



Navigating the World's Largest Democratic Exercise: India's 2024 General Election

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Abstract – The general election in India in 2024 will be an enormous democratic challenge, requiring the mobilization of enormous human and material resources nationwide to manage an electorate of around 1 billion people and overcome several logistical obstacles. The 2024 elections are expected to surpass all previous records in terms of voter turnout and expenditure, involving an estimated 673 political parties, 1 million polling stations, over 15 million election officials, 5 million voting machines, and lasting 44 days. From the massive numbers of individuals eligible to vote and the number of political parties involved to the specifics of the voting process, the associated expenses, and the possible consequences, this article covers it all. More than 968 million people are entitled to vote, which is over 150 million more than in the 2019 elections. 543 people will be chosen to serve in the Lok Sabha, India's lower house of parliament. Due to the large number of eligible voters, the voting process takes place in seven stages spread out over 28 states and 8 territories, with some areas having to set up remote booths in inaccessible areas including offshore islands, deserts, mountains, and forests. Electronic voting devices were first used in the 1980s and allow voters to record their preferences. The 15 million election authorities in charge of the election in India must meticulously organize the deployment of this technology across the country's varied landscape. As an example of India's dedication to facilitating democratic engagement, they spend days traversing marshes and thick jungles to establish voting stations for as little as a single voter. Voter turnout in the 2024 election is expected to surpass the 67% peak in 2019, indicating a widespread enthusiasm for the political process. But it costs a pretty penny to organize elections for more than 17% of the world's population; estimates for this election cycle put the price tag somewhere between \$10 billion and \$15 billion. Present prime minister will become the third longest serving leader in India if his Bharatiya Janata Party wins a third consecutive term in office. Given that around 20% of the world's population is of voting age, the result is highly consequential. This study sheds light on the intricate mechanisms that enable the world's largest electorate to exercise their democracy by exploring the various aspects of India's election, such as the number of voters who are 100 years old or the days it took officials to set up remote polling sites. The 2024 general election in India will be an unprecedentedly large-scale and locally consequential event that, if held and concluded well, will demonstrate the power of democratic principles and citizen engagement.

Keywords: Democracy, Election Commission (EC), Participation, Inclusion, Diversity, Representation, Grassroots, Accountability, Transparency, Empowerment.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Hook Describing the Scale and Significance of India's Election

It is no exaggeration to state that the very foundation of modern democracy will tremble when India goes to the polls beginning April 2024. The sheer magnitude of the electoral exercise surpasses any previous democratic undertaking in history. Consider that the number of eligible voters—a staggering 968 million—



exceeds the combined populations of North America and South America. Or that the over 1 million polling stations planned to be set up for the multi-phase voting surpass the number of such stations established in all 543 parliamentary constituencies over 7 decades till now. When one in every eight human beings on the planet gets the chance to participate in choosing their next government, the significance cannot be overstated.

The 2024 Lok Sabha elections will eclipse all records in terms of eligible electorate, duration, expenditure, geographical spread, and logistical complexity. The 8-week multi-phase voting process represents the longest ever, while the estimated \$10 billion-plus in costs marks new heights for an election budget. No other poll has witnessed more special arrangements—from mountain peaks over 15,000 feet high to remote islands—to enable citizens to cast their ballot. The sheer statistical proportions of every parameter, from the over 15 million election officials to the 5 million-plus voting machines to be deployed, make this an unparalleled exercise in aggregating and operationalizing democracy.

Yet there is an invisible component that is far harder to quantify but much more consequential in terms of impact. This election provides a platform for the hopes, fears, aspirations, and desires of nearly a fifth of the world's people to find decisive expression. The result could profoundly reshape India's future trajectory as a nation for the next half decade and beyond. Will incumbent Prime Minister buck anti-incumbency trends to register a hat trick of victories for his party? Or will the combined opposition coalesce behind a counter-narrative of economic turmoil and social polarization to unseat the BJP juggernaut? The stakes have seldom been higher for Indian democracy.

There are also significant international ramifications embedded in the outcome of such a mammoth democratic spectacle. At a time of global democratic recession, the successful conduct of elections for 950 million plus people would serve as an unequivocal endorsement of participative government. It would reinforce India's soft power credentials as the world's largest democracy, burnishing its ambitions to be a vital rule-maker in the emerging multipolar world order. Any subversion of a free and fair voting process would conversely deal a grievous blow to the country's ambitions of securing a permanent seat at the United Nations high table.

The 2024 elections are further augmented by nearly 18 million newly eligible young voters, representing over one-sixth of the total youth population of India. The aspirations and choices of this mammoth generational cohort could decisively shift the direction of political discourse for the next half-century. In addition, the elections shall witness record high voter turnouts, with the 2019 figure of 67% expected to be bettered thanks to rising enthusiasm, awareness and tech-enabled facilitation. Clearly, all signs point to seismic happenings on the electoral front.

Even seemingly minor statistics reveal the grand scale on which these elections are constructed. Take the specially commissioned vehicles transporting electronic voting machines to far-flung areas in the mountainous terrain. More than 100,000 such vehicles will criss-cross the highest motorable passes like the Baralacha La Pass (16,020 feet) in the Himalayas. Or the 30,000 powerboats and traditional sailing vessels deploying personnel and materials along the 7500 km coastline and islands. Every detail adds fresh perspective on what is undoubtedly the grandest democratic spectacle in human history.

When the curtains finally close on the longest ever polls in independent India's history, one name shall reverberate most loudly across global headlines—the Prime Minister of India in 2024. Irrespective of who occupies the coveted chair, the massive power mandate provides huge opportunities to reshape the collective fortunes of over 1.4 billion people, nearly 20% of humanity. It is a responsibility and privilege



granted through the freely exercised choices of close to a billion voters. Therein lies the true significance of this greatest celebration of the democratic spirit that the world has ever witnessed. No superlative can accurately capture the scale of India's election—it is the birthplace of hope, change and progress for the largest democracy on Earth.

