

Press Release

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Allegations of electoral manipulation and irregularities in Haryana & Jammu & Kashmir 2024 Vidhan Sabha elections: Vote for Democracy Draft Report

"Democracy in India is at a crossroads. We cannot stand by as the integrity of our electoral system is eroded. The time for answers and reforms is now."

In its most recent report, Vote for Democracy (VFD) has raised serious concerns over the integrity of the Haryana and Jammu & Kashmir 2024 Vidhan Sabha elections, highlighting troubling allegations of electoral manipulation, unexplained vote percentage increases, and a lack of transparency in the election process. The detailed report from VFD exposes significant discrepancies in the election data, pointing directly to flaws in the Election Commission of India's (ECI) handling of the polls especially with relation to its reluctance in releasing actual figures of persons who have voted. In the Vidhan Sabha elections of 2024 in Haryana, instead of constituency wise data, *district-wise data of vote percentages were released by the ECI!*

The detailed report prepared by VFD under expert¹ guidance reveals a disturbing trend of manipulated voter turnout data, particularly in Haryana, where the official voter turnout spiked by 6.71% between October 5 and 7, 2024—a shift equating to an additional 1.3 million votes. This surge is both unusual and unexplained, raising suspicions of data manipulation to favour certain political parties. Key districts, including Panchkula and Charkhi Dadri, experienced extraordinary turnout increases of over 10%, all of which disproportionately benefited the BJP in closely contested constituencies. These irregularities call into question the veracity of the official turnout figures and their role in influencing the election results. **(See table 5 of the report; the entire report may be read here)**

Moreover, the ECI has failed to release raw vote counts, instead opting to publish district-wise turnout percentages. This deliberate opacity prevents any meaningful scrutiny of the electoral process. Alarming, last-minute revisions to the voter turnout figures just hours before counting on October 8 suggest an attempt to hide discrepancies and manipulate the results. Such actions undermine the transparency and legitimacy of the entire process.

Further troubling findings from the report suggest a mismatch in the EVM vote tallies at various booths, notably in regions where the BJP secured narrow victories. The hike in EVM votes in areas such as Panchkula (10.52%) and Charkhi-Dadri (11.48%) after the polls raised serious red flags. In addition, the BJP's strong performance in just 10 districts, where it won 37 out of 44 seats, contrasted starkly with its poor showing in the remaining 12 districts, where it secured only 11 out of 46 seats.

¹ Dr Pyara Lal Garg, Former Dean, Faculty of Medical Sciences, Panjab University, Chandigarh is the expert who provided the basis for mathematical extrapolations, Prof. Sebastian Morris, IIM Ahmedabad (Retd.), & Member, Independent Panel for Monitoring India's Elections, Professor Harish Karnick (IIT, Kanpur, (Retd) & Member, Independent Panel for Monitoring India's Elections.

These discrepancies are not easily explained by local issues or voter preferences, raising concerns about the manipulation of voting data to favour the ruling party. **(See Table 23 and 24 of the report)**

The report also traces a pattern of irregularities extending back to the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, where similar unexplained voter turnout increases were observed. The consistency of such data manipulation raises doubts about the Election Commission's ability to conduct fair and free elections, casting a shadow over its credibility.

In Haryana, the manipulated voter turnout figures are believed to have directly impacted the results, especially in 17 constituencies where the margin of victory was under 5,000 votes. In these tight races, the inflated voter turnout figures helped secure BJP victories, while smaller parties like the INLD (Indian National Lok Dal) saw minimal benefits. In total, the report suggests that the turnout manipulation likely contributed to the BJP's win in at least 24 additional seats across Haryana. Similar irregularities have been alleged in the Jammu & Kashmir elections, where last-minute jumps in voter turnout percentages further fuel concerns about the overall fairness of the election process. The widespread nature of these discrepancies calls into question the legitimacy of the entire electoral process in both states. (See table 30 of the report)

The findings of this report, coupled with the overall lack of transparency and consistency in electoral data, raise serious questions about the integrity of the electoral process in Haryana and Jammu & Kashmir. VFD calls for an immediate and independent investigation into these allegations. **The lack of transparency, data manipulation, and inconsistencies in the reported turnout figures demand urgent action to restore public trust in the electoral system. The ECI must release all raw data, explain the anomalies, and take responsibility for these discrepancies to ensure such manipulation does not occur in future elections.**

Why is this exercise is important

This exercise is particularly timely as the upcoming state elections in Jharkhand and Maharashtra will soon test the transparency and integrity of India's electoral system. As citizens prepare to vote, it is essential that every vote is accurately counted and reported. By focusing on raw vote counts rather than percentages, the call for transparency ensures that the true outcome of the election is clear and verifiable. Vote counts, which are exact and definitive, eliminate the risks associated with rounding errors or vote leaks that percentages can sometimes obscure. The publication of real, raw vote counts empowers voters and election observers to trust that the process reflects the will of the people, without distortion.

Moreover, the use of Forms 17-A and 17-C, which provide real-time and final tally records of votes, serves as a safeguard against discrepancies or manipulation, offering candidates and citizens alike the tools to verify the accuracy of election results. This call to action emphasises the need for consistency and transparency, ensuring that all votes are recorded and counted faithfully.

In light of the forthcoming elections in Jharkhand and Maharashtra, this initiative is even more critical. These elections offer a chance to reinforce the integrity of the democratic process, ensuring that voters' voices are heard and respected without interference. Transparency across all stages of voting—from booth-wise queue data to VVPAT verification—is vital for fostering public trust in the electoral system. The call for video evidence and polling officer accountability further strengthens this transparency, ensuring that every step of the process is open to scrutiny.

As highlighted in the VFD report, the integrity of elections hinges on transparent practices that prevent tampering, miscounts, and data manipulation. With the stakes high in these state elections, ensuring a clear, accurate, and transparent voting process is essential not only for the credibility of the elections but also for the health of India's democracy.

Finally, it is settled principle that the true will of the voter must reflect in the results of the election, If, however irregular and corrupt practices have influenced the result, or the electorate has been a victim of any such fraud or compulsion on any essential matter, meaning, if the will of the people as recorded in their votes is not the 'free and true', articles 324-326 of the Constitution and several provisions of Election related law and rules, stand violated. Under Article 324 of the Indian Constitution, the ECI is vested with the powers of superintendence, direction and control of the elections. But such superintendence and control of the elections is not only limited to the announcement and conduct of the elections but also requires 100% purity of the entire election process.

The second VFD Draft Report reveals clear signs of deliberate misconduct and manipulation taken place in the Haryana and J&K Vidhan Sabha election 2024. The complete report may be read on <https://votefordemocracy.org.in/>.

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