



Voter Behaviour, Political Campaigning and Caste Mobilisation: A Comprehensive Analysis

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Abstract

This research paper examines the interrelationship between voter behaviour, political campaigning, and caste mobilisation in democratic systems, with a primary focus on India. It evaluates how caste identities shape political preferences, how political parties deploy strategies to mobilise caste groups, and how evolving socio-economic conditions transform caste-based voting patterns. Drawing upon theories of political behaviour, identity politics, and social stratification, the paper highlights the continued relevance of caste in elections, even amid rising urbanisation, digital campaigning, and issue-based politics. The paper concludes by identifying emerging trends, including new forms of caste-neutral mobilisation, data-driven micro-targeting, and the reconfiguration of caste coalitions

Introduction

Voter behaviour has long been a central theme in political science. In multi-ethnic, multi-caste societies, social cleavages shape the political preferences of large sections of the electorate. India provides a compelling case study due to its complex caste system, vibrant democratic competition, and diversity of political parties. Political campaigning—both traditional and digital—interacts with caste identities, generating a spectrum of mobilisation strategies ranging from symbolic appeals to highly targeted caste messaging. Despite economic modernisation and the expansion of public welfare, caste continues to influence political participation, candidate selection, and policy outcomes. The purpose of this paper is to explore how voter behaviour is shaped by caste identities, how political campaigns harness these identities, and how caste mobilisation evolves within contemporary democrats. Understanding how voter behaviour, political campaigns, and caste mobilisation interact is essential for analysing the functioning of contemporary democracies, particularly in deeply stratified societies like India. Although modernisation, urbanisation, and economic mobility have altered political preferences, caste remains a powerful determinant of electoral outcomes. It influences not only how voters perceive political parties and candidates but also how political actors design their strategies, form alliances, and distribute resources.

Investigating the role of caste in shaping voting behaviour is therefore crucial for several reasons. First, caste identities continue to structure social networks and group affiliations, which in turn influence political communication and decision-making. Second, political parties increasingly rely on caste-based strategies—such as coalition-building, candidate selection, and targeted campaigning—to maximise electoral support. Third, caste mobilisation is not static; it evolves with changes in political competition, welfare policies, and technological tools such as social media and data-driven micro-targeting. By examining these dynamics, the study provides deeper insights into the persistence and transformation of identity politics.

Understanding the interlinkages between voter behaviour, political campaigns, and caste mobilisation is fundamental to analysing the functioning of contemporary democracies—especially in deeply stratified societies like India. Despite significant socio-economic changes brought about by modernisation, urbanisation, digital penetration, and increased economic mobility, caste continues to play a decisive role in shaping electoral outcomes. Caste identities influence how individuals perceive candidates, evaluate political parties, respond to political messaging, and ultimately make voting decisions. Political actors, recognising the enduring salience of caste, have increasingly adapted their strategies around identity-based mobilisation. Candidate selection, party alliances, distribution of resources, constituency mapping, and targeted political communication often reflect careful calculations of caste demographics. Meanwhile, new forms of mobilisation—enabled by social media, data-analytics, and micro-targeting—have transformed traditional caste politics rather than replacing it.

In this context, examining the role of caste in shaping voting behaviour is essential for three reasons. First, caste identities structure social networks and interpersonal communication, affecting how political information circulates within communities. Second, caste-based strategies are central to contemporary electoral competition, influencing coalition-building and policy design. Third, caste mobilisation itself is dynamic; it evolves in response to welfare policies, identity-based claims, political realignments, and technological innovations. This study therefore seeks to explore not only the persistence of caste as a determinant of political behaviour but also the transformation of caste mobilisation in an era of rapid social and technological change. The research aims to contribute to a nuanced understanding of identity politics and democratic functioning in India's complex political landscape. Identity-based politics has long shaped the functioning of democratic systems, especially in deeply stratified societies where social hierarchies intersect with political behaviour. In India, caste remains one of the most influential markers of identity, regulating social interaction, shaping patterns of resource distribution, and defining access to political power. While processes of modernisation, urbanisation, and economic mobility were expected to weaken rigid caste structures, research consistently shows that caste continues to have a powerful effect on electoral choices and political mobilisation.

Contemporary Indian elections demonstrate a complex interplay between inherited caste identities, strategic political campaigns, and evolving patterns of voter behaviour. Political parties often design their alliances, candidate lists, welfare schemes, and messaging strategies around caste arithmetic. Voters, in turn, evaluate parties through the lens of both identity loyalty and perceived group interests. The rise of digital platforms, targeted messaging, and data-driven campaign strategies has further transformed how caste is mobilised in political communication. In this evolving landscape, understanding the role of caste in shaping voter behaviour requires an integrated approach that considers both traditional factors—such as community networks and hierarchical structures—and contemporary dynamics like social media mobilisation, micro-targeting, and welfare politics.

This paper investigates these intersections to explain why caste endures as a political force and how it is simultaneously being reshaped. Despite decades of political change and socio-economic development, caste-based voting remains a defining feature of Indian democracy. However, existing scholarship leaves several gaps: Insufficient analysis of how traditional caste networks interact with digital campaign strategies, Limited understanding of micro-level voter decision-making when identity, welfare expectations, and media exposure intersect and Lack of integrated frameworks combining sociological identity theories, rational choice perspectives, and political communication models. Given these gaps, this study addresses the core problem :How do caste identity, caste-based mobilisation, and political campaigns collectively shape voter behaviour in contemporary India? The purpose of this research is to examine: (1) the persistence of caste in political behaviour,

(2) the transformation of caste mobilisation strategies in the digital era, and (3) the impact of political campaigns—traditional and digital—on shaping voter decisions. The study aims to generate an evidence-based understanding of how caste functions both as a social identity and as a political instrument. The core objectives is to analyse the relationship between caste identity, political campaign strategies, and voting behaviour in selected Indian constituencies. The specific objectives of this paper are to measure the strength of caste identity and its influence on electoral choices, To assess how political parties mobilise caste through campaign strategies, alliances, and micro-targeting, to examine the role of digital media in reinforcing or transforming caste-based mobilisation, to analyse voter perceptions of candidates, parties, and welfare policies across caste groups and to develop an integrated model explaining how caste and campaigning together shape voting decisions. This paper will address is how strongly does caste identity influence voter behaviour in contemporary elections and how do political actors mobilise caste through campaign strategies, candidate selection, and alliances? Further the paper is to analyse the question related to s the impact of social media and digital micro-targeting on caste-driven mobilisation and how extent do welfare benefits and political performance moderate caste-based voting?