1.2 India's 2024 General Election is a Complex Logistical and Democratic Undertaking Unparalleled in Scale and Scope. This Paper Analyzes Key Statistics, Procedures, Costs, and Implications of These Record-breaking Elections

The very pillars of the largest democracy on Earth will be tested as India undertakes its 17th general election beginning April 2024. On multiple parameters—eligible voters, expenditure, duration, geographical spread, number of phases—the polls scheduled are set to surpass all records in the seven-decade history of Indian elections. The sheer statistical proportions in every category, from nearly a billion voters to the estimated \$15 billion budget, make this the grandest and most complex democratic exercise witnessed till date. When the final votes are counted after the unprecedented eight-week multi-phase voting across 28 states and 8 union territories, the nation would have affirmed its credential as the undisputed leader of global democratic governance.

This paper sets out to comprehensively analyze the myriad facets that make India's 2024 Lok Sabha election an unparalleled logistical and democratic accomplishment. The electoral process represents the smooth aggregation of inputs, dependencies and stakeholders on a scale unprecedented in human history. We provide data-driven perspectives on four key dimensions encompassing quantitative metrics, procedural conduct, budgetary allocations and potential implications. Across all four verticals, the 2024 polls are primed to overhaul long-standing Indian and global benchmarks.

Our core thesis is that the 2024 general elections signify far more than just the periodic change in political leadership. It represents the ultimate testament to the robustness of democratic processes, providing incontrovertible evidence of the system's capability to give voice to popular will on an unimaginable scale. The presumed success holds invaluable portents for the future of participative government globally in an era besieged by authoritarian strongmen. Beyond geopolitical symbolism, the election carries real consequences for the path India takes over the next half decade, which in turn impacts nearly a fifth of humanity.

In building our thesis, we crunch the numbers that spotlight the mammoth proportions, starting with the over 950 million eligible voters that make it larger than the last US and Brazilian elections combined. No polls in history have required over 1 million voting machines and 15 million election officials to service booths from the Himalayas and islands to the deserts. We provide granular analyses of voting phases, party machinations, procedure monitoring and booth protocols that underline the smooth functioning.

Further, we highlight the gargantuan price tag exceeding \$10 billion that makes India's elections history's costliest ever. Allocations towards machinery, awareness campaigns and model code enforcement provide insight on budget utilization optimized for voter facilitation and transparency. On implications, we evaluate scenarios from electoral outcomes to youth participation for their capacity to reshape India's trajectory. In spotlighting relevant data indicators across all aspects, the paper constructs an integrated information repository unearthing the unprecedented complexity of organizing free, fair and informed elections for nearly a fifth of humanity.



Our analytical approach combines quantitative assessment with contextual commentary to spotlight superlative metrics as well as pivotal issues and arrangements driving electoral functioning. In putting forth forceful yet evidence-based arguments, we reinforce the paper's thesis on the 2024 elections as an unparalleled testament to democratic governance and organization unmatched in human history. It provides the ultimate validation of institutions and infrastructure to enable the annual renewal of popular consent for political leadership across the kaleidoscopic diversity of sub-continental India.

The sheer enormity of inputs aggregated, dependencies coordinated and expectations managed make this a unique undertaking with immense symbolic value in an era beleaguered by global democratic retrenchment. Our research shall highlight through granular analysis how the due fulfillment of electoral responsibilities by over 15 million officials and 950 million voters fundamentally upholds the democratic promise. We contend the 2024 polls may well represent democracy's finest hour in enabling rightful self-determination to nearly a fifth of humanity, showcasing its unmatched utility as the fundamental pillar for legitimate state power. Its thriving beyond geographical and identity faultlines shall compellingly reinforce India's standing as the foremost exemplar of freedom and liberty to other emerging nations.

2. BY THE NUMBERS: QUANTIFYING INDIA'S MASSIVE ELECTION

2.1 Voters – 968 Million Eligible Voters

The Most Numerous Electorate in History

The single biggest testament to the mammoth proportions of India's 2024 general election lies in the sheer enormity of its voter base. A staggering 968 million citizens over the age of 18 will be eligible to cast their ballots—over 150 million more than the 2019 elections. To put this number in perspective, India's electorate exceeds the entire combined populations of Europe and North America. Simply put, this represents the largest ever electorate in recorded human history.

India's voting population has witnessed steady growth from 176 million in the first 1952 polls to 834 million in 2014. The last election in 2019 constituted about 900 million eligible voters. The accelerated expansion between 2019 and 2024 can be attributed to two key factors. Firstly, over 18 million young citizens turned 18 during this period, representing one of independent India's largest spikes in first-time voter expansion. Secondly, targeted enrollment campaigns in remote tribal belts, city slums and migrant communities led to over 50 million new voters getting registered. Special registration drives along border areas, hills and coastal regions played a pivotal role.

In terms of gender composition, the 2024 electorate has 471 million registered female voters and 497 million males. The gap of 26 million more enrolled males is the lowest ever, with the Election Commission's consistent messaging around egalitarian participation showing dividends. There are also approximately 197 million young voters belonging to the 18–25 age bracket, underscoring the youthful demographic profile likely to shape future electoral choices.

The geographical distribution of voters mirrors India's overall population composition. The states of Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra boast the largest voter bases with 149 million and 112 million electors respectively. They are followed by West Bengal, Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Gujarat with over 60 million eligible voters each. The smallest electorates belong to sparsely populated hill states like Sikkim (4.6 lakhs) and Arunachal Pradesh (7.6 lakhs). Certain demographic and topographical realities manifest in the relative state-wise voter proportions across India's diverse expanse.



A noteworthy segment that expands the notion of India's voter base are non-resident Indian (NRI) citizens estimated at over 10 million globally. From blue-collar contract workers in West Asia to Silicon Valley software engineers, these overseas electors have swelled in recent times. The 2014 and 2019 elections witnessed record NRI voter turnouts. For 2024, over 1 million NRIs have already registered as overseas electors to participate in shaping India's future policy priorities.

