

Religious Minorities And Electoral Politics: Understanding Muslim Voting Behavior In India

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Abstract: The study examines Indian Muslims' election behaviour and focuses on the determination of their choices using historical, political, and socio-economic drivers. It reflects on how political involvement among Indian Muslims evolved along with its implication on identity politics. The study utilizes a mixed-method design to examine patterns of votes between 2004 and 2014 with a focus on a consistent preference for secular and opposition parties, such as the Indian National Congress (INC), and local parties, such as the Samajwadi Party (SP) and Trinamool Congress (TMC). While comprising a significant minority, Muslims are disproportionately represented in parliaments, with their political choices impacted by communal myths, socio-political issues, and policy considerations. The study finds that whereas socioeconomic conditions and geographic distinctions affect voting, religious identity concerns and inclusiveness matter most in informing political decisions. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) continues to draw little support from Muslims because it is identified with majority politics. The findings emphasize the political relevance of Muslim votes and the impact this has on representative democracy. Policy suggestions involve increasing Muslim representation, strengthening anti-discrimination efforts, and promoting civic education to build political participation. Future research must examine the political conduct of young Muslim voters and the political impact of new media on their electoral choices.

Index Terms - Electoral Politics, Identity Politics, Muslim Voting, Political Representation, Voting Behavior.

I. INTRODUCTION

The political environment of India comprises a myriad of cultures, religions, and socioeconomic factors that have been built on the basis. The religious minorities made a difference in the changing environment of elections (Sanyal, 2011). Indeed, Muslims constitute one of the world's most significant and also most historically important minority populations. Their political engagement has evolved through decades of fluctuation between changeable socio-economic structures, colonial legacies, and modern identity politics (Islam, et. al., 2015). To understand the broader dynamics of democratic representation and electoral mobilization in India, it is important to have insight into the voting behavior of Muslims (Banerjee, 2008).

The Muslim section is the only reason why the religious minorities have been identifiable through India's democracy (Nielsen, 2011). Their political track-record-from pre-independence skirmishes to post-independence election viabilities-has traceable marks of an ever-evolving interrelationship of cultural identity and political aspiration (Raghavan, 2017). Over time the changes happening in the socio-political environment have redefined Muslim political involvement and underscored the value of their electoral decisions in formulating policy and governance (Dinesha, 2016). The study investigates the evolution of political participation among Muslims from historical perspectives at different points in time and, in the end, brings to the fore how such historical milestones affect present-day voting behaviors and points out the broader consequences in the context of democratic representation within a multicultural society.

Muslims are often faced with electoral under-representation and political marginalization despite being a fairly large population in India. The general dissemination of collective narratives and identity-based politics sometimes distorts the understanding of their electoral behavior into simplistic assessments that do not capture the complexity of their voting decision-making processes (Bhargava, 2007). Further, few studies—especially those based solely on secondary sources—have left room for a thorough understanding of Muslim political involvement, from a historical and contemporary perspective, voting patterns. Hence, this difference speaks of the necessity for a deeper examination into the wider factors accounting for Muslim voting behaviour, including historical grievances and present-day political issues.

The study aims at analyzing the historical and political perspective of Muslim voting behavior in India. This study will explain the growth of Muslim political participation that relates to communal narratives and identity politics and provide a deeper understanding of how historical patterns impact present voting behavior. This will add to the broader debate of democratic representation and elucidate the problems facing Muslim voting patterns in India.

This introduction is followed by the rest of the study. Firstly, section 2 defines reviews according to several authors, referring to previous studies. Section 3 states the objectives of this paper. Section 4 summarizes the methodologies used in this research. Moreover, section 5 analyzes the findings and results. Then, section 6 clarifies the discussion. Finally, section 7 spells out the conclusions, implications, constraints, and recommendations for future research while references close the article.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Nellis, et. al., (2016) identified ethnic group conflict as a significant danger to emerging democracies. The impact that the partisanship of incumbent politicians has upon the frequency and intensity of local ethnic violence was studied. A unique regression-discontinuity model was employed for this analysis, which helps show how crescent wins with the candidates of India's Congress party in closely fought state assembly elections held between 1962 and 2000 had significant effects in decreasing distances between Hindu-Muslim riots. The implications, however, were large enough where models were made as though had Congress lost all closely contested elections within that time frame, India would have 11 percent more riots. The findings give rising new insights into the relationship that exists between political partisanship and ethnic conflict; they also point towards many challenges of democratic consolidation in ethnically fragmented countries. These significant results highlighted the essential importance of political incentives.