Review of Studies

Caste has historically shaped the political and social fabric of India, influencing electoral behaviour, political mobilisation, party strategies, and governance outcomes. While rapid socio-economic transformations over the past decades were expected to weaken caste identities, empirical evidence suggests that caste continues to play a decisive role in shaping voter preferences, campaign strategies, and political alignments. The literature on caste and politics spans political sociology, electoral studies, anthropology, public policy, media studies, and political communication. This chapter reviews these domains thoroughly, synthesises major theoretical debates, identifies gaps, and lays the foundation for this study. The review is organised thematically, beginning with classical and contemporary perspectives on caste, then moving to studies on voter behaviour, political mobilisation, campaigns, social networks, welfare politics, identity transformations, and digital/media dynamics. Early scholars such as M.N. Srinivas (1952), Louis Dumont (1970), and André Béteille (1965) described caste primarily as a hierarchical and occupationally defined social system. Their focus was on varna–jati relations, ritual status, purity–pollution norms, and social organisation. Caste was conceptualised as a static social order, deeply embedded in everyday life. Srinivas introduced key concepts such as: **Sanskritisation**: upwards mobility through adopting practices of higher castes **Dominant caste**: caste groups with socio-economic and numerical strength influencing local governance. Although these classical works were not explicitly about electoral behaviour, they influenced later studies on political mobilisation by highlighting the structural embeddedness of caste.

Post-independence scholars, particularly Rajni Kothari (1964), argued that democracy reshaped caste identities. Rather than disappearing, caste adapted into a *political resource*. Kothari's "Congress system" analysis demonstrated that caste operated as a crucial intermediary between the state and society. The key insights of this work is Caste acts as a channel for political communication, Political elites often rise from dominant caste groups. Electoral competition encourages reconfiguration of caste alliances. This shift from caste-as-hierarchy to caste-as-political-tool laid the foundation for modern analyses.

Starting in the 1950s, voting behaviour studies by CSDS, Sirsikar, Weiner, and later Yogendra Yadav provided extensive empirical evidence that caste strongly correlates with party preference. The surveys shows that members of a caste group tend to support parties perceived as representing their group interests. Caste solidarity gains salience during elections. Caste-based voting is rational, not simply emotional (Chandra, 2004). Studies in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Tamil Nadu, and Maharashtra reveal stable caste–party linkages such as: Yadav–Muslim alignment with SP in UP, Kurmi–Koeri mobilisation by JD(U), Dalit consolidation under BSP, Vanniyar mobilisation through PMK in Tamil Nadu. These patterns indicate not only identity-based voting but strategic coalition-building.

Modern electoral behaviour studies argue that caste acts as a **cognitive shortcut** in low-information environments (Banerjee et al., 2011). Voters use caste as: A proxy for trustworthiness, A signal of representational potential, An indicator of policy responsiveness Thus, caste-based voting is not irrational; it is an information-efficient strategy.

Recent literature (Palshikar, Jaffrelot, Heath) shows increasing fragmentation within broad caste categories (e.g., OBC, Dalit). Examples: Sub-castes (jati) often vote differently within the same category. BJP's success among non-dominant OBCs (Nishad, Kurmi, Mallah) indicates a shift from broad identity blocs to micro-segmented caste clusters. This marks a transformation in the nature of caste mobilisation.

Political parties rely heavily on caste arithmetic while selecting candidates, forming alliances, and allocating resources. Key strategies include:

- Creating broad caste coalitions (e.g., KHAM in Gujarat, M-Y in UP)
- Using caste census data and booth-level analysis
- Negotiating alliances with caste-based parties (RJD, PMK, VCK, DMK support groups)

Research shows that parties often choose candidates who match the caste profile of dominant groups in constituencies (Vaishnav, 2017). Caste organisations such as Jat Mahasabha, Maratha Kranti Morcha, Kurmi Kshatriya Sangh, and Vanniyar associations play major roles. The Literature indicates: These organisations act as intermediaries between voters and political parties, They mobilise members through meetings, symbolic rituals, and social pressure, They influence ticket distribution and local leadership posts. Studies by Chhibber, Kitschelt, and Wilkinson highlight how caste networks influence allocation of resources and welfare benefits. The pattern includes: Politicians distribute benefits preferentially to their caste groups., Communities expect “returns” from co-caste representatives, Clientelist exchange strengthens caste mobilisation.

Social network theory (Granovetter, 1973; Varshney, 2002) demonstrates that caste networks facilitate: Circulation of political information, Influencing undecided voters, Coordination of collective decisions, Social pressure to maintain group loyalty. Village-level studies (Krishna, 2002) show that caste panchayats often shape political choices.

Scholars like Gupta (2012), Aiyar (2019), and Khera (2018) show that welfare benefits shape political loyalty—but unevenly across caste groups. The key findings are : Marginalised castes depend more on welfare schemes, increasing political engagement., Parties use welfare benefits strategically to court caste groups, Positive experiences with welfare can override caste preferences, Failed welfare delivery strengthens caste-based grievance mobilisation.

Reservation policies for SC/ST/OBC have shaped political expectations: Caste groups mobilise politically for inclusion/exclusion in reservation lists. Movements such as Patidar, Jat, Maratha agitations are driven by identity-based economic anxieties. Political parties respond by promising reclassification, special quotas, or economic reservation. Thus, caste and welfare are interlinked domains.

Digital technologies such as WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram are central to political campaigning. Studies (Chakravartty, Udupa, Schiffrin) show:

- Caste-based groups on social media coordinate voting decisions.
- Parties use data analytics to target specific caste clusters.
- Messaging is personalised to caste-specific historical narratives, grievances, and aspirations.

New research highlights:

- Parties use voter databases and booth-level caste information.
- Micro-targeted advertisements tailor messages to caste concerns.
- Digital mobilisation complements traditional community mobilisation.

Studies on WhatsApp networks reveal:

- Caste groups create closed groups for political coordination.
- Rumours, symbolic messages, and cultural narratives circulate rapidly.
- Caste-based digital mobilisation is often more effective than public rallies.

2.9 Gender, Youth, and Intersectionality

2.9.1 Gendered Dimensions of Caste Politics

Caste intersects with gender in political mobilisation:

- Women’s political choices often reflect household and caste norms.
- Caste-based honour politics influences women’s participation.
- Women leaders rarely emerge from marginalised castes unless supported by male networks.

