**EVMs and Fair Elections**

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The integration of electronic voting machines (EVMs) in the electoral system has been perceived as a potent tool to curb electoral fraudulence, comprising the manipulation of paper ballots and ballot stuffing. More than 30 countries have used electronic voting machines (EVMs) in their elections, including Brazil, India, Venezuela, the Philippines, and South Africa. The specific types of EVMs used and the degree of their adoption vary across these countries. In some countries, such as Brazil and India, EVMs are used in all elections, while in others, such as the Philippines, their use is limited to specific regions or types of elections.

Some developed countries, including the US, have limited the use of EVMs. Each state has laws and regulations regarding election procedures and the use of voting technology, but all states use some form of electronic voting, but the types of machines and technology used vary widely. Some states use touch screen machines, while others use optical scan machines that read paper ballots.

A News agency, Brookings mentioned that EVMs brought confidence in the voter and have increased transparency in the electoral process in India. One of the serious concerns regarding unfair elections is using paper ballots and stuffing the ballot box with fake ballots.

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Pakistan perennially faces allegations of rigged elections for quite a long time. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has demonstrated a proclivity for the integration of EVMs in elections and has carried out various pilot tests to assess their feasibility. However, the ECP has also acknowledged that implementing EVMs in Pakistan presents technical, financial, and logistical challenges that require meticulous scrutiny. Shibli Faraz who was the Minister for Science and Technology of the PTI government said that this machine cannot be hacked and bugged as there are strict protocols and the verification of the vote is also done with a printed piece of paper.

But the political parties and a specific portion of civil society organizations have raised apprehensions about the potential for EVMs to be hacked or manipulated, as well as about the security and transparency of the technology. These concerns are amplified by the limited public awareness and understanding of EVMs, which is impeding building trust in the technology among voters and other stakeholders.

To address these concerns the ECP should work in collaboration with the government and can take several measures that will require a comprehensive approach. Firstly, the willingness of all the political parties and stakeholders is necessary for the adoption of EVMs. Moreover, there is a need to increase transparency in the procurement, testing, and deployment of EVMs along with assuring the public that the process is fair and unbiased. Transparency in the process can be achieved through the advancement of technology. We have an advanced security system in the banking sector that cannot be hacked and bugged. Similar technology can be introduced in the election process.

Secondly, the ECP can conduct awareness campaigns to educate people about EVMs and their operation. The campaigns can involve public demonstrations of EVMs, training sessions for election officials and voters, and the dissemination of information through various media outlets. This will help dispel myths and misconceptions surrounding EVMs and provide voters with confidence in the technology.

Thirdly, pilot testing of EVMs in selected constituencies before nationwide deployment could be an effective way to identify and address any technical or operational issues. Pilot testing will also allow for feedback from election officials and voters, which can be incorporated into the final design and deployment plan. Moreover, deployment in fewer constituencies will also help the administration to apprehend the approach of the people

Fourthly, the ECP can address security concerns related to EVMs by implementing strict security protocols and ensuring that only authorized personnel have access to the machines. The provision of transparency in the storage and transportation of EVMs will also be crucial in this regard. Furthermore, conducting periodic audits and checks on the machines will provide added assurance to the public that the technology is secure and trustworthy.

Lastly involving all stakeholders, including political parties, civil society organizations, and the media, in the decision-making process related to the use of EVMs will be a critical step in building trust and confidence in the technology. It will ensure that all perspectives are considered and that the public is fully informed about the use of EVMs in the election process. The credibility of the use of EVMs in elections hinges upon the transparency, integrity, overall electoral process, the quality of technology, and security protocols deployed. It also depends upon the extent to which voters and other stakeholders are educated about the technology and its potential benefits and drawbacks. By addressing the aforementioned concerns and taking these measures, the government can provide the public with confidence in the use of EVMs and ensure the integrity of the election process.

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