Supreme Court Order on VVPAT Verification

Why in news?

The Supreme Court has recently directed the Election Commission (EC) to increase random checking of VVPAT slips to five per Assembly segment.

What is the SC's order?

- Earlier, VVPAT slips from only one Electronic Voting Machines (EVM) in every Assembly segment/constituency was subjected to physical verification.
- SC has now directed the EC to increase this to five.
- In general elections, VVPAT slips of five EVMs in each Assembly segment of a Parliamentary Constituency would be subjected to physical counting.
- In State Assembly elections, this would extend to five random EVMs in each Assembly constituency.
- The Supreme Court order would be implemented in this Lok Sabha polls (2019).
- Notably, there was a demand from Opposition parties for VVPAT verification in 50% or 125 polling booths in each constituency. Click here to know more.

Why not 50%?

- The opposition's idea would be a drain on the ECI's infrastructural resources and manpower.
- VVPAT slip counting takes place in specially erected VVPAT counting booths.
- It takes place under the close monitoring of the returning officer and direct oversight of the observer.
- So a 50% VVPAT verification would require a huge increase in extra personnel in each of the 4,125 polling stations.
- The ECI also said that a 50% random physical verification of VVPATs would delay Lok Sabha poll results of 2019 by six whole days.
- Given these, the court said VVPAT verification of 5 EVMs, rather than in 125 polling booths, is more "viable at this point of time."

Is it a welcome move?

- The higher figure will increase the overall number of EVMs to be counted to close to 20,000 machines.
- This should reasonably address the very remote possibility of 'insider fraud'.
- The court also stated that the aim is to ensure the greatest degree of accuracy and satisfaction in election process.
- However, in effect, the increase to 5 EVMs from 1 would only increase the VVPAT verification percentage from 0.44% to less than 2%.
- Nevertheless, in any case, the VVPAT slip verification is more of a reassurance to voters that the EVM is indeed foolproof.

What is the real problem?

- For the ECI, the key technical issue with EVMs and VVPATs is not really in regard to tampering but to machine glitches.
- The parliamentary by-elections in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and the Assembly election in Karnataka in 2018 had registered significant machine replacement rates (20% and 4%, respectively).
- But these were brought down to less than 2% in later elections held in the winter months.
- The availability of replacement machines and the ability to deploy them quickly in case of a failure of VVPATs are essential to avoid disruptions in the coming elections.

Source: The Hindu