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Research Paper

A Theoretical Perspective on the Determinants of Voting Behaviour in India

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Abstract
Voting embodies the essence of democracy as it allows people to choose their representatives and establish their government through elections. Voting is the most essential action a citizen can take to ensure that the government functions as designed and that their political beliefs are recognized by the nation's political framework. Thus, it serves as the primary means of political engagement in liberal democratic societies, and the examination of voting patterns is a highly specialized area within political science. Voting has essentially become a widespread method through which people arrive at collective choices.

Keywords: *Political system, Election, soul of Democracy, Citizen, Voting, charisma, Political campaigns.*

I. Introduction

A citizen utilizes voting to express his support or disapproval of governmental choices, policies, and initiatives from different political parties. Voting behaviour pertains to the actions and non-actions of individuals regarding their participation in elections for representatives in local, regional, or national government.

In democratic societies, adult citizens utilize "voting" to convey their support or opposition to governmental actions, policies, and initiatives. Casting a vote is a crucial aspect of the democratic system, and the choices made at the grassroots level can shift the power dynamics among elites. For this reason, voting can arguably be viewed as the fundamental decision-making procedure in a democracy.

However, in broad terms, as Richaed Rose and Harve Massavir point out, voting covers as many as six important functions:-

- It involves an individual's choice of governors or major governmental policies;
- It permits individuals to contribute to a reciprocal and continuing exchange of influence with officeholders and candidates;
- It contributes to the development of an individual's allegiance to the existing constitutional regime;
- It contributes to the development of a voter's disaffection from the existing constitutional regime;
- It has emotional significance for individuals; and
- For some individuals, it may be functionless of any emotional or political significant personal consequences. The study of voting behaviour has come to be regarded as an important feature of current political research and theory.

Voting usability

Electoral ergonomics was developed by Michael Bruter and Sarah Harrison, who described it as the interaction between electoral systems and their organization and the psychology of voters. In simpler terms, it explores how the arrangement of an election or voting system affects the mindset of voters during that particular election.

Considering how electoral arrangements influence voter emotions is crucial and impacts their electoral behavior. During the week leading up to the elections, 20 to 30% of voters either finalize their choice or alter their previous decisions, with nearly half making changes on election day. A study indicates that individuals are more inclined to support conservative candidates when polling places are situated in churches, while another study reveals that voters aged 18-24 are almost twice as likely to back far-right parties when voting is conducted by mail.

Mechanisms of affective influence on voting

The differential effect of several specific emotions have been studied on voting behavior:

(i). Surprise –In assessing the effect of home-team sports victories on voting, Healy et al. showed that surprising victories provided close to twice the benefit to the incumbent party compared to victories overall.

(ii). Anger – Affective theory would predict that anger increases the use of generalized knowledge and reliance upon stereotypes and other heuristics.

(iii). Anxiety – Voters who report anxiety regarding an election are more likely to vote for candidates whose policies they prefer, and party members who report feeling anxious regarding a candidate are twice as likely to defect and vote for the opposition candidate. Others have denied that anxiety's indirect influence on voting behavior has been proven to the exclusion of alternative explanations, such as the possibility that less preferred candidates produce feelings of anxiety, as opposed to the reverse.

(iv). Fear –One study found that subjects primed with fear spent more time seeking information on the web before a hypothetical voting exercise than those primed with anger.

(v). Pride – Results from the American National Elections Survey found that pride, along with hope and fear, explained a significant amount of the variance in peoples' 2008 voting choices. The size of the effect of expressions of pride on voting for McCain was roughly one third of the size of the effect of party identification, typically the strongest predictor. Appeals to pride were also found to be effective in motivating voter turnout among high-propensity voters, though the effect was not as strong as appeals to shame.

(vi). Neuroticism- This is usually defined as emotional instability characterized by more extreme and maladaptive responses to stressors and a higher likelihood of negative emotions (e.g., anxiety, anger, and fear.

Effects of voting on emotion

The act of voting itself can produce emotional responses that may bias the choices voters make and potentially affect subsequent emotional states.

A recent study on voters in Israel found that voters' cortisol levels, the so-called "stress hormone," were significantly higher immediately before entering a polling place than personal baseline levels measured on a similar, non-election day. This may be significant for voting choices since cortisol is known to affect memory consolidation, memory retrieval, and reward- and risk-seeking behavior. Acute stress may disrupt decision making and affect cognition.

