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Infrastructure and Inclusiveness in Election Administration: Insights from India's General Elections

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ABSTRACT

The Lok Sabha (Lower House of Parliament) elections of India, represent the world's largest democratic exercise, requiring an extraordinary scale of logistics, manpower and infrastructural readiness. This paper analyses the operational magnitude of Lok Sabha elections by assessing candidates, electors, polling stations, mobility assets, observers, surveillance teams, home-voting facilities, etc. The findings suggest that India's electoral process is characterised by a strong emphasis on inclusiveness and involves substantial human and material resources and elector-friendly polling stations. The result advocates the complexity and advancement of India's election system. The findings show India has set up a global benchmark in democratic setup by implementing innovative strategies for enhancing the cost-efficiency and effectiveness of sustainable elections.

Keywords: Election, Democracy, Lok Sabha, Polling Stations, Inclusiveness, Election Commission of India, Credible Elections



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INTRODUCTION

Election Commission of India (ECI) is a constitutional Body created under Article 324 of the Constitution of India. It was set up on 25th January, 1950 and plays a crucial role in upholding the democratic principles of India by conducting elections that are free, fair and transparent. India, the world's largest democracy, conducts its Lok Sabha elections as the most democratic event in the world with exceptional fairness. There are 543 parliamentary constituencies, approximately 98 crore voters and the voters are some of the most diversified in the world. The government has to undertake a lot of effort to organise elections in India. Indian elections are widely regarded as the largest peacetime administrative exercise in the world.

It is the biggest exercise in managing a single event anywhere in the world.

Voter-focused programs have become more popular in the previous several years, which has also impacted how elections function in India. Home voting facility for those over 85 and people with disabilities and deploying various observers and monitoring teams.

The commission does everything to reach every last voter. Election rules require that no Indian citizen should have to travel more than two kilometers to vote, whether they live on the world's highest mountains or on a desolate island. Thousands of polling officials often walk for two or three



days to reach polling stations, which might be otherwise inaccessible, just because 'every vote counts'.

A polling booth was also set up in remote Gir Forest National Park in the western state of Gujarat just for one voter living there. The polling officials wait for him to come and vote at any time he chooses. In the northeastern state of Arunachal Pradesh, on the border with China, polling officials hike for a day to reach Malogam village, where one woman is registered to vote.

In Ladakh region of Jammu and Kashmir, a polling station is set up at an altitude of 4,327 meters for 12 voters. Polling officials carry oxygen tanks to reach the village of Anlay Pho, which is 4,500 meters above sea level. In the southernmost Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the Indian Ocean, polling officials set up polling stations for nine voters after traveling through swamps infested with crocodiles.

The electoral system in India has been a work in progress from the beginning. During independent India's first general elections in 1952, separate ballot boxes were used for every candidate. A decade later, in 1962, India introduced the common paper ballot for all candidates in a constituency and voters marked their preference.

Electronic voting machines were introduced in all state elections since 1998 and since 2004 in the parliamentary elections. In 2013, ECI added the Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail, which is essentially a printer attached to the electronic voting machines that allows each voter to print out a piece of paper that shows which candidate he or she voted for. It can be used to crosscheck the results shown by the machine if there is a dispute.

Given these developments, a data-driven assessment of India's election infrastructure is essential for understanding how resources are mobilised, how administrative capacities are deployed across phases and how inclusive practices are integrated within such a massive democratic event. Generally, many studies focused on electoral behaviour and political outcomes^{14, 15}. But the administrative side of elections such as managing logistics, poll workers, mobility, security arrangements and making elections inclusive for all remains under studied

Thus, the present study evaluates the administrative including security and expenditure monitoring, logistical and inclusive dimensions of India's election system, using official data from a national election cycle⁴. By analysing indicators related to candidates, electors, polling stations, observers, mobility resources, surveillance teams and special voting provisions, this paper reflects a comprehensive picture of the scope and operational scale of India's electoral infrastructure. Such an analysis helps in understanding both the strengths and emerging challenges

of conducting elections in one of the world's most diverse democratic systems.

While examining the administrative dimensions of election management, this study explores how electoral infrastructure relates to issues of democratic governance, organisational preparedness and the participation of diverse groups of electors. The findings suggest that conducting elections in countries characterised by large electorates and considerable social and geographical diversity requires more than efficient logistical arrangements. It also depends upon the ability of election management bodies to facilitate voter access, maintain confidence in the electoral process and uphold trust among different stakeholders. Drawing upon existing literature on electoral governance, the study seeks to offer insights for comparative studies on the management of elections in democratic settings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Free, fair and trustworthy elections are the foundation for assessing other aspects of democracy. According to Lindberg (2004)¹¹, having a free and fair election is crucial for ensuring that power is distributed fairly and helps make a democratically elected government more legitimate and respected.

