

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LEGAL STUDIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES [IJLSSS]

ISSN: 2584-1513 (Online)

Volume 4 | Issue 3 [2026] | Page 01 - 07

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VOTING BEHAVIOUR IN INDIA

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INTRODUCTION

We all know that India is the largest democracy in the world , and one of the most important component of a democracy is free & fair election for which the vote of every single citizens matters a lot, citizens use this as a tool to express their support or view towards the governmental policies, decisions and ideology of different political parties. Study and data's on electoral behaviour shows that behaviour of man is influenced by several irrational factors and pressure groups in invoking religious and communal factors, influence of money or charismatic personality of a leader.

The study of voting behaviour is significant for following reason:

1. It helps in comprehending the process of political socialisation
2. It helps us to know the weather the political development is evolving and taking a new form or is primordial
3. Predicting and Shaping Electoral Strategy
4. Ensuring Electoral Integrity

MEANING OF VOTING BEHAVIOUR

Voting behaviour refers to how people decide how to vote. This decision is shaped by a complex interplay between an individual voter's attitudes as well as social factors. Voter attitudes include characteristics such as ideological predisposition, party identity, degree of satisfaction with the existing government, public policy leanings, and feelings about a candidate's personality traits. Social factors include race, religion and degree of religiosity, social and economic classes, educational level, regional characteristics, gender and age.

Voter decision-making is not a purely rational endeavor but rather is profoundly influenced by personal and social biases and deeply held beliefs as well as characteristics such as personality, memory, emotions, and other psychological factors.

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THEORETICAL APPROACHES

PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS

COGNITIVE BIASES

- a. **Confirmation Bias:** Voters often favor information that confirms their pre-existing beliefs. For instance, during the 2014 general elections, many supporters of the BJP interpreted news and events in a way that favored Narendra Modi's narrative of development and anti-corruption, reinforcing their decision to vote for him.
- b. **Availability Heuristic:** Voters make decisions based on readily available information or recent events. For example, the Anna Hazare anti-corruption movement in 2011 created a surge of support for the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), as the issue of corruption was fresh in the public's mind.

EMOTIONAL APPEALS

- c. **Hope and Fear:** Political parties often use public's emotion of fear and hope to influence voters towards themselves. The NDA's alliance campaign in 2025 Bihar's Legislative Assemblies election effectively used the narrative of "**Jungle Raj**" and the slogan "**Bhulega Nahi Bihar**" (Bihar will not forget) by referring the period between 1990 and 2005 as the period of state of total lawlessness done by the RJD under Lalu Prasad Yadav and Rabri Devi, alongside promises of economic development, to garner widespread support.
- d. **Charisma of a Leader:** The personal appeal, attractive and powerful speech delivery or charismatic personality significantly influences voters preferences. Leaders like Narendra Modi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi, Atal Bihari serves as the concrete evidences of the role of charisma in the electoral behaviour of our country India.
- e. **Identity and Self-Concept:**

Caste and Religion: Voters are highly influenced by the candidates or political party who have a common identity on the basis of caste and religion . For example, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and Samajwadi Party (S.P) in Uttar Pradesh has consistently garnered support from Yadav community (OBC) and Dalit community (Scheduled Castes) respectively.

Regional Identity: Regional pride and linguistic identity also plays a crucial role in attracting voters for the political parties. All India Trinamool Congress (AITMC) in West Bengal is one of the most prime example which has successfully branded itself as the “guardian of Bengali culture” under the leadership of Mamta Banerjee.

- f. **Perception of Competence and Integrity:** Voters assess whether the candidate is credible or not or are they competent to be elected or not. For instance, Arvind Kejriwal’s image is being portrayed as an accountable, educated and most honest politician, which helped the AAP to secure a landslide victory in the 2015 Delhi’s Assembly Elections.

SOCIOLOGICAL FACTORS

- a. **Caste System:** The traditional caste system in India influences the voters to vote for the candidates belonging to their caste. For example, In Begusarai constituency in Bihar is highly inhabited by the people belonging to the Bhumihar caste which plays a major role BJP’s Giriraj Singh victory.
- b. **Religious Influence:** AIMIM (All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen) under Asaduddin Owaisi emphasises struggle for the rights of all marginalized groups (Muslims, Dalits, and Adivasis) to influence voters and dominates in region of Hyderabad which is highly populated by people belonging to Islam.
- c. **Family and Community Influence:** The Scindia Family in Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh(MP) ,The Royal Family of Jaipur in Rajasthan derive their legacy as a prominent family ruled in their respective region. The influence is at such level that when Jyotiraditya Scindia left the Congress with 22 MLAs, it toppled the Kamal Nath government and led to collapse of the government.
- d. **Media & Communication:** The widespread coverage by media of PM Modi’s “Chai pe Charcha” campaign in 2014 which held over 4000 locations across 24 states in India and in 50 locations in 15 countries which was participated by 10,000,00 people made BJP won an absolute majority with 282 seats in Lok Sabha election with 31.2% of vote share surge.

- e. **Social Media Influence:** There are over 800 million internet users and 400-500 million social media users in India, a survey showed that 43% of respondents believed social media which significantly influenced the voter behaviour.

