# PERCEPTION SURVEY IN DELHI ON IMPACT OF ELECTION CAMPAIGNS

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**Abstract:** Perceptions are knowledge and judgment, and voters had a perception or opinion about the electoral process based on their experience and expectation. Such opinion was sought to be represented in committees set up to explore electoral reforms, and also in election studies. Voter perception might also be molded through tools of perception like electoral campaigns, media coverage and the voter surveys. Under study in this research paper is the impact of one such tool, electoral campaigns, on voter perception. The objective of the present study was to ascertain the impact of election campaigns on the perception of voters in a highly mediatized location within the democratic sphere. Additionally, the study sought to learn; (i) if such perception was retained by the voter over a period of time; (ii) if the voter was aware of negative campaigns; and, (iii) whether the voter was satisfied that the campaign promises were kept by politicians.

To realise the research objectives, a public opinion survey was undertaken in Delhi and the findings revealed voters were aware of negative election campaigns, retained long-term memory of controversial events and displayed dissatisfaction with election promises by politicians.

**Introduction**: The centrality of the electoral process in democracy was established by both the experience of the voters and their perception about it. Perceptions are knowledge and judgment, and they included expressed and unexpressed opinions on issues in public domain. The voters held an opinion about the electoral process they participated in, (Kumar & Rai, 2013) and this opinion was sought to be represented in authoritative reports of commissions and committees set up to explore electoral reforms, (Report 244, 2014) and also in election studies (Lokniti). Such perception or public opinion (Reddy, 2009) could also be molded through tools of perception like electoral campaigns, media coverage and the voter surveys. Under study in this research paper is the impact of one such tool, electoral campaigns, on voter perception and expectation.

**Objective**: The objective of the study was to ascertain the impact of election campaigns on the perception of voters in a highly mediatized location within the democratic sphere. Additionally, the study sought to learn; (i) if such perception was retained by the voter over a period of time; (ii) if the voters was aware of negative campaigns; and, (iii) whether the voter was satisfied that the campaign promises were kept by politicians.

**Methodology**: To realise the research objectives, a survey was conducted in a location that was chosen following two criteria; one, the place with highest number of registered news organizations with the highest measurable dissemination of national news, and two, the place with highest national, political and institutional decision-making powers on electoral process in terms of the presence of Election Commission of India, the Indian Parliament, etc. Urban territorial locations featured high on the list of places with media saturation and political activity, like Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Chennai, etc., of which Delhi ranked first. The Delhi survey was mainly explorative in nature and the survey design sought to look for a constructivist approach to the electoral individualization of the voter created from his/her perception of the democratic system and its responsiveness. The structure of the survey was gradually evolved with fieldwork and three pilot surveys that tested issues, consistency of answers and question structure.

The survey was conducted in two Assembly constituencies, chosen based on the perception that the main electoral contest was between the Bharatiya Janata Party and Aam Aadmi Party in the 2015 Delhi Assembly elections, and the two constituencies Krishna Nagar and New Delhi were represented by their chief ministerial candidates, respectively. Three advantages were discovered in these constituencies; one, voters were polarized because of strong candidates; two, perceptions were clear about the intense political campaigns, and three, voters expected change to be delivered through the electoral process. Although the survey was conducted before the scheduled Assembly election, it was not a pre-poll survey as it did not forecast outcomes of the elections.

As per the latest Electoral Roll (2015) issued by the Chief Electoral Officer in Delhi, Krishna Nagar had 65 localities while New Delhi had 70 localities. A target sample of 200 voters from each constituency was selected through multi-stage random sampling to ensure that the selected sample was fully representative of the cross-section of voters in the selected geographical area while being completely random. Substitution was not allowed, based on the NES experience as it was observed by the Lokniti

Team (2004) that uneven substitution rates imbalanced the total sample and a better way of maintaining sample size was to opt for a larger target sample, which was done in NES 2009 and 2014. The survey was conducted a week before the Delhi Legislative Assembly Elections from January 30, 2015 to February 3, 2015. The questionnaire was bilingual in Hindi and English. Of the target 400 sample, only half could be surveyed due to unavailability, although the targeted sample list was prepared from the latest electoral rolls published on January 22, 2015. The major reasons for unavailability of sample were if a person was not found at the address, he/she was not interested in the survey, his/her name was deleted from voter list, or was deceased. Among the final achieved sample of 210, men were 204 with achieval rate of 53 percent approximately, and women were 196 with achieval rate of 52 percent approximately. In comparison to this, the share of men and women in the electoral population of Delhi was 56 percent and 44 percent, respectively (ECI, Statistical Report, 2015).

