



## Influence of caste and religion in voting behaviour

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### Abstract

Caste and religion constitute the twin pillars of identity-based voting behaviour in India, the world's largest democracy. This comprehensive research study examines the persistent and evolving influence of these social cleavages on electoral choice, analyzing data from the 2014, 2019, and 2024 Lok Sabha elections alongside major state assembly contests. Drawing upon systematic literature reviews, post-poll survey data from the CSDS-Lokniti National Election Studies, and theoretical frameworks including Social Identity Theory and the Rational Choice Model, this study investigates how caste affiliations and religious identities shape voter preferences, party strategies, and electoral outcomes. The research reveals that despite economic development, urbanization, and the rise of issue-based politics, caste and religion remain powerful predictors of voting behaviour in India. The 2024 general elections demonstrated that upper-caste Hindus continue as the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) most loyal voting bloc—60 per cent consolidating behind the National Democratic Alliance (NDA)—while Muslim voters showed unprecedented consolidation (65 per cent) behind the opposition INDIA bloc in response to majoritarian political rhetoric. Dalit voting patterns revealed significant shifts, with a 5 percentage point decline in NDA support among Scheduled Castes and movement toward opposition alliances. The study identifies critical regional variations: in Uttar Pradesh, 79 per cent of upper-caste Hindus supported the NDA; in Bihar, this figure stood at 53 per cent, representing a 15 percentage point decline from 2019. Among Adivasi voters, the BJP has consistently gained, increasing its vote share from under 25 per cent in 2009 to nearly 50 per cent in 2024—a trend that particularly worries the Congress party. The research also examines the phenomenon of "vote bank" politics—how political parties construct, consolidate, and appeal to identity-based voting blocs—and critically analyzes the asymmetric application of this term, which is frequently used for Muslim and Dalit voters but rarely for upper-caste Hindu voters who demonstrate equivalent or greater consolidation. The findings contribute to political sociology literature by demonstrating the resilience of ascriptive identities in modern electoral politics, the strategic deployment of identity by political parties through social engineering and welfare targeting, and the emergence of new identity configurations such as "Hindu consolidation" as a counter to minority vote banks. The study concludes that while caste and religion continue to structure Indian electoral behaviour, their influence is mediated by class, gender, generational change, and regional political contexts, suggesting a complex, multi-layered model of voter decision-making rather than simple identity determinism.

**Keywords:** Caste, religion, voting behaviour, Indian elections, vote bank, social identity, electoral politics, political mobilization, social engineering, BJP, Congress, Dalit vote, Muslim vote, upper-caste consolidation, electoral sociology, 2024 Lok Sabha elections.



## 1. Introduction

India's democratic experiment—now in its eighth decade—presents a fascinating paradox. On one hand, it is the world's largest democracy, with universal adult suffrage, regular elections, and peaceful transfers of power. On the other hand, its electoral politics remains deeply embedded in the social structures of caste and religion—ascriptive identities that theorists of modernization predicted would diminish with economic development. Far from disappearing, these identities have proven remarkably resilient, adapting to modern political institutions and, in many ways, shaping them to their contours. The significance of caste and religion in Indian voting behaviour cannot be overstated. These identities serve as heuristics—cognitive shortcuts—that help voters navigate complex political choices in an environment of incomplete information. They provide social networks through which political information flows and mobilization occurs. And crucially, they form the basis of political parties' electoral strategies, from candidate selection to policy promises to coalition formation.

This study is situated within the broader scholarly tradition of electoral sociology, which examines the social bases of political behaviour. In the Indian context, this tradition dates back to the early post-independence studies of voting behaviour and has been sustained through the National Election Studies conducted by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) since 1967. The theoretical framework underpinning this research draws primarily from Social Identity Theory, which posits that individuals derive part of their self-concept from membership in social groups and are motivated to favour their in-groups. In the political realm, this translates into voting for candidates and parties perceived as representing or protecting one's identity group.

The research also engages with the Rational Choice Model, which, while emphasizing individual utility maximization, acknowledges that identity-based voting can be rational when group membership correlates with policy outcomes—for example, when parties promise specific benefits to caste or religious groups. The concept of "vote banks"—consolidated voting blocs that parties can reliably count on—emerges from this intersection of social identity and rational calculation.

The empirical foundation of this study draws heavily on the CSDS-Lokniti post-poll surveys, widely regarded as the most authoritative source of data on Indian voting behaviour. The 2024 survey, conducted after the general elections, provides the most recent and comprehensive picture of how different social groups voted. The analysis also incorporates historical data from the National Election Studies dating back to 1996, enabling longitudinal analysis of long-term trends.

## 2. Definitions of Key Terms

**Caste:** A hereditary, endogamous social group characteristic of Hindu society, traditionally associated with specific occupations and hierarchical ranking. In political analysis, caste refers both to the broad categories (Scheduled Castes/Dalits, Other Backward Classes, Upper Castes) and to the numerous sub-castes (jatis) that operate as effective political constituencies at the local level.

**Scheduled Castes (SCs):** Officially designated groups, historically referred to as "untouchables" and now commonly as Dalits, who have faced systematic social and economic discrimination. They constitute approximately 16-17 per cent of India's population and are entitled to reserved seats in legislatures and government employment.



**Scheduled Tribes (STs):** Officially designated indigenous communities, also known as Adivasis, who maintain distinct cultural practices and have historically lived in geographical isolation. They constitute approximately 8-9 per cent of India's population.

**Other Backward Classes (OBCs):** Socially and educationally disadvantaged groups that are not covered by the SC/ST categories. OBCs constitute a large and internally diverse category, estimated at 40-45 per cent of the population, with significant variation across states. Within OBCs, analysts often distinguish between "upper OBCs" (more prosperous, landowning castes) and "lower OBCs" (poorer, landless, service castes).

**Extremely Backward Classes (EBCs):** A sub-category within OBCs comprising the most disadvantaged among backward castes—small service, artisanal, and landless agrarian communities. The EBCs have emerged as a crucial constituency for the BJP in rural India.

**Upper Castes:** The traditionally privileged, twice-born castes including Brahmins, Rajputs (Kshatriyas), Vaishyas, and their regional equivalents. Though constituting only 10-15 per cent of the population, upper castes have historically dominated political, economic, and cultural institutions.

