Electronic Voting Machines

Why EVMs were introduced?

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- Illegal efforts to shape electoral outcomes are not uncommon.
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- Electoral fraud not only undermines public trust in democratic institutions, but also adversely affects the provision of public goods.
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- In India, with more than 800 million registered voters, and a complex multi-party system, **electoral fraud has been a leading cause for concern.**
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- In several constituencies under the paper ballot system, polling booths would be captured and ballot boxes would be stuffed.
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- To address fraud and simplify the electoral procedure, the Election Commission of India (ECI) introduced electronic voting machines **(EVMs) in the late 1990s.**
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How EVMs help?

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- EVMs were introduced on an experimental basis in 1998 in a few constituencies in state assembly elections.
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- Post-2001, EVMs replaced paper ballots for all state elections.
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- An important feature of EVMs was that these co**uld register only five votes per minute.**
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- Thus, thes polling booths had to be captured for a longer period to rig elections, thereby increasing the cost of electoral fraud.
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- EVMs would **improve the efficiency** of tallying electoral results, thereby reducing human error.
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What is the data supporting the fact?

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- Using state assembly election results between 1976 to 2007, it is found that the introduction of EVMs led to a significant decline in electoral fraud.
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- **The introduction of EVMs led to a 3.5% decline in voter turnout.**
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- The decline was substantially larger in states prone to electoral fraud, where politicians faced serious criminal charges.
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- These **results could also be explained** by voters' negative preference toward voting machines, or the formation of long lines in polling booths due to the upper limit on the maximum votes per minute.
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- To address all of these issues, **post-poll survey data** was collected and analysed by an independent agency.
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- Interestingly, they found that the ability of vulnerable citizens (illiterates, females, SC, ST) to cast their vote improved significantly after the introduction of EVMs.
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- Additionally, EVMs also led to a virtual elimination of rejected or error-ridden votes.
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- In a rigged electoral system, politicians fail to provide security to ordinary people because they depend on criminal elements in the electoral process.
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- **A district-level data on crimes from the NCRB** suggested a very strong link between the introduction of EVMs and decline in crime.
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- Also, the introduction of EVMs led to a serious decline in the vote share of incumbent parties. These effects were more pronounced in states prone to electoral violence.
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Source: The Indian Express

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