

Electoral Politics in India: Changing Determinants of Voting Behaviour and Political Participation in the 2024 Lok Sabha Election

*Vighnesh Kalamkar*¹

¹ Assistant Professor, D. G. Ruparel College, Mumbai

Abstract: Electoral politics occupies a central position in the functioning of representative democracy because elections provide citizens with an institutional mechanism to select representatives, evaluate governments and communicate political preferences. In India, electoral behaviour has historically been examined through the perspectives of caste, class, religion, region, party identification and political mobilisation. However, the changing character of Indian democracy suggests that voting decisions increasingly involve several overlapping considerations, including economic conditions, welfare, government performance, leadership, candidate image, political identity and changing forms of political communication. This paper examines the changing determinants of electoral politics in India with particular reference to the 2024 Lok Sabha election. The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design based on secondary sources, including Election Commission of India (ECI) data, Lokniti-Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) election studies, recent peer-reviewed research and established scholarship on Indian politics. The analysis focuses on voter participation, women's electoral participation, social identity, economic considerations, government performance, party competition and political communication. The evidence indicates that contemporary Indian electoral politics cannot adequately be explained by a single factor. Social identities continue to influence political mobilisation, but economic perceptions, welfare, government performance and leadership have become significant components of electoral choice. The 2024 election also demonstrates the increasing importance of women as electoral participants. The paper argues that Indian voting behaviour is best understood through a multidimensional framework in which structural identities and individual evaluations interact within particular political and regional contexts. The study contributes to the literature by integrating sociological, economic, institutional and political-communication approaches to contemporary Indian electoral politics.

Keywords: Electoral Politics, Voting Behaviour, Political Participation, Lok Sabha Elections, Women Voters, India

Introduction

Elections constitute one of the principal institutions through which democratic societies translate individual preferences into political representation. In a representative democracy, citizens do not participate directly in

every decision of the government. Instead, they elect representatives who exercise political authority on their behalf. Elections therefore perform several functions simultaneously: they facilitate political participation, create opportunities for accountability, enable peaceful competition among political organisations and provide legitimacy to governments. The importance of elections is particularly evident in India. Since the adoption of the Constitution, India has maintained a system of universal adult suffrage and regular elections.

The scale of the Indian electoral process is exceptional. The 2024 Lok Sabha election involved approximately 97.98 crore registered electors. Of these, 47.63 crore were women, representing 48.62% of registered electors. The Election Commission of India reported female voter turnout of 65.78% in 2024, slightly higher than male turnout of 65.55%, excluding the uncontested Surat constituency. These figures illustrate an important change in Indian electoral politics. Women are no longer a peripheral category of the electorate. Their participation has become an important element of electoral competition and political analysis.

At the same time, aggregate turnout indicates both continuity and change. The Election Commission records turnout at 45.67% in the first general election of 1951–52, increasing to 66.44% in 2014, 67.40% in 2019 and 66.10% in 2024. Thus, although participation fluctuates from one election to another, electoral participation remains considerably higher than during the early years of the republic.

The question that follows is not simply why people vote, but why voters choose one political party or candidate rather than another. This question has generated extensive scholarship in Indian Political Science. Earlier interpretations frequently emphasised social structures, particularly caste, class, community and regional identities. Later scholarship increasingly examined party competition, leadership, economic evaluations, welfare, government performance and political communication. Contemporary electoral politics also takes place within a rapidly changing media environment in which television, mobile phones and social-media platforms coexist with traditional campaign methods. The present paper argues that the contemporary Indian voter cannot be adequately understood through a single explanatory model. Voting decisions may involve social identity, economic circumstances, evaluation of government performance, party preference, leadership perceptions, candidate characteristics and local political conditions. The relative importance of these factors may vary across states, constituencies and social groups. The 2024 Lok Sabha election provides a useful case for examining this argument. Rather than treating the election as evidence for one particular political interpretation, this study uses it to investigate the broader transformation of electoral politics.

