

# Caste, Religion And Language As Drivers Of Voting Patterns In Indian Politics

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## ABSTRACT

Voting behaviour defines the pattern of casting vote or the factors that influence people in casting vote. Its study explains what factors determine or influence voter's choice of voting. Study of voting behaviour does not confine to the observation of voting statistics, record and electoral data (shifts). It also covers psychological aspects such as voters' perception, emotion, etc. and their relation to political action and institutional patterns. Determinants of Voting Behavior in India Indian society is highly diversified in nature and composition. Hence, voting behaviour in India is determined or influenced by multiple factors.

**KEY WORDS:** Caste, Gender, Religion, Language and Region

## I. INTRODUCTION

Voting behaviour forms a part of election studies. The subject to study elections is known as psephology. Its purpose is to analyse questions about the behaviour of voters during the elections. What is it that determines voting behavior Why do voters vote a candidate or prefer a party in the elections Is it the economic factor such as employment, inflation, removal of poverty or noneconomic factors Is it quality of leader – strong, charismatic, etc? These are some of the questions which have been addressed in studies about the determinants of voting behaviour. In India, political scientists, sociologists, anthropologists, media houses and political parties have been involved in election studies. During post-Independence India, election studies started in the 1950s since the first general election of 1951-52. But systematic studies of elections began in the 1960s, with the initiative of Rajni Kothari, a scholar in the Centre for the Studies of Developing Societies (CSDS), New Delhi, and Myron Wiener, an American political scientist, who specialised in Indian politics. In the 1980s, Prannoy Roy, Davit Butler and Ashok Lahiri's book A Compendium of Indian Elections, gave a new momentum to election studies.

But it was since the 1990s that election studies have become a regular feature of studies on electoral politics. The principal reason for this has been the increasing frequency of elections for state assemblies or Lok Sabha. As members of the CSDS team, scholars from various universities in the country conducted election studies. The methods of doing the election studies mainly include surveys. These surveys are known as National Election Survey (NES). The scholars conduct survey before and after election to ascertain various aspects relating to elections. And the determinants of voting behaviour form an important aspect of NES studies. The findings of these studies have been published in several articles in academic journals, books and print media. Apart from the CSDS, several scholars and media groups, political parties engage in studying determinants of electoral behaviour. Many people in society modify their vote decisions the night before an election for a variety of reasons such as social, political, emotional, and so on. One of the most essential parts of civic participation is voting. Voting behaviour is influenced by a number of crucial aspects, including why people vote for a certain candidate and how these influences shape people's minds, which leads to all people voting for that candidate. Democracy is based on voting behaviour. The voting habits of each citizen are unique.<sup>1</sup> The term "social structure" refers to the framework of a society in which human beings have a role. There are numerous subgroups in society. Political, economic, religious, familial, and group issues.

## II. OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

1. To know the voting behaviour
2. To study the voting behaviour in India
3. To find out different voting behaviour based on various factors

### III. METHODOLOGY

In tune with the objectives mentioned the present study has conducted with the help of secondary sources of data. The secondary data are drawn, classified, and studied from the Publications, monthly journals on Caste, Religion and Language as Drivers of Voting Patterns in Indian Politics, including the annual reports of Caste, Religion and Language as Drivers of Voting Patterns in Indian Politics. Wherever, necessary reference was also made to different issues of bulletins viz., economic development issues and challenges. Apart from this, different editions of daily newspapers such as, The Hindu, Indian Express. etc. were also used for the purpose of collecting the information on Caste, Religion and Language as Drivers of Voting Patterns in Indian Politics

### IV.VOTING BEHAVIOUR

“The term electoral behaviour is not new. But recently, it has been used to describe certain areas of research and types of political phenomena that were not previously conceived or considered inappropriate.” Behaviour during voting is not limited to the assessment of voting statistics, records, and counting of changes in elections and balances It is an analysis of a person's psychological processes and his relationship to political actions. According to J. K. Plano and Riggs: “Behaviour in voting is a field of study regarding how people tend to vote in public elections and the reasons why they vote the way they do”. A person's choice of casting vote and related values is called voting activity. Elections relate to the process of democratic participation in which all people express their opinions about individuals and issues by making voting ballots However, given the situation with Indian selective behaviour, prof. V.M.Sirsikar well notes: “The study of the election process points to other factors besides rationality. It can be said that India has achieved a stable government, but massive manipulations, caste influences, fears of minorities and the prime minister’s charismatic dominance did not play a significant role in this

### V.VOTING BEHAVIOUR IN INDIA

India is the largest democracy in the world. All citizens of 18 years or above of the age have the right to vote in Indian elections. Despite the fact that nearly half of them are illiterates, they have in the past acted wisely and in a mature way to elect their representatives. They have already participated in several elections to Lok Sabha, state legislative assemblies and a large number of bi-elections. At the first general elections in India in 1952, some election studies were conducted. In the beginning, these studies lack methodological rigour and sophistication. However, with the increased use of the survey method and observation technique has improved the quality of election studies in India. Indian electoral studies are mainly inspired by Western research on voting behaviour, particularly in the United States, Colombia, and Michigan. Scholars at Columbia University in New York highlighted the impact of social and environmental forces on voter choice.

