

A Study of Electoral Behavior concerning Patna University Student Union Election

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Abstract

The student's union election is considered to be the miniature of the state assembly election. Patna University Students' Union (PUSU) Elections have always been a big event, for it has thrown top leaderships for the state. The elections were revived in 2012 after a long gap of 28 years after a lot of prodding from the state government and intervention of the Patna high court. But after that, there was again a gap of five years. The elections have been a regular feature since 2017.

An empirical study was conducted by the researcher to study the voting behavior of students and to highlight the determinants of the voting behavior in the PUSU elections held between 2012 and 2019. The study displayed the astounding fact that the students' behavior is influenced by social, economic, and some other factors like female students' safety and security, caste, the influence of money, charismatic leadership, political affiliation, campus, and related issues which appear to be influencing the minds of the student voters.

Key Words

Voting, Voting Behavior, Voters, Determinants, PUSU.

Introduction

According to Samuel S. Eldersveld, the term 'voting behaviour' has been used of late to describe certain areas of study and types of political phenomena that previously had either not been conceived or were considered irrelevant. It is not confined to the examination of voting statistics, records, and computation of electoral shifts and swings but it also involves an analysis of individual psychological processes (perception, emotion, and motivation) and their relation to political action as well as of institutional patterns, such as the communication process and their impact on the election. In the words of Plano and Riggs, 'Voting Behaviours is a field of study concerned with how people tend to vote in a public election and the reasons why they vote as they do.' The term voting behavior has recently been expended in meaning and is taken as one major and board area of study subsumed within the broader designation of political behavior. It involves a study of human political behavior in the context of voting in elections. Voting behaviors studies open windows on the minds of the millions of people who are involved in the political process as voters. These constitute an important area of social and behavioral sciences in which theory can be systematically and qualitatively measured and tested. Election refers to a process of democratic participation in which all the people express

their opinion about personalities and issues through marking their preferences on the ballot paper or voting machine meant for the purpose. Election expresses a democratic class struggle through voting. Major differences in the political allegiances of different age groups, classes, education, religious or ethnic groups have been reported by the voting survey. Voting for right or left depends upon a person's life experiences. The study of electoral behavior constitutes a very significant area of empirical investigation that takes the subjects of politics very close to the discipline of psychology, sociology, and education with the result that a new dimension of advanced study, rather a discipline, is becoming more and more popular with the name of political sociology, sociological politics, electoral dynamics, etc. Human beings are supposed to be rational creatures in the philosophical sense of the term; they do not appear to be so rational in the realms of his economic and political behavior. An empirical study of the electoral behavior displays the astounding fact that human behavior is influenced by several irrational forces. The role of political parties and pressure groups in invoking religious and communal factors, the influence of money or the charismatic personality of a leader, and a host of other irrational forces have their definite influence on the minds of the voters. The role of these irrational forces can be discovered or discerned in case a student of empirical politics focuses his attention on how the favorable results of an election are obtained. This fact applies to every democratic system and, as such, India is no exception. However, keeping the case of Indian voting behavior in view, Prof. V. M. Sirsikar well observes: 'An inquiry into the process of election indicates factors other than rationality. It may be said that India has secured a stable government, but the mass manipulation, casteist influences, minority fears, and charismatic hold of the Prime Minister have played no main part in this process.'

Table: 1

Showing percentage of votes polled during Patna University Students' Union (PUSU) Election during 2017-19

Sl. No.	Name of Booth	Total No. of Votes in 2019	Total Vote Cast in 2019	Percentage of Vote Casted		
				2019	2018	2017
1.	Patna Women's College	4752	3345	70.39	47	
2.	College of Arts & Crafts	211	167	79.10	84	
3.	Magadh Mahila College	3393	1893	55.78	67.4	
4.	Women's Training College	197	148	75.12	80	
5.	Patna College	2187	1312	59.90	60	
6.	Patna Training College	188	148	77.60	66	
7.	Patna Law College	819	497	60.10	54.70	
8.	Patna Science College	1755	1012	57.60	65.00	

9.	Vanijya Mahavidyalaya	1514	799	52.77	49.00	
10.	B. N. College	2442	1351	55.30	53.39	
11.	P. G. Science	846	414	48.90	50.00	
12.	P.G. Commerce, Education & Law	510	223	43.7	50.99	
13.	P. G. Social Science	1842	855	46.41	43.63	
14.	P. G. Humanities	578	281	48.61	39.60	
	Total Vote	21234	12442	58.59	57.90	

Source: Patna University, Patna

The voting percentage in the PUSU election (2019) was estimated to be around 58.59%, which is higher than last year. College of Art and Craft recorded the highest voting percentage i.e. 79%, followed by 77.6% in Patna Training College, 75% in Patna Women's Training College, and 70.39% in Patna Women's College.