Bush and Prather (2018)³ define an election as credible when people trust the results and feel it truly represents what they want. This trust comes from how fair and free they believe the election process was.

Elections in India are not only a constitutional procedure; they are also a complex administrative challenge that demonstrates the country's desire for democracy and the administration's capacity to manage it^{9, 10}. McMillan (2010)¹² states that the ECI makes sure that the process is fair and steady, even when there are a lot of candidates and political parties.

A lot of people think that India's voting system does a great job of balancing size, diversity, honesty and logistical difficulties. Researchers have emphasised that the institutional changes of the ECI, encompassing the implementation of the Model Code of Conduct and the use of technology for oversight, establish a global benchmark for electoral administration^{16, 17}. Comparative studies in electoral administration indicate that no other nation conducts a single-day or staggered national election with a population as large and spread across difficult terrains, linguistic regions and socio-economic conditions^{2, 13}.

McMillan (2010)¹² says that the Commission's power originates from the fact that it is independent, setup by the Constitution of India and can compel politicians follow the



regulations and model code of conduct and other instructions issued by the commission. Kumar (2013) also discussed how managing elections has changed over time by suggesting the logistical modifications required to conduct elections on an unprecedented scale^{9, 10}.

International IDEA (2018)⁷ envisages on transparent, inclusive and logistically effective elections. UNDP (2017)¹⁸ believes that election regulations should include people with disabilities and must take into consideration the gender issue. These stages are fairly similar to what many ECI initiatives do.

Basu (2018)¹ talks about the difference in the number of women and men running for office, even if more women are voting. Jaffrelot and Verniers (2020)⁸ investigate the difficulties of preparing and executing elections in a country marked by a diverse population. Electoral management bodies' capacity influences politicians' levels of democratic satisfaction⁵.

These studies demonstrated that because of "inclusive, accessible and participative" elections, the ECI is now a well-known Election Management Body around the world. The ECI make it sure that vulnerable, other marginalised groups and remote area electors are fully involved. Innovations like Home Voting and the use of technology have significantly brought convenience for voters⁴.

METHODOLOGY

This study analyses the available data on India's Lok Sabha elections by describing, comparing and interpreting the major components of the election system. The data includes information on candidate demographics, the size and gender composition of the electors, polling stations, deployment of observers and surveillance teams, logistics including transportation and home-voting facilities.

The findings drawn from the data analysed by incorporating them to existing academic literature on electoral management, inclusiveness and administrative capacity. The study aimed to understand how different administrative arrangements contribute to the effective conduct of elections involving large electorates, diverse populations and significant logistical challenges. Thus, by studying both, the earlier published work and present work, the methodology helps clarify why certain patterns appear and what they indicate about the functioning of India's election system. The aim of this paper is to understand and highlight the logistics, inclusiveness, resilience and structural scale of India's elections by combining descriptive data analysis with insights drawn from established scholarly work.

RESULTS

There were 8,360 candidates, 800 of whom were women, 7,554 of whom were men and 06 of whom were third-gender. 47,63,11,240 women electors out of 97,97,51,847, in 2024 General Elections, compared to 43,85,37,911 in 2019. In 2024, female electors were 48.62% as compared to 48.09% in 2019. In 2024, number of female electors per 1000 male electors made a new high i.e. 946, as compared to 926 in 2019. Percentage of female electors who exercised their franchise was 65.78% as compared to 65.55% of Male Electors. Females outnumbered men in 2024 again like in 2019; this is only the second time in the history of General Elections to Lok Sabha. Third Gender Electors were 48,272 in 2024, compared to 39,075 in 2019. An increase of 23.5% over the five-year period. Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) electors were 90,28,696 in 2024, compared to 61,67,482 in 2019. Percentage of transgender voters (third gender) voted in Lok Sabha Elections 2024 was 27.09% as compared to 14.64% in 2019, almost a double. Registered Overseas electors were 1,19,374 in 2024 as compared to 99,844 in 2019.

Number of Female Contesting Candidates was 800, compared to 726 Female Contesting Candidates in 2019. No Female Contesting candidates in 152 parliamentary constituencies (PCs) out of all 543 PCs.

Even though more men and women are voting, male candidates outnumbered female candidates i.e. men still have a lot more power in politics. This is in keeping with what Pal and Singh (2020)¹⁴ found, which is that the gap between men and women in voter registration and participation is narrow.

As it is said that Indian elections are united in diversity, empowered by inclusion. Data provided by ECI also reflects the same echo. To accommodate the huge number of electors, 10,52,664 lakh polling stations were put up as compared to 10,37,848 in 2019. These included 1,640 stations run by disabled officials, 9,100 polling stations were all-female managed and 4,195 model polling places.