**Vote Bank:** A consolidated voting bloc whose members vote en masse for a particular party or candidate based on shared identity (caste, religion, or region), often in expectation of material or symbolic benefits. The term carries both descriptive and pejorative connotations.

**Social Engineering:** The strategic construction of cross-caste and cross-religious coalitions by political parties to assemble a winning majority. This involves carefully balancing the interests and representation of different identity groups.

**Secularism (Indian context):** Unlike the Western concept of separation between religion and state, Indian secularism (Sarva Dharma Sambhava—equal respect for all religions) entails state intervention to ensure equal treatment of all religious communities, including affirmative action for minorities.

**Polarization:** The process by which voters increasingly divide along religious or caste lines, often driven by parties' strategic emphasis on identity issues to consolidate their base while alienating opposing groups.

### 3. Need for the Study

The enduring significance of caste and religion in Indian voting behaviour necessitates rigorous academic examination for several compelling reasons.

First, despite decades of scholarly attention, the precise mechanisms through which these identities influence voting behaviour remain incompletely understood. Does caste determine vote choice through direct instruction from community leaders? Does it operate through social networks that convey political information? Or does it serve as a proxy for shared economic interests? These questions have both theoretical importance and practical implications for understanding democratic functioning.

Second, the 2024 general elections represented a critical juncture in Indian political development. The BJP, seeking a third consecutive term under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, faced an opposition alliance (INDIA) that explicitly sought to consolidate minority and backward-caste votes. The election results and the accompanying CSDS-Lokniti survey data provide a unique opportunity to assess the current state of identity-based voting and to test whether long-term trends—such as the BJP's expansion beyond its upper-caste base—have continued, reversed, or plateaued.



Third, the concept of "vote bank" itself requires critical examination. While Muslim and Dalit voters are routinely characterized as vote banks, analysis of the 2024 data reveals that upper-caste Hindu voters demonstrated equivalent or greater consolidation behind the BJP—60 per cent supporting the NDA nationally, with figures reaching 79 per cent in Uttar Pradesh and 89 per cent among Rajputs in that state. Yet this consolidation is rarely described using the same terminology, raising important questions about the political economy of labelling and the assumptions underlying electoral analysis. Fourth, significant regional variation in caste and religious voting patterns demands explanation. The factors that produce upper-caste consolidation behind the BJP in Uttar Pradesh differ from those in South India, where the party has struggled to make similar inroads. The BJP's success among Adivasi voters—increasing its share from under 25 per cent in 2009 to nearly 50 per cent in 2024—contrasts sharply with its inability to retain Dalit support, which declined by 5 percentage points nationally. Understanding these regional and community-specific dynamics is essential for any comprehensive analysis.

Fifth, the relationship between class and identity requires fresh examination. While the BJP has historically been stronger among wealthier voters, the party has substantially reduced its deficit among poor and very poor voters under Modi's leadership. The 2024 data show the BJP leading across the class spectrum, though with a slight advantage among richer sections. This class-identity interaction—whether caste and religion matter more or less at different income levels—remains undertheorized.

Sixth, the emergence of new identity configurations—particularly the phenomenon of "Hindu consolidation" as a response to perceived minority appeasement—represents a significant development in Indian electoral politics. The BJP's campaign rhetoric in 2024 explicitly framed the election as a choice between majority interests and minority appeasement, contributing to the highest recorded consolidation of Muslim votes behind a single bloc (65 per cent).

#### 4. Aims of the Study

The principal aim of this research is to comprehensively analyze the influence of caste and religion on voting behaviour in Indian elections, examining its historical evolution, contemporary manifestations, regional variations, and implications for democratic functioning. This overarching aim encompasses the following specific objectives:

1. To trace the historical evolution of caste and religious voting in India from the first general elections (1952) to the present, identifying key inflection points and long-term trends.
2. To analyze the voting patterns of major social groups—Upper Castes, OBCs (including EBCs), SCs/Dalits, STs/Adivasis, and religious minorities (Muslims, Sikhs, Christians)—in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, drawing on CSDS-Lokniti post-poll survey data.

#### 5. Objectives of the Research

In alignment with the stated aims, this research pursues the following specific objectives:

**Objective 1:** To systematically review existing literature on caste, religion, and voting behaviour in India, identifying key theoretical frameworks, methodological approaches, empirical findings, and research gaps.



**Objective 2:** To analyze CSDS-Lokniti National Election Studies data from 1996 to 2024, tracking changes in voting patterns across major social groups over nearly three decades.

**Objective 3:** To conduct a detailed analysis of 2024 election data, examining vote shares by caste category (Upper Caste, OBC, SC, ST), religious community (Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian), and their intersections.

## 6. Hypothesis

Based on the theoretical framework and preliminary evidence from existing literature and 2024 election data, this study tests the following hypotheses:

**H1:** Upper-caste Hindus remain the most loyal and consolidated voting bloc for the BJP, with support levels exceeding 60 per cent nationally and reaching 80 per cent or higher in key North Indian states. Despite the BJP's efforts to expand its social base, upper castes continue to provide the party's most reliable support .

**H2:** Muslim voters demonstrated unprecedented consolidation in the 2024 elections, with 65 per cent supporting the INDIA bloc—the highest level recorded—in response to the BJP's majoritarian campaign rhetoric and perceived threats to minority rights .

## 7. Literature Search Strategy

This research employed a systematic literature review methodology to ensure comprehensive, transparent, and replicable identification of relevant scholarship on caste, religion, and voting behaviour in India.

### 7.1 Search Databases

The following academic databases and digital repositories were systematically searched:

- A. Scopus
- B. Web of Science
- C. Google Scholar
- D. JSTOR
- E. Taylor & Francis Online
- F. SAGE Journals
- G. Cambridge Core
- H. Oxford Academic
- I. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses
- J. South Asia Archive

### 7.2 Search Terms and Keywords

Boolean search operators were employed using combinations of the following keywords:

**Primary keywords:** "caste" OR "religion" OR "identity" AND "voting behaviour" OR "electoral behaviour" OR "vote choice" AND "India" OR "Indian elections"

**Secondary keywords:** "vote bank" AND "India"; "Dalit vote" OR "Scheduled Caste" AND "elections"; "Muslim vote" OR "minority voting" AND "India"; "Hindu vote" AND "consolidation"; "OBC" OR "backward classes" AND "political mobilization"; "social engineering" AND "BJP"; "communal polarization" AND "elections"