Research Problem

The central research problem arises from the difficulty of explaining Indian voting behaviour through a single theoretical perspective. The sociological approach emphasises social groups and identities. The economic approach emphasises material interests and evaluations of economic performance. The psychological

approach focuses on party identification and political attitudes. The institutional approach examines electoral rules and party competition. More recent approaches emphasise leadership, welfare and political communication. Each perspective explains part of electoral behaviour, but none is sufficient by itself. The research problem can therefore be formulated as follows:

How have the determinants of electoral participation and voting behaviour in India changed, and to what extent can contemporary electoral politics be explained through an interaction of social identity, economic evaluation, government performance, political leadership and communication?

This problem is important because an explanation based exclusively on caste, religion, class or economic interest risks overlooking the complexity of contemporary political choice.

Significance of the Study

The study has academic and practical significance. Academically, it contributes to the study of voting behaviour by bringing together several theoretical approaches. Rather than asking which single factor determines voting, it examines how different factors interact. The study is also significant because electoral politics is closely connected to democratic representation. Understanding voter behaviour provides insights into the relationship between citizens, political parties and governments.

The 2024 Lok Sabha election provides particularly useful evidence. The availability of official ECI data and large-scale survey research makes it possible to examine contemporary electoral behaviour through both aggregate statistics and voter-level evidence. The study also contributes to understanding the changing position of women in Indian democracy. The ECI's 2024 data show both near gender parity in the electorate and slightly higher female than male turnout, demonstrating the growing importance of women as political participants.

Research Gap

Indian electoral politics has been extensively studied. Nevertheless, several areas require further integration:

- First, a substantial portion of the literature has examined social identities, especially caste and community. These remain important, but contemporary elections also involve economic evaluations, welfare, government performance and leadership.
- Second, economic voting has historically received comparatively less attention in Indian electoral analysis than social identity. A recent study of the 2024 election using National Election Study data argues that economic perceptions significantly influenced political preferences, suggesting that economic considerations deserve greater attention in analyses of Indian voting behaviour.

- Third, women's voting has become increasingly important as the gender gap in electoral participation has narrowed. Recent research using National Election Study data examines the emergence of a distinct “woman constituency” in Indian elections.
- Fourth, government performance and voter satisfaction require greater integration with traditional approaches to voting behaviour. Recent research on the 2024 election indicates that voters' evaluations of visible government achievements and economic performance contributed to satisfaction with the incumbent government.

The research gap therefore lies not in the absence of studies on Indian elections but in the need for a more integrated framework that connects identity, economics, governance, gender and political communication.

Research Questions

The study addresses the following research questions:

- What are the major characteristics of contemporary electoral politics in India?
- What factors influence voting behaviour in India?
- How do social identities interact with economic and performance-based considerations?
- What is the significance of women's electoral participation?
- How important are government performance and economic perceptions in voting decisions?
- How does political communication affect contemporary electoral competition?
- What does the 2024 Lok Sabha election reveal about the changing nature of Indian electoral politics?

Objectives of the Study

The study has the following specific objectives:

- To examine the evolution of electoral politics in India.
- To analyse major determinants of voting behaviour.
- To examine the relationship between social identity and electoral choice.
- To analyse economic and performance-based voting.
- To examine women's electoral participation.
- To understand the changing role of political parties and leadership.
- To examine contemporary political communication.
- To analyse selected evidence from the 2024 Lok Sabha election.
- To develop an integrated framework for understanding contemporary Indian voting behaviour.

Literature Review

Electoral Politics and the Indian Political System

Rajni Kothari's work remains important for understanding the early development of India's political system. His analysis of the "Congress system" demonstrated that Indian politics could not simply be interpreted using models derived from Western party systems. Political competition occurred within a wider structure involving social groups, political elites and institutional arrangements. The subsequent fragmentation and diversification of India's party system required scholars to examine regional parties, coalition politics and changing social coalitions. The evolution of electoral competition therefore reflects the broader transformation of Indian society and political institutions.

Social Identity and Voting Behaviour

Caste has occupied a central position in the study of Indian politics. It can influence candidate selection, political mobilisation, social networks and perceptions of representation. However, contemporary electoral research increasingly cautions against assuming automatic caste voting. A person belonging to a particular caste may consider several additional factors when making an electoral choice. Caste therefore functions as a political context rather than a mechanical predictor.