The unprecedented near-billion voter base will exercise their democratic rights across 1.06 million polling stations, up from 1 million in 2019. From the Thar desert and Sundarbans wetlands to Himalayan passes like 15,300 ft high Anlay Pho, voting booths are being established closer to people's doorsteps. Such infrastructural scale-up and process decentralization has played a pivotal role in progressively raising national voter turnout from the paltry 55% levels in early polls to record highs exceeding 67% in 2019. All indicators point to an even higher turnout in 2024 given the enthusiastic participation visible in recently held state elections.

In spotlighting the sheer diversity of languages, geographies and social segments encompassed within the voter base, India's election authorities have their task cut out to ensure informed, equitable and efficient participation. It is no mean feat to deliver transparent communications regarding registration, voting dates, candidate information and result declarations across the length and breadth of the sub-continent. That they have consistently done so over multiple election cycles serves as resounding proof of the robustness and reliability of India's electoral infrastructure. When the last vote is cast in the summer of 2024, India will have once again showcased its exceptional credentials as the undisputed leader of democratic ethos and values amongst emerging nations.

2.2 Phases - 7 Phases of Voting Over 44 Days

The Longest Electoral Marathon in History

In keeping with the mammoth scale of its electoral exercise, India's 2024 general elections will be conducted in seven phases over a prolonged duration of 44 days. This marks the longest voting schedule in the history of Indian general elections thus far. The multi-phase voting is necessitated by the challenges in logistics, security and monitoring entailed in enabling the participation of nearly 1 billion voters. The phased schedule allows election authorities to mobilize personnel and equipment in a staggered manner without overstressing limited resources. It also facilitates the movement of security forces and polling staff to ensure peaceful, orderly voting across vast swathes of remote and violence-prone terrain. The 7 phases are further subdivided into numerous 'voting days' ranging from one to three depending on the size of each state.

The 1st phase scheduled for April 19th includes 3 voting days during which 132 constituencies across 15 states will go to polls. The states covered in the opening phase consist of all seats in Goa, Tripura, Nagaland and Meghalaya, while major states like Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Bihar, Assam and Maharashtra vote for certain constituencies. The Election Commission identifies potentially vulnerable booths here for focused deployment of Central security forces. Phase 2 commencing April 24 will witness polling across 235 seats in 7 states over 3 days. The highlight is the crucial state of Tamil Nadu voting for its 39 Lok Sabha and 18 Assembly seats in a single phase. Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jammu & Kashmir, Maharashtra and West Bengal feature in the other seats up for polls during this stage. With intense contests expected in all these states, unprecedented security arrangements are being made. The biggest voting phase begins from April 27 over 4 voting days encompassing 408 seats spanning 9 major states. The eyecatchers are populous Uttar Pradesh with 140 seats and potential kingmaker Bihar with 78 going to polls in a single go, in addition



to Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan and West Bengal. Over 22% of the total Lok Sabha seats will witness polling frenzy during this phase.

Phase 4 conducted over 3 voting days involves 290 seats distributed across 7 states and 1 Union Territory. Crucial battles in electorally important Uttar Pradesh continue for 86 seats that vote in this leg. Intense contests are foreseen for 10 seats each in Jharkhand and Jammu–Kashmir going to polls alongside Bihar, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Nepal and Rajasthan constituencies. In the 5th phase spanning May 6th and 7th, 102 Lok Sabha seats spread across 6 States vote in the penultimate phase of polling. Key clashes are foreseen in 18 seats across Bengal amidst further voting for Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana, Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh representatives. Phase 5 leads up to the high-decibel climax. The 6th voting phase is conducted for just 1 voting day on May 12 when 59 parliamentary seats across 6 states and 1 UT go to polls. Besides wrapping up voting in Bihar, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, this phase facilitates participation of electorates in Delhi, Jharkhand and Chandigarh.

The grand finale i.e 7th and last phase is held on May 19th for 13 seats across 4 states and 1 UT. Punjab finishes its voting process alongside constituencies in Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Chandigarh. By the end of the day, the world's largest democratic exercise would have drawn to a close after over a month-and-a-half. The prolonged multi-phase voting allows for comprehensive monitoring, transportation and regulated movement of materials and manpower. The elaborate arrangements enable the Election Commission of India (ECI) to facilitate robust rallies, raise voter awareness, uphold electoral ethics and maximise turnouts in the most extensive polls ever witnessed. When the final votes are counted on June 4th, the newly elected Lok Sabha would have been rigorously vetted by an informed electorate encouraged to make considered choices about national priorities without coercion – affirming India's identity as the global bastion of transparent and participative democracy.

2.3 Parties – Over 600 Parties Participating

The Crowded Electoral Marketplace

One of the defining features of India's vibrant democracy is the sheer multiplicity of political outfits contesting for power. Electoral authorities have registered over 2900 parties as of early 2024, out of which 673 are expected to be in the fray during the upcoming Lok Sabha polls. While only dozens secure actual legislative representation, the participation of such an expansive slate underscores the pluralistic foundations underpinning the democratic process. The Election Commission of India (ECI) classifies parties under three categories – six National Parties, over 50 State Parties and hundreds of unrecognized registered and non-registered political outfits. National and State parties must fulfill extensive membership and electoral criteria across multiple states to be officially classified as such. Prominent National parties who have historically dominated the electoral landscape include the Indian National Congress, BJP, CPI, CPM, BSP and NCP. Yet regional political forces have rapidly emerged as potent change agents, with state-specific parties already ruling in over a dozen states. Key regional forces expected to steer substantial voting percentages based on loyal sub-national constituencies are SP, BJD, YSRCP, DMK, TRS and SS. Many regional satraps have allied as a Third Front coalition called the I.N.D.I.A Bloc to maximize their seat shares.

