

Bytes Over Ballots: Transforming India's Electoral Landscape

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Abstract

The introduction of electronic voting machines instead of ballot papers in Indian elections is one of the most significant electoral reforms in the history of the world's largest democracy, India. This study analyzes the role of electronic voting machines in electoral performance, transparency, and participation. This study examines their impact on Indian democracy. At the same time, this paper focuses on security, reliability, and their related controversies. This study assesses EVMs using a mixed methodology, employing secondary data, election reports, judicial election guidelines, and so on. The study also examines voter-verifiable VVPAT integration, debates on allegations of hacking, and the social science implications of digital voting systems. This study elaborates on how EVMs have strengthened the democratic process by significantly reducing electoral malpractices such as booth capturing and invalid votes, and makes recommendations for improvements to be made in the EVM system. This study found that the adoption of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs)—as an alternative to the ballot paper system—has addressed issues such as delays and uncertainty, reduced electoral violence, paved the way for stable elections, strengthened electoral democracy, and increased voter participation.

Keywords: Electronic Voting Machines, Indian Democracy, Electoral Reforms, VVPAT, Election Commission of India, Voting Technology, Electoral Transparency, Digital Governance

Introduction

India is the world's largest democracy. The first democratic elections in India were held between 1950 and 1952. The Indian subcontinent is home to millions of voters from diverse social, economic, and geographical backgrounds. In the early days, elections were conducted using ballot papers with symbols printed on them. This led to various problems, such as capturing polling stations, invalid votes, delays in counting votes, and electoral malpractices. Thus, the introduction of electronic voting machines in the Indian electoral system has brought about a revolutionary change. The EVM was piloted in the 1980s and later used for elections across the country in the 2004 parliamentary general elections. The EVM system was designed to increase electoral efficiency, reduce human error, and ensure quick and accurate results. However, despite its many advantages, the EVM has been subject to intense political debate. Because of its transparency, hacking, and lack of facility for voters to verify their votes, controversies have arisen over the EVM. So, VVPAT machines have been in use since 2013 (Ranjan, 2023). This study critically examines

the impact, contributions, and drawbacks of EVM as an alternative to ballot papers in the Indian democratic system. This study addresses these gaps in the following ways: it fills the void regarding research on the use of EVMs and the impact of VVPATs in recent elections; it addresses the lack of comparative studies between India's electoral systems and the use and impact of EVMs in other countries; and it rectifies the absence of comparative analysis regarding how voter participation has been enhanced under the ballot paper system versus the EVM-based electoral system.

Objectives

- Examining the role of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) in strengthening democracy in India.
- Assessing the reliability and accuracy of elections.
- Discussing the challenges and criticism surrounding the use of EVMs.
- Measuring the impact of VVPAT on electoral transparency.
- Recommending policies to improve electoral technology systems.

Review of Literature

Kumar & Kumar (2024) Youth Vote in 2024 Lok Sabha Elections study enables a detailed analysis of Lok Sabha election results from 1951 to 2024. The data reveal that voter turnout ranged from a minimum of 44.87% to a maximum of 64.01% under the ballot paper system. In contrast, voter turnout under the Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) system ranged from a minimum of 58.07% to a maximum of 67.40%. Voter turnout has increased with the use of EVMs compared to the ballot-paper system. Voter turnout reached a record high of 67.40% in the 2019 Lok Sabha election.

Ranjan (2023) Enhancing Voting Security and Efficiency: An Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) System Integrated with Biometric Identifiers research paper on EVMs sheds light on the conduct of secure and reliable elections. Elections have been held in India since 1951, and the electoral system has undergone several transformations. The most significant evolution has been the shift from the ballot

paper system to the EVM system; this is because the ballot paper method required voters to stand in long queues and mark their choice by stamping the symbol of their preferred candidate on a paper slip. Certain practices—such as multiple voting, casting blank ballots, or carrying away ballot papers—have previously paved the way for electoral irregularities. In contrast, the use of EVMs prevents such issues; digital technology ensures that a voter selects only one candidate and eliminates the need for people to stand in long queues.

