

CASE REPORT

Caste and the Ballot: A Psychological Understanding of voter behavior in Bihar

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ABSTRACT

This article tries to explore and understand the depth of caste based emotions in the electoral psyche of Bihar. It draws on historical, psychological, and empirical evidence to show how caste continues to be a dominant factor in shaping voter behavior.

The study highlights how caste based identity, social memory, and emotional affiliations influence democratic choices and voting trends in Bihar.

KEYWORDS

- Caste • Voter psychology • Bihar Politics • Democracy • Electoral behavior
- Identity Politics

INTRODUCTION

The roots of democracy in Bihar can be traced back to the Lichhavi dynasty, which governed Vaishali in the 6th Century BCE and is often regarded as one of the earliest examples of republican systems (Jha, 2004).

In promoted inclusive discussion and consensus, standing in contrast to the deep seated caste democratic practices of present day Bihar. Over centuries, the decline of such democratic values and the strengthening of the

caste system created a highly stratified society, where political identity is now closely tied to social identity.

CASTE AND POLITICAL PSYCHOLOGY

From a Psychological standpoint, Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) explains why individuals in Bihar Vote along caste lines. People derive self-esteem and social meaning from their group identity, often caste based in India. When this identity is politically

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mobilized, it leads to in-group favoritism and out-group prejudice. This manifests in Bihar's political through:

Symbolic Politics: Leaders using caste pride or historical injustice to rally emotions support. (Chandra, 2004)

Heuristic Voting: Voters relying on caste cues rather than manifestos or policy promises (Banerjee, 2014).

Collective Memory: Historical narratives of dominance or Victimhood passed down generations that shape trust or resentment (Jaffrelot, 2003).

Empirical Evidence from Bihar: The 2020 Bihar Assembly elections demonstrated the deep rooted role of caste. Data from Lokniti – CSDS post poll studies showed that 76% of Yadavas voted for the R.J.D. led alliance, while 80% of upper castes supported the B.J.P. - J.D.U. combine (Verma & Gupta 2021).

This voting pattern reflects not ideological loyalty lent caste consolidation.

Moreover parties like RJD, JD (U) and B.J.P. have historically allocated tickets and crafted campaign strategies based on caste equations (Palshikar *et al*, 2014).

The use of caste as an electoral compass has created voter psychology rooted in group benefit rather than public good.

EMOTIONAL PRESSURE TIED TO IDENTITY:

This continuous reinforcement of caste identity through electoral politics creates a vicious cycle:

- (1) Caste leaders claim to represent the group's interest.
- (2) Voters respond by voting mainly based on caste.
- (3) Parties care about groups than about single voter.
- (4) Government decisions are based on group loyalty, not the beggar needs.

This results in what psychologists call "Identity trap" where individual rationality is compromised by collective emotion (Klein, 2020).

SUGGESTION

To break this cycle, we must promote issue based political awareness, especially among

youth and first time voters. Electoral literacy programmers should include content that highlights:

The psychological impact of identity voting.

The importance of individual issues over group identities.

Bihar's forgotten democratic heritage (like the Lichhvis) that emphasized participation beyond caste.

Civic education in schools and grassroots campaigns by Civil Society can help voters reflect more critically, reducing subtle influence of caste.

CONCLUSION

Bihar, once the torch bearer of ancient democracy through the Lichhvis, has today become a study of deeply rooted identity politics. While caste offers a sense of belongingness, its psychological dominance over political behavior poses serious challenges to democratic maturity. Understanding Voter behavior through the lens of political psychology can pave the way towards more conscious, inclusive, and rational participation in elections.

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