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Digital Mobilisation and the AI Frontier: Assessing Voter Awareness and Perception of AI Based Content in the 2025 Bihar Assembly Election

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Abstract

A powerful human tool that has become instrumental in shaping the world around us is the technological revolution. One of the prominent areas where the latent potential of this is witnessed is the use of AI and state-of-the-art technology for shaping elections in India. While the use of AI has transformed the manner in which elections are conducted in India, however an alternative side of this emerging agency of power also needs due consideration. For research purposes, this study is anchored in quantitative methodology primarily based on survey data of 398 voters, conducted during the Bihar assembly election 2025 across eleven districts of Bihar. The preliminary findings indicate that a significant number of voters consume AI-generated content, but do not know the source or the manner in which it is created. It also highlights the perception regarding the misinformation generated through it for the purpose of manipulating the cognitive domain of the voter to achieve the electoral objectives of various political parties. The role of political consultants is becoming increasingly prominent in handling the strategic and technical aspects of it during elections. In this context, it is argued that in recent times, rapid advancements in technology, particularly AI in elections, raise grave concerns regarding governance and regulation, specifically when there's a dearth of law and other legal measures to regulate it.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence, Electoral Participation, Bihar Election 2025, Digital Democracy, Political Consultancy*

Introduction

The rapid growth of artificial intelligence (AI) and data analytics has significantly transformed electoral campaigning across the globe, particularly in India, since 2014, coinciding with the boom of social media and digital campaigning in Indian general elections. Political consultancy, once rooted in traditional methods like mass rallies and print/media ads, has now shifted towards data-driven, AI-enabled approaches. AI tools such as voter segmentation, predictive modelling and sentiment analysis now allow political consultants to craft highly personalised messages and target voters on a micro level (Bonier, 2018).

According to Privacy International, microtargeting is the use of personal data "to target you with information and adverts to an unprecedented degree of personalisation" (Meryl Sebastian, 2024). Artificial intelligence, along with such vast data without a proper framework to handle it, puts a lot at risk. During a pilot interview with a consultant, when asked about the access to data about voters, the response was that "we get data from the government officials about different schemes beneficiaries, which we further process for microtargeting them."

Further, when asked about whether the opposition raises concern for it, "No, actually it's about

influencing those who are in power; they get data easily, and those not in power also get it with the influence of the leader's image or connections" (Anonymous, 2024). Another consultant was of the opinion that booth management and money management plays much more important role than anything else. According to him, there are a number of rules and regulations related to polling booths which could be helpful for their clients who are contesting elections, so their team gave extra attention to booth management along with other services (Yatin Parmar, 2024).

The absence of a comprehensive framework leads to various issues related to data management, gathering, harvesting, and ethical utilization in the era of artificial intelligence. According to a survey conducted in the USA, "With enough money, 40 per cent of the consultants say they can get voters to accept a weaker candidate. And 44 per cent of them conceded they've been sorry about some of the people they helped win office" (*Washingtonpost.com: Consultants' Ethics: Politics Survey Finds Attitude of 'Don't Blame Us'*, 2015).

Many scholars have pinpointed the importance of perceptions among the people to get into power and sustain it. So, it is important to delve deep into the receiver's end, i.e., contestants in elections and those who vote. Technological advancement over the period of time played an instrumental role in communication dissemination and narrative build-up. Artificial intelligence is one of the interventions that has been one of them. In recent times it has been an important tool for the political consultant and political parties for content generation. Acknowledging this phenomenon, the Election Commission of India came up with a guideline for the political party , asking them to label it and use it responsibly and transparently (Election Commission of India, 6th 2024). While existing research focuses on AI's strategic use in campaigns, there is limited empirical evidence on voter awareness and perception of AI-generated political content in emerging electoral contexts like Bihar.

This paper deals with the voter awareness and exposure of AI in elections and how do voters perceive AI-driven political communication in a state-level Indian election.

Literature Review

Over the last decade, a profound transformation driven by the integration of AI has been seen in electoral campaign sphere. This shift is frequently conceptualised through the theoretical frameworks such as "computational propaganda", "algorithmic campaigning", and "political automation" which collectively describe how political actors leverage big data, machine learning, deep learning and automated systems to organise campaigns, manipulate public opinion, and influence voter behaviour (Arabaghatta Basavaraj, 2022; Veneti, Lilleker and Jackson, 2022).