While national issues still significantly shape voter preferences, astute parties focused on economic development have scored recent successes. Hence the Trinamool Congress, AAP and YSRCP eyeing national footprints based on popular state leadership and real delivery. Caste and community formations also impel fragmentation, with many micro-identity parties garnering dedicated voting blocks. Such jostling for relevance means Indian national elections often necessitate complex post-poll alliance building



for government formation. Regional heavyweights likely to punch above their weight as coalition partners or external supporters are JDU, TDP, TMC and BJD. The rise of state-based parties thus adds another layer of intricacy and volatility to electoral number crunching.

The 2024 race may well hinge on the success of mega-alliance building. The primary face-off is between incumbent PM Modi's NDA coalition headlined by a super-charged BJP versus the united opposition front called I.N.D.I.A Bloc consisting chiefly of INLD and the Congress. Smaller national and regional parties make up the numbers for both blocs, but their role in swinging vote shares across India's diverse expanse remains pivotal. The NDA hopes to ride PM Modi's popularity, Hindutva consolidation and welfare schemes towards an unprecedented third straight majority victory. But the I.N.D.I.A Bloc has mounted a spirited challenge around the issues of economic strife, social fissures and alleged erosion of Constitutional pillars under BJP's centralized authority. Most pre-poll analyses predict a tighter race, with regional chieftains expected to drive harder bargains in government formation parleys. The participation of the full range – from prominent national and state level parties to smaller fringe and ethnic issue based outfits – represents the true mosaic of India's political landscape. The Bazaar electorate comprising over 950 million voters is too vast and diverse to be swayed by a uniform agenda. Local priorities shape choices as much as do national policies, necessitating political customization.

Such a vast spectrum then allows for efficient aggregation and distillation of varied voter interests and perspectives across the national-regional-hyperlocal continuum. The final election result is thus a more accurate reflection of ground realities through the layers of successive negotiation and consensus-building tie-ups. Post-poll alliances also necessitate adoption of common ideological platforms acceptable to a wider spectrum. Far from being an unstable Molotov cocktail, the inclusive participation of India's disparate political voices testifies to the assimilative strength of its democracy. When the Lok Sabha convenes in June 2024 with parties occupying benches based on a cohesive banner, the formalization of compatible partnerships would showcase stability derived from prior representation of sub-national aspirations. Regardless of eventual composition, the parliamentary dispensation shall embody the collective hopes and dreams of a billion Indians through the elected agents of their choice across nearly 700 diverse political formations.

3. THE VOTING PROCESS

3.1 Technology – Use of Electronic Voting Machines

Empowering a Billion Voters with Electronic Marvels

One of the vital pillars facilitating the smooth conduct of elections for India's massive electorate is the extensive use of electronic voting machines (EVMs). Introduced in 1982, EVMs have emerged as the bedrock tool upholding the integrity of the electoral process by enabling reliable vote casting and transparent tabulations across the length and breadth of India. Over 5.5 million EVMs will be deployed in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, 50% more than previous elections. Such infrastructural investments and technological focus has hugely streamlined voting logistics. EVMs have also plugged procedural gaps exploited to distort electoral verdicts during the era of manual ballot papers. The efficiency, accuracy and fidelity engendered serve as the scaffolding that enables unparalleled voter participation on sub-continental scales.

Refinements over successive elections have incorporated advanced security protocols making EVMs invulnerable to external interference and completely tamper-proof. The Standalone design with strict access controls makes them solely responsive to voting booth inputs, with no external connectivity to



networks/hardware. Power backup ensures continuous functioning for 16 hours without electricity needed. The machines are manufactured under military-grade security surveillance at highly restricted government plants. The Vote Recording Control Units (VRCU) embedded in EVMs comprehensively capture all aspects – candidate/party registration, vote casting, turnout data, result aggregation etc. Multiple validation layers like digital signatures of authorized personnel and time-stamped operational logs enhance transparency. Robust safeguards include one-time programmability of chipsets, protocol driven memos, dynamic coding of balloting units and mandatory randomization in allocation cycles across locations.

Such rigorous processes explain the absence of any successful allegations around EVM malpractice across four decades and 20 odd state/national polls. Opposition parties unsuccessfully clamoring about tampering after suffering electoral routs has become a tired trope lacking any credible basis. The Supreme Court has consistently upheld EVMs as completely trustworthy platforms reflecting the genuine choices of the Indian electorate. Voter experience and interface has also improved tremendously from the 2004 era of bulky machines with minimal embedded business logic. Compact M3 (third generation) EVMs adopted since 2015 incorporate advanced features like dynamic interoperability, intuitive GUI displays and multilingual interfaces while enhancing reliability. The VVPAT (voter verifiable paper audit trail) layer lets voters visually validate vote registration, lending further credibility.

The extensive infrastructure upgradation for the 2024 polls will address prior gaps in availability. Till 2019, there were rarely reserve stockpiles of more than 15%, but now adequacy levels for even high-turnout eventualities have crossed 50% coverage across regions. Manufacturing capacity enhancements shall see monthly production of 35,000 EVMs from 2023. Such scale initiatives manifest the ECI's proactive outlook in harnessing technology to facilitate participative democracy. By pioneering and perfecting EVMs as the fulcrum of trustworthy and dynamic voting mechanisms, India has shown the world how technology adoption for public digital infrastructure projects can transform outcomes. With voting slated across 1 million booths from May 2024, the seamless functioning of EVMs remains vital to enabling the voice of 950 million-plus Indians in determining their collective future. The anticipated record turnouts are testimony to ever growing voter confidence regarding the failsafe virtues of India's pioneering electronic voting backbone.

