

A View of the Voter's Behaviour in Politics

***Rajveer Yadav**

Abstract:

In the modern era of democratic politics, one of the expressions that is used the most often is "voting." This phrase has become well-known due to the democratic idea and practises' rising popularity. Each adult citizen in democratic systems, which are numerous and constantly growing, uses "voting" to express his or her agreement or disagreement with governmental decisions, the platforms of different political parties, and the qualifications of the candidates vying to represent the interests of the people. A highly important field of empirical research is the examination of factors that influence voting behaviour. In a philosophical sense, man is a rational creature, but in terms of his actions in the political or economic spheres, he is not as rational. An empirical study of the factors influencing voting behaviour reveals the astonishing fact that a variety of irrational forces, including pressure groups invoking religious and communal factors, the power of money or a leader's charisma, and a host of other unjustified forces, have a real impact on people's behaviour. The major goals of the current research are to draw attention to Indian voting patterns and to identify the elements that influence such patterns.

Key Words: Election, Constituency, Voting Behaviour, and Determinants of Voting.

Introduction

The word "voting" is one of the most often used in the modern era of democratic politics. Even common people are familiar with this concept because to democratic theory and practice's rising popularity. Each adult citizen in democratic systems, which are numerous and even on the rise, uses "voting" to express his or her approval or disapproval of governmental decisions, policies, and programmes of different political parties, as well as the traits of the candidates who are competing to become the people's representatives. Voting, in a restricted sense, refers to the process of choosing representatives by ballots during elections. However, as Richard Rose and Harve Massavir point out, voting may broadly refer to up to six significant functions:

1. It entails a person's choice of significant government policies or governors;
2. It enables people to engage in a continuous and reciprocal exchange of influence with candidates and officeholders;
3. It assists in fostering or maintaining a person's loyalty to the current constitutional system;
4. It helps to foster or maintain a voter's dissatisfaction with the current constitutional system;

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5. People's emotional lives are impacted by it;
6. It could not have any meaningful emotional or political ramifications for certain people, making it functionless.

Voting is a very important activity for citizens, candidates, and political science students.

What is Voting Behaviour?

Voting behaviour is not a new concept, according to Samuel S. Eldersveld in his essay "Theory and Method in Voting Behaviour Research." However, term has recently been employed to characterise a number of academic fields and political issues that were either unheard of or disregarded in the past. Examining vote data, records, and calculating electoral swings and changes are just a small portion of understanding voting behaviour. Additionally, it entails examining how each person's perception, emotion, and motivation relate to political action as well as institutional patterns like the communication process and how they affect elections. Voting behaviour is a topic of research that focuses on how individuals often vote in public elections and the factors that influence their voting decisions, according to Plano and Riggs. Voting behaviour is now understood to be one large and broad topic of research included under the more general category of political activity. The word has lately expanded in connotation. It entails a study of political conduct in people in relation to election voting. Studies on voting patterns provide a glimpse into the thoughts of the millions of individuals who participate in politics by casting ballots. These make up a significant field of political science where theory may be quantitatively and systematically assessed.

Elections are democratic processes in which all participants cast their votes on ballot papers to express their opinions on candidates and subjects. Voting in elections reflects democratic class conflict. Voting surveys have shown significant discrepancies in the political preferences of various age groups, classes, educational levels, and religious or racial groupings. Depending on a person's life experiences, they may vote for the right or the left. The study of electoral behaviour is an important area of empirical research that brings the study of politics and sociology very closely together. As a result, political sociology, also known as sociological politics, is emerging as a new field of advanced study that is gaining popularity. In a philosophical sense, man is a rational creature, but in terms of his economic and political conduct, he is not. It is remarkable to see how many irrational influences have an impact on human activity, as shown by an empirical examination of voting behaviour.

Voters' opinions are definitely influenced by the way political parties and pressure organisations invoke communal and religious reasons, the power of money or a leader's charm, as well as a variety of other illogical influences. If a student of empirical politics concentrates his attention on how the favourable outcomes of an election are produced, the function of these irrational factors may be found or identified. This principle holds true for all democracies, and India is no different. But as Prof. V.M. Sirsikar rightly points out, "An inquiry into the process of election indicates factors other than rationality," taking the situation of Indian voting behaviour in mind. While it's true that India now has a stable administration, mass manipulation, casteist influences, minority anxieties, and the Prime Minister's charismatic grasp have had nothing to do with it.

