

**Caste, Religion and Youth Politics: A Study of University Students of  
Varanasi**

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## **Caste, Religion and Youth Politics: A Study of University Students of Varanasi**

### **Abstract**

Indian politics has been mostly discussed in the context of caste and religion-based mobilization by political parties. Many scholars have focused on caste and communal politics and its impact on electoral politics. In social science, many attempts have been done by scholars to understand how population size of a particular social community matter in electoral politics. In other words, the politics of vote bank can be seen as an attempt of mass mobilization of a particular social group by political parties. Mandal vs Kamandal politics will always be the best example to understand the politics of mass mobilization in the context of caste and religion.

Uttar Pradesh is one of the finest examples of both caste and communal politics. The identity, ideology has been shaped and reshaped over time and some issues turned out to be the representation of the state i.e. Caste politics and Communal Politics (Babri Masjid and Ram Mandir). Both caste and communal politics are prevalent in Uttar Pradesh, it is supposed to be the 'heartland' for both. The state of Uttar Pradesh inherited the caste factor which reflects in the politics of elections. It is an important factor in determining the winning party. The communal politics was inherited during the Babri Masjid and Ram Mandir controversy. Both caste and communal politics have shaped the identity of the state and politics over time. Polarisation found its base in the state with the caste and communal politics, the division of mankind, the communal and caste-based clashes became a part of every election in the state.

The study of youth in the context of politics has not been very much explored despite a sizeable section of Indian voters being young. Youth voters as a political category are not much focused as an issue of political interest and research until recent times. According to the Election commission, only youth voters constituted 69% of the total voter's population in 2014 Lok Sabha election. So, the number always matters to the political parties. Attempts to mobilize youth to vote are not only done by political parties but also election commission, which has started many programs for electoral participation of youth. But still, the youth voters as a political category have hardly been an issue of political interest and analysis until recent times. It was only during the 2009 Lok Sabha election and in various assembly elections after the Lok Sabha election that there has been an increasing interest in the youth vote in India.

The youth are the most important and dynamic segment of the population in any country. Our nation is witnessing a historic demographic shift. Youth shows strong passion, motivation and will power which also make them the most valuable human resource for fostering economic, cultural and political development of a nation. A country's ability and potential for growth is determined by the size of its youth population. Youth are the creative digital innovators in their communities and participate as active citizens, eager to positively contribute to sustainable development. This section of the population needs to be harnessed, motivated, skilled and streamlined properly to bring rapid progress for a country. Youth can promote social economic development and sustainable growth in India, they offer a roadmap for programs and priorities that aim to address the need of the society. The vision document that guides youth policy in India is the National Youth Policy (NYP 2014), which defines youth as those in the age group of 15-29 years, comprising as per the Census of India 2011, about 330 million, close to 27.5 % of the population. One among the eleven priority areas in the NYP 2014 is that of 'participation in politics and governance', which mostly talks about facilitating participation and civic engagement at all levels of governance and it is reflected through the responses of the respondent.

The manifestation of youth's opinion in politics has never been addressed separately under the theme of mass mobilization or pressure groups, while caste, majority and minority vote bank politics have been largely discussed in the social science field. However, youth shared the highest vote population in electoral politics. On behalf of youth's hope, politicians are targeting each other during the election campaign. Is the youth benefited from politician's slogans or their opinion matter to these politicians who are using youth to target their opponents? Or youth will only become a pendulum in the current political ecosystem, where they as a voter category will fall under the mobilization on the issues of caste, communal, nationalism, and not on issues of their own? Or do they merely become the career of political party's propaganda throughout the election campaign?

This research is qualitative in nature and specially focused on Youth and their political views about Caste and Religion based politics. For this study, 65 Students of Banaras Hindu University and Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapeeth had interviewed to understand the youth perspective on various social and political views.

## **Objective of the Research**

1. To understand the involvement of youth in politics.
2. How caste and religion are given importance in youth Politics.
3. To understand the ideology of youth and their political orientation.