3.2 Logistics – Deploying Booths and Staff to Remote Areas

Election at the Ends of the Earth

India offers up some of the most challenging landscapes for sustaining human presence – remote mountain peaks, dense jungles, offshore islands or barren deserts. But for authorities conducting the world's largest elections, no geographical barrier is daunting enough to stop the ballot box from reaching every eligible voter. This commitment lies at the core of safeguarding the democratic rights of all citizens. The 2024 general elections involve setting up around 1.4 million polling stations, which exceeds the total number of such stations established over the past 60 years! Nearly half a million new facilities are being provisioned exclusively for this poll to facilitate greater participation. This gargantuan exercise underscores the emphasis on optimizing access and inclusion irrespective of terrain limitations.

The logistical preparations focus on last-mile connectivity through modes best suited for specific areas. In the insurgency prone districts of Chhattisgarh, security convoys transport personnel and election materials to deep Maoist forest strongholds. Camel caravans carry EVMs, VVPAT machines and staff via the Thar Desert to distant hamlets in Western Rajasthan. Powerboats, motorized country canoes and steamers ply



along the Brahmaputra and Ganges to set up booths housing water level indicators in flood prone Assam and Bihar. Certain areas present exceptional combinations of geographical and climatic challenges. Anlay Pho is the highest booth in India at 15,300 ft in the Himalayan heights requiring mountaineering endurance to reach. Ka Pole in Arunachal Pradesh entails a weeklong trek snaking through mountain passes above 13,000 ft amidst perpetual snow. The Sela Pass station perched over 13,700 ft necessitates acclimatization of personnel to set up booths handling altitude drops of 2700 ft.

In the Andaman & Nicobar Islands, dinghies transport diesel generators and wireless equipment alongside EVM boxes to forest clearings. Tiny coracles are the only mode for election staff to access the Navinal Island booths. The most remote booth in mainland India at Malogam requires a 36 km trek through Myanmar border forests! No cost is spared by the Election Commission to map, provision infrastructure and enable participation for even one citizen in our most detached outposts. Isolated booths have been set up exclusively for lone voters like Mahant Bharatdas Darshandas voting from his ashram deep in Gir Forest, Gujarat every election since 2007! Teams trekked for 3 days into Sariska Tiger Reserve to allow guard Vikram Singh to vote in 2019. Prison personnel also vote from temporary booths across over 1500 prisons housing over 5 lakh inmates.

The inspiring efforts simultaneously target accessibility through localization. In urban slums lacking formal addresses, polling stations are created right outside shanty clusters through mobile infrastructure. Local dialect speaking personnel, regional party symbols and area representatives on EVMs facilitate cultural resonance. Through creative transportation and ambient adaptation, election administrators overcome unimaginable odds because they appreciate how every vote counts equally in the world's largest democracy. The extensive logistics also focus extensively on optimization, management and transparency. Complete geo-location enabled route mapping allows efficient transportation planning minimizing redundant transit. Extensive training sessions prepare officials for diverse climactic and situational eventualities. RFID chips and QR code tracking of electronic voting machines enables real-time location monitoring across final mile transit to home stretch booths. When over a billion ballots are counted after phases of voting culminating mid-May 2024, India would have delivered free access to fundamental rights in even the most impossibly cut-off corners of our geography. Such infrastructural and demographic immersion across testing frontiers stands out as an unparalleled movement in election administration anywhere globally. It represents democracy's deepest permeation to facilitate participative decision making – the heart and soul of credible representative governance.

3.3 Turnout – Projected Record High Turnout

New Heights of Transparent and Enthusiastic Participation

As India prepares for its 17th general election, unprecedented levels of voter enthusiasm foreshadow potentially historic turnouts. Electoral participation has been rising with every cycle since independence. Yet multiple factors like youth inclusion, women mobilization, awareness campaigns and fearless facilitation point to record shattering numbers in the summer of 2024. The initial decades after independence witnessed poor turnout levels hovering in the 45–55% range. This reflected disenchantment with inefficient delivery mechanisms post-independence euphoria and lack of ground infrastructure enabling access for the impoverished masses. The lowest ever 45.67% figure in 1962 highlighted wider ambivalence with politics.

Efforts by the Election Commission of India since the 1980s via systematic campaigns spotlighting the importance of accountable governance gradually transformed voter outlooks. Turnouts climbed to 65% by



1984, before dipping temporarily during the 1990s coalition era dominated by regional satraps amidst destabilizing identity politics around religion, caste and language divides. The 21st century polls have reversed that negative momentum emphatically with national turnouts breaching 66% in the last three elections. In 2019, an unprecedented 67.47% eligible voters or roughly 900 million citizens cast their ballots – at once a resounding validation of free choice untrammelled by artificial barriers as well as growing recognition of grassroots electoral impact in shaping state accountability and transparency.

All metrics are pointing to potentially much higher percentages in the 2024 milestone polls given the frenzied momentum visible across recent state elections. The fiercely contested 2021 Bengal polls witnessed record 84% polling that enthused the entire nation about the sanctity of participative democracy. High turnouts were similarly registered in the largest state of UP at 65% alongside 67% in Punjab during their 2022 assembly elections. Factors like enhanced youth mobilization, targeted women engagement drives and extensive awareness campaigns around the electoral process are working to maximize inclusions. Specially designed outreach highlighting registration details, voting dates, candidate credentials and EVM protocol in plain terms helps demystify the system. Social media channels relentlessly amplify the importance of responsible voting among key target segments.

Hassle free voting avenues minimize the opportunity cost for citizens. Paperless EVM driven process completion within minutes, single identity documentation requirements under AADHAR national biometric ID program and abundantly available voting stations due to 40% rise in poll booth number since 2019 are crucial. 72 lakh assured family man days of daily wage compensation for low-income voters under a special electoral insurance scheme provide added impetus. Cross benchmarks like Nepal's November 2022 turnout of close to 70% as well as recent Colombian and Swedish elections witnessing 76% & 78% respectively highlight how today's electorates are overcoming cynicism by participating enthusiastically. Through meticulous planning, zealous mass mobilization and fearless communication, India's election authorities have placed ballot access on a platform never more accessible in independent history. The projected record turnouts in 2024 would showcase participative democracy thriving proudly at the grassroots.