CASE STUDY:2019 GENERAL ELECTION (LOK SABHA)

BACKGROUND

The General Election of Lok Sabha was conducted simultaneously with Legislative assembly elections in the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and Sikkim in seven phases from 11 April to 19 May 2019 to elect the members of the 17th Lok Sabha. The result of the election was declared on 23rd may. The BJP (Bhartiya Janta Party) won in a landslide by receiving 37% of votes, the highest vote share by a political party since 1989 General Election, and winning 303 seats, further increasing its substantial majority. The BJP led NDA (National Democratic Alliance) won 353 seats.

In addition, the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) won 91 seats, while other parties won 98 seats.

This election was also important from the perspective of voter turnout because the voter turnout was over 67% which was highest ever in any Indian general election, as well as the highest ever participation by women voters until the 2024 Indian General Election.

KEY DETERMINANTS OBSERVED

LEADERSHIP FACTOR

The 2019 general election was a story of focus, leadership, dedication, branding, communication, marketing. In BJP there had been a significant number of influential leaders emerge. They have made an incredible mark of their own in the eyes of the world. From the influential speeches of Sushma Swaraj in international representations, to the unprecedented eloquence of Nirmala Sitaraman in messaging defense approaches to international audience, there have been monumental instances where leaders from the BJP have stood up to represent for our country.

The political campaigns done by the BJP government highlighted the lack of well internal structure within the congress party and the dynasty politics of the Gandhi family during Congress era.

Narendra Modi's personal appeal was one of the main cause or central pillar for winning the general election by the BJP. The party portrayed Narendra Modi as the "**Chowkidar**" of the nation, a protector against both external(terrorism) and internal threats (against dynastic corruption and rule in politics) of the country. The post-election surveys by **Lokniti-CSDS** found that one-third of the voters of BJP have not voted to the party if modi would not have been the prime ministerial candidate of BJP. Narendra Modi's team meticulously choreographed his image across traditional and social media for constant positive visibility.

NATIONAL SECURITY

In 2019, in response to the Pulwama Attack, the Indian Air force conducted an airstrike inside Pakistan- for the first time since 1971Indo-Pakistan war. The ongoing conflict which was going on with the Pakistan in 2019 played a significant role in the election. BJP with this portrayed itself as the strong decision taking government without any fear and showed the country and its armed forces power not just defensive but also retaliatory. The opposition parties accused of politicising the army, whilst the BJP countered their accusations by stating that such allegations raised by them were adversely affecting the morale of armed forces.

According to the "**Pew Research Center**", both before and after the outbreak of recent India-Pakistan tensions, their 2018 and 2019 surveys suggest that the significant majority of the voters consider Pakistan as a "very serious threat" to their country, and terrorism to be a "very big problem".

WELFARE SCHEMES

In the 2019 general election campaign, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) constantly highlighted the achievements of its welfare schemes such as Ujjwala and Jan Dhan Yojana. post-poll survey data collected by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) to study the views of Indian voters on various welfare schemes. The results show that the schemes introduced by it since 2014 have relatively high coverage. For instance, 34% of respondents had received cylinders under the Ujjwala scheme. Even existing schemes like the public distribution system (PDS) had high coverage (44%). Respondents credited the Union government for welfare schemes in the 2019 post-poll survey as opposed to the state government in previous years.

CASTE AND SOCIAL COALITION

Despite the deep rooted caste politics in India since independence, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had won massive mandates in many states across India. As many as 15 states and the union territory of Delhi have returned more than 50% vote share for Modi's party in the seats that it contested. In four more states, the BJP has notched up vote shares between 40% and 50%.

The need for Hindu consolidation increases even more when Opposition parties enter into an alliance as they did in the state of Uttar Pradesh (UP). Samajwadi Party (SP) is traditionally known to bank upon Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and Muslims, and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) has had a firm grip on Dalit votes. In order to win UP — both at the state and the Centre — the BJP had to prise non-Yadav OBC votes away from the SP and non-Jatav Dalit votes away from the BSP. Given the BJP's performance in 2019 — 50.8% vote share on the seats it contested in the state — it won't be surprising if a significant number of Yadavs and Jatavs too would have voted for the party.

Secondly, the Modi-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government has decisively shifted to delivery of welfare benefits through Aadhaar directly into bank accounts of beneficiaries. The actual rationale behind the idea of Aadhaar as welfare benefits were prone to significant leakages. Even though Aadhaar was the brainchild of the United Progressive Alliance government, its rollout for welfare delivery was massively accelerated by the NDA government.

Thirdly, the Modi-led NDA government brought in specific policies and schemes which further diluted the role of caste. The biggest move was the quota for the economically weaker sections (EWS) that was introduced through a Constitutional amendment in January 2019. Other successful schemes too focused on identities other than caste. For instance, the Ujjwala scheme to provide LPG cylinders to poor households benefitted women from all castes and communities.

ANALYSIS

Thus, the general election of 2019 or Lok Sabha election of 2019 highlighted the different factors which affected the elections what were the major impacts of this election and how and why this general election became one of the remarkable election in the history of democracy of India.

CONCLUSION

Voting behaviour in India is shaped by a complex interaction of social, economic, political, and psychological factors. While traditional determinants such as caste and religion continue to influence electoral decisions, there is a growing shift towards leadership appeal, governance, and development-oriented issues.

The case study of the 2019 General Elections highlights how modern electoral behaviour increasingly reflects a combination of identity-based and performance-based considerations. Additionally, the role of media and digital platforms has significantly transformed the way voters perceive political information.

In conclusion, voting behaviour in India is not static but continuously evolving. Understanding these changing patterns is essential for strengthening democratic processes and ensuring more informed and rational participation by citizens.