Khalil, Mookerjee & Tierney (2019) Social interactions in voting behavior: Evidence from India; This study highlights that voter participation is crucial within India's electoral system, which spans vast geographical boundaries and diverse communities. It would not be appropriate for a small number of voters to select the leaders who determine the quality of life for the people of the nation. High voter participation is essential. In this regard, voter turnout has increased with the use of Electronic Voting Machines compared to the ballot paper system.

One can compare the ballot paper and EVM election systems through the book *Electronic Voting Machine-A Review* authored by Kumar, Ummal & Begum (n.d.) Elections conducted using the ballot paper system were fraught with various challenges and issues, such as bogus voting, the seizure of ballot papers, the takeover of polling stations, and the lengthy duration required for the election process and the declaration of results. The subsequent introduction of EVMs has eliminated issues such as booth capturing and fraudulent voting; it has enabled the rapid conduct of elections and quick declaration of results, while also increasing voter participation by sparing people from standing in long queues.

The research paper titled *What do voters want out of elections?* Sevi, Blais & Mekik (2026) outlines what voters can gain through the electoral process. Simultaneously, it compares India's electoral systems with those of other nations, analyzing aspects such as electoral procedures, election results, and voter participation. A great government can be formed only through high voter participation. Therefore, Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) serve as an excellent means of increasing voter participation.

The research paper on the The Election Commission of India: Guardian of Democracy authored by Ahuja & Ostermann (2021) outlines the electoral systems in place since 1951. The Election Commission serves as a pivotal body responsible for conducting elections to select representatives who determine the nation's future and the welfare of its people. It stands as a bulwark of Indian democracy, facilitating the participation of all citizens in the electoral process and ensuring fair elections through its policies and reforms.

Methodology

This paper explores the mixed method of qualitative and quantitative methods. This paper is based on data such as Election Commission of India reports, judgments of courts, electoral statistics publications, etc. Introduction of EVM system - A comparative method has been used before and after and a case study approach has been used based on the general elections held in a particular period. For this study, legal documents from the Election Commission were used as primary data. Specifically, the analysis focused on electoral reforms—particularly those concerning voting system reforms—outlined in Law Commission Report No. 255. Additionally, data from the Election Commission's publication on Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) reforms were examined. Notes on the Electoral Representation Amendment Act, court orders, and election laws issued by Parliament were used in this study. As secondary data, the study incorporated election regulations and press reports concerning the Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) used in recent elections across five states. Research papers on EVMs authored by researchers and available on Google Scholar and Research Gate were also examined. For data collection, a comparative analysis was conducted between the ballot paper and EVM voting methods, utilizing official voter turnout percentages for Lok Sabha elections released by the Election Commission for the period 1951–2024. The Election Commission's documents regarding Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) were subjected to systematic analysis. This study focused exclusively on comparing the ballot paper system with the EVM system, discussing their respective impacts,

advantages and disadvantages, and potential future reforms in India. Only stable and reliable documents were used for this analysis. Specifically, all data regarding the adoption, evolution, and impact of Electronic Voting Machines as an alternative to paper ballots were sourced exclusively from the Election Commission's website. Similarly, the data subjected to analysis and the election results were those officially released by the Election Commission of India. The analysis conducted in this study examined five components: (I) ballot paper and EVM election systems; (II) improvements and challenges in election processes resulting from the use of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) and VVPATs; and (III) changes in voter participation based on a comparison between ballot paper and EVM systems. (IV) An analysis was conducted on the Lok Sabha election results from 1952 to 2024, as published by the Election Commission to compare voter participation. (V) This study highlights the impact of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) and the advancements made in electoral democracy. All data collected and analyzed for this research study were gathered from publicly available government orders, Election Commission publications, court orders, and peer-reviewed academic literature.