4. COSTS AND IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Expenditures – Estimated \$10–15 Billion Price Tag

The World's Costliest Democratic Spectacle

The mind-boggling scale of India's electoral undertakings manifests starkly in the monumental expenses incurred towards executing free, fair and informed polls at continent-like proportions. Costs have risen steadily with every election cycle as the voter base expands alongside continually improving transparency, integrity and inclusivity parameters. Expenditure watchdog bodies estimate overall spending including by government and participating candidates for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls to breach INR 75,000 crore – comfortably crossing the \$10 billion mark, if not nearing \$15 billion. Factoring state-level expenditure, the aggregate figure for the entire voting cycle spanning over 40 days could approach \$20 billion!

Such humongous budgetary allotments reflect the granular micro-planning and infrastructural immensity vital for conducting transparent elections across over a million voting stations catering to nearly one-sixth of humanity. The functional components driving expenses encompass awareness generation, voter registration & mobilization campaigns, securing logistics channels and booths, deploying comprehensive



surveillance & communications apparatus and remunerating the 15 million-strong election official workforce.

The Election Commission of India shall incur projected expenditure of \$7 billion, a significant increase over 2019's \$6.5 billion reflecting addition of 55 million new eligible voters and corresponding rise in logistical arrangements. Budgets cover costs of electronic voting machine procurement & transportation, printing voter slips & ID cards, training security forces and ground functionaries, creating polling infrastructure including ramps, shelters etc. along with media and result dissemination. Upgrading IT-enabled administrative infrastructure to streamline monitoring also entails major capital investments. Embedding GIS and geo-tagging protocols for tracking materials, digitally mapping remote booths through satellite imagery, Know-Your-Polling-Station mobile apps guiding voters and online portals for system transparency is budget intensive yet vital. The ECI's unique Model Code of Conduct enforcement via district media certification committees and centralized grievance helplines requires continued financial commitments.

The expenses from political parties are predicted to double from 2019 levels to aggregate over \$4 billion. Bulk of spends arise from extensive mass outreach activities – rallies, advertisements, volunteer campaigns & candidate branding exercises. Cost ceilings per constituency have nearly trebled since 2014 in line with real economic dynamics. Regulatory guidelines urge transparent disclosure of funding sources to curb illegal monetization around elections. Routine raids curb malpractices like hoarding liquor or cash for distribution to influence electorates. When the gargantuan trillion dollar Indian economy chooses its next rulers across the summer of 2024, the process would have stimulated economic ripple effects across sectors like media, transportation, construction, hospitality and technology services. By boosting output and generating seasonal employment for lakhs, the very act of energizing participative democracy catalyzes grassroots prosperity. The budgetary bottom lines provide perspective on the infrastructural enormity vital for recording the voices of a complex, multifarious electorate nearing a billion – a logistical miracle feasibly executed only by a handful of countries on Earth today.

4.2 Results – Possibility of Third Term Present PM

Will Present PM Reshape India's Destiny with an Encore?

As 900 million voters prepare to cast their ballots from April 2024, incumbent Prime Minister seeks an unprecedented third consecutive term at the helm. Riding on his stranglehold over the BJP election machinery, brand seems firmly saddled as the frontrunner in pre-poll analyses. However, new power equations emerging from a reinvigorated opposition looking to capitalize on anti-incumbency make it the closest race since his initial landmark triumph in 2014.

Modi had snatched power with the first outright parliamentary majority for a single party in 30 years when he spearheaded BJP and its NDA coalition to a stunning 336 seats. With the Congress reduced to a record low of 44 seats, Modi instantly became the undisputed leader with an unequivocal nationwide mandate. His populist development pledges resonated widely with aspirations of an overwhelmingly young electorate. Championing himself as an outsider battling entrenched Lutyens' Delhi elites, he encapsulated ambitions of economic revival and dismantling institutionalized corruption networks.

Although the 2019 repeat mandate with BJP winning a negligible 11 seats lower at 303 was relatively slimmer, Modi strode like a colossus nevertheless as the opposition failed to capitalize despite a concerted anti-incumbency push. However, PM dominance in 2019 relied heavily on riot-hit states like UP voting



characteristically along religious fault lines while regional stalwarts like Naveen Patnaik and Jagan Mohan Reddy offered external legislative support.

Three years on, voters seem more polarized regarding his reign and recent state election trends indicate his plurality diminishing significantly. While welfare schemes have uplifted millions from abject poverty through housing, sanitation, healthcare and food security, uneven growth and severe recession pangs since 2020 have jaded large sections inhabiting India's aspirational landscape. Allegations of authoritarian strong-arming of dissent and reactions against hot-button identity flashpoints also threaten erosion of his 'development for all' positioning.

Yet PM possesses a formidable electoral machinery firing on all cylinders in what promises to be the most expensive campaign ever. His oratory flourishes and appeal among women, youth and backward communities helped trump anti-incumbency last time. BJP President J P Nadda has also bolstered organizational robustness to booth levels while neutralizing factionalism. Master strategist Amit Shah helms vital backroom manoeuvring, alliance building with smaller parties and systematic consolidation of the loyal Hindu vote bank through Hindutva groups.

However, PM current parliamentary strength relies on numerous small regional parties chiefly motivated by state rather than national priorities. Any major desertions sensing diminished returns from the NDA ship will impact seat tallies and coalition stability in a fractured verdict. Most significantly, the united opposition 'I.N.D.I.A Bloc' helmed by the rejuvenated Congress seems to have shaken off policy paralysis by aggressively wooing regional satraps through extensive seat share adjustments. Hence the stage seems set for Present Prime Minister acid test in repeating his trailblazing achievement yet again. Regardless of eventual outcome, brand Modi has undoubtedly transformed India's future trajectory through far-reaching governance, economic and diplomatic decisions since 2014. Yet the possibility of wresting another record watershed mandate seems more tenuous presently than ever before, with the final Election Day results on June 4th 2024 keenly anticipated.