Additionally, research done on voters in Ann Arbor and Durham after the US 2008 elections showed partial evidence that voting for the losing candidate may lead to increased cortisol levels relative to levels among voters who chose the winning candidate.

Moreover, Rui Antunes indicated within a 2010 academic study that a personal relationship created with the political parties in America. This may be due to the strong influence in the USA of the development of this relationship through a socialisation process which is somewhat caused by the nature of the individual's background.

Practical implications

(i). Political campaigns

The use of emotional appeals in political campaigns to increase support for a candidate or decrease support for a challenger is a widely recognized practice and a common element of any campaign strategy Campaigns often seek to instill positive emotions such as enthusiasm and hopefulness about their candidate among party bases to improve turnout and political activism while seeking to raise fear and anxiety about the challenger. Enthusiasm tends to reinforce preferences, whereas fear and anxiety tends to interrupt behavioral patterns and leads individuals to look for new sources of information.

(ii). Military voting behavior

Enlisted personnel political behavior has only been studied more recently, notably by Dempsey, and Inbody. Enlisted personnel, often thought to behave and vote as did officers, do not. They more nearly represent the general population. In general, the usual demographic predictors of voting and other political behavior apply to military personnel.

Technological implications

(i). Access to technology

We are currently living in an era within which we are becoming increasingly reliant upon the use of technology; many of us have become accustomed to using technology and therefore would find it very difficult to function and make decisions without it. As a result of this, voting behaviour has been changing significantly in recent years due to these advancements in technology and media, "tracing the rise of email, party websites, social media, online videos and gamification, scholars have shown, since the 1990s, parties have become heavily dependent on digital technology." This portrays just how important access to technology is, as many will alter

their views on which political party to vote for, whether to vote at all and whether they encourage the next generation to vote based upon what they learn whilst using technology.

(ii). Impacts of social media

Although social media has many positive implications, the lack of monitoring and accessibility opens a gateway for foreign interference in elections and indoctrination of voters. Due to the advancements in technology over the last two decades, politicians and their political parties are becoming heavily reliant on technology and in particular social media outlets such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat. Martin Moore supported this view in his book, "A survey conducted amongst British journalists that summer found that seventy per cent were using Twitter for reporting. Therefore voters are now accessing information from less conventional outlets; yet the ease allows for politicians to expand their reach from the eldest generations, right down to the younger generations.

(iii). **Loss aversion**

The loss aversion theory by Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman is often associated with voting behavior as people are more likely to use their vote to avoid the effect of an unfavorable policy rather than supporting a favorable policy. From a psychological perspective, value references are crucial to determine individual preferences. Furthermore, it could be argued that the fact that loss aversion is found only in high stakes serves as a validation of loss aversion, because it shows that even when people care much about the outcome of their decision they are still biased. This is evident when it comes to elections and referendums, as voters make their choices based on the cost benefit analysis.

Voting Behaviour In India: Determinants

The behaviour of voter is influenced by several factors such as religion, caste, community, language, money, policy or ideology, purpose of the polls, extent of franchise, political wave etc. The political parties and groups make use of these variables for the sake of winning the battle of the ballot box. Despite making their professions for enlightened secularism, politicians can be found making appeals to the religious and communal sentiments of the people; they can also be found involved in exploiting the factors of language or money to achieve the purpose of emerging successful in the war of votes.

(a). Charisma:

One important factor of voting behaviour is Charisma. It means exceptional quality of a factor and override group elements leader that becomes a source of attraction and reverence for the people in large numbers; in an opposite sense, it also means a source of awe and terror that frightens the people in large numbers not to speak or dare to do anything against the wishes of the mighty leader. Fortunately, in our country, the constructive aspect of charisma has had its role at the time of election. Huge attendance at the meetings addressed by towering personalities like Nehru,Indira, Vajpayee,Modi and a sudden change in the mind of the voters in response to the appeals issued by such great figures may be counted as the concrete evidences of the role of charisma in the electoral behaviour of our people.

(b). Religion :

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 behavior

(c). Language :

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.