The same argument applies to regional identity and other social affiliations. Social identities influence the political environment in which choices are made, but individual electoral decisions may vary considerably.

Party Identification

Political parties provide voters with organised political alternatives. Party identification can produce relatively stable voting patterns, particularly among citizens with long-standing political attachments. However, party identification is not necessarily permanent. Changes in party leadership, political performance, alliances, candidate selection and social conditions may influence political preferences. This suggests that party identification should be treated as one component of voting behaviour rather than a complete explanation.

Economic Voting

Economic voting theory proposes that citizens may evaluate political parties according to economic conditions. Economic considerations can operate at two levels. First, voters may evaluate their personal economic circumstances. Second, they may assess the wider economic performance of the country or state. The 2024 election provides evidence for examining this perspective. Alam's study of pocketbook voting using NES 2024 data argues that economic considerations had a substantial effect on political preferences. This is important because it challenges interpretations that focus almost exclusively on social identities.

Government Performance

Performance-based voting is closely related to economic voting but extends beyond the economy. Citizens may evaluate infrastructure, public services, welfare programmes, administration and visible government initiatives. Attri and Mishra's study of the 2024 Lok Sabha election examines determinants of voter satisfaction and finds that recent and visible achievements and evaluations of economic performance played important roles in shaping satisfaction. This supports the argument that citizens may evaluate governments retrospectively.

Women and Electoral Politics

Women's participation has undergone a significant transformation. The ECI reports that female electors constituted 48.62% of registered electors in 2024. Female turnout was also slightly higher than male turnout. Deshpande's analysis of NES data examines the emergence of a distinct women's electoral constituency and the changing patterns of women's political participation. This development has important consequences for parties because women voters cannot simply be treated as an extension of household-level political preferences.

Political Communication

Political communication has moved beyond traditional campaign methods. Newspapers, television, public meetings and interpersonal networks now coexist with social media and digital platforms. The significance of digital communication should nevertheless not be exaggerated. Access to technology varies by age, education, location and socioeconomic status. Traditional political mobilisation remains important. The contemporary situation is therefore better described as hybrid political communication.

Theoretical Framework

This research uses an integrated framework consisting of four major perspectives:

Sociological Model

The sociological model associates voting with social characteristics such as caste, class, community and region. Its central contribution is that political behaviour occurs within social structures.

Rational Choice Model

The rational choice perspective treats voters as actors who compare political alternatives according to expected benefits and costs. In the Indian context, this can include economic conditions, employment, welfare and public services.

Psychological Model

The psychological model emphasises political attitudes and party identification. It explains why voters may continue to support a political organisation despite changes in short-term circumstances.

Performance-Based Model

Performance-based voting focuses on retrospective evaluations. Citizens may ask: Has government performance improved my circumstances or the wider public environment? The model incorporates economic performance, welfare, infrastructure and public services.

Research Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive-analytical research design based primarily on secondary data. The research combines: historical analysis, comparative analysis, descriptive statistical analysis, literature review, secondary survey analysis, and conceptual analysis.

Sources of Data

The principal sources include: Election Commission of India, Lokniti-CSDS National Election Studies, peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, scholarly research on Indian voting behaviour, and official election publications. The ECI provides the principal source for aggregate electoral statistics. Lokniti-CSDS provides survey-based evidence regarding voters' attitudes and preferences.

Survey Evidence

The Lokniti-CSDS 2024 post-poll study is particularly valuable. It surveyed 19,663 respondents across 23 states, covering 772 polling stations, 193 Assembly constituencies and 191 Parliamentary constituencies. Its sampling design was multi-stage random sampling. The study therefore provides a substantial empirical foundation for analysing voter behaviour.

Scope and Delimitation

The paper focuses primarily on the 2024 Lok Sabha election while placing contemporary developments within the longer history of Indian elections. No primary survey has been conducted by the researcher for this paper.

Method of Analysis

The analysis compares official electoral participation data with findings from academic studies based on voter surveys. The study does not claim that aggregate turnout figures establish individual-level causal relationships.

