The Role Of Political Parties And Muslim Voting Behavior In Bihar

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Abstract

Bihar has been politically involved in Indian politics from the beginning. The emergence of identity-based political parties that reflect linguistic, regional, and caste identities has recently been a significant aspect of Bihar politics. Keeping this in mind, the current study aimed to examine the role of political parties and Muslim voting behavior in Bihar. The study utilized a primary and secondary data gathering method where Primary Data was collected from 385 Muslim voters of Bihar through a structured questionnaire. These responses were analyzed through various tools like Excel and SPSS. While Regression was used to test the hypothesis. The findings revealed that socioeconomic factors (education, income, and occupation) influence Muslim voting behavior in Bihar. There was also a significant impact of political party strategies, religious identity, and outreach on the voting and political preferences of Muslims in Bihar. It has been concluded that in Bihar, the relationship between political parties and Muslim voting behavior is constantly shifting, and this change is a reflection of both traditional identity-based factors and shifting socioeconomic goals. The study will be significant for educating political parties and civil society to promote inclusion build democratic institutions, and meet Muslim needs for fairer and more effective governance The study will be significant for educating political parties and civil society to promote inclusion build democratic institutions, and meet Muslim needs for fairer and more effective governance

Keywords: Election; Voting Behavior; Caste System; Political Culture; Political Preferences; Muslim Community.

Introduction

In a democratic system, the majority's opinion counts for most things. The election plays a crucial role in indirect democracies and necessitates a certain set of rules and procedures. As a result, in a parliamentary democracy, candidates from various political parties compete for authority. Over fifty crore people have the right to participate in electing representatives in India's democracy, making it the biggest and most prosperous in the world (Soroka & Wlezien, 2010). Voting behavior entails examining how people behave politically in the setting of elections (Chatterjee, 2008).

Election voting is a complicated phenomenon that is influenced by a variety of psychological and socioeconomic elements, including caste, feudal governmental apparatus, and unofficial terror (Caldeira, et al., 1985). Bihar's election results are more likely to be determined by issues of imagined identity, such as language, religion, caste, or geography. Each of these identities is rooted in the cultural past of both India and Bihar and cannot be understood in isolation from this background (Sahay, 2004). In India, Muslims make up the second-largest religious group. As of the 2011 census, their total population was 172.2 million, or 14.23% of India as a whole(Gayer & Jaffrelot, 2012). It would be difficult for a democratic state to disregard the wishes of a minority population of this magnitude. The Hindutva vote, motivated by anti-Muslim communal prejudice, was essential in the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to victory and has frequently drawn the attention of the Indian National Congress (INC) and other secular political organizations (Desai, 2011).

In the last Bihar election, political parties have attempted to alter the social mobilization that is based on caste and identity (Sahay, 2009). Nitish Kumar, head of the Janata Dal-United party, claims to be the de facto leader of Bihar due to widespread support among members of the same caste. The BJP has effectively united people from different social backgrounds and castes (Chhibber, 2001). However, BJP's electoral campaign is indicative of the religion-centered mass mobilization, in which it was felt that all the castes were united under a single fold.

The illusive Muslim vote is a contentious issue in the constantly changing Indian electoral landscape. All political parties competing are attempting to capture public support as major states, including Himachal Pradesh, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Gujarat, have elections at the regional or local elections. Studies on the role of political parties and Muslim voting behavior have become necessary since the Muslim vote has frequently remained a cherished electoral reward in this political impasse over the years.

The Political Representation of Muslims in India

On the state and federal levels in India, Muslims have been traditionally under-represented in public office (Hussain-Gambles, et al., 2004). Muslims in India also rank among the country's poorest citizens. "Deficits and deprivation" were found in almost all dimensions of development, including access to loans and credit, employment in the government sector, access to education, and literacy, according to a recent government report that investigated the social, economic, and educational status of Muslims in India (Sachar et al., 2006). Largely Muslim states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar were evaluated as having a "particularly grave" condition. The survey revealed that the 'development gap' is compounded by Muslims' prevalent belief that they are the target of discrimination and exclusion. Muslim ideas on political representation have traditionally centered on the extended family or extended community as the primary unit of representation and source of allegiance.