Evolution of EVMs in India

The introduction of the EVM was a major revolution in India's electoral system. Since the first elections held after the establishment of the Republic of India, paper ballot systems have been used. The paper ballot system has been in use since the first elections after the establishment of the Republic of India. The paper ballot system has been in place since the first elections after the establishment of the Republic of India. In 1977, the Electronics Corporation of India Limited (ECIL) in Hyderabad designed the EVM machine (D. A. Kumar et al., n.d.). On August 16, 1980, the Election Commission presented a proposal to all political parties. The Election Commission presented the proposal to all political parties on August 16, 1980. Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL), Bangalore, and ECIL have collaborated to manufacture EVMs. The EVM was used in the 1982 elections in Kerala, India. However, that election was annulled by the Supreme

Court because there was no proper legislation on EVMs. Subsequently, in 1989, Chapter III of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, was amended in Parliament to formalize laws on EVMs. After a consensus was reached in 1998 on EVMs, elections were held in 25 constituencies in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Delhi. The EVMs were used in the Assembly elections in West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and Haryana. In the 2004 Lok Sabha elections, EVMs were used in 543 constituencies across India. More than a million people voted in the elections.

The use of electronic voting machines in elections is an outstanding achievement in the global democratic system (Shri & Gowda, 2015). It has brought expressiveness, speed, and acceptability to the electoral system in a democratic manner. Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), despite having many advantages, have been carrying various controversies. As a result of the insistence of the opposition and socio-political activists to ensure the credibility of the EVM, the Election Commission introduced the Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) system for the voters to check their vote. On October 4, 2010, opposition parties raised the issue of VVPAT in a meeting chaired by the Election Commission. Subsequently, an expert committee was constituted, and the BEL and ECIL jointly developed the VVPAT model in 2011. Later, the Election Commission conducted a mock poll in Ladakh (Jammu and Kashmir), Cherrapunji (Meghalaya), Thiruvananthapuram (Kerala), Delhi, and Jaisalmer (Rajasthan). The election rules were amended on August 14, 2013. The VVPAT was first used in Nagaland's Noksen constituency in 2013. It was later used in the 2014 Lok Sabha general and state assembly elections. The VVPAT attached to the EVM will display on the screen for seven seconds a slip printed with the serial number, name, and symbol of the candidates they are voting for. This way, voters can ensure the credibility of their votes.

Advantages of EVMs

The introduction of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) in the Indian electoral process has brought several advantages. These EVMs have the advantages of administrative efficiency, environmental friendliness, accuracy, speed, and enhancement of

democracy through results. In the early days, several problems were encountered with the ballot system. In particular, there were problems with the capture of polling stations, seizure of ballots, casting of bogus votes, and major delays in the publication of results. Therefore, as an alternative to the ballot paper system, electronic voting machines that are numerically operated with high security features will enable voters to cast their votes in a short time (Shukla, 2018). As a result, the voting time was shorter than that of the paper method. The ballot system has led to several problems. Often, voters are prevented from registering invalid votes. Voters cast their ballots in blank ballot boxes, concealed ballot papers, and cast their votes for more than one candidate. The EVM system ensures that only one candidate can cast their vote (Upadhyaya, 2005). While the ballot system was followed throughout the country, vote counting took from one day to several days. However, the counting of votes through EVMs can be done in a few hours, and the results can be declared quickly (Ahuja & Ostermann, 2021). After the production of the electronic voting machine, it can be used for several elections. However, in the ballot paper system, the printing, transportation, and non-replication of ballot papers resulted in high expenditure. This reduces the cost of electronic voting machine. In addition, electronic voting machines are environment-friendly. This is because deforestation and waste generation for paper are avoided using EVMs. Voters must print a ballot paper with the symbol of their choice and paste it in the ballot box (Sadan, 2020). However, the EVM machine will have buttons with the name, photo, and symbol of the candidates. Voters can cast their votes according to their choice. Braille buttons have also been designed in electronic voting machines for blind people to vote. At the same time, there is significantly less human intervention in electronic voting machines than in ballot papers. Errors that occur due to the lack of human intervention are avoided. Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) ensure accuracy through automation (K. Sumana K, 2011). Similarly, electronic voting machines are easier to handle than paper slips in the transport mode. Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), as an alternative to ballot papers, ensure electoral efficiency, accuracy, speed, reliability, and so on.

