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Research Paper On Influence Of Caste And Religion In Elections In India

BY- Viraj Pratap Khatter

ABSTRACT

This research paper on Influence of caste and religion in elections in India will be on the adverse effects on the election outcomes. The adverse effects on these two factors are; impact of social groups, influence on voters, influence on political parties, Muslim vote bank. The origin of this paper is where I want to analyze how their different castes and religions co-exist during elections even though they are immensely influential. In order to understand the problem, the paper will also deal with the results of elections. In this report, I have analyzed different statistics of seven states. These seven states are Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.



INTRODUCTION

History first started a process of a casteist system in India after the advent of Vedism in India. It was first used as a system to classify people based on their professions.

In India, the caste system is the most important factor that affects each and every part of life.

The caste system is a major hindrance in achieving a true democratic society in India. It is a vital factor for deciding about your future, marriage and even education. It influences¹ each and every aspect of social life. The caste identity becomes even more important when it comes to choosing a political candidate as well as party to vote for.

Lin (1998) argues that the political system of India² is affected by caste, religion and other factors like region etc. The reality is that every party tries to take the support of different castes for their electoral success. But it becomes difficult for them because people vote differently based on their caste and religion than any other factor. The competition among individuals who belong to same caste or region also affect the election results. Political parties also try to take advantage of this phenomenon in order to get more votes in form of caste-based voting.

The factors affecting the Indian election are the caste, religion, region etc. If any party wants to win more votes during elections they have to formulate their policies based on these factors. It is because people vote differently based on their caste and religion than any other factor.

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¹Aidt, T. S., & Franck, R. (2015). Democratization under the Threat of Revolution: Evidence from the Great Reform Act of 1832. *Econometrica*, 83(2), 505-547.

²Beck, E. M., & Tolnay, S. E. (1990). The killing fields of the deep south: the market for cotton and the lynching of blacks, 1882-1930. *American Sociological Review*, 526- 539.

ANALYSIS OF FACTORS

Caste, Religion and Region of India are the factors that affect the Indian elections. These factors have been formed from social practices that have been followed by people from different backgrounds. For example, these two groups do not eat the same type of food and their belief is different from each other's etc. There is a great culture difference among them which has sprung up over the years³ due to their individual habits and traditions. Every caste has developed its own set of customs, trends of behavior and traditions.

There are three kinds of factors that affect the Indian elections. These factors are caste, religion and region. Every political party tries to take the support of different castes for their electoral success. There is caste-based voting done by people which makes it difficult for parties to gain votes. The competition among individuals who belong to same caste or region also affect the election results. Political parties also try to take advantage of this phenomenon in order to get more votes in form of caste-based voting.

Members of the same religion also vote according to their religion. This phenomenon is known as communal voting. Members of the same religion vote for the representatives of their own religion. This type of voting makes difficult for political parties to gain votes. Political parties try to break this barrier by using religious personalities or symbols during election campaigns; using religious personalities or symbols or by highlighting issues that are considered essential or central to members of that community.

Elections in India are based on the concept of separate electorate. There are four types of electorates in Indian elections, which are the state level, national level, constituency and municipal level. The state-level elections are held for the members of Parliament, state legislative assemblies and state legislative council. The national-level elections are held for Lok Sabha (Lower House) and Rajya Sabha (Upper House). The constituency-level elections are held for the members of State Assembly. Municipal-level elections are held for members of Municipal Corporation. The State Legislative Assemblies send the specified number of representatives to the Lok Sabha.

Though Independent candidates can also contest in all three levels, but they cannot take part in the national level elections (Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha). Caste is one⁴ of the major factors that affected voting behavior at all levels. Voting behavior at state level, constituency level and municipal level is affected by caste factor. The caste factor is very important in Indian elections and it affects the voting behavior at all levels. The voters belonging to different castes do not show their true commitment towards a political party. They vote according to the caste vote bank. The ruling party tries hard to gain votes from the voters from different castes by using leaders from that caste or region as their representatives. This also affects the state level, constituency and municipal level elections.

³Blakeslee, D. (2013). Propaganda and Ethno-Religious Politics in Developing Countries: Evidence from India. Mimeo, Columbia.

⁴An Empirical Investigation of Hindu—Muslim Riots in India. Journal of Peace Research, 47(5), 589-600.

Communal voting is another important factor that acts as a barrier for winning elections in India. In fact, there have been cases in the past when a candidate from a minority community⁵ has been elected from a majority Hindu community. This, however, is contrary to the nationalistic ideals in India and acts as a barrier for a candidate from a minority group to win in a minority community in an Indian election.

Social and political activities that have been carried out in the past have been restricted in a manner that they have been violations of the election code. Most people⁶ involved in these activities tend to be poor and the politicians who are the supporting parties often try to win votes.

Important features of rural voting patterns include influence of caste and religion. Due to influence of caste; the voting patterns change in favour of the ruling party. Votes are gained by creating caste vote banks. Caste is also closely related with the election of political party in Indian elections. The country's political parties tend to play caste card to gain votes. The voters belonging to different castes prefer to vote according to their caste groups. The voters belonging to different castes also use elements of religion to influence the vote.

People belonging to different castes do not vote according to their political background, region or village. People belonging to different castes identify themselves with their caste at the national and state level. They identify themselves with their caste even in the village and they vote according to the castes which they belong to. Religious affiliations of voters also have a big role in the formation of voting patterns in India. India being a multi-religious country, votes have been actually split on the basis of religion. The religion factor is a very important factor in Indian elections. Religious fundamentalist tendency has a definite influence on the voter's choice.

