IPSFM grantees cover the festival of democracy – the 2019 General Elections

Covering Indian general election is one of the high-points of a news entity’s existence. There is no other event that matches the planning, the resources and the emotions all thrown into one. Not surprisingly the Foundation’s grantees have put their shoulders to the wheel, and are in most cases leading the coverage.

We bring to you a snapshot of the Foundation’s grantees in:

1. deep ground-reporting
2. analysing the government’s performance
3. innovations in coverage.

1. Deep ground-reporting

One thread that is common to the grantees is the strong accent on reporting from ground-zero andeschewing the growing trend of resorting to armchair journalism.

The Wire’s election coverage is centred on a major video series, Sadak-Se-Sansad, which takes its readers on a road trip out of its newsroom and into 50 key constituencies across the length of India.

Khabar Lahariya points its lens on political trends in the hinterland, through a news and opinion show Chunavi Bukhaar (http://bit.ly/2Is6lIQ). Another show Savdhaan looks at how changing technology impacts elections and voting behaviours. KL also looks at how traditional coverage of elections actually voices the voices and role of women into the margins; and strives to bring their issues to the fore.

The Caravan concentrates on the electorally critical states of UP, Telangana, Bihar, Odisha and Gujarat with an accent on opposition politics, particularly the emerging Bahujan politics and regional leadership.

Malayalam digital news portal Dool News has begun an election analysis column Priya Voterrmare (http://bit.ly/2ItWaNx) which will look at deep-coverage of all 20 constituencies of Kerala including conducting straw polls to test the political winds.

Max Maharashtra, an online Marathi news portal, plans on-ground reporting from important states like UP. (http://bit.ly/2lSUGB)

Max Maharashtra has launched a TV programme ‘De Tal’ (please hyperlink to this https://bit.ly/2uXf54X), presented by transgender anchor Madhuri Sharma, which takes a deep dive into issues facing the transgender community in India.

The Indian general elections of 2019 - for 543 seats, with 900mn voters, 1mn polling stations and more than 8,000 candidates - is the biggest democratic exercise in the world. With such huge numbers and diversity, the media plays a critical role in decoding the parties, their practices and the issues.
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With a whopping 45 mn new voters scheduled to enter the electorate in the North-Eastern States, other than deep-reporting, EastMojo is also reaching out to campuses to cover the pulse of the younger audience and new voters.

Economic & Political Weekly (EPW) is among the few publications that has covered all 17 general elections in independent India. It plans on a deep-dive into their vast archives and contextualize current debates through an archival lens, to produce at least 18 incisive features on topics such as economy of elections, role of caste, social capital and functioning of democracy, industrial lobby's, and the peculiarities of dynastic politics, etc. (http://bit.ly/2Ito7x3)

2. Analysing government’s performance

For any citizen, the decision on whom his or her vote should be going to is usually based on whether the party in power has delivered especially when measured against their promises and the party manifesto. So it’s no surprise to find that grantees have tried to delve deep into the performance of the present government and present a ‘report card’ to their readers.

In this content, Khabar Lahariya has launched a ‘Sansad ka report card’, which travels to remote villages in different constituencies and gets individual voters to grade their MPs on the basis of what they have delivered.

IndiaSpend has introduced ‘DataBaaz’, India’s first data and evidence-based video network with a focus on converting numbers and statistics into crisp short video stories for today’s mobile generation. It tracks and evaluates promises made by the government. In collaboration with academia, it concentrates on date-based ‘real stories’ in the polls as on healthcare, jobs, farm distress and communal polarisation. (http://bit.ly/2IspKD9)

IndiaSpend is also doing ‘Modi’s Report Card’ – a series evaluating the government’s flagship schemes. An eleven-part series tracking employment in the informal sector, reported from the nationwide labour hubs – Indore, Jaipur, Perumbavoor and Ahmedabad has also commenced.

The Khabar Lahariya team conducting ‘Meera Ki Chaupai’ a bi-monthly adda that examines people’s issues and concerns.

The Wire has also worked on a comprehensive, scrupulous but user-friendly presentation – ‘Modi Marksheet’ – of how the BJP has delivered on each of the 150 promises made in its 2014 election manifesto. (http://bit.ly/2luKDbh)

The Caravan through the Modi-meter fact-checks every promise made by the ruling party in its 2014 manifesto – nearly 450 of them in 59 categories. These reports and investigations through a “National Report Card,” will provide an overview of the key aspects such as culture and nationalisation, education policy, state of employment, informal sector and women, the future of civil rights for sexual minorities, and the future of the agrarian struggle.

The News Minute takes a very close look at the elections and the issues from the five southern states of Andhra, Karnataka, Tamilnadu, Kerala and Telengana. It has already notched up exclusive interviews with news-makers in the southern states like DMK chief M K Stalin, actor-turned-politician Kamal Haasan, Hyderabad’s MP Asaduddin Owaisi, TDP leader Nara Lokesh and Janasena party’s Pawan Kalyan.

EPW’s special visual feature, a “Morality Map”, charts various “morailities” based on which political parties campaign to garner votes. A ‘debate kit’ specific to Indian elections has been instituted – a one-page repository will highlight distinct aspects of electoral politics in each of the States and will be of relevance to readers beyond the current electoral and news cycles.

3. Innovations in coverage

Some grantees have adopted innovative methods to measure and analyse electoral issues.

The EPW Digital Team.

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GRANTEE IMPACT

IPSMF’s grantees are frontrunners not just in the readership numbers they clock but as importantly in their impact on the ground. We bring to you a few and select instances of the change they seek to make.