Huber, et. al., (2016) examined the reasons for the prominence of ethnicity in electoral politics in some locations while being inconspicuous in others. To function under different premises, with the implementation of majoritarian states, the significance of ethnicity was most visible, usually overshadowed by the presence of deep economic cleavage among ethnic groups. The analysis has revealed that in India, widening wealth gaps among groups tend to vary political support for different parties. The implications demonstrated a substantial class dimension in ethnic politics in India and highlighted the importance of distinguishing the effects of group identification from those of economic status. The key finding is that economic disparity is significantly associated with ethnic-based electoral behaviour meaning that policy initiatives designed to reduce income inequalities may reduce ethnic divisions in vote allegiance.

Heath, et. al., (2015) demonstrated that Muslim voters were predisposed to support Muslim politicians just when such candidates have a viable opportunity for victory, demonstrating a pronounced strategic component in electoral choice. The religion of a candidate was studied to further investigate its impact on voting behaviour in those cases where religion mattered. Past studies have suggested that minority politicians received some electoral advantage from in-group voters or some disadvantage from out-group voters, though such social dynamics were not clearly understood. The study provided the first in-depth study of an ethnically segmented democracy in Uttar Pradesh, North India, using conditional logit models to analyze voting behaviour; findings showed no Hindu bias against Muslim candidates or electoral backlashes for nomination of Muslim candidates. The findings highlighted how identity, strategy, and electoral dynamics intersect to drive voter decisions.

Susewind, & Dhattiwala (2014) endeavored to resolve the contentious discourse about Muslim "vote banks" in India by redirecting the spatial emphasis from state-wide evaluations to the constituency level. The study employed a novel booth-level ecological inference approach on data from Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh during the 2014 general elections. The study offered evidence that Muslims voted cohesively for or against some parties; however, unlike what was previously assumed, their voting patterns were much more localized. In most areas, Muslim support for the BJP hardly ever translated into electoral victories; exceptions were noteworthy. In Uttar Pradesh, opposing parties drew support from varied geographical locations. The study looked into regional disparities in Muslim voting behaviour by analysing the moderating influences of minority concentration, history of communal violence, and ethnic coordination. The study concluded with the need for additional disaggregated study to comprehend better the local dynamics and complex factors involving Muslim voting behaviour.

Bhalotra, et. al., (2014) examined the extent to which the religious identification of state lawmakers in India affected development results for both their own religious constituents and the wider populace. The study was conducted to investigate the links between the identity of the legislators and constituency-level voting behavior or major religious traits by employing quasi-random variations in legislators' identity from closely contested elections fought between Muslim and non-Muslim characters. The analysis found that better political representation in terms of Muslims resulted in better health and education outcomes from the constituency where these lawmakers were elected. The study could not find any evidence of religious favoritism, as Muslim children from Muslim representation did not receive more benefits compared to children from other groups. These indicate overall improvements in development due to better representation, highlighting the significance of lawmaker identity in public policy and development outcomes in India.

Dancygier, (2013) analyzed how increasing ethnic variety in Europe compelled the Left to reconcile the integration of new minorities with sustaining support from established, working-class constituents. The Labour Party has also chosen a number of Muslim candidates, which the study indicates using dataset containing more than 42000 local election candidates in England: the study was that where economically disadvantaged areas lived with lots of Muslims, the inclusion of candidates from economically disadvantaged areas in these Muslim cities was less likely because primary voters were mainly concerned with their hard material and religious interests. The selection of candidates-analyzed in terms of how Far left see economical and cultural challenge Muslim participation posed towards what may be an anti-majoritarian element in their constituency-from that then should prove quite helpful in terms of discerning possible insights into those dynamics that might sway the political integration of ethnic minorities in society.

Bhalotra, et. al., (2012) examined the influence of Muslim political participation on religious strife in India from 1980 to 2007. Religion had names coded from and updated conflict statistics were derived from Times of India archives. Conducted at the district level with an instrumental variable approach, the study included the proportion of Muslims elected to state legislatures with the instrument being the proportion of Muslims winning closely contested elections vis-a-vis that of non-Muslims in the same district. Initial findings indicated that an increase in Muslim political participation reduces Hindu-Muslim riots significantly. The segment of gains is quite large but limited to a favourable selection of leaders from minority groups. Results fell in line with parochial politics theories, emphasizing how political identity matters in determining policy changes delineating an unexplored source of contention and incorporating fresh ways to manage policies.

Dhattiwala, & Biggs (2012) analysed the political rationale for the 2002 anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat via a comprehensive examination of data from 216 towns and rural regions. A rigorous quantitative methodology, using negative binomial regression, was employed to explore the association between local socioeconomic factors, election processes, and the incidence of violence. According to the study, violence against ethnic groups in the country was found to be greatest in districts where there was severe competition in elections with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), rather than in places where there was political dominance, suggesting that political elites use ethnic tensions to enhance electoral advantages. The study found that other variables, such as underemployment and influx of Muslims, were associated with high levels of all forms of violence.