The most important shift is the widespread use of predictive analytics and voter segmentation. nowadays campaigns are guided by Ai-based sentiment analysis on vast datasets derived from social media platforms, online forums and public polls, which enables them to map voter preferences and optimise their advertising strategies in real-time (Li, 2024). By generating granular psychological profiles, political consultants are able to execute micro-targeted messaging through different means tailored to the specific demographic and psychographic vulnerabilities of individual voters (Zuboff, 2022; Maine and Esiefarienrhe, 2024). This practice was notably observed in the Cambridge Analytica case (Zuboff, 2022; Li, 2024). These type of campaign optimisation strategies, maximises resource efficiency but fundamentally alter political communication by replacing public discourse with individualised appeals with narrowly focused appeals delivered out of the public eye (Phadnis and Khandelwal, 2022).

Beyond analytics, political automation has expanded through the deployments of chatbots, automated messaging networks, and AI-driven content generation. These bots on social media are routinely used to stimulate grassroots engagement, amplify specific narratives, and engineer artificial consensus (Carvajal, Graniel and Mata, 2024; Islam *et al.*, 2024).

With a double-edged nature of AI usages, raised a polarised scholarly debate regarding its democratic implication at large. On one side scholars argue that AI enhances democratic engagement by facilitating personalised communication, expanding political accessibility, streamlining voter registration processes and helps in other beneficial processes. On a different note, scholars are critical about the way AI fundamentally exacerbated manipulation, information asymmetry and intensify political polarisation (Chennupati, 2024). AI based algorithms are being designed in such a way which foster echo chambers and filter bubbles that limit exposure to diverse viewpoints.

In Indian context, During the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections, as well as Assembly election in Karnataka, political parties heavily relied on political consultancies and localised IT cells to manage vast WhatsApp networks for decentralised, micro-targeted campaigning (Arabaghatta Basavaraj, 2022; Phadnis and Khandelwal, 2022). The 2019 and 2024 National elections marked by the rapid spread of AI-generated fake news and doctored videos that helped in shaping and manipulating voter sentiment and exacerbated communal tensions (Dhanuraj, Harilal and Solomon, 2024; Islam *et al.*, 2024). Moreover, scholars noted that western-centric models of algorithmic fairness are often insufficient in Indian context as current policy and guidelines fail to adequately address the issues at large (Biju and Gayathri, 2024).

After the critical evaluation of the methodological approach of the existing literature reveals notable limitations. A notable portion of the research into AI and elections relies heavily qualitative case studies, insider interviews with political consultants, and retrospective analysis of digital trace data harvested from social media platforms (Vaccari, 2010; Jungherr, 2016; Veneti, Lilleker and Jackson, 2022). While these approaches effectively map the supply side of algorithmic campaigning, they frequently lack rigorous experimental designs. Also, there is limited empirical evidence capturing voter-level awareness and perception, particularly in subnational electoral contexts like Bihar.

Theoretical Background

Due to development in information technology and spread of internet penetration, digital technologies has created an important place in modern electoral processes as it allows the convenience for political actors in interaction with voters, quick response to political events and increases the level of public engagement which saves not only in terms of cost but time as well (RUDNIEVA, 2024, p. 175). To better explain this adoption of technology and its cognitive implication for voters, our study is grounded in Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which put forward that individual's acceptance of a technology is determined by two key factors: perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use (Davis, 1989). Different studies have used this framework to understand different dimension of technology acceptance across diverse fields, including education, healthcare, e-commerce, and public administration (Chan and Teo, 2007; Malatji, van Eck and Zuva, 2020; Abuhassna *et al.*, 2023). AI driven tools such as personalised messaging, targeted advertisement, sentiment analysis, perception management are being handled to enhance the accessibility and relevance of political communication particularly during election campaign. Through the lens of TAM, voters are more likely to engage with the content when they perceive it as useful or informative about the political issues and the ease to consume through widely accessible digital platforms. So, it becomes an important lens through which examination of how voters interact with and respond to AI mediated political communication could be well understood. In this study, smartphone access reflects perceived ease of use, while voter engagement and interpretation of AI-generated content relate to perceived usefulness.

Methodology

This paper adopts cross-sectional quantitative survey design. It was conducted during 2025 Bihar Assembly elections, to capture the real-time voter awareness and perceptions in an active electoral environment. It is thereby reducing recall bias and enhancing contextual validity. A mul-

ti-stage systematic random sampling approach was employed to cover the diverse geographical and demographic context within Bihar (Lokniti, no date). Initially, 11 districts were randomly selected from a total of 38 using probability proportional to population size. In the second stage, one assembly constituency was randomly selected from each selected districts i.e. 11 constituency. In the final stage, polling booths within each constituency were selected using systematic random sampling, two booths from each of the sampled constituencies. At last, it was followed by sampled participants. It has been done in Microsoft excel. The data of all the assembly constituency has been downloaded from Bihar's chief electoral office website to understand (Total Electors as per the proposed Final roll w.r.t. 01.01.2024 as qualifying date) as well as gain the other minute details about migration (Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, Bihar, 2024).

