

Voting Behaviour

Voting behaviour, also known as electoral behaviour, involves understanding the factors and reasons which influence voting patterns.

To interpret voting behavior both political science and psychology expertise were necessary and therefore the field of political psychology emerged including electoral psychology.

Voting Behaviour is an important topic in the polity segment of the UPSC Exam, and as such this article will shed light on the meaning and the determinant factors of voting behaviour.

Definition of Voting Behaviour

Voting Behaviour is defined as the following by the following Sociologists and Political Scientists

According to Sociologist Gordon Marshall: “The study of voting behaviour invariably focuses on the determinants of why people tend to vote in public elections as they do and how they arrive at the decisions they make”.

According to Political University Professor - Stephen Wasby (New York State University, Department of Political Science): “The Study of Voting Behaviour involves an analysis of individual psychological make-up and their relation to political action as well as institutional patterns, such as the communication process and their impact on elections”.

Significance of Voting Behaviour

The scientific study which deals with voting behaviour is known as Psephology. The recorded history of voting goes back to the Greek city-states of classical antiquity.

The modern world for the study of voting behaviour, psephology, derives from the classical Greek ‘*Presphos*’, the piece of pottery on which certain votes, mainly about the banishment of those seen as dangerous to the state, were inscribed.

The study of voting behaviour is significant for the following reasons:

1. It helps in comprehending the process of political socialisation
2. It helps in examining the internalisation of democracy as a value among the elites as well as masses.
3. It emphasises the real impact of the revolutionary ballot box
4. It enables to throw light as to how far the electoral politics continue or break with the past
5. It helps to measure whether it is modern or primordial in the context of political development

Determinants of Voting Behaviour in India

Indian society is highly diversified in nature and composition. Hence, voting behaviour in India is determined or influenced by multiple factors. Broadly speaking, these factors can be divided into two categories: socio-economic factors and political factors

They are explained in detail below:

1. **Caste:** Caste is an important factor influencing the behaviour of voters. Politicisation of caste and casteism in politics have been a feature of Indian politics. While formulating their election strategies political parties account for the factor of caste.

Large and important castes in a constituency tend to back either a respected member of their caste or a political party with whom their caste identifies. However, local factions and local-state factional alignments that involve inter-caste coalition, are also important factors in influencing voting behavior.

2. **Religion:** Religion is another significant factor which influences electoral behaviour. Political parties indulge in communal propaganda and exploit the religious sentiments of the voters. The existence of various communal parties has further added to the politicization of religion. Despite India being a secular nation, no political party ignores the influence of religion in electoral politics.
3. **Language:** Linguistic considerations of the people influence their voting behaviour. During elections, the political parties arouse the linguistic feelings of the people and try to influence their decision-making. The reorganisation of states (in 1956 and later) on language basis clearly reflects the significance of language factor in India politics.

The rise of DMK in Tamil Nadu and TDP in Andhra Pradesh can be attributed to linguism.

4. **Region:** Regionalism and sub-regionalism play an important role in voting behaviour. These parochial feelings of sub-nationalism led to the emergence of perpetual regional parties in various states. These regional parties appeal to the electorate on the ground of regional identities and regional sentiments. Sometimes, the secessionist parties call for the boycott of elections.
5. **Personality:** The charismatic personality of the party leader plays an important role in electoral behavior. Thus, the towering image of Jawaharlal Nehru (Born on November 14, 1889), Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Narendra Modi had significantly influenced the electorate to vote in favour of their parties.

At the state-level also, the charismatic personality of the regional party leader has been a significant factor of popular support in the elections.

6. **Money:** The role of the money factor cannot be overlooked in explaining the voting behaviour. Despite the limitations on the election expenditures, crores of rupees are spent on elections. The voters seek money or liquor or goods in return for their votes.

In other words, 'votes' are freely exchanged for 'notes'. However, money can influence the decisions of the in the normal circumstances and not in a wave election

7. **Performance of the Ruling Party:** On the eve of elections, every political party releases its election manifesto containing the promises made by it to the electorate. The performance of the ruling party is judged by the electorate on the basis of its election manifesto.

The defeat of Congress Party in 1977 elections and that of Janata party in 1980 elections illustrates that the performance of the ruling party influences voting behaviour. Thus the anti-incumbency factor (which means dissatisfaction with the performance of the ruling party) is a determinant of electoral behaviour.

8. **Party Identification:** Personal and emotional association with political parties play a role in determining voting behavior. People who identify themselves with a particular party will always vote for that party irrespective of its omissions and commissions. Party identification was especially strong in the 1950s and 1960s. However since the 1970s, there has been a decline in the number of strong party identifiers.
9. **Ideology:** The political ideology professed by a political party has a bearing on the decision making of the voters. Some people in the society are committed to certain ideologies like communalism, capitalism, democracy, secularism, decentralization and so on. Such people support the candidates put up by the parties that profess those ideologies.
10. **Other Factor:** In addition to the above explained factors, there are also various other factors, which determine the voting behaviour of the Indian electorate. These are mentioned below:

- (i) Political events preceding an election like war, murder, of a leader, corruption scandal etc.
- (ii) Economic conditions at the time of election like inflation, food, shortage, unemployment etc.
- (iii) Factionalism - a feature of Indian politics from bottom to top levels
- (iv) Age - old or young
- (v) Sex - men or women
- (vi) Education - educated or uneducated
- (vii) Habitation - rural or urban

(viii) Class (income) - rich or poor

(ix) Family and kinship

(x) Candidate orientation

(xi) Election campaign

(xii) Political family background