## **Methodology**

Qualitative research has used for this study. Qualitative research can provide complex textual description of youth's perspective that can be studied deeply. A qualitative researcher has to provide greater time with the participant of the study to understand the views, opinions, beliefs, emotions of the participant to the phenomenon being studied. It requires extra rigor and hard work to bring out effective understanding of the phenomenon.

## **Research Design**

The research study has adopted a descriptive research design where the researcher will try to understand the experiences of youth, party's organization members and views of various political activists. A descriptive research design can afford to look at all the participants with different backgrounds and experiences.

## **Tools of Data collection**

### **Source of Data:**

#### **1. Primary data:**

The researcher has used interview schedule to collect data from student studying at BHU and MGKVP universities.

#### **2. Secondary Data**

The newspaper articles, various interviews of political leaders, speeches made during election campaigns and views shared on social media and you tube by the political leaders, party members have been analyzed.

### **Findings of the Research:**

The youth are more aware about political events, so they emphasized that awareness about ongoing political debate is must for every citizen of the country because electoral politics is all about promises and policies for the betterment of the people. The least participation in politics can make our politicians unaccountable, so participation is must to keep politicians responsible and keep debate around the policies. While analyzing data from field, beyond the political line youth seems very much concerned about the unaware citizen and their inactive participation in politics.

Youth are engaged either actively or passively in politics and are associated with political parties. All the participant equivocally said every citizen should be aware of political affairs and policies as they feel that electoral politics is all about policies and promises which will have impact on everybody's life. Youth think that most of the people are unaware about the politics that affects their everyday life. The least participation in the active politics and the low level of awareness about the policies, may be against or in favor of people.

If we look at those protest which were led by Youth from different universities, most of the protest were happened against the government policies. Every government have to face youth's protest in their regime even in pre independence India militant and politically sound youth had attacked several times on British government. However, youth always have been always politically aware in every time period but unfortunately in Indian politics youth's manifestation of opinion is still ignored and also the politicization of youth and considered youth as a political category are emerging phenomena.

Youth thinks that there is an urgent need to reframe the policies related to marginalize section of the society because politician uses caste sentiment in the name of reservation that mixed the caste politics and reservation politics and the benefit of reservation policies must reach to those people who actually needed it. However, caste in politics is all about the electoral equation that is always done by every political party because the Indian society is based on the caste system that's why the political parties distributed tickets to the candidate according to their caste in context of their constituency's caste equation. While caste-based polarisation has always been done by all political parties, but religion-based polarization is limited to some political parties—only those who raised religious issues in their speeches and manifesto. Every youth is agreed that the politics around caste can be benefited to some caste but religion based politics only create communal tension

which breaks the communal harmony and sometimes it become very harmful to the society in terms of riots, demolition of religious places, hate speeches and communal remarks on particular religious community.

Youth think that every ideology must have some basic similarity such as belief in equality, prosperity and diversity. Most of the youth seemed to find difficulties in giving proper response to what is ideology? Mostly those youth gave proper response who are in higher education or actively participate in cadre camp where ideology is discussed by the organization of political parties. Humanitarian ground must be foundation of any ideology, must be no place for violence act. Though youth are also believed that there are some ideology who is threat to our country for Nationalist, Maoist ideology is dangerous for our country and for Socialist, Bahujan and Centralist, the RSS ideology (Nationalist) is dangerous for our country. And also every participant has similar views on believing in ideological differences. But some of them who follow nationalist ideology, also concerned that there should not be any conspiracy against country in the name of ideological differences.

## **Recommendations of the Research**

In order to understand the youth's perspective about caste and religion based politics, researcher tried to recommend some important point that came from data which is useful to the government officials, Non-government organizations, Academicians and to those who are working on and consider youth as social or political category in social science.

1. Political system of India must encourage for the participation in electoral politics and aware people about real issues.
2. Youth should not be used by political parties as a propaganda spreader, instead of it, manifestation of youth's opinion must be part of policy making or in decision making process.
3. Caste politics and reservation politics should be discussed separately. Both are different.
4. Diversity should be respected and have open space for it. Only diversity can strengthen democracy not uniformity.