

Environmental Promises And Electoral Malpractices: A Critical Analysis Of Greenwashing In Indian Electoral Campaigns

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Abstract

Environment is a prominent issue today for political people as being a major agenda for elections. Greenwashing is a phenomenon when the false promises are made with respect to environment and nothing is done on the agenda after elections. During election these matters are a part of election campaign and this area lacks regulation. There is also lack of awareness among rural population of India. International organizations and some nations are focused to entertain this with seriousness whereas in India there are several factors which undermine this agenda such as poverty, unemployment and various related factors those are more prioritised by the political parties. This paper focuses on the phenomenon of greenwashing and also focuses on the challenges faced to greenwashing in India. This research also provides suggestive measures for the problem and possible solutions on the basis of practices prevalent all around the world and suggestions from international organizations.

Keywords: Environment, Political parties, Civil Society, Government, Greenwashing.

1. INTRODUCTION

In India's dynamic democracy, political parties use election campaigns as a vital forum to explain their goals and pledges to a wide range of voters. Environmental issues have become more prominent among the many topics that drive these campaigns, reflecting the public's growing awareness of pollution, climate change, and sustainable development. In response, political parties of all stripes have included environmental pledges in their manifestos, frequently displaying audacious promises to tackle ecological issues. But the sincerity of these pledges is regularly questioned, and charges of greenwashing—the act of making false or inflated claims about environmental projects—are growing in importance. In order to understand how political parties use environmental rhetoric to win votes while frequently falling short of producing meaningful policy results, this research paper critically analyses the phenomenon of "greenwashing" in Indian election campaigns. The purpose of this study is to examine how electoral malpractices and environmental promises interact in order to identify the tactics used, their effects on voter confidence, and the overall effect on environmental governance in India. This analysis aims to draw attention to the difficulties in coordinating electoral rhetoric with substantive environmental action within the framework of India's distinct sociopolitical landscape, which is marked by rapid urbanisation, industrial growth, and ecological degradation.

2. Greenwashing in the Context of Indian Elections

Making inflated or false claims about environmental commitments in order to win over the public is known as "greenwashing," and it has become a prominent strategy in Indian election campaigns. Political parties are increasingly including green promises in their manifestos and campaign rhetoric as environmental issues like air pollution, water scarcity, and climate change become more urgent concerns for India's expanding electorate. But rather than being true policy commitments, these promises frequently act as electoral tools, undermining environmental advancement and public confidence. This section examines how

greenwashing has appeared in Indian elections, its tactics, and its effects given the nation's distinct sociopolitical and environmental context.

In India, election-related greenwashing frequently takes the shape of ambiguous or impractical environmental pledges devoid of concrete plans or quantifiable results. Parties might promise to "clean rivers" or "achieve zero carbon emissions," as in case of R.S. Nayak v. A.R. Antulay. For example, without mentioning deadlines, financing sources, or methods of implementation. One notable example is the Ganga River's ongoing electoral focus on cleanliness, which has been a pledge in several party manifestos since the 1980s this scenario is similar to M.C. Mehta v. Union of India where tanneries in Kanpur discharged untreated effluents into the Ganga, despite promises of environmental compliance this Public Interest Litigation under Article 32 and can be faced by politicians through PILs if their commitments are misleading or unfulfilled, though no electoral malpractice was alleged here. Even though a lot of political capital was spent on these promises, programs like the Namami Gange Programme have come under fire for their sluggish progress and dubious effectiveness, with reports showing that the river is still polluted. These disparities show how environmental pledges are frequently made to stoke voter emotions rather than deal with structural issues.

Selectively highlighting small environmental projects while downplaying more significant ecological failures is another prevalent greenwashing strategy. Tree plantation drives and solar energy projects are often cited in political campaigns as examples of environmental commitment, but they are frequently small-scale, poorly monitored, or unrelated to larger policy frameworks. For instance, a number of parties promoted afforestation efforts during the 2019 general elections; however, post-election analyses showed that the trees planted had poor survival rates because of poor planning and maintenance. The lack of comprehensive policies to address urgent problems like industrial emissions or urban air quality, which greatly contribute to India's environmental crisis, is concealed by this selective emphasis on obvious, populist measures.

In Indian elections, greenwashing is also made easier by taking advantage of religious and cultural feelings related to the environment. Voters, especially those in rural areas, are greatly moved by pledges to save holy rivers or conserve natural heritage sites. These promises, however, frequently remain merely symbolic and are rarely fulfilled. Parties can demonstrate environmental concern while avoiding implementation accountability by using such emotionally charged rhetoric. In states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, where river conservation is a recurrent electoral theme but concrete results are still elusive, this practice is especially noticeable.

Greenwashing has significant ramifications for Indian elections. Voter trust is damaged because unmet promises cause disenchantment with environmental governance and political procedures. Furthermore, it takes focus away from the pressing need for structural changes in fields like pollution control, waste management, and the use of renewable energy. India's progress towards sustainable development is hampered by a cycle of electoral malpractices that are sustained by the absence of accountability mechanisms and lax regulatory oversight, which permit greenwashing to continue.