In order to fulfil the sample, from each booth 20 participants were required. But 45 participants have been sampled, to mitigate the unknown circumstances but there were a large number of participants who either went for harvesting or migrated for work. To map out the logistics requirement, it was necessary to get the coordinates of the all the booth, so to reach at the exact place. KOBOTOOLBOX is a software to collect data through survey, has been utilised in this fieldwork for data collection. The survey measured three key dimensions: (1) digital access, (2) awareness of AI, and (3) perception of AI's role in elections. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, before asking further questions for survey. Those participants who did not consented, we moved to next participants in the row of sampled participants. Then, after the data collection it has been manually cleaned to make it ready for further analysis with the help of MS-Excel.

Findings

Demographics: There are around 96% of the participants who have consented for the survey, these are the people whom we had been able to find somehow as shown in Figure 1. People mentioned different issues such as non-availability of time, busy with campaigning, harvesting season, some of them feared we are from government department and may twist their data, due to which they were hesitant in sharing perception regarding our research.

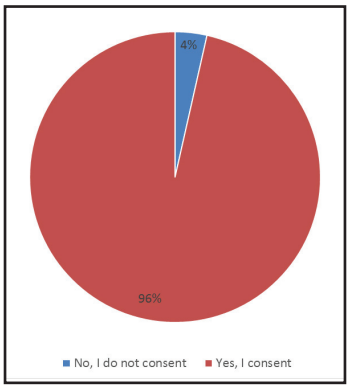

Fig. 1: Consent for Survey by Participants

Initially our survey started with the understanding and screening of the people who were above 18 years of age and will be voting in this election so to screen them out based on it, around 90% of the participants had voter id card as shown in pie chart from Figure 2. It was a nuanced observation that people did have their name in last electoral role but did not find their place in the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) which was conducted during the Bihar assembly election 2025, till the time we surveyed them and did not have the knowhow of the current status.

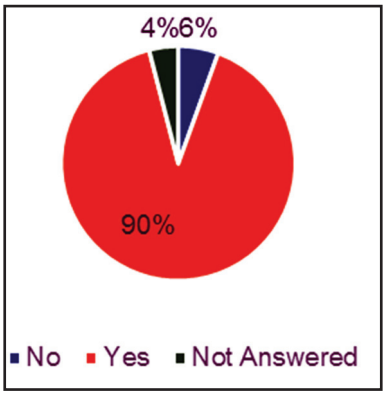

Fig. 2: Name in Voter List

From figure 3, it can be inferred that the largest portion of around 63% of the surveyed popu-

lation did have smartphones and around 18 % had basic keypad phone which was only used for cellular calls and other basic stuff but cannot connect to internet and use it for social media usages. There was a meagre 5% of them only had both kind of Mobile phones. But there was 10% of the participants who did not have any of them.

Digital Access

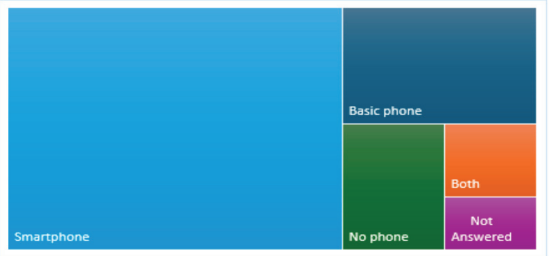

Fig. 3: Type of mobile phone used by Participants

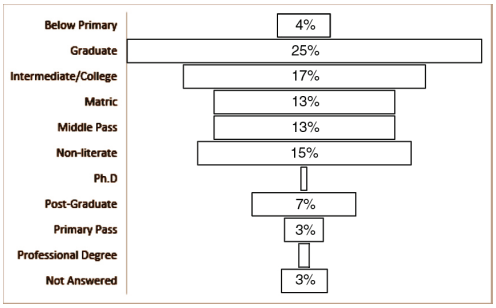

Fig. 4: Highest level of Education

In this survey 25% of the total consented participants was graduate whereas 17 % of them passed Intermediate and 15 % of them were illiterate and there were two researchers also as shown in Figure 4.

