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VVPAT

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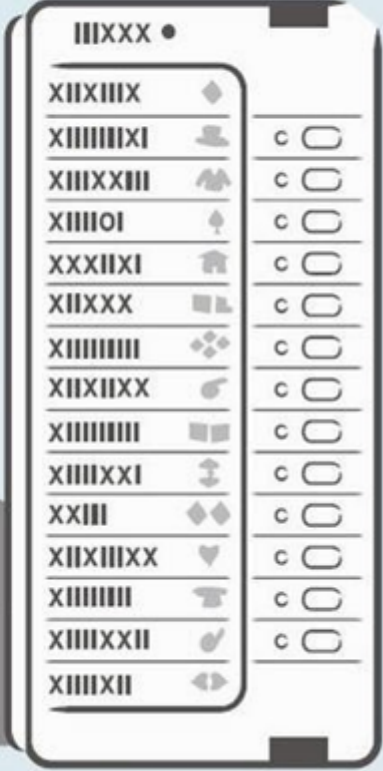
Why is in news? Why VVPAT was brought in, why Opposition wants all slips verified

With the first phase of voting set to take place on April 19, the Supreme Court (SC) said that petitions seeking 100% verification of Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) slips would be taken up soon.

In March 2023, the Association for Democratic Reforms had filed a petition before the apex court saying that to ensure free and fair elections, the tally from Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) should be cross-verified with the use of barcodes on

VOTER VERIFIABLE PAPER AUDIT TRAIL (VVPAT)

- 1** The EVMs currently display only the total number of votes polled, followed by votes secured by the individual candidates.
- 2** In the VVPAT system, when a vote is cast, a slip will be printed showing the name of the candidate, voter serial number and poll symbol.
- 3** Voter can see printout but not take it out. He can verify his vote was registered correctly. The paper trail can be used during a recount.



The VVPAT machine is **attached to the ballot unit of the EVM**, and **provides visual verification for the vote cast** by a voter by printing a slip of paper with the voter's choice on it.

This slip of paper, containing the candidate's serial number, name, and party symbol, is displayed in the machine behind a glass window, giving the voter seven seconds to verify her vote.

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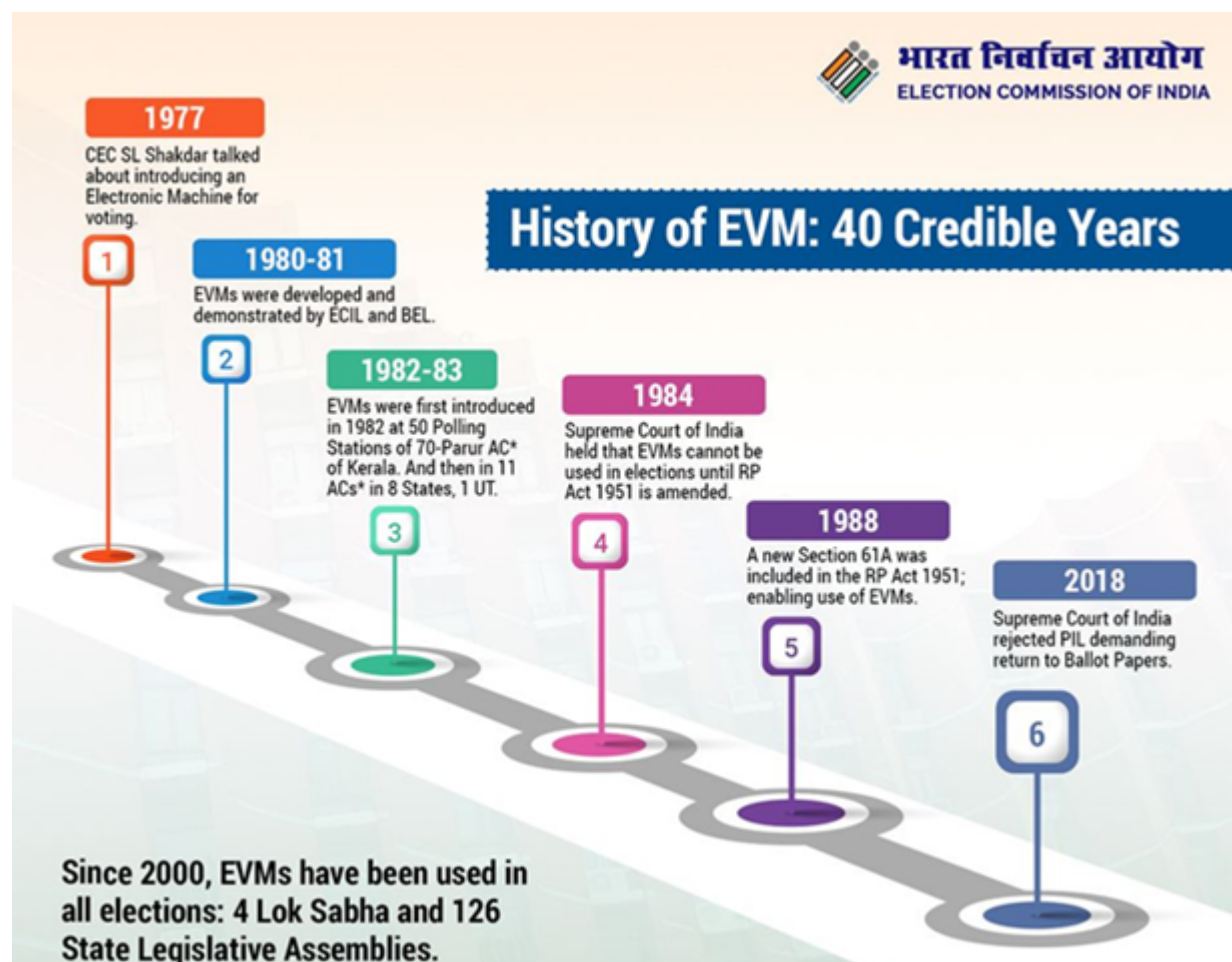
Following this, the slip falls into a compartment underneath.