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

Obj1. To analyze trends in Muslim voting behaviour in India in relation to different political parties.

Obj2. To describe the influence of religious identity, and party affiliation on Muslim voters' electoral preferences.

Obj3. To suggest policy recommendations for enhancing Muslim political participation and their voting behavior.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive and exploratory research design to deeply analyze Muslim voting patterns in India. A descriptive and exploratory research design gives a complete insight into election behavior by combining statistical information and interpretive understandings. The study primarily employed secondary sources in gathering data. This was done due to the availability of detailed election statistics, government publications, and academic studies on Muslim voting behavior. Secondary data were collected from academic journals, books, peer-reviewed articles, election polls, and opinion polls by official agencies such as the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Pew Research Centre, and Lokniti. The utilization of secondary data allows for a comparative and historical analysis of election trends over time, offering a broader perspective than that which can be derived from primary data. Additionally, it ensures reliability through the utilization of

established research and verified databases, thus avoiding biases associated with limited sample sizes in primary research.

Ethical Considerations

- **Source Credibility:** To endeavor to only selected credible and objective sources, whether taking insights from historical background from secondary sources. The utmost effort is made to check whether the information is reliable and objective.
- **Neutrality in Interpretation:** Political and cultural research being relatively sensitive, great care must be taken to remain neutral. The analysis is thus strictly conducted in an objective manner, and interpretations of political developments are done not accepting biases. Such ethical behavior protects the research's integrity and, at the same time, adds weight to its acceptance by contrasting audiences.

V. RESULT

Obj1. To analyze trends in Muslim voting behaviour in India in relation to different political parties.

Table 1: National General Election Trends

Election Year	Party/Alliance	Approximate Muslim Vote Share (%)	Notes	Citation
2004	Congress	75–80	Post–Sachar Committee analyses	Carnegie Endowment
2004	BJP	<10	Very low support	Carnegie Endowment
2009	Congress	75–80	Similar pattern as 2004	Carnegie Endowment
2009	BJP	<10		Carnegie Endowment
2014	Congress	70–75	Slight decline compared to 2004–2009	Progressive Muslim vote
2014	BJP	8–10		Progressive Muslim vote

Source: Self-prepared by author

The table presents another aspect regarding the trends in the proportion of Muslims' vote in relation to the Indian general elections contested by BJP and Congress between 2004 and 2014. Congress received approximately 75%-80% of that vote in both 2004 and 2009, but plummeted to 70-75% in 2014. A post-2014 drop in the Muslim share of Congress votes indicating political changes and potential reflection of regional interests and emerging options. Continuously weak BJP support indicates lessening electoral interest among Muslim voters while political interest has improved overall.

Table 2: Year-Wise Summary

Election Period	Dominant Trend Among Muslim Voters	Approximate Percentage Range	Key Observation	Citation
2004–2009	Overwhelming support for Congress	~75–80%	Minimal support for the BJP (<10%)	Carnegie Endowment
2014	Slight decline for Congress; BJP remains low	Congress: ~70–75%, BJP: ~8–10%	Overall secular alignment maintained	Progressive Muslim vote

Source: Self-prepared by author

The table summaries Muslim voting during 2004 to 2014, wherein Congress and regional opposition parties are favorites of the Muslim population. From 2004 to 2009, Congress received overwhelming Muslim support in the range of about 75%-80%, with BJP remaining at below 10%. In 2014, Congress saw a minor decline in Muslim support while sharing between 70%-75%, in Bihar, West Bengal, and Uttar Pradesh. The preliminary evidence for 2014 indicates continued low support from Muslims for the BJP.

Table 3: Religion and Community Profile by State – NES 2009 vs. Census of India 2001 (in %)

S. No	STATES	Hindus (Census)	Hindus (Survey)	Other Major Religions (Census)	Other Major Religions (Survey)	Muslims (Census)	Muslims (Survey)	Dalit (Census)	Dalit (Survey)
1	Andhra Pradesh	89.0	81.5	–	Muslims : 9.2	10.6	–	16.2	18.7
2	Arunachal Pradesh	34.6	19.8	Christians: 18.7	29.5	0.6	–	64.2	84.8
3	Assam	64.9	71.5	–	Muslims : 30.9	23.2	–	6.9	12.1
4	Bihar	83.2	83.2	–	Muslims : 16.5	15.3	–	15.7	19.4
5	Chhattisgarh	94.7	93.7	–	Muslims : 2.0	1.8	–	11.6	13.8
All India		80.5	79.1	–	Muslims : 13.4	12.8	–	16.2	18.8

Source: CSDS-Lokniti NES post-poll.