The party system in India is marked by relatively low levels of party cohesiveness, with lawmakers regularly switching parties, despite the fact that the country has a plurality election

system that offers less of an incentive to vote, particularly for candidates compared to open-list PR (Proportional representation) systems. Thus, it is common for candidate characteristics and ideologies to be valued more highly than party affiliations, which may enhance the influence of candidate characteristics - particularly religion - on voting. Second, rather than choosing parties based on their policy platforms, voters frequently choose parties that include individuals from their ethnic group (Heath and Yadav 2010, Chandra 2007). This is known as an "ethnic headcount" during elections. Thirdly, multiparty rivalry is a feature of places like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, where three secular parties fight with one another for the support of Muslims.

The primary political competition in the state is characterized by the participation of various political parties, namely the SP (Samajwadi Party), BSP (Bahujan Samaj Party), BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party), and Congress. These parties have distinct social bases that contribute to their strong support among specific communities. The SP garners significant backing from the Yadavs, who traditionally belong to low-to-middle-ranking agricultural-pastoral castes (Verma, 2004). The BSP, on the other hand, enjoys substantial support from the Jatavs and other Dalit communities, which were formerly considered untouchable (Chandra, 2009). The BJP, being a Hindu nationalist party, receives strong support from the Hindu Upper Castes (Heath, 1999). In contrast, Congress lacks a distinct social base (Heath and Yadav, 2010). Muslims are a significant ethnic community inside the state, although they lack a dedicated political party to advocate for their interests. Consequently, Muslims may exhibit a propensity to alter their political allegiance among any of the three secular parties (SP, BSP, Congress) based on the religious affiliation of the candidates. The candidate selection technique is influenced, to some extent, by the presumption that Muslims exhibit a higher propensity to vote for politicians who share their religious affiliations (Wald, 2008).

Voting Behaviour and its Determinants

The phenomenon of voting behavior encompasses the various actions or lack thereof exhibited by individuals in relation to their engagement in the electoral process, specifically in the context of selecting representatives for their respective regional, local, or national governing bodies. The behavioral outcomes manifest either as an endorsement of political candidates or parties or as a deliberate abstention from engaging in the electoral process. The voting behavior of individuals can be attributed to their perception of the potential benefits or drawbacks that may impact their overall quality of life as a result of their choices at the polls (Lau & Redlawsk, 2001). Voting is important to a functioning democracy. This is likewise true with regard to India. India has had many national and state elections since 1951–1952.
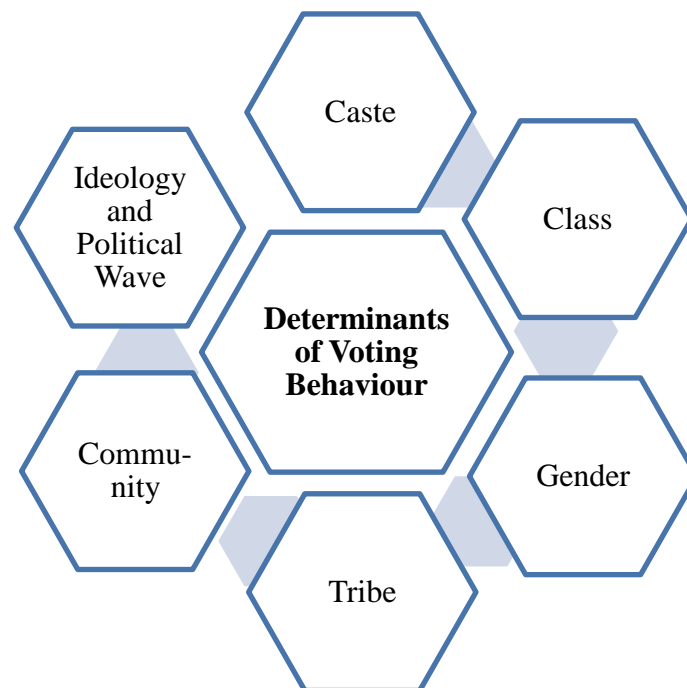
Figure 1: Determinants of Voting Behaviour (factors that influence the behavior of voters)[1]

The above-mentioned Figure 1 shows the different determinants of the voting behavior of an individual. People can't help but be influenced by the fact that they don't all share the same caste, religion, language, or gender. These issues also influence voters' decisions in elections. Linking these elements to people's economic and other demands makes them more powerful. Religion, social status, socioeconomic status, community, ethnicity, language, philosophy, political fads, and other factors all influence voter turnout. The political parties try to win over people based on these factors. All political party representatives employ these factors in their appeals to voters of all stripes and persuasions. These factors also influence voters' choices at the polls.

