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# Voting Behaviour of Youth: A Study of Jorhat District

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### **Abstract**

*This paper analyses youth voting in Jorhat district, Assam, and establishes the key influences on voting and voter participation. Amid concerns about youth disengagement from politics, it evaluates candidates' qualities, issues, party loyalty, education, and identity (caste, religion, gender). Using a quantitative design, an online questionnaire was conducted with students from two higher education institutions in Jorhat. Results show that youth prioritize candidate personality, education, and development-related issues (education, employment, healthcare, infrastructure). Identity-related indicators have little influence. Motivations behind voting include aspirations for change, civic responsibility, and political education. Jorhat youth are issue-focused and make decisions based on merit, which promotes democratic accountability and participation.*

**Keywords:** Youth voting, Jorhat Assam, candidate personality, issue-based voting, voter motivations, civic responsibility, merit decisions, democratic participation

### **Introduction:**

Voting refers to the practice within democratic governance where citizens choose their leaders to manage government affairs. It gives individuals the chance to actively engage in state matters, rather than remaining passive or uninvolved in the political arena. Participating in elections by casting a vote is the most prevalent way for people to engage politically. The outcomes of elections reveal various dimensions of human behavior, helping to identify the factors and considerations that influence political attitudes and voting choices (Kanwal et al., 2016).

Voting behaviour is the choices of citizens they reach when it comes to vote. It's all about the decision they make and the factors that influence their decision making while voting. Voting is influenced by various factors like caste, class, religion, gender, political party, ideology, language, regional identity, candidate's personality, qualification etc. India is a democratic country, where citizens get their voting rights at the age of 18. The youth represent a valuable asset for any nation, and their engagement in the democratic process is deemed crucial for reinforcing the political framework. Consequently, the voting patterns of young people are a significant focus for many democratic nations around the globe (Kanwal et al., 2016). According to National Youth Policy (2014), youth is anyone who falls between the ages of 15 and 29. According to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (2021), the youth population consists of 27.2 percent of the total population,

amounting to approximately 345 million people in the year 2021. Although this percentage is expected to decrease to 22.7 percent by 2036, the youth population is an important one. Around the general elections of the year 2024 the age of the first-time voters in India has been reduced to 180 million people, with more than 215 million voters who will vote for the first time under the age of 20 (Vishnoi, 2024). These numbers show the increasing importance of the youth in electoral politics. Voting behaviour is the connection to people's decision-making process in case of elections, and the factors that influence the decision-making process of the people during the elections. This includes political opinions in terms of political governance, ratings on candidates, and political participation (Kumar & Rai, 2013).

### **Theoretical framework of voting behaviour-**

There are three major research school in the scientific study of voting behaviour there are:

#### **Sociological Model of Voting Behaviour:**

The Sociological Model was developed by Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet in their book "The People's Choice," focusing on the contributions of the social factors to the voting process (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet, 1948). Their study carried out in the U.S presidential elections of 1940, resulted in use of questionnaires and panel studies to understand the process by which voters make decisions and the influence of media during that process. Some of the main conclusions were that voting behaviour is dependent on social forces in a decisive manner and impacts the role of primary groups and social class. Media exposure and personality traits were shown to play an insignificant role compared to their social context including religion, socio-economic status and the place of residence in influencing the votes of the voters. The paper provided the so-called Index of Political Predisposition which states that social groups memberships have a strong impact on voting (Antunes, 2010).

#### **Psychological Voting Behaviour Model:**

The Psychological Model that had its origin at the Survey Research at the University of Michigan. The centre and detailed *The American Voter*, is concerned with partisanship which is psychological affinity with a political party (Campbell et al., 1960). According to this model, the socialization process through the family, peers, and reference groups builds up partisanship and produces a long-lasting and stable identification with the party. This approach as compared to the Sociological Model focuses on inner psychological attachment as opposed to the outer social forces. Partisanship is a filter of perceptions where they determine the way the electorate makes sense of political information and finally, affects the voting behaviour.

