Syncing Aadhaar with Voter IDs

What is the issue?

- The General Elections 2019 witnessed discrepancies in voter eligibility and rolls, and the resultant denial of voting rights of many.
- The disenfranchisement of voters is likely due to four factors which are discussed below, calling for Aadhaar as a solution to resolve them.

What are the concerns with registration?

- **Issue** - Several people are unable to register to vote.
- The reasons for this range from not being aware of the registration methodology, to the process itself being inconvenient to not even knowing there is one.
- **Challenges** - It is the responsibility of the Election Commission of India (ECI) to inform the eligible voters who have not registered yet.
- The ECI does this via mass campaigns since it is not possible for it to exclusively identify unregistered adult citizens.
- Currently, the easiest way to freshly apply to be registered as a voter is to fill out a Form 6 on the NVSP (National Voters' Service Portal) or the ECI's app.
- However, this is an extremely cumbersome exercise and potentially an impediment to comprehensive voter registration efforts.
- **Way out** - Aadhaar can significantly simplify the process, once the ECI has ascertained that a resident is eligible to vote.
- This whole process could be replaced with a single step Aadhaar based e-KYC.

What went wrong with voter rolls?

- **Procedure** - Several government functionaries have discretionary powers that empower them to remove names from voter lists.
- Additionally, the ECI has the right to disqualify citizens from voting under certain conditions as per the Constitution.
- The ECI maintains and it is indeed mandated to publish a list of people disqualified from voting in each state.
- However, the reasons for their disqualifications are not included and likely not recorded either.
- **Concerns** - There are people who have voted at a particular booth previously

but have been omitted from the voter rolls.
- In many cases, the ECI does not have the contact details (or updated ones) of voters to notify them before a deletion takes place.
- The absence of contact information was due to the fact that up until recently, the ECI did not collect these details.
- In cases where they have contact details, the changes in the same are not made by voters unless the Electors Photo Identity Card (EPIC) is their de facto ID.
- Besides, the most disturbing factor is the political adventurism of parties (and politicians) and voters alike.
- There have been cases reported of voters who are registered to vote in multiple booths and, thus, can vote multiple times.
- **Way out** - During registration, Aadhaar holders could give consent to the ECI to have their contact details shared.
- In that case, they could be pre-emptively notified about an impending deletion.
- The illegality of private and political actors in regards with voters roll needs to be checked.
- Here, Aadhaar's anti-fraud and de-duplication features can be put to use.

What were the other problems that came up?

- **Details** - Several people have been turned away from voting due to discrepancies between their details on the rolls and the ID documents they present for validation.
- Generally, people who get married or have recently changed other demographic parameters might make the necessary changes to their Aadhaars and neglect other IDs.
- In such cases, reliance on Aadhaar will mitigate the risks of exclusion that are a consequence of demographic data mismatches.
- **Relocation** - The most easily addressable cause of disenfranchisement is relocation.
- It is often the case that people who have made the requisite changes will feature both on the voter list of their new and previous residences.
- Here too, it is far more likely for people to update Aadhaar rather than their EPIC.

What could be done?

- As discussed, many of the exclusions discussed above can be remedied with Aadhaar.
- It uniquely identifies every individual in the country through all of the same details as the EPIC.

- Also, unlike EPIC, Aadhaar captures biometric data, which is useful in validating uniqueness.
- Ironically, the EPIC does not guarantee a vote; if a name does not appear on the voter rolls, she will not be permitted to vote.
- Even if a person's name does appear on the voter rolls, the EPIC is not the only document that is accepted as proof of identity.
- Therefore, the very existence of the EPIC is worth reconsidering today.
- In this regard, the ECI publicly expressed its interest in seeding their databases with Aadhaar.
- It also attempted a drive to voluntarily link Aadhaar to voter IDs but was halted by the Supreme Court in 2017.
- There have been recent reports, however, suggesting that the ECI has been preparing to resume these activities.
- Given that Aadhaar is the only universal, de-facto identification infrastructure in India today, the move could be taken further.

Source: Indian Express

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