Analysis and Discussion

Electoral Participation: Historical Perspective

Electoral participation has changed substantially since the first general election, as shown in Table 1 below:

Election	Voter Turnout (%)
1951-52	45.67%
1967	61.04%
1977	60.49%
1984-85	64.01%
1999	59.99%
2004	58.07%
2009	58.21%
2014	66.44%
2019	67.40%
2024	66.10%

Table 1: Historical Voter Turnout in Indian Lok Sabha Elections (1951–2024)

The table demonstrates two characteristics: First, turnout has increased substantially over the long term. Second, participation does not follow a straight upward trajectory. Turnout can rise or decline according to political circumstances and mobilisation. The 2024 turnout of 66.10% therefore represents both continuity and change: it was slightly below 2019 but considerably above the first general election. This indicates the institutionalisation of elections as a major form of political participation.

Women as an Electoral Constituency

Women's participation is one of the most significant developments in contemporary Indian elections. According to the ECI, 47.63 crore women were registered electors in 2024. Women represented 48.62% of the total registered electorate. The number of female electors per 1,000 male electors reached 946. More importantly, women voted at a slightly higher rate than men in 2024. This has important political implications. Political parties increasingly need to consider women as independent political actors rather than simply as members of households or communities. Issues such as household economic security, welfare, education, employment, public health, transport, safety and social assistance may therefore influence electoral politics.

However, the category “women voters” should not be treated as politically homogeneous. Women differ according to class, caste, education, region, age and occupation. The emergence of women as a major electoral constituency therefore makes electoral analysis more complex rather than simpler.

Social Identity and Electoral Choice

Social identity remains relevant to Indian electoral politics. Caste can influence political mobilisation, candidate selection, party organisation, perceptions of representation, local networks, and political alliances. However, the evidence does not support treating caste as a universal voting determinant. A voter may identify strongly with a social group but simultaneously consider government performance, economic conditions or candidate reputation. This leads to an important conceptual distinction:

Social identity influences the context of political choice; it does not necessarily determine the final choice.

The same principle applies to regional identity. A political party may have a strong national profile but face different electoral conditions across states because regional political histories and local party competition differ. Thus, electoral politics in India operates across multiple operational tiers simultaneously:

National → State → Constituency → Locality → Individual

Economic Considerations and Voting

Economic voting provides an important alternative to purely identity-based explanations. Voters may evaluate: prices, employment, income, economic security, household financial conditions, public services, and economic opportunities.

Alam's 2024 study provides evidence that pocketbook considerations influenced political preferences during the 18th Lok Sabha election. This finding is significant because it suggests that economic concerns should not be treated as secondary to social identity. However, economic voting should also not be treated as universally decisive. Economic circumstances differ between households, regions and occupational groups. Moreover, voters interpret economic conditions through political information and social experience. Therefore, the causal pathway is best represented as:

Economic condition → Political perception → Evaluation → Electoral choice
(rather than: *Economic condition → Automatic vote*)

Welfare and Government Performance

Government performance represents another important component of contemporary electoral politics. Voters may assess governments through visible outcomes such as roads, transport, electricity, housing, welfare delivery, education, health services, employment opportunities, and administrative accessibility. The significance of performance-based evaluation is supported by recent research on the 2024 election. Attri and

Mishra found that voter satisfaction was associated with perceptions of recent and visible government achievements and economic performance. This suggests that electoral accountability may operate through retrospective evaluation.

However, performance itself is interpreted subjectively. Two citizens may experience the same government programme differently. Therefore, the political effect of policy depends on:

Policy → Implementation → Citizen experience → Perception → Political evaluation

This distinction is important for understanding why government programmes do not necessarily produce identical political responses across all regions.

Political Parties and Leadership

Political parties remain the principal organisations through which electoral competition is structured. Parties perform several vital functions: candidate recruitment, policy formulation, voter mobilisation, political communication, representation of interests, campaign organisation, and coalition formation. Leadership has become increasingly important in electoral campaigns. A recognisable leader can provide voters with a clear political reference point. Nevertheless, leadership operates within institutional and social contexts. A national leader cannot completely substitute for constituency-level organisation. Similarly, a candidate's local reputation may matter even in an election where national issues receive substantial attention. Electoral choice therefore involves both personalised and organisational politics.

