

Date: 01-04-2021

To

Shri Sunil Arora

Chief Election Commissioner
Election Commission of India (ECI)

Shri Rajiv Kumar

Election Commissioner
Election Commission of India (ECI)

Shri Sushil Chandra

Election Commissioner
Election Commission of India (ECI)

Subject: Request for an immediate implementation of reforms to stop instances of booth capturing, violence, bogus voting, voter intimidation etc. during elections and proposed recommendations for the same.

Dear Sir(s),

1. During the Lok Sabha 2019 elections, 900 million eligible voters were expected to cast their ballot across approximately 10 lakh polling booths in India. Across some of these polling stations, several instances of booth capturing, violence, voter intimidation etc. were reported in the media. One of most serious cases of booth rigging were reported from Tripura (West) where allegations of massive booth capturing and false voting resulted in repolling in 168 polling stations in 26 assembly constituencies.

Some of the reporting on such instances can be accessed from the references given below:

- <https://www.hindustantimes.com/lok-sabha-elections/lok-sabha-elections-2019-evm-glitches-allegations-of-booth-capturing-convulse-rohtak-voting/story-3FExQgaEB0HSB7nxPVWocN.html>
- <https://www.thehindu.com/elections/lok-sabha-2019/violence-mars-polling-in-bengal/article27109826.ece>
- <https://zeenews.india.com/lok-sabha-general-elections-2019/election-commission-declares-polling-in-168-booths-across-tripura-west-void-repolling-on-may-12-2201847.html>
- <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/india-news-haryana-polling-agent-arrested-after-video-of-booth-capturing-in-faridabad-surfaces-on-social-media/330291>
- <https://www.eastmojo.com/news/2019/04/13/violence-booth-capturing-mar-polls-in-arunachal-pradesh/#bypass-sw>

Most recently in February 2021, amid the polling under way during the Punjab civic body polls, [instances of violence](#) including booth capturing, bogus voting, manhandling and clashes were reported, with media reports suggesting that around [40 miscreants](#) entered a polling booth.

2. The continuing occurrences of polling stations mired with instances of electoral malpractices, violence and increase of criminal elements and their role in elections is deeply disturbing and subverts the whole electoral process. Holding free and fair elections has become a serious challenge faced by the democratic polity in the country today. The purity of electoral process reinforces the credibility of democratic institutions such as the Election Commission of India, State Election Commissions etc. which are responsible for ensuring the integrity of the democratic processes. Integral to democracy is the principle that the people must have the liberty to choose candidates on merit, however, in reality winning elections becomes so important and dominant a consideration that many candidates have no hesitation in employing unfair and unlawful means to get themselves elected.

In view of this background, the Association for Democratic Reforms would like to reiterate a crucial suggestion to eliminate booth capturing put forth by a like-minded citizen to the Election Commission of India back in 2011. To curb the menace of bogus voting, a biometric iris scanner-counter can be installed at each polling booth. The objective of the iris scanner will be to count the number of unique human eyes of persons visiting the polling station to cast their votes. After the polling is over, the biometric eye data recorded using the scanner will be compared with the number of votes casted that day using the data recorded in the EVMs. In case of any mismatch between the two, the Election Commission can order re-polling. Installation of the biometric iris scanner will ensure that it is impossible for miscreants to resort to malpractices and cast bogus votes. To that end, any biometric unique identification process may be used.

It must also be noted that the aforesaid suggestion is not only effective in addressing the issue of booth capturing but is also economically viable. The price of iris detection machines is estimated to be approximately Rs 2500 when purchased in bulk. The investment per booth is of value given the expected results of such a proposition that has the potential to rid world's largest democracy of booth capturing.

3. Indian election is an enormous exercise and a mammoth venture in terms of money spent. Therefore, it becomes even more imperative to adopt a cautious and careful approach. The universal principle of 'free and fair' elections implies 'free and fair conduct' in every manner. Free and fair elections also demand that the electoral process is more democratic, responsible, accountable and transparent and therefore imposes a primary obligation upon the Election Commission to prevent such serious electoral malpractices and remove every category of doubt from the minds of the citizens.
4. Article 324 of the Constitution of India already bestows the relevant powers, duties and functions upon the Election Commission of India to conduct free, fair, credible elections in a free, fair and transparent manner. Therefore, to prevent a more serious situation from developing, it is expected that the Election Commission will look into the aforementioned suggestions and act more promptly by putting in place the requisite system to prevent electoral malpractices such as booth capturing, violence, voter intimidation, bogus voting etc. from occurring, and restore public's confidence in the Indian electoral process.

We hope that the Commission will take swift action in this regard and uphold the faith of the public in it by ensuring prompt implementation of the aforesaid recommendations to eradicate the menace of booth capturing and lead by example for other electoral democracies.

Yours sincerely,



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