#### **Rational Choice Theory:**

One of the theories is the rational Choice theory Proposed by Anthony Downs; the theory considers voting as a rational decision due to the reasons behind it being self-interest (Downs, 1957). Voters consider which party will be more advantageous to the individual to make their decisions. This theory gave rise to spatial models of electoral competition by proposing.

#### **Objectives of the study:**

1. To identify the most important factors that impact the youths voting behaviour in Jorhat District.

2. To investigate the reasons why the young people may vote.

**Review of literature:**

Henn, Weinstein, and Forrest in their research titled *Uninterested Youth? Young People's Attitudes towards Party Politics in Britain* challenge the political apathy among young voters in Britain. They surveyed 705 first-time voters in 2002. They reported feeling powerless (81 percent reported low effectiveness), disappointment with parties (e.g., 87 percent broke promises), and distance rather than engaging with life cycle or new politics issues.

Kirmania Danish Mohd, Lakshmia Nirupa, Hasanb Faiz, Bhardwaj Yogendra Pal *Dynamics of sacrifice: Empirical Investigation of Young Indian voters* underline the fact that to win election in India, one should design effective campaigns and know more about the voter behaviour. It provides meaningful information on aspects that affect voter turnout and satisfaction particularly in economic and global terms. Solutions to such issues as social problems and economic issues are recommended to the politicians in order to increase voter satisfaction and trust. Also, voter knowledge is important to be more involved in the political process which, however, might not be the guarantee of satisfaction. This implies that Indian politicians should take a delicate stance as they have to touch on the practical problems and not on religion or castes.

In his book *General Elections in India (1987)*, Rao Bhaskar brings out the complexity of the 8<sup>th</sup> general election to the Lok Sabha of India. It examines why Congress (I) won the elections by a landslide in the majority of the states except Andhra Pradesh. The book presents the effect of national and regional politics, caste politics, finances and communalism on elections. It also looks into electoral behaviour in various states, effects of sympathy waves, weakness of national parties, emergence of regionalism and significance of leadership.

Patel, Binjola, and Siddiqui, in their article *Indian Social Media Politics: New Era of Election Wars*, discuss how social media influences the voting choices of young people in India. Young people follow social media for political information, which also helps them become politically aware. Social media platform acted as a game changer and a catalyst in wooing young voters and influencing their opinion

HB Karuchola and KA Kumar in their work, *The New Voter: A Study of the Voting Behaviour of Youth in Kakinada Urban Assembly Constituency in East Godavari District, Andhra Pradesh*, discusses about the voting pattern and understand the dimensions of voting behaviour in relation to the youth. According to this study Youth are influenced to some extent by caste and media in voting and cine actor/actress propaganda has no impact in elections. Election campaigns attract them strongly, especially for parties like YSRCP.

Zoramthanga in his work, *Voting Behaviour and Perception in Mizoram Legislative Assembly Elections* analyses how urban youth in Aizawl participated in the 2013 Mizoram Assembly elections. The vast majority reported not being affiliated with any party, primarily due to a lack of interest in politics and low trust in existing political parties. Voting decisions were most often influenced by party manifestos, followed by NGO-led election awareness campaigns, while rallies and campaigning had little impact. Almost half of respondents felt that the change in ruling party had not significantly changed daily

life, further fueling feelings of political apathy and low trust in the government's effectiveness. Despite this disconnect, more than half considered the youth-focused welfare policies in the manifesto to be very important, demonstrating a demand for youth-friendly measures despite a lack of trust in parties.

Kumar Sanjay and Rai Praveen in their book, measuring voting behavior presents the concept of voting behavior along with the explanation of why it is necessary to measure it. It offers a thorough generalization of the measurement of the voting behavior amongst the Indian students. It talks about the earliest research on the subject of voting in India and the development of election polling in India. The book also has a broad scope of discussion where it discusses the survey methods, the sampling technique, questionnaire design, collection of the data and analysis of the survey results. It goes into the issues of the difficulty of gauging voting behavior in India and challenges the future surveys.