This table also compares the religious and community composition of the different Indian states according to the 2001 Census and the NES 2009 survey. Percentage of Hindus, other major religions (like Christians in some states), Muslims, and Dalits for every state has been procured from both sources. For example, Andhra Pradesh Census reflects 89.0% Hindus as compared to 81.5% in the survey; that is how data have been collected for Muslims and Dalits as well. In the country as a whole, the table indicates that on the whole, the figures are quite similar between the two data sources encompassing such as Hindus around 80.5% (Census) vs. 79.1% (Survey), Muslims at 13.4% vs. 12.8%, and Dalits at 16.2% vs. 18.8%, thus representing the survey's general representativeness of the wider population.

Table 4: Comparison of the Profile of NES 2004 and Census 2001 by Religious Community, SC and ST by States

STATE S	Hindus (Census)	Hindus (Survey)	Other Major Religions (Census)	Other Major Religions (Survey)	Muslims (Census)	Muslims (Survey)	Dalit (Census)	Dalit (Survey)	Adivasi (Census)	Adivasi (Survey)
Andhra Pradesh	89.0	82.3	–	Muslims: 9.2	9.1	–	16.2	17.7	6.6	6.2
Arunachal Pradesh	34.6	23.3	Christians: 18.7	30.7	0.6	–	64.2	79.8	–	–
Assam	64.9	67.9	–	Muslims: 30.9	27.2	–	6.9	12.6	12.4	14.6
Bihar	83.2	82.4	–	Muslims: 16.5	16.5	–	15.7	17.1	0.9	2.8
All India	80.5	79.8	–	Muslims: 13.4	11.3	–	16.2	17.9	8.2	9.0

Source: CSDS-Lokniti NES post-poll.

The comparative profile demographically of various Indian states recorded from the 2001 Census and the NES 2004 survey are presented side by-side in this table. The percentages of Hindus, other major religious groups (that is, Christians in some states), Muslims, Dalits, and Adivasis in each state are given according to both sources. By juxtaposing these figures, the table diffuses the positive and negative aspects of community composition as represented in Census and survey data, thereby contributing to the understanding of NES 2004 social group-wise and regional representativity relative to official numbers.

Table 5: Pre Poll Survey - Profile of the Achieved Sample in 21 States

States	Wome n (Cens us)	Wome n (Surve y)	Musli m (Cens us)	Musli m (Surve y)	Urban (Cens us)	Urban (Surve y)	SC (Cens us)	SC (Surve y)	ST (Cens us)	ST (Surve y)
Andhra Pradesh	49.8	49.3	9.2	5.9	33.3	27.4	16.4	25.3	7.0	6.2
Assam	48.9	50.3	30.9	39.6	15.3	14.3	7.1	5.1	12.4	18.5
Bihar	47.8	40.8	16.5	10.9	11.2	8.0	15.9	21.1	1.3	2.7
Chhattisgarh	49.7	42.9	2.0	2.8	23.2	14.2	12.8	18.5	30.6	27.4
Delhi	46.4	46.4	11.7	18.3	—	—	16.8	11.7	—	—
West Bengal	48.7	51.0	25.2	27.0	31.8	23.4	23.5	30.7	5.8	4.1

Source: CSDS-Lokniti NES post-poll.

The first table ("Table 3: Religion and Community Profile by State - NES 2009 versus Census of India 2001") compares the demographic breakdowns of the states in terms of census data and the NES 2009 survey. It reports Census figures for the percentage of Hindus, other major religions (such as Christians), Muslims, and the Dalits, as opposed to those observed in the survey. For Andhra Pradesh, the Census shows Hindus at 89.0%, according to the survey it is 81.5%, and the percentages of Muslims, which are shown as Census-10.6% against Survey-solidarities; alternate listing shows Muslims as 9.2 in the survey. The alternate version of Table 3 adds more refinement using NES 2004 with SC and ST adding more detail to differentiate between states' community profiles. Meanwhile, Table 5 ("Prepoll Survey-Profile of the Achieved Sample in 21 States") describes the composition of the survey sample by specification of the key demographic variables, including percentages of women and Muslims, urban population, SC, and ST as compared with Census data. Together, these tables validate that the survey samples are fairly representative of the larger population while showing interesting state-wise peculiarities in the community composition. Such demographic baselines become the foundation for the analysis of trends in Muslim voting behavior: The Muslim vote has historically tilted in favor of the Congress party (having a vote share of 75-80% in 2004 and 2009, reduced slightly to 70-75% in 2014) while the share going to the BJP has been consistently low (<10% to 8-10%). Besides, the changes from intra-community variations (also shown via further breakdowns by caste and economic class in other tables) strengthen that these trends are determined by demographic stability and regional factors thus cementing an analysis of Muslim voting behavior in India.