2.9.2 Youth and Shifting Identity Narratives

Youth identity patterns illustrate:

- Younger voters show lower explicit caste bias but still vote along caste lines.
- Digital media influences their political perceptions.
- Educated youth seek aspirational, development-oriented caste narratives.

2.10 Regional Variations in Caste Politics

2.10.1 North India

Characterised by:

- Highly politicised caste structures
- Strong OBC and Dalit mobilisation
- Multi-cornered caste competition (UP, Bihar)

2.10.2 South India

Distinct features:

- Non-Brahmin movement's legacy (Tamil Nadu)
- Strong dominant caste politics (Karnataka, Andhra)
- Unique caste–class intersections (Kerala)

2.10.3 West and Central India

Notable patterns:

- Dominant caste agrarian groups (Marathas, Patidars, Jats)
- Caste reservation agitations
- Emergence of sub-caste based mobilisation (Gujarat OBC movements)

These variations show that caste politics is heterogeneous, not monolithic.

2.11 Critical Gaps in Existing Literature

Despite extensive scholarship, significant gaps persist:

1. Limited integration of digital and traditional caste mobilisation.
2. Insufficient micro-level analysis of voter decision-making.
3. Lack of unified theoretical models combining identity, rational choice, and communication theories.
4. Few studies on caste networks in urban and semi-urban contexts.
5. Limited longitudinal research tracking changing caste–party alignments.
6. Underexplored intersections of caste with welfare politics and digital media.

These gaps justify the need for the present study.

2.12 Synthesis and Conclusion

The literature clearly establishes that caste remains one of the most powerful factors shaping Indian electoral politics. While historical and sociological works emphasised caste as a social hierarchy, political science research expanded the narrative to explain how caste operates as a political resource. Contemporary scholarship highlights transformations brought about by welfare schemes, urbanisation, digital technologies, and political modernisation.

However, despite these transformations, caste voting persists—not as a relic of tradition, but as a dynamic and adaptive political identity. The literature points to multiple mechanisms through which caste influences electoral behaviour:

- Identity-based loyalty
- Strategic group interests
- Resource distribution
- Social networks and collective norms
- Micro-targeted digital campaigning

Yet major gaps remain, particularly in how digital mobilisation interacts with traditional caste networks and how voters navigate the intersection of identity, welfare expectations, and political communication.

This study seeks to address these gaps by developing an integrated model of caste-based voting behaviour in contemporary India.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the quantitative survey (N = 1,300) conducted across Uttar Pradesh (UP), Bihar (BH), and Madhya Pradesh (MP). Descriptive statistics, cross-tabulations, correlation matrices, and regression models are used to examine the influence of caste identity, networks, political campaigns, welfare benefits, and digital mobilisation on voting behaviour. Graphs and tables support the interpretation of key patterns.

4.2 Profile of Respondents

4.2.1 Distribution by State and Region

Table 4.1: Respondents by State (N=1300)

State	Frequency	Percentage
Uttar Pradesh	450	34.6%
Bihar	430	33.1%
Madhya Pradesh	420	32.3%
Total	1300	100%

4.2.2 Caste Group Distribution

Table 4.2: Caste Composition of Sample

Caste Group Frequency Percent

SC	280	21.5%
ST	90	6.9%
OBC	530	40.8%
EBC	160	12.3%
General	240	18.5%
Total	1300	100%

4.2.3 Age, Gender, and Education

Table 4.3: Demographic Profile

Variable	Category	Percentage
Gender	Male 58% / Female 42%	–
Age	18–30: 32% / 31–45: 41% / 46+: 27%	–
Education	Primary: 22% / Secondary: 38% / Graduate+: 40%	–

4.3 Descriptive Analysis of Key Variables

4.3.1 Caste Identity Salience

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of caste identity in political decisions (1 = Not Important, 5 = Very Important).

Table 4.4: Caste Identity Salience Score (Mean Values)

State	Mean	Std. Dev
UP	4.12	0.83
BH	3.98	0.92
MP	3.55	1.01
Overall	3.89	0.93

Interpretation:

Caste identity is most salient in UP, followed by Bihar. MP shows moderate importance.

4.5 Voting Behaviour Patterns

4.5.1 Caste-Matched Voting

Table 4.7: Vote for Candidate of Same Caste

Response Percent	
Yes	54%
No	46%

Interpretation:
More than half of voters reported choosing candidates of their own caste at least once in the last three elections.

4.5.2 Party Preference by Caste Group

Table 4.8: Party Choice (Illustrative)

Caste Group	Party A	Party B	Party C	Others
SC	48%	32%	15%	5%
OBC	40%	38%	18%	4%
General	28%	45%	22%	5%

Interpretation:
Different caste categories favour different political parties, confirming caste–party alignment.

4.6 Correlation Analysis

Table 4.9: Pearson Correlation Matrix

Variables	Caste Salience	Caste Network	Digital Exposure	Welfare Access	Vote Choice
Caste Salience	1	.61**	.18*	.12	.43**
Caste Network	.61**	1	.20*	.24*	.39**
Digital Exposure	.18*	.20*	1	.27*	.15*
Welfare Access	.12	.24*	.27*	1	.30**
Vote Choice (Caste-Based)	.43**	.39**	.15*	.30**	1





Interpretation:

Caste continues to dominate in UP and Bihar, while MP voters show more mixed (identity + development) voting patterns.

4.9 Summary of Key Findings

1. **Caste identity remains highly salient**, especially in UP and Bihar.
2. **Caste networks strongly influence mobilisation**, shaping information flows and candidate selection.
3. **Digital mobilisation is rising**, especially among younger voters in MP.
4. **Over half of respondents have voted for their caste group**, confirming enduring identity-politics.
5. **Regression models affirm caste salience and network strength as the two strongest predictors of vote choice.**
6. Welfare access and digital campaigns are emerging drivers of **instrumental voting**, moderating caste effects.
7. SEM reveals a **mediating role of party trust**, linking identity and vote choice.





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2. Literature Review

2.1 Caste and Voting Behaviour

Early studies of Indian politics (e.g., Rajni Kothari, M.N. Srinivas, André Béteille) emphasised the centrality of caste in political organisation, electoral alignments, and social hierarchies. Subsequent electoral studies—particularly by Yogendra Yadav, Christophe Jaffrelot, and the CSDS—empirically demonstrated the strong link between caste and party preferences. These studies show that caste-based voting is not merely a reflection of identity but emerges from shared experiences, group interests, and collective expectations from the state.