No voter can take the VVPAT slip back home, as it is **later used to verify votes cast in five randomly selected polling booths**.

The idea is that by allowing for a physical verification of the electronically cast vote, both voters and political parties have greater faith in the process — that their vote is being recorded correctly.

Why did the Election Commission introduce VVPATs?

The idea of the VVPAT machine **first emerged in 2010**, when the Election Commission of India (EC), held a meeting with political parties to discuss how to make the EVM-based polling process more transparent.



After a prototype was prepared, **field trials** were held in **Ladakh, Thiruvananthapuram, Cherrapunjee, East Delhi, and Jaisalmer** in July 2011.

After fine-tuning the design, holding more trials, and taking feedback from political parties, an EC expert committee approved the design in February 2013.

Later that year, the **Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961** were **amended to allow for a printer with a drop box to be attached to the EVM**.

The VVPAT was used for the **first time in all 21 polling stations** of the Noksen Assembly constituency of **Nagaland** in **2013**, after which the EC decided to introduce VVPATs in a phased manner.

By June **2017**, there was **100% adoption of VVPATs**.

Why are VVPAT slips of only five polling booths randomly counted?

To determine what percentage of VVPAT machines' slips need to be counted to verify the accuracy of an election, the **EC, in 2018, asked the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI)** to come up with a mathematically sound, statistically robust and practically cogent sample size for the internal audit of the VVPAT slips with electronic result of EVMs.

In February 2018, the EC mandated the counting of VVPAT slips of **one randomly selected polling station** per Assembly constituency.

This was **increased to five** polling stations per Assembly seat, following a **Supreme Court judgment in April 2019** on a petition filed by TDP leader Chandrababu Naidu.

The five polling stations are selected by a draw of lots by the Returning Officer concerned, in the presence of candidates/ their agents.

What have been the legal cases surrounding the VVPAT?

The VVPAT has been a subject of multiple legal cases, starting with **Subramanian Swamy vs Election Commission of India**, in which the SC ruled that a paper trail was indispensable for free and fair elections, and ordered the government to provide funding for the roll-out of VVPATs.

In 2019, Chandrababu Naidu moved the SC asking for a **minimum 50% randomised VVPAT slips** to be counted. The EC, however, argued that if this were to happen, results would be delayed by five to six days.

Moreover, it pointed to ISI's calculations which found that even counting of slips from 479 randomly selected VVPATs across the country would **guarantee over 99% accuracy** — but the EC's guideline at the time of verifying slips from one polling station per constituency would have led to counting of 4,125 VVPATs.

Nonetheless, the **court ordered the EC to count VVPATs in five polling stations instead.**

Why does the EC not want to count 50% of VVPAT slips?

As per a previous submission in the SC, the EC claims that it takes **about an hour for election officers to match** VVPAT slips with the EVM count in one polling station.

Moreover, since the counting of VVPAT slips can begin only after EVM votes for the concerned polling station have been tabulated, for five polling stations, it would mean a delay of five hours in all, EC sources said.

The EC has also **highlighted infrastructure challenges**, including the availability of manpower, as obstacles to increasing the number of polling booths where VVPAT slips are counted.

Why are political parties demanding widened verification of VVPAT slips?

Opposition parties continue to call for verification of more polling booths to make voting more transparent. They argue that the sanctity of a fair election outweighs the concern of delay in the declaration of results.

Parties have called for **anything from 50% to 100% verification of VVPAT slips.**

In December, the Opposition INDIA alliance, passed a resolution demanding 100% verification of VVPAT slips. The INDIA Alliance has sought time to meet Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar to discuss their concerns.

However, the EC has, thus far, been reluctant to do so. As per EC sources, the EVM and VVPAT concerns have been litigated and addressed by the Commission many times.

Significance of VVPAT:

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In the world's largest democracy, every vote counts and the EVMs and VVPATs try and ensure that the massive election process is in tune with the latest technological advancements.

The Election Commission has never doubted the workings of EVMs and their **utility in a free and fair electoral process**.

However, VVPATs add another layer of **transparency and reliability** to convince voters about the sanctity of EVMs.

EVMs and VVPATs also **quicken the election process** as counting votes on EVMs takes much lesser time than counting paper ballots.

The EVMs and VVPATs are also **environment-friendly** as they use very little paper compared to paper ballots.

Challenges:

One of the primary concerns with VVPAT machines is the **possibility of technical malfunctions**. The machines are supposed to print a paper receipt of the vote cast by the voter, which is then deposited in a box.

Another challenge is the **verification of the paper trails** generated by the VVPAT machines, because it is **not always clear how this record can be verified**, especially in cases where there is a discrepancy between the electronic and paper records.

The recent **reports of defective VVPAT machines** have further eroded the public's confidence in the electoral process.

Way Forward:

One way to address the issue of technical malfunctions is to **ensure regular maintenance** of the machines.

To address concerns about the verification of paper trails, can be achieved by **providing more information to political parties and the public** about the functioning of the VVPAT machines and the process of verification.

The EC should take responsibility for the defective VVPAT machines and take steps to ensure that such incidents do not occur in the future.

This can be achieved by **instituting a system of accountability** for those responsible for maintaining and testing the machines.

Finally, there is a **need for ongoing research and development in the field of electronic voting**. New technologies and innovations should be explored to improve the accuracy, security, and transparency of the electoral process.