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Dynamics of Change & Stability of Voters' Behaviour

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ABSTRACT

India which is known for its cultural diversity, is a constitutional democracy with a parliamentary system of government and at the heart of the system is a commitment to hold regular, free and fair elections at all the three levels (National, State and Local level). The elections at the various levels reflect the existence of the spirit of democracy. Voting is one of the most commonly used terms in contemporary age of democratic politics as it shows a formal expression of an individual's choice for or against a certain candidate or political party during the elections.

In a limited way, voting refers to the function of electing representatives by casting votes in elections. Frequent and highly competitive elections based on universal adult franchise have become the hallmark of Indian Democracy- the largest of the world. It is an acknowledged fact that contrary to the history of most modern representative democracies which began with the right to vote from exclusion to inclusion. India stands out as a triumphant democracy by providing non-discriminatory Right to Vote to every citizen of India from the very inception of its constitution.

In India, every citizen, irrespective of religion, caste, creed etc. who has attained the age of 18 years, has a constitutional right to cast his vote independently to a contestant of his own choice. What more can be produced as a proof to the fact that in India, the democratic values survive quite successfully.

The paper is a descriptive and explanatory study which has much to lay about the change and stability of the voters' behavior during the elections in India.

Keywords: Dynamics, Change, Stability, Voters, Behaviour, Elections, Candidates

INTRODUCTION

India is a democratic country which allows the people of India irrespective of caste, religion, creed or culture to participate in the functioning of democracy, in making the government, in functioning the government by electing the government representatives in the Lok Sabha Elections, Vidhan Sabha Elections and the Panchayat Election. The process of elections in India begin with the preparation of the voters' list, correction in the voters' list and publication of the voters list, notification about the dates and with the announcement of the code of conduct followed by the nomination of the candidates, withdrawal of the nomination for various reasons, training of the members of the polling parties at the district level or tehsil level, preparation of the polling booths, deployment of the police, military and para-military force, polling and counting, announcement of the results and oath taking by the winning candidates. [1]

The success of elections in a constituency depends on the coordination of all the organs of election process. If any of the organs fails to function properly abiding the rules prescribed for the elections, the elections are found in doubt. Of the various organs of the election process, the voters are the most important one without whom no elections are possible, and no smooth working of democracy and no success of democracy are possible. It is the voters who decide the victory or defeat of the candidates contesting elections. The victory of the candidates in elections depends on the voters' positive attitude and behavior.

In the context of India, it will be quite right to mention that India is the largest democracy of the world, and despite being ignorant, illiterate and conventional in approach, the people of India are very active in politics. All this can be evidently seen at the time of elections in India when the people leave their own work to join election rallies and campaigns and when they are found all enthusiastic. The active political participation of the citizens of India during the elections, has succeeded in electing and rejecting governments legitimizing representative democratic system of the country. But this Indian story of elections and journey of voter participation has not been limited to numbers or statistics alone, qualitative changes are also being witnessed since the last decade of the 20th century, that is, post 73rd and 74th Amendments where after the electoral participation has been expanded to the 3rd tier - grass root level - of government along with reservation of seats for women.

The contemporary election scenario from the angle of both the contestants and the voters, is all changed. On the one hand, even those candidates who do not have a political family background contest elections, and on the other hand, the voters are found to be all conscious to the political activities.

Even in the villages, the picture is now changed because along with the men, the women are also developing awareness and in the elections, they too contest elections to prove their leadership qualities. [2]

Thus electoral & participatory democracy has acquired a new connotations and the voting behavior of people is perceptibly affecting the Indian democratic system highlighting its strengths and also exposing its faultiness. Besides the traditional factors that have hitherto influenced voting behavior such as religion, caste, community, language, money, muscle power, ideology, political wave etc. There are other factors which have tremendously impacted voting behavior during the preceding decade. Apart from this, the role of Election Commission and a few electoral reforms have also augured far reaching changes in the electoral process and also party system in the country.

The voters' behavior in India can be interpreted during three phases- Pre-elections, Mid-elections and Post-elections. The voters grow active for voting and for electing the contestants immediately after the dates of elections are declared and the nominations are made and finalized. In the first phase, the Indian voters don't reveal any finality as to in whose favour they are going to cast their votes.

However, the visits of the candidates and their supporters in the area bring them closer to the candidates, the political parties they belong to and to the decision of vote they are likely to exercise. The second phase that reflects the behavior of the votes in India is too complicated. It is very difficult to know understand and know exactly about the voters.

There are the voters who are firm in their decision of voting in favour of some particular contestant right from the beginning due to their faith in the candidate and their political ideology; there are the voters who being confused, turn out to be rolling stones and keep making confusing statements during the whole electoral process, and there are the voters who reveal faith in some particular candidate at the beginning, but at the eleventh hour, shift from that candidate and cast their vote in favour of some other candidate on one or the other pretext.

