

Election Studies in India

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Election Studies in India

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Abstract

The election system