NOTA in India

What is NOTA?

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- None Of The Above (NOTA) is a ballot option designed to allow the voter to indicate disapproval of all of the candidates in a voting system.
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- It was introduced in India following the 2013 Supreme Court directive in the People's Union for Civil Liberties v. Union of India judgment.
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- However, NOTA in India does not provide for a 'right to reject'.
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- The candidate with the maximum votes wins the election irrespective of the number of NOTA votes polled.
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What is the current pattern of NOTA?

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- NOTA polling figures are still small.
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- In the 2013 Assembly elections held in four States NOTA constituted 1.85% of the total votes polled.
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- Then it dropped to 0.95% in the 2014 Assembly elections held in eight States.
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- It increased to 2.02% in the 2015 Assembly elections held in Delhi and Bihar. While Delhi polled a mere 0.40%, Bihar saw 2.49% of NOTA votes, which remains the highest NOTA votes polled so far in any State in Assembly elections.
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- The number of NOTA votes polled was larger than the winning margin in 261 Assembly constituencies and in 24 constituencies in the Lok Sabha elections since 2013.
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- Therefore in these constituencies the NOTA votes did make a difference to the election results.
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- **Reserved constituencies -** Reserved constituencies have seen a relatively larger number of NOTA votes. This point to the continued social prejudice against political reservation for SC/STs.
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- **Left-Wing Areas -** Constituencies affected by left-wing extremism have also recorded higher NOTA performance and here probably it served as an instrument of protest against the State itself.
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- **Mainstream Parties -** It is comparatively higher in the constituencies which have seen a direct contest between the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party. This might be some indication of the people's disenchantment with two mainstream political parties.
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- NOTA is also used to express their protest against many things they perceive wrong in the political system.
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What is the way ahead?

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- So far, a small number of Indian voters have come to see NOTA as an instrument of protest.
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- The perceived cynicism of Indian voters against the political class thus seems exaggerated.
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- Nevertheless, it is important to note that these voters have used the democratic means of NOTA to express their resentment rather than boycotting the polls outright.
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- This electoral option will become a meaningful means of negative voting only if it becomes a 'right to reject' rather than being a symbolic instrument to express resentment as it is now.
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Source: The Hindu

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