

Theoretical Perspective of Voting Behaviour in India: Approaches and Determinants

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Abstract

Voting is one of the fundamental types of political support in liberal law based society. It is a key transform in the democratic set up and assumes critical part in smooth functioning and existence of democracy. Voting is acknowledged as the instrument of reaching consensus and in the period a basic method of institutionalizing clashes amid different aggregations. On equitable systems, their number is truly huge and at increasing point, every grown-up resident utilizes 'voting' as a means for expressing his approval or disapproval of governmental decisions, approaches and programmes of different political parties and the qualities of the candidates who are engaged in the battle until get the status of being the delegates of the people. 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. 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. The main purpose of the present study is to highlight the approaches and major determinants which are affecting voting behaviour in India.

Key Words: *Fundamental, Voting, Political, Instrument, Democracy*

Introduction

Voting is one of the fundamental types of political support in liberal law based society. It is a key transform in the democratic set up and assumes critical part in smooth functioning and existence of democracy. Voting is acknowledged as the instrument of reaching consensus and in the period a basic method of institutionalizing clashes amid different aggregations. The voting pattern focuses on the determinants of why people vote as they do and how they arrive at the decisions they make. In democratic system, and their number is quite large and ever increasing, each adult citizen uses 'voting' as a means of expressing his approval or disapproval of government decisions, policies and programmes, the policies and programmes of various political parties and qualities of candidate who are engaged in struggle to get the status of being the representatives of people. In a limited way, voting refers to the function of electing representatives by casting votes in elections. Political scientists, on the other hand, have concentrated on the influence of political factors such as issues, political programmes, electoral campaigns and the popularity of party leaders on voting behaviour.

Samuel S. Eldersveld in his article, Theory a Method in Voting Behaviour

Research writes: "The term "voting behaviour" is not new. But it has been used of late to describe certain areas of study and types of political phenomena which previously had either not been conceived or were considered irrelevant." He remarked that voting behaviour connotes today more than examination of voting records, compilation of voting statistics and computation of electoral shifts (Eldersveld, 1972:267). It is also treated for describing certain areas of study and types, of political phenomena. Voting behaviour is not confined to the examination of voting statistics, records and computation of electoral shifts and swings. Voting behaviour implies the psychological processes of the voters such as perception, emotion and motivation and relates it to political wisdom. It is a complex act and the voters exercise their right under such influences like the advice of a friend for a particular candidate or party, the voters feeling about a particular issue (Sikri, 1989:108). Voting behaviour studies deal with the behaviour and action of voters as a whole in the electoral process.

Elections refer to a process of democratic participation in which all the people express their opinion about personalities and issues by making on a

ballot paper. Election expresses democratic class struggle through voting. Major differences in the political allegiances of different age groups, classes, education, religious or ethnic groups have been reported by voting survey. Voting for right or left depends upon a person's life experiences. The study of electoral behavior constitutes a very significant area of empirical investigation that takes the subjects of politics very close to the discipline of sociology with the result that a new dimension of advanced study, rather a discipline, is becoming more and more popular with the name of political sociology or sociological politics. Man is a rational creature in the philosophical sense of term; he is not so rational in the realms of his economic and political behaviour. An empirical study of the electoral behavior displays the astounding fact that the behavior of man is influenced by several irrational forces. The role of political parties and pressure groups in invoking religious and communal factors, influence of money or charismatic personality of a leader and a host of other irrational forces have their definite influence on the minds of the voters. The role of these irrational forces can be discovered or discerned in case a student of empirical politics focuses his attention on

how the favorable results of an election are obtained. This fact applies to every democratic system and, as such, India is no exception.

Voting behaviour study acquires a great significance where the polity is characterized in terms of high degree of social and cultural diversity. The voting behaviour is taken to be the one area of political science where theory can be systematically developed and quantitatively measured and tested. Secondly, in voting behaviour research, people have achieved more explicit conclusions than in any other type of political science research. Thirdly, in the voting behaviour research, theory construction has reached a high stage of sophistication (**Eldersveld, 1972: 268**). However, keeping the case of Indian voting behavior in view, Prof. V. M. Sirsikar well observes: "An enquiry into the process of election indicates factors other than rationality. It may be said that India has secured a stable government, but the mass manipulation, casteist influences, minority fears, and charismatic hold of the Prime Minister have played no main part in this process."