Table 6: Vote Choice Among Different Caste Groups of Muslims

Caste Category	INC (%)	DMK, TMC, NCP, RJD, SP (%)	BJP (%)	NDA allies (%)	Others (%)
Upper caste	35%	26%	12%	1%	26%
OBC	39%	31%	5%	2%	22.50%
Muslim (rest)	39%	12%	6%	25%	39.80%

Source: CSDS-Lokniti NES post-poll.

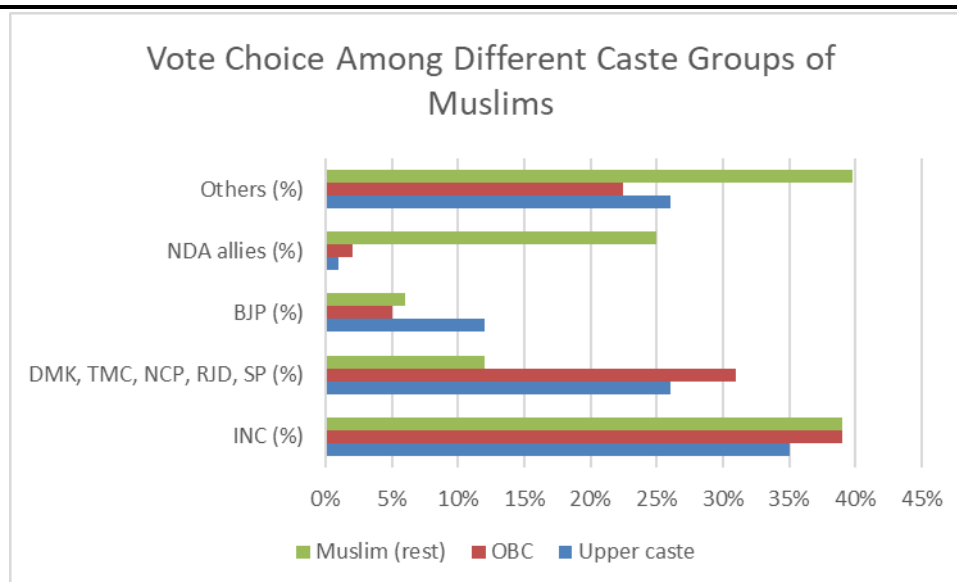


Figure 1: Vote Choice Among Different Caste Groups of Muslims

Source: Self-prepared by author

The table indicates election preferences across various caste groups among Muslims. The upper-castes indicated the highest preference for Congress (35%) and major parties like DMK, TMC, NCP, RJD, SP (26%), with 12% choosing the BJP. For OBC Muslims, the strong support for Congress (39%) and DMK, TMC, NCP, RJD, and SP (31%) compared to the insignificant support for BJP (5%). The "Muslim (rest)" category also exhibited a more mixed voting pattern, with 39% voting for Congress, 12% DMK, TMC, NCP, RJD, SP, and 25% voting for NDA allies, reflecting differences in political allegiance among caste groups.

Table 7: Muslim Voting Economic Class Wise

Economic Class	INC (%)	DMK, TMC, NCP, RJD, SP (%)	BJP (%)	NDA allies (%)	Others (%)
Poor	33%	25%	11%	2.40%	27.80%
Lower	40%	26%	7.20%	1.60%	25.50%
Middle	39%	28%	5.60%	2.40%	25.20%
Rich	41%	24%	6.10%	0.80%	28.40%

Source: CSDS-Lokniti NES post-poll.