Weiner Myron and Kothari Rajni in the book, " Indian Voting behavior," delve into the historical and cultural backgrounds which affect the voting patterns in India in an attempt to understand what factors produce these results more. The authors examine these matters in the form of analysis and case studies which include, caste, religion, ethnicity, class, regionalism, and political identity and their effect on voting.

In a journal article, Voting Behavior in India and Its Determinants, Hazarika Biraj sheds light on the evolving attribute of voting behavior in India despite the fact that the political picture is now characterized by issues rather than identity-related politics. This is where the elections come in and there is a necessity to have free and fair elections as a way of capturing the will of the people in democratic states and to also have a true reflection of the will of the people. The paper brings to the fore different issues affecting voting behavior among them being religion, caste, and ideology and inserting the notion that there should be no undemocratic methods like manipulation and rigging. On the whole, it highlights the need to observe the integrity and fairness of the electoral process to ensure the democratic principles are maintained.

### **Methodology:**

The research uses a mixed method, combination of both qualitative and quantitative research to analyse the voting behaviour of youth and the factors to consider when they vote. Primary and secondary sources of data were used. Primary data were gathered using the online questionnaire created using Google Forms, and secondary data were collected in the books, academic journals, reports, and official publications. The study population was formed by the students between the ages of eighteen and twenty-six years in two institutions of higher learning in Jorhat district. Both male and female undergraduate and postgraduates were also represented. Snowball sampling was also adopted because of time issues and the inability to access all respondents and also because of how students are interconnected, a typical method in youth based political research studies. The Survey multiplier was sent over social media and messaging apps to contact the target group. The targeted sample was one hundred respondents but ninety-four valid responses were obtained and analysed. The sample size was taken to be sufficient enough to achieve the purposes of the study and make significant inferences. The realism of the situation was the guiding force behind the choice of two colleges to target which resulted in limited resources and accessibility that in turn enabled a more focused and manageable analysis.

**Findings of the study:**

Jorhat district as a major socio-cultural and educational hub of Assam has a costly influence to form political attitudes and patterns of participation among young people of the area. To grasp the issue of voting behaviour in the given context, it is necessary to explore the wide variety of factors that shape the electoral decision making between the candidate image, the party ties and the preferences based on the issues and the socio-political awareness. Motivational drivers, such as civic responsibility and democratic values, peer and community pressure etc are also equally important and facilitate the participation in elections. Based on the answers to 94 young voters, the following tables provide a close description of these determinants and motivations as they can demonstrate empirical evidence of the patterns of youth participation in the democratic process in the Jorhat district.

**Table 1: Factors influencing voting behaviour**

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Candidate's Personality	56	59.6%
Stance on issues	49	52.1%
Educational Qualification	36	38.3%
Party affiliation	10	10.6%
Use of words during speech	1	1.1%
Candidate's moral discernment/public opinion consideration	1	1.1%
Combination of multiple factors	1	1.1%
Dedication to work	1	1.1%
Caste	1	1.1%
Gender	0	0%
Religion	5	5.3%

Source: Field survey

The empirical results are substantive in determining the kind of determinants that influence the electoral behaviour among the youth in Jorhat district. According to Table 1, the personality of the candidate was cited the most salient factor of voting choice (59.6 percent), then alignment with certain policy issues (52.1 percent) and educational qualification of the candidate (38.3 percent). These findings prove such a strong tendency to candidate centred evaluation, were personal traits and perceived ability override party

loyalty. Party affiliation had only 10.6 percent of responses indicating a detrimental diminution of the traditional party-based alignments. The speech delivery, work commitment, moral judgment and a combination of factors, reported by only 1.1 percent of the respondents, all had insignificant effects. Equally, caste (1.1 percent), religion (5.3 percent), and gender (0 percent) turned out to be a peripheral concern with minimal salience of identity-based determinants in this group of cohorts.

