

Vote counting process after polling is over

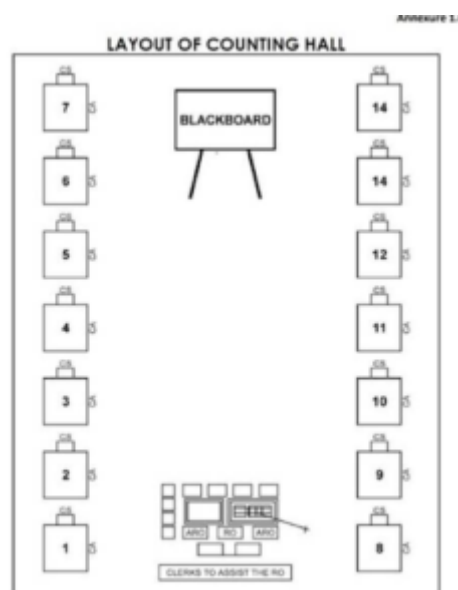
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In news– As Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh Assembly election results are out, let us look at how votes are counted after the poll is over.

Process of vote counting-

Location of Counting-

- **Ideally, all votes should be counted in one location in the constituency.** But during General Elections, when seats are larger with multiple Assembly constituencies, many counting centres can be appointed, depending on the number of votes that need to be counted.
- **The location(s) for counting votes is decided by the Returning Officer (RO),** with multiple centres in assembly segments being under the supervision of the Assistant Returning Officers (ARO).



- In counting centres, **ideally all votes are counted in one big hall having multiple tables.**
- However, if the RO feels there is a risk of

overcrowding, more rooms may be opened up after permission from the Election Commission (EC).

- Counting centres are housed in walled accommodation with strict security requirements. **Government school and college buildings are commonly used.**

Who is the Returning Officer?

- The RO is **appointed for each constituency by the Election Commission.** During the duration of the election, the RO is the **highest authority in the constituency** having a wide range of powers in order to peacefully and impartially conduct elections. With respect to counting of votes, the RO has the **following duties**:
 - To designate the counting centres and get them approved by the Commission well in advance;
 - To send notice to the candidates about the place, date and time of counting of votes;
 - To appoint and train counting staff;
 - To count the votes and declare the result.
- **ROs themselves do not count all votes but verify the counting** at multiple stages and announce the results. They are the **final authority in the matter of vote counting in an election.**
- To assist the RO, the EC also appoints **Assistant Returning Officers (AROs) to assist the RO** in carrying out all the duties.
- In case of multiple counting centres in a constituency, each centre will be under the supervision of one ARO. The number of AROs appointed can vary, depending on the requirements of the constituency.
- **Generally, the District Magistrate is the ex-officio RO in Lok Sabha elections while the Sub-Divisional Magistrate is the RO in state assembly elections.**

Other participants involved in the process-

Counting Supervisors and Assistants:

- A counting room will have multiple counting tables, **on each table, there is a counting supervisor** and up to two assistants who do the actual counting.
- **They should be gazetted officers and are appointed by the RO.** They receive specific training pertaining to the tasks they are expected to undertake.

EC-appointed Observers:

- The **Election Commission appoints observers at each counting room, who are supposed to record the proceedings and file a report.**
- They are **generally employees of the Government of India,** and are tasked with the duty to oversee overall functioning of the election apparatus.
- **Micro-observers are appointed for each table where votes are being counted.**
- Observers are also supposed to **randomly verify votes counted for some EVMs** in each round of counting.

Candidates and Counting Agents:

- **Candidates who were on the ballot are also allowed in the counting room** along with their representatives.
- **All parties and candidates send counting agents** in order to ensure that votes are counted fairly and according to procedure, and lodge complaints, if any.
- **These counting agents are bound by a certain code** prescribed in the Handbook for Counting Agents and must themselves follow the EC's instructions in order to not disrupt the counting process.

Security:

- While armed forces are typically **not supposed to enter counting rooms, they are in charge of maintaining**

multiple layers of security, both at the counting room as well as the path through which EVMs are brought to the counting rooms from their strong rooms (where they are stored after polling).

- The security forces, including **CRPF and local police**, are under the authority of the RO of the constituency.