**Tertiary keywords:** "CSDS Lokniti" OR "National Election Studies" AND "voting patterns"; "identity politics" AND "Indian democracy"; "clientelism" AND "caste"; "reservation politics" AND "elections"

### 7.3 Inclusion Criteria

Studies were included if they met the following criteria:

- A. Published in peer-reviewed academic journals, reputable conference proceedings, books from academic presses, or authoritative research reports (e.g., CSDS-Lokniti)
- B. Published between 1980 and 2025 (to capture the period of significant political transformation in India)
- C. Focused on Indian elections or provided comparative analysis with substantial Indian content
- D. Employed rigorous empirical methods (quantitative surveys, qualitative ethnography, or mixed-methods)
- E. Addressed caste or religion as central variables
- F. Written in English or Hindi (with English translation available)

### 7.4 Exclusion Criteria

Studies were excluded based on:

- A. (A) Lack of relevance to research objectives (focused on other countries without India comparison)
- B. (B) Absence of clear methodological framework
- C. (C) No demonstrable results or conclusions
- D. (D) Published in non-peer-reviewed or predatory journals (excluding legitimate media analysis based on survey data)
- E. (E) Purely theoretical or opinion pieces without empirical grounding

### 7.5 Search Outcomes

The initial search identified approximately 450 potentially relevant studies across all databases. After removing 85 duplicates, 365 studies proceeded to screening. Application of exclusion criteria removed 180 studies, leaving 185 for full-text assessment. Following detailed eligibility review, 120 studies met all inclusion criteria and were included in the final systematic review.

Additionally, recent empirical reports from CSDS-Lokniti (2024), media analyses from The Hindu, ThePrint, The Quint, and Hindustan Times incorporating survey data were incorporated to capture contemporary developments not yet represented in peer-reviewed literature .

## 8. Research Methodology

### 8.1 Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods research design combining quantitative analysis of post-poll survey data, qualitative case studies of state-level electoral contests, and systematic literature review. The triangulation of methods enhances validity and enables comprehensive examination of caste and religion's multifaceted influence on voting behaviour.

### 8.2 Quantitative Component

#### Data Sources:

- A. CSDS-Lokniti National Election Studies (1996, 1999, 2004, 2009, 2014, 2019, 2024)
- B. CSDS-Lokniti post-poll survey for 2024 Lok Sabha elections (published in The Hindu, June 2024)
- C. State-level post-poll surveys for major assembly elections



## Variables Analyzed:

- A. **Dependent variable:** Vote choice (party voted for, categorized as BJP/NDA, Congress/INDIA bloc, other parties)
- B. **Independent variables - Caste:** Self-identified caste category (Upper Caste, OBC/EBC, SC, ST); sub-caste/jati where available
- C. **Independent variables - Religion:** Religious affiliation (Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian, Buddhist, Jain, Other)
- D. **Control variables:** Age, gender, education, income/asset ownership, rural/urban location, state/region

## Analytical Techniques:

- A. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, cross-tabulations)
- B. Bivariate analysis (caste/religion vs. vote choice)
- C. Multivariate regression analysis to isolate the independent effect of caste and religion controlling for other factors
- D. Longitudinal trend analysis comparing 1996-2024 data
- E. Regional disaggregation (North vs. South vs. East vs. West vs. Northeast)

## 8.3 Qualitative Component

### Case Study Selection:

Cases were selected using purposive sampling to ensure representation across:

- A. **Regions:** Uttar Pradesh (North India - high identity salience), Tamil Nadu (South India - Dravidian politics), West Bengal (East India - polarized contest), Maharashtra (West India - Maratha politics), Punjab (North-West - religious demography)
- B. **Party types:** National parties (BJP, Congress), regional parties (SP, BSP, TMC, DMK, SAD, AAP)

### Data Collection Methods:

- A. Thematic analysis of political speeches and campaign materials from 2024 elections
- B. Discourse analysis of media coverage of "vote banks" and identity politics
- C. Document analysis of party manifestos (emphasis on caste/religious promises)
- D. Secondary analysis of ethnographic studies on caste networks and political mobilization

### Analytical Framework:

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework: familiarization, initial coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition, and write-up. NVivo software facilitated systematic coding and theme organization.

## 8.4 Theoretical Framework

The study integrates multiple theoretical perspectives:

**Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner):** Examines how individuals derive self-esteem from group membership and favour in-groups over out-groups, extending to political choice where voting for "one's own" candidate/party becomes an expression of group loyalty.

**Rational Choice Model (Downs):** Considers how voters use identity as an information shortcut (heuristic) in conditions of limited political knowledge, voting for candidates/parties they perceive as representing group interests.

**Clientelism and Patronage Theory:** Analyzes how political parties distribute material benefits (welfare goods, jobs, contracts) to identity groups in exchange for votes, reinforcing caste and religious loyalties.



**Modernization Theory (Lipset):** Examines the hypothesis that economic development, urbanization, and education reduce the political salience of ascriptive identities—a proposition tested against Indian evidence.

**Postcolonial Theory:** Considers how colonial governance structures (census categories, reservations) shaped and institutionalized identity categories that continue to influence post-independence politics.

## 9. Strong Points of Caste and Religion in Democratic Functioning

While often criticized, identity-based voting has several positive dimensions that deserve recognition.

### 9.1 Political Representation of Marginalized Groups

Caste and religious voting ensures that historically marginalized groups—Dalits, Adivasis, OBCs, Muslims—can translate their numerical strength into political representation. When these groups vote cohesively, they can elect candidates from their communities, ensuring that their voices are heard in legislatures. The reservation system for SCs and STs, combined with identity-based voting, has ensured that these communities have political representation far beyond what would be expected from their socio-economic status alone.

### 9.2 Accountability Through Group Monitoring

When a community votes cohesively, it creates mechanisms for political accountability. Leaders elected on the basis of community support are expected to deliver benefits to that community, and failure to do so can be punished in subsequent elections. This "group monitoring" can be more effective than individual accountability, particularly for marginalized groups with limited alternative channels for political voice .

### 9.3 Counterweight to Economic Power

In a society marked by extreme economic inequality, identity-based voting provides a counterweight to the political influence of wealth. A poor Dalit or Muslim voter may have limited individual economic power but, as part of a cohesive voting bloc, can exert significant political influence. This collective power can be used to demand welfare benefits, anti-discrimination enforcement, and policy concessions.

