Electoral View - India

***Broadcasting representative Democracy, One Clip At A Time***

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# Executive Summary

In an era dominated by an abundance of information yet plagued by a lack of clarity. Our project aim to transform the complex world of electoral data into accessible, understandable, and engaging content, by leveraging the power of short videos. This initiative seeks to bridge the informational gap, ensuring that the essence of democracy is not lost in transformation or translation.

India's demographic landscape, with over 600 million individuals under 25, presents a unique opportunity in the digital age. This young, tech-savvy population predominantly interacts with content through social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube, where short videos thrive due to their brevity and visual appeal. Acknowledging this shift, our project endeavors to simplify complex electoral data into concise, visually stimulating short videos. These are designed to resonate with a broad audience including first-time voters and rural inhabitants, often bypassed by traditional media channels. Our strategy intertwines ADR’s data-driven research with automated storytelling, aiming to produce short videos that are not only informative but also engaging and widely shareable on social media.

The vision for this project extends beyond mere information dissemination; it aspires to cultivate a transparent, participatory electoral process, thereby enhancing democratic engagement. By empowering voters with easily digestible and reliable data, we anticipate a improvement in voter awareness, engagement, and participation, reinforcing the democratic foundation in India.

# Context and Need

The 2019 Lok Sabha elections not only exposed the stark wealth disparities among candidates but also reflected the broader economic spectrum of Indian politics. With individuals from Bihar and Telangana reporting assets in the hundreds of crores, the need for financial transparency becomes evident. This economic diversity spans the length and breadth of the country, from urban centers to rural constituencies, highlighting the varied financial and criminal backgrounds of electoral candidates. The participation of diverse political parties in asset declaration further emphasizes the ubiquity of wealth across the political landscape, necessitating a platform where voters can access clear and comprehensive financial data. This level of transparency is crucial for ensuring that voters can make informed decisions, free from the influence of wealth and power dynamics. ADR and National Election Watch have done a terrific job in addressing this problem and find better ways to gain access to this information.

Our project, through the innovative use of short video, aims to make the electoral data accessible and engaging, particularly for demographics like the youth and young adults who are often overlooked by traditional media. By transforming dense financial and electoral information into digestible content, we strive to enhance voter engagement and participation across the socio-economic spectrum. The initiative also serves as a barricade against the tide of misinformation, offering a trusted source of factual and unbiased information to counter speculative and misleading narratives. Furthermore, the project's commitment to continuous electoral education extends beyond periodic elections, aiming to instill a deep-seated understanding and appreciation of democratic processes and responsibilities. This continuous engagement is designed to cultivate a well-informed electorate that actively participates in shaping a dynamic and robust democracy, ensuring that the pillars of transparency, accountability, and informed participation are firmly upheld.

## Evolution of Media Consumption in India

The digital landscape in India has undergone a dramatic transformation in the past decade, significantly altering media consumption habits. As of 2021, the country boasted over 600 million internet users, a figure projected to rise substantially. This growth is driven by the affordability of smartphones and data plans, broadening the reach of digital content across diverse population segments.

Young Indians, a considerable demographic force, are spearheading this digital revolution. Their preference for quick, engaging, and visually captivating content mirrors global trends, gravitating towards short-form video platforms such as Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts, and, prior to its prohibition, TikTok. These platforms have emerged as primary sources for information, entertainment, and social interaction, particularly among the younger crowd.

The conventional reliance on print, television media or blog posts for election information is diminishing within this younger demographic, who are now turning to faster and more interactive news consumption methods. This shift poses challenges for electoral engagement, as traditional media may no longer suffice to engage this dynamic and tech-savvy audience. It emphasizes the need for electoral information providers to evolve with these changing consumption patterns to stay relevant and effective.

The evolution in media consumption offers a unique opportunity to utilize short video content for electoral education and engagement, aligning with the communication preferences of the younger generation. This alignment can render electoral information more accessible, engaging, and influential, potentially enhancing political awareness and participation among this key demographic.

At the heart of democratic governance lies informed participation, where citizens make electoral decisions based on a comprehensive understanding of their choices and the consequences thereof. Thriving democracies depend on well-informed voters. This project is dedicated to improving decision-making quality by offering voters succinct, factual, and easily comprehensible information about candidates and electoral processes, facilitating choices that accurately reflect their preferences and aspirations.

