

Opportunities for Election Tourism in the Largest show of Democracy: The case of the Great Indian General Elections

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Abstract: Politics and tourism are strange bedfellows, but the big fat Indian general election is giving that notion a vote of no confidence. The festival of democracy can spark a new niche of election tourism where the global tourists can become a part and witness the greatest show of democracy on earth. It's an emerging concept where the visitors can taste the flavour of democracy along with their usual activities of visiting various tourists' destinations. With this in place, here is an attempt to explore the niche tourism concept of election tourism in the Indian context which is still at a nascent stage with few of the travel aggregator showing their interests in it. It's an untapped sector which can be explored more and can be rearranged in order to give meaning to the endeavour. The political spectrums of India with details of all general elections are described in this paper. Also, the concept of election tourism along with a tentative list of activities to be performed is suggested here. It will definitely help the policymakers, marketers as well as other stake holders to think beyond the usual avenues of generating tourism revenue and step towards sustainability.

Keywords —Democracy, Elections, Election Tourism, Indian General Elections

I. INTRODUCTION

India since ages is known as a melting pot for diverse natural resources, cultures and people and thus has been labelled as Incredible by the World. This land is known for its rich heritage, astonishing architectures, amazing history and of course the most valuable human resources (<https://electiontourismindia.com/about.html>). India derives Pride for being the world's largest and most vibrant democracy with multiparty parliamentary system governed by its native people. Constitution wise, each government in India is elected for a period of five years where the commoners are given a right to elect their nominees who will be fighting for their rights in the parliament (*Shah 2007*).

The ceremonial heal of Indian democracy of the President of India who gets elected indirectly by the Electoral College consisting of the members of the national and state level legislatures for a term of five-years (*Shastri et al. 2009, Gledhill, 1970*). The person with the most executive power in India is the post of the Prime Minister who heads the government at the centre (*Sharma, 1950*).

The party or political alliance with maximum numbers of members in the lower house 'Lok Sabaha' normally nominates one of its members as the Prime minister who is the de facto face of the government (*Sharma, 1950*).

Elections in India are conducted according to the constitutional provisions and parliamentary legislations and overseen by the Election Commission of India to ensure that they are conducted in a free & fair manner. Here in India, the elections are held for various constitutional verticals namely members of the parliament in Lok Sabha, members of State legislative assemblies, members of the parliament in Rajya Sabha, and for Members in local panchayats or city corporation councils enacted by the *Representation of the People Act 1950*. (*Sundar et al. 2000*)

The lower house of the parliament, also known as the House of People or Lok Sabha is the most prominent body within the Indian legislative structure with its 545 members elected by direct voting of the people of India. This election is normally held in every five years or until the body is dissolved by the President of India with the advice of the council of the ministers.

For electoral procedures in India demands the prospective candidates to register for the elections beforehand. Either the aspiring candidate should stand as Independent or he needs to be fielded by a recognized political party of India. During elections, no party is allowed to use government resources for the campaigning or bribe the people. Once the elections are announced a model code of conduct is implemented where the present

government cannot start any projects during the project. The campaigning for the elections ends by 06:00 PM two days before the polling days. The collector of each district acts as the officer in charge of polling. Government employees are employed as poll officers at the polling stations. Electronic Voting Machines (EVM) are being used instead of ballot boxes to prevent election fraud. After the citizens vote their left index finger is marked with an indelible ink. A unique feature of None of the Above (NOTA) was added in the year 2013 resulting from the petition from the electoral commission and the people's union for civil liberties from 2009 where the citizens of the country can press the NOTA button in the EVM machine if they don't want to cast their votes to any of the contesting candidates. Amid controversies of alleged tampering of the EVM machines, the election commission has decided to use the technology of Voter-verified paper audit trail (VVPAT) in order to ensure the transparency in the election process (Shivadekar, 2015). In this system a receipt from the EVM machine gets generated for each of the vote casted.

The details of various Lok Sabha seats in India are as follows.

