

# Overseas Indian Voters: High Registration, Low Turnout in Lok Sabha Polls 2024

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## What's in today's article?

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- Voting by overseas Indian voters
- Participation of overseas Indian voters in Lok Sabha polls 2024

## Why in News?

As per the data released by the Election Commission of India, nearly 1.2 lakh overseas Indians registered as voters for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, showing enthusiasm for electoral participation. However, only a small fraction actually voted.

## Voting by overseas Indian voters

- What is the current process of voting by NRIs/overseas Indian voters?

- Currently, Election Commission of India (ECI) allows NRIs to register as overseas electors as long as they have not acquired the citizenship of another country.
- An NRI can vote in the constituency in which his/her place of residence, as mentioned in the passport, is located.
- He/she can only vote in person and will have to produce her passport in original at the polling station for establishing identity.
- Voting rights for NRIs were introduced only in 2011, through an amendment to the Representation of the People Act 1950.
  - As per the government, **total number of overseas voters** on January 1, 2023 stood at over 1.15 lakh.
- In Lok Sabha elections of 2019, roughly 25,000 of them flew to India to vote.
- **Proxy voting proposal**
  - In 2018, a bill to allow proxy voting for NRIs was passed in the Lok Sabha but stalled in the Rajya Sabha.
- **Postal Ballot Proposal**
  - The EC, in 2020, had written to the Law Ministry proposing NRIs be allowed to vote through postal ballots.
  - For this, EC had proposed the extension of **Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System (ETPBS)** facility to these voters.
- ETPBS enables the voters to cast their vote on an electronically received postal ballot from their preferred location.
- ETPBS facility is so far available only to service voters, including members of the armed forces and central armed police forces posted outside their home constituencies and members of Indian embassies and diplomatic missions.
  - According to the EC proposal, any NRI interested in voting through the postal ballot in an election will have to inform the Returning Officer (RO).
  - RO should be informed in a time period not later than five days after the notification of the election.
  - On receiving such information, the RO will dispatch the ballot paper electronically.
  - The NRI voters will download the ballot paper, mark their preference on the printout and send it back.
  - This ballot is to be sent back along with a declaration attested by an officer appointed by the consular representative of India in the country where the NRI is resident.

## Participation of overseas Indian voters in Lok Sabha polls 2024

- **Enthusiasm in Registration but Poor Turnout**
  - Overseas Indians showed significant enthusiasm in registering as electors, with 1,19,374 enrolling in the 2024 voter list, an increase from 99,844 in 2019.
  - However, only 2,958 flew to India to cast their votes, with Kerala contributing the majority (2,670).
- **State-Wise Voting Trends**
  - **Kerala:** Highest participation with 2,670 voters out of 89,839 registered electors.
  - **Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Assam, Bihar, Goa:** Zero turnout despite registrations.
  - **Gujarat:** Only 2 out of 885 overseas electors voted.

- **Maharashtra:** Only 17 of the 5,097 electors participated.
- **Andhra Pradesh:** 195 out of 7,927 electors cast their votes.

- **Legal and Logistical Challenges**

- Registered NRI voters must travel to their constituencies in India to vote and show their original passports for identity verification.
- High travel costs, employment obligations, and education are cited as barriers to participation.

- **Future Prospects**

- The Election Commission continues to receive appeals from the Indian diaspora for postal voting, highlighting the need for electoral reforms to address the low turnout among overseas electors.
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## **Q.1. Why is voter turnout among overseas Indians so low?**

Legal and logistical challenges, such as the need to travel to home constituencies and high travel costs, deter overseas Indians from voting. Only 2,958 of 1.2 lakh registered voters participated in 2024.

## **Q.2. What are the proposed reforms for NRI voting?**

The Election Commission has proposed postal ballots via Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System (ETPBS) to enable NRIs to vote remotely. This reform aims to address low turnout by simplifying voting logistics.

**Source:** TH | ECI

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Source: <https://vajiramandravi.com/current-affairs/overseas-indian-voters-high-registration-low-turnout-in-lok-sabha-polls-2024/>

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