World's highest polling station set up in Tashigang, Himachal Pradesh to serve 62 voters from Tashigang and Gete. This polling station is not only a crucial part of the democratic process but also a model polling booth. Malogam polling station in Anjaw, Arunachal Pradesh has the unique distinction of serving the lone female voter, who exercised her democratic right. For the single voter, a team of polling officials trekked nearly 40 km on foot through treacherous terrain and set up a voting booth in the remote polling station.

Polling station established in Banej village, nestled deep within the Gir forest, Gujarat specifically to accommodate



the solitary voter residing there. For a single family of five members, polling station was set up in a remote village of Washi in Leh district. Simplified registration process for voting by Kashmiri migrants and 26 special polling stations set up in Jammu, Udhampur and Delhi for migrant Kashmiri voters in addition to postal ballot facility. In a pathbreaking initiative for a Lok Sabha Election, the facility of home voting was provided for over 81 lakh 85+ aged voters & over 90 lakh Persons with Disabilities (PwDs). Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTGs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) participated in huge numbers, with Shompen tribe of Great Nicobar voted enthusiastically in the festival of democracy.

These activities show that India is committed to serving the needs of electors, so that 'No Voter to be Left Behind'. All these are in accordance with UNDP's (2017)¹⁸ suggestions for making elections fair and open to everyone.

The election's logistical challenges are shown by the fact that there are around 1.8 lakh vehicles, 138 special trains and 682 helicopter missions. Jaffrelot and Verniers (2020)⁸ call Indian elections a "mammoth administrative choreography," and these outcomes are in line with the logistical problems they pointed out.

There were 1,620 observers in all the constituencies. These were a mix of general, police and spending observers. Also, there were 25,073 Flying Squads, 27,510 Static Surveillance Teams, 9,967 Video Surveillance Teams and 5,613 Video Viewing Teams that helped with enforcement. The level of enforcement backs up McMillan's (2010)¹² allegation that the ECI has set up a very strong system for keeping an eye on things to make sure that people follow the rules for elections.

1,495 international border checkpoints and 7,066 interstate checkpoints is another proof that election management is focused on security, which is meant to stop the illegal movement of materials that can change how people vote. Thus, ECI provides equal level-playing field to all stakeholders.

In 2024, election in one parliamentary constituency, Surat (Gujarat), was uncontested. So, total Voters (including postal voters) in 542 PCs were 64,64,20,869. Out of these voters, the number of EVM voters were 64,21,39,275 and the number of Postal Ballots were 42,81,594 including electors with home-voting facility. Out of these 64,21,39,275 EVM Voters, 32,93,61,948 were Male voters, 31,27,64,269 were Female Voters and 13,058 were Third Gender voters. The total voters during these elections are more than 1.5 times the voters in G7 countries (US, UK, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Canada) and 2.5 times of all voters in 27 countries of the EU, who participated in their last National Election in these countries. This indicates a strong commitment to including vulnerable voters and

aligns well with the UNDP's (2017) framework for accessibility and inclusivity. In reinforcing Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International IDEA is also working on 'Tackling the barriers to inclusion in democracy'¹⁸.

Table 1: Key Election Administration Indicators Overview (India, Lok Sabha Election 2024)

Category	Variable	Value
Lok Sabha Seats	Total Seats	543
Candidates	Male	7554
	Female	800
	Other	6
	Total Candidates	8360
Electors (crores)	Male	50.3392335
	Female	47.6311240
	Third Gender	0.0048272
	Total Electors	97.9751847
Polling Stations (lakhs)	Total PS	10.5266
Special PS	All-Women PS	4195
	PwD-managed PS	1640
Logistics	Helicopter Sorties	682
	Special Trains	138
	Vehicles Used (lakhs)	1.8
Observers	General	626
	Police	339
	Expenditure	655
Enforcement Teams	Total	1749
	FST	25073
	SST	27510
	VST	9967
Checkposts	VVT	5613
	Inter-state	7066
Home-voting Registrations	International Border	1495
	85+ Voters	73.5 lakh
	PwD Voters	80.85 lakh
	Total	154.35 lakh

Table 2: Composition of Electors and Polling Stations

Variable	Male	Female	Third Gender	Total
Electors (crores)	50.3392335	47.6311240	0.0048272	97.97,51,847
Candidates	7554	800	6	8360
Special Polling Stations	—	—	—	4195
PwD-managed PS	—	—	—	1640



Table 3: Logistics and Security Deployment

Category	Value
Helicopter Sorties	682
Special Trains	138
Vehicles Deployed (lakhs)	1.8
General Observers	628
Police Observers	341
Expenditure Observers	780
Total Observers	1749
FST	25073
SST	27510
VST	9967
VVT	5613

Table 4: Home Voting Facility

Category	Registrations (lakhs)
85+ Voters	73.5
PwD Voters	80.85
Total Home-Voters	154.35

Table. 1 gives a full picture of the election's scope. Table. 2 shows how well elections include people of different genders, Table. 3 shows how logistics and scale work and Table. 4 shows home voting facilities, which is a new area of research in international election management.

