

2019 GENERAL ELECTIONS

VVPAT slips: EC's excuse that verifying 50% votes will delay counting is a lame one, says Agnivesh

The activist urged the poll body to give up its 'negative stand' on the matter.

Scroll Staff

Yesterday · 01:32 pm



[Facebook/Swami Agnivesh](#)

Social activist Agnivesh on Thursday said the Election Commission's stance that verifying 50% of votes in elections with Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail slips will delay the counting is a "lame excuse". He said the polling and counting in the ongoing Lok Sabha elections already span over 40 days, and "a few more days of wait will not hurt anyone".

Agnivesh made the remarks in support of a demand in the [Supreme Court](#) by 21 Opposition parties to get at least 50% votes cross-checked using VVPAT slips. Earlier this month, the top court did not agree to this demand, but ordered that VVPAT slips of five electronic voting machines in every constituency be checked instead of just one. The Election Commission had told the court that

logistical difficulties in verifying 50% VVPAT slips would delay the announcement of results by six days.

On Wednesday, the Opposition parties filed a [review plea](#).

In his statement, Agnivesh said that it is a “measure of the air of general distrust” that the political parties had moved the Supreme Court on the matter. “This is a legitimate demand and the Election Commission discredits itself by opposing it,” he said. Waiting longer for the results is “welcome as a necessary investment in ensuring the credibility of the election process”, he said.

Read the full text of Agnivesh's statement:

Those who value and respect the spirit of democracy will readily agree on the need to safeguard the credibility of the polling and counting processes. No price is too much to pay to attain this goal. For a citizen it is traumatic to feel or suspect that he has been cheated of his right to choose a candidate or party of his preference. The genius of democracy is corrupted and perverted, if even one voter ends up aggrieved in this respect.

Exemplary impartiality and trustworthiness in human conduct is an ideal. It is not an assured reality in the public sphere. EVMs were deployed to mitigate the dangers of booth capturing. In that sense, they are symbolic of a commitment to the integrity and inviolability of elections. Man-made machines are, however, error-prone and human agents could be, besides, biased in the discharge of their electoral duties. Whether it be the intriguing ephemerality of the ‘indelible ink’ used in the first phase of polling, or the reported malfunctioning of EVMs from diverse constituencies, or the tendency on the part of some of these machines to exercise a will of their own, transferring the votes cast in favour of one party to another, a smoke-screen of suspicion surrounds the conduct of elections.

It is a measure of the air of general distrust that twenty-one parties have approached the Supreme Court to have 50% of the VVPAT slips to be verified against the EVM data. This is a legitimate demand and the Election Commission discredits itself by opposing it. The excuse of delay in declaring the results is a lame one. No one minds waiting for a few more days, if that helps to make the election process suspicion-free. The polling and the counting of votes are already spread over forty days. A few more days of wait will not hurt anyone. It is welcome as a necessary investment in ensuring the credibility of the election process. How can an election be ‘free and fair’, if a large number of the parties have apprehensions about the integrity of the processes and devices used?

As a citizen, I appeal to the Supreme Court to ensure that at least 50% of the VVPAT slips are counted and verified. I appeal to the ECI to give up its negative stand and to volunteer to cover 50% of VVPAT slips in the verification process. It is awkward for the election watch-dog to be seen resisting attempts to ensure the integrity of the process it presides over. It can never be free, in popular imagination, from suspicions of partisanship.

© 2019 Scroll.in