volunteers on the day of polling to facilitate PwDs and infirm voters.

With an aim to mainstream electoral literacy and create a robust framework for strengthening democracy, a congenial atmosphere is being created whereby school/ colleges/ universities, higher education, technical & professional education in both private and public sector are being nudged to establish ELCs as also activate campus ambassadors to perform and participate with great enthusiasm.

Glimpses of ELC SVEEP Activities

Office of CEO, Punjab

e-EPIC: Smart Phone carrying Smartcard

Sonika Gurjar is a student of class 12 of Tagore International School. Bubbly and vivacious, she had turned 18 recently and had filled up Form 6 enthusiastically to get registered as a voter.

Sonika had always been a very conscientious and diligent girl. Even at school, she shouldered many responsibilities and was quite vocal about the rights and duties of a student. Hence, getting registered as a voter in the electoral roll as soon as her eighteenth birthday arrived came naturally to her.

As a teenager, like most of her peers, she was hooked on her mobile. Like all parents, Sonika's parents felt their share of annoyance over it. But Sonika could not be weaned off it. Smartphone though it was, its usage wasn't. As the National Voters' Day celebrations were kicking in, Sonika was oriented about the e-EPIC and how she could download it on her mobile.

The school's Electoral Literacy Club had also conducted a slogan-writing and poster-making competition on the theme of e-EPIC. At first Sonika did not react to it, but soon the concept of e-EPIC and its advantages began to rouse her curiosity and excitement. The very idea of having one's Voter Card in a digital format, safe and secure in one's mobile was such a techno-savvy thing, after all! To add to it, the consistent refrain of smartphones to be used smartly set the bells ringing in her head.

She was all ears when the following conversation took place:

Sonika : But tell me one thing, why do I need to download it when I can get a physical copy of it in my wallet?

BLO : True, Sonika but just think about what if you lose it? Imagine if you could have your e-EPIC in your digilocker! You could use it for ready reference.

Sonika : Digilocker? You mean, the e-EPIC in my mobile? Wow! That sounds cool.

BLO : Yes and that it serves as your identity proof, ready for use anytime. In fact, your digilocker becomes the custodian of your identity as a citizen of India. Also, you can get it physically printed and keep a copy for later.

Sonika : I am sure now you will explain the techno-puzzle of downloading it, which will leave me befuddled. How I wish it were an easy-peasy procedure!

BLO : As a matter of fact, it is, Sonika! Just a few clicks and there's your e-EPIC safely snuggled in your digilocker. You can download it from the Voter Portal, Voter Helpline App or even from the NVSP Portal.

Voila! Sonika immediately downloaded her e-EPIC on her mobile with the BLO's assistance, saved it and now flaunts it in the true spirit of an informed, aware citizen of India.

Having been an active member of her school ELC, Sonika made sure to become the informal brand ambassador for e-EPIC, spreading the good word about it. She plumed herself on her digital card and took it as her duty to ensure that most of her classmates who had registered as new voters in the electoral rolls downloaded their e-EPIC in their mobiles.

Sonika looks even more radiant now, full of pride and enthusiasm–someone who stood up for the democratic values of her country, the future of which was now certainly looking brighter with many more conscientious young new voters.

Shikha Soni
SVEEP Consultant

Vote to Elect, Vote to Collect

Article 326 of the Indian Constitution ensures my 'Right to Vote'. My one vote proves that I am sincere towards my country in terms of its development and in electing the representatives who make future dream projects possible, as well as make a unique identity of my beloved country around the globe.

I believe in the saying 'drop by drop fills the pot' and implement this in my life by voting. When our great Constitution provides the right to vote, it means we are empowered by voting right no matter what our religion, caste, creed, sex, or colour. History elaborates multiple incidents where one vote changed the course of power in a kingdom, or states or an empire where a democratic infrastructure was constructed. My vote shows the kind of attention I pay towards my great Constitution and my participation makes the voting process fairer.