Awareness of AI

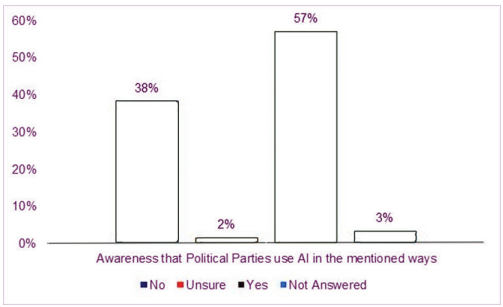

Fig. 5: Awareness that parties use AI in said way

Due to unawareness about the usages of AI in election by different stakeholders, we did provide certain examples, before asking questions, provided context, "*Now, we will talk about Artificial Intelligence (AI). This includes personalised ads on social media, automated WhatsApp messages, and digitally created videos of leaders.*" about the usages of AI based technology and its application in electoral campaigns and microtargeting then the question was asked *"Before this survey, were you aware that parties use AI in these ways?"* and around 57 % of the total respondents said yes and 38% said NO and 2% of the total surveyed participants said they were unsure about it. Here it suggest that while 57% report awareness of AI use, a majority simultaneously report uncertainty about its impact, suggesting surface-level awareness without functional literacy.

Perceptions of AI

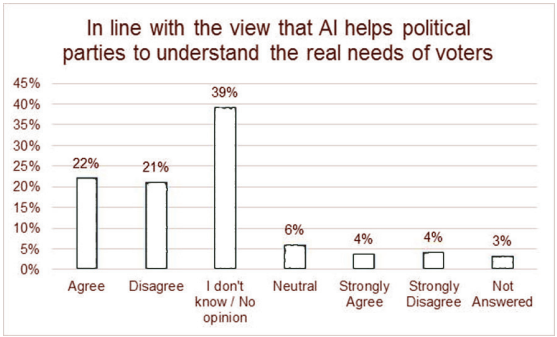

Fig. 6: Perception about AI helps political parties understand the real needs of voters

It was interesting to understand their perception regarding the political parties and their usages of AI in understanding the real needs of the voters, i.e. developing an organic understanding from bottom to top rather than political parties pushing their narrative from top to down. Figure 4 suggests that the highest percentage of people registered their perception as "I don't Know/ No opinion".

Concerns: Privacy & Misinformation

When asked about *"Please indicate how much you agree or disagree: The use of AI in campaigns is an invasion of voter privacy.",* 36 % of the respond-

ents had marked *No opinion or I do not know* option and there were around 6% who choose Strongly Disagree and 5% participants clicked on Neutral option.

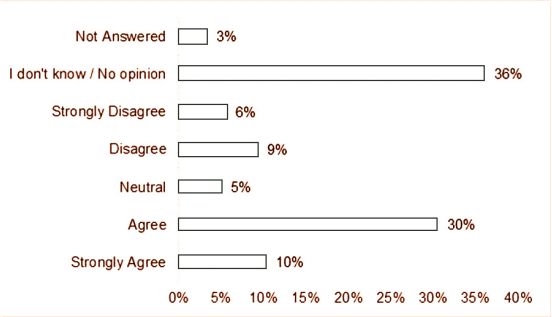

Fig. 7: Perception regarding use of AI in campaigns is an invasion of voter privacy

Discussion and limitations

AI plays an expanding role in political campaigning, including voter targeting and content generation. These applications, noted by various authors, range from generating instant responses and targeted ads to optimising fundraising efforts (TOMIĆ, DAMNJANOVIĆ and TOMIĆ, 2023; Indian Political Action Committee, 2024) While these applications promise greater efficiency and effectiveness in campaigning, they also introduce emerging ethical dilemmas, these transformations are also reflected at the voter level, as observed in this study, where a significant number of participants reported exposure of AI-driven campaign content.

Existing studies highlight several limitations of AI in political campaigns, including the concerns around transparency , bias and data privacy (Khare, 2023). These concerns are reflected in the findings of the survey, where a large portion of participants expressed uncertainty regarding the implications of AI in electoral process.

AI's increasing role in elections could prioritise data-driven decision-making over traditional democratic processes. One of the first notable uses of AI in an Indian election campaign was a deepfake video, in which a politician's speech was convincingly lip-synced into Punjabi (NDTV, 2020). The emergence of artificial intelligence (AI), especially deepfakes, poses significant challenges to the fairness of elections as mentioned by (CBC News: The National, 2024; DW News, 2024). when asked from the participants in survey regarding the usages of this technology as invasion of their privacy 30% agreed and 36% had answered as I don't know/no opinion. It shows one third of the participants had no idea about it, which is a significant portion.