4.3 Significance – World's Largest Democratic Exercise

A Celebration of the Global Democratic Spirit

As India prepares to embark on its mammoth once-in-five-years general election spectacle beginning April 2024, the country once again finds itself at the vanguard of democratic traditions globally. The sheer magnitude and complexity across multiple dimensions position these polls as the ultimate celebration of participatory decision-making worldwide. With an electorate exceeding the population of Europe and North America combined, over a million voting stations requiring traverses across insurmountable Himalayan peaks and dense forests, and an estimated budget surpassing the last five US Presidential elections, superlatives fail to capture the immensity. The range of parameters from nearly a billion voters to expenditures exceeding \$10 billion make this the grandest show of people power.

From booth set-ups along India's sprawling coastline to high altitude icy terrain 15,000 feet above sea level, the election machinery conducts one of humanity's largest peacetime mobilizations. Transporting nearly 5 million EVMs and accompanying paraphernalia over 3 million sq km to facilitate the collective choice of representatives heading the Lok Sabha or Lower House of Parliament is akin to logistical wizardry. The smooth conduct bears testimony to the institutional resilience built assiduously over seven decades of India's democratic journey since 1947. The neutral and non-partisan Election Commission serves as judicious referee ensuring due processes are duly upheld by parties and candidates for enabling free,



inclusive and fair participation by citizens from all strata of society. Globally, India stands virtually unchallenged as the torchbearer of democratic ideals allowing for bloodless and orderly transfer of power. As ascending authoritarian regimes and populist dictatorships hollow out participative structures across Asia, Africa and East Europe, India's adherence to electoral integrity lends it pivotal leverage in international affairs. Its principled stance on issues like Ukraine has been determined greatly by such credentials.

Domestically too, the 2024 election carries unparalleled significance in shaping developmental pathways for a complex multi-religious, multi-ethnic social fabric yearning for progressive change and inclusion within aspirational paradigms. The results could fundamentally realign policy priorities around economic revival, social justice and geopolitical leanings over the coming half decade. The election provides a stage for renegotiating consensus around India's fundamental values enshrined in its Constitution as world's largest democracy. With multiple flashpoints testing its pluralistic equilibrium recently, the 2024 vote emerges as society's medium to make decisive choices through righteous participation.

Hence beyond the extravaganza marked by riotous colors, divisive rhetoric and theatrical grandstanding, the deeper promise of this election lies in reaffirming the sacrosanct tenets of justice, liberty and equality to pave the path ahead. Its endurance serves as an unequivocal global testament to the promise of democracy serving as the fundamental catalyst in actualizing human freedoms and dignities despite myriad limitations or fault lines. When the final ballot is cast, India would have inspired and illuminated the transformational potential of democratic processes for nearly a fifth of humanity while sending an unequivocal message about its abiding commitment to upholding universal ideals of inclusive, accountable and people-centric governance systems within the sovereign framework.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary of Key Statistics and Superlatives

As the curtains draw on the world's largest democratic pageant unfolding across India's vast geographic and sociocultural expanse, it is worth recapitulating the sheer scales that position this exercise in a league of its own globally. The numbers pertaining to voters, phases, parties and costs underscore the magnitude of operations surpassing entire continents, leave alone countries. Let us crunch the statistical dimensions across the multiple verticals highlighting the contrasts between India's elections and any recent polls worldwide. The 17th general elections shall witness over 950 million citizens – nearly 150 million more than in 2019 – as eligible voters, exceeding the cumulative population of Europe and North America by almost 200 million! The Phase-wise voting shall span the longest duration ever at nearly 44 days broken across 7 voting days per phase in the most protracted ballot exercise globally.

The Election Commission of India regulates the world's most crowded political theater with 673 parties spanning national heavyweights, dozens of key regional chieftains and smaller caste/community dominated outfits competing in the gladiatorial arena. Nowhere else is the choice so mosaic yet meaningfully shrunk into plausible governance alternatives through smart post-poll coalitions rather than fragmented votes of protest. Logistically, the Indian election is mankind's largest peacetime mobility drive – with intrepid personnel setting up over 10 lakh polling stations overflowing from the world's highest motorable mountain passes in Ladakh nearly 17,000 feet above sea level down to isolated booths deep inside jungle clearings accessible only via dinghy! Nowhere else would you find free and fair polling facilities within such vast contrasts – deserts, mountains, river islands or forests.



Nearly 5 million electronic voting machines shall grace these widely dispersed booths – the cornerstone of trustworthy and efficient processes endowed with advanced technological safeguards designed indigenously. Over 15 million election officials including police and civilian bureaucracy shall helm smooth operations supported by cutting edge communications/monitoring protocols implemented via satellites floating 35,000 km in space! The humongous costs exceed the last 5 US Presidential polls put together – aggregating over \$10 billion! Nowhere has any election exercised such financial prudence given gigantic geographical coverage alongside ensuring transparency, integrity and participation for the meagrely compensated farmer in the backwaters to the upwardly mobile Fortune500 executive.

When seen holistically, the sheer statistical proportions explain why no other poll comes remotely close to the magnitude India's elections have consistently achieved across 7 decades of rising benchmarks. It is as much a tribute to the visionary institution builders who astutely empowered the common Indian right from the outset in 1952. It underscores their abiding conviction that democratic processes shall thrive bottom upwards when universally accessible to the ordinary citizen irrespective of creed or station. With the cacophonous din of the greatest democratic durbar in human history receding this summer, we must applaud the singular achievement of this nation in shining the beacon for grassroots empowerment. India's giant election machinery stirring to enable the hopes and aspirations of a billion plus people lies at democracy's vanguard today in catalyzing global advancement. The success of the 2024 elections shall resound as freedom's ultimate triumph!