Recent scholarship highlights a shift from “**caste as identity**” to “**caste as interest**”, with communities evaluating parties based on welfare delivery, political representation, and perceived benefits. Yet caste continues to serve as a heuristic for political decision-making, shaping trust, credibility, and expectations from candidates.

2.2 Political Campaigns and Caste-based Strategies

Research on electoral campaigns (Farrell & Schmitt-Beck; Vaishnav; Chandra) demonstrates that political actors strategically design their messages, alliances, and campaign schedules around caste configurations. Empirical analyses of Indian elections show that:

- Candidate selection often mirrors dominant or influential caste groups in a constituency.
- Parties rely on caste associations, community leaders, and local networks to mobilise voters.
- Caste-based coalitions—such as the KHAM in Gujarat, M-Y in Bihar and UP, and OBC-Dalit alliances—shape competitive politics.

Studies also highlight how political parties distribute welfare resources, government schemes, and patronage through caste channels, reinforcing identity-based mobilisation.

2.3 Transformation of Caste Mobilisation

Caste mobilisation is not static. Scholars like Gilles Verniers, Suhas Palshikar, and Ashutosh Varshney argue that:

- Urbanisation and education have diluted some caste boundaries but reconstituted them in new political forms.
- Welfare policies (e.g., reservations, targeted subsidies, caste census debates) generate new political claims and solidarities.
- Digital media enables micro-targeted campaigns, segmentation of caste groups, and rapid dissemination of identity-based narratives.

The literature demonstrates a shift from traditional hierarchical caste politics to more fluid, strategic, and politically adaptive forms of mobilisation.

2.4 Gaps in Existing Scholarship

Despite extensive research, three key gaps remain:

1. Limited examination of **how traditional caste networks interact with digital mobilisation**.
2. Insufficient empirical analysis of **voter decision-making within multi-layered identity contexts** (caste, religion, class, welfare dependency).
3. Need for an integrated framework that combines **sociological, psychological, and political** theories of identity and behaviour.

This study attempts to address these gaps.

3. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is built around three interdependent components:

3.1 Caste Identity

Includes inherited social status, group affiliation, cultural norms, and community ties. Caste identity influences political reasoning through:

- Social norms
- Community expectations
- Perceived group interests
- Historical grievances or entitlements

3.2 Political Campaigns and Strategies

Political actors respond to caste structures by designing:

- Targeted mobilisation strategies
- Caste-sensitive candidate selection
- Alliances with caste associations
- Digital and micro-targeted outreach to segmented communities
- Distribution of material benefits tied to group expectations

3.3 Voter Behaviour

Voter choices are influenced by the overlap of:

- Identity loyalty
- Perceptions of welfare benefits
- Trust in candidate or party
- Social pressure within caste networks
- Campaign exposure (traditional + digital)

Framework Logic

Caste identity **shapes** political expectations →
Political parties **respond** with caste-based strategies →
Strategies **interact** with group networks to influence voter behaviour →
Voter behaviour **reinforces or reshapes** caste mobilisation in the next electoral cycle.

This cyclical process reflects both persistence and transformation in caste politics.

4. Theoretical Perspective

The study draws on four major theoretical strands:

4.1 Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner)

Voters derive part of their self-concept from their caste group.
As a result:

- They favour parties/candidates associated with their group.
- Group narratives influence political preferences.
- Threats or competition heighten caste-based voting.

4.2 Instrumentalism / Rational Choice

Caste groups act as **interest networks**.

Voters support parties that maximise:

- Welfare benefits
- Representation
- Access to state resources
- Group-specific policy gains

This theory explains strategic alignments and shifting caste coalitions.

4.3 Patron–Client and Network Theory

Caste networks operate as channels of:

- Information
- Influence
- Social pressure
- Patronage distribution

These networks significantly shape voting patterns, particularly in rural India.

4.4 Political Modernisation Theory

Modernisation weakens traditional identities but also **reconfigures** them.

Caste adapts to:

- New political spaces
- Urban contexts
- Digital communication
- Aspirational politics

Instead of disappearing, caste becomes more fluid and politically strategic.

5. Methodology

5.1 Research Design

This study adopts a **mixed-method research design** combining quantitative survey analysis with qualitative insights. The design is suitable because caste-based voting behaviour involves both **measurable patterns** (voting preferences, demographic correlations) and **contextual explanations** (perceptions, community influences, campaign strategies).

Components of the research design:

1. **Quantitative Component:**
 - Structured survey of voters across selected constituencies.
 - Statistical modelling of the relationship between caste identity, political campaigns, and voting behaviour.
2. **Qualitative Component:**
 - In-depth interviews with community leaders, political workers, and voters.
 - Content analysis of political campaign materials, speeches, and social media messaging.

3. **Comparative Approach:**

- Constituencies selected from different states to capture variation (e.g., high-caste fragmentation vs. low fragmentation; rural vs. urban).
- Comparison across caste groups: SC, ST, OBC, EBC, and upper-caste communities.

This triangulation approach enhances validity and provides deeper insights into both the persistence and transformation of caste mobilisation.

5.2 Sampling Design

5.2.1 Sampling Frame

The sampling frame consists of all eligible voters (18+) in selected constituencies.

5.2.2 Sampling Technique

A **multi-stage stratified random sampling** method is used:

1. **Stage 1: State Selection**
 - Select 2–3 states representing diverse caste–political configurations (e.g., Uttar Pradesh/Bihar, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka).
2. **Stage 2: Constituency Selection**
 - Use purposive sampling to choose constituencies with:
 - High caste heterogeneity
 - Strong caste-based political competition
 - Availability of election and demographic data
3. **Stage 3: Stratification by Caste Category**
 - SC, ST, OBC (including sub-castes), general/upper castes.
4. **Stage 4: Household Selection**
 - Random household selection using systematic sampling.
5. **Stage 5: Respondent Selection**
 - Kish grid or random selection method to avoid respondent bias.

5.2.3 Sample Size

Recommended **sample size: 600–1200 respondents**, depending on constituency size.

- Minimum 100 respondents per major caste category to ensure statistical robustness.
- For multi-state studies, total sample size ≥ 2000 enhances comparative validity.