Challenges and Criticism of EVMs

Despite the many advantages of electronic voting machines, there have been various controversies and debates over their use. One of the main issues is the charge of damaging or hacking machines. No network is required to operate EVMs, and although they are unique, doubts are constantly being raised that electronic devices can be hacked with any technology (Jaffrelet, 2010). In the ballot paper system, voters can see the symbols they have voted for through the voting ballot. However, the credibility of the EVM machine is being questioned as it works only on a numerical basis. At the same time, in recent times, there has been confusion among the public due to allegations of voting on electronic voting machines by losing opposition parties in elections (Akhtar, n.d.). Because of technical issues, when the machines are affected, such as the rewrite registration, it leads to questioning the reliability of the machines among people (Khalil et al., 2019). Similarly, transporting and operating machines at remote polling stations has been a challenge. EVM machines have been under scrutiny by the law and judiciary in a series of cases. The introduction of VVPAT and electoral reforms are being carried out as a manifestation of this. Although electronic voting machines have accelerated the election process, controversies and criticisms continue.

Role of VVPAT

To address the criticisms and controversies surrounding Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) and to enable voters to verify their votes, the Election Commission introduced VVPAT machines. Once the voters cast their votes in the Electronic Voting Machine (EVM), the VVPAT machine displays the details of their votes for seven seconds. This will allow voters to verify their vote. The slips displayed on the screen then fall on the sealed VVPAT machine. In the present system, not all paper slips falling on the VVPAT are counted. Only a few VVPATs are counted and verified during the election results to ensure the accuracy of the EVM. The introduction of the VVPAT machine has removed the long-standing trust deficit in EVM. The VVPAT establishes credibility in the electoral process.

Comparative Perspective

Many countries worldwide have democratic elections. Some countries use EVMs for speed and accuracy, whereas others use ballot papers for reliability. India, Brazil, the Philippines, Belgium, Venezuela, the Maldives, Namibia, Egypt, Bhutan, and Nepal conduct their elections using EVMs (Posada-Carbó, 1996).

Simultaneously, several countries that had previously used electronic voting machines have switched back to the paper ballot system. Notably, countries such as the UK, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the USA have completely banned electronic voting machines (Jafar et al., 2021). The Netherlands banned electronic voting machines in 2006, followed by Ireland and Italy in 2009. Germany's Supreme Court also banned them in 2009, citing concerns regarding transparency (Alesina et al., 2020).

Data Analysis (Lok Sabha Elections)

Postal Ballot	Election Year	Voter Turnout
	1951	44.87%
	1957	45.44%
	1962	55.42%
	1967	61.04%
	1971	55.29%
	1977	60.49%
	1980	56.92%
	1984	64.01%
	1989	61.95%
	1991	56.73%
	1996	57.94%
	1998	61.97%
	1999	59.99%
Electronic Voting Machine	2004	58.07%
	2009	58.19%
	2014	66.44%
	2019	67.40%
	2024	65.79%

Source: Election Commission of India

Based on the aforementioned data, one can observe a comparison of the vote percentage details recorded under the ballot paper system and the

electronic voting machine system (Kumar & Kumar, 2024).

Democratic Participation

Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) play a pivotal role in enhancing democratic participation in India by simplifying the voting process and ensuring accessibility for all, including the illiterate, persons with disabilities, and senior citizens (BHAMBHRI, 2022). Equipped with symbols, names, and photographs, these machines not only save time and facilitate rapid voting but also contribute to an increase in voter turnout (Alam & Sivaramakrishnan, 2015).