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Determinants of Indian Voter Behaviour

Numerous variables, including religion, caste, community, language, wealth, policy or philosophy, the aim of the elections, the scope of the franchise, political waves, etc., have an impact on voter behaviour. To win the war at the voting booth, political parties and organisations make advantage of these characteristics. Politicians often appeal to people's religious and communal sentiments despite professing to be enlightened secularists. They may also be seen taking advantage of language or financial advantages to gain an advantage in the vote-winning contest. For the same reason, appeals are made and canvassing efforts are launched in the name of a certain philosophy or programme. The nature or aim of the elections or the degree of suffrage also have an impact on the interests of the voters and, therefore, how they behave while casting a ballot. When candidates use catchphrases like "Garibi Hatao," "A vote for a pair of bullocks is a vote for Panditji and progress," "Indira means India, India means Indira, or Indira means Dictatorship," "My heart beats for India versus Rajiv means Bofors," and similar phrases, it can have an impact on the electorate. In the study of Indian electoral conduct, the roles of each of these elements may be investigated. The reasons for Indian voters' voting behaviour are varied. This essay outlined various factors that influence Indian voters. The following major political and socioeconomic variables influence voting patterns in India's democratic system:

1. Magnetism/ Charisma:

Magnetism or charisma is a significant component in voting behaviour. In contrast, it also refers to a source of awe and terror that prevents the people in large numbers from speaking or daring to act against the wishes of the powerful leader. It refers to exceptional qualities of a factor and override group elements leader that become a source of attraction and reverence for the people in large numbers. Fortunately, in our nation, charismatic qualities that are positive have played a part in elections. Huge turnouts at events where towering figures like Nehru, Indira, Vajpayee, and Modi spoke, as well as a sudden shift in voters' opinions in response to their appeals, may be considered tangible proof of the influence of charisma on our people's voting behaviour. The 'Garibi Hatao' campaign slogan performed wonders in the election of 1971, and Mrs. Gandhi's persona, after India's amazing triumph in the Bangladesh War, had the same wonderful influence on the electorate's minds in the State Assembly elections of 1972. In the 1977 elections, Jayaprakash Narayan's image had a similar impact. The personalities of Rajiv Gandhi in the elections of 1984 and V.P. Singh in the elections of 1989 also had an impact. Modi's popularity helped the BJP win the 2014 election. Because of this, it is believed that "where the groups factors are weak or cancel out, this charisma may be the major."

2. Caste:

In India, caste is still a factor in voting patterns. It is deeply ingrained in culture and serves as the cornerstone of all social interactions. Caste still influences political conduct despite the enactment of various laws that prohibit actions and discrimination based on it. The political system in India is widely recognised for the politicisation of caste and casteism. The caste issue is constantly taken into

consideration by all political parties in India while developing their policies, plans, and election campaigns. Caste is taken into consideration when choosing candidates from a constituency to run in an election. Caste-related demands for votes are made. The "principles" of Jat Ki Vot Jat Ko, Brahmin votes vs. Jat votes, Jat votes vs. Ahir votes, etc. are often utilised to construct an electoral strategy.

Numerous academics have examined how caste influences voting behaviour, and they have come to the conclusion that "politics is more important to caste and caste is more important to politics than before," as Morris Jones puts it. The primary language of voters in rural India is caste. Caste still dominates Indian politics despite the acceptance of democratic ideals that envision a society devoid of casteism. In fact, it has emerged as one of the primary methods for involving the Indian people in the democratic political system. The choice to follow the Mandal Commission's suggestion for employment reservations for other Backward Classes (castes) and the political response it sparked are testaments to caste's persistent influence on Indian politics. However, it must be acknowledged that, at least in metropolitan areas, the influence of caste in determining voting behaviour has been changing. Political conflict based on issues is beginning to take form in India. However, the situation is still contradictory.

3. Religion:

The creation of a secular state in India, which guarantees everyone's right to freedom of religion, treats all religions equally, and forbids the recognition of any religion as the state religion, has not been able to stop the influence of religion on politics in general and voting behaviour in particular. One of the reasons why religion continues to play a role in influencing voting behaviour is the presence of such political parties and neo-political organisations that are tied with a certain religion, such as Muslim League, Akali Dal, Hindu Maha Sabha, Shiv Sena, etc. The political climate in India is characterised by a strong religious plurality that has a significant impact on the competition for power between political parties. Candidates are chosen with consideration for whether a given constituency has a religious majority. The candidates don't think twice about playing the religious card with fellow believers and the secular card with followers of other religions in order to get votes. It is also common practise to use religious institutions for political purposes, especially during election seasons. Political parties and other organisations are once again resorting to the religiousization of social-political concerns. Voters often base their decisions on their religious beliefs.

4. Language:

India has several different languages. Language has a role in voting behaviour as well. The division of the country into states based on language perfectly captures the significance of language in Indian politics. In several states, there have been issues with the status of a specific language or the quality of the status of a language in a state. People often succumb to persuasion anytime a language-related problem arises because they have an emotional relationship to their native tongues. Voting conduct is constantly influenced by linguistic interests.