In 2018, the leadership of Janata Dal United (JDU), the ruling party of Bihar, was actively involved in electioneering for the candidates of Chhatra JDU, the student wing of their party despite some controversies. The Chatra JDU candidates were elected for the post of president and treasurer in an otherwise near Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) sweep. ABVP is the student wing of BJP. BJP was the coalition ruling partner of JDU in the state. This was the first time JDU backed candidate won any seat in PUSU, though it brought JDU and the BJP face to face. The Opposition also used it as ammunition to highlight contradictions within the ruling dispensation.

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Table: 2

Showing detailed votes cast to the candidates of Central Panel in PUSU Election-2019

Sl. No.	Posts of Central Panel	Parties/ Alliance	Vote Cast to Winner Candidate	Vote Cast to Runner Candidate
1.	President	CJAP	2815	2375
2.	Vice-President	RJD	2910	2209
3.	General Secretary	ABVP	3731	2869
4.	Joint Secretary	CJAP	4145	2611
5.	Treasurer	AISA	2238	1812

Table-2 envisaged that the candidate affiliated to the Chhatra Jan Adhikar Party (CJAP) won the Presidential Election of Patna University Students' Union (PUSU) for the first time in 2019. The CJAP also won the election of Joint Secretary. The unbelievable result in favor of CJAP is perhaps due to its day-to-day intervention in students' related academic as well as other welfare issues inside and outside the university campus. Jan Adhikar Party (JAP) is relatively a new political party of Bihar formed in 2015 by Pappu Yadav. The charismatic leadership of JAP National President also influenced the electoral behavior. On the other hand, ABVP became an overall loser. The ABVP won the election of only General Secretary but its ally Chatra JDU could not open an account. The top leaders of both the student wings of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) did not take much interest in the PUSU election. Chatra RJD, the student wing of Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) which is currently the main opposition party of Bihar and its left ally All India Students' Association (AISA), the student wing of CPI (ML) won the PUSU's post of Vice-President and Treasurer respectively.

Table: 3

Showing party-wise details of the candidates of Central Panel wining PUSU Election from 2012 to 2019

Sl. No.	Posts of Central Panel	2019	2018	2017	2012
1.	President	CJAP	JDU	Independent	ABVP
2.	Vice-President	RJD	ABVP	ABVP	AISF
3.	General Secretary	ABVP	ABVP	ABVP	AISF
4.	Joint Secretary	CJAP	ABVP	CJAP	JDU
5.	Treasurer	AISA	JDU	ABVP	RJD

Table-3 revealed that the candidates affiliated to the NDA had won all the posts of the central panel of PUSU in 2018. The ABVP bagged three seats of Vice-President, General Secretary, and Joint Secretary whereas Chatra JDU won two seats of President and Treasurer. The student union of the RJD led left ally could not succeed on any post of the central panel. In 2017, the ABVP won four out of five posts of the central panel. These were President, Vice-President, General Secretary, and Treasurer. Though an independent candidate won the presidential election, he was considered to be the rebellious candidate of ABVP who did not succeed in getting the parent political party, BJP's nod. The CJAP for the first time opened an account by winning the election of Joint Secretary.

The political scenario was quite different in PUSU Election-2012. The RJD led left alliance succeeded to win three seats out of five seats of the central panel. The alliance won the posts of Vice-President (AISF), General Secretary (AISF), and Treasurer (RJD). The NDA had won two seats of the central panel i.e., President (ABVP) and Joint Secretary (JDU).

Factors that influenced the Voting Behavior in PUSU Election

The behavior of voters is influenced by several factors such as religion, caste, community, language, money, policy or ideology, purpose of the polls, extent of franchise, political wave, etc. The political parties make use of these variables for the sake of winning the battle of the ballot box. Despite making their professions for enlightened secularism, candidates affiliated to various political parties or their student wings can be found making appeals to the voters based on their religious and communal sentiments; they can also be found involved in exploiting the factors like language or money to achieve success in the war of votes. Appeals, campaigns, and canvassings are done by candidates or their groups based on ideologies, policies, and practices followed by their political parties to which they are affiliated. The interest of the voters and accordingly their behavior at the time of voting is also influenced by the nature or purpose of the elections or the extent of the suffrage. The force of charisma has its part to play whereby the voters are influenced by a slogan like 'Namankan Fees Kam Karo', or 'Your Campus, your leader' or 'Vote for Hope' etc. The role of all these factors can be examined in the study of student electoral behavior. Several factors are identified that appear to be affecting /influencing voting behavior in student union elections.