Parties take advantage of cultural sentiments, selective initiatives, and ambiguous promises to win votes while frequently falling short of producing significant results. More voter awareness, careful policy analysis, and strict accountability procedures are needed to address this issue and make sure that environmental pledges are fulfilled. This analysis emphasises the need for a more thorough comprehension of how greenwashing has influenced India's environmental and electoral landscape.

3. Challenges to Greenwashing in India

First of all, there is absence of robust regulatory framework and enforcement in India for environmental issues to hold political parties accountable. Election commission of India is responsible for issuing guidelines for electoral conduct but it lacks specific guidelines to scrutinize the veracity of environmental claims. In India, there is absence of post-election audits or performance review of political party in power on delivery in the area of environment. For example, Namami Gange Programme launched in 2014 received significant funding but according to report of Controller and Auditor General (CAG) of India it lacks efficiency and inordinate delays.

Secondly, there is less awareness among voters in India about environmental issues such as issues during elections are replaced by Cultural and Religious sentiments. There is lack of reliable information related to environment. For example, in 2019 elections afforestation campaigns were publicized but subsequent reports show low tree survival of trees due to poor planning. Indian media failed to analyse greenwashing claims while being vibrant about other topics.

Thirdly, political parties prioritize voter appealing initiatives such as tree plantation drives and clean-up drives which are visible that give immediate media coverage but lack sustained impact on environment because same lack long term planning and the tree planted do not survive because they are not taken care of. Whereas, due to high competition in election leads to lack of attention on long term environmental solutions. Some issues like river clean up are raised but fail to attend connected issues such as industrial pollution and sewage management. Political parties never face any challenge from public for not addressing the concerns of environmental sustainability.

Fourthly, on the institutional level there is fragmented authority because there are different ministries for different responsibilities such as Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and Ministry of Jal Shakti. Due to different ministries coordinating different responsibilities there is lack of coordination often result in poor implementation as it happened in the case of Namami Gange Programme as there was gap in on-ground reality and promises made during elections which can be a clear violation of guidelines mentioned in Ekam Eco Solutions case. Political parties due to abovementioned reasons evade accountability.

Fifthly, political will and challenges before polity are most important factors which define the agenda of election campaign as concerns such as poverty, unemployment and infrastructure development are of immediate nature for political parties because significant population is affected by such concerns. Polity always resonates around emotional topics such as protection of sacred river while not addressing the reforms among industrial or developmental interests. There is always an ongoing conflict between environmental sustainability and development which often leads to greenwashing and issues are addressed without addressing the root cause of the problem.

Sixthly, in India, there is lack of influence by civil society in environmental matters but there are some efforts by some organisations such as Centre for Science and Environment and Greenpeace India create awareness about greenwashing but constrained by limited resources and reach in rural areas. There is no consumer-focused greenwashing which can compel political parties and corporate to address the environmental matters and if not addressed than may lead to protest or boycott campaign. Electorate also lack education about environmental issues so political parties are not held accountable.

4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Greenwashing in Indian electoral campaigns undermines public trust and hinders progress toward sustainable development, as political parties often make exaggerated or misleading environmental promises to secure votes. Addressing this issue requires a multi-faceted approach that strengthens regulatory frameworks, enhances voter awareness, promotes media scrutiny, and fosters international collaboration. Indian judiciary in *Vanashakti v. Union of India* where Supreme Court stays operation of the office memorandums issued by Central Government on ex post facto environmental clearances by ministry.

Election commission must issue specific guidelines to regulate environmental claims from political parties and their performance in that regard. It can be done by taking inspiration from European Union's Green Claims Directives. Election Commission can also conduct post-election audits on implementation of environmental promises which is similar to Germany's Independent Policy Review.

In India, there is less awareness as well as focus on environmental issues and people in rural areas are often tied to cultural or religious sentiments in order to address this situation government in collaboration with organizations of civil society such as Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) can launch a nation-wide campaign to educate and evaluate the work done in consonance with the promises made during elections. There can be symbolic gestures such as tree plantation drive, river clean-up drive and systematic reforms for the

agenda of pollution control. Social media can also be used to amplify the awareness programme in order to achieve desired results.

Media in India is very active in case of environmental issues it is lacking behind as very less coverage on environmental issues, fact checking of agendas of political parties in manifestos. Media in collaboration with civil society organization can enhance the capacity to analyse the environmental policies and their impact since they are implemented as done in Australia under Australia's Climate Council. Media and civil society organisations can publish post-election report cards on the basis of performance of political parties in connection with the efforts made in the area of environmental sustainability as done in Canada under Canada's Ecojustice Initiative.

There must be a Central Task Force under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change in the task force there must be representatives from state governments and experts from the field of environment. This task force can maintain public database to track the progress of environmental initiatives. Government can focus on standards from United Nations Environmental Policy on environmental claims and same could guide the Election Commission of India to issue Guidelines in regulation. International collaboration in environmental projects for the purpose of knowledge sharing from the nations like Sweden. India must align with international commitments such as Paris Agreement.

Government in India must encourage incentives for parties and candidates who give environmental outcomes. There must be public recognition or funding for constituencies that achieve significant progress in the area of afforestation or pollution reduction. Similar initiative is taken by Brazil as Brazil Amazon Fund which could be inculcated to support local projects and promises and can result into reality. This kind of approach would shift focus from symbolic gestures to long term an impactful policy.

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