Based on the preceding brief introduction, this component of the study contains evaluations of similar publications that have been conducted in the past to aid in understanding the status of the subject. For ease of understanding, this section has been divided into three parts.

   i.   **Religious Concerns and Political Preferences**

  ii.   **Voting Behavior of Muslim**

 iii.   **Status of Muslims in Politics**

Religious Concerns and Political Preferences

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[1] Source: https://egyankosh.ac.in/bitstream/123456789/66628/1/Block-2.pdf

Vaggione (2005) revealed that despite limitations that might be imposed on it by advancements like industrialization, globalization, and democracy in the election-making process, religion has demonstrated that it continues to play a crucial role in society. Similarly, **McCleary & Barro (2006)** found that both economic growth and political stability have been influenced by the level of religious commitment and conviction held by a population. On the contrary, **Chaves (1994)** discovered that the concept of secularization extended to the idea that as a society's economy developed, the importance of organized religion in making political choices and other spheres of social and legal life declined. However, **McConnaughy et al. (2010)** studied how voters' perceptions of a candidate's race and religion affected their vote. Some studies have found that in the United States and some North European nations **(Bergh & Bjørklund, 2011)**, people of visible minority groups were more inclined to vote for candidates from their own racial or ethnic groups. In the same manner, **Popkin (1991)** found that the candidate's religion, ethnicity, race, local ties, and gender were all significant cues because voters perceived the connection between these attributes and actual behavior in their everyday lives. In addition, **Heath (1999)** stated that candidate qualities and ideology were generally considered crucial, especially in light of the fact that party designations may dilute the effect of attributes like religiosity on the electorate. Lastly, **Heath and Yadav (2010)** noted that Elections can also be referred to as "ethnic headcounts," in which voters choose parties based on the representation of their ethnic group rather than on the merits of individual candidates' policies.

Voting Behavior of Muslim

Amjahad and Sandri (2012) investigated the voting patterns of Muslims in Belgium, which showed that Muslims consistently support the Socialist Party regardless of their socioeconomic standing or geographic location. Whereas **Rudolph and Rudolph (1987)** showed that Muslims have a tendency to vote for Muslims if they believe their coreligionist has a good chance of winning the election. However, **Alam (2009)** indicated that most people agree that the political climate was the primary factor shaping Muslims' voting behavior. There has been a wide range of candidates whom Muslims support. Even in the past, the type of electoral rivalry, the geographic dispersion of the community, and the available political options have all played significant roles in shaping Muslims' voting preferences. On the other hand, **Choi (2009)** discovered that voting patterns of Scheduled Castes and Muslims in India differ despite the fact that these communities belong to members of marginalized minority groups. Muslim voting has been influenced by whether or not alliance politics exist on the state level.

Similarly, **Wright (1977)** realized that despite the division of India and the accompanying religious violence, it has been certain that the majority of Indian Muslim voters cast their ballots for the Congress party in the initial stages of the country's electoral history. In the context of this statement, **Hasan (1997)** argued that Muslim voter conduct began to diverge from such norms gradually, and the results were apparent in the 1967 general election when the Congress party's loss in the Hindi belt was blamed on this shift. Moreover, **Teney et al. (2010)** found that Muslims have a deeper sense of religious identity and affiliation as a result of the

challenges Muslims endure. It indicated that Muslims were more likely to vote for candidates within their own faith than for those of other faiths. In addition, **Dana et al. (2011)** demonstrated a correlation between mosque attendance and non-electoral engagement on the side of Muslims (e.g., protesting, giving, contacting politicians, and boycotting companies).

Status of Muslims in Politics

Muslims in India were vastly underrepresented in the country's most important institutions (**Bhargava, 2007**). Similarly, **Bajpai (2011)** reported that political reservation for geographically scattered minorities has been provided by the Constitution of India. However, unlike the Scheduled Castes, Muslims have no access to compensating measures like reserved seats. Therefore, Indian Muslims' political representation has to rely on the backing of other socioeconomic groups. In the same manner, **Jaffrelot & Kumar (2012)** found that both at the national and state levels, Muslims in India have been traditionally underrepresented in public office. Whereas **Khalidi (1993)** noted that the unwillingness of political parties to select Muslim candidates out of fear of alienating other voters in the district was one reason why there have been a lesser amount of Muslim candidates in the political arena. In the same context, **Ansari (2006)** displayed data from 1952 to 2004. After the 1952 election, Muslims possessed about 4% of the seats in the Indian Parliament. This number rose to about 9% in the 1980 elections but then slightly decreased to 5-7% in elections held between the mid-1980s and 2004. The study concluded that Muslims were constantly underrepresented and that one of the primary causes of such underrepresentation was that parties were reluctant to nominate Muslim candidates.