1. Charismatic Leadership: It appears that an important factor influencing the voting behavior of students is the Charismatic leadership a candidate possesses. It means the exceptional quality of a leader that becomes a source of attraction for them. In an opposite sense, it also means a source of awe and terror that frightens the students in large numbers not to speak or dare to do anything against the wishes of the mighty leader. Generally, the constructive aspect of charisma has had its greater role at the time of the election in our university campuses although opposite aspects were also noticed in some university elections.

2. Caste: Caste continues to be a determinant of voting behaviors in students' union elections. It has deep roots in society and constitutes an important basis of social relations at all levels. Despite the adoption of several provisions that prohibit action and discrimination on its basis, caste continues to be a determinant of political behaviors. The politicization of caste and casteism in politics has been a well-known reality of the Indian political system which has its bearing on student union elections of colleges and universities. The political parties in India, without any exception, while formulating their policies, programmes, and election strategies always keep in mind the caste factor. Caste is a factor in the selection of candidates for contesting an election from a constituency. Votes are demanded in the name of caste.

The examination of caste prevalence in the student leadership of Patna University it was found that the continued prevalence of the Bhumi-har-Brahman caste was broken in the PUSU Election 2019. Candidates from the Ydava caste (a politically dominant backward caste in Bihar) won two seats of Central Panel namely President and Joint Secretary. Both candidates were from CJAP, the student wing of the Jan Adhikar Party (JAP). The role of caste as a determinant of voting behavior has been analyzed by several scholars and they have come out with the conclusion, as Morris Jones writes, 'Politics is more important to caste and caste is more important to politics than before.' Caste is the main language of voters belonging to rural India. Despite the adoption of democratic values that conceive of a society free from casteism, caste continues to characterize politics in India. Indeed it has become one of the chief means by which the Indian masses have been attached to the process of democratic politics. However, it must be stated that the role of caste as an influential factor for voting behavior has been changing, at least in the urban areas. Issue-based political struggle is gradually taking its shape in the Indian polity. But the situation continues to be paradoxical.

3. Religion: The establishment of a secular state in India—by guaranteeing the right to freedom of religion to everyone, treating every religion equal, and non – recognition of any religion as a state religion – has not been successful in preventing the role of religion as a determinant of political behavior in general and voting behavior in particular. The existence of such political parties and neo-political groups stand linked with a particular religion. Religious pluralism of Indian society is a major feature of the environment of the Indian political system and it greatly influences the struggle for power among political parties. The selection of candidates is done with an eye upon the presence of a religious majority in a particular constituency. The candidates do not hesitate to seek votes by playing the religious card with co-religious voters and the secular card with members of other religious communities. The use of religious places for political ends is also standard practice, particularly during elections. The religionization of social-political issues is again resorted to by political parties and other groups. The voters very often vote on religious considerations. Some impact of religion is also seen in students' union elections of Indian universities. To prove the secular identity, some student outfits contesting elections try to include at least a candidate from a minority community. A student outfit affiliated with a right-wing political party may take a conscious decision to keep away a candidate of a particular religion away from contesting panel for a better chance of winnability.

4. Language: India is a multi-lingual state. Linguism also serves as a factor in voting behavior. The organization of states on a linguistic basis fully reflects the importance of language as a factor of politics in India. There have been problems in states like that of the status of one particular language in that state, or relating to the quality of the status of a language of a state. Since people have an emotional attachment with their languages, they easily get influenced whenever there comes up any issue relating to language. Linguistic interests always influence voting behavior. Although language has a definite impact on the political behavior of voters in India, no such impact was seen in the PUSU election. Such influence may be seen in a metropolitan university having a sizeable number of students speaking English, Hindi, and other languages.

5. Money Factor: India is a poor country with a large number of people living below the poverty line. Money as such plays a vital role in determining the voting behavior of the people in India. A rich candidate or party has always better chances of winning the elections. The impact of the money factor is visible in students' union elections in Indian universities. The definite impact of the money factor was visible in all the above-mentioned elections of the PUSU. The contesting candidates and groups spent a lot of money on electioneering in violation of the election code of conduct. Many candidates were found inviting students to dinners in restaurants and distributing gift items like pens and calendars.

6. Sub-Nationalism: Ethnic pluralism, communalism, regionalism, and sub-nationalism are the hard realities of Indian society. Of late sub-nationalism has become a crucial factor in influencing the voting behavior of the people. At times a secessionist group gives a call for the boycott of elections and uses pressure tactics to forces the voters either not to vote in favor of a particular party. Some regional political parties like some fractions of the Alkali Dal, Naga Nationalist Organization, Gorkha League, Jharkha party, AASU, and AAGSP in Assam have raised parochial slogans from time to time and have disturbed the emotional stability of the people of their states. Such actions of some political parties have at times influenced some people to organize themselves on narrow and parochial lines. No impact of sub-nationalism was seen in the PUSU elections as the students studying in the Patna university are more or less homogenous groups and issues of sub-nationalism are absent.