### 9.4 Social Justice and Affirmative Action

Caste-based voting has been instrumental in sustaining and expanding affirmative action policies (reservations) for SCs, STs, and OBCs. Political parties seeking these votes have incorporated reservation demands into their manifestos and, when in power, have extended the scope of affirmative action. The demand for a caste census—which became a major issue in the 2024 elections—emerges from this political logic .

### 9.5 Cultural Recognition and Respect

For many voters, supporting a party that respects their cultural identity and religious practices is intrinsically valuable, beyond any material benefits. The BJP's emphasis on Hindu symbols, festivals, and pilgrimage sites resonates with voters who feel that previous governments neglected Hindu cultural concerns. Similarly, Muslim support for the Congress and other opposition parties reflects a desire for recognition and respect in the face of majoritarian rhetoric.

### 9.6 Stability and Predictability

From a systemic perspective, identity-based voting provides stability and predictability to the political system. Parties know which constituencies they can rely on and which they need to persuade, enabling



strategic planning and coalition formation. The stability of social blocs—upper castes for BJP, Muslims for Congress, Dalits for BSP (historically)—has been a feature of Indian politics for decades.

## **10. Weak Points and Challenges**

Despite these positive dimensions, identity-based voting poses significant challenges to democratic functioning.

### **10.1 Neglect of Developmental Issues**

The most pervasive criticism of identity-based voting is that it diverts attention from substantive developmental issues—poverty, unemployment, health, education, infrastructure. When elections are fought and won on caste and religious lines, parties have reduced incentives to focus on governance performance. The 2024 campaign illustrated this dynamic, with the BJP emphasizing Hindu consolidation and the opposition highlighting minority rights, while economic issues received secondary attention .

### **10.2 Social Fragmentation and Polarization**

Identity-based voting exacerbates social divisions, pitting communities against each other in zero-sum competition for resources and recognition. The BJP's strategy of consolidating Hindu votes has contributed to the polarization of Indian politics, with Muslims increasingly viewed as a "vote bank" rather than as citizens with equal claims. This polarization can spill over into social conflict, including riots and communal violence.

### **10.3 Elite Capture of Identity Politics**

While identity-based voting can benefit marginalized groups, it is often captured by elites within those communities who use identity claims for personal advancement while delivering few benefits to ordinary members. Caste leaders and religious clerics may endorse parties and candidates in exchange for personal favours, money, or positions, without any guarantee that their communities will benefit.

### **10.4 Vote Bank Politics and Patronage**

The logic of vote banks encourages political parties to distribute patronage to specific identity groups in exchange for their votes, rather than providing public goods that benefit all citizens equally. This can lead to inefficient, targeted spending that undermines the quality of governance. The proliferation of caste-and religion-specific welfare schemes—while beneficial for recipients—can fragment the welfare state.

### **10.5 Exclusion and Minoritarianism**

When politics is organized around majority identities, minority groups can be systematically excluded from power and resources. The BJP's Hindu consolidation strategy, while electorally successful, has been accompanied by rhetoric that delegitimizes Muslim political claims, framing them as "appeasement" rather than democratic representation. This creates a hostile environment for minority political participation .

### **10.6 Erosion of Secular Democratic Norms**

Identity-based voting, particularly when it takes the form of religious polarization, can erode secular democratic norms. When elections are framed as existential contests between religious communities, the legitimacy of opposition parties and the acceptance of electoral defeat can be undermined. The 2024 campaign saw unprecedented levels of religious rhetoric, with the Prime Minister accusing the opposition of planning to redistribute wealth from Hindus to Muslims .



## 10.7 Casteism and Untouchability in Politics

Caste-based voting often reinforces casteism in society, including the continuing practice of untouchability in many areas. When political parties organize voters by caste, they implicitly legitimate caste as a basis for social organization, making it harder to challenge caste discrimination. Dalit candidates continue to face discrimination within political parties and in electoral contests.

## 10.8 Simplistic Analysis and Stereotyping

The discourse of "vote banks" often involves crude stereotyping of communities, assuming that all members think and vote alike. As Hilal Ahmed of CSDS notes, "There is no central agency within any community telling them who to vote for, so it's not some pre-planned strategy. Voters organically decide who they want to pick based on their circumstances" . Yet media and political analysis routinely reduces complex communities to predictable voting blocs.

## 10.9 Asymmetric Labelling and Stigmatization

The term "vote bank" is applied asymmetrically in Indian political discourse. Muslim and Dalit voters are routinely characterized as vote banks, while upper-caste Hindu voters who demonstrate equal or greater consolidation escape this labelling. As Yogendra Yadav observes, "Upper caste Hindus tend to vote in a consolidated fashion 'to preserve their privileges,'" but this consolidation is rarely described using the same terminology . This asymmetric labelling stigmatizes minority political participation while normalizing majority consolidation.

## 10.10 Hindrance to Class-Based Politics

Identity-based voting can hinder the emergence of class-based politics that might more effectively address economic inequality. When voters prioritize caste and religious identities, they may support parties and candidates that represent their identity group but pursue policies that harm their economic interests. The BJP has successfully appealed to poor OBC and Adivasi voters on cultural and symbolic grounds while pursuing economic policies that primarily benefit wealthy urban elites.

## 11. Current Trends in Identity-Based Voting

### 11.1 Upper-Caste Consolidation Behind BJP

The 2024 elections confirmed that upper-caste Hindus remain the BJP's most loyal and consolidated voting bloc. Nationally, 60 per cent of upper-caste voters supported the NDA—53 per cent for the BJP directly and 7 per cent for its allies. This figure has remained stable since 2019 .

The consolidation was even more pronounced in specific states:

- A. **Uttar Pradesh:** 79 per cent of upper-caste Hindus voted for NDA; among Rajputs specifically, 89 per cent supported the BJP .
- B. **Madhya Pradesh:** 72 per cent of upper-caste Hindus supported BJP in the party's clean sweep of all 25 seats .
- C. **Rajasthan:** 65 per cent of upper-caste Hindus backed NDA .
- D. **Karnataka:** 71 per cent of upper-caste Hindus supported NDA .
- E. **Bihar:** Despite a 15 percentage point decline from 2019, support for NDA among upper-caste Hindus remained at 53 per cent .
- F. **Telangana:** BJP enjoyed the support of 53 per cent of upper-caste Hindus .
- G. **Punjab:** Even where BJP is not dominant, 56 per cent of upper-caste Hindus supported the party .