Other important factors in Indian elections are poverty and illiteracy. Poverty and illiteracy play a very important part in the formation of voting patterns in India. In the Indian villages, people belonging to the same caste have a very different standard of living from others. In many cases, it is very difficult for people from certain castes to get education and employment. In order to give a person an opportunity to get education, there has been a high consideration shown by the government towards educational institutions of the backward classes. It is also noticed that illiteracy has a great effect on poor people's voting pattern. The same caste, which has a different standard of living, does⁷ not vote according to their economic condition. This fact is an indication of the influence of poverty on the voter's choice. This also means that people living below the poverty line are not aware of what they are voting for. They vote for "Dharti, Beedi and Pani."

Another important factor in Indian elections is lack of competition. Lack of competition is one of the reasons why sub-conscious factors are very influential in Indian elections. Indian parties are very powerful and exercise very great influence on the voter's choice. Political parties in India do not exercise any real competition on each other. It is due to this fact that the voter is not aware of the influence of various factors on his own vote.

Another important factor in Indian elections is poverty and illiteracy. These two factors are very important in the formation of voting patterns in India. Factors like poverty, ⁸illiteracy, caste and religion have more influence on Indian voters than anything else. It is only when the government is able to control these factors that India will be able to have better elections.

⁵Dinecco, M & Onorato, M. G. (2015), The Economic Legacy of Warfare: Evidence from Urban Europe. Paper presented at 'The Political Economy of Social Conflict' Conference, Department of Economics, Yale University, 16-17 October 2015.

⁶Fair, R. C. (1996). Econometrics and Presidential Elections. *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 89-102.

⁷Field, E., Levinson, M., Pande, R., & Visaria, S. (2008). Segregation, Rent Control, and Riots: The Economics of Religious Conflict in an Indian City. *The American Economic Review*, 505-510.

⁸Glaeser, E. L. (2005). The Political Economy of Hatred. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 120 (1), 45-86

Voting patterns are determined by several factors in India. Poverty, illiteracy, religion and caste are some of the most important factors in Indian elections. Factors like poverty and illiteracy have more influence on Indian voters than anything else. It is only when the government is able to control these⁹ factors that India will be able to have better elections. Caste and religion play a major role in deciding on which candidate to vote for. These factors can be more or less influential depending on the area of India where they are prominent. However, the most important factor is poverty and illiteracy, and if these problems are dealt with, caste and religion can play a lesser role in elections.

Caste and religion used to be the biggest factors that determined who would get voted for; however, with literacy rate rising and people becoming aware of their rights this has changed. With literacy rate rising, people are also becoming knowledgeable about their rights, which means that it is more difficult for candidates to manipulate voters. With an increase in literacy rate, more¹⁰ opportunities open for candidates to reach out to the voters. It has become easier for candidates who are not affiliated with any political party to get votes. There is more of a chance that they will get votes because people want different things in the candidate than what the party he/she is affiliated with represents.

In order to better understand this situation, it helps to look at the election results from the constituency where the voting took place. In Uttar Pradesh, which is one of India's most populous states, a lot of money and power is at stake. In this state there are nearly five million people living on less than two dollars a day, and voters decide who will be voted for on what issues. Generally speaking, caste determines who will get votes here as well as religion. However, with modernization and an increase in literacy rate, this is becoming less important. For example, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) was founded in 1984 by Kanshi Ram. This party is based on the issues of dalits (untouchables) and has won about ten elections since formation. However, it lost its first election in 1991 to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), but then regained power in 1993.

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⁹Zussman, A. (2014). The Effect of Political Violence on Religiosity. *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, 104, 64-83.

¹⁰Nellis, G., Weaver, M. and Rosenzweig, S (2015), Do Parties matter for Ethnic Violence? Evidence from India. Mimeograph, Department of Political Science, Yale University.

CONCLUSION

Religious riots have complex underpinnings - frequently social, economic and political factors are involved. This paper demonstrates how these riots may influence voter behaviour and the incentives of political parties. Using data on Hindu-Muslims riots in India over 21 years, combined with electoral and demographic data, we demonstrate a causal link between¹¹ electoral politics and communal riots. We use an innovative instrument that draws upon the random variation in the day of the week that important Hindu festivals fall on each year to isolate the causal effect of riots on electoral results. We find that riots occurring in the year preceding an election increase the vote share of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya¹² Janata Party in the election. Our results are robust to various robustness checks on the data and econometric analysis. This result does not imply that riots are not caused by electoral reasons. It may be the case that most of the riots are in fact the result of political calculations. Our attempt here is to disassociate those political reasons for riots and to examine the effect on electoral results of exogenously caused riots. The fact that our results show that a party systematically benefits from the riots, may establish that there is a clear incentive for this party to cause riots for electoral benefit. Therefore, our findings have important implications for the relationship¹³ between ethnic violence and electoral politics not just in India, but also in other diverse democratic societies.



¹¹Rao, M., Mishra, I., Singh, P., & Bajpai, V. (2014). Fact Finding Report: Independent inquiry into Muzaffarnagar “riots”. *Economic & Political Weekly*, 49(2).

¹²Pathania, V., & Tandon, S. (2011). *Divisive Politics and Violence: Evidence from the Success of the Bharatiya Janata Party in India*. Working paper

¹³Pandey, G. (2001). *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India*. Cambridge University Press.