Table 1: Details of Seats across Indian States & Union Territories

Sl.	States & Union Territories	Nos. of Seats
1	Nominated	2
2	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	1
3	Andhra Pradesh	25
4	Arunachal Pradesh	2
5	Assam	14
6	Bihar	40
7	Chandigarh	1
8	Chhatisgarh	11
9	Dadra & Naga Haveli	1
10	Daman & Diu	1
11	Delhi	7
12	Goa	2
13	Gujrat	26
14	Haryana	10
15	Himachal Pradesh	4
16	Jammu & Kashmir	6
17	Jharkhand	14
18	Karnataka	28
19	Kerala	20
20	Lakshadweep	1
21	Madhya Pradesh	29
22	Maharashtra	48
23	Manipur	2
24	Meghalaya	2
25	Mizoram	1
26	Nagaland	1
27	Odisha	21

28	Puducherry	1
29	Punjab	13
30	Rajasthan	25
31	Sikkim	1
32	Tamilnadu	39
33	Telangana	17
34	Tripura	2
35	Uttarakhand	5
36	Uttar Pradesh	80
37	West Bengal	42
	Total Seats	545

Table 1: No. of Lok Sabha Seats in India Source: wikipedia

As per latest publication from the website of the Election Commission, In India, around 1841 registered parties are there amongst which 7 are national parties, 52 are state parties and the rest 1785 unrecognised parties. All of the registered parties contesting the elections need to choose a symbol from a common list of available symbols offered by the election commission. If we analyze the results of the Indian general elections from the beginning, it is the Indian National Congress who has dominated the Indian political arena for maximum times as stated below. India has gone for elections 17 times till 2019, from which the Indian National Congress has formed its government 10 times (7 times with absolute majority & 3 times with coalition of other parties). The Jan Sangh, later known as the Bharatiya Janata Party is the second most successful political venture who has formed its government at the centre 4 times in coalition of other parties. The remaining 3 times it is the amalgamation of various political parties who have joined together to form a government at the central stage.

History of Lok Sabha Elections:

Table 2: Details of Elections & Results in India

No	Year	Majority	Seats Share	Status
1st LS	1951-52 IGC	Indian National Congress (INC)	364 of the 489 seats	Majority
2nd LS	1957 IGC	Indian National Congress (INC)	371 of the 494 seats	Majority
3rd LS	1962 IGC	Indian National Congress (INC)	361 of the 494 seats	Majority
4th LS	1967 IGC	Indian National Congress (INC)	283 of the 520 seats	Majority
5th LS	1971 IGC	Indian National Congress (INC)	352 of the 518 seats	Majority
6th LS	1977 IGC	Janata Alliance led by Janata Party	298 of the 542 seats	Coalition
7th LS	1980 IGC	Indian National Congress (INC)	351 of the 542 seats	Majority
8th LS	1984 IGC	Indian National Congress (INC)	404 of the 514 seats	Majority
9th LS	1989 IGC	National Front (NF) supported by BJP & Left parties	276 of the 545 seats	Coalition
10th LS	1991 IGC	Indian National Congress (INC)	244 of the 545 seats	Coalition

		supported by other parties		
11th LS	1996 IGC	The United Front (UF)	332 of the 545 seats	Coalition
12th LS	1998 IGC	Bharatiya Janata Party with alliance of other parties	286 of the 545 seats	Coalition
13th LS	1999 IGC	National Democratic Alliance led by Bharatiya Janata Party	298 of the 545 seats	Coalition
14th LS	2004 IGC	United Progressive Alliance (UPA) led by Indian National Congress	335 of the 545 seats	Coalition
15th LS	2009 IGC	United Progressive Alliance (UPA) led by Indian National Congress	322 of the 545 seats	Coalition
16th LS	2014 IGC	National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led by Bharatiya Janata Party	336 of the 545 seats	Coalition
17th LS	2019 IGC	National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led by Bharatiya Janata Party	353 of the 545 seats	Coalition

(Keys: LS = Lok Sabha, IGC = Indian General Elections)

(Source: wikipedia: history of loksabha elections)

II. ELECTION TOURISM - THE CONCEPT:

When it comes to the elections, in India, everything is colossal as aptly mentioned by the economist magazine where it compared the great Indian elections to a "lumbering elephant embarking on an epic trek". (bbc.com) In 2019, with 900 million of eligible voters, India's election is the largest in the world as the eligible voter mass is more than the combined population of Europe and Australia. Out of the total the first time eligible voters' numbers stand at 84.3 million. A total of 8040 candidates are contesting the elections in 2019 across party lines including the independents. (Election commission of India).

