Electoral Reforms

Why in news?

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

What are the major concerns discussed?

- Members demanded that ‘Paid news’ should be made a cognisable criminal offence. And there was unanimity on banning opinion polls.
- Most speakers demanded state funding of elections and a ban on corporate donations.
- Several members demanded a ceiling on expenditure by political parties to bring down the cost of elections.
- 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.
- There is growing concern that the system can lead to majoritarianism.
- 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.
- The PMs 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.
- Some said it is against India’s federal polity, others believed it will go against the basic structure of the constitution.
- Few wanted the abolition of the provision that allows a candidate to stand
for election in more than one constituency.

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

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

What is the issue of VVPATs?

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

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

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

- 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.

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

What are EC’s proposals on Electoral Reforms?

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

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

- **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.
• **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.

• **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.

• 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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