Accessible and trustworthy information about electoral candidates and processes is vital for ensuring transparency and accountability within democratic frameworks. This project aims to shed light on candidates' backgrounds, policies, and performances, holding them accountable to the electorate and promoting a culture of transparency.

By making electoral information widely available, the project empowers individuals across all societal sectors, regardless of socio-economic or educational backgrounds, to actively engage in the democratic process. This empowerment is in line with the democratic principle of equal participation, where every informed vote contributes to shaping the nation's future.

Continual education about democratic processes and rights is crucial for maintaining engagement beyond the electoral cycles. This project seeks to foster an informed, vigilant, and proactive citizenry, engaged with democracy not only during elections but as a part of ongoing civic commitment, thereby reinforcing the democratic fabric of the nation.

# Methodology

India, as the world's largest democracy, faces unique challenges due to the scale of its elections. In the 2019 general elections, approximately 8,000 candidates contested across 537 constituencies, presenting a daunting task for comprehensive coverage by mainstream media. This situation underscores the limitations of traditional media in providing detailed, constituency-level analysis, especially given the scarcity of non-partisan news outlets. This gap in the media landscape offers a distinct opportunity to deliver impartial, on-demand information to voters, achievable through targeted social media posts for a limited duration.

The success of this project hinges on translating candidate information into English, available through the National Election Watch and the MyNeta (<https://www.myneta.info/>) website. The plan is to utilize this data to craft concise videos, contingent on obtaining the necessary permissions and access. The strategy involves distilling data points into succinct statements for audio narration, complemented by on-screen text, candidate photos, and party symbols. Enhancing these videos with pictorial symbols can add depth to the message, making the information more relatable and impactful. A proposed technical workflow includes using Python scripts, Google's Text-to-Speech service, and generative AI for creating visual symbols on backgrounds, aiming to produce engaging and informative short videos.

The process involves generating symbolic backgrounds, formulating data-driven statements, converting these statements into audio using text-to-speech technology, and then assembling these elements into videos that also feature candidate and party visuals. After production, videos would be stored and categorized by constituency, enhancing accessibility and relevance.

For dissemination, the strategy encompasses utilizing YouTube, Instagram, and Reddit, each requiring a tailored approach.

* YouTube's playlist feature can organize videos by constituency, offering a systematic viewing experience.
* Instagram's strategy could vary between individual posts or dedicated pages for each constituency, with the latter providing a more streamlined user experience but requiring logistical considerations.
* Reddit offers a platform for dedicated subreddit pages, ensuring wider reach.
* Additionally, Twitter's Lists feature might be employed for similar purposes, pending platform limitations and permissions.

Interactivity and outreach are pivotal, suggesting a dual approach developing a comprehensive website with search functionality and leveraging local influencers to amplify the message. The website would serve as a central hub for all constituency wise post related information, while engaging local influencers could enhance visibility and credibility, promoting widespread information dissemination and engagement.

This approach can also be applied to various Indian languages that support Neural or WaveNet options in Text-to-Speech services. An additional step would involve translating the informational data points into the respective languages using Google Translate. Given the higher error rate of automated translations, it would be prudent to include a disclaimer noting that the content is in a beta version.

# Timeline

Given that the elections are structured in seven phases, we can strategically target constituencies based on their polling schedules. Each video production cycle is anticipated to take approximately one hour per constituency, with the entire process for generating and posting videos for 537 constituencies expected to take no more than five days. While there are opportunities for process optimization, this serves as a preliminary estimate for the required timeframe. Below is a proposed timeline for initiating the video production process, aligned with the polling phases:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Phase | Polling Date | Number of Constituencies | Initiation Date |
| 1 | April 19 | 102 | April 15 |
| 2 | April 26 | 89 | April 21 |
| 3 | May 7 | 94 | May 2 |
| 4 | May 13 | 96 | May 8 |
| 5 | May 20 | 49 | May 15 |
| 6 | May 25 | 57 | May 20 |
| 7 | June 1 | 57 | May 25 |

The additional days allocated for each polling date are designed to ensure the proper setup of cloud systems, generation of videos, quality checks on the videos, and verification of posting the videos onto social media platforms.

This schedule should serve as an effective guide for the timely creation and dissemination of the video content. Additionally, automating the tagging process could further streamline operations and enhance efficiency.