(d). Mass literacy :

Mass literacy has been another factor of voting behaviours in India. It is because of this weakness of the people that political parties, communal groups and militant outfits, are in a position to exploit the sentiments of the people in the name of caste, religion, region and other such factor. The votes of the illiterate constitute a big proportion of the votes polled and hence it plays a big role in determining the outcomes of elections. However, despite this feature, the common sense and maturity born out of experience of the past has also been playing a big role in influence the voters mind and actions. In 1977 they united to defeat the forces authoritarianism and 1980, they again to defeat the this united non performers.

(e). **Factionalism :**
The Indian Political life, from the village level to the national level, in characterized by factionalism. No political party, nor even the cadre based BJP and the two communist parties is free from factionalism. It is at work, as Rajani Kothari points out, at all level of the congress. It has adversely affected the strength of the congress is a political party with glorious past, a weak present and not a bright future. Other parties are also suffering from factionalism.

(f). Money Factor :
India is a poor country with a large number of people living below poverty line. Money as such plays a vital role in determining voting behaviour of the people in India. A rich candidate or party has always better chances of winning the elections. But it is to be pointed out here that it happens only in normal circumstances and not during a wave –election or when other key issues are involved. Despite organizing a very expensive election campaign, the Congress(I) lost power in 1989.

(g). Civic education
Civic Education or the democracy education would generally be a part of the school education curriculum unless it is structured into adult education programmes. The curriculum may broadly include the following:

- Knowledge of the political systems and government; Constitutional provisions; Democratic Institutions: their role, structure and functioning; rights and responsibilities;
- Independent Judiciary, Electoral Management Body.
- Freedom of expression, media.
- Democratic values and principles; culture and society. and equality before law, inclusion, citizenship, integrity, mutual civic respect and civic engagement
- Important social, political, economic, environmental, international and other related issues.
- Elected offices; roles and responsibilities, electoral system and how it operates for regular and periodic free and fair elections; accountability.

Factors affecting Voting Behaviour

Voting behaviour is rather a complex and multi-faceted subject. Diverse factors that comprise both political and non-political have an effect on it. Its determinants are vast and wide-ranging, and differ from one person to another to a substantial degree. Voting behaviour is determined by the political attitudes, assumptions, policy preferences, and partisan loyalties of individuals and the political and institutional context within which they cast their votes in an election. Thus, there are a numbers of indicators affecting voters' choice as one of the early pioneers of electoral studies in India, V.M. Sirsikar, observes, "an enquiry into the process of election indicates factors other than rationality."

The assessment of voting pattern consistently focuses on the determinants of why people vote as they do and how they arrive at the decisions they make. Most attention has been, however, to the behaviour of the mass electorate. A variety of research on the study of voting behaviour has identified two major types of factors, which can be broadly categorized as sociological (demographic, social, and economic attributes) and psychological (politically relevant attitudes, beliefs and values). The comparative political science literature recognizes that certain variables such as education; income and unemployment; importance of party support or attachment; perception of issues; ideology and issues; partisanship; evaluation of leaders or the top candidates; etc., have generally been found to associate with voting behaviour of the electorate. Some of the selected predicators of voting behaviour for this study are analyzed as follows:

Sociological factors

(i). Gender: Both Male and female played a very important role in voting. However, the commitment is more to candidate then to party both to males and females. Village consensus and advice of village headman work more with female voters than with male voters, while the merit of the candidates attracts more males than females. Sex provides a base for diversity where modernism is a significant issue, since in most societies women's role are more involved in religious institutions and less in modern economic ones. Consequently, where there is a difference between the voting pattern of the two sexes, women tend to support traditionalist parties more than modernising ones.

(ii). Kinship: Kinship is a relationship between any entities that share a genealogical origin, through either biological or cultural, or historical descent. In a kinship based society, kinship provides many of the social relations in which a person is likely to be involved in the course of his life. It is a strategy force determining political behaviour of the people and influencing their thought process.

(iii). Age: Age may be less important than the strength of the voters' attachment to a political party, and it is this allegiance that hardens with age. However the relationship between age and voting is curvilinear, with a gradual increasing in the mid-age group and declining thereafter. nonetheless, "it is the candidate orientation which dominates in all the age groups."

(iv). Education: Over the years, education has emerged as one of the major predicators of voting. Educations widen the political visualization and "expands the horizon of one's interest in the political process. It enables the individual to develop the skill for political participation." The electorate having more years of formal education has the greater probability of exercising their franchise in any election.

