



INDIAN INTERNATIONAL MODEL UN

STUDY GUIDE

COMMITTEE: LOK SABHA

AGENDA: Means of monitoring(/tackling) the (changing) micro profiling of voters and targeted campaigning.

INTRODUCTION

Political parties have always had conventionally undertaken constituency-categorized and booth-categorized caste and religious profiling and targeting of voters. Also, wooing community or religious leaders to swing votes of their followers has been a time-tested campaign practice. Further, political parties have always attempted to identify fence-sitters and spot households and neighbourhoods that can be lured by incentives, including alcohol and cash. Not all of these means deployed during elections are legal.

Real-time data collection from each booth on election day is the new normal; it helps a political party intervene if it finds some anomaly in voter turnout in a locality.

The media are important to democracy, and a democratic election is essential without media. A foolproof election is not only about the privilege to vote and the knowledge of how to cast a vote, but also about an interactive and engaging process where the voters engage in public debate and have enough facts about parties, policies, candidates and the election process itself to make accurate choices. To add, media positions as a mandatory watchdog to democratic elections, protecting the transparency of the process. Indeed, a democratic election with no media liberty, or restricted media freedom, would be a contradiction at times.

The good gospel for now is that while no one can extract whether Cambridge Analytica did indeed try to the Congress and JD(U) in July, it seems clear though that nothing came out of it. But in the coming years, if we are to safeguard foolproof elections, we can learn from the super powers and what they are feeling with Cambridge Analytica and its role in Brexit and Trump's win. We have to initiate and implement tough data protection laws that would turn to individualised tracking of voter behaviour analysis. We are indeed very far away from that goal.

A political party gains electoral rolls and enriches the data. This data is engulfed with many data fact, you may have downloaded an app that gives access to the other apps on your phone, credit card transactions or simply the web pages you frequently surf. These data points are used to analyze profiles and then coordinate with the electoral rolls. Political elements then form WhatsApp groups or send Facebook invites.

HISTORY

Politics in 2017 is at a far distance from 1951-52, when India had faced her first complete election. The cyber world and other technologies develop wonderful opportunities for democracy, but they also initiate grave threats. As the count of web users across world is rising, these techniques will become more effective in both analyzing and impacting election results. If we can have a look at the Indian context, the count of cyber users in 2019 is projected to be above 520 million, that is over 50% of the population that will be on Facebook. The use of smart phones is also expected to increase to 48 percent by 2019. As more Indians welcome social media platforms, it will be a cake walk for campaign managers to track and send their messages to a well targeted

audience. As voters would be tracking information not only from a party's official accounts but also from exuberant volunteers, it would be hard for them to track the authenticity of claims. Most Big Data methods of social media manipulation and analysis in shrewd hands could come very close to predicting the outcome of the next parliament elections. This may end up as a nightmare for the election commission.

India is indeed a young student in democracy. For many first time voters and other social organizations, the internet and smart phones may very well be the primary interaction through which they can track their voice, vote, and ideology. Attempts have been made by foreign and domestic elements to destabilize nations and hijack elections; trying to manipulate internal political outcomes is not new. But with the advent of technology, it is becoming easier and affordable to do so. The enemy could be anywhere.

Politics along caste and religious lines is still blatantly practised in India. As data analytics pushes Indian political campaigns into the 21st century, there is also the risk that it drags divisive caste politics with it.

Clearly, there is scope for improvement in policies. But, there should be strong efforts to analyze the initiation of policies. There should be no knee-jerk reaction in favour of a strong data protection authority empowered to monitor and control. Such monitoring would encourage an inspector raj that would more likely impede the digital economy, with negative impact on privacy enhancement. India requires a proactive, but light-touch regulation with industry SROs working with the data protection authority in a co-regulatory model under the proposed DP Act.

CURRENT SCENARIO

The Election Commission is India's pride monument of democracy. It has done a commendable job in organizing elections on a scale unlike anywhere else on the planet. It is now time for it to approach for this debut challenge. There is a nice balance between seducing free speech and monitoring spread of misinterpretations. A digital code of conduct and rules and regulations must be drafted and regulated. At the same time, the EC has to prepare to produce secure politicians and political parties' vital information. A cyber cell should be established to monitor the campaign activities of different parties, keep an eye on fake news trending, and defend against other attacks.

India and the EC should spend time to initiate precautionary measures taken by the global tech giants and governments. The Indian political forum has only had a few tastes of both the power and threats of technology. As the country starts playing with these new toys, it is equally important to pay heed to the statutory warnings that always come with new things.