7. Performance of the Party in Power: Each Political party contests elections based on an election manifesto, and after coming into power, it is expected to fulfill the promises made therein. Good or bad performance of the ruling party, just based on the election promises made and promises fulfilled influence the basic behavior of the people in a big way. We experienced it in 1989 in India, when the Congress (I), which got a thumping majority in the 1984 election could not win even a simple majority in the very next election held in 1989 mainly because it failed to perform successfully. In 1989, the Congress Party and in 1991 the Janata Dal failed to win because they failed to exercise power and maintain their political stabilities. This has happened mainly because of a corresponding increase in the number of 'floating voter' or 'switchers' who are mostly young men and women from an educated upper-middle-class and are ready to shift their support from one party to another based on their performance.

The performance of ruling and opposition political parties also affected the behavior of student voters in PUSU elections. The JAP played a very active role in helping the common people during the devastating flood of Bihar in 2019. The party helped the flood-affected students of Patna in a big way by providing them food and other essential items along with monetary help. This led to a noticeable impact on the voting behavior of students in the PUSU election, 2019.

9. Factionalism: The Indian Political life, from the village level to the national level, is characterized by factionalism. No political party, nor even the cadre-based BJP and the two communist parties are free from factionalism. It is at work, as Rajani Kothari points out, at all level of the congress. It has adversely affected the strength of congress is a political party with a glorious past, a weak present and not a bright future. Other parties are also suffering from factionalism. The voters are getting disenchanted with some of the political parties because of their inability to overcome factionalism. They are turning to locally organized parties or regional parties which, because of their small organizational network and limited operational based are relatively less affected by factionalism. The factionalism within political parties and as a consequence in their student wings also affect the voting behavior of university students in students' union elections.

10. Public Esteem of the Candidate: A candidate report with the people with a constituency or his known qualities or contribution in any value spread of activity always acts as a factor of voting behavior. Apart from his party's loyalty or opinion on various issues and problems, a voter while making his choice always takes into account the nature and level of his association with the candidate. A positive image of a party's candidate is a source of popular support for the party. A voter prefers to vote for a candidate who is approachable and who can help him anyway. Public esteem of a candidate has also a definite bearing on the voting behavior of students in university elections.

11. Digital Election Campaigns: Each party launches a vigorous election campaign for influencing the voters in its favor. Use of social media: Facebook, twitter, youtube, and WhatsApp increases the chances to win votes, particularly the floating votes. Election Campaign through virtual rally or meeting on digital platforms (Zoom, google meet, Jio Meet, etc.) designed to make a voter believe that his interest can be best served by the party and their candidates. Poll eve campaigning plays a role in influencing the choice of the voters. A party that is in a position to create an impression through its election campaign that it has a chance to win can earn some additional votes as several voters try to side with the side which they perceive to be a winning side. Nowadays digital election campaign is very popular in students' union elections of universities. The digital campaign was very popular in

the 2018 and 2019 PUSU elections. Social media like Facebook, Youtube, and WhatsApp were used by almost all candidates and groups for campaigning.

Conclusion

These are thus the important determinants of voting behavior in political elections and the university students' union elections in India. The continuity in the operation of India's political system as a developing democratic political system is gradually training the Indian voters. The process of emergence of an issue-based political struggle in place of caste or religion or personality dominated struggle for power is very slowly but gradually taking shape. Elections occupy a prominent place in any democratic set up including academic institutions. It is a means through which students express and enforce their representative views in academic and administrative decisions of the institutions and regulate their democratic functioning. However, the behavior of a student voter is influenced by several factors such as religion, caste, community, language, money, policy or ideology, the purpose of the polls, and political affiliations of student outfits. For electing an effective students' union, the use of these determinants must be avoided and elections should be conducted in a very free and fair manner. It also depends upon whether the system allows freedom of thought, expression, and association to the students within the universities. The mere conducting of students' union elections regularly does not make a university system democratic. The will of students is expressed through voting in students' union elections and therefore, all irrational, undemocratic, and unfair practices must be avoided in these elections. No such action is taken which would in any way undermine the popular will expressed through elections. Student union elections in Indian universities are highly politicized and election codes set by the Lyndogh Committee and adopted by all the universities of the country are often violated. The election of students' union in many universities like PUSU election is not held on the basis of contesting students' affiliation to student wings of political parties. Despite the fact, students declare their affiliation and campaign under the banner of respective affiliation with the student wings. The political parties take a keen interest in the students' union elections of the universities in the country.

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