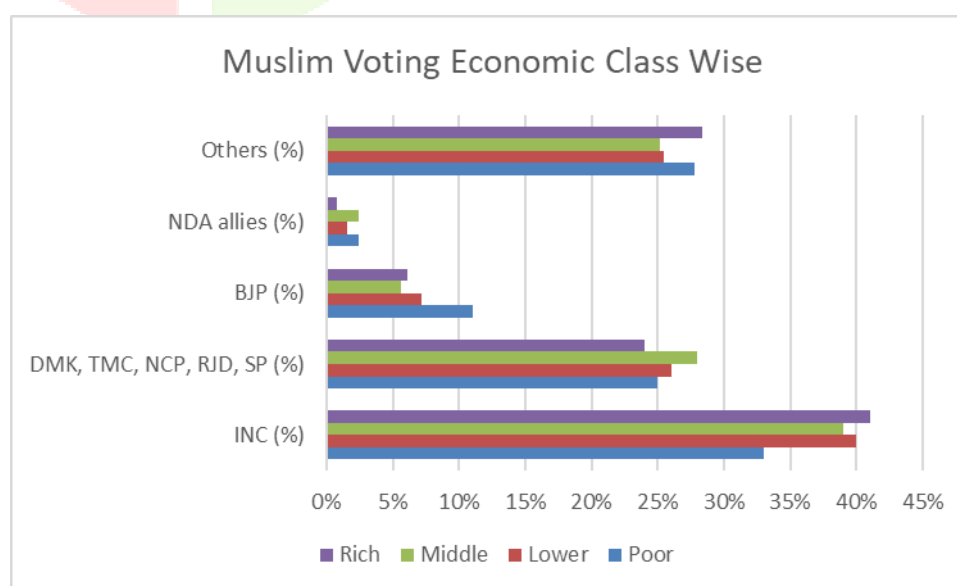


Figure 2: Muslim Voting Economic Class Wise

Source: Self-prepared by author

The data provided in the chart indicate the respective Muslim electoral behavior according to economic classes. The table highlights that even though voting by the Congress has generally got a very high input across all income classes from the poor-33% to the rich-41%, the major parties like DMK, TMC, NCP, RJD, SP were not left far below, managing a little above that level for the middle class by obtaining 28% support. The BJP support was low in all income classes with the highest support at 11% among the poor. There were considerably small shares at the voting section received by the NDA allies, but a huge number of Muslims at every economic level voted for the other parties. Overall, the tables highlight some important trends in Muslim voting behavior in India for different elections, regions, caste groups, and economic classes. Over the years, the majority of Muslim votes have been cast in favor of Congress and its allies, although there has been a decline since 2014 and, further, variations across regions have emerged. The share of the Muslim vote for the BJP was low during all election periods and for all economic classes, and caste groups showed that the party had few suitors among Muslims. However, the state-level data tell a different story, with the Muslims aligning with opposition parties like the Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh and Trinamool Congress in West Bengal. While economic and caste-based analysis portrays differences in support levels, it only serves to reconfirm the general trend of Muslims shying away from BJP parties, thereby affirming the objective of analyzing their voting patterns in terms of those parties relating to their models.

Obj2. To describe the influence of religious identity, and party affiliation on Muslim voters' electoral preferences.

Table 8: Influence of Religious Identity and Party Affiliation on Muslim Voters

Factor	Influence on Muslim Voters	Data/Evidence	Citations
Protection of Religious Identity	Muslim voters strongly favor parties they perceive as safeguarding their religious and minority rights.	Surveys and qualitative analyses indicate a high importance placed on protecting religious identity (often cited as 70–80% emphasis in exit polls).	Vaishnav (2015)
Impact of Party Rhetoric	BJP's polarizing rhetoric on religious issues and exclusionary policies results in very low Muslim support.	Consistent evidence shows BJP vote share among Muslim voters remains below 10% across multiple elections.	Sridharan et al. (2014)
Appeal of Inclusive, Secular Parties	Regional and secular parties (including Congress and local allies) benefit from their emphasis on welfare and inclusivity.	Empirical studies reveal that parties promoting inclusive policies secure substantially higher vote shares among Muslims compared to parties with exclusionary rhetoric.	Sridharan et al. (2014) ; Vaishnav (2015)

Source: Self-prepared by author

This table outlines key factors that influence Muslim voters' electoral preferences by linking specific voter behaviors with underlying evidence. It shows that Muslim voters place a strong emphasis on the protection of their religious and minority rights—surveys and qualitative analyses suggest that 70–80% of voters prioritize parties that safeguard their religious identity (Vaishnav, 2015; Lives of Muslims in India). Additionally, the table highlights that BJP's polarizing rhetoric on religious issues leads to very low support from Muslim voters, with evidence indicating that the party's vote share among Muslims remains consistently below 10% (Sridharan et al., 2014). Finally, the table demonstrates that regional and secular parties, such as Congress and its local allies, benefit from emphasizing welfare and inclusivity, thereby securing substantially higher vote shares among Muslim voters (Sridharan et al., 2014; Vaishnav, 2015).

Obj3. To suggest policy recommendations for enhancing Muslim political participation and their voting behavior

Table 9: Policy Recommendations for Enhancing Muslim Political Participation

Recommendation	Rationale	Supporting Evidence	Citations
Reservation in Legislatures	To address persistent underrepresentation of Muslims in national and state legislatures.	Analyses show that Muslim representation in parliament is significantly below their population share.	Sridharan, (2014)
Strengthening Anti-discrimination Measures	To reduce systemic biases that hinder Muslim engagement in public services and politics.	Surveys and qualitative studies reveal high levels of perceived discrimination among Muslims in public institutions.	Sridharan, (2014); Vaishnav (2015)
Grassroots Civic Education and Mobilization	To improve political awareness and participation, particularly among marginalized Muslim groups.	Evidence indicates lower voter turnout among Muslim women; targeted civic initiatives have successfully increased awareness.	Sridharan, (2014)
Inclusive Welfare Schemes	To ensure equitable distribution of welfare benefits, thereby increasing trust in political institutions.	Studies demonstrate that economic marginalization correlates with lower political participation among Muslims.	Sridharan, (2014)
Promoting Cultural and Linguistic Inclusivity	To counteract cultural marginalization by preserving and promoting languages (e.g., Urdu) and cultural symbols.	"Lives of Muslims in India" highlights how cultural and linguistic exclusion deepens socio-political marginalization among Muslims.	Shaban (2012), Sridharan (2014)
Economic Empowerment Initiatives	To enhance political participation by addressing economic disparities that limit voter engagement.	"Understanding the Indian Voter" emphasizes that robust economic performance and targeted economic initiatives can boost participation.	Vaishnav (2015), Sridharan (2014)

