Postal Ballot

Why in news?

Recently, in Madhya Pradesh, an opposition party confronted election officials for opening the strong room where postal ballots had been stored.

What options are available for voting in India?

- **Visiting the poll booth** - A person will visit the polling booth to exercise his/her franchise.
- **Postal ballots** - A voter exercises his/her franchise through post.
- **Proxy voting** - The person can authorize another residing in the same polling booth area to cast a vote on his/her behalf.



What is postal vote ballot?

Features	Postal Vote Ballot
Postal ballot voting	• It refers to the *distribution of ballot papers to registered voters by post* instead of people coming to the polling booth directly to vote. • These votes are returned in the post or handed in person in the elections office or at a polling station
Applicable to	• Service voters • Special voters • Absentee voters • Voters on election duty • Electors under preventive detention
Service voters	• Service voter includes a member of the Armed Forces of the Union, Armed Police Force of a State or employed under the Government of India. • They can cast their votes either through postal ballot or through a proxy voter. • A voter who opts to vote through a proxy is called a *Classified Service Voter.*
Special voters	• It includes President of India, Vice President, Governors, Union Cabinet ministers, Speaker of the House and government officers on poll duty.

Absentee voters	• These are voters employed in *essential services* and unable to cast their vote due to their service conditions. • **Notified voters**- Delhi Metro Rail Corporation, Northern Railway (Passenger and Freight) Services and media persons. • Senior citizens *above 80 years of age* and those belonging to the category of physically disabled *(PWD).* • COVID-19 infected or suspected patients.
Electronically Transmitted Post Ballot System (ETPBS)	
• Through this system, the service voters cast their vote on an electronically received postal ballot, from anywhere outside their constituency. • It is a fully secured system, having 2 security layers - *OTP and PIN.* • **Launched by** - *Election Commission of India* with the help of Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC). • **Applicable for** - Service voters • **Motto** - "No voter to be left behind"	

What is the procedure for storing postal voting ballot system?

- **Casting of votes-** Voters who are eligible for postal ballots can cast their votes at facilitation centres or by post.
- The ballots are collected daily and stored in a strong room by the Returning Officer (RO).
- **Transfer of ballots**- The RO informs the candidates when the postal ballots will be moved from one strong room to another.
- The postal ballots are taken out of the strong room in front of the candidates or their agents, put in a steel box and sealed.
- **Opening of ballots** - The steel box is escorted by armed CPF to the strong room at the counting centre a day before counting and opened in the presence of candidates or their representatives.

What are the issues with postal ballot?

- **Tampering of votes**- They are vulnerable to being altered, stolen, or forged by malicious actors.
- **Time constraints-** They may cause delays in counting and declaring the results due to the time required to process and verify them.
- **Violates privacy-** They may violate the voting confidentiality and expose the voters to undue influence or coercion by others.
- **Complexity-** They may impose unequal burdens and consequences on different groups of voters depending on their literacy, accessibility, and availability of postal services.

Quick facts

Electronic Voting Machine (EVM)
• It is an electronic device for recording votes that consists of 2 units – a Control Unit and a Balloting Unit. • It was introduced in *Parur Assembly Constituency* of Kerala in the year 1982. • **Developed by-** State-owned Electronics Corporation of India and Bharat Electronics Limited

Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trial (VVPAT)
• It is an independent system attached to an EVM. • It acts as a second line of verification and allows the voters to verify that their votes are cast as intended. • When a vote is cast, a slip is printed on the VVPAT printer containing the *serial number, name and symbol* of the candidate voted. • This remains visible through a *transparent window* for ***7 seconds.*** • The printed slip automatically gets cut and falls into a sealed drop box which can be counted if needed.

Related links – Transfer of EVMs

References

1. Indian Express- How EVMs, Postal EVMs stored
2. ECI- Procedure to vote through postal ballots

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