- In December 2018, as a result of Azhimukham’s 8-part investigative series on the corruption in KIRTADS, in Kozhikode, the issue was taken up in the Kerala assembly by former CM Oommen Chandy, along with several other opposition MLAs, who demanded a deep investigation into the malpractices. ([http://bit.ly/2IVdRuu](http://bit.ly/2IVdRuu))

- The Ken’s story on the aberrations in the placement-system in India’s B-schools created conversations and debate among readers and institutions. 700+ students across 100+ educational institutes globally read the story. ([https://bit.ly/2uf2LmF](https://bit.ly/2uf2LmF))

- After Down To Earth’s (DTE) story on how the government’s prohibition on the export of ‘red sanders’ was actually encouraging illegal trade, the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) relaxed the rules for its export. ([https://bit.ly/2DbKoUx](https://bit.ly/2DbKoUx))

- Vallabhbhai Vasrambhai Marvani-ya, a 97-year-old pioneering ‘carrot farmer’ from Gujarat, was accorded the Padma Shri after his story of grit and determination against odds, was published on The Better India. ([https://bit.ly/2J9eRa5](https://bit.ly/2J9eRa5))

- After The Ken’s story in January on how patients and advocacy groups in India are importing cheap cancer-medicines from Bangladesh because of the huge cost of patented medicines in India, the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) invoked its ‘extraordinary powers’ to bring 42 non-scheduled anti-cancer drugs under price control in March. ([https://bit.ly/2VCrs8H](https://bit.ly/2VCrs8H))

- Khabar Lahariya covered “rumours” of a woman about to commit sati in Bundelkhand which drew large crowds in support. The video-report, which went viral, exhibited that such social evils had support in certain sections even today and technology in the wrong hands had the potential to amplify these events and endanger lives. ([https://bit.ly/2UkoBNJ](https://bit.ly/2UkoBNJ))

- Down To Earth’s story on ‘nitrogen-pollution’ was widely circulated and read at the recently concluded United Nations Environment Assembly 4 (UNEA4) in Nairobi, Kenya. India spearheaded the effort which resulted in a historic resolution on nitrogen pollution. ([https://bit.ly/2GhzLB1](https://bit.ly/2GhzLB1))

- Dool News broke the story of Kotta Abdul Rahman, who posing as a qualified medical practitioner, and protected by vested groups, was duping and exploiting cancer patients and their families for years. The story not only exposed the fraud but forced authorities to clamp down on his deception. ([https://bit.ly/2G6GfC4](https://bit.ly/2G6GfC4))

TIMELINE OF GRANTS

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<th>BOARD MEETINGS</th>
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<tr>
<td>FY 2015-16: 5 Meetings</td>
<td>CGNetSwara, IndiaSpend and The Wire (English).</td>
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Total Commitment – INR 44.4 Cr
### OUR NEW GRANTEES: BOOTS ON THE GROUND

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**The Lede**, founded in March 2016 by Chennai-based journalist Sandhya Ravishankar, had struggled to stay afloat due to lack of funding. Resurrected in March 2018, the Lede provides ground-reported, high-impact stories from south India. Sandhya won the Ramnath Goenka Award for environmental reporting in 2018 for stories on illegal beach-sand mining in Tamilnadu.

**Suno India**, launched in July 2018, is a podcast-only platform that is dedicated to audio journalism on issues of public importance. The founders - Padma Priya, Rakesh Kamal and Tarun Nirwan - bring a combination of skills in journalism, advocacy and technology. The programmes are aimed at informing as well as challenging listeners without being preachy.

**Janjwar** is a Hindi-news portal that started out as a blog by journalist Ajay Prakash in 2007. It was turned into a full-fledged news-site in 2012. Janjwar aims to cover issues and events in the states of UP, Bihar, Uttarakhand, Jharkhand, Haryana and Delhi. It especially focusses on people's movements and struggles, and the marginalised - Dalits, farmers and students.

**The Bastion** conceptualised and started by three students - Sourya Reddy, Chirag Chinnappa and Swagam Dasgupta - was incubated at the Ashoka University, near Delhi. The Bastion strives to leverage research and academia to put out data and evidence-based stories. They focus on stories on education and the environment.

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### Innovations in coverage...

#### contd. from Page 2

**Think Pragati** has used the fast-growing medium of podcasts to address issues with an edgy and provocative take. For instance, the 69th edition of the Pragati Podcast looks at the issues of "Why do we elect criminals?" [see [https://bit.ly/2InbLOT](https://bit.ly/2InbLOT)]

**Sadhana Weekly** has adopted a unique way to educate its voters by providing a 'mantra' for the voter from Gandhian and social activist Baba Amte who had written a series of articles for Sadhana in 1967 titled Mati Jagvil Tyala Mat. Based on this, Sadhana is publishing a 'Five point formula for voters' - which provides a template for the voter to make an informed choice of their representative.

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**ThePrint** has launched a pioneering web app My543 ([https://bit.ly/2UVswEK](https://bit.ly/2UVswEK)) which seeks to monitor and analyse the performance of all elected MPs. A reader can select any of the 543 constituencies of relevance to him and examine an MP’s performance, use of MPLADS funds, etc. It features videos of work accomplished by MPs and invites voters, opponents and incumbents to contribute to the conversation.

The proliferation of misinformation and fake news is expectedly playing a very damaging role, particularly at such a sensitive and critical juncture as the Lok Sabha polls.

*Alt News’* launch of an app is thus very appropriate. It lets users fact-check a specific piece of news or information. The app will provide an automated and almost instant response if the information is already fact-checked. Otherwise, it will go into a pool to be fact-checked and will provide the response as soon as it is fact-checked. This functionality is being built into their WhatsApp, Twitter and Facebook Messenger platforms.