Deepfakes are sophisticated fake videos created using AI algorithms, which can spread misinformation and distort public opinion (NDTV, 2020). The inability to distinguish between authentic and manipulated content can erode trust in electoral processes and influence voter decision making. To address this issue, regulations are needed to control the spread of deepfakes, and educational efforts is required to equip voter at large or people, about how to recognise them (The Deshbhakt, 2024). Without these measures, the integrity of democratic processes could be at greater risk. The high portion of participants responding with 'No opinion', in this study suggests uncertainty, which may increase vulnerability towards to misinformation as well as disinformation.

This study contains several limitations which need to be acknowledged. First, it is based on quantitative data with 397 participants, and there were sampled participants who did not participate which may lead to selection bias, due to which it cannot be generalised for the whole state. Second, it is a cross-sectional survey, and to understand better, a longitudinal data collection will provide a deeper and comprehensive changes regarding the perception in due course of time. Third, while our study tried to report on awareness and perception regarding AI usages, it does not directly measure an actual exposure to it. It is based on the participants perception and the way they reported it. Finally, our study focuses on quantitative survey data, and future research could benefit from incorporating qualitative segment to gain deeper insights into voter cognition and interpretations of AI-driven political messaging.

Regulatory Frameworks and Policy Recommendations

Regulatory responses and ethical considerations regarding the use of AI in elections, particularly by political consultants in India, are critical to maintaining the integrity of democratic processes. As AI technologies, including deepfakes and data analytics, become increasingly prevalent in electoral campaigns, there is a pressing need for comprehensive frameworks to govern their usage.

Scholars have highlighted in a number of research studies recently the kind of impact AI has on elections in swinging public perception, due to which there is a need for a comprehensive framework for regulatory purposes. AI has the potential to enhance democratic processes by improving voter engagement and political representation; at the same time, it also poses risks such as misinformation campaigns and voter manipulation (Thapa, 2024). Research indicates that the public differentiates among various applications of AI in elections, expressing significant opposition to deceptive practices (Jungherr, Rauchfleisch and Wuttke, 2024). Countries like Indonesia are investigating legal measures to control AI in elections in order to address these issues. These measures include introducing legislation specifically addressing AI and harmonising current electoral laws. A balanced strategy that encourages responsible development while reducing potential risks is necessary for the effective governance of AI. This calls for thorough policy frameworks that handle risk management and ethical issues in a variety of industries affected by AI technology (Chhatre and Singh, 2024).

India's existing data protection and election laws remain inadequate to regulate AI's impact on elections. The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, and the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, have provisions on data privacy but lack specific guidelines on AI transparency. There are frameworks and guidelines released by different ministries. The proposed Digital India Act, 2023, which was presented in Digital India Dialogues on 09.03.2023 by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, has not seen the light of day. These emerging ethical dilemmas, from voter manipulation via deepfakes to privacy breaches highlight the gaps in current regulatory frameworks and public understanding, underscoring the need for comprehensive research into AI's role in electoral democracy.

Biju and Gayathri argue that due to lack of a robust privacy regime and data protection policy, accessibility to the large volume of data becomes easily accessible to the public and private sectors, in comparison o contexts with stringent privacy laws (Biju and Gayathri, 2024, p. 2333). They also advocate for a formal regulatory regime.

Conclusion

Artificial Intelligence and its application are increasingly shaping electoral processes, particularly through its role in political communication and campaign strategies. Findings in our study suggests that there is need for enhanced digital literacy that goes beyond access to include critical understanding of AI-generated content. It adds that while a significant proportion of voters are exposed to AI-generated political content, many lack the ability to meaningfully interpret or evaluate it. In the domain of elections, AI and its application is utilised for good as well as had repercussion, when applied for misinformation, or to create deepfake videos for tarnishing the image of a leader or political parties. The findings underscore the need for regulatory frameworks to ensure transparency and accountability in the use of AI in election. A coordinated effort is needed from the side of civil society as well as the government to tackle the issue. Election is one of the most important component of the democratic framework and level playing field needs to be provided by the Election Commission of India and the concerned department for free and fair election for which literacy and regulation is needed about the technology in election and public disclosure of the algorithms used by the political parties during election so to audit for a better democratic process to prevail and pave the way in becoming a developed country at the earliest.

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