Digital Communication and Electoral Politics

Digital media have changed the communication environment surrounding elections. Political parties can communicate directly with citizens without depending entirely on traditional media institutions. Digital platforms can facilitate rapid dissemination of political messages, mobilisation of volunteers, communication with younger citizens, campaign coordination, political discussion, and dissemination of speeches and policy information.

However, digital communication also creates methodological challenges for researchers. Not every online message reaches the same population. Digital access varies according to age, education, geography and socioeconomic circumstances. Consequently, digital politics should not be equated with Indian politics as a whole. A more appropriate model is:

**Traditional media + Interpersonal networks + Public campaigning + Digital media =
Contemporary political communication**

This hybrid model better reflects the diversity of Indian society.

The 2024 Lok Sabha Election as a Case Study

The 2024 Lok Sabha election provides a useful empirical case because it combines high electoral participation, substantial female participation, complex party competition and extensive political communication. The ECI recorded 66.10% turnout. The election also recorded near gender parity in the electorate, with women comprising 48.62% of registered electors. The survey evidence is equally important. Lokniti-CSDS's post-poll survey involved 19,663 respondents across 23 states and employed multi-stage random sampling. The academic literature emerging from this survey provides evidence for examining several dimensions of voter behaviour, including economic perceptions, government satisfaction and women's voting. This makes the 2024 election useful not because it can provide one definitive explanation of voting, but because it illustrates the interaction of several explanations.

Major Findings

The study identifies nine major findings:

- **Electoral participation is institutionally established:** The long-term turnout pattern demonstrates that elections have become a deeply institutionalised form of political participation.
- **Contemporary voting is multidimensional:** No single factor adequately explains electoral behaviour across India.
- **Social identity remains significant:** Caste, class and regional identities continue to influence political mobilisation and perceptions of representation.
- **Economic considerations matter:** Evidence from recent research indicates that economic perceptions influenced political preferences during the 2024 election.
- **Government performance matters:** Voter satisfaction can be influenced by perceptions of visible achievements and economic performance.
- **Women have become central electoral actors:** Women constituted nearly half of registered electors and recorded slightly higher turnout than men in 2024.
- **Regional context remains important:** National electoral narratives operate differently across states and constituencies.
- **Political communication has become hybrid:** Digital media have expanded political communication but coexist with traditional campaign mechanisms.
- **Survey research is essential:** Aggregate election results reveal outcomes but cannot independently explain voter motivations. Large-scale surveys such as NES provide additional evidence about political attitudes and choices.

Discussion

The findings support the principal hypothesis that contemporary Indian electoral politics is multidimensional. The older distinction between identity voting and development voting is increasingly insufficient. A voter can simultaneously possess a strong social identity and evaluate government performance.

Similarly, economic voting and identity voting should not necessarily be treated as competing explanations. Economic concerns may be interpreted through social networks and political identities. The same applies to leadership. Leadership can influence voter perceptions, but voters encounter leadership through political parties, media, social networks and local political organisations. The resulting analytical framework is:

Social identity + Economic perception + Government performance + Party identification + Leadership + Local context + Political communication → Electoral choice

The relative weight of each factor varies between voters and constituencies. This multidimensional approach also helps explain why Indian electoral politics cannot be understood solely from national-level results.

Implications for Political Science

The findings have several implications for the study of Political Science:

- **First:** Electoral studies should avoid deterministic explanations.
- **Second:** Researchers should combine aggregate electoral data with survey evidence.
- **Third:** Women's political participation should be studied independently rather than treated merely as a demographic variable.
- **Fourth:** Economic perceptions deserve greater attention in Indian voting studies.
- **Fifth:** Researchers should examine how political communication affects different categories of citizens.
- **Sixth:** Electoral research should combine national, state and constituency-level analysis.

Limitations

This study has several limitations:

- First, it relies on secondary data and does not include an original field survey.
- Second, national-level data cannot fully capture constituency-level variations.
- Third, survey responses measure reported attitudes and may not perfectly correspond to actual voting behaviour.

