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The Election Commission's decision to deploy the [Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail system for all the constituencies in the Gujarat Assembly elections](#) is questionable. This will be the first time VVPAT will be used on a State-wide basis. A costly but useful complement to the Electronic Voting Machine, it allows the voter to verify her vote after registering it on the EVM, and the paper trail allows for an audit of the election results by the EC in a select and randomised number of constituencies. The implementation of VVPAT was to have been undertaken by the EC in a phased manner, but this blanket use appears to have been expedited after a series of unwarranted attacks on EVMs by some political parties and scaremongers. The EC had sought to allay concerns and confront allegations of voter fraud by running through the administrative and technological safeguards instituted to keep EVMs and the voting process tamper-proof. It had also challenged political parties to a hackathon to see if, with these safeguards in place, EVMs could be manipulated. The representatives of only two political parties, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Nationalist Congress Party, bothered to turn up. It is unfortunate that parties have found it worthwhile to cry wolf but refuse to meaningfully engage with the EC when challenged to do so. The introduction of VVPAT and the audit process should allay some of the doubts raised by EVM naysayers — but this is a costly process and should not become the norm going forward.

[Read more: All you need to know about VVPAT](#)

Meanwhile, it would be wise for the EC to rapidly transit to third-generation, tamper-proof machines, which must be thoroughly tested and vetted by experts before deployment. The EC's use of a standalone, non-networked machine that runs on a single programmed microchip shows that India's simple but effective EVMs were ahead of the curve compared to the alternatives used elsewhere in the world. Many advanced democracies used networked EVMs, which raised the question of remote manipulation through viruses and malware, compelling many of them to revert to paper ballots. The EC has so far demonstrated that the voting process is robust and its machines are continually upgraded to meet possible challenges, but there are other concerns regarding the use of technology that it must be aware of. For example, Russian cyber-hacking, using techniques such as spear-phishing of election officials and related manipulation of voter data, has been suspected in some jurisdictions abroad. The EC's move in late 2015 to avoid the linking of the voter identity card with the Aadhaar number in order to avoid the trap of linkages with big data, thus becoming susceptible to digital manipulation, was thus a wise decision. It must continue to keep its processes decentralised and accountable.

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