Due to its enormous scale of operations, the election process takes a lot of time (Generally between 2 to 3 months) and is conducted in several phases over the time. In order to avoid partisan of the state police departments, generally the federal forces are deployed all over the country in order to secure the whole polling process. In 2019, Approximately 270,000 paramilitary and 2 million state police personnel provided organisational support and security at various polling booths (wikipedia). According to the Election commission of India, more than 1 million polling stations (10,35,918 to be exact count) are established in the general elections to facilitate the voting procedures. From the mountain peaks at Himachal Pradesh to the jungles of Gir, Gujrat and to the floating polling station in Jammu region, India definitely possesses all ingredients to a successful democracy.

For such a mammoth exercise, nearly 5 million government officials and security forces are being deployed who travel

by foot, road, special train, helicopter, boat, and sometimes even on elephants in order to carry out their assigned tasks. According to the election commission of India, the cost of conducting general elections in 2014 was around \$5.5 billion which has been estimated at more than \$6.5 billion in 2019. The major issues in general elections in 2019 can be listed as national security and terrorism, economic performance, unemployment rate, alleged institutional undermining, agrarian and rural distress etc.

In such a gigantic arrangement, the general elections in India is definitely can be counted as one of the greatest events where the presence of tourists is a beneficial proposition for both the parties (tourists and the hosts) where they can witness the entire polling process in the largest democracy of the world as well as help in gaining profits for the local economy.

With this background, the concept of election tourism comes to the forefront for discussion where it is the idea of combining the process of elections to the concept of travel & tourism.

As per one of the famous travel aggregator, Election Tourism India, around 5200 tourists participated in Indian election tourism in 2014. They have visited from countries like China, Nepal, US, UAE (Dubai & Abu Dhabi), Australia, Ukraine, Japan, Germany, France, and many others from across the globe. The tourists mass comprised of students, researchers, media professionals, political analysts and those who wanted to understand how elections in India are conducted on such a massive scale. The aggregators specially customised to offer a window to India's rich culture, election rallies and political complexities. The major tourists attractions for election tourism in India includes states like Gujarat, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Kerala and Himachal Pradesh etc. These tours help the tourists in understanding the Indian democracy and its history.

III. TENTATIVE ITINERARY FOR THE TOURISTS IN ELECTION TOURISM

Apart from visiting to some most popular tourist's destination, the common ingredients for a political tour in India may include the following activities that is drawn across party lines, establishments and judiciary systems as well in order to give an overview of the political spectrum at this great temple of democracy.

- ✓ Visit to the Vidhan Sabha, also known as the Legislative Assembly, where the lower house of the legislature of a State operates to understand its functioning and effects on the administrative arena.
- ✓ Visit to the Secretariat where the headquarters of the State Government operates.
- ✓ Visit to the office of the election commission, the constitutional authority responsible for administering

the electoral process of the nation to get a detailed overview of the whole process.

- ✓ Stop by the residence of some popular and powerful members of State Legislative assembly as well as senior IAS & IPS officers to get a glimpse into the life of political leader, government officials and civil servants.
- ✓ Meet with the local municipal corporation officials to understand their way of functioning and views.
- ✓ Visit to the residence of a Member of Parliament to get a glimpse of his/her life.
- ✓ Meeting a practicing lawyer as well as judge practicing in the High court / Supreme Court and knowing the judicial views about the political system in India.
- ✓ Meeting some renowned journalists to assess their views about the political scenario in India.
- ✓ Meeting a state level leader of the ruling party and discuss about various political issues & their views.
- ✓ Meeting a state level leader of the opposition party and discuss about various political issues & their views.
- ✓ Meeting a national level leader of the ruling party and discuss about various political issues & their views.
- ✓ Meeting a national level leader of the opposition party and discuss about various political issues & their views.
- ✓ Take part in a political rally of the ruling party.
- ✓ Take part in a political rally of the opposition party.
- ✓ Take part in a debate between the ruling and opposition parties.
- ✓ Meeting a polling officer on duty to discuss about the formalities.
- ✓ Visit to a model polling booth with special permission during the elections.
- ✓ Meet some of the officers deputed to conduct polls in the country at various localities to get their views on the overall electoral process.

IV. WAY FORWARD

In this greatest show of democracy, where the common people choose their nominees to represent and fight for their causes, the great Indian general elections are the perfect opportunities for the service firms to promote and attract more nos. of visitors in order to gain sustainability over a period of time. The niche tourism concept of election tourism is an emerging concept which provides an added dimension to the existing tourism concepts in order to promote the brand India as a lucrative destination proposition amongst the global tourist community. But, this sector needs more careful attention and planning in order to promote the destination in a holistic manner.

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