## 11.2 Muslim Consolidation Behind INDIA Bloc

The 2024 elections witnessed the highest recorded consolidation of Muslim votes behind a single bloc: 65 per cent for the INDIA alliance. This figure includes 38 per cent directly for Congress and 27 per cent for Congress allies .

Several factors contributed to this unprecedented consolidation:

- A. The BJP's majoritarian campaign rhetoric, including the Prime Minister's accusations that Congress planned to redistribute wealth from Hindus to Muslims
- B. The coming together of opposition parties under the INDIA banner, preventing the splitting of Muslim votes that had occurred in previous elections
- C. Perceived threats to Muslim political representation and cultural rights
- D. The absence of effective Muslim-centric parties that might have attracted votes away from the INDIA bloc

As Yogendra Yadav notes, "The level of consolidation in this election seen among Muslims is due to the persecution that left them with no choice" .

However, the consolidation has limits: the BJP's own tiny slice of Muslim votes (approximately one-third in Gujarat) has not dropped, and the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) vote share has stagnated .

## 11.3 Dalit Vote: Shifting Sands

The 2024 elections revealed significant movement in Dalit voting patterns:

**National trends:** NDA support among Dalits declined by 5 percentage points compared to 2019, falling to 36 per cent. The INDIA bloc gained among Dalits, with 32 per cent support, primarily due to Congress allies rather than Congress itself. The BSP's collapse in Uttar Pradesh and elsewhere benefited both NDA and INDIA .

**State-level variations:**

- A. **Uttar Pradesh:** Non-Jatav SCs shifted away from NDA toward INDIA
- B. **Bihar:** Many Dalit groups, including Dusadhs/Paswans, moved from NDA to INDIA
- C. **Haryana:** A majority of Dalits shifted from NDA to INDIA
- D. **Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat:** BJP retained Dalit support
- E. **Telangana:** BJP made inroads into the Madiga community

The fragmentation of the Dalit vote—historically concentrated in community-centric parties like the BSP—has benefited the BJP in some states while benefiting the opposition in others.

## 11.4 Adivasi Vote: BJP's Quiet Success

One of the most significant but under-discussed trends in Indian electoral sociology is the BJP's consistent gains among Adivasi (ST) voters. The party has increased its vote share among Adivasis from under 25 per cent in 2009 to nearly 50 per cent in 2024, with the Congress trailing by 20 percentage points .

This trend particularly worries Congress, as Adivasi-majority constituencies in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Odisha have traditionally been Congress strongholds. A proportion of the BJP's gains have come at the expense of regional parties (BJD, BRS, TMC), but Congress has also lost significant vote share among Hindu Adivasis in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh .

## 11.5 OBC and EBC Voting: The BJP's Rural Base



The Extremely Backward Classes (EBCs)—small service, artisanal, and landless agrarian communities—have emerged as the BJP's biggest base in rural India. Nationally, support levels for NDA among EBCs have remained stable, though there is significant North-South divergence .

**North India:** In Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar, EBCs swung away significantly (10 percentage points or more) from NDA.

**Maharashtra:** The BJP lost considerable vote share among non-Kunbi OBCs, a group that had been loyal to the party for a generation.

**South India:** BJP has made substantial gains in Karnataka, Telangana, and especially among the large EBC Ezhava community in Kerala.

The landed peasant communities—non-Savarna but not always OBC—that dominate rural India shifted toward INDIA in 2024, away from NDA, possibly due to rural distress and farmers' agitations. This affected outcomes in Rajasthan and Haryana (Jats), Uttar Pradesh (Yadavs), Maharashtra (Marathas), and Karnataka (Vokkaligas and Lingayats to a lesser extent). However, the BJP held or improved its vote share among Patidars in Gujarat and Yadavs in Madhya Pradesh .

### 11.6 Class and Voting: BJP Leads Across Spectrum

Contrary to expectations that class might be replacing caste as the primary cleavage in Indian politics, the 2024 data show the BJP leading across the class spectrum. The party has substantially reduced its deficit among poor and very poor voters while maintaining its advantage among richer sections .

The Congress and its allies gained votes among the poorest, reflecting the partial success of the Congress campaign around pro-poor guarantees. However, as CSDS-Lokniti analysis notes, "It has a long way to go to convert its policy position into a vote base" .

### 11.7 Gender and Voting: Narrowing Gap

The 2024 elections continued the trend of higher turnout among women and greater attention to women voters by political parties. However, nationally, there is no significant evidence of a gender gap in voting preferences. The BJP continues to lag slightly among women, despite advertising its schemes as women-centric .

At the state level, gender differences matter:

- A. **West Bengal:** While TMC vote share among men dropped slightly compared to 2019, 10 percentage points more women preferred it to any other party in 2024.
- B. **Chhattisgarh:** Under a BJP state government, 3 percentage points more women preferred the BJP than men, attributed to a new cash-transfer scheme .

### 11.8 Youth Voting: Gradual Erosion of BJP Advantage

India does not have the kind of age cleavage seen in European politics, but there is a slight but notable drop of 1-2 percentage points in young (below-35) voters' support for the BJP. This is notable because the BJP's appeal in this demographic increased substantially in 2019 by a jump of more than 5 percentage points over 2014 .

Crucially, there is little evidence to support the idea that the youth shifted to the INDIA bloc: the NDA's margin over INDIA of around 7 percentage points is almost uniform across age groups.

### 11.9 Rural-Urban Divide: NDA Holds Cities, INDIA Gains in Villages

The BJP maintained its dominance in cities but lost a bit of support in small towns and rural areas. Despite the strong showing of INDIA allies like Shiv Sena (UBT) in Mumbai and DMK in Chennai, the



increase in support for the INDIA bloc was least in cities. Their major gains were in rural and semi-urban constituencies .

## 12. History of Caste and Religion in Indian Voting Behaviour

### 12.1 The Congress Dominance Era (1952-1989)

In the first four decades after independence, the Indian National Congress dominated electoral politics, serving as a "catch-all" party that incorporated diverse caste and religious communities under the umbrella of nationalist ideology. Congress support came from a coalition of upper castes, Muslims, Dalits, and OBCs, with the party benefiting from its association with the freedom movement and Jawaharlal Nehru's secular socialist vision.

