

PAPER 1, SECTION B

By Dr. SUSHANT VERMA

TRENDS IN VOTING BEHAVIOUR

Voting behavior is a field of study concerned in the ways in which people tend to vote in public election and the reasons why they vote as they do. The study of the factors or situations which inspire and influence the voter to exercise his right to vote in favour or against a particular candidate is called voting behavior. It was pioneered by Behavioural revolution in the discipline.

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 ELECTORAL BEHAVIOUR

In view of Prof Ashutosh Kumar and Prof Rekha Saxena, from the literature on electoral behavior in India, one can find the following factors as major determinants of voting behavior in India-

- (a) Party-identification: - Party-identification acts as one of the main factors in attributing a behavioural tendency for voting patterns in India.
- (b) Issues: - By forming an identification of issues with local constituency the candidature or the party aims at gathering support from voters.
- (c) Immediate Gains: - Myopic voters with a short time horizon will tend to favour those candidates that can offer immediate incentives.
- (d) Candidate: - A "good" candidate has considerable chance of winning elections in India. Personality, credibility and performance of the candidate are considered by the Indian voter.
- (e) Policy-programme: - Promise of policy is more important even than a candidate to a vote before the elections.
- (f) Anti-Incumbency Wave: - Anti-incumbency factor is a major determinant in many elections in India that refers to the fact of ruling parties routed routinely in most of the states assembly polls forcing governing coalitions to replace incumbents with fresh candidates.

(g) Charismatic Leadership: - Populism and Personalism are being encouraged to influence voters. Charisma of leader is used to a large extent to garner support from the people. Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi, Atal Behari Vajpayee, Jyoti Basu are the example of this point.

(h) Religion: - The influence of religion on voting behavior has become important in India as the religious groups act as “vote-banks”.

(i) Caste: - In India, considerable importance is assigned to caste based voting. The local voter assumes greater weight to caste-issues. There has been politicization of castes in India. Caste groups also act as “vote-banks” like Lingayats and Vokkalingas in Karnataka(assembly poll results of 2013 was influenced highly by these groups), Yadavs, Rajputs, Jats, Thakurs, Bhumihars and Kurmis in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

(j) Region: - The post 1977 electoral politics notices state-specific electoral verdicts with growing emphasis on problems and issues at the regional level. When caste no longer remains traditional vote-bank, the “regional identification” dominates the voters’ mind in India today.

(k) Local Elites: - Local elites play a dominant role in identification of voters choice as they act as a means of coercion for the individual at the village.

(l) Ideology: - Often ideology plays a role in voter’s mind. Recent elections in India, however, find expression in the decline of ideology, particularly in the coalition-era.

(m)3-M’s Power (Money-Mafia-Ministerial):- The increasing role of the violence and crime related behavior with regard to party-connections with money, mafia and ministerial power has led to the emergence of criminalization of politics which overtly or covertly influence the voting behavior.

(n) Media-Wave: - ‘Fringe-voter’ under the impact of media-wave sometimes decides the fate of elections as the mass media, particularly in our times of 24x7 news channels, has the capacity to bring matters to the attention of the public or to conceal them – a process referred to as ‘agenda setting’ .

(o) Class: - The class factor, i.e. the economic interest sometimes exerts influence upon the Indian voter to make a choice.

(p) Marginal Individual Voter: - Today, caste-group or class-group influences are playing a smaller role in India elections. It is the individual who is the centre of political mobilization. Re-election or election of parties or candidates crucially depends on how they can integrate the “marginal voter” into the political sphere

Caste

Caste is among the most researched determinant in studies of voting behaviour. Although caste has been one of the most effective determinants of voting behaviour in elections in the post-Independent India, it has become more spectacular since the 1990s. The main reason for this has been the impact of Mandal Commission which was introduced by the VP Singh government giving reservation to the OBCs in the central government institution and rise of the parties such as the BSP, the SP and the RJD in north India. These parties have been identified with Dalits, OBCs or the peasant classes. Prior to their rise, the Congress party represented a coalition of various castes. Emergence of these parties underlined the significance of the marginalized castes playing decisive role in electoral politics. Their rise also increased competition among different castes.

In view of Christophe Jafferlot, traditionally, caste has been considered the most important variable that must be factored in to explain the electoral behaviour of Indians. Political parties carefully analyse the caste composition of every constituency at the time of candidate selection. Political parties take caste into consideration while formulating their manifestos, programmes and agendas. Caste also impacts in policy making. Parties consider the caste of candidate while nominating him/her to contest election.

The voter turnout is not lower among citizens at the lower end of the social and economic hierarchy; if anything, the reverse is true. This is because **a poor, low caste person is more likely to vote here than an upper caste, upper class person. Also, the rural electorate votes more than their urban counterparts;** voting in the tribal areas has caught up with the rest of the country; and the gap between the turnout of men and women has reduced substantially in the recent years.