**Findings**:

1. To learn about the recall of election campaigns, the following question was asked: 'Which parties do you identify the following with: (a) Bofors Scam (b) Right to Information (RTI) (c) Kargil War (d) Babri Masjid Demolition.' Two of these four controversial events, the Bofors scam and RTI, had happened during Congress party government, and the other two, demolition of Babri Masjid and Kargil War, during BJP government at the state and Centre, respectively. The findings are given below in Table I.

**Table I: Findings**

| Event | Correct answers (Approx.) |
|---|---|
| (a)Bofors Scam | 50 |
| (b)RTI | 55 |
| (c)Kargil War | 35 |
| (d)Babri Masjid emolition | 55 |

To sum up, respondents had better recall mainly because of possible repetition and contestation of such controversial events. Such perception of respondents was constantly fortified with new information and updates, which took place in a highly mediatised location like Delhi.

2. To assess the voter perception about elected representatives and the reason for their perceived inefficiency, the following two questions were asked: 'Are elected representatives able to improve the life of common people? (a) Yes (b) No.' Findings, given below in the Figure 1, revealed that out of the 210 respondents, approximately 65 percent respondents said that elected representatives were not able to improve the life of common people.
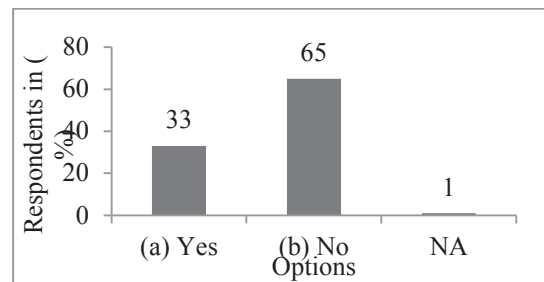


**Fig. 1: Findings**

As a follow up to this, the second question was asked: 'What makes politicians inefficient? (a) Corruption (b) Personal ambition (c) Political compulsion (d) Bureaucratic hurdles.' Findings show that respondents gave multiple answers and chose more than one option. More than half of the respondents felt that corruption made politicians inefficient, followed by approximately 20 percent respondents who felt that politicians after getting elected only focused on personal ambition.

3. To know the impact of negative election campaigns, the following question was asked: 'Do you think accusations in poll campaigns lead to making of negative image of a candidate? (a) Yes (b) No.' As given below in comparative graph Figure 2, out of the total 210 voters surveyed, approximately 56 percent respondents chose Option (a) and approximately 42 chose Option (b).
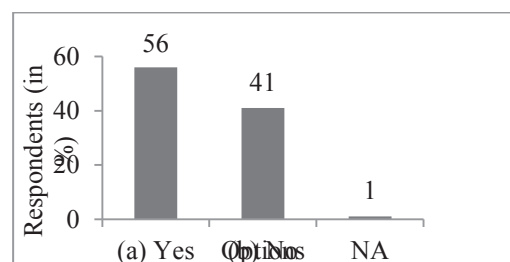


**Fig. 2: Findings**

To sum up, a majority of respondents seemed to be aware of accusatory election campaigns and revealed a negative perception among the voters. Further, a high number of respondents also felt that such campaigns did not create a negative perception, pointing to an affirmation by such campaigns of an earlier perception among the voters.

**Conclusion**: The main objectives of the survey were to discover perception about electoral campaigns among highly mediatized voters. Findings showed that respondents had a good recall of controversial events in Delhi and were aware of negative election campaigns. Voters were dissatisfied with the performance of their elected representatives and felt corruption to be the main cause. To sum up, the perception survey in Delhi revealed the voters to be highly aware of election campaigns, along with high level of dissatisfaction about promises made in such campaigns by politicians. Surveyed voters' easy recall

of controversial events coupled with dissatisfaction with elected representatives created an overall negative perception about the electoral process and its ability to deliver transformative change.

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