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UNFAIR: A report shows 490 complaints of Dalits being bullied during the Lok Sabha polls. Rajasthan (pic) leads the list with the most number of intimidation-related complaints.

Dalits harassed, stopped from casting vote

Vikas Pathak
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A JUST-RELEASED report has claimed that 499 Dalits from 264 constituencies across 13 states were not allowed to cast their votes during the recently concluded 15th Lok Sabha polls.

The report also criticised the Election Commission officials, saying "poll officials at the local level are not always unaffected by local politics and power dynamics".

The National Dalit Election Watch (NDEW) — set up by leading Dalit organisations — compiled the report on the basis of inputs from its 3,500 volunteers who monitored 3,770 polling stations during the polls.

The complaints in the report have been divided into sub-heads: threat and intimidation, exclusion from voter list, inducements through liquor, non-acceptance of identity proof and police atrocities.

Fifty-two per cent (165 complaints) of the complaints were related to intimidation by dominant castes, political parties and *pradhans* (village heads). While Rajasthan led the list of intimidation-related complaints (74), Bihar came second with 45 complaints.

In Andhra Pradesh, maximum complaints (42) were of intimidation by political parties and inducement through money or liquor.

General secretary of National Dalit Movement for Justice Sirivella Prasad said: "The NDEW experience has now provided an experiential backing to the long-held beliefs about Dalits and the right to franchise."

Significantly, the report showed that almost all parties have been found guilty of threatening Dalits, including the Bahujan Samaj Party and Lok Janshakti Party — both headed by Dalit leaders.

In BSP-ruled Uttar Pradesh, however, only 21 per cent of the complaints were related to intimidation.

Rapping the EC, the report said the officials were not easily accessible. Some fax numbers — including Delhi — did not work, while officials in Bihar switched off their cell phones. In Uttar Pradesh, the EC website gave wrong numbers of its election observers.

The report also outlines that violations in reserved constituencies outnumbered those in general constituencies.

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