

## On Postal Ballot for NRIs

### Why in news?

*In the Supreme Court, the Union government that said it was considering ways to facilitate non-resident Indians (NRIs) to cast their votes remotely.*

*Earlier, the Chief Election Commissioner of India urged the NRIs to register as overseas electors and talked about a proposal on Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System (postal ballot) facility for NRIs.*

### What do the NRIs miss out on?

- India has the largest diaspora population, with nearly 1.35 crore NRIs spread across the globe.
- Many of them leave the country for short-term work and could miss out on exercising some of their rights such as registering their vote in India's Assembly or parliamentary elections.
- Currently, the Election Commission of India (ECI) allows enrolled overseas citizens to vote in person at the polling station in the constituency where the person is registered as an overseas elector.
- The necessity to vote in person and the costs have, for overseas citizens, acted as a disincentive for their wanting to exercise their mandate.
- This was evident in the numbers of such voters in the 2019 Lok Sabha election - 25,606 among the 99,844 registered electors who voted.

### What are some actions taken to remedy this problem?

- In 2014, a committee constituted by the ECI to probe methods to enable overseas voters' mandates concluded that proxy voting was the most viable, though some political parties objected to the idea.
- A Bill was passed in the 16<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha (2014-19) to enable this, but lapsed.
- In 2020, the ECI approached the Government to permit NRIs to vote via postal ballots, similar to the system already used by service voters, i.e., the Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System (ETPBS).

*The Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System allows registering their mandate on a downloaded ETPB and sending it to the returning officer of the constituency.*

## What will be the impact?

- Allowing postal ballot use does increase the burden on embassy or consular officials.
- But, allowing postal ballot use should be a good move for NRIs.
- This is also a more trustworthy way of registering mandates rather than appointing proxies.

*Appointing proxies is currently allowed for service personnel who are a limited number in each constituency unlike NRIs who could constitute a more substantial chunk among the electorate in some States.*

- In the 2014 discussion organised by the ECI, some parties raised the question whether NRIs will get a benefit denied to internal migrant workers.
- But the higher costs of travel back to India, as opposed to travelling within, is a valid reason for allowing NRIs the partially ETPB facility.
- Several democratic countries allow for this option to their overseas citizens, but again, none has to deal with anything near the scale India has.

## What is the other group to which the ETPB facility can be extended?

- The more important question to be tackled while extending the facility of voting to overseas Indians is whether longer term migrants should also be allowed to register their mandate.
- This is because the idea behind limiting voters to specific constituencies on account of their residency will become infructuous.
- Therefore, if the postal ballot system is indeed instituted, rules must be clearly framed for voters' eligibility on the basis of their time spent away from the country.

## Reference

1. [The Hindu | Remote voting: On postal ballot for NRIs](#)
2. [The Hindu | Postal ballot facility for NRIs being contemplated](#)

## Quick Facts

## Voting Options in India

# Voting Options in India

## Three Ways of Voting

Visiting the polling booth

Postal ballot

Proxy voting

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- Generally, a person will visit the polling booth to exercise his/her franchise.
- **Postal ballots** - In which a voter exercises his/her franchise through post is available only for people on election duty, armed forces personnel, and electors subject to preventive detention.
- **Proxy voting** - The option of proxy voting is available only for armed forces, police, and government officials posted outside India.
- The person can authorize another residing in the same polling booth area to cast a vote on his/her behalf.
- This option is currently available for wives of the above-mentioned personnel, but not for the husbands.

## Overseas Voter

- A non-resident Indian, who holds an Indian passport, can vote in his/her hometown after registering as an Overseas Voter.
- The NRI must fill the Form 6A, which can be downloaded online or taken from the nearest Indian Mission.
- Once the person returns to India, they will have to re-register themselves as a general voter and obtain an EPIC card.
- To know more about the Overseas Voters, [click here](#).



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