The third phase which reveals the voters' behavior is the one when most of the voters reveal their faith in the winning candidate saying proudly that they casted their votes in his favour even if the vote was given to some other candidate. [3]

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- Discussing the role of the voters in the success of the electoral process
- Observing the voters behavior before, during and after elections
- Discussing the stability of the behavior of the Indian voters and exploring its causes and effects
- Discussing the change in the behavior of the Indian voters and exploring its causes and effects
- Generalizing the issue keeping in view the shifting tendency and behavior stability of the voters

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

- **Hang Lee (2020)**, in the research paper entitled **Voters' involvement, attitude, and confidence in the era of new media**, holds the idea that there is an integral relationship between the determinants of social network site usage, voters' involvement with politics, voters' attitude toward voting, and their confidence of voting decision.
- **Malik Ata Hasan Sabir (2019)**, in his research paper on **Democracy and voting behavior in India**, discusses that voting is the very essential aspect of the democracy or representation of the will of the people. Voting is the function of the eligible citizens through which they elect their rulers or representatives. Indian Constitution provides for the parliamentary form of democracy. In this form of government, the people are given the right to vote which they cast at regular interval or time period and the party which achieves the majority of the votes, is declared elected to power. Voting in India is a constitutional right guaranteed by constitution itself in Article 326 to all the people who have reached the age of 18 years.
- **Fei Hu and I-Ching Lee (2018)**, in **Democratic Systems Increase Outgroup Tolerance Through Opinion Sharing and Voting: An International Perspective**, share that democracy may contribute to friendly attitudes and positive attitudes toward outgroups (i.e., outgroup tolerance) because members of democratic societies learn to exercise their rights (i.e., cast a vote) and, in the process, listen to different opinions.
- **Satish Mishra (2018)**, in **The shift to proportional representation: Is it time for India?** discusses that democracies constantly evolve to meet the demands of changing times and the requirements of their citizens. This continuous unfolding includes reforms in the electoral system, such as in India. The issue regained momentum after the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) won the 2014 general election with a clear majority.
- **Arnab Chatterjee, Marija Mitrović & Santo Fortunato (2013)**, in **Universality in voting behavior: an empirical analysis**, discuss that electoral system is proportional representation. The basic principle is that all voters deserve representation and all political groups deserve to be represented in legislatures in proportion to their strength in the electorate. In order to achieve this 'fair' representation, the country is usually divided into multi-member districts, each district in turn allocating a certain number of seats. Most countries having a PR system use a party list voting scheme to allocate the seats among the parties – each political party presents a list of candidates for each district. On the ballot the voters indicate their preference to a political party by selecting one or more candidates from the list. The number of seats assigned to each party in a district is proportional to the number of votes collected by the party. [4]
- **Markus Wagner, David Johann, and Sylvia Kritzinger (2012)**, in **Voting at 16: Turnout and the quality of vote choice**, discuss the issue of voters under 18 years of age saying that while the turnout levels of young people under 18 are relatively low, their failure to vote cannot be explained by a lower ability or motivation to participate. In addition, the quality of these citizens' choices is similar to that of older voters, so they do cast votes in ways that enable their interests to be represented equally well.

WORKING HYPOTHESIS

- In the electoral process, the voters have the most important role to play because it is only they who determine and decide the victory or defeat of the contestants.
- There is a significant relationship between the contestants and the voters.
- The voters' behavior before, during and after elections is not same.
- Some of the Indian voters do not get moved and remain stable and unchanged in their behavior
- Some of the Indian voters reflect change in their behavior during elections and shift from one candidate to another.
- Both stability and change in the behavior of the Indian voters is apparent during elections period.

METHOD

The study which is descriptive and explanatory in nature, was carried out quite systematically in order to arrive at fruitful conclusion. For the purpose, the researcher first, selected the theme and title which paved a path of study for her. Beginning with the selection of the title, the study passed through the selection of the theme and title related relevant previous studies available on the various internet sites, review of the related literature, adoption of the research design, formulation of hypothesis, findings of the study using personal observation of the behavior of the voters and collected secondary data through the related studies, and finally generalization in the form of conclusion. [5]

All the steps prescribed and suggested for research were adopted for the present study. Through the steps undertaken for the purpose, the scientific spirit of the study was kept and its scientific nature was ensured.

MAJOR FINDINGS, CONCLUSION & DISCUSSION

India is the largest democracy of the world which can be evidently seen during elections when all the citizens of India who have attained the age of 18 years take an active part in the electoral process and enthusiastically cast their votes in favour of those candidates whom they find most suitable to represent them in the government. Social cleavages and hierarchies such as caste, class, religion, gender, age, rural-urban, and region of origin/language are believed to play a major role in public opinion and perception. Over the next several years, there are chances to explore the degree of convergence or divergence in social attitudes on specific issue areas in political economy, development, and social change across the principal hierarchies and cleavages in Indian society. Psychologically speaking, it is not possible to understand the behavior of the individual. The same is true of the understanding of the voters' behavior in India. Most of the voters say something and do something in terms of vote casting. Generally, three forms of voters' behavior in India are apparent. First, there are the voters who are ground-rooted in their political ideology and faith in some one or the other political party and its candidates. These voters are not ready to change their decision come what may. Even if the candidate does not belong to their own caste or religion, they blindly favour him just because he or she belongs to the political party they confide in. [6]

Secondly, there are the seasonal voters who change and who shift from one political party or one candidate to another political party or candidate when they find that the political party or its candidate that they favoured in the previous election or elections, could not make any remarkable performance. As the seasons change, the behavior of these voters also change according to the situation. Thirdly, there are the voters who seem to be supporting and favouring some particular candidate through the participation in his or her rallies and campaigns, but change their decision of voting overnight and finally cast their vote in favour of the candidate for one or the other reason whom they did not support publicly previously.

The findings of the study are as under-

- In India every citizen who has completed the age of 18 years has the constitutional right to vote
- Voting attitude of the voters is different for the elections that are fought at the different levels
- Voting behavior is complex and cannot be understood easily
- Caste, religion, sex, region, ideology, financial status, personality of the contestant etc. determine the voters' behavior
- Firmness and stability of voting behavior is there only in those voters who have an unshaken faith in some political party due to an unshaken and firm political ideology
- Confused voters remain imbalanced in their voting behavior and nothing can be predicted about them
- Shifting from one political party or its candidates is there in those voters who are opportunists and who are ready to change their voting decision if the circumstances and situation of elections is not in their favour or if the contestant is not competent enough to represent them.[6]

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