With increased micro-targeting, political parties no longer need to face public dissent. Instead their energies are directed on winning every voter by making targeted promises specific people would expect. Experts predict that with rapid advancements in technology, it would be possible in the future for virtual avatars of politicians to

come on with direct campaigns and engage with individual voters, about whom these avatars would have full background information thanks to Big Data. On the contrary, on your way to work, imagine yourself shaking hands with a life-size avatar of a future prime minister who is concerned about your problems and promises to resolve them.

Thus campaigning would be reduced to saying as little as possible in the public sphere to allow the candidate. And, as most of private sphere would be segmented based on highly accurate data about each and every voter, eventually the political speech around us would be filtered more and more so that we hear only what we would like to hear and nothing else.

Meanwhile, technology has advanced while the field of data analytics has matured. "Data is exploding at breakneck speed all around you. A new era in "electioneering" is here that promises to change the way elections are fought from here on out, analysts say. Gray-haired political strategists who relied on hunches and intuitions to gauge complex demographics of caste, religion, community and localities are on the way out. In their place are quants, programmers and data scientists. Data analytics is moving out of research labs into real-time monitoring of people's reaction to politics, policy and rapid responses to crisis situations.

BLOC POSITIONS

Union minister Ravi Shankar Prasad had alleged the Congress of engaging with the controversial firm for the 2017 Gujarat elections and had enquired whether the Congress intended to win using "data theft and manipulation". The Congress denied the charges vehemently and counter-attacked by pointing to claims made by Cambridge Analytica's Indian partner Ovens Business Intelligence, that had worked with the BJP in the 2014 general elections and the JD(U)-BJP combine for the 2010 Bihar Assembly elections. Both BJP and JD(U) denied the charges. The government has now issued a notice to Ovens asking it to reveal whether it did use Facebook data breach to influence elections in India. The Election commission has ordered a probe into these matters.

However, it would have been impossible for Cambridge Analytica to have used Facebook data in any election in India leading up to and including the 2014 Lok Sabha polls. Because they did not have it then.

BJP had used IT and data analytics in a big way in the 2014 general election. However, it was really about quick opinion polls to gauge how politically palatable a remark by its prime ministerial candidate Narendra Modi was and pushing political messaging through social media.

Micro voter targeting takes it to a bigger level. When you look at a page of an electoral roll, it looks like

random data – add to it profession, age group, web pages visited, apps used for online shopping, and it gives you a picture of a person.

These data points throw up a bigger picture which can be used to target voters directly and more effectively.” So far, the parties had been following the concept of “panna pramukhs” to negate voters at the booth level. Panna pramukhs are foot soldiers who are given the job of the electoral roll and are asked to ensure that to voters on that page are given voter slips and promotional material, and turn up to vote on the voting day. With micro voter targeting, these pramukhs have got a bigger role in the virtual space.

SUGGESTED MODERATED CAUCUS TOPICS

- 1) Role of Media in Elections
- 2) Can the Media be a Public Educator?
- 3) Election Commission and Data Analytics
- 4) Consensus among political parties to tackle micro profiling
- 5) Transparency in Voter Lists
- 6) Combating Targeted Campaigning
- 7) Experimenting Paper Ballot System
- 8) Regulation and Strategizing Measures by Election Commission
- 9) Citizen Responsibility against tackling micro profiling
- 10) Political Interference in Elections

RESEARCH LINKS

- 1) <https://eandt.theiet.org/content/articles/2017/05/are-political-social-media-campaigns-a-threat-to-democratic-elections/>
- 2) <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/feb/16/india-big-data-election-pollsters-target-age-caste-religion-uttar-pradesh>
- 3) <http://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/2139719/cambridge-analytica-asia-modern-day-colonialism-or-empathy>
- 4) <https://mashable.com/2018/03/24/how-microtargeted-ads-affect-behavior/>
- 5) <https://factordaily.com/narendra-modi-app-bjp-2019-election/>
- 6) http://peoplesdemocracy.in/2018/0401_pd/hacking-democracy-big-data-fake-news-and-big-money
- 7) <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/micro-targeting-lets-parties-conquer-ridings-one-tiny-group-at-a-time/article4359559/>

8) <https://callhub.io/10-ways-internet-changed-political-campaigning/>

9) <http://jantakamood.com/index.php/tag/constituency-profiling/>

10) <https://ourdataourselves.tacticaltech.org/posts/addressable-tv/>