Similarly, the **Secretariat (2006)** also noted that Muslims in India's government have long been underrepresented despite making up a sizable minority in that country. Almost every measure of social and economic well-being showed that the community was failing. On the other hand, **Alam (2004)** found that the party's electoral fortunes began to deteriorate at the same time as the BJP and caste- and region-based parties began to gain ground. During this time, Muslim legislators increasingly emerged from political parties apart from the BJP that weren't affiliated with the Congress. In a similar manner, **Bhatti (2011)** examined the political and financial position of Muslims worldwide using specific examples. The statistics suggested that India's Muslim population's political future has become "almost very bleak."

Voting practices vary from region to region, culture to culture, and occasionally, person to person across the nation. While existing studies often highlight the impact of political parties and identity considerations, there's a dearth of in-depth, data-driven research examining how economic and development-related issues intersect with Muslim voting patterns over time, with special reference to Bihar. Closing this research gap would be valuable for policymakers and parties aiming to address the multifaceted needs and aspirations of Bihar's Muslim population. The aforementioned three sections aid in diversifying and acquiring various points of view on the subject in order to move toward the objectives based on the identified research gap.

Objectives of the Study

Obj.1 To analyze the factors that influence Muslim voting behavior in Bihar elections.

Obj.2 To assess the role of religious identity in shaping political preferences among Muslims in Bihar.

Obj.3 To investigate the role of political party strategies and outreach in shaping Muslim voter preferences.

Hypothesis of the Study

H1: Socioeconomic factors, such as education, income, and occupation, influence Muslim voting behavior in Bihar.

H2: Religious identity significantly impacts the political preferences of Muslims in Bihar.

H3: Political Party Strategies and outreach create an impact on Muslim voter preferences.

Methods and Methodology

The study utilized both "primary and secondary data collection methods in conjunction with the purposive sampling method to determine "the role of political parties and Muslim voting behavior in Bihar. The study has been conducted in the Bihar state of India. The primary data was collected via a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire has been designed on the basis of demographic factors and the variables of the study. These questionnaires were distributed to 450 respondents (Muslim voters), out of which responses from 412 respondents were received, and finally, data from 385 respondents has been considered for the study who fulfilled the questionnaire in a complete manner which was equivalent to the response rate of 85.56%. The study employed a mixed-method research design. Excel and SPSS software has been used to examine the data. A statistical tool, Regression, has been used to test the Hypothesis.

Table 1: Analytical Framework of Objectives

Sr. No.	Objective	Hypothesis	Used Statistical Test	Description
1.	To analyze the factors that influence Muslim voting behavior in Bihar elections.	**H1:** Socioeconomic factors, such as education, income, and occupation, influence Muslim voting behavior in Bihar.	**Regression**	A compendium of statistical methodologies for ascertaining the degree of association between two variables
2.	To assess the role of religious identity in shaping political	**H2:** Religious identity significantly impacts the political preferences of Muslims in Bihar.	**Regression**	A compendium of statistical methodologies for ascertaining the

	preferences among Muslims in Bihar.			degree of association between two variables
3.	To investigate the role of political party strategies and outreach in shaping Muslim voter preferences.	**H3:** Political Party Strategies and outreach create an impact on Muslim voter preferences.	**Regression**	A compendium of statistical methodologies for ascertaining the degree of association between two variables.

Result and Findings

This section outlined the results and data interpretation. The results have been divided on the basis of demographic profile and hypothesis. Inside the hypothesis, the result has been shown with the use of a table and their explanation.

- **Demographic Profile**

Table 2: Demographic Profile of Respondents

S No.	Demographic Characteristics	Category	N	%
1	**Gender**	Female	178	46.2%
		Male	207	53.8%
2	**Age group**	18-30 years	131	34.0%
		31-40 years	101	26.2%
		41-50 Years	74	19.2%
		51-60 years	54	14.0%
		Above 60 years	25	6.5%
3	**Education**	Primary Education	111	28.8%
		Secondary Education	115	29.9%
		Bachelor's degree	111	28.8%