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5. Money Factor:

India is a developing nation where a significant portion of the population lives in poverty. Money itself is a key factor in influencing Indian voters' voting habits. A wealthy candidate or party will almost always have a higher chance of winning. But it should be noted that this only occurs under normal conditions; it does not occur during a wave election or when other important concerns are at stake. The Congress (I) lost power in 1989 despite running a highly costly election campaign.

6. Sub-Nationalism:

The harsh realities of Indian society include ethnic pluralism, communalism, regionalism, and sub-nationalism. Sub-nationalism has recently grown in importance as a factor affecting how people vote. A separatist organisation may sometimes urge people to abstain from voting and may use other coercive measures to prevent them from doing so. Various regional political groups, such as various Alkali Dal factions, the Naga Nationalist Organisation, the Gorkha League, the Jharkha Party, the AASU, and the AAGSP in Assam, have sometimes shouted nativist slogans and upset the emotional equilibrium of their states' residents. Such political party activities have sometimes led some individuals to unite along partisan and localised lines.

7. Performance of the Party in Power:

Each political party runs for office using a campaign platform, and while in office, it is expected to follow through on the pledges stated in the platform. Just on the basis of election promises made and pledges actually kept, the governing party's performance—good or bad—has a significant impact on the general public's conduct. We saw that in 1989 in India when the Congress (I), which had won a resounding victory in the previous election in 1984, was unable to secure even a simple majority in the 1989 election due to its inability to perform well. Because they failed to exercise their political stability and hold onto their positions of power, the Congress Party in 1989 and the Janata Dal in 1991 both lost. This is mostly due to a rise in the number of "floating voters" or "switchers," who are often young adults from the educated upper middle class who are willing to switch their allegiance from one party to another depending on how well they do.

8. Mass literacy:

Another element influencing Indian voters' choices is the level of mass literacy. Political parties, communal organisations, and militant groups might take advantage of people's feelings in the name of caste, religion, area, and other similar factors because of this vulnerability in the populace. Election results are greatly influenced by the votes cast by the illiterate, who make up a significant section of the electorate. The common sense and maturity that come from prior experience, however, has also been playing a significant part in influencing the voters' thoughts and behaviours. Together, they overcame the forces of authoritarianism in 1977, and in 1980, they overcame the unified non-performers once again.

9. Factionalism:

Factionalism is a defining feature of Indian political life at all levels, from the village to the national. Factionalism exists in every political party, even the two communist parties and the BJP, which are built on a cadre. As Rajani Kothari notes, it is active at every level of the congress. The strength of the congress has been negatively impacted by a political party with an illustrious history, a meagre present, and a bleak future. Factionalism is affecting other parties as well.

Due to their incapacity to combat factionalism, certain political parties are losing support from the electorate. They are turning to regional or regionally based parties, which are often less impacted by factionalism due to their modest organisational networks and operational bases.

10. Public Esteem of the Candidate:

Voting behaviour is always influenced by a candidate's reputation among his constituency's residents, his well-known traits, or his participation in any activity that contributes to a wider range of values. A voter always considers the kind and degree of his relationship with the candidate while making his decision, regardless of his party affiliation or view on numerous issues and problems. A party may get support from the general public by having a good reputation for its candidate. Voters want to support candidates who are personable and who are able to assist them in some manner.

11. Election campaigns:

Each party starts a forceful election campaign in an effort to sway voters in its favour. To gain votes, especially the floating votes, propaganda is used together with street meetings, mass gatherings, speeches by celebrities, TV and radio broadcasts, newspaper advertisements, hand bills, processions, and posters. Election campaigns aim to persuade voters that their interests will be best served by the party and its candidate running in their district. Election day campaigning has an impact on voters' decisions. A party that is able to give voters the idea throughout the election campaign that it has a chance to win may get some extra support from voters who are trying to support the candidate they believe will win.

Conclusion

Thus, these are the key factors that influence voting behaviour in India. As a growing democracy, India's political system continues to function consistently, progressively educating Indian voters. The transition from a caste-, religion-, or personality-based quest for power to an issue-based political conflict is happening very slowly but surely. In a democratic government, elections take centre stage. It is a way for individuals to express and enforce their political views and control how the political system in society is organised. However, a number of factors, including religion, caste, community, language, money, policy or ideology, the purpose of the polls, the scope of the franchise, and the like, affect a voter's behaviour. Political parties and groups use these factors in an effort to win the battle at the polls. Therefore, it is essential that the use of these criteria be avoided and that elections be held in a highly free and impartial way. It also relies on whether the system grants individuals the freedom of association, speech, and ideas. A political system is not automatically democratic just

because it has an election system in place. Elections allow the public to express their will via voting, hence it is important to steer clear of any unfair or undemocratic tactics like rigging and manipulation. The public will expressed via elections is not in any way threatened by any such action.

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