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Relating Systems Thinking and Design
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From Perception to Power: Unravelling the infamous Indian voter and the dynamics of democracy

Ananaya Singh, Neil Barnabas, and Vacha Patel

In this study, we embark on a captivating journey through Indian democracy, with a special focus on the enigmatic, Infamous Indian Voter. As new voters ourselves, we were drawn to the complexities of the electoral process and the power it bestows upon individuals. Through immersive research and data collection, we unveil the remarkable realm of Indian elections—a colossal spectacle driven by technology, deeply rooted in democracy, and guarded by a constitutional body. However, the true essence lies in the mysterious nature of the Indian voter. Known for their unpredictability, these voters defy conventional norms and prioritise factors beyond economic growth. Our aim is to decode their perspectives, motivations, and the immense influence they hold in shaping the nation's future. Through qualitative and quantitative research methods, we explore the intricate tapestry of Indian democracy, interweaving the complexities of logistics, media, campaigns, ideologies, transparency, and more. The gigamap provides a comprehensive view of the interplay between leadership, governance, and the indomitable spirit of the Indian voter. By understanding the power of perception and acknowledging the volatile nature of voter behaviour, we unlock the potential to fortify the democratic framework and build a more inclusive society where every voice finds its place.

KEYWORDS: systems, system design, voting, voters, elections, democracy, leadership, governance

RSD TOPICS: Policy & Governance, Culture & Society, Mapping & Modelling

Setting the Context

At its core, democracy is a process, not a state, which has come into existence after a long period of trial and error owing to its ability to accommodate change.

Our initial connection with this space formed due to the fact that we were about to vote for the first time. As new voters ourselves, we were faced with a whole new ecosystem to navigate and base our choices on a multitude of inputs. This gave us a sense of responsibility and opened doors to various avenues we hadn't consciously explored before. The deeper we delved into this, the more the complexity boggled us.

Immersed in this context, we uncovered the remarkable and distinctive realm of Indian elections—a colossal spectacle, electronically driven, democratic to its core, logistically mammoth, and guarded by a constitutional body. Yet the most distinctive and crucial part of the Indian elections was hardly explored - The Infamous Indian Voter.

While Democracy has managed to connect with the population on its stance of freedom of choice, it is not without its shortcomings. When a governance style is by the people, for the people, the onus of smart choices also lies with them. The Indian voter, infamously notorious for being unpredictable, has kept the political parties on their toes by compounding individual choices into a magnified impact. This holds true, especially in the case of Indian voters, who have long defied the orthodox notion of voting based on economic growth. Although changes are afoot, voters have set precedence of prioritising other factors—namely patronage, populism, parochialism and more.

Intentions

Consequently, we set out with this project to try and decipher the voter perspective, mainly their—experience, excitement, perception, and motivation, and determine the future power of the nation and, subsequently, the global narrative it weaves.

Humans are perceptive creatures. These perceptions form consciously or subconsciously over time. This is the basic idea our systems map builds on. Facts and figures about elections have always been prevalent. Elections are, however, a play of feelings. For us, they ceased to be mere statistics. It's about connecting with voters and being able to gauge their responses and needs. This enabled us to start forming a vague

idea about the various aspects from which we explored the macro system of leadership in humans and animals and how it related and evolved into governance. Democracy emerged not only as a standalone system but as a vital cog within a layer of a deeply interconnected ecosystem—a realisation that magnified the appreciation for its underlying complexities.

Creative Process

We followed a rather organic methodology in the initial stages to absorb and accumulate insights via conversations with stakeholders to understand mental models and motivations. This directed our research on a majorly qualitative axis of trying to gauge the influences stemming from and affecting voters. The gigamap is a result of intensive field research across three cities in India with qualitative samples of over 50 individuals across stakeholder groups and 200 responses in quantitative studies. Our quantitative data was collected via surveys, and qualitative data was collected via stakeholder interviews, task analysis, museum visits, polling booth visits, task mappings, component maps, influence maps, hierarchy mappings, empathy maps, and personas.

The resulting gigamap showcases an intricate tapestry that traces the evolutionary path of leadership and various forms of governance in animals and humans, ultimately converging upon the phenomenon we know as democracy. This map breathes life into the excitement and sentiments of voters throughout the election journey, interlacing the complexities of logistics, media, campaigns, ideologies, transparency, and much more.