My one vote shows the quality of thinking, choice and expression to the rest of the world. Like me many youngsters want voting rights at 18 years of age according to Universal Adult Franchise, to once more elect the leaders whose personalities resemble Atal Bihari Vajpayee & P.V. Narsimha Rao who brought changes to our country whether by LPG reforms of 1991 or the GDP rate of 2010, and showed the power of our country in the battlefields of 1962, 1971 and 1999. My one vote also shows a step towards forming a Responsive, Legitimate and Accountable government. My one vote shows the respect I pay to those great freedom fighters that fought for the independent democratic country India, by performing well on their expectations. Lastly, I want to request everyone to vote to elect, vote to respect, vote to show your presence in development, and vote to collect the identity of an active citizen from India.

Pratulya Arora
AMU ABK High School, Aligarh

1947

India Attains Freedom

1950

The Constitution came into force in 1950 with a democratic government system. Article 326 of the Indian Constitution provides that every person who is a citizen of India and is not less than 21 years of age is entitled to be registered as an elector*.

1951-52

The 1st General Election was held between 1951 to 1952 in which 1874 candidates contested for 489 seats. Around 17cr people participated in the elections.

In first General Elections, each candidate was assigned a separate ballot box. 2473850 metal boxes and 111095 wooden boxes were used to receive ballots.

Some ballot boxes were found with petals of flowers dusted with vermillion which indicated that certain voters had regarded the ballot boxes as objects of worship.

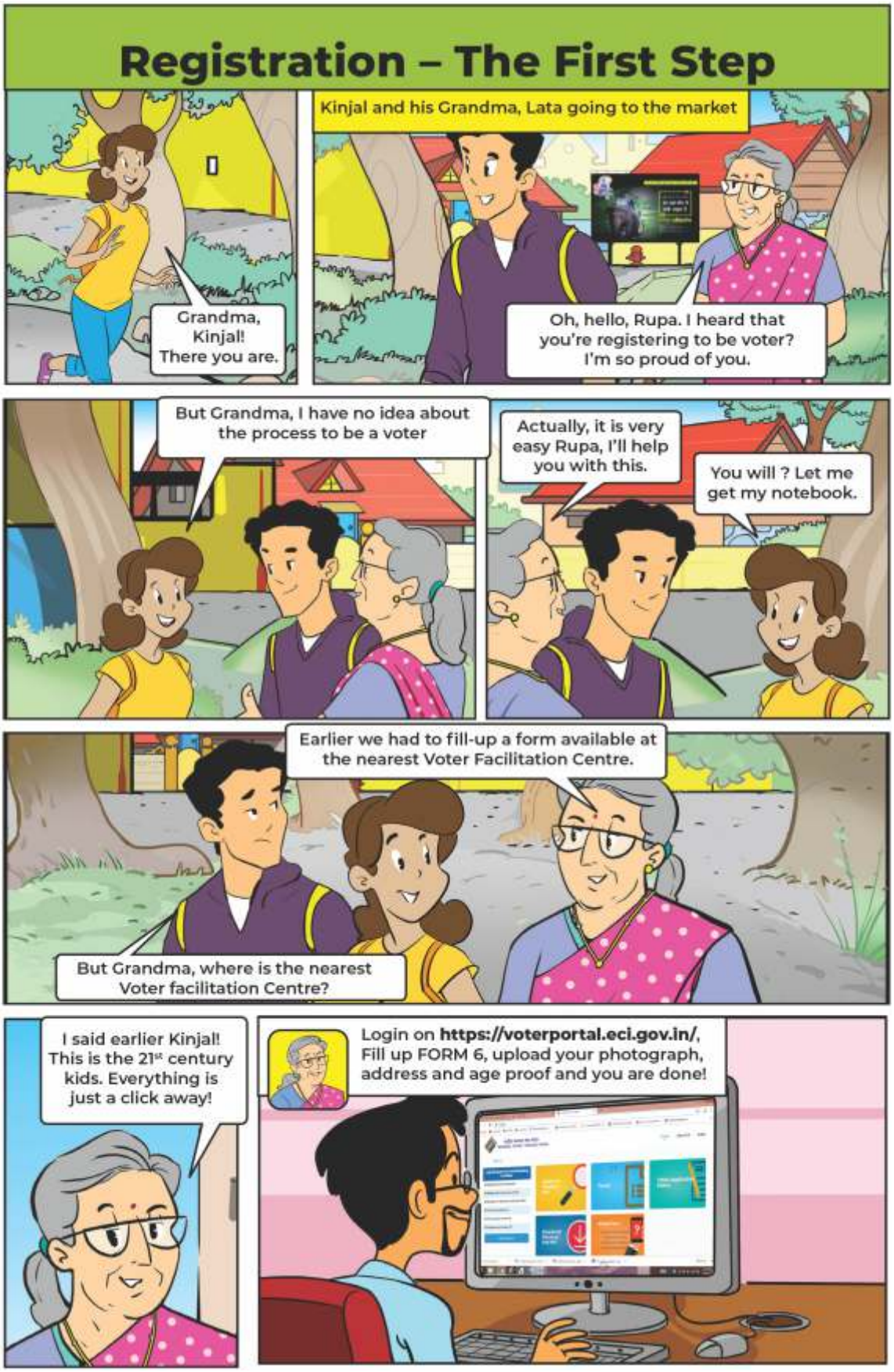
During the first General Elections, as many as 397 newspapers were started to inform & educate the people about the electoral process. Most of them ceased publications with the conclusion of elections.