In comparison to the urban areas, caste is more determining factor in elections in the rural areas. The caste factor not only affects the party formation but also the affiliation of particular caste with the national party. As Pushpendra mentions in an article, during 11th Lok Sabha election (1996) the upper caste particularly in northern India deserted Congress party and chose to rally behind BJP. The rise of regional parties and backward castes, despite inter and intracaste divisions and conflicts have found strong political representation in the form of different regional parties and vote support base. The parties which are identified with specific castes maintain their support base among the principal castes; for instance, the SP, JD (U), RJD are generally identified with the OBCs, the BSP with the Dalits or the BJP with the high castes.

Jafferlot argues that Jati remains one of the most relevant units of analysis for understanding electoral behaviour at the state level, because a relative majority of each jati aligns itself with one party. For instance, the Yadavs tend to support the SP in UP and the RJD in Bihar. Jatavs support the BSP in UP and Rajputs

support the BJP. This state of things may result from emotional attachment to the leaders of these parties who belong to the same jati.

Class

Class is reflected in economic issues such as employment or employment allowance, price rise, land reforms, subsidies, removal of poverty (garibi hatao), loan waiver, etc. These issues have been the focus of campaign in several elections. Indeed, it was slogan of garibi hatao given by the Congress in the 1971 Lok Sabha elections in which the party won handsomely. It is generally acknowledged that this slogan was the main factor that determined the voting behaviour in favour of the Congress.

The class-based issues were among the principal issues of political mobilization in elections during the 1950s-1960s. Land reforms and welfare schemes of the Congress were among other issues that won the Congress support of voters in the elections during the 1950s-1960s. In the 1960s, socialist parties along with other opposition parties had mobilized people on economic issues. This resulted in the defeat of the Congress in eight states in 1967 elections and formation of the non-Congress governments.

In 1998 assembly election the voters voted against the BJP because of lack availability of onions and hike in their price. In cities such as Delhi, class-related issues such as concessions in electricity and water bills have determined electorates behaviour in favour of AamAdami Party in 2020 assembly election.

Gender

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.

However, there are differences among political parties on reservation for women in legislatures. Several parties have included issues about women's welfare in their manifestos and programmes. For example, in 2015 assembly election in Bihar, Nitish Kumar launched anti-liquor policy for welfare for women, especially for those belonging to the marginalised and backward classes. Nitish Kumar regime's Cycle Yojna which enabled girl student to travel to schools influenced voting behaviour of several voters in an assembly election in Bihar. Modi government policies such as Beti Padhao Beti Bachao and Jan Dhan Yojna determined women's voting behaviour in several elections held in India since 2014.

Rainuka Dagar's study (2015) on 2014 Lok Sabha elections shows the gender became a point of reference across three broad issues, i.e,

- ✓ governance,
- ✓ development, and
- ✓ secularism which formed part of the campaign.

Women issues were lobbied across all three fronts as a point of reference. Women's safety, inclusive growth model and economic, social and physical security were the essence of the broad issues. Indeed, this election saw the increase in number of women's participation. These issues determined the voting behaviour to a considerable extent. Even though other factors such as caste, class, religion and language impact the choice, women are becoming more aware of their rights and welfare schemes.

Ethnicity

Ethnicity is not only visible in voting pattern but also in the formation of political parties. The most suitable example of ethnicity formed on the bases of multiple factors that determine voting behaviour can be found in northeast India and other tribe-inhabited parts of India. Northeast Indian states present most important examples of ethnicity based electoral politics and voting behaviour. Different ethnic groups are formed on the bases of differences in these markers (culture, history, economy and perceived sense of discrimination and exploitation). During political competition or political conflict, these markers become symbols of political mobilization.

Tribes often complain that they have become "internal colonies" of the outsiders who exploit their economy and culture. On several occasions, this has resulted in ethnic violence. Political parties, students' organisations and other civil society organisations mobilize tribes on these issues. During every election the political parties, especially regional parties espousing the cause of the tribal community, campaign on the issues related to tribes'

- ✓ cultural identities,
- ✓ economy and
- ✓ political autonomy.

Specifically, the most common determinants of voting behaviour of tribes are

- ✓ protection of their cultural identity,
- ✓ sustenance and protection of natural resources such as forest, minerals and other natural resources,

- ✓ the influx of outsiders which often leads to erosion of their cultural identity and exploitation of resource,
- ✓ regional development,
- ✓ political autonomy ensured through the V and VI schedules.

These issues generally work as the determinant of tribes' voting behaviour.

Religion

Since religion forms an important part of peoples' lives, in practice separating religion from politics becomes impossible. Religion not only affects political behaviour of people, but also religious symbols are used by political parties and leaders to muster political support.