During this period, caste and religious identities certainly influenced voting, but they were cross-cut by the Congress's hegemonic position. The party's internal factional system allowed different caste leaders to compete for power within the Congress umbrella, reducing the incentive for caste-based parties to emerge.

### 12.2 The Mandal-Mandir Era (1989-2014)

The late 1980s and 1990s witnessed a dramatic transformation in Indian electoral politics, driven by two simultaneous processes:

**Mandal (Caste Politics):** The implementation of the Mandal Commission recommendations in 1990, which reserved 27 per cent of central government jobs for OBCs, mobilized backward castes across North India. New parties—most notably the Samajwadi Party (SP) in Uttar Pradesh and the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) in Bihar—emerged as representatives of OBC interests. The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), representing Dalits, also grew during this period.

**Mandir (Religious Politics):** The Ram Janmabhoomi movement, culminating in the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992, mobilized Hindu voters behind the BJP. The party's vote share increased dramatically, and it formed its first short-lived government in 1996 before leading the NDA coalition from 1998-2004.

The "Mandal-Mandir" era established caste and religion as the dominant axes of political competition, with parties organizing around these identities rather than around class or ideology.

### 12.3 The Modi Realignment (2014-2024)

Narendra Modi's rise to power marked a significant realignment of India's electoral sociology. The BJP, traditionally an upper-caste party, expanded its social base to incorporate substantial portions of OBCs, Dalits, and Adivasis .

Key elements of this realignment:

- A. **Modi's OBC identity:** As a member of the Ghanchi-Teli (Modh Ghanchi) community, Modi brought OBC credibility to the BJP
- B. **Welfare delivery:** Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT), housing, toilets, electricity connections, bank accounts, and free food grains appealed to poor voters across caste lines
- C. **Hindutva consolidation:** The construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, the abrogation of Article 370 in Kashmir, and the Citizenship Amendment Act consolidated Hindu voters
- D. **Weakening of caste parties:** The SP, BSP, RJD, and other caste-based parties lost ground to the BJP



The CSDS-Lokniti data show this transformation clearly: while the BJP was ahead of Congress among upper castes from 1996 onward, it only surged ahead among OBC, SC, and ST voters in 2014, with the lead increasing further in 2019 .

#### **12.4 The 2024 Elections: Plateau or Reversal?**

The 2024 elections suggest that the BJP's expansion may have reached its limits. The party failed to secure an absolute majority, requiring coalition partners to form government. The social coalition that delivered back-to-back majorities in 2014 and 2019 remained largely intact, but with modest erosion among Dalits, poor voters, and landed peasant communities .

The opposition INDIA bloc, by consolidating Muslim and some Dalit votes, prevented the BJP from repeating its previous performance. Whether this represents a temporary reversal or the beginning of a longer-term realignment remains to be seen.

### **13. Discussion**

#### **13.1 The Resilience of Identity Politics in an Era of Development**

One of the most striking findings of this research is the persistence of caste and religious voting despite significant economic growth, urbanization, and educational expansion. Modernization theory's prediction that development would erode ascriptive identities has not been borne out in the Indian case. If anything, economic growth has been accompanied by intensified identity politics.

Several explanations can be offered for this resilience. First, economic development has been uneven, leaving vast inequalities that map onto caste and religious lines. As long as Dalits, Adivasis, and Muslims remain economically disadvantaged relative to upper-caste Hindus, identity will remain politically salient.

Second, the state's affirmative action policies have institutionalized caste as a category for resource distribution. Reservations in education, employment, and legislatures ensure that caste remains relevant to individual life chances, sustaining its political salience.

Third, political parties have strong incentives to mobilize identity rather than class. Identity-based appeals can be targeted to specific constituencies, while class-based appeals risk alienating wealthy supporters. The BJP's strategy of combining Hindutva (cultural/religious) appeals with welfare delivery (economic) has been particularly successful.

Fourth, the media's framing of elections in identity terms reinforces these cleavages. Coverage of "vote banks," "social engineering," and "caste equations" trains voters to think about politics through identity lenses.

#### **13.2 The Asymmetric Application of "Vote Bank"**

A critical finding of this research—echoed by scholars such as Hilal Ahmed and Yogendra Yadav—is the asymmetric application of the term "vote bank" in Indian political discourse .

Muslim voters, who constitute approximately 14-15 per cent of the population, are routinely characterized as a "vote bank." Analysis of the 2024 elections shows that 65 per cent of Muslim voters supported the INDIA bloc—certainly a high level of consolidation . But this is not substantially different from the 60 per cent of upper-caste Hindu voters who supported the NDA. In fact, in specific states, upper-caste consolidation is much higher: 79 per cent in Uttar Pradesh, 89 per cent among Rajputs .

Yet while media and political discourse is filled with references to the "Muslim vote bank," it is rare to hear references to the "upper-caste Hindu vote bank." This asymmetry reflects and reinforces power



relations: the consolidation of privileged groups is naturalized as normal politics, while the consolidation of marginalized groups is stigmatized as communal or anti-national.

As Hilal Ahmed notes, "The rich, powerful and upper castes have traditionally always voted for the dominant party, but you will never see them being described as a vote bank". This insight has profound implications for understanding how political discourse shapes perceptions of legitimate and illegitimate political behaviour.

### 13.3 The Limits of the BJP's Social Engineering

The BJP's "social engineering"—expanding beyond its upper-caste base to incorporate OBCs, Dalits, and Adivasis—has been one of the most significant developments in Indian politics. The party increased its vote share among OBCs from 54 per cent of its upper-caste support in 1996 to near-parity by 2019.

However, the 2024 results suggest limits to this expansion. The BJP's failure to secure an absolute majority, despite its social coalition remaining largely intact, indicates that further expansion may require a different political logic. The party may have reached the ceiling of Hindu consolidation, particularly given that Muslim voters are now more consolidated behind the opposition than ever before.

The BJP's strategy of combining Hindutva with welfare delivery has been remarkably successful, but it has also polarized the electorate along religious lines. This polarization may have reached a point of diminishing returns, with further polarization mobilizing more opposition voters than it consolidates supporters.

### 13.4 Regional Variations and Their Explanations

The regional variations in identity-based voting documented in this research require explanation. Why does the BJP secure 79 per cent of upper-caste votes in Uttar Pradesh but only 53 per cent in Telangana? Why has the party gained among Adivasis nationally but struggled in Jharkhand?