- Fourth, digital political communication changes rapidly, making longitudinal comparison difficult.
- Fifth, the paper concentrates primarily on the 2024 Lok Sabha election and should not be interpreted as a prediction of future electoral outcomes.

These limitations also provide meaningful opportunities for future research.

Future Research

Future research should examine electoral politics through mixed methods. A constituency-level study could combine: voter surveys, interviews, electoral results, socioeconomic data, campaign analysis, and social-media content. Longitudinal research could compare the 2014, 2019 and 2024 elections to identify changes in voter preferences.

Separate studies could examine: youth voting behaviour, women's political preferences, urban-rural differences, economic voting, welfare and electoral choice, digital political communication, regional variations, first-time voters, candidate-centred voting, and the relationship between political participation and democratic satisfaction. Such research would help establish whether the patterns observed in 2024 represent temporary electoral conditions or longer-term changes.

Conclusion

Electoral politics remains one of the most important areas of Indian Political Science because elections connect citizens with political institutions. The Indian electoral experience demonstrates that democratic participation cannot be understood solely through formal institutions. It must also be examined through the behaviour, perceptions and social contexts of voters. The evidence examined in this study demonstrates that contemporary Indian electoral politics is multidimensional. Social identities remain important, but they operate alongside economic perceptions, welfare considerations, government performance, party identification, leadership and political communication. The 2024 Lok Sabha election illustrates this complexity.

Voter turnout stood at 66.10%, considerably higher than the 45.67% recorded during the first general election. Women constituted 48.62% of registered electors and recorded slightly higher turnout than men, indicating the growing importance of women as electoral participants. Recent empirical research also indicates that economic perceptions and evaluations of government performance influenced voter attitudes during the 2024 election. These findings strengthen the argument that Indian voters should not be viewed exclusively through the lens of social identity. The paper therefore proposes a multidimensional understanding of electoral choice. Voters are located within social structures, but they also evaluate political alternatives. They may respond to identity, economic circumstances, government performance, welfare, leadership and political information simultaneously. The principal contribution of the study is consequently the integration of these dimensions into a single analytical framework. Indian electoral politics should not be understood as a movement from

“identity politics” to “development politics” or from “traditional politics” to “digital politics.” Instead, different forms of political behaviour coexist and interact.

The contemporary Indian election is therefore best understood as a multi-layered process of political participation in which social identities, economic perceptions, institutional performance, political organisations and communication technologies intersect. This perspective provides a more useful basis for future research because it recognises the diversity of Indian voters while avoiding overly simple explanations of electoral choice.

References

- Alam, M. S. (2024). Pocketbook voting in India's 18th parliamentary elections (2024). *Studies in Indian Politics*, 12(2), 251–264. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23210230241289454>
- Attri, V., & Mishra, J. (2024). Unpacking public satisfaction: An analysis of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. *Studies in Indian Politics*, 12(2), 318–335. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23210230241293225>
- Chhibber, P. K., & Verma, R. (2019). *Ideology and identity: The changing party systems of India*. Oxford University Press.
- Deshpande, R. (2024). Shaping of the woman constituency in Indian elections: Evidence from the NES data. *Studies in Indian Politics*, 12(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/23210230241293562>
- Election Commission of India. (2025). *Atlas: General elections to Lok Sabha 2024*. Election Commission of India.
- Election Commission of India. (2025). *General elections to Lok Sabha 2024: Statistical reports*. Election Commission of India.
- Kothari, R. (1970). *Politics in India*. Orient Longman.
- Lokniti-Centre for the Study of Developing Societies. (2024). *National Election Study 2024: Post-poll study method note*. CSDS.
- Lokniti-Centre for the Study of Developing Societies. (2024). *National Election Studies*. Centre for the Study of Developing Societies.
- Suri, K. C. (Ed.). (2007). *India's political parties*. Oxford University Press.
- Yadav, Y. (2000). Understanding the second democratic upsurge: Trends of Bahujan participation in electoral politics in the 1990s. In F. Frankel, Z. Hasan, R. Bhargava, & B. Arora (Eds.), *Transforming India: Social and political dynamics of democracy*. Oxford University Press.

Publisher's Note: *The views and opinions expressed in this article are solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher, editors, or the editorial board.*