		Master's degree or higher	45	11.7%
4	**Occupation**	Student	87	22.6%
		Employed	153	39.7%
		Self-Employed	98	25.5%
		Others	47	12.2%
5	**Monthly Income**	Nill	55	14.3%
		less than 20,000	121	31.4%
		20,000-40,000	101	26.2%
		40,001-60,000	69	17.9%
		More than 60,000	39	10.1%

Table 2 shows "the Demographic Characteristics of the respondents" in the context of their Gender, Age group, Education, Occupation, and Monthly Income of respondents. According to Table 1, out of 385 respondents, 53.80% are male and 46.20% are females which belong to Bihar. The maximum number (131) of respondents are from the age group of 23-30 years, i.e., 34.00%. The maximum number (115) of respondents have completed Secondary Education, i.e., 29.90%. The further table shows the maximum number (153) of respondents are Employed, i.e., 39.70%, and The maximum number (121) of respondents have a monthly income is less than 20,000, i.e., 31.4%.

- **Hypothesis Testing**

H1: Socioeconomic factors, such as education, income, and occupation, influence Muslim voting behavior in Bihar.

Table 3: Regression Analysis

Hypothesis	Regression Weights	Beta Coefficient	R	R2	F	t-value	p-value	Hypotheses Result
H1	Educational Background -> Muslim Voting Behavior	.124			3.514	2.483	.015	**Supported**

| | Monthly Income -> Muslim Voting Behavior | .110 | .164 | .027 | | 1.928 | .023 | **Supported** |
| | Occupation -> Muslim Voting Behavior | .069 | | | | 1.202 | .035 | **Supported** |

Table 3 shows the regression analysis for the hypothesis analyses if socioeconomic factors, i.e., Educational background, Monthly Income, and Occupation, have an impact on Muslim voting behavior. The dependent variable, Muslim voting behavior, was regressed on the predictive variables of Educational background, Monthly Income, and Occupation to test the hypothesis. $F = 3.514$, $p<0.05$, demonstrating that Educational background, Monthly Income, and Occupation have a significant influence on Muslim voting behavior in Bihar (b = 0.124, .110 & .069, and $p<.005$). Furthermore, the $R^2 =.027$ implies that the model explains 2.7% of the variation in the Muslim voting behavior in Bihar, an alternate hypothesis is accepted.

H2: Religious identity significantly impacts the political preferences of Muslims in Bihar.

Table 4: Regression Analysis

Hypothesis	Regression Weights	Beta Coefficient	R	R2	F	t-value	p-value	Hypotheses Result
H2	Religious Identity -> Political Preferences of Muslims	.124	.124	.015	6.001	2.450	.015	**Supported**

Table 4 shows the regression analysis for the hypothesis analyses if Religious identity has an impact on the political preferences of Muslims. The dependent variable, political preferences of Muslims, was regressed on the predictive variable, Religious identity, to test the hypothesis. $F = 6.001$, $p<0.05$, demonstrating that Religious identity has a significant influence on the political preferences of Muslims in Bihar (b = 0.124, and $p<.005$). Furthermore, the $R^2 =.015$ implies that the model explains 1.5% of the variation in the political preferences of Muslims in Bihar, an alternate hypothesis is accepted.

H3: Political Party Strategies and outreach create an impact on Muslim voter preferences.

Table 5: Regression Analysis

Hypothesis	Regression Weights	Beta Coefficient	R	R2	F	t-value	p-value	Hypotheses Result
	Political Party Strategies -> Muslim Voter Preferences	.116				2.510	.012	**Supported**
H3	Political Party outreach -> Muslim voter preferences	.409	.425	.181	42.168	8.831	.000	**Supported**

Table 5 shows the regression analysis for the hypothesis analyses if political party strategies and outreach have an impact on Muslim voter preferences. The dependent variable, Muslim voter preferences, was regressed on the predictive variables of Political Party Strategies and outreach to test the hypothesis. $F = 42.168$, $p<0.05$, demonstrating that Political Party Strategies and outreach have a significant influence on the Muslim voter preferences in Bihar (b = 0.116, & 0.409, and $p<.005$). Furthermore, the R^2 =.181 implies that the model explains 18.1% of the variation in the Muslim voter preferences in Bihar, an alternate hypothesis is accepted.

Discussion

This research examines the impact of caste, religion, and socioeconomic variables on the voting behaviors of Muslims in Bihar. The electoral process in India is characterized by its complexity and diversity, creating the need for further discussion and research on aspects of political parties and Muslim voting patterns. This section of the study report presents a comprehensive discussion of the findings and observations derived from the literature review and empirical investigation, providing illumination on the multifaceted nature of this phenomenon. This research enables the comprehension of the complicated connection between the voting behaviors exhibited by Muslims and the strategies employed by political parties, taking into account their religious identity and the extent of outreach undertaken by these parties.