Different Approaches of Voting Behaviour

A number of different approaches have been used to explain voting behaviour. The major approaches may be distinguished as structural, ecological, social-psychological, rational-choice and radical.

1. **Structural** (or sociological) approaches concentrate on the relationship between individual and social structure, place the vote in a social context, and examine the effects of such variables as social class, language, nationalism, religion, and rural-urban contrasts on voting. This approach has placed much emphasis on the party identification and social class.

2. **Ecological** (or aggregate statistical) approaches relate voting patterns to the characteristic features of a geographical area (ward, constituency, state, etc.).

3. **Social-psychological** approaches relate voting decisions to the voter's psychological predispositions or attitudes, for example, his or her party identification, attitudes to candidates, and the like.

4. **Rational-choice** approaches argue that voting is governed less by group loyalties and class position than by individual's rational calculations of self-interest. These approaches attempt to explain voting

behaviour as the outcome of a series of instrumental cost-benefit calculations by the individual.

This model of voting behaviour sees the voter as thinking individual who is able to take a view on political issues and votes accordingly. It rejects the notion that voting behaviour is largely determined by class affiliation or class socialization.

5. **Radical approach** regards class-based (structural) model as outdated and insufficient to explain contemporary developments and consider the rational-choice model as inadequate.

This approach has suggested two main sources of influence which structure political alignments:

(a) Sectoral cleavages which separate people into groups with different interests and priorities, e.g., public sector and private sector, and

(b) Dominant ideological messages which are conveyed mainly through the media and form 'political consciousness'.

Determinants of Voting Behaviour

Voting behaviour is rather a complex and multi-faceted subject. In the democratic set up voting is essential process. The democratic system has been working smoothly, for the past 60 (57) years.

Citizens of India enjoy their full freedom and understanding in voting power. Parties try to capture maximum number of votes to come in power. For this they tend to develop and determine the voting behaviour of the voters. Issues related to the daily life such as unemployment, price rise, law & order system and other developmental issues often influence the vote of common people. The behaviour of a voter is influenced 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. Despite making their professions for enlightened secularism, politicians can be found invoking 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.

The interest of the voters and accordingly their behaviour at the time of voting is also influenced by the nature or purpose of the elections or the extent of the suffrage. That is, national elections or the election of the chief executive engage wider attention than a local election for the post of

a sub-ordinate authority. The force of charisma has its own part to play where by voters are influenced en masse by the slogan of “Garibi Hatao”, or ‘A vote for a pair of bullocks is a vote for Panditji is and a vote for Panditji vote for stability and progress; or ‘Indira means India, India means Indira’ and the like.

This paper highlighted some major determinants of Indian voting behaviour. 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. In India, following main political and socio-economic factors which act as determinants of voting behaviors in our Democratic system;

Caste

Caste continues to be a determinant of voting behaviour 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 determinant of political behaviour. Votes are demanded in the name of caste. “Jat Ki Vote Jat Ko.” Brahmin votes vs Jat votes or Jat votes vs Ahir votes etc., are commonly used ‘principles’ in planning election strategy.

Religion

It is a fact that religion plays an important role especially where both the followers Hindus and Muslims are situated in a constituency. This gave a support to Religion based parties. Though, in a secular state like India, it must not be used. The establishment of a secular state in India by guaranteeing the right to freedom of religion to everyone, treating every religion as equal and non Recognition of any religion as a state religion-has not been successful in preventing the role of the religion as a determinant of political behaviour in general and voting behaviour in particular. The existence of such political parties and non political groups as stand linked with a particular religion, for example, the Muslim league, the Akali Dal, the Hindu Maha Sabha, the Shiv Sena etc. has 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 the 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.

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. The slogan of “Garibi Hatao” worked miracles in the election of 1971; the personality of Mrs. Gandhi after India’s miraculous victory in the Bangladesh War had the same marvelous

impact on the mind of the electorate in the State Assembly elections of 1972. The image of Jayaprakash Narayan had the same effect in the elections of 1977. So was the effect of the personality of Rajiv Gandhi in the elections of 1984 and of V. P. Singh in the elections of 1989. Personality of Modi, BJP won election of 2014. That is why, it is said: “Where the groups factors are weak or cancel out, this charisma may be the major.

Language

India is a multi-lingual state. Linguism also serves as deciding 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.

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.