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# Budget

The projected total budget for this project is approximately Rs. 13,000 (around $150). However, with the provision of an email address and the necessary permissions, costs could potentially be nullified utilizing the credits provided by Google Cloud for new accounts. Below is a detailed breakdown of the estimated costs:

**Cloud Compute Machine:**

A reference C3-standard-4 machine costs \*$0.257584 per hour. The proof of concept, which processed data for 50 candidates, took about 1 hour. Extending this to 8,000 candidates across two languages, the computation would require:

Total hours = (8000/50) \* 2 \* 1 = 320 hours

Cost for compute = 320 \* $0.257584 ≈ **$82**

**Google Text-to-Speech Generation:**

On average, each candidate's data consists of 245 characters, necessitating audio generation. For 8,000 candidates in two languages, this equates to 3,920,000 characters.

The API is priced at US $16 per 1 million characters.

Total cost for speech generation= $3.92 \* $16 = **$62.72**

**Storage:**

The project is expected to require about 20GB of storage, with costs at $0.02 per GB per month.

Total cost for storage = $0.4

The upload script can operate on a free tier virtual machine, incurring no additional cost. While these prices are subject to change, any fluctuation is anticipated to be within a 20% margin

**Monitoring and Evaluation**

For every video, a disclaimer should be included, stating that the data has been sourced from the Election Commission of India (ECI), and viewers should report any discrepancies via a provided email address. This email needs to be actively monitored to address any reported discrepancies or grievances promptly.

After the videos are uploaded to social media platforms, tracking, and analyzing viewer engagement is essential. Usage statistics will offer insights into the reach and impact of the content. Additionally, monitoring and analyzing comments for user sentiment can be achieved through existing automation tools or custom scripts, providing valuable feedback on public perception.

While there's no definitive measure of success for this aspect, aiming for 24 million views across the approximately 12,000 videos is an ambitious yet attainable goal. This figure represents approximately 10% of the active social media users, based on an estimate that 60% of the 400 million active social media users are of voting age. Although achieving this level of engagement depends on various factors, such an outcome would indicate a significant impact, reflecting positively on the project's success and its contribution to informed electoral participation.

# Proof of Concept (PoC)

I've proactively created a proof-of-concept script in English that needs just slight adjustments to be fully production-ready with the actual data. By harnessing information from <https://www.myneta.info/>, I've gathered details on the Lok Sabha 2019 election winners (excluding by-elections) and crafted their videos.   
Please use the links below to access a sample of 543 videos.

Youtube - <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLZ_abrVkRYFgsTcbki7j9Do3H3wUPYTnb>

Instagram - <https://www.instagram.com/bharatiya_1857/> (Requires Login)

The YouTube videos can be viewed though the above link and not though the profile while the Instagram post will need you to login to the account. The upload scripts are in-progress, and I will upload all the videos once it is developed.

Although these videos haven't been formally evaluated for reach, the preliminary feedback from my network has been exceptionally positive. This response boosts my confidence in the content's potential to captivate and provide value to a wider audience upon its public release.

# My Request:

I am enthusiastic about contributing to your efforts in transforming the electoral landscape of Indian democracy and am keen to play a role in this transformative journey.

To effectively implement this project, I require direct access to comprehensive data on candidates, constituencies, and states, as well as the underlying data models. Relying on scraping data from your website would introduce unnecessary delays and could compromise data consistency.

For post-project analysis, accessing user activity data through the user account would be crucial. This access would allow me to refine the code for future integrations and enhancements based on user interactions and feedback.

As an NRI, my perspective might seem distant, yet I am genuinely interested in deepening my understanding of the Indian electoral system. Your guidance would be invaluable in navigating its complexities and identifying potential areas for improvement, ultimately aiding in devising effective solutions.

If you find this proposal agreeable and are willing to provide the necessary data and support, I am prepared to finance this initiative and proceed with minimal guidance from your IT and legal teams.

# Summary

The project aims to provide ease of access to electoral data in India by creating short, engaging short videos using data from the My Neta website. The intent is to make complex electoral information easily accessible and engaging, particularly targeting the young adult demographics. The methodology involves distilling data points into succinct statements for audio narration, and enhancing associated video with pictorial symbols, using a technical workflow that includes Python scripts, Google's Text-to-Speech service, and generative AI.

For implementation, direct access to comprehensive data on candidates, constituencies, and states is required to avoid delays and ensure data consistency. The project will utilize social media platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and Reddit for dissemination, with strategies tailored to each platform's unique features.

The request emphasizes the need for access to user activity data for post-project analysis to refine future integrations and enhancements. I would like to express a strong desire to contribute to and understand the Indian electoral system better and seeking guidance from your esteemed organization and its members.