



An Analysis of Impact of Caste on Voting Behaviour in Himachal Pradesh Elections

Sunil Dutt

Research Scholar, Nirwan University, Jaipur, Rajasthan.

Email id: sunilduttchd@gmail.com

Dr. Ritesh Mishra

Assistant Professor in Department of Political Science, Nirwan University Jaipur, Rajasthan

ARTICLE DETAILS

Research Paper

Keywords:

Voting Patterns, Electoral Behaviour, Caste Influence, Political Preferences, Himachal Pradesh, Youth Voting, Generational Differences, Political Alliances, Electoral Success, Social Identity

ABSTRACT

The present research investigates the role of caste in shaping voting behaviour during elections of state assembly in Himachal Pradesh state of India. The study was conducted with a sample survey of 400 voter respondents residing in different assembly constituencies of Himachal Pradesh through structured questionnaire. The study reveals that caste continues to be a dominant factor in electoral decisions pertaining to assembly elections in Himachal Pradesh. A striking 71.5 percentage of respondents indicated a preference for voting for candidates from their own caste, while nearly 79 percentage of respondents observed that people in their area generally vote along caste lines. The study found that caste alliances significantly impact political party success, with 75.3 percentage of respondents acknowledging their importance. While about 61 percentage of respondents believed that caste's influence in elections is increasing over time, there's a notable generational shift; 74.5 percentage of the respondents observed that younger voters are less influenced by caste compared to older generations. Further, 67 percentage of respondents believe that caste-based politics results in better economic policies for disadvantaged castes. These findings highlight the complex relationship between caste and electoral politics in Himachal Pradesh, where traditional caste loyalties persist alongside

emerging changes in younger voters' attitudes. The research contributes valuable insights into understanding how social identity shapes political choices and party strategies in contemporary Indian democracy.

Introduction:

Caste is defined as a "localized group" traditionally associated with a person's birthplace and occasionally linked to specific professions (*N.D. Arora, 2010*). A person's social status is determined by their caste at birth. Currently, caste significantly influences political processes and administrative structures, particularly through voting and institutions like Panchayati Raj. This involvement is a result of caste members collaborating to ensure their collective interests are represented. The dynamics within Indian political parties, the process of nominating candidates, and the nature of election campaigns can all be understood through the lens of caste interests and the pursuit of caste balance (*Hardeep Kaur, 2018*).

Over time, caste has evolved into a significant political tool influencing party policies, governance, and election outcomes. Political campaigns have increasingly utilized caste-based mobilization, with parties appealing to the caste identity of voters (*Jaffrelot, 2016*). In Indian elections, it is quite common for parties to forge caste alliances to garner support from specific demographic groups (*Vaishnav, 2017*). The strategic calculation of voting based on caste often overshadows other considerations such as ideology or policy issues, highlighting caste's profound impact on electoral politics (*Manor, 2012*).

Caste also plays a critical role in candidate selection. Political parties strategically nominate candidates from diverse caste backgrounds to appeal to a broader electorate, actions driven by the notion of caste as a political asset aimed at maximizing electoral success (*Vaishnav, 2017*). *Jaffrelot (2016)* observes that in some regions, caste-based political parties like the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) wield significant influence and explicitly champion caste interests, focusing on securing the economic and political rights of specific caste groups.

Objectives and Research Methodology: The primary objective of this study is to examine the impact of caste on voting behaviour in Himachal Pradesh assembly elections and to analyze the social and economic outcomes of caste-based politics. The research aims to explore voters' preferences regarding caste-based candidate selection, voting patterns, and investigate the role of caste alliances in political

party success. The study employed a comprehensive sampling approach combining cluster, multistage, and random sampling techniques to ensure diverse representation across socio-economic, demographic, and cultural dimensions. The present study was conducted across Himachal Pradesh with a balanced gender representation of 400 voters, divided equally between male and female respondents.

The sampling framework encompassed four strategically selected districts, representing each cardinal direction (north, south, east, and west) of the state to capture the current political landscape effectively. From these districts, eight assembly constituencies were chosen - two from each district. Notably, two of these constituencies were specifically selected from areas reserved for Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST). To ensure uniform representation, 50 respondents were selected from each assembly constituency, resulting in the total sample size of 400.

Data Analysis and Interpretation: Caste continues to play a significant role in shaping voting behaviour and political strategies in Himachal Pradesh, there are signs of evolving attitudes, particularly among younger voters. The perceived benefits of caste-based politics in addressing economic and social disparities suggest that caste remains a relevant factor in policy formulation and implementation.

The data indicates a prevalent preference among respondents for voting for candidates of their own caste, highlighting the influence of caste identity on electoral choices and preferences.

The frequency table depicts respondents' preferences regarding voting for a candidate of their own caste. The data reveals a substantial agreement among respondents, with a significant majority expressing either agreement or strong agreement with the statement.