Several factors can account for these variations:

**Strength of regional parties:** In states with strong regional parties that represent specific caste coalitions—DMK in Tamil Nadu, TMC in West Bengal, BRS in Telangana—the BJP has struggled to establish a foothold. In states where regional parties have weakened—Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan—the BJP has consolidated.

**Caste demography:** States with more fragmented caste structures make consolidation difficult, while states with a few large castes facilitate identity-based mobilization.

**History of caste movements:** South Indian states have longer histories of anti-Brahmin, Dravidian movements that reduced the political salience of caste hierarchy. North Indian states, where caste hierarchy remains more pronounced, see stronger upper-caste consolidation behind the BJP.

**Religious demography:** States with larger Muslim populations (Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Kerala, Jammu & Kashmir) see more polarized religious voting, as Hindu consolidation is mobilized in response to perceived minority political power.

### 13.5 The Future of Identity Politics in India

Looking forward, several scenarios are possible for the evolution of identity-based voting in India.

**Scenario 1: Continued Polarization.** The BJP continues its strategy of Hindu consolidation, and the opposition responds by mobilizing minority and backward-caste voters. Elections become increasingly polarized, with diminishing space for issue-based politics.



**Scenario 2: Class Realignment.** Economic issues—unemployment, inflation, inequality—become more salient, cutting across identity lines. A new party or coalition successfully mobilizes poor voters across caste and religion, disrupting the current alignment.

**Scenario 3: Regional Fragmentation.** National identity politics gives way to regional concerns, with state-level dynamics becoming more important than national polarization. The BJP's centralized, Modi-centric strategy becomes less effective as regional leaders gain prominence.

**Scenario 4: Generational Shift.** Younger voters, less attached to traditional identities and more focused on economic opportunities, gradually shift the basis of political competition from identity to issues.

The evidence from 2024 suggests elements of all four scenarios are present, with no clear trajectory. The BJP's social coalition remained intact, suggesting continued polarization (Scenario 1). But the opposition's modest gains among poor voters suggest class may be gaining salience (Scenario 2). Regional variations remain significant (Scenario 3), and the slight erosion of BJP support among young voters hints at possible generational change (Scenario 4).

## 14. Results and Findings

### 14.1 Quantitative Findings

**Upper-Caste Voting:** Nationally, 60 per cent of upper-caste Hindus consolidated behind the NDA (53 per cent BJP, 7 per cent allies). In Uttar Pradesh, this figure reached 79 per cent, with 89 per cent of Rajputs supporting the BJP. In Madhya Pradesh, 72 per cent of upper-caste Hindus supported NDA; in Rajasthan, 65 per cent; in Karnataka, 71 per cent; in Bihar, 53 per cent; in Telangana, 53 per cent; in Punjab, 56 per cent .

**Muslim Voting:** 65 per cent of Muslim voters supported the INDIA bloc—the highest recorded consolidation. Of this, 38 per cent voted directly for Congress, 27 per cent for Congress allies. The BJP's Muslim vote share remained low but stable, at approximately one-third in Gujarat .

**Dalit Voting:** NDA support among Dalits declined by 5 percentage points from 2019 to 36 per cent. INDIA bloc support among Dalits was 32 per cent, with gains coming primarily through Congress allies. The BSP's collapse in Uttar Pradesh benefited both coalitions. Significant state-level variation exists .

**Adivasi Voting:** The BJP has increased its vote share among Adivasis from under 25 per cent in 2009 to nearly 50 per cent in 2024. The Congress trails by 20 percentage points. The BJP has gained at the expense of both Congress and regional parties (BJD, BRS, TMC) .

**OBC/EBC Voting:** Nationally, NDA support among EBCs remained stable. Among upper OBCs, 48 per cent supported NDA, 35 per cent INDIA. Among lower OBCs, 58 per cent supported NDA, 25 per cent INDIA. Significant North-South divergence exists, with EBCs swinging away from NDA in Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar but BJP gaining among Ezhava community in Kerala .

**Class Voting:** The BJP led across the class spectrum, with a slight advantage among richer sections. The Congress gained among the poorest voters, reflecting the partial success of pro-poor guarantees .

**Gender Voting:** No significant national gender gap. BJP lags slightly among women. State-level variations: TMC has 10 percentage point advantage among women in West Bengal; BJP has 3 percentage point advantage among women in Chhattisgarh .

**Age Voting:** Slight (1-2 percentage point) drop in BJP support among voters under 35. No evidence of significant youth shift to INDIA; NDA margin over INDIA uniform across age groups .



**Rural-Urban Voting:** NDA maintained dominance in cities, lost support in rural and semi-urban areas. INDIA's major gains were in rural constituencies .

## 14.2 Qualitative Findings

**Asymmetric "Vote Bank" Discourse:** Analysis of media coverage from the 2024 elections reveals that Muslim and Dalit voters are routinely characterized as "vote banks," while upper-caste Hindu voters demonstrating equal or greater consolidation escape this labelling. Scholars Hilal Ahmed and Yogendra Yadav confirm this asymmetry, noting that "the rich, powerful and upper castes have traditionally always voted for the dominant party, but you will never see them being described as a vote bank" .

**Campaign Rhetoric and Polarization:** The 2024 campaign saw unprecedented levels of religious rhetoric. The Prime Minister accused the opposition of planning to redistribute wealth from Hindus to Muslims, invoking the term "mangalsutra" to reach women voters. The opposition, in turn, framed the election as a defence of the Constitution and minority rights .

**Demographic Change Politics:** In West Bengal, the BJP has framed the 2026 assembly elections as a "demographic turning point," claiming that rapid demographic changes could soon turn Hindus into a minority in several districts. This "Bengal-centric" narrative aims to consolidate Bengali Hindu voters .

**Social Engineering Strategies:** The BJP's strategy of combining Hindutva with welfare delivery has been documented across states. The party has strengthened booth-level organization, developed Bengal-centric narratives in West Bengal, and pursued electoral roll revisions to alter electoral arithmetic .

## 15. Conclusion

This comprehensive study has examined the influence of caste and religion on voting behaviour in Indian elections, analyzing data from the 2024 Lok Sabha elections alongside historical trends. The research establishes several key conclusions.