The indelible ink for application on voters' finger was indigenously developed by Indian Council of Scientific & Industrial Research in 1951. Since 1962, Mysore Paints & Varnish Limited has been manufacturing this ink for the Election Commission.

1951 and 2019 : A Look at Numbers

	1951 General Election	2019 General Election
Total Electors	17.3 Cr	91.1 Cr
Total Polling Stations	1.96 Lakh	10.37 Lakh
Elected Women Representatives	24	78
Total Contestants	1874	8054

*The Sixty-first Amendment of the Constitution of India lowered the voting age from 21 years to 18 years


Registration – The First Step
Grandma, Kinjal! There you are.
Kinjal and his Grandma, Lata going to the market
Oh, hello, Rupa. I heard that you're registering to be voter? I'm so proud of you.
But Grandma, I have no idea about the process to be a voter
Actually, it is very easy Rupa, I'll help you with this.
You will ? Let me get my notebook.
Earlier we had to fill-up a form available at the nearest Voter Facilitation Centre.
But Grandma, where is the nearest Voter facilitation Centre?
I said earlier Kinjal! This is the 21st century kids. Everything is just a click away!
Login on https://voterportal.eci.gov.in/, Fill up FORM 6, upload your photograph, address and age proof and you are done!

* An electoral roll is a compilation that lists persons who are entitled to vote in a particular constituency.
**Election Commission of India issues notification in this regard.

Steps To Vote

Stapu game to learn about the steps of voting

Voter Helpline 1950

Every Vote Counts

Election Commission of India

Chunav Pathshala

VVPAT shows a slip with the name and symbol of the candidate chosen by us for about 7 seconds.
' Yes or No ? '

10

On EVM we have to press a button in front of the name and photograph of the candiate we have chosen (we will hear a beep).
' Yes or No ? '

8

If we do not want to vote for any candidate then we can press the last button NOTA (None or the Above) on the EVM.
' Yes or No ? '

9

We do not have to deposit our voter's slip with the third Polling Officer and show our inked finger.
' Yes or No ? '

7

First Polling Officer checks our name on the Voters' list and our voter ID card (EPIC) or any other proof of identity.
' Yes or No ? '

5

Second Polling Officer puts an ink mark on the first finger of our left hand and takes our signature on a register.
' Yes or No ? '

6

We can take mobile phones, cameras and other gadgets inside the polling station.
' Yes or No ? '

4

Paid leave is granted in the constituency where elections are to be held.
' Yes or No ? '