I would prefer to vote for a candidate of my own caste.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	24	6.0	6.0	6.0
	Disagree	49	12.3	12.3	18.3
	Neutral	41	10.3	10.3	28.5
	Agree	168	42.0	42.0	70.5
	Strongly Agree	118	29.5	29.5	100.0

	Total	400	100.0	100.0	
--	-------	-----	-------	-------	--

The data reflects that 42 percentage of respondents agree, while 29.5 percentage of respondents strongly agree, totalling 71.5 percentage of respondents who prefer to vote for a candidate of their own caste. A smaller proportion of respondents (18.3 percentage) express disagreement or strong disagreement, with only 6 percentage strongly disagreeing. It is worthwhile to mention that 10.3 percentage of respondents remain neutral on the issue.

The data indicates a widespread perception among respondents of the influence of caste-based voting patterns in their area, emphasizing the significance of caste considerations in electoral behaviour. The frequency table illustrates respondents' perceptions regarding voting patterns along caste lines in their area. The data suggests a predominant agreement among respondents, with a significant majority expressing either agreement or strong agreement with the statement.

People in my area generally vote along caste lines.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	13	3.3	3.3	3.3
	Disagree	17	4.3	4.3	7.5
	Neutral	55	13.8	13.8	21.3
	Agree	171	42.8	42.8	64.0
	Strongly Agree	144	36.0	36.0	100.0
	Total	400	100.0	100.0	

The results indicate that 42.8 percentage of respondents agree, while 36.0 percentage of respondents strongly agree, totalling 78.8 percentage of respondents who believe that people in their area generally vote along caste lines. A smaller proportion of respondents (7.6 percentage) express disagreement or strong disagreement, with only 3.3 percentage of respondents strongly disagreeing. It is worthwhile to mention that 13.8 percentage of respondents remain neutral on the issue.

The data indicates a widespread perception among respondents regarding the influence of caste alliances on the success of political parties, underscoring the importance of caste dynamics in electoral outcomes.

The frequency table illustrates respondents' perspectives on the impact of caste alliances on the success of political parties. The data suggests a prevalent agreement among respondents, with a significant majority expressing either agreement or strong agreement with the statement.

Caste alliances significantly impact the success of political parties.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	19	4.8	4.8	4.8
	Disagree	32	8.0	8.0	12.8
	Neutral	48	12.0	12.0	24.8
	Agree	158	39.5	39.5	64.3
	Strongly Agree	143	35.8	35.8	100.0
	Total	400	100.0	100.0	

The results indicate that 39.5 percentage of respondents agree, while 35.8 percentage of respondents strongly agree, totalling 75.3 percentage of respondents who believe that caste alliances significantly impact the success of political parties. A smaller proportion of respondents (12.8 percentage) express disagreement or strong disagreement, with only 4.8 percentage of respondents strongly disagreeing. It is worthwhile to mention that 12 percentage of respondents remain neutral on the issue.

The data reflects a mixed perception among respondents regarding the trend of caste influence in elections, suggesting differing viewpoints and interpretations within the study population. The frequency table presents respondents' perceptions regarding the increasing influence of caste in elections over time. The data indicates a varied perspective among respondents, with a notable portion expressing agreement or strong agreement with the statement.

The influence of caste in elections is increasing over time.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	19	4.8	4.8	4.8
	Disagree	47	11.8	11.8	16.5
	Neutral	92	23.0	23.0	39.5
	Agree	119	29.8	29.8	69.3
	Strongly Agree	123	30.8	30.8	100.0
	Total	400	100.0	100.0	

The results indicate that 29.8 percentage of respondents agree, while 30.8 percentage of respondents strongly agree, totalling 60.6 percentage of respondents who believe that the influence of caste in elections is increasing. A significant proportion of respondents (16.6 percentage) express disagreement or strong disagreement, with only 4.8 percentage of respondents strongly disagreeing. It is worthwhile to mention that 23 percentage of respondents remain neutral on the issue.

The data suggests a widespread perception among respondents that younger voters in their community are less influenced by caste compared to older generations, highlighting potential shifts in societal attitudes and voting behaviour among different age groups.

Young voters in my community are less influenced by caste compared to older generations.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	20	5.0	5.0	5.0
	Disagree	8	2.0	2.0	7.0
	Neutral	74	18.5	18.5	25.5
	Agree	132	33.0	33.0	58.5
	Strongly Agree	166	41.5	41.5	100.0
	Total	400	100.0	100.0	

The frequency table illustrates respondents' perceptions regarding the influence of caste on young voters compared to older generations in their community. The data indicates a prevailing agreement among respondents, with a significant majority expressing either agreement or strong agreement with the statement. The results indicate that 33 percentage of respondents agree, while 41.5 percentage of respondents strongly agree, totalling 74.5 percentage of respondents who believe that young voters are less influenced by caste. Only a small proportion of respondents (7 percentage) express disagreement or strong disagreement, with only 5.0 percentage of respondents strongly disagreeing. It is worthwhile to mention that 18.5 percentage of respondents remain neutral on the issue.