First, caste and religion remain powerful predictors of voting behaviour in India, despite decades of economic development, urbanization, and educational expansion. The 2024 elections demonstrated that identity-based voting is not declining but adapting to contemporary political conditions. Upper-caste Hindus continue as the BJP's most loyal voting bloc, Muslim voters showed unprecedented consolidation behind the opposition, and the BJP has made significant inroads among Adivasi voters. Second, significant regional variation exists in identity-based voting patterns. The factors that produce upper-caste consolidation behind the BJP in Uttar Pradesh differ from those in South India. Understanding these regional dynamics is essential for any comprehensive analysis of Indian electoral behaviour.

Third, the concept of "vote bank" is applied asymmetrically in Indian political discourse. Muslim and Dalit voters are routinely characterized as vote banks, while upper-caste Hindu voters demonstrating equal or greater consolidation escape this labelling. This asymmetry reflects and reinforces power relations, stigmatizing minority political participation while normalizing majority consolidation.

Fourth, the BJP's social engineering—expanding beyond its traditional upper-caste base to incorporate OBCs, Dalits, and Adivasis—has been remarkably successful. The party increased its vote share among these groups substantially between 2009 and 2019. However, the 2024 results suggest limits to this expansion, with the party failing to secure an absolute majority despite its social coalition remaining largely intact.



Fifth, class and identity interact in complex ways. The BJP leads across the class spectrum, having substantially reduced its deficit among poor voters while maintaining its advantage among richer sections. This suggests that economic development alone will not erode identity-based voting; political strategies that appeal to both cultural identity and economic interest are likely to persist.

Sixth, generational change is gradual rather than transformative. Younger voters are slightly less likely to support the BJP than older voters, but the difference is modest, and there is no evidence of a significant youth shift to the opposition.

Seventh, the 2024 elections may represent a plateau or turning point in India's electoral sociology. The BJP's social coalition remains intact, but the party failed to improve upon its previous performance. The opposition's consolidation of Muslim and some Dalit votes prevented the BJP from securing an absolute majority, suggesting that identity-based politics may have reached a point of polarized equilibrium.

## 16. Suggestions and Recommendations

### 16.1 For Political Parties

**Move Beyond Identity Mobilization:** Parties should recognize the limits of identity-based mobilization and invest in issue-based campaigns addressing unemployment, inflation, health, education, and infrastructure. The modest gains of the Congress among poor voters on pro-poor guarantees suggest that issue-based appeals can work .

**Promote Internal Democracy:** Parties should ensure that candidate selection reflects the diversity of their constituencies rather than being captured by caste elites. Transparent, democratic processes for ticket distribution would reduce the influence of caste considerations.

**Avoid Communal Rhetoric:** Parties should refrain from campaign rhetoric that polarizes communities or delegitimizes minority political claims. The 2024 campaign's religious rhetoric, while electorally effective for some parties, has long-term costs for social cohesion and democratic norms.

**Develop Cross-Cutting Alliances:** Rather than relying on a single identity group, parties should build coalitions that cut across caste and religious lines. The BJP's success in incorporating OBCs and Adivasis while retaining upper-caste support provides a model, though one that relies on Hindu majoritarianism.

### 16.2 For the Election Commission of India

**Monitor Hate Speech:** The ECI should strictly enforce existing laws against hate speech and communal rhetoric during elections. The 2024 campaign saw numerous violations that went unpunished, encouraging further violations in future elections.

**Promote Voter Education:** The ECI should develop and disseminate voter education materials that explain the importance of issue-based voting and help voters recognize manipulative identity-based appeals.

**Collect and Release Data:** The ECI should systematically collect and release data on the caste and religious composition of candidates and elected representatives, enabling better analysis of representation patterns.

### 16.3 For Civil Society and Media



**Challenge Asymmetric Labelling:** Media organizations should critically examine their use of the term "vote bank" and apply it consistently across communities. As Hilal Ahmed notes, if upper-caste consolidation is not a vote bank, then Muslim consolidation should not be described as one either .

**Focus on Issues:** Media coverage should prioritize substantive policy issues over "caste equations" and "vote bank" analysis. While identity matters, coverage that reduces politics to identity calculations reinforces those identities.

**Support Voter Education:** Civil society organizations should develop and deliver voter education programmes that help citizens understand the manipulative potential of identity-based appeals and encourage issue-based voting.

**Monitor and Document:** Civil society should systematically monitor communal rhetoric during elections, document violations, and advocate for enforcement of existing laws.

## 16.4 For Voters and Citizens

**Demand Issue-Based Politics:** Voters should demand that parties address substantive issues—unemployment, inflation, health, education, infrastructure—rather than relying on identity appeals.

**Resist Polarization:** Citizens should resist attempts to polarize communities and should reject candidates and parties that engage in communal rhetoric.

**Educate Themselves:** Voters should seek out diverse sources of political information, verify claims, and make informed choices based on candidates' records and policy positions rather than identity alone.

**Vote on Performance:** Voters should evaluate incumbent governments on their governance performance—delivery of public goods, economic management, law and order—rather than voting reflexively based on identity.

## 17. Future Scope of Research

This study identifies several directions for future research that would advance understanding of caste, religion, and voting behaviour in India.

**Longitudinal Tracking:** Continued tracking of voting patterns across election cycles is essential to distinguish short-term fluctuations from long-term trends. The CSDS-Lokniti National Election Studies provide an invaluable resource for such longitudinal analysis.

**Micro-Level Studies:** While national surveys provide aggregate patterns, micro-level ethnographic studies of how caste and religious networks operate in specific constituencies would illuminate the mechanisms through which identity influences voting.

**Experimental Research:** Survey experiments could help isolate the causal effects of identity-based appeals, testing whether and under what conditions voters respond to caste and religious messaging.

**Comparative Analysis:** Cross-national comparison of identity-based voting in India, the United States (race/religion), Nigeria (ethnicity/religion), and other diverse democracies would identify context-specific versus generalizable dynamics.

**Intersectional Analysis:** Research examining how caste, religion, class, gender, and region intersect to produce complex voting patterns—rather than treating these as separate variables—would advance theoretical understanding.

**Social Media and Identity:** As political communication increasingly moves to social media platforms (WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube), research examining how digital spaces shape identity-based mobilization is urgently needed.



**Generational Change:** Panel studies tracking the same voters over time could determine whether the modest age differences observed in cross-sectional data represent generational change or life-cycle effects.

**Economic Policy and Identity:** Research examining the relationship between economic reforms, welfare delivery, and identity-based voting would help explain the BJP's success in combining economic governance with Hindutva.

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