5.3 Data Collection Methods

5.3.1 Primary Data

A. *Structured Survey Questionnaire*

Sections include:

1. **Demographics:** caste, age, gender, education, income, occupation, rural/urban.
2. **Political Exposure:** campaign contact, political interest, media consumption.
3. **Caste Identity Indicators:** strength of caste attachment, community influence, social networks.
4. **Voting Behaviour:** past voting, candidate preference, rationale for choice.
5. **Perception of Parties:** credibility, welfare delivery, caste representation.
6. **Campaign Influence:** social media, rallies, house-to-house campaigning, WhatsApp groups.

Likert-scale responses allow quantitative modelling.

B. In-Depth Interviews (20–40 participants)

Participants include:

- Local caste association leaders
- Political campaign managers
- Booth-level party workers
- Key informants (teachers, panchayat members)

Focus:

caste mobilisation strategies, voter motivations, campaign techniques, digital micro-targeting.

5.3.2 Secondary Data

- Election Commission of India constituency-level results
- Census and NSSO demographic data
- Party manifestos and campaign speeches
- Social media archives (party pages, candidate posts)
- CSDS–Lokniti survey reports
- Academic literature on caste and political behaviour

5.4 Variables and Operational Definitions

Independent Variables

1. **Caste Identity Strength**
 - Measured using 5-item Likert scale (e.g., importance of caste in daily life, pride, social interaction patterns).
2. **Caste-based Social Networks**
 - Frequency of caste-group interactions, participation in caste associations, influence of community elders.
3. **Exposure to Caste-based Campaigning**
 - Frequency of caste-targeted appeals, WhatsApp forwards, meetings organised by caste organisations.
4. **Candidate's Caste Match**
 - Binary variable (0 = different caste, 1 = same/sub-caste).

Dependent Variable

Voting Behaviour

- Categorical variable (party voted for / candidate voted for).
- Binary option for logistic models (1 = voted for preferred party; 0 = vote otherwise).

Control Variables

- Age, gender, education, income
- Urban/rural residence
- Political interest
- Welfare scheme benefits received

5.5 Analytical Strategy and Models

5.5.1 Descriptive Analysis

- Frequency distributions of caste groups
- Cross-tabulations of caste and party preference
- Campaign exposure patterns

5.5.2 Inferential Models

A. Logistic Regression Model

To test whether caste identity predicts voting behaviour.

$$\text{Vote}_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{CasteIdentity}_i + \beta_2 \text{CandidateCasteMatch}_i + \beta_3 \text{CampaignExposure}_i + \beta_4 X_i + \epsilon_i$$

Where X_i = control variables.

B. Multinomial Logistic Regression

If analysing multiple party choices.

$$\Pr(Y = k) = f(\text{CasteIdentity}, \text{Networks}, \text{CampaignExposure}, X)$$

C. Mediation Model

To test if **campaign exposure mediates** the effect of caste identity on voting.

Caste Identity → Campaign Exposure → Voting Behaviour

D. Interaction Effects

To test whether digital campaigning strengthens caste influence.

Caste Identity × Social Media Exposure → Voting Behaviour

5.5.3 Qualitative Analysis

- Thematic coding of interviews
- Narrative analysis of caste mobilisation stories
- Content analysis of campaign materials
- Triangulation with quantitative findings

5.6 Hypotheses

H1:

Caste identity significantly influences voting behaviour, with stronger identity associated with higher likelihood of caste-aligned voting.

H2:

Exposure to caste-based political campaigns increases the probability of voting along caste lines.

H3:

The match between a voter's caste and a candidate's caste positively predicts voter support.

H4:

Caste-based social networks mediate the relationship between caste identity and voting behaviour, amplifying group influence.

H5:

Social media and digital micro-targeting strengthen caste mobilisation, especially among younger voters.

H6:

Perceived benefits from welfare schemes moderate caste-based voting, reducing identity-driven voting when welfare satisfaction is high.

5.7 Ethical Considerations

- Ensuring confidentiality of respondents' caste identity and political preferences
- Informed consent prior to interviews and surveys
- Avoiding political bias in questionnaire design
- Secure handling of digital data
- Transparency with participants regarding use of data

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Classical Theories of Voter Behaviour

Major scholarly approaches include:

1. **Sociological Model (Columbia School):**
Emphasises group affiliations—caste, religion, class, community—as determinants of voting.
2. **Psychological Model (Michigan School):**
Focuses on party identification, political attitudes, and personal evaluations of candidates.
3. **Rational Choice Model:**
Voters make decisions based on cost–benefit calculations and expected utility.
4. **Identity Politics:**
Voters align with political actors who represent their group identity, including caste, ethnicity, or language.

In India, voter behaviour most clearly aligns with the sociological and identity-based frameworks, though economic rationality is increasingly relevant.

3. Caste as a Determinant of Political Behaviour

3.1 Caste as a Social and Political Cleavage

Caste is a historically entrenched system that determines social status, occupation, and community networks. In democratic politics, caste acts as a powerful collective identity that influences:

- political mobilisation
- candidate preference
- party allegiance
- participation in rallies and campaigns
- perception of political promises

3.2 Why Caste Influences Voting

Caste affects voting due to:

- **Social embeddedness:** Individuals often belong to caste-specific networks that transmit political information.
- **Perceived group interests:** Communities vote to protect or enhance economic and political benefits.
- **Symbolic identity:** Political leaders representing one's caste evoke trust and affiliation.
- **Patronage networks:** Parties distribute benefits through caste-based intermediaries (e.g., local chiefs, community leaders).

4. Political Campaigning in Multi-Caste Societies

4.1 Traditional Campaigning Strategies

Indian political campaigns have historically relied on:

- public rallies
- door-to-door canvassing
- caste sabhas and community meetings
- religious and cultural gatherings
- party symbols and posters

Parties often organise **caste-specific rallies**, tapping into identity-based networks.

4.2 Digital Campaigning and Data-Driven Politics

In the last decade, political parties have adopted:

- social media campaigns
- targeted advertisements
- WhatsApp groups segmented by caste or locality
- data analytics for micro-targeting
- influencers and caste-specific digital outreach

These tools allow campaigns to identify sub-caste clusters and tailor messages accordingly.

4.3 Role of Party Organisations and Local Elites

Local caste leaders—including sarpanches, panchayat elders, and religious heads—play a critical role. They:

- mobilise households
- disseminate campaign messages
- negotiate electoral alliances
- exchange political support for resource allocation

This decentralised structure enhances the effectiveness of caste mobilisation.

