

Electoral Reforms

Why in news?

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On March 22, 2017, in Rajya Sabha, an electoral reform debate has happened for over 5 hours.

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What are the major concerns discussed?

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 - Members demanded that '**Paid news**' should be made a cognisable criminal offence. And there was unanimity on banning opinion polls.
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 - Most speakers demanded **state funding of elections** and a ban on corporate donations.
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 - Several members demanded a ceiling on expenditure by political parties to bring down the cost of elections.
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 - Also, it discussed about long-prevalent **first-past-the-post system** (candidate with the most votes in the constituency wins) in which the winner takes all.
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 - There is growing concern that the system can lead to majoritarianism.
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 - The members wanted this system to be **replaced by the proportional representation system** which can ensure that every section of the citizenry gets due representation.
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 - The PM's proposal for simultaneous elections came in for a lot of attack and it was seen as an attempt to bring in the presidential form of government.
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 - Some said it is against India's federal polity, others believed it will go against the basic structure of the constitution.
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 - Few wanted the abolition of the provision that allows a candidate to **stand**

for election in more than one constituency.

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- And some mentioned reservation for women, voting by NRIs and migrants and the need to make the model code of conduct more liberal.

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- However, nobody was interested in talking about the increasing criminalisation of politics.

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What is the issue of VVPATs?

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- Previously, in a judgement, the Supreme Court had commended the Election Commission for taking a series of steps to introduce VVPATs.

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- The SC has also told the govt that holding that the **paper trail is an indispensable requirement** of free and fair elections.

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- Appreciating the EC's efforts, the court approved its plan to roll out VVPATs in phases till 2019.

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- More than three years after the court's directive and despite 10 reminders from the EC, the govt has not released the requisite funds for VVPATs.

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- So far, the EC has just 52,000 machines (against the nearly 20 lakh required) which were deployed in the recent elections.

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What are EC's proposals on Electoral Reforms?

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- It is noteworthy that the EC has mooted all these reforms for over two decades.

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- The EC's proposals could broadly be divided into three categories.

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- **Cleanse the electoral system:** Reforms like debarring criminally-tainted politicians from contesting, checking money power, and empowering the EC to deregister defunct and dubious parties.

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- **Make the EC stronger:** Like appointment of election commissioners through a collegium, their elevation to CEC on the criterion of seniority and protecting their tenure by vesting the powers of impeachment on the CEC.
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- **Make the electoral system efficient:** Like the introduction of totaliser machines to prevent disclosure of polling patterns in a polling booth.
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What is the way forward?

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- So, if a committee is set up, it must look at all the reforms proposed by the EC over the years, instead of reinventing the wheel.
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- It should deal with the entire gamut of electoral reforms and not recommend piecemeal solutions.
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Source: The Hindu

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