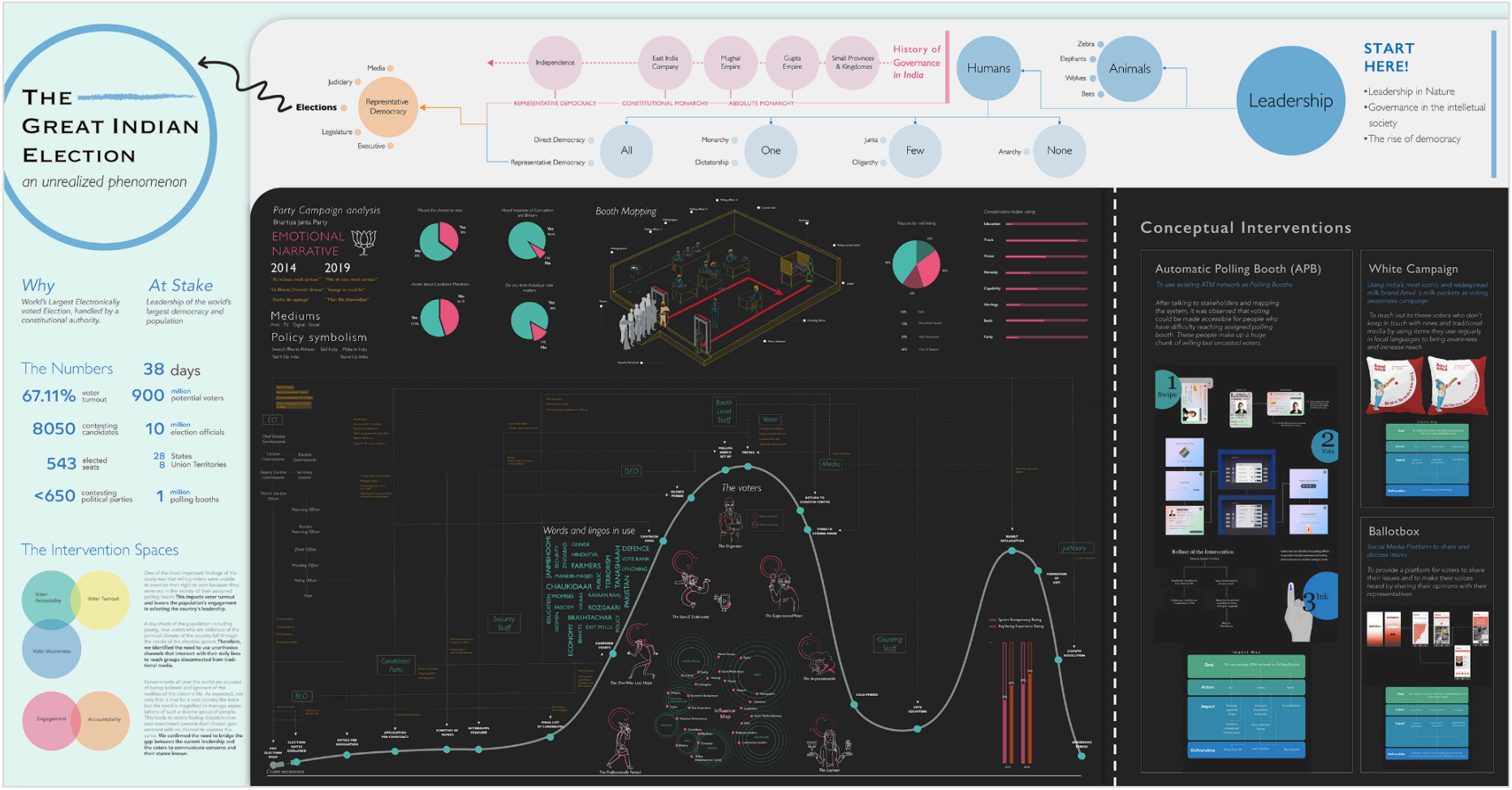
The gigamap goes beyond observation; it unveils proposed solutions that bridge the identified gaps within the democratic landscape in India. Despite a comparatively high turnout, there are still groups of voters who fall through the cracks and are unable to participate in the decision-making process.

The intervention areas uncovered include but are not limited to awareness, accountability and attendance. These were mitigated by using unconventional channels that intersect with their daily lives via a White Campaign, bridging communication gaps between current leadership and voters via Ballotbox, and leveraging existing infrastructure to maximise voting opportunity via an Automatic Polling Booth (APB),

respectively. We derived that each intervention area uncovered had the voter at its centre. It thus became apparent that volatile voter behaviour is an unacknowledged cornerstone around which Indian democracy is built.

Reflection

In conclusion, the gigamap offers a progressive and all-encompassing view of governance not only within the natural order but also in the thriving democracy that pulsates through the fabric of India. By unravelling the power of perception and acknowledging the volatile nature of the infamous Indian voter, we unlock the potential to fortify the democratic framework. Our endeavour is to build a more inclusive and resilient system where every voice finds a place and the cornerstone of Indian Democracy is truly celebrated. Through this exploration, the map represents a remarkable interplay between democracy, perception, and the indomitable spirit of the infamous Indian voter.


THE GREAT INDIAN ELECTION
an unrealized phenomenon
Why
World's Largest Electronically voted Election, handled by a constitutional authority.
At Stake
Leadership of the world's largest democracy and population
The Numbers
38 days
67.11% voter turnout
900 million potential voters
8050 contesting candidates
10 million election officials
543 elected seats
28 States 8 Union Territories
<650 contesting political parties
1 million polling booths
The Intervention Spaces
Voter Accessibility
Voter Turnout
Voter Awareness
Engagement
Accountability
Media
Judiciary
Elections
Representative Democracy
Legislature
Executive
Independence
East India Company
Mughal Empire
Gupta Empire
Small Provinces & Kingdomes
History of Governance in India
REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY
CONSTITUTIONAL MONARCHY
ABSOLUTE MONARCHY
Humans
Animals
Zebra
Elephants
Wolves
Bees
Leadership
START HERE!
•Leadership in Nature
•Governance in the intelletual society
•The rise of democracy
Direct Democracy
Representative Democracy
All
Monarchy
Dictatorship
One
Junta
Oligarchy
Few
Anarchy
None
Party Campaign analysis
Bhartiya Janta Party
EMOTIONAL NARRATIVE
2014 2019
Mediums
Policy symbolism
Booth Mapping
Words and lingos in use
The voters
Conceptual Interventions
Automatic Polling Booth (APB)
To use existing ATM network as Polling Booths
Rollout of the Intervention
White Campaign
Ballotbox
Social Media Platform to share and discuss issues