

Does NOTA Option in elections make sense?

India adopted the democratic model after almost 200 years of colonial rule. Since citizens of the country elect the government, hence democracy ensures the smooth functioning of government. And, it is also accountable for the representation of legal rights.

“GOVERNMENT FOR THE PEOPLE, OF THE PEOPLE, AND BY THE PEOPLE.”

-Abraham Lincoln

India is the world's largest democratic country whose voter base at large is composed of a “literate-to-illiterate” population. India has managed people to exercise their right to elect every time it goes to poll. Electoral reform is the way for the fulfillment of the legal right i.e., “Right to elect”. Voting is a necessity of democracy.

First and Foremost,

Elections make the foundation of democracy as voting is a declaration of one's freedom and equality. The right to vote in elections gives some sense of responsibility to citizens. Citizen votes to represent their views and ideas. The country's electorate has some part in decision-making. The election is a way of presenting the views of citizens of the country.

Through voting, citizens perform civil duties towards their country. For that, it is important that each voter cast votes against the political party of their choice.

Initially, citizens often prefer not to vote, which is a common stance. Especially the middle class and upper class have shown resentment at the electoral reforms owing to political, economic, and social issues.

For instance,

- rising corruption in the political classes,
- not fulfilling the commitments made by candidates like failing to meet basic requirements, road/electricity.

Not voting means abandoning civil rights. But these reasons limit the participation of the electorate in democratic processes and also lead India to lower voting turnouts.

For the survival of democracy, it is important to participate in democratic processes. The Supreme court of India ruled “None of the above” NOTA on 27th September 2013 (directed in People’s Union for Civil Liberties Vs. the Union of India). For the voters who do not wish to vote for any of the candidates to exercise their right to reject. Accordingly directed the Election Commission to provide an option of NOTA in the electronic voting machines. Thus, India became the 14th country to initiate negative voting.

It is significant to note that the NOTA existed before the judgment, but by violating the rule of secrecy. As per rule 49-O of Conduct of Election Rules 1961 gave citizens a right to vote for no candidates. Registering their option of NOTA in a register compromising the secrecy.

Specifically, NOTA does not change any outcome of an election, so what is the rationale behind the introduction?

The introduction of NOTA ensures voter secrecy and helps to express the feeling of disapproval. NOTA interpreted as several communities democratically protest against political parties that have failed in fulfilling the commitments of the citizens. It clearly states that more votes for NOTA express disenchantment of the kind of candidates being put up by parties. As stated, Chief Justice of India, P Sathasivam, *“Negative voting will cause a systemic change in polls, hence political parties will be compelled to project clean candidates. Since the right to vote is a statutory right, then the right to eliminate a candidate is a fundamental right of speech and expression under the Constitution”*.

NOTA may also encourage more citizens to participate in elections who are otherwise dissatisfied with any of the candidates contesting in the election. It allows them to fulfill their civil duties towards the country. NOTA option might put some cracks on a vicious circle of corruption to some extent. This is the first step in compelling politicians to come with a clean image and direct them to fulfill fundamental commitments the Indian Constitution has made to them.