

POLLING STATIONS

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Context:

During the ongoing Lok Sabha elections, 96.8 crore electors are enrolled to vote at 10.5 lakh polling stations spread out nationwide.

Background:-

The list of polling stations undergoes verification and updation during annual electoral roll revisions.

Key Takeaways:

Under Section 25 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 (RPA), the district election officer (DEO) is assigned the responsibility to set up and publish the list of polling stations in their district.

Setting up polling stations: norms and principles:

1. There are some principles on the basis of which polling stations are set up.
2. These include ensuring that voters do not have to travel more than two km to cast their vote, a station has a minimum area of 20 sq m, a station serves at most 1,500 electors, and a village with over 300 voters is provided with a polling station.
3. These principles, however, are not set in stone. Polling stations can even cater to less than 300 voters in case access is a problem, say in rugged terrain. For instance, Arunachal Pradesh's Malogam polling station caters to only a single voter. Conversely, in cases where the number of electors exceeds 1,500, auxiliary polling stations are set up, preferably in the same building.
4. In urban areas, one building can have a maximum of four polling stations, whereas in rural areas, it can have at most two.
5. Locations for polling stations are chosen carefully, preferably in government or semi-government institutions.
6. Private buildings are avoided unless absolutely necessary — they can be requisitioned with the written consent of the owner, or forcefully under Section 160 of the RPA.

Layout and some facilities:

1. There are separate entrance and exit points for voters, even if only one door is available. This is done with temporary fencing using bamboo and ropes.
2. The voting compartment, constructed from opaque corrugated plastic sheet or steel grey flex board, measures at least 24 x 24 x 30 inches (length x width x height), and is positioned away from windows or doors.

People inside a polling station, voting day restrictions:

1. Only specific individuals are permitted access inside a polling station. These include registered electors, polling officers, candidates, one polling agent per candidate at a time, authorised media personnel, public servants on election duty, ECI-appointed observers, micro observers, videographers, photographers, and webcasting staff for critical/sensitive polling stations, a child in arms accompanying an elector, a person assisting a blind or infirm voter, and any others admitted by the Presiding Officer for voter identification or assistance purposes, whenever required.
2. A polling party comprises a Presiding Officer and three Polling Officers. The first Polling Officer verifies the elector's identity, the second applies indelible ink on their left index finger, maintains the voters' register, and issues voter slips. The third Polling Officer takes back the voter slip issued by the second polling officer, manages the EVM's control unit, and ensures that an elector has been properly inked before being allowed to vote.
3. There is also a prohibition on any political propaganda, use of cameras, mobile phones, and canvassing within a 100 metre radius of the polling station, with a penalty of arrest without warrant under Section 130 of the RPA.
4. Candidates can set up their booths beyond 200 m of the polling station, and there are also restriction on the use of loudspeakers.



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