Parties also often select candidates to contest elections on consideration of religious identities. And people often vote in elections on religious considerations. Thus, religion works as a determinant in voting behaviour in India. There are few political parties in India that use religious symbols for political mobilization; for example the BJP, the Shiv Sena, Shiromani Akali Dal, and MIM (Majlis Itehdul Muslimeen). In religious mobilization, a religious community is seen to be suffering due to favour given to another community. In competitive politics the former and the latter become rivals. In a situation marked by religious polarization, different religious communities tend to vote for rival political leaders or parties.. Mobilization by them shapes the role of religion as a determinant of voting behaviour.

In elections which took place before 1967, religion played minor role in determining voting behaviour. It had become effective in the 1960s. In 1967 and 1969 assembly elections in Jana Sangh's victory, religion was an important determinant of voting behaviour. However, religion was not the only factor: it operated along with economic issues.

In India, religion became a regular determinant of voting behaviour since the 1980s. The Congress after getting new nomenclature as the Congress (I) in 1980 sought to use religious symbols to get political gains. It sought to strengthen its position by attempting to strike a balance between Hindus and Muslims. In order to get Hindus' support, the Congress government also unlocked the temple in February 1986 for darshan of Ram Temple. It had allowed the VHP to lay foundation stone (Shilanyas) of the proposed site of Ram Temple at Ayodhya. For getting Muslims' support the Congress government introduced the Muslim Women's (Protection of Rights and Divorce Bill) in 1985. The purpose of the bill was to neutralize the impact of Shah Bano case.

This led to competitive politics between the Congress and the BJP to mobilize communities in the name of religion. **But Political parties, leaders and organizations mix religious issues with non-religious issues of people**

- ✓ economic needs,
- ✓ governance issues,
- ✓ removal of corruption,
- ✓ cultural issues, etc., and become common issues of a religious community.

The electorates feel that a party or candidate of their choice in elections, not only will protect their religion but also economic and cultural interests and provide better governance.

Since 1980s, the BJP has grown from a two-MP party in 1984 Lok Sabha election to a party with absolute majority of 303 in the 2019 Lok Sabha election. It has also formed governments in several states on its own or with its allies. The growth of the BJP over three decades is an indication of religion becoming an important determinant in electoral behaviour. There is no single factor that caused spectacular victory of the BJP: apart from governance, basic needs, campaign style, leadership patterns, lack of credible, promise to provide jobs, bring back black money, ideology/nationalism, etc. also mattered.

The role of social media

The social media plays a crucial role in mobilizing masses for electoral politics. It not only encourages religion-based mobilization but also populism. In contemporary electoral politics, it has been used as a tool to attract or manipulate populace's perceptions towards party and party leaders. During 2014 and 2019 General elections, social media has played a significant role in campaigning of political parties and leaders and has also impacted voting behaviour of people.

Usage of smart phone and internet has provided a new platform for political parties to reach out to masses. The advantage of this medium is that it is accessible without any constraint of region, ethnicity or religion. The important user of social media is youth and its target is to mobilize young middle-class voters as young middle-class voters are not follower of traditional factors of voting pattern. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube have made this new method of communication accessible to different sections of the society, and has given opportunity to political leaders to popularize their ideology and mobilize public opinion.

In view of **Ghanshyam Shah**, Modi launched digital India 272 plus mission in 2014, referring to the number of seats he needed for a majority in Parliament. In election campaign, the BJP used this medium to connect and spread Modi's messages like 'corruption free India', 'development' and efficient management.

Language

Language also works as determinant of voting behaviour. But generally, language alone does not determine voting behaviour. It does so in alliance with other factors: **when language is seen as the basis of favour or discrimination of communities, regions or ethnic groups.** In comparison to other factors such as caste, religion, it becomes more effective in electoral politics in certain situations.

Language has been most effective determinant in Tamil Nadu reflected in agitation against what was seen as imposition of Hindi; in the northeast, especially in the 1960s – there was conflict on Assamese and Bengali languages. This led to demand for creation of separate state resulting in creation of Meghalaya in 1972. After Assam Accord, Bodo language became an important determinant in politics of Bodo-dominated areas.

In UP, language often becomes part of politics based on religions, Hindi becomes symbol of Hindu identity and Urdu of Muslim identity. From the 1950s, the Congress government and other parties (socialists, communists, Jana Sangha) in UP had been opposed to making Urdu as second official language but sought to promote Hindi. In 1989, N.D Tiwari government in UP passed legislation making Urdu second official language – provoking communal riot in Badaun. The Ordinance was finally implemented in 1994 by Mulayam Singh government.

Urdu was given second official language status. The socialist launched movement in UP and Bihar for making Hindi compulsory and removal of English as an official language in the 1960s.

**VAJIRAM & RAVI**

Main 2021

Q7. Electoral behavior of voters is governed more by social and economic factors than the political factors. Explain (20 Marks).





