**Civil society members, former bureaucrats urge ECI to disclose record of voter turnouts**

Flagging their concerns over the fluctuation in figures of voter turnouts in the first two phases of the ongoing Lok Sabha election, a group of civil society members and former bureaucrats have urged the Election Commission of India to “immediately disclose” through its website, the authenticated record of voter turnout as contained in Part I of Form 17C - which is the account of votes recorded in each polling station.

“We are writing to flag our concerns arising from the large fluctuation in figures of voter turnout in the first two phases of the ongoing general elections and to urge the Election Commission of India to immediately disclose through its website, the authenticated record of voter turnout as contained in Part I of Form 17C,” the letter addressed to Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar and other Election Commissioners said.

As per Rule 49S of the Conduct of Elections Rules, at the close of polling, the presiding officer has to prepare an account of votes recorded in Part I of Form 17C and also furnish an authenticated copy of this to every polling agent.

For the first phase of elections, the ECI in its press note on the day of polling (April 19) had said that as of 7 p.m., the estimated voter turnout was over 60%. The voter turnout data published 11 days later by ECI on April 30, provided a figure of 66.14% - a jump of more than 6%. Similarly, for the second phase, the press note on the day of polling (April 26) stated that the approximate voter turnout was 60.96% as of 7 p.m., which was subsequently revised to 66.71% in the press note of April 30, 2024. The electoral body has though for the third phase held on May 7 released the final voting percentage a day after the polls on May 8.

“The inordinate delay in the release of voter turnout, coupled with the unusually high revision of nearly 6% [in the first two phases] sans any explanation in the ECI’s press note of April 30, has raised concerns and doubts among people about the voter turnout figures,” the letter said.

The letter urged the ECI to immediately upload on the Commission’s website a “scanned legible copy” of Part I of Form 17C (Account of Votes Recorded) of every polling station where voting took place in the first three phases. “Further, for the remaining phases, this information must be publicly displayed on the ECI website within 48 hours of the close of polls”.

In addition to uploading a scanned copy of the forms, a tabulation of the constituency and polling station wise figures of voter turnout in absolute numbers must also be publicly displayed on the ECI website, it said.

Some of the signatories to the letters were Transparency activist Anjali Bhardwaj, Lawyer and activist Prashant Bhushan, Yogendra Yadav of Swaraj Abhiyan, and former bureaucrats MG Devasahayam, Sundar Burra, and Deb Mukharji.