



# The Changing Voting Behavior and Indian Democracy

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## ABSTRACT

*National Voters' Day in India is observed on January 25th each year. It was initiated to encourage more young voters to actively participate in the political process. This special day was first celebrated on January 25, 2011, to mark the foundation day of the Election Commission of India, which plays a crucial role in organizing free and fair elections in the country. National Voters' Day serves as a reminder of the importance of voting and aims to educate and engage citizens in the electoral process.*

**KEYWORDS**-democracy, voting, elections, India, behaviour

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Voting is the foundation of democracy in India. In India, every citizen has the right and responsibility to participate in it. In this blog, we will discuss the importance of voting, how to get a voter ID card, who is eligible to vote, and the significance of making informed choices. By understanding these key aspects, we can actively contribute to shaping our nation's future and fulfill our duty as responsible citizens. Voting is a process where eligible individuals express their preference for a particular candidate, option, or decision in an election. This is done by using an electronic voting system or ballot paper voting. The candidate who receives the most votes is declared the winner, and this plays a crucial role in determining who will represent a community, region, or country, as well as the outcome of important decisions[1,2,3]

## Importance of Voting in India

- Voting is the cornerstone of democracy and plays a crucial role in shaping the political landscape of India.
- It allows citizens to exercise their right to choose their representatives and participate in the decision-making process.
- Through voting, individuals have the power to hold their elected officials accountable for their actions and policies.
- Voting ensures a fair and transparent electoral process, promoting social and political equality.
- It helps in establishing a government that reflects the will and aspirations of the people.
- By voting, citizens have the opportunity to voice their opinions on various issues and contribute to the development of the nation.

- Voting empowers marginalized sections of society, allowing them to have a say in matters that affect their lives.
- It promotes the growth of a responsible and responsive government, as elected representatives are more likely to address the concerns of their constituents.
- A high voter turnout strengthens the legitimacy and credibility of the democratic system.
- Voting is not only a right but also a civic duty, and by exercising it, individuals actively participate in the democratic process and contribute to the overall progress of the country.[4,5,6]
- Non-citizens: Non-Indian citizens, including foreign nationals and Non-Resident Indians (NRIs), are not allowed to vote in Indian elections.
- Minors: Individuals below the age of 18 are not eligible to vote. The minimum voting age in India is 18 years.
- Disqualified Individuals: People who have been disqualified from voting due to specific legal provisions, such as those convicted of certain criminal offenses or declared bankrupt, may be disqualified from voting.

To vote in India, citizens need to follow certain steps and procedures. Here is a general guide on how to vote in India:

In India, the right to vote is granted to all citizens who meet certain criteria. Here is an overview of who can vote in India:

- Citizenship: Only Indian citizens are eligible to vote in elections. Non-citizens, including foreign nationals and Non-Resident Indians (NRIs), are not allowed to vote.
- Age Requirement: The minimum age to vote in India is 18 years. Any citizen who has reached this age or will reach it on or before the qualifying date specified by the Election Commission is eligible to vote.
- Electoral Rolls: To be eligible to vote, citizens must have their names included in the electoral rolls (voter list) of their respective constituencies. The Election Commission prepares and updates these rolls periodically.
- Residence: Individuals must be residents of the constituency where they wish to vote. They should have a permanent address or a temporary residence of at least six months in that constituency.[7,8,9]
- Mental Soundness: Individuals must be mentally sound and capable of making their own decisions in order to vote.
- Disqualification: There are certain circumstances that may disqualify a person from voting, such as being of unsound mind, being disqualified by law due to criminal offenses, or being declared as bankrupt.
- Eligibility Check: Ensure that you meet the eligibility criteria to vote, which is mentioned above.
- Voter Registration: If you are not already registered as a voter, you need to apply for voter registration. You can do this by filling out Form 6, available online on the official website of the Election Commission of India or at Electoral Registration Offices. Submit the form along with the required documents, such as proof of age, address, and identity.
- Obtaining Voter ID Card: Once your application is processed and approved, you will receive a voter ID card, also known as the Electors Photo Identity Card (EPIC). The voter ID card serves as proof of your identity and is required to vote.
- Checking Voter List: Before an election, check the voter list to ensure that your name is included. The voter list is usually available online on the official website of the Chief Electoral Officer of your state or can be checked at Electoral Registration Offices.
- Polling Station Information: Find out the location of your designated polling station, as mentioned in the voter list. Polling stations are usually set up in schools, community centers, or government buildings. The Election Commission may also provide the option of finding your polling station online or through a helpline number.
- Voting Day: On the designated voting day, go to your assigned polling station during the specified voting hours. Carry your voter ID card or any other valid photo identification document, such as a passport or driving license.[10,11,12]

## 2. DISCUSSION

Certain individuals are not eligible to vote in India. Here are some categories of people who cannot vote:

- **Queue and Verification:** Join the queue at your polling station and wait for your turn. When your turn comes, present your identification document to the polling officials for verification. They will cross-check your details with the voter list and mark your finger with indelible ink.
- **Casting Your Vote:** Enter the voting booth and press the button or use the Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) to cast your vote for the candidate/party of your choice. Follow the instructions provided by the polling officials.
- **Verification Slip:** After casting your vote, collect the verification slip from the polling officials. This slip serves as proof that you have voted.
- **Code of Conduct:** Voters are expected to adhere to the Model Code of Conduct issued by the Election Commission, which includes guidelines on fair practices, ethical conduct, and maintaining decorum during elections.
- **No Campaigning:** Voters should refrain from engaging in any form of campaigning or promoting a particular candidate or political party inside or near the polling booth. Electioneering activities are not allowed within a certain radius of the polling station.
- **Queue Discipline:** Voters are expected to follow the instructions of polling officials, maintain discipline, and wait patiently in the queue for their turn to vote.
- **Compliance with Election Laws:** Voters should comply with all relevant election laws, regulations, and guidelines issued by the Election Commission and other authorities.