Source: Self-prepared by author

This table presents a set of policy recommendations designed to enhance Muslim political participation in India. Each recommendation is accompanied by a rationale that explains why the measure is needed, along with supporting evidence from relevant studies and citations. For example, reservation in legislatures is proposed to tackle the persistent underrepresentation of Muslims in parliament, as analyses indicate that their representation is significantly lower than their share of the population. Similarly, strengthening anti-discrimination measures is recommended to counter systemic biases that hinder Muslim engagement in public institutions, supported by surveys showing high levels of perceived discrimination. Other recommendations include grassroots civic education to boost political awareness, inclusive welfare schemes to build trust in political institutions, and the promotion of cultural and linguistic inclusivity to counteract cultural marginalization (as evidenced in "Lives of Muslims in India"). Lastly, economic empowerment initiatives are suggested to address economic disparities that limit voter engagement.

VI. DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that there is a consistent pattern of Muslim voting behavior observable in different elections over time. The Nationally available data indicate Congress's dominance among Muslim voters, with Congress winning between 75-80% of the Muslim vote in 2004 and 2009, tapering down to around 70-75% in 2014. On the other end, the BJP is getting less than 10% of the Muslim vote, implying that the doubts regarding the Bharatiya Janata Party's religiously polarizing agenda continue. An analysis of demographic indicators and intergroup divergence shows, nevertheless, that while secular and inclusive voting parties receive considerable support from Muslims, there are differences in Muslim votes according to particular variables. Caste and economic class differences underpin an instrumental view of Muslim voting decisions between time-honored and modern socio-economic considerations. These findings further substantiate the previous finding that Muslim electoral behavior is not a monolith but is rather informed by a complicated interaction of historical, cultural, and economic factors.

These results are consistent with previous studies of Muslim voting patterns in India. Verniers, and Kumar (2015) discovered that Muslim voters will vote for co-religionist candidates only if they have a realistic hope of winning, which suggests a strong strategic component to their voting. This contradicts the idea of a fixed "Muslim vote bank" and instead suggests a pragmatic strategy to electoral engagement. Likewise, Susewind and Dhattiwala (2014) contend that Muslim voting is extremely localized and differs from one constituency to another, with communal violence and ethnic concentration in the past influencing voting decisions. This is supported by the findings of the current study, especially in states such as Uttar Pradesh and Assam, where political and communal localized contexts shape Muslim voting differently compared to other states.

Other study have investigated the interaction between Muslim political representation and communal violence. Bhalotra et al. (2012) discovered that greater Muslim political representation resulted in fewer Hindu-Muslim riots, which indicates that minority representation has a stabilizing effect on inter-community relations. This is especially relevant since the study's results show that Muslims want parties that are seen as inclusive and protective of minority rights. Secondly, Nellis, Weaver, and Rosenzweig (2016) also illustrated that historically, Congress-led governments were able to curb communal violence, further affirming the role of political incentives in influencing ethnic conflict. The findings of the study also concur with Dhattiwala and Biggs (2012), who established that political parties occasionally use religious differences for political advantage, thus further influencing Muslim electoral choices. These analyses collectively support the contention that Muslim voters strategically make choices in the political arena on the basis of both historical and ongoing considerations.

Table 10: Comparison Table

Citation	Title	Findings	Research Gap	How Present Study Fills the Gap
Thachil, T. (2014)	Elite parties and poor voters: Theory and evidence from India	Elite parties outsource recruitment to nonparty affiliates to appeal to poor communities while maintaining elite linkages.	Lack of examination of grassroots mobilization mechanisms within elite parties.	Present study explores the political relevance of marginalized communities and their voting patterns.
Kurien, P. (2001)	Religion, ethnicity and politics: Hindu and Muslim Indian immigrants in the United States	Political struggles between Hindu and Muslim immigrants in the U.S. over Indian identity.	Limited focus on how these conflicts translate to political participation in India.	Present study emphasizes the political relevance of Muslim votes and their impact on representative democracy.
Chandra, K. (2009)	Why voters in patronage democracies split their tickets	Split-ticket voting driven by strategic voting among ethnic communities.	Insufficient data on demographic influences on strategic voting.	Present study contributes by analyzing the voting behavior of marginalized groups.
Tausch, N. et al. (2011)	Pathways of collective action: Emotional and efficacy factors	Emotional and efficacy factors influencing collective and nonnormative actions.	Lack of focus on how these dynamics affect voting behavior.	Present study highlights the civic engagement and political conduct of Muslim voters.
Thomas, A. & Sergenti, E. (2010)	Economic growth and Hindu-Muslim riots	Economic growth inversely related to ethnic riots in Indian states.	Limited analysis of how economic conditions influence voting behavior.	Present study examines the political consequences of economic inequalities.