**Table 2: Issue related factors influencing voting behaviour**

Issue related factors	Frequency	Percentage
Education	62	66%
Infrastructure	45	47.9%
Job	45	47.9%
Healthcare	42	44.7%
Sustainable development	1	1.1%
Views on different issues	1	1.1%
Removing caste system	1	1.1%
Dedication to betterment of country	1	1.1%
Safety of women and children	1	1.1%
Other	2	2.1%

Source: Field survey

The analysis is further detailed by issue-based considerations, as shown in Table 2. Education (66.0 percent), employment opportunities (47.9 percent), infrastructure development (47.9 percent), and health care provision (44.7 percent) were the most outstanding ones. In comparison, the interest in such issues as sustainable development without damaging the environment (1.1 percent), overall opinions about different issues (1.1 percent), the elimination of caste-based discrimination (1.1 percent), commitment to national progress (1.1 percent), and women and children security (1.1 percent) had little voice. The simplicity of developmental and welfare-based considerations is signifier of pragmatic disposition of young voters as a result of which real policy effects are prioritised over symbolic or ideological kinds of appeals.

**Table 3: Motivating factors influencing voting behaviour**

Motivating factors	Frequency	Percentage
Want a change in society	34	36.2%
Voting is my civic duty	31	33%
To make my voice heard	10	10.6%
Responsibility as youth to elect good candidates	1	1.1%
Other reason	1	1.1%

Source: Field survey

This trend is supported by motivational determinants of electoral participation which are summed up in Table 3. The desire to bring change to the society was the most dominant reason (36.2 percent), then there was a sense of civic duty (33.0 percent). The need to have a person who is politically represented (10.6 percent) was yet another but lesser motivation. Conversely, other sources of motivation like the obligation to choose competent representatives (1.1 percent) or any other unspecified ones (1.1 percent) were of less importance.

On the whole, these results point to the clear change in voting tendencies among the youth out of the loyalty-based trends to the pragmatic evaluation decision making. It is against this backdrop that the current centrality of what are implemented as merit-based assessments, developmental priorities, and policy relevance in the defining of electoral engagement which places young voters in the role of key drivers of accountability and democratic consolidation in the Jorhat district.

This paper has highlighted the fact that socio-political, demographic and issue-related factors interact to influence voting behaviour among youth in the Jorhat district. The results show that an apparent change in identity-based vote trends in favour of the evaluative strategy is being observed, in which the personality of the candidate and his/her correspondence to the central issues of development, as well as the level of education, becomes an overriding force. The issue-based issues, especially education, employment, infrastructure, and healthcare, are at the centre around which the electoral preference will converge, whereas caste, religion, and gender are playing a minor role, which indicates a gradual shift towards making political participation based on merit. These behaviour patterns represent a politically conscious and participative youth group that can empower the state of democratic accountability and governance.

**Conclusion:**

The current research adds to the insight into the issue of what influences youth voting behaviour in the district of Jorhat and demonstrates that such trends can empower the practice of democracy. The results show that young voters are not following the traditional, identity-based determinants and instead are pursuing more politically conscious, change-related decisions. They focus on issues based on matters like education,

infrastructure, employment, and health, and their personality, qualification and stance on issues but not on their caste and religion. These trends are pointers to a positive change in the political culture where young voters are becoming the critical citizens, who seek the performance of governance and social development rather than past loyalties. This kind of behaviour can make Jorhat and other places more accountable and responsive to policy. Future studies should use the comparative and longitudinal design to determine whether these behavioural changes among young people are a continuation of a general change in the Assamese political culture. Future research should also establish the increasing role of digital platforms, shifting political identities, as well as, varying regional socio-economic backgrounds in influencing youth electoral turnout.

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