2

Before entering a polling station we should keep our proof of identity and voter slip ready.
' Yes or No ? '

3

Before elections we should check our name in the voter list.
' Yes or No ? '

1

To begin playing, first read the rules

Start

End

NO VOTER TO BE LEFT BEHIND

Steps to Vote - This is a floor game that can be played by 5–10 players at a time. To start the game, players should spread the game on a floor with even surface. The game requires a facilitator. Players should decide amongst themselves as to who will be the game facilitator. Facilitator should read the instructions carefully and explain to the players. The players mutually decide the order in which they will take turns to play.

Instructions for playing - There are 10 steps (rectangles) in the game and each step has one question written on it. Players mutually decide who will start first. If 5 players are playing, then the game is played in 2 rounds. In round one, the first player stands at Start, aims and throws a small flat object called stapoo (like a coin, carom striker or an eraser) in step 1. The stapoo should fall within the step and not on the outline of the step, otherwise the player will lose. The player reads out the question written in step 1 and answers the question in 'Yes or No'. If the answer is incorrect, the player loses and goes out of the game. The player also loses if the other foot touches the ground while inside the game. The facilitator conducts a discussion related to the question with all the players and bystanders. Facilitator encourages everyone to share their opinion and experiences related to the question. Facilitator and other players can read questions for players who cannot read.

If the player gives correct answer, then he hops on one foot from step 1 to 10 and back. On the way back the player stops at step 1 and picks up the stapoo. Now the second player has to aim and put the stapoo in step 2, answer the question and repeat the process. Player 3 has to throw the stapoo in step 3 and the same process is repeated till the 5th player takes turn. Thus, each player aims at a different step. After all the 5 players have taken a turn, the second round of the game starts. Now the five players will aim to throw the stapoo in step 6–10 as per their order in the previous round. The facilitator repeats the process of asking questions and having discussions on the questions. The facilitator will end the game session by doing a 3-2-1 Feedback - 3 things that we have learnt, 2 things that we will apply in our life and 1 thing that we want to know more about.

Only for the Facilitator - Remember: The answer to question on step 4 and step 7 is 'No'. For the remaining questions the answer is 'Yes'. When 10 players play the game, then each player has to throw the stapoo in one step only as per the order in which they decide to play. The other rules of the game remain the same. Rules of the game can be modified and simplified by mutual consent of the players. By hanging this game on a wall, the game can also be played like a dart game.

Test Your Voter Quotient (VQ)

Level-1

NVSP stands for?

A. National Volunteers' Service Panel
B. National Voters' Service Portal
C. National Voters' System Platform
D. National Volunteers' System Portal

What is the Voter Helpline phone number?

A. 1950
B. 1098
C. 1947
D. 1097

Level-2

Who is responsible for the preparation of electoral rolls for a Parliamentary or Assembly Constituency?

A. The Booth Level Officer
B. Deputy Returning officer
C. Electoral Registration Officer
D. Presiding officer

What is the term of the Lok Sabha?

A. 6 years
B. 4 years
C. 5 years
D. 8 years

Level-3

Who appoints the Presiding Officer and Polling Officer?

A. District Election Officer
B. Chief Electoral Officer
C. Returning Officer
D. Polling Clerk

Which is the Parliamentary Constituency with the smallest area (of 10.59 sq km)?

A. Paharganj
B. Chandni Chowk
C. Karol Bagh
D. Daryaganj

Level-4

Which state has the highest value of vote per MLA (208)?

A. Andhra Pradesh
B. Sikkim
C. Uttar Pradesh
D. Rajasthan

What does FLC stand for?

A. Factual Leads Checking
B. First Level Coding
C. First Level Checking
D. Final Level Checking

Level-5

How many proposers does a candidate of a recognized National/State Party require?

A. One
B. Two
C. Three
D. Four

Which form should Armed Forces personnel submit to make application for enrolment Service Voter?

