



The Scope of Approval Voting in India

This editorial is based on [Many of the Above](#) which was published in The Indian Express on 18/07/2023. It talks about the approval voting system and challenges associated with the approval voting.

For Prelims: [United Nations](#), [NOTA](#), [Parliament](#), First-Past-the-Post

For Mains: Benefits and Challenges of the Approval Voting

India is a **diverse and multi-party democracy**, with more than **600 parties contesting the general elections** and nearly **three dozen parties having at least one member** in [Parliament](#).

The **first-past-the-post** (FPTP) method is incongruous with India's unique political diversity, as it rewards the **splitting of votes among numerous parties** and creates incentives for opportunistic and unnatural alliances among parties.

Approval voting, on the other hand, **can reduce voter fragmentation and encourage ideological politics**, as it allows voters to express their support for multiple parties without fear of wasting their vote or helping their least preferred option. It can also prevent post-election defections and horse-trading (political vote trading), as it **reduces the need for pre-poll alliances and seat-sharing arrangements among parties**.

What is the First Past the Post System?

▪ About:

- An electoral system in which voters cast a **vote for a single candidate**, and the candidate with the **most votes wins the election**.
 - Also known as the **simple majority system or plurality system**.
- One of the **simplest and oldest electoral systems**, used in countries such as the UK, the US, Canada, and India.

▪ Features of the First Past the Post System:

- Voters are **presented with a list of candidates nominated by different political parties** or running as independents.
- Voters choose one candidate by **marking their ballot paper or electronic voting machine**.
- The candidate **who receives the most votes in a constituency is declared the winner**.
- The winner **does not need to get a majority** (more than 50%) of the votes, but only a plurality (the largest number) of the votes.

▪ Alternative Electoral Systems:

- **Proportional Representation (PR) Systems:**

- These are systems that **allocate seats to political parties or candidates according to their share** of the popular vote.
- **Ranked Voting Systems:**
 - These are systems that **allow voters to rank candidates in order of preference**, rather than choosing one candidate.
- **Score Voting Systems:**
 - These are systems that **allow voters to score candidates on a numerical scale**, rather than choosing one candidate or ranking them.

What is Approval Voting?

- Approval voting is a voting method that **allows voters to choose as many candidates or parties as they want** from a list of options.
 - The winner is the **candidate or party that receives the most approvals** or tick marks from the voters.
- Approval voting is **different from the FPTP method, which forces voters to choose only one option** and gives the victory to the option with the most votes, even if it does not have a majority.
- Approval voting is also **different from ranked-choice voting**, which requires voters to rank their preferences of candidates or parties and eliminates the **least preferred options until one option has a majority**.
- Approval voting is a **well-researched voting methodology** that is used in elections with **multiple credible choices**, such as in the [United Nations](#), internal party **primaries in the US**, and sometimes in the election of the Pope.

How does MOTA Offers a Way to Implement Approval Voting?

- Approval voting can be **implemented in India by adding a new option** on the ballot paper called **MOTA (Many Of The Above)**, which is the **mirror image of [NOTA](#) (None of the Above)** that we already have on every ballot.
- MOTA would **allow voters to choose as many candidates or parties as they want from a list of options**, instead of forcing them to choose only one.
- MOTA would **not require any major changes in the existing electoral system** or machinery, as it would only involve adding a new option on the ballot paper and counting the number of approvals for each option.
- MOTA would also **not violate any constitutional or legal provisions**, as it would not affect the right to vote or the representation of people in Parliament.

What are the Benefits of Approval Voting for India?

- **Increase in Voter Turnout:**
 - It can increase voter turnout and participation, as voters would have **more choices and freedom to express their preferences**.
- **Reduce Polarization:**
 - It can reduce polarization and extremism, as voters would be **encouraged to consider more moderate** and inclusive options rather than choosing between extremes.
- **Wider Representation:**
 - It can enhance representation and accountability, as candidates and parties would have to appeal to a broader and **more diverse electorate** rather than catering to narrow interests or loyal bases.
- **Ensure Stability:**
 - It can foster stability and governance, as it **would reduce the dependence on coalitions** and alliances that are often unstable and prone to corruption or blackmail.

What are the Challenges of Approval Voting for India?

- **Lack of Familiarity and Understanding:**
 - Approval voting is a relatively new concept in Indian politics, and many voters may be unfamiliar with the methodology.
 - Building **awareness and educating voters about how approval voting works and its advantages would be essential** to gain acceptance and ensure effective implementation.
- **Resistance from Established Parties:**
 - Approval voting may **face resistance from established political parties**, particularly those who benefit from the existing FPTP system or have a stronghold in certain regions.
 - Parties may be **reluctant to embrace a system** that could challenge their dominance or disrupt existing electoral dynamics.
- **Potential for Fragmented Results:**
 - While approval voting aims to reduce fragmentation, **there is a possibility that the outcome may still lead to fragmented** results, particularly if a significant number of candidates receive high approval ratings.
 - This may result in the need for **post-election coalition-building** or further rounds of voting to determine a clear winner.
- **Constitutional and Legal Considerations:**
 - Implementing approval voting may require constitutional or legal amendments to existing election laws.
 - Overcoming **legal hurdles and ensuring compliance** with constitutional provisions may pose challenges that need to be carefully addressed.

What Steps can be Taken for Introduction and Effective Implementation Approval Voting?

- **Promote Awareness and Education:**
 - Conduct public awareness campaigns to **educate voters about the concept and benefits of approval voting.**
 - Collaboration among civil society organizations, educational institutions, and media outlets to disseminate information on the advantages of approval voting in reducing voter fragmentation.
- **Pilot Programs and Case Studies:**
 - Implement pilot programs in select constituencies or regions **to test the feasibility and effectiveness** of approval voting in the Indian context.
 - Conduct case studies and gather empirical **data on the outcomes of approval voting**, highlighting its potential to minimize vote splitting and encourage voter participation.
- **Engage with Political Parties:**
 - Encourage political parties to **open dialogues and discussions** on the adoption of approval voting as an **alternative electoral method.**
 - Highlight the advantages of approval voting in fostering ideological politics and **reducing the reliance on opportunistic alliances.**
- **International Collaboration and Expert Consultation:**
 - **Seek collaboration** with international organizations and **electoral experts who have experience with approval voting** or similar alternative voting methods.
 - Organize **consultations and workshops with experts** to gather insights, learn from best practices, and adapt approval voting methodologies to suit the unique characteristics of Indian elections.
- **Public Discourse and Debates:**
 - Encourage public debates and discussions on the **need for electoral reforms** and the potential benefits of approval voting.
 - Facilitate **platforms for experts, academics, politicians, and citizens to express their views** and opinions on the subject, fostering a wider understanding and acceptance of approval voting.

Drishti Mains Question:

Evaluate the merits and demerits of approval voting in the context of India's political diversity and democracy.

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year's Question (PYQs)

Prelims:

Q. Consider the following statements: (2017)

1. The Election Commission of India is a five-member body.
2. The Union Ministry of Home Affairs decides the election schedule for the conduct of both general elections and bye-elections.
3. Election Commission resolves the disputes relating to splits/mergers of recognised political parties.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 3 only

Ans: (d)

Mains:

Q. Discuss the role of the Election Commission of India in the light of the evolution of the Model Code of Conduct. (2022)

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