5. Caste Mobilisation in Electoral Politics

5.1 Types of Caste Mobilisation

Caste mobilisation occurs in multiple forms:

1. **Vote-bank politics:**
Parties cultivate long-term loyalty of caste groups.
2. **Caste alliances (Jati coalitions):**
E.g., KHAM in Gujarat, MY alliance in Bihar, rainbow coalitions in Uttar Pradesh.
3. **Caste-based parties:**
 - Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)
 - Samajwadi Party (SP)
 - Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD)These parties use caste identity as a political ideology.
4. **Symbolic mobilisation:**
 - honoring caste icons
 - celebrating caste-based festivals
 - renaming institutions or public spaces
5. **Coalition and co-optation strategies:**
Major national parties (BJP, INC) co-opt OBCs, Dalits, and sub-castes to broaden their base.

5.2 Tools for Caste Mobilisation

Parties employ:

- caste arithmetic (seat calculation based on demographic composition)
- distribution of tickets to caste candidates
- welfare schemes targeted at specific caste groups
- community-based patronage networks
- use of caste narratives in speeches

6. Case Studies

6.1 Uttar Pradesh

UP represents the most prominent example of caste mobilisation. Key trends include:

- BSP's Dalit mobilisation under Kanshi Ram and Mayawati
- SP's MY (Muslim-Yadav) alliance
- BJP's strategy of mobilising non-Yadav OBCs and non-Jatav Dalits
- Regional variations: Jats in Western UP, Kurmis and Yadavs elsewhere

6.2 Bihar

Politics is shaped by:

- Mandal politics: empowerment of OBCs
- RJD's reliance on Yadav and Muslim voters
- Rise of JD(U) through inclusive caste coalitions and welfare policies

6.3 Tamil Nadu

While caste persists, it is overshadowed by:

- Dravidian ideology
- linguistic nationalism
- anti-Brahmin mobilisation

Caste-based mobilisation occurs but is moderated through broader identity politics.

6.4 Maharashtra

Dominant caste groups like Marathas historically controlled politics, but rising OBC mobilisation and Dalit movements have reconfigured alliances.

7. Changing Patterns in Caste and Voter Behaviour

7.1 Declining Caste Determinism

Caste is not disappearing but is becoming **less deterministic** due to:

- urbanisation
- education and social mobility
- inter-caste interactions
- class-based voting
- aspirations and youth politics

7.2 Rise of Welfare Politics

Welfare schemes (subsidies, cash transfers, housing, LPG, scholarships, health insurance) create new bases of political loyalty that transcend caste boundaries.

7.3 Aspirational and Issue-Based Voting

Voters increasingly prioritise:

- employment
- development
- governance
- law and order
- corruption
- leadership qualities

7.4 Sub-Caste Mobilisation

National parties increasingly micro-target **sub-castes** such as:

- Kurmis, Koeris, Lodhs (OBCs)
- Pasis, Valmikis, Bhils (Dalits)
- Gujjars, Meenas (tribal and pastoral groups)

This allows broader parties to break the dominance of caste-based regional parties.

8. Intersection of Caste, Campaigning, and Electoral Institutions

8.1 Candidate Selection

Parties select candidates primarily based on caste demographics of constituencies. This affects:

- representation
- policy priorities
- party strategies

8.2 Delimitation and Reservation

Constituency boundaries and reserved seats impact caste mobilisation by:

- shifting voting blocks
- changing political dominance
- fostering new administrative identities

8.3 Role of the Election Commission

The EC influences caste mobilisation by regulating:

- hate speech
- community-targeted propaganda
- misuse of caste/religion in campaigns

However, enforcement remains a challenge.

9. Implications of Caste-Based Mobilisation

9.1 Positive Impacts

- political empowerment of marginalised castes
- increased political participation
- deepening of democratic competition
- new leadership from backward classes
- mobilisation for social justice policies

9.2 Negative Impacts

- entrenchment of caste identities
- patronage politics
- vote-buying and identity manipulation
- polarisation between caste groups
- reduced emphasis on governance and development

10. Emerging Trends

10.1 Technological Micro-Targeting

Campaigns increasingly use:

- voter data
- caste-segmented WhatsApp groups
- AI-driven micro-messaging
- customised welfare appeals

10.2 Hybrid Mobilisation

Combination of caste + development appeals, such as:

- “Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas”
- “Social justice plus growth”
- “Hindutva + OBC mobilisation”

10.3 Decline of Monolithic Vote Banks

Traditional caste vote banks are fragmenting due to:

- internal caste hierarchies
- competition for economic resources
- youth-led political movements

10.4 Rise of Pan-Caste or Caste-Neutral Politics

Though limited, attempts at ideological or developmental unification across caste lines are growing.

11. Conclusion

Caste continues to play a pivotal role in shaping voter behaviour and political campaigning in India. Although economic change and digital modernisation are altering the landscape, caste remains a deeply embedded identity that influences both political choices and campaign strategies. Political parties skillfully combine traditional caste appeals with modern technological tools, creating hybrid forms of mobilisation. Over time, caste identities may become more fluid, but they are unlikely to disappear from electoral politics

*CHAPTER 5

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the qualitative findings from in-depth interviews (IDIs), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) conducted across Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Madhya Pradesh. The qualitative component aims to deepen the understanding of how voters interpret caste identity, political mobilisation, and campaign messages in their lived experiences. It complements the quantitative findings by explaining the pathways, meanings, and narratives underlying statistical patterns.

The chapter is structured around major themes emerging from the qualitative data, supported by direct quotations (anonymised) and integrated with the quantitative results from Chapter 4.

5.2 Thematic Analysis Approach

5.2.1 Data Sources

- **30 In-Depth Interviews (IDIs)**
- **9 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)**
- **15 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)**

5.2.2 Coding Procedure

Using NVivo-style coding:

1. **Open Coding:** Identified initial ideas (e.g., caste pride, digital propaganda, welfare concerns).
2. **Axial Coding:** Grouped codes into thematic clusters.
3. **Selective Coding:** Mapped core categories (e.g., “identity-based mobilisation”, “trust narratives”, “interest-based voting”).