Source: Self-prepared by author

VII. CONCLUSION

The study explains the central historical, political, and socio-economic factors driving Muslim voting behavior in India. Historically, Muslim electors have voted for secular and opposition parties such as the Indian National Congress (INC) and regional parties such as the Samajwadi Party (SP) and Trinamool Congress (TMC). However, the dominance of Congress has declined, and regional parties have become increasingly prominent. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) continues to draw minimal Muslim votes due to its association with majority politics. Regional differences and economic conditions largely impact Muslim vote patterns, exemplifying the strategic nature of their vote.

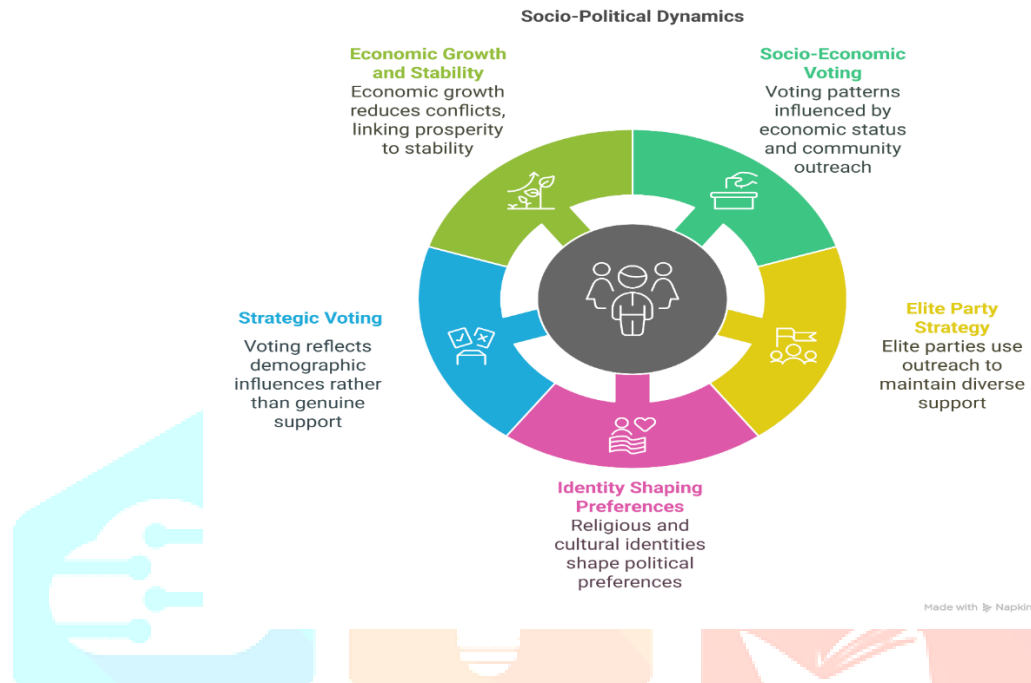


Figure 3: Socio-political dynamics

Source: Self-prepared by author

The historical grievances, the socio-economic status, and the political strategies would weigh heavily upon these voting patterns among Muslims. Along with these, party narratives and identity politics become major ways of supporting any party emphasizing minority rights and welfare programs. It is further discussed that Muslim voters exercise a certain level of pragmatism in voting based on strategic considerations rather than religion. In addition, regional differences add to the complexity of Muslim political participation.

Recommendations

- **Policy Interventions:** Increasing Muslim representation in legislatures, strengthening electoral laws against communal polarization, and promoting civic education to enhance voter awareness.
- **Electoral Reforms:** Encouraging minority participation through inclusive candidate selection, anti-discrimination policies, and fair access to government welfare programs to build political trust.

Limitations of the Study

This study mainly draws on available secondary data and thus does not engage with voters directly. Media biases in political narratives may also play a role in affecting interpretation of data. Apart from focusing at the national and state levels, other hyper-local patterns remain untouched.

Future Research Directions

Future investigations should aim at making comparisons of voting trends for religious minorities in South Asia, longitudinal studies on the electoral behavior of Muslims, and possibly digital media and misinformation. An emerging topic might certainly be their political engagement of young and first-time Muslim voters, providing glimpses into future trends at the polls.

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