### VI.CASTE, RELIGION AND LANGUAGE AS DRIVERS OF VOTING PATTERNS IN INDIAN POLITICS

**1. Caste:** Caste is an important factor influencing the behaviour of voters. Politicization of caste and casteism in politics have been a feature of Indian politics. While formulating their election strategies political parties account the factor of caste. Caste continues to be a determinant of voting behaviours in India. It has deep roots in the society and constitutes an important basis of social relations at all levels. Despite the adoption of several provisions which prohibit action and discrimination on its basis, caste continues to be a determinant of political behaviours. Politicisation of caste and casteism in politics has been a well known reality of the Indian political system. The political parties in India, without any exception, while formulating their policies, programmes and election strategies always keep in mind the caste factor . Caste is a factor in the selection of candidates for contesting an election from a constituency. Votes are demanded in the name of caste . Jat Ki Vot Jat Ko, Brahmin votes vs. Jat votes or Jat votes vs Ahir votes etc., are commonly used „principles“ for planning an election startagy. The role of caste as a determinant of voting behaviour has been analysed by several scholars and they have come out with the conclusion, as Morris Jones writes, „Politics is more important to caste and caste is more important to politics than before.“ Caste is the main language of voters belonging to rural India. Despite the adoption of democratic values which conceive of a society free from casteism, caste continues to characterise politics in India. Indeed it has become one of the chief means by which the Indian masses have been attached to the process of democratic politics. The decision to implement Mandal Commission recommendation for reservation of jobs for other Backward Classes (castes) and the reaction it generated in politics testifies to the continued presence of caste as a determinant of politics in India. Large and important castes in a constituency tend to back either a respected member of their case or a political party with whom their caste identifies. However, local factions and local-state factional alignments that involve intercaste coalition are also important factors in influencing voting behavior.

2. **Gender:** Though Gender is a broader concept, when we discuss gender in relation to voting behaviour it is mainly refers to women's role in voting. Since the 1990s, the participation in voting in elections of the marginalized sections or plebeians, including women, has increased. Voting is a device which enable women's empowerment in terms of making choice of their representatives. The significance of women's role in voting is highlighted by the fact that many regional parties include issues concerning women in their agenda. These issues range from domestic economy, sexual violence, dignity to reservation for women in legislatures and social oppression
3. **Religion:** Religion is another significant factor which influences electoral behaviour. Political parties indulge in communal propaganda and exploit the religious sentiments of the voters. The existence of various communal parties has further added to the politicization of religion. Despite India being a secular nation, no political party ignores the influence of religion in electoral politics. The establishment of a secular state in India – by guaranteeing right to freedom of religion to every one, treating every religion equal and non – recognition of any religion as a state religion – has not been successful in preventing the role of religion as determinant of political behaviour in general and voting behaviour in particular. The existence of such political parties and neo-political groups as stand linked with a particular religion, for example, Muslim League, Akali Dal, Hindu Maha Sabha, Shiv sena etc., have been one of the reasons behind the continued role of religion as a determinant of voting behaviour. Religious pluralism of the Indian society is a major feature of the environment of Indian political system and it greatly influences the struggle for power among political parties. The selection of candidates is done with an eye upon the presence of a religious majority in a particular constituency. The candidates do not hesitate to seek votes by playing the religious card with co-religious voters and the secular card with members of others religious communities. Use of religious places for political ends is also a standard practice, particularly during elections. The religionisation of social-political issues is again resorted to by political parties and other groups. The voters very often vote on religious considerations.
4. **Language:** Linguistic considerations of the people influence their voting behaviour. During elections, the political parties arouse the linguistic feelings of the people and try to influence their decision-making. The reorganisation of states (in 1956 and later) on language basis clearly reflects the significance of language factor in India politics. India is a multi-lingual state. Linguism also surves as factor in voting behaviour. The organization of states on linguistic basis fully reflects the importance of language as a factor of politics in India. There have been problems in states like that of status of one particular language in that state, or relating to the quality of the status of a language of a state. Since people have emotional attachment with their languages, they easily get influenced whenever there comes up any issue relating to language. Linguistic interests always influence voting behaviour
5. **Region:** Regionalism and sub-regionalism play an important role in voting behaviour. These parochial feelings of sub-nationalism led to the emergence of perpetual regional parties in various states. These regional parties appeal to the electorate on the ground of regional identities and regional sentiments. Sometimes, the secessionist parties call for the boycott of elections.

## VII.CONCLUSION

Elections occupy a prominent place in the democratic government . It is a means through which people express and enforce their political opinion and regulate political organization of the society. However the behaviour of a voter is influence by several factors such as religion, caste, community, language, money, policy or ideology, purpose of the polls, extent of franchise and the like political parties and groups make use of these variables for the sake of winning the battle of the ballot box. It is therefore, imperative that the use of these determinants should be avoided and elections should be conducted in a very free and fair manner. It also depends upon whether the system allows freedom of thought, expression and association to the people. Mere presence of an electoral system does not make a political system democratic. The will of people is expressed through voting in elections and therefore, all undemocratic and unfair means like manipulating and rigging need to be avoided in the elections.

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