Economic Factors:

The economic status of the electorate is an important indicator of voting behaviour. Though it is often considered as non-existent impact on voting, economic factors play an important role in shaping voting behaviour of the electorate as Arivind Virmani points out:

An improvement (or) worsening of economic conditions can increase (or) decrease the probability of voting for the party perceived to be responsible for the change. Further, the independent or floating voter is more likely to be affected by economic conditions than voters committed to a particular party for social, caste, religious and cultural reasons.

` However, as Wolfinger and Rosenstone's findings indicated, the likelihood of voting may not be a linear function of income. The key difference seems to be the unpleasant variation among those of high-income groups and low-income groups. The most distinguishing factors in election are vote bribing which is open-secret which "reflect a clash between traditional economic ties and changing cultural pressure." Poor voters are reported to have received money offered by various candidates.

(a). Public Employment: Along with education and economic status, occupation appears to exert a great effect on voting behaviour. Public officials tend to take greater interest in voting and are usually votes for the party which is likely to address their interest. Even farmers, who are conventionally viewed as being uncommonly likely to abstain from voting, have become much less distinctive in this regard. Studies have also revealed that government workers of all types tend to take an unusual interest in political matters and are unlikely to vote in the election.

Psychological Factors:

(i). Interest in Public Affairs: Those voters who have interest in public affairs and who follows the news of the present day situation are likely voters in any election. This is because of the fact that such voters are very much concern with the affairs of state's policies and programme. On the contrary, there are some who take minimal interest in such affairs and are unlikely voters. Many voters made explicit references to specific issue concerns, whereas others spoke in more global terms about parties, leaders or local candidates without elaborating their reasoning in any detail.

(ii). Strength and Direction of Party loyalty: Voting behaviour is more easily explained by emphasising party loyalty. Some party men are likely to vote in elections than others as different parties may draw their members from different social base which reflects the weakness and the strength of the party. However, in India, people do not hesitate to shift their votes from one party to another as parties' identities are not very strong. If party loyalty is taken as one of the key indexes of political considerations, it may be assumed that the parties play a marginal role in determining the preference of the voters. Though party loyalty is an important indicator of voting behaviour, it is often "determined by other factors like social class, economic position or ethnic affiliation."

(iii). Perceived difference between Parties:

Recent research, however, has emphasized 'party de-alignment.' Ideology could be said to be present only in terms of accent on social justice, involving considerable overlap and neutralization among parties which vied in usurping each other's ideological planks. Therefore, people are most unlikely to vote in the election where there are no ideological differences.

(iv). Charisma of the Candidate: Role of personality in influencing the electoral behaviour cannot be refuted, Charisma refers to mean 'a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural … or … exceptional powers or qualities'. Moreover it is this quality of the leader which enables him to attract a large number of people and under the influence of which the people pay reverence to the charismatic leader. Therefore, there is a strong belief that organisation of political party under a charismatic leader is a source of popular support for the party.

(v). Public Opinion and Mass Media: Pubic opinion and mass media has, of late, become an important indicator of voting behaviour. Public opinion refers to the attitudes of a significant number of people about public affairs, or matters of government and politics that concern the people at large. It is "one not of advocacy of any particular policy, subject or topic, but of the provider of both objective and subjective information, obtained systematically and objectively, analysed dispassionately and delivered evenly."

Voting Behaviour in the Indian Context:

Voting behaviour is influenced in the Indian context by various factors such as religion, caste, community, language, class, money, personal charisma of the leaders and also by certain unforeseen or accidental factors. Though majority of Indian voters are found to be illiterate and ignorant, they are politically more alert than the

educated persons. They take an active role in voting. They have shown on some occasion's appreciable political maturity in unseating some of the inefficient state governments.
It is because of their faith in the democratic processes, interest in elections and active participation in voting, India continues to be the largest democracy in the world with 50 years of history.

II. Conclusion

The continuity in the operation of India‟s political system as a developing democratic political system is gradually training the Indian voters. The process of emergence of an issue based political struggle in place of a caste or religion or personality dominated struggle for power is very slowly but gradually taking shape. 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. No such action is taken which would in any way undermine the popular will expressed through elections.

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