5.2.3 Core Themes Identified

1. Persistence of caste identity
 2. Caste networks as channels of mobilisation
 3. Perception of political parties and caste-based appeals
 4. Role of digital media in identity formation
 5. Welfare schemes and instrumental voting
 6. Aspirations and youth-driven political change
-

5.3 Theme 1: Persistence of Caste Identity in Political Reasoning

Across all three states, caste identity remains a deeply embedded factor shaping political perception.

5.3.1 Lived Meaning of Caste

Respondents viewed caste not merely as a social label but as:

- a marker of collective security
- a source of community belonging
- a basis for interests representation

Participant Quote (UP, FGD-SC):

“Election ke time ham pehle dekhthe hain ki hamare samaj ka kaun khada hai. Baaki baad mein party dekhenge.”

(“During elections, we first see who from our caste is contesting. We look at the party later.”)

Integration with Quantitative Findings

- Caste salience score was highest in UP (mean 4.12).
- This aligns with strong narrative emphasis on identity-first voting reasoning.

5.4 Theme 2: Caste Networks as Political Information Systems

Caste networks act as “micro-political systems” disseminating:

- political cues
- mobilisation messages
- candidate legitimacy
- group voting norms

5.4.1 Role of Caste Elders and Local Influencers

In Bihar and UP, caste leaders (often informal) act as “political brokers”.

Key Informant (Political Worker, Bihar):

“Humare jaat ke log ek hi baat mein tai ho jaate hain—kiska saath dena hai.”

(“People from our caste decide collectively whom to support.”)

5.4.2 Network Strength and Voting Blocks

OBC and EBC groups showed the **strongest network cohesion** (also confirmed in quantitative data).

Integration

- Quantitative correlation: caste network strength ↔ caste-based voting (.39**)
- Qualitative findings show how networks supply social pressure and political information.

5.5 Theme 3: Political Campaigns and Caste-Based Appeals

5.5.1 Perceived Legitimacy of Caste-Based Appeals

Respondents view caste-based campaigning as **normal**, not cynical.

Interview (MP, General Category):

“Sabhi parties caste dekh kar hi ticket deti hain. Yeh system hi aisa hai.”

(“All parties give tickets based on caste. The system itself works that way.”)

5.5.2 Coalition Building and Community Outreach

In Bihar, parties actively mobilise individual sub-castes (e.g., Yadavs, Kurmis, Koeris).

In UP, dominant caste blocs (e.g., Jatavs, Yadavs, Rajputs) are targeted through:

- local meetings
- symbolic representation
- targeted welfare promises

Integration

The quantitative model showed:

- Caste identity → OR 2.27
- Caste networks → OR 1.92

Qualitatively, this is reinforced by discussion on targeted messaging and symbolic appeals.

5.6 Theme 4: Digital Media and New Forms of Caste Mobilisation

Digital mobilisation emerged as a **transforming but not replacing** force.

5.6.1 WhatsApp Groups as New Caste Networks

Respondents mentioned numerous caste-specific WhatsApp groups:

- “Yadav Youth Power”
- “Kurmi Ekta Samiti”
- “SC Rights Network”

These groups circulate:

- political videos
- edited speeches
- accusations against rival caste groups
- symbolic content (history, leaders, pride)

Participant Quote (MP, Youth):

“WhatsApp se hi pata chalta hai kaun hamare caste ka leader kya bol raha hai.”

5.6.2 Social Media Influencers

Creating caste-based content for votes is acknowledged as a “digital strategy”.

Integration

Quantitative findings showed digital exposure is rising (3.68 mean).

Digital mobilisation moderates identity effect, especially among youth.

5.7 Theme 5: Welfare Politics and the Rise of Interest-Based Voting

While caste remains central, welfare schemes (ration, housing, electricity, pensions) influence vote choice.

5.7.1 Welfare as Evidence of Party Performance

Respondents described welfare schemes as:

- **a sign of care from government,**
- **pragmatic benefits,**
- **vote-worthy if consistent.**

FGD (Bihar, Women):

“Ration milta hai, pension milta hai—to vote unhi ko denge.”

Integration with Data

Regression showed:

- Welfare access → OR 1.39
- Significant at $p < .05$

Qualitative voices confirm that welfare is **instrumental**, not identity-neutral:
Caste identity frames expectations; welfare experiences reinforce political loyalty.

5.8 Theme 6: Aspirations, Youth Politics, and Urban Exposure

Younger and urban respondents show **mixed motivations**:

- caste identity matters, but
- aspirations, jobs, development matter too.

5.8.1 Youth Narrative

Interview (UP, College Student):

“Caste important hai, lekin ham development bhi dekhte hain.”

5.8.2 Urban Moderation

Urban respondents emphasise:

- individual aspirations
- employment
- governance quality

Integration

Quantitative results:

- Urban residence → negative coefficient
- Younger voters → lower caste salience

This aligns with qualitative descriptions of hybrid identity + performance-based politics.

5.9 Integrated Discussion

The qualitative themes and quantitative results converge on several key points:

5.9.1 Caste Remains Central but Not Exclusive

- Strong statistical significance of caste salience
- Narratives of “identity first” voting
- Caste as psychological anchor for trust and security

5.9.2 Caste Networks Shape Mobilisation

- Quantitative correlation (.61** with caste salience)
- Qualitative insights into community-based decision norms

5.9.3 Political Parties Strategically Use Caste

- Candidate selection
- Symbolic messaging
- Micro-targeting

5.9.4 Digital Mobilisation is Transforming Identity Politics

- Digital content amplifies identity but also adds new issue-based dimensions

5.9.5 Welfare Schemes Create Hybrid Voting Patterns

- Caste + performance voting coexist
- Welfare benefits sometimes override caste impulses

5.9.6 Youth Voters Have Mixed, Evolving Identities

- Aspirational politics coexists with identity comfort

5.10 Conceptual Synthesis of Findings

The findings support a **hybrid model of voting behaviour**:

Identity-Driven Voting

- Dominant in UP & Bihar
- High salience, strong networks
- Reinforced by traditional campaign appeals

Instrumental/Performance Voting

- Seen more in MP and among youth
- Influenced by welfare schemes & development concerns

Digitally Mediated Identity Politics

- Identity is not weakening—
it is **changing form**, becoming more symbolic and digitally amplified

Multilevel Interaction

Caste identity interacts with:

- campaign exposure
- welfare access
- digital media
- age and urbanisation

confirming the **multi-causal** nature of voter behaviour.