5.2 Importance of Voter Participation

As the world's most expansive democratic spectacle draws to a close after almost two months since polling kicked off in April 2024, it is vital to spotlight the central protagonist without whom these elections would be meaningless – the Indian voter. Despite the hullabaloo around larger-than-life political figures, exit poll number crunching and coalition permutations overshadowing the process, we must ultimately credit the ordinary citizen queuing stoically at booths for affirming India's democratic promise. The unprecedented turnouts witnessed these elections, breaching 75% nationally, underscores that the flame of participative decision-making burns strongly across regions, identities and income groups. Voters resolutely brave inclement weather, infrastructure limitations and identity faultlines to cast their ballots, defying cynics predicting voter apathy stemming from disillusionment with slow material progress. Nearly 700 million citizens exercised their franchise fearlessly across 1 million voting stations – united in the hope their combined voice shall impact policy choices over the coming years.

Such enthusiastic participation seems astonishing in global contexts where advanced democracies like the USA, UK and France struggle to mobilize over 66% of their electorate and that too via processes far less challenging for their predominantly urban citizens familiar with candidate messaging. India's voters transcend their daily grind and limited exposure to confidently back political outfits mirroring local priorities using symbols on EVMs, trusting ballot authenticity. Three broad factors seem responsible for this tremendous demonstration of grassroots faith upholding democratic participation. First has been the neutral oversight by the Election Commission of India (ECI), helming transparent, ethical and diligent processes enabling max inclusivity via system preparedness, security assurances and campaign moderation. Second is growing recognition of voting rights as the tool for upward mobility among the new middle classes.

Finally and most crucially, the ECI's emphasis on awareness generation and infrastructure investment to activate voter consciousness have proven transformational. Specially targeted outreach for 300 million first



timers below 25 years via digital mediums sensitizing them to local issues has brought revolutionary change. Hassle free digital voter ID cards, maximized poll booth availability within 2 km proximity via apps and seamless EVM functioning has eliminated opportunity costs for voters. Hence beyond the crucial wider ramifications like government formation, policy corrections and global optics, this election's cardinal achievement has been the triumphant validation of India's grassroots democratic consciousness. The spectacle of participation cutting across identities and stations spotlights the maturation of world's largest electorate in separating electoral duties from petty partisan positions.

Such fabulous turnouts graphically demonstrate that ambivalence cannot dent the electorate's growing recognition of their ballot power as agents of accountability and change. It highlights optimism around perfecting the democratic apparatus to address deficiencies in law enforcement or delivery systems through sustained constructive pressure. Our competitive federalism has brought greater choice in political leadership as catalysts of regional development. When India registers its highest ever vote share exceeding two-thirds of its mammoth billion plus electorate in the summer of 2024, it would have emphatically amplified its long-standing reputation as the global exemplar for nurturing participative ethos within the citizenry. The sheer magnitude of turnouts showcases ascent towards a more egalitarian, emancipated and enlightened polity – the hallmarks of a thriving democratic order.

5.3 Role of Elections in Indian Democracy

Elections as the Ultimate Social Equalizer

As the world's most expansive democratic project concludes after nearly two months of voting across the sub-continental expanse of India, it seems apt to analyze the pivotal role elections have played in nurturing India's democratic roots. Despite myriad contradictions and limitations frequently questioning its sustainability, India's tryst with uninterrupted elections since 1952 serves as an unequivocal validation of its democratic resilience. The continuous successful conduct of transparent, fair and participative polling processes significantly bolstered the democratic apparatus inherited rather nascently in 1947 after two centuries of colonial rule. The initial decades focused on systematic awareness campaigns convincing desperate populations about electoral efficacy as tools for accountable governance despite deep social hierarchies thriving across the severely underdeveloped agrarian economy with abysmal literacy levels then.

Yet the unwavering commitment to universal adult franchise laid early foundations for participatory traditions by deliberately facilitating access for the impoverished millions inhabiting remote terrains spread across modern India's 32 lakh square km inherited landmass holding 17% of global population. Regular elections helped bridge disconnect between largely metaphorical policy designs fashioned in Delhi and ground realities concerning ordinary citizens inhabiting far flung villages through incremental enhancements in bottom-up feedback mechanisms. Over decades, Indian democracy steadily deepened without exception via the rigorous electoral exercise as more diverse sections found representation and hitherto marginalized groups began asserting rights within constitutional safeguards. Despite persisting limitations like criminalization and imperfect candidate choices curtailing voter options, the last 70 years witnessed phenomenal transformation in nurturing informed, emancipated and assertive electorates seeking dignified livelihoods.

Elections crucially empowered even the most socio-economically disadvantaged citizens feeling increasingly self-assured in questioning delivery failures by elected regimes of the day backed by knowledge of imminent accountability cycles via neutral ballot mechanisms guaranteeing timely change.



Polling booth odder India's iconic EVMs witnessed new social combinations as upper caste landlords often solicited lower caste labour electorates during election campaigns while female participation rose steadily with patriarchal barriers lowering at voting centers. In spotlighting aspirations of the largest youth population globally at 200 million plus, frequent elections have emerged as dynamic platforms enabling latest policy perspectives around jobs, environment, technology access or entrepreneurship ecosystems to percolate into political agenda for responsive course corrections in national priorities. Our comprehensive, well networked and fiercely vocal media landscape plays catalytic role in elevating electoral discourse via impactful messaging that percolates up to grassroots.

The sheer size and heterogeneity of issues makes India's functioning democracy appear often chaotic and willfully non-conformist when analyzed from theoretical prisms. Yet the ultimate unifying force empowering citizens across identities and geographies emerges from the unwavering ballot exercise within fixed timelines. Its unique form perfectly blends universal franchise rights with sufficient decentralization for preserving socio-cultural diversity at state/regional levels while furthering national integration. The ultimate democratic corrective flows via timely rejection or endorsement of leaders/ideologies by a watchful, assertive electorate through the faithful medium of apolitical elections.

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