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# National Voters Day 2026 — ECI at 76, ECINET, and India's Electoral Challenges

25 January 2026

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CURATED &amp; WRITTEN BY

**Bharat Choudhary**

UPSC Educator &amp; Content Creator •

[linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)

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## WHY IN NEWS

India observes the 16th National Voters Day on January 25, 2026, marking 76 years since the Election Commission of India was established. The ECI launched ECINET — a unified digital platform integrating 40+ ECI applications — and adopted the Delhi Declaration 2026 at the India International Conference on Democracy and Election Management.

## THE ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA — CONSTITUTIONAL FOUNDATION

The **Election Commission of India (ECI)** is a permanent constitutional body established by the Constitution of India — not by an Act of Parliament. Its authority derives from **Part XV (Elections)** of the Constitution:

### Key constitutional provisions:

Article	Provision
<b>Article 324</b>	ECI's superintendence, direction, and control of all elections to Parliament, State Legislatures, President, and Vice-President
<b>Article 325</b>	No person to be ineligible for inclusion in electoral rolls on grounds of religion, race, caste, or sex
<b>Article 326</b>	Universal adult franchise — elections to Lok Sabha and State Assemblies on the basis of adult suffrage (age: 18 years)
<b>Article 327</b>	Parliament's power to make laws for elections
<b>Article 328</b>	State Legislature's power to make laws for state elections
<b>Article 329</b>	Bar on courts to interfere in electoral matters (except election petitions)

### ECI structure (post-2023 amendment):

**Chief Election Commissioner (CEC):** Head of ECI

**Election Commissioners:** Two additional commissioners

**Appointment:** By President on recommendation of a committee (PM + Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha + a Cabinet Minister nominated by PM) — change introduced by **Chief Election**

**Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023** (replacing the earlier situation where only the President appointed CEC without a selection committee)

**Removal:** CEC can be removed only by the same process as a Supreme Court judge (impeachment by Parliament)

**Term:** 6 years or until age 65, whichever is earlier.

## ECI'S HISTORICAL JOURNEY

Period	Milestone
<b>January 25, 1950</b>	ECI established (day before Constitution came into force)
<b>1951–52</b>	<b>First General Election</b> — world's largest democratic exercise at the time; ~17 crore voters; Sukumar Sen as CEC
<b>1957</b>	Second General Election; ECI demonstrated Indian democracy's viability
<b>1967</b>	Emergence of regional parties; Congress lost power in several states
<b>1975–77</b>	Emergency period (Article 352); elections suspended; restored 1977
<b>1977</b>	First non-Congress government elected at Centre (Janata Party)
<b>1989</b>	Eighth GE; new electoral reforms; Voter Photo ID card idea emerged
<b>1993</b>	Voter ID (EPIC — Electoral Photo Identity Card) introduced under T.N. Seshan as CEC
<b>1995</b>	Model Code of Conduct (MCC) strengthened by T.N. Seshan
<b>2000</b>	EVMs (Electronic Voting Machines) used in all constituencies
<b>2010</b>	Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) started piloting
<b>2019</b>	VVPAT used in all constituencies (50 EVM-VVPAT slips verified per constituency)
<b>2024</b>	18th General Election; ~96.8 crore voters; 642.5 million votes cast (record)
<b>January 25, 2026</b>	16th National Voters Day; ECINET launched

## T.N. SESHAN — THE CEC WHO TRANSFORMED ECI

**Tirunellai Narayana Iyer Seshan** (CEC: 1990–1996) fundamentally transformed the ECI’s institutional authority:

- Rigorous enforcement of Model Code of Conduct (MCC) — first time it had real teeth

- Introduced the **Voter ID card (EPIC)** system

- Postponed or countermanded elections for violations

- His stern enforcement earned him both admiration and political opponents

- Awarded the **Ramon Magsaysay Award (1996)** — often called the Asian Nobel Prize

- The Supreme Court upheld ECI’s authority during his tenure in landmark cases

## ELECTRONIC VOTING MACHINES (EVMS) AND VVPAT

India’s EVMs are **standalone ballot units** (not connected to the internet) — designed and manufactured by two PSUs:

- BEL** (Bharat Electronics Limited, Bengaluru)

- ECIL** (Electronics Corporation of India Limited, Hyderabad)

**EVM structure:**

- Balloting Unit (BU):** What the voter sees and presses

- Control Unit (CU):** With the presiding officer; records votes; cannot be connected externally

- VVPAT (Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail):** Paper slip visible to voter for 7 seconds confirming their vote — printed and stored in sealed box

**Recurring controversy:** Opposition parties have repeatedly alleged EVMs can be tampered with. The Supreme Court in **ADR v. Election Commission of India (2024)** upheld EVMs but directed 100% VVPAT slip counting in 5 assembly booths per constituency.

## MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT (MCC)

The MCC is a set of guidelines developed by the ECI to regulate the conduct of political parties and candidates during elections. It:

- Comes into force when the **election schedule is announced** by ECI

- Remains in effect until the announcement of election results

- Covers: government announcements, use of official machinery, party manifestos, campaign behavior

- Not a law** — enforced by ECI’s moral authority and withdrawal of recognition/facilities

Cannot override existing laws

## ECINET — DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF ECI

**ECINET (Electoral Commission Integrated Network)** consolidates 40+ ECI applications including:

**Voter Helpline (1950):** Single number for voter queries

**eVIGIL:** App for citizens to report MCC violations with geotagged photos/videos

**KYC (Know Your Candidate):** Voter access to candidate's criminal, financial, educational details from affidavits

**ENCORE:** Enumeration of Citizens' Core — electoral roll management

**Suvidha:** Candidate permission application portal

**ECI Booth App:** Booth-level officer monitoring

## VOTER DEMOGRAPHICS AND CHALLENGES

### Indian voter base (2024):

Total registered voters: ~96.8 crore (968 million)

First-time voters (18–19 age group): ~1.85 crore

Senior voters (85+): ~82 lakh

Persons with Disabilities (PwD) voters: ~88 lakh

Women voters: ~47.1 crore

### Major electoral challenges:

**Voter turnout disparities:** Turnout varies significantly — Northeast states often 80%+; some urban constituencies below 55%

**Money power in elections:** Reported election expenditure per Lok Sabha seat often exceeds legal limits

**Electoral bonds (SC struck down Feb 2024):** Supreme Court ruled them unconstitutional; raised questions about anonymous corporate political funding

**Disinformation and AI:** Deepfake videos of candidates; targeted misinformation on social media — new frontier for election integrity

**Urban apathy:** Low turnout in major cities despite higher educational levels

**Migrant workers:** Unable to vote in their home constituency without OVAT (One Nation One Voter application)

## NATIONAL VOTERS DAY — WHY JANUARY 25?

The NVD was first established by the Government of India in 2011 to:

**Encourage youth participation** — celebrated with focus on 18-year-old newly enrolled voters

**Raise awareness** of ECI's role and democratic processes

**Promote voter registration** in the run-up to elections

January 25 specifically marks ECI's founding anniversary — a day before Republic Day — reinforcing the connection between voting rights and India's republican democratic identity.

## UPSC RELEVANCE

*Article 324 (ECI's constitutional basis); Article 326 (universal adult franchise, age 18); Article 329 (courts cannot interfere in electoral matters); ECI founded: January 25, 1950; First CEC: Sukumar Sen; T.N. Seshan: CEC 1990–96 (Ramon Magsaysay 1996); First GE: 1951–52; 18th GE: 2024; EPIC (Voter ID); VVPAT; eVIGIL app; NVD: first observed January 25, 2011 (1st NVD); 16th NVD: 2026; ECINET (40+ apps); Delhi Declaration 2026; CEC Appointment Act 2023; MCC (not a law); EVMs: BEL + ECIL.*

*ECI's constitutional status and independence; electoral reforms (EVMs, VVPAT, electoral bonds); appointment of CEC (2023 Act vs earlier system vs SC rulings); Model Code of Conduct — scope and enforcement; challenges to electoral integrity (money power, disinformation); India's voter base and participation trends; federalism in elections — Centre vs State election laws.*

## ★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

### ECI — CORE FACTS:

Founded: **January 25, 1950** | Constitutional basis: **Article 324**

First CEC: **Sukumar Sen** (1950–1958) | Current CEC: **Gyanesh Kumar** (from March 2024)

Structure: CEC + 2 Election Commissioners (after CEC Appointment Act 2023)

CEC removal: Same process as Supreme Court judge (Article 324(5))

Term: **6 years** or age **65**, whichever earlier

### NATIONAL VOTERS DAY:

First NVD: **January 25, 2011** (1st NVD) | 16th NVD: **January 25, 2026**

Theme 2026: **“My India, My Vote”** | Tagline: “Citizen at the Heart of Indian Democracy”

### VOTERS DATA:

Registered voters (2024 GE): **~96.8 crore**

Voting age: **18** (lowered from 21 by 61st Constitutional Amendment, 1988)

First-time voters 2024: **~1.85 crore**

### EVM TECHNOLOGY:

Manufacturers: **BEL** (Bengaluru) + **ECIL** (Hyderabad) — two PSUs

Components: Balloting Unit (BU) + Control Unit (CU) + VVPAT

VVPAT: Paper slip visible for **7 seconds**; stored in sealed box

EVMs: Standalone (no internet); ADR v. ECI (2024): SC upheld EVMs

### KEY ELECTORAL MILESTONES:

Voter ID (EPIC): Introduced under **T.N. Seshan** (CEC 1990–96)

EVMs in all constituencies: **2000**

VVPAT in all constituencies: **2019**

Electoral bonds SC struck down: **February 2024** (5-judge bench)

CEC Appointment Act: **2023** (selection committee: PM + LoP + Cabinet Minister)

### ECINET:

Launched: **2026** | Integrates: **40+ ECI applications**

Key apps: cVIGIL (MCC violations), KYC (Know Your Candidate), Voter Helpline **1950**, Suvidha (candidate permissions)

### OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

MCC: Not a law; ECI moral authority; comes into force with election schedule announcement

Article 329: Bar on court interference in electoral matters (only election petitions post-election)

Model Code of Conduct: Strengthened by T.N. Seshan; covers government announcements, official machinery misuse, manifesto content

T.N. Seshan: Ramon Magsaysay Award 1996; transformed ECI into a powerful constitutional body

Sources: ECI India, PIB, Lok Sabha Secretariat

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# Bharat Choudhary

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

 [linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)

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