Thus, this study discussed the field of politics and focused on the role of political parties and Muslim voting behavior in Bihar. This study divided the literature into three sections: religious concerns and political preferences, the voting behavior of Muslims, and the status of Muslims in politics. Some of the prominent studies that were discussed in that part are mentioned below:

Flinders (2012) discovered that one of the key aspects of studying elections in a dynamic society like Bihar involved analyzing the relationship between continuity and change, which manifested as a crystallization of electoral patterns over an extended duration. As proposed by **Wilder (1999)** found a strong correlation between membership in 'biradri' (basic groupings such as family, caste, and kinship) and political preferences. According to the findings of the research carried out by **Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier (2008)** and **Dubois (2007)** the economic, institutional, political, contextual, and individual variables have all been found to play significant roles in

determining and influencing voters' choices at the polls. In the same context, **Sekhon (2000)** has discovered that social and demographic characteristics, including gender, age, education, religion, ethnicity, and others, have a significant role in influencing voting behavior. On the other hand, **Weiss (2009)** revealed that political campaigns play a significant role in influencing voting behavior. Political campaigns that have been well thought out and well executed affected how voters cast their ballots. In order to win over voters in both urban and rural areas, political parties and candidates have created creative and original campaigns. Different campaign formats and strategies boosted party members' dedication and manipulated people to support a political party (**Shaheen, 2004**; **Bike, 1998**). On the other hand, **Mathew & Moore (2011)** discovered that the persistent endeavor toward politics of identity and religious mobilization rooted in Hindutva ideology has resulted in a state of fragmentation for more than a decade rather than fostering a stable multiparty system that was anticipated in Bihar's political landscape following the decline of the Congress party. On the contrary, **Knott (2010)** argued that the rise of Muttahida Ittahidul Muslim as a key political figure in Bihar politics denoted the religious significance of the psychological and sociological factors contributing to minority populations' sense of insecurity and terror throughout India, notably in Bihar. It has also been found that Muslims who voted for Congress regardless of their class to oppose Modi's BJP were a prime example of identity politics' endurance.

Similar findings were made in this study about the connection between Political Parties and Muslim Voting Behavior in Bihar state of India. Socioeconomic factors, such as education, income, and occupation, were found to significantly influence Muslim voting behavior in Bihar, as seen in Table 3. It has also been found true that Religious identity significantly impacts the political preferences of Muslims in Bihar, as seen in Table 4. Additionally, Table 5 demonstrates that despite Socioeconomic factors and Religious identity influences, Political Party Strategies and outreach can create an impact on Muslim voter preferences.

Conclusion

Muslims make up the largest and most influential religious minority in Bihar; hence, their votes play a vital part in the formation and overthrow of administrations. According to the census completed in 2011, Muslims make up 16.5% of the total population in the state of Bihar. Voting trends among Muslims are neither communal, homogeneous, nor monolithic. However, the majority of the time, Muslims cast their vote for political parties and politicians who do not view them as the "other," who support them, and who do not question the legitimacy of their claims to citizenship. In this context, the current study has focused on the role of political parties and Muslim voting behavior in Bihar.

The findings revealed that Socioeconomic factors, such as education, income, and occupation, all have a significant influence on Muslim voting behavior in Bihar. There was also a significant impact of Political Party Strategies, Religious identity, and outreach of Political Parties on the voting and political preferences of Muslims in Bihar. Further, it has been found that all three hypotheses of the study have been accepted.

These findings make it very clear that even if caste and politics are tightly intertwined, the manner in which this interaction takes place is not predictable in any way. The dynamic of the relationship shifts from time to time and is highly dependent on the circumstances. Finally, the study concluded that the future of Indian politics might thus develop in one of two ways over the course of the next decade: either it will take the shape of alliances of religion- and caste-based parties both at the central level and in the states, or it could result in much greater representatives for communities inside the major political parties. Further, it has been suggested that as the current study is limited to only Muslim caste and Bihar state, Future studies might concentrate on other minority groups and be conducted in various regions of India. The key elements influencing local elections may be shown with great success using a heterogeneous sample. The system of castes is strongly ingrained in society, thus, future research should focus more on its possible impacts.

Acknowledgments

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