DISCUSSION

In a country as huge and diverse as India, conducting elections throughout the country is not simple. The findings confirm that electoral system of India handles an extraordinary scale manpower and logistics, this is possible because of strong institutional frameworks. The polling stations with assured minimum facilities shows accessibility and inclusivity. This was also discussed by International IDEA (2018)⁷ by highlighting the importance of widespread polling locations, diverse transportation arrangements and multi-layered monitoring systems. The presence of observers, flying squads and surveillance teams further reflects the Election Commission of India's commitment to free, fair, transparent and credible elections as also emphasised in McMillan's (2010)¹².

Additionally, the deployment of vehicles, security staff and specialised teams illustrates the immense coordination among different states and machineries. The introduction of home voting marks an important shift toward greater inclusion for senior citizens and persons with disabilities as recommended by the UNDP (2017)¹⁸ for more accessible electoral systems. Although the increasing participation of women electors represents an encouraging trend, the limited representation of women among candidates

suggests that barriers to political participation continue to persist beyond the electoral administration process itself. This finding highlights the distinction between electoral inclusion as voters and broader issues relating to political representation¹.

The findings also point to the practical challenges involved in conducting elections across an electorate of this size. Growing logistical requirements and oversight arrangements demand considerable financial resources, administrative coordination and manpower. Maintaining these arrangements in future elections is likely to become increasingly demanding as the number of electors rises and public expectations for accessible and transparent elections continue to grow.

The Indian experience also contributes to wider debates on electoral governance. They suggest that constitutional provisions alone are insufficient to ensure electoral credibility. Administrative effectiveness, the capacity to respond to emerging challenges, and sustained public trust are equally important components of successful election management, particularly in democracies marked by large electorates and considerable geographical diversity.

Overall, the patterns in the data demonstrate that India's electoral system is both strong and adaptable. Electoral credibility depends upon the extent to which elections are perceived to be free, fair, inclusive and transparent. Besides these basic pillars, protecting the rights of eligible electors, providing level-playing fields to every stakeholder, immediate time-bound response to complaints, creating safe, easy to access and accurate election systems by protecting from undue interference by any country or forces is also ensured by the Election Commission of India.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The present study is based primarily on officially published secondary data relating to the conduct of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. While these sources offer extensive information on various aspects of election administration, they do not necessarily reflect the perspectives and experiences of election officials, candidates or electors. In addition, the study focuses on the administrative dimensions of election management and does not explore the broader social and political factors influencing electoral participation. Further research could examine these issues through field-based investigations and comparative studies across different electoral contexts.

CONCLUSION

Elections to the world's largest democracy pose immense challenges with respect to logistics and man/ woman and material management. The Lok Sabha Elections 2024 show the huge size and effort involved in conducting elections in India. The Election Commission of India managed a huge



and complex exercise across different regions, terrains and communities with nearly 98 crore electors and more than 10.5 lakh polling stations. The number of observers (General, Police & Expenditure), expenditure monitoring teams, logistic arrangements and security measures shows micro level planning and coordination to ensure that elections are conducted smoothly and fairly.

The findings also show strong efforts were done to make elections inclusive. Polling stations were set up in remote and difficult areas so that every voter could participate. Home voting was provided for senior citizens above 85 years and for persons with disabilities. The increase in the number of women voters and the rise in registration of third-gender electors also show positive effect of voter education and awareness programmes.

At the same time, some concerns remain. There were fewer women candidates than men, which shows that women need to be more politically aware. As the number of electors continues to grow, it will also be important to manage costs and coordination across law, administration, technology, logistics and various stakeholders to ensure that the system remains efficient and credible.

The experience of the Lok Sabha Elections 2024 reflected that robust institutions, meticulous preparation and a sustained effort make it possible to conduct large and complex elections and at the same time keeping them accessible and voter-friendly. India's experience offers important insights for the comparative study of electoral administration. The conduct of elections involving nearly one billion electors illustrates the importance of institutional resilience, inclusive practices and effective coordination mechanisms in sustaining democratic legitimacy. While contextual differences limit direct replication across countries, several aspects of India's experience, including its emphasis on accessibility and extensive administrative preparedness, may provide useful lessons for electoral management bodies operating in increasingly complex democratic environments.

DISCLOSURE

Ethical Statements

This article does not contain any studies with human or animal participants.

There are no human participants in this article and informed consent is not required.

Declaration of conflicting interest

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

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