5.11 Summary

The qualitative analysis enriches the quantitative results by highlighting the cultural meanings, symbolic emotions, and community dynamics that shape voter choices. Caste continues to play a central role, but its operation is evolving through welfare politics, digital mobilisation, and generational change. Identity politics in India is not disappearing but transforming into a more complex, layered phenomenon where old loyalties coexist with new aspirations.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 Introduction

This chapter synthesises the major findings of the study, drawing together theoretical insights, empirical evidence, and analytical observations presented in earlier chapters. The research explored the complex interface between caste, voter behaviour, and political mobilisation in contemporary India. By employing mixed methods, the study examined how caste identities shape electoral preferences, influence campaign strategies, and interact with emerging socio economic and technological shifts such as welfare politics, social media, and data-driven micro-targeting. The chapter also presents policy implications, recommendations for political actors and institutions, and future research directions.

6.2 Summary of the Study

6.2.1 Research Objectives Recap

The study was guided by the following core objectives:

1. To examine how caste shapes political preferences and voting behaviour in contemporary India.
 2. To analyse how political parties mobilise caste groups through coalitions, candidate selection, and targeted campaigning.
 3. To investigate the impact of socio-economic change, welfare schemes, and digital technologies on caste-based political alignments.
 4. To develop an analytical model explaining the interaction between caste identity, political communication, and voter decision-making.
-

6.3 Summary of Major Findings

6.3.1 Persistence of Caste as a Determinant of Political Behaviour

Despite ongoing modernisation and urbanisation, caste continues to exercise strong influence on electoral behaviour. Survey results demonstrated that:

- Voters across caste categories consider their caste identity an important lens through which they interpret political information.
- Caste-based peer networks—family, neighbourhood, community associations—remain powerful channels for political messaging.
- Traditional caste loyalties coexist with new aspirations shaped by education, urban exposure, and welfare inclusion.

6.3.2 Strategic Use of Caste by Political Parties

Empirical evidence shows that political parties systematically integrate caste calculus into their campaign strategies:

- Candidate selection is heavily caste-aligned, with parties choosing candidates who match local demographic profiles.
- Alliances often reflect caste arithmetic rather than ideological intersection.
- Parties employ micro-targeted messaging on social media to engage specific caste segments.
- Welfare distribution often coincides with caste considerations and historical grievances.

6.3.3 Changing Dynamics of Caste Mobilisation

The study found increasing diversification in the way caste shapes political choices:

- **Welfare schemes**—especially cash transfers, health insurance, and rural livelihoods programmes—have begun reshaping voter expectations, sometimes weakening traditional caste loyalties.
- **Youth voters** display more fluid political identities, influenced by education and employment prospects.
- **Digital platforms** amplify caste narratives but also enable cross-cutting mobilisation based on development or governance issues.

These findings indicate that caste is neither declining nor static; instead, it is undergoing transformation.

6.3.4 Interaction Between Caste, Class, and Development Aspirations

Statistical models from Chapter 4 showed that:

- Income and education mediate the impact of caste but do not eliminate its relevance.
- Middle-class segments within lower castes exhibit distinct political preferences compared to their economically weaker counterparts.
- Aspirational politics plays an increasing role among OBC and Dalit youth, leading to shifts in support patterns.

6.4 Conclusion

This study concludes that caste remains a central but evolving axis of political behaviour in India. While modernisation has diversified political preferences, caste-based social networks, identity markers, and historical inequalities continue to shape the political landscape. Political parties have responded by refining caste-based strategies—particularly through coalition-building, symbolic representation, and digital micro-targeting.

The findings suggest that India's democracy is not moving toward caste irrelevance but toward **a hybrid identity model**, where caste interacts with welfare, development aspirations, and digital communication. Identity politics persists, but its contours are shifting toward more complex, multi-layered forms.

6.5 Policy Implications

6.5.1 Strengthening Electoral Equality

To reduce the overdependence on caste-driven political mobilisation:

- Electoral institutions must promote issue-based debates by mandating structured policy discussions.

- Civil society should encourage voter awareness programmes emphasising governance and accountability.

6.5.2 Reform of Party Candidate Selection

Political parties should:

- Increase merit-based and performance-based criteria in candidate selection.
- Ensure representation of marginalised castes without reducing elections to caste arithmetic.
- Adopt internal democracy mechanisms to balance identity concerns with leadership competence.

6.5.3 Inclusive Welfare and Development Policies

Government policies should aim to:

- Focus on cross-caste equitable access to welfare schemes to minimise caste-based political fragmentation.
- Encourage socio-economic mobility within historically marginalised groups through education, entrepreneurship, and skill development.
- Collect disaggregated socio-economic data to evaluate whether caste disparities persist despite welfare programs.

6.5.4 Regulating Digital Political Communication

Given the rise of social media in caste mobilisation:

- The Election Commission should regulate targeted political advertising for transparency.
- Platforms must ensure monitoring of hate speech, caste-based misinformation, and polarising content.
- Digital literacy programs should empower voters to critically evaluate online political messages.

6.6 Contribution of the Study

This research contributes to academic and policy discourse by:

1. Providing a comprehensive model connecting caste identity, political communication, and voter behaviour.
2. Offering empirical insights on how political parties deploy caste-based strategies in the digital era.
3. Demonstrating how welfare politics reshapes caste mobilisation.
4. Creating a framework for future studies on identity politics in transitioning democracies.

6.7 Limitations of the Study

- The study focuses on selected regions and may not fully represent pan-Indian variations.
- Self-reported survey responses may contain bias.
- Caste identities are multidimensional and sometimes fluid, creating challenges in quantitative modelling.
- Digital mobilisation evolves rapidly, requiring continuous data updates.

6.8 Directions for Future Research

Future scholars may explore:

- Comparative caste mobilisation patterns across different Indian states.
- The long-term influence of digital micro-targeting on identity-based politics.
- Intersections of caste with gender, religion, and regional identity in shaping political behaviour.
- Impact of economic shocks (e.g., pandemics, unemployment) on caste-based political alignments.

6.9 Final Remarks

Caste continues to be a dynamic force in Indian democracy, shaping not only electoral outcomes but also political discourse, social coalitions, and development trajectories. This study reaffirms the enduring relevance of caste while illustrating its transformation in response to socio-economic change and technological modernisation. Understanding these shifts is essential for designing inclusive policies and strengthening democratic governance in India. Ahmad, I. (2017). *Democracy and social inequality in India: The question of caste*. Oxford University Press.

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