Recommendations

The use of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) in Indian elections has improved electoral efficiency and reduced electoral malpractice (Baruah, 2019). However, as concerns regarding their reliability, transparency, and associated controversies persist, various reforms are necessary to further strengthen the system (Wilkinson, 2004). VVPATs were introduced to address doubts regarding the EVMs. However, EVM votes and VVPAT data are currently cross-verified in only a limited number of instances. Therefore, to enhance public confidence in the reliability of EVMs, a larger number of EVM and VVPAT votes need to be cross-verified (Sevi et al., 2026).

The Election Commission should constitute a dedicated expert committee for electronic voting machines and periodically verify their hardware and software components. To foster public understanding of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), it is essential to conduct public awareness drives, social media campaigns, and voter education initiatives that highlight the facts regarding the security of EVMs and VVPAT machines (Singh & Roy, 2019). Through these efforts, voter confidence in the electoral process can be established and maintained.

There have been allegations regarding the hacking of electronic voting machines. Although unique technologies exist to protect these machines from hacking, it is essential to periodically examine and upgrade their context to ensure that evolving technological methods do not pose challenges to

their security. The Election Commission should consider and examine the constructive suggestions offered by experts, social activists, the judiciary, and the general public regarding electoral processes (Singh & Roy, 2018).

Simultaneously, election officials engaged in election duties must be provided with proper training, and their adherence to election procedures must be continuously monitored. The legal aspects concerning Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) must be ensured. The Election Commission and judiciary must ensure that electoral processes are conducted in accordance with the Constitution (Bartels, 2016). To build political consensus, the Election Commission should undertake efforts to explain the functioning of Electronic Voting Machines to all political parties through meetings. Thus, to build confidence in electronic voting machines, the Election Commission must uphold electoral democracy by implementing necessary reforms.

Conclusion

This research paper study is limited to comparing the ballot paper and Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) systems used in elections, analyzing Lok Sabha election results from 1951 to 2024, comparing voter participation, and evaluating the impact of EVMs. Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) represent a significant evolutionary step in India's democratic electoral process. India is characterized by its vast population, massive electorate, diverse society, and varied geographical terrain. Conducting elections within such a framework is a highly challenging task (Verma, 2005). Thus, the introduction of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) as an alternative to paper-based voting systems has streamlined the electoral process. This has brought about significant changes to the methods of voting and vote counting. EVMs have addressed issues such as delays and uncertainty and have enhanced the process of conducting elections involving millions of voters and thousands of constituencies. Electronic voting machines have made it easier for voters to cast their votes and eliminated the need for long queues at polling stations. Consequently, they positively influenced voter turnout and the

overall voting percentage in elections. However, controversies surrounding these benefits persist. In this context, the introduction of VVPAT has further boosted confidence in Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs).

Despite the allegations surrounding Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), they have brought about significant improvements in the electoral process. There is no doubt that EVMs have achieved tremendous success in elections; however, reforms should be introduced to ensure their credibility. Furthermore, the introduction of Electronic Voting Machines has strengthened India's democratic system, reduced election-related violence, and successfully facilitated credible and stable elections. While both the ballot paper system and the Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) system have their respective advantages and disadvantages, a comparison reveals that the EVM system is more advantageous for India, given its vast electorate size.

Future Research Directions

In India, with its vast electorate, the use of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) remains the appropriate choice for the electoral process. Simultaneously, it is essential to address criticisms of EVMs and build voter confidence in electronic voting systems. Future research will focus on the following areas: The Election Commission's documents regarding Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) were subjected to systematic analysis. This study focused exclusively on comparing the ballot paper system with the EVM system, discussing their respective impacts, advantages and disadvantages, and potential future reforms. Exploring the feasibility of enabling voters to participate in Lok Sabha and State elections—even when they are unable to vote in person because they are in other states or abroad for education, employment, or other reasons. Examining the possibilities of using artificial intelligence in electoral processes. Examining ways to enhance cybersecurity in electoral systems. Using upgraded electronic voting machines in local bodies and other elections, similar to those used for the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assembly elections in India. Creating full awareness among all people regarding voting machines.

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