### 3. RESULTS

#### Secrecy and Rules for Voters:

Secrecy and rules for voters are essential aspects of the electoral process in India. Here are some key points regarding secrecy and rules for voters:

- **Secrecy of Voting:** The principle of secrecy ensures that a voter's choice remains confidential. Voters have the right to cast their votes without revealing their preferences to anyone, including polling officials or other voters.
- **Booth Secrecy:** While voting, voters should maintain secrecy inside the polling booth by ensuring that no one else sees their marked ballot paper or how they vote.
- **Prohibition on Influencing Voters:** It is against the law to influence or intimidate voters in any way, including through bribes, threats, or coercion. Voters should exercise their choice freely and independently.
- **Single Vote:** Each eligible voter is entitled to cast only one vote in an election. Voting multiple times or impersonating someone else is illegal.
- **Restricted Area:** Voters are not allowed to carry cameras, mobile phones, or any other electronic devices inside the polling booth. These items may be prohibited to prevent any unauthorized recording or dissemination of voting-related information.
- **Voter ID Card:** Voters must carry their voter ID card or any other valid photo identification document while going to vote. This helps in verifying their identity and eligibility to vote.

#### What Are Your Voting Rights in India?

- **Everyone can vote:** Every citizen aged 18 and above has the right to vote.
- **Vote secretly:** Your vote is confidential and nobody can know whom you voted.[13,14,15]
- **Fair elections:** The Election Commission ensures that elections are unbiased and transparent.
- **No discrimination:** You cannot be denied the right to vote based on gender, caste, religion, or disability.
- **Choose freely:** You can pick from different political parties and candidates.
- **Get information:** You have the right to know about candidates, parties, and their plans.
- **Report problems:** If you see any issues during elections, you can complain and authorities will take action.
- **Run for office:** If eligible, you can even become a candidate and contest elections.
- **Improve the system:** You can be part of discussions to make the electoral process better.

#### GENERAL ELECTIONS IN INDIA FESTIVAL OF DEMOCRACY

1. India will hold a general election starting April 11 in the world's largest democratic exercise.
2. The election will be conducted in seven phases until May 19 and votes will be counted on May 23.

3. Around 900 million people are eligible to vote, which is nearly the combined population of the whole of Europe and Brazil. About 432 million of them are women voters.

4. The process is conducted by the Election Commission of India (ECI), an autonomous constitutional authority, with a staff of more than 300 full-time officials at its headquarters in New Delhi.

5. The ECI has set up about 1 million polling stations in the country, as no voter should be more than 2 km away from a polling station.

6. For such a mammoth exercise, over 5 million government officials and security forces are deployed, travelling by foot, road, special train, helicopter, boat, and sometimes, elephant to access remote areas.

7. The contest is for 543 of the 545 seats in the Lok Sabha. The remaining two seats are reserved for the Anglo-Indian community, who are nominated by the President of India.

8. In the last Indian election in 2014, there were more than 830 million registered voters, with about 8,251 candidates from 464 political parties.

9. In the 2009 general election, the ECI set up a polling station in the Gir forest of Gujarat, home to Asiatic lions, just for one voter.

10. The voting takes place in multiple phases, typically taking more than a month to allow officials and security forces to re-deploy, and the counting for all 543 constituencies is done in a single day.[16,17,18]

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Democracy in India is the largest by population in the world.<sup>[1][2]</sup> Elections in India started with the 1951–52 Indian general election. India was the 19th most electoral democratic country in Asia according to V-Dem Democracy indices in 2023 with a score of 0.399 out of 1.<sup>[3]</sup> The Economist Democracy Index considered 2022 India a Flawed democracy.<sup>[4]</sup> According to V-Dem Institute laws on sedition, defamation, and counterterrorism are used to silence critics,<sup>[5]</sup> and describes India as "one of the worst autocratisers in the last 10 years".<sup>[6]</sup> Free political speech is limited.<sup>[7]</sup> Gerrymandering is another challenge to democracy in India

The trajectory of Indian democracy is more uncertain after two terms of BJP rule, as key democratic institutions have proven themselves to be brittle. Opponents and critical journalists have been harassed, prosecuted, investigated for tax irregularities or put under surveillance, restricting critical voices.[19]

Election campaign finance laws have become more opaque, making it easier for individuals to make unlimited anonymous donations, undermining the integrity of elections. Worst of all, religious division and resentment has intensified, challenging the constitutional right to religious freedom and undermining the rule of law.

Government measures against Muslims have stoked a more polarized politics reflected online and in communities.

In December 2021 BJP allies helped organize an event in the northern state of Uttarakhand at which Hindu leaders called for violence against Muslims. Public lynchings have taken place elsewhere and been shared on social media.

The BJP is accused of encouraging religious division in pursuit of its objective of a Hindu homeland, rowing back from the earlier secular consensus.

Whether such a monochrome vision can fit in a country as diverse as India is far from clear cut.[20]

#### Conflict of interest statement

Authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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