A. Form 7
B. Form 6
C. Form 2
D. Form 3

Q. 1 (b), Q. 2. (a), Q. 3 (c), Q. 4 (c), Q. 5 (), Q. 6 (b), Q. 7 (c), Q. 8 (c), Q. 9 (a), Q. 10 (c)

PARTY WITH MAXIMUM NUMBER OF SEATS
IN LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

Andhra Pradesh	2004 INC	2009 INC	2014 TDP	2019 YSRCP	Meghalaya	2008 INC	2013 INC	2018 INC	
Arunachal Pradesh	2004 INC	2009 INC	2014 INC	2019 BJP	Mizoram	2008 INC	2013 INC	2018 MNF	
Assam	2006 INC	2011 INC	2016 BJP		Nagaland	2008 NPF	2013 NPF	2018 NPF	
Bihar	2005 RJD	2010 JD(U)	2015 RJD	2020 RJD	Odisha	2004 BJD	2009 BJD	2014 BJD	2019 BJD
Chhattisgarh	2008 BJP	2013 BJP	2018 INC		Punjab	2007 SAD	2012 SAD	2017 INC	
GOA	2007 INC	2012 BJP	2017 INC		Rajasthan	2008 INC	2013 BJP	2018 INC	
Gujarat	2007 BJP	2012 BJP	2017 BJP		Sikkim	2004 SDF	2009 SDF	2014 SDF	2019 SKM
Haryana	2005 INC	2009 INC	2014 BJP	2019 BJP	Tamil Nadu	2006 DMK	2011 AIADMK	2016 AIADMK	
Himachal Pradesh	2007 BJP	2012 INC	2017 BJP		Telangana	2014 TRS	2018 TRS		
Jammu & Kashmir	2008 JKNC	2014 JKPDP			Tripura	2008 CPI (M)	2013 CPI (M)	2018 BJP	
Jharkhand	2005 BJP	2009 BJP & JMM	2014 BJP	2019 JMM	Uttarakhand	2007 BJP	2012 INC	2017 BJP	
Karnataka	2004 BJP	2008 BJP	2013 INC	2018 BJP	Uttar Pradesh	2007 BSP	2012 SP	2017 BJP	
Kerala	2006 CPI(M)	2011 CPI(M)	2016 CPI(M)		West Bengal	2006 CPI (M)	2011 AITC	2016 AITC	
Madhya Pradesh	2008 BJP	2013 BJP	2018 INC		NCT Delhi	2008 INC	2013 BJP	2015 AAP	2020 AAP
Maharashtra	2004 NCP	2009 INC	2014 BJP	2019 BJP	Puducherry	2006 INC	2011 AINRC	2016 INC	
Manipur	2007 INC	2012 INC	2017 INC						

PARTY WITH MAXIMUM NUMBER OF SEATS
IN LOK SABHA ELECTIONS*

	2004	2009	2014	2019
Max. Seats	INC 145	INC 206	BJP 282	BJP 303
2nd Max. Seats	BJP 138	BJP 116	INC 44	INC 52

*~ Over **10 Lakh** Polling Stations across the Counrty now

325 Crore Voters

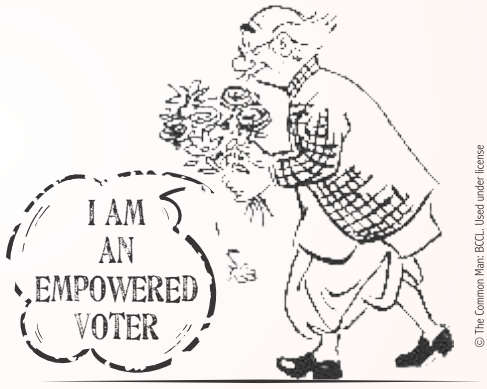
127 Assembly Elections | **4** Lok Sabha Elections

(used EVMs since 2004)

98 Crore Voters

21 Assembly Elections | **1** Loksabha Election

(used EVMs & VVPATs since December 2017)



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Pride of Indian Democracy

EVM & VVPAT

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