The data indicates a mixed perception among respondents regarding the impact of caste-based politics on economic policies, reflecting differing viewpoints and interpretations within the study population.

The frequency table illustrates respondents' opinions regarding the impact of caste-based politics on economic policies for disadvantaged castes. The data suggests a varied perspective among respondents, with a significant portion expressing agreement or strong agreement with the statement.

Caste-based politics leads to better economic policies for disadvantaged castes.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	22	5.5	5.5	5.5
	Disagree	23	5.8	5.8	11.3
	Neutral	87	21.8	21.8	33.0
	Agree	163	40.8	40.8	73.8
	Strongly Agree	105	26.3	26.3	100.0
	Total	400	100.0	100.0	

The results indicate that 40.8 percentage of respondents agree, while 26.3 percentage of respondents strongly agree, totalling 67.1 percentage of respondents who believe that caste-based politics leads to better economic policies for disadvantaged castes. A notable proportion of respondents

(11.3 percentage) express disagreement or strong disagreement, with only 5.5 percentage of respondents strongly disagreeing. It is worthwhile to mention that 21.8 percentage of respondents remain neutral on the issue.

Conclusion: A significant majority of respondents express a preference for voting within their own caste, indicating the enduring influence of caste identity on electoral choices. The study also highlights the perceived importance of caste alliances in determining political party success, suggesting that caste considerations remain a crucial factor in electoral strategies. The majority of respondents believe that caste influence in elections is increasing over time; there is also a strong perception that younger voters are less swayed by caste considerations compared to older generations. A majority of respondents believe that caste-based politics leads to better economic policies for disadvantaged castes, suggesting a perceived benefit in terms of targeted development initiatives.

References:

- Ahuja, A., & Ostermann, S. L. (2016). Crossing caste boundaries in the modern Indian marriage market. *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 51(3), 365-387.
- Banerjee, A., & Pande, R. (2007). Parochial politics: Ethnic preferences and politician corruption. *Kennedy School of Government Working Paper No. RWP07-031*.
- Chandra, K. (2004). *Why ethnic parties succeed: Patronage and ethnic head counts in India*. Cambridge University Press.
- Deshpande, A. (2011). *The grammar of caste: Economic discrimination in contemporary India*. Oxford University Press.
- Gill, S. S. (2020). The dynasty paradigm in Indian politics. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 55(32), 39-46.
- Gupta, D. (2005). Caste and politics: Identity over system. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 34, 409-427.
- Heath, O., & Ziegfeld, A. (2018). Electoral volatility and turnout: Party entry and exit in Indian elections. *Journal of Politics*, 80(2), 570-584.
- Jaffrelot, C. (2003). *India's silent revolution: The rise of the lower castes in North India*. Columbia University Press.
- Jensenius, F. R. (2017). *Social justice through inclusion: The consequences of electoral quotas in India*. Oxford University Press.



- Jodhka, S. S. (2020). *Caste in contemporary India (2nd Ed.)*. Routledge.
- Kothari, R. (1970). *Politics in India*. Orient Blackswan.
- Kumar, S., & Palshikar, S. (2014). India's states: Emergence of new political patterns. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 49(37), 13-15.
- Kumar, S., & Prasad, B. (2019). *Electoral politics in India: The resurgence of the Bharatiya Janata Party*. Routledge.
- Mehta, P. B. (2018). *The Indian Parliament as an institution of accountability*. United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research.
- Pai, S. (2013). *Dalit assertion*. Oxford University Press.
- Palshikar, S., & Yadav, Y. (2021). Exploring the persistence of caste in Indian electoral politics. *Studies in Indian Politics*, 9(1), 7-23.
- Rao, A. (2009). *The caste question: Dalits and the politics of modern India*. University of California Press.
- Shah, G. (2002). *Caste and democratic politics in India*. Anthem Press.
- Sircar, N. (2020). The politics of vishwas: Political mobilization in the 2019 national election. *Contemporary South Asia*, 28(2), 178-194.
- Srinivas, M. N. (1962). *Caste in modern India and other essays*. Asia Publishing House.
- Vaid, D. (2014). Caste in contemporary India: Flexibility and persistence. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 40, 391-410.
- Vaishnav, M. (2017). *When crime pays: Money and muscle in Indian politics*. Yale University Press.
- Wilkinson, S. I. (2019). *Army and nation: The military and Indian democracy since independence*. Harvard University Press.