

# Vote counting process after polling is over

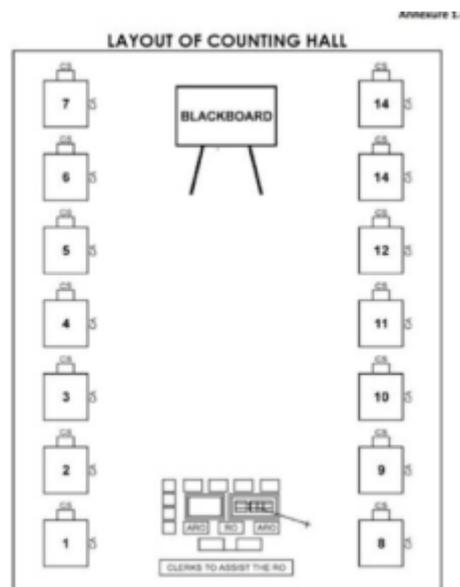
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**In news**– As Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh Assembly election results are out, let us look at how votes are counted after the poll is over.

## **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.