Sub-Nationalism

Ethnic pluralism, communalism, regionalism and sub-nationalism are the hard realities of Indian society. Of late sub-nationalism has become a crucial factor in influencing the voting behaviour of the people. At times a secessionist group gives a call for the boycott of elections and uses pressure tactics to force the voters either not to vote in favour of a particular party. Some regional political parties like some fractions of the Akali Dal, Naga Nationalist Organization, Gorkha League, Jharkha party, AASU and AAGSP in Assam have raised parochial slogans from time to time and have disturbed the emotional stability of the people of their states. Such actions of some political parties have at times influenced some people to organize themselves on narrow and parochial lines.

Performance of the Party in Power

Each Political party contests elections on the basis of an election manifesto, and after coming into power, it is expected to

fulfill the promises made there in. Good or bad performance of the ruling party, just on the basis of the election promises made and promises actually fulfilled influence the basis behavior of the people in a big way. We experienced it in 1989 in India, when the Congress (I), which got a thumping majority in 1984 election, could not win even a simple majority in the very next election held in 1989 mainly because of its failure to perform successfully. In 1989, the Congress Party and in 1991 the Janata Dal failed to win because of their failures to exercise power and maintain their political stabilities. This has happened mainly because of a corresponding increase in the number of “floating voter” or “switchers” who are mostly young men and women from educated upper middle class, and are ready to shift their support from one party to another on the basis of their performance.

Current Events

The current problems and difficulties faced by the people as well as recent political developments or the poll eve developments also act as determinants of voting behaviour. The political and economic events of the election year also act as determining factors. The price rise, shortages and other economic hardships faced by the people during 1966-67 helped

several Political parties in considerably reducing the popularity of the congress with the masses. In 1967, the congress, though it retained its majority at the centre, suffered a loss of popularity which was reflected in its poor performance in the elections to the Legislative Assemblies. However, the victory in the 1971 Indo-pak war turned the tide in favour of the Congress in the elections that followed. In 1984 of the assassination of Mrs. Gandhi created a huge sympathy wave in favour of the congress(I) and its leaders Mr. Rajiv Gandhi in 1991, the assassination of Mr. Rajiv Gandhi on 21st May, stemmed the swing away to a low swing in favour of the Congress(I). The violent protests against the decision to implement the Mandal Commission Report by the Janta dal Government in 1990 played a definite role in reducing its popularity. In the election, the current event like the Kargil victory always influences the voting behaviour.

Election Campaigns

Each party launches a vigorous campaign for influencing the voters in its favour. Use of such means as mass meetings, street meetings, personal contacts, posters, poster war, speeches by film stars, T.V and radio broadcasts, News Paper advertisements, hand bills, processions and

propaganda is made to win votes, particularly the floating votes during the election campaigns. The election campaigns are designed to make a voter believe that his interest can be best served by the party/the candidate of the party contesting from his constituency. Thus acts as an important determinant of voting behaviour.

Local Issues

Local issues always influence the choice of the voters. A regional or a local party always tries to identify itself with local issues and there by secures for itself popular local support. The success of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha in Jharkhand region of Bihar is a classic example which highlights the role of local issues as determinants of voting behaviour. The spectacular success of the Telugu Desam Party in Andhra Pradesh in the 1999 Lok Sabha and Andhra Vidhan Sabha elections was largely determined by its image as a local party identified with the local interests of the state and having a good support with the centre. All regional parties try to win elections on local issues. In fact, all agencies of public opinion always act as determinants of voting behaviour.

Mass Illiteracy

Mass illiteracy has been another factor of voting behaviour 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 votes of the illiterates constitute a big proportion of the votes polled and hence they play a big role in determining the outcomes of elections. However, despite this feature, the common sense and maturity born out of the experience of the past has also been playing a big role in influencing the voter's minds and actions. In 1997, they united to defeat the forces of authoritarianism and in 1980, they again united to defeat the disunited on-performers.

Conclusion

Voting is one of the fundamental types of political support in liberal law based society. It is a key transform in the democratic set up and assumes critical part in smooth functioning and existence of democracy. Voting is acknowledged as the instrument of reaching consensus and in the period a basic method of institutionalizing clashes amid different aggregations. The voting pattern focuses on the determinants of why people vote as they do and how they arrive at the decisions they make. In democratic system, and their number is quite large and ever increasing, each adult citizen uses 'voting' as a means of expressing his approval or disapproval of government decisions,

policies and programmes, the policies and programmes of various political parties and qualities of candidate who are engaged in struggle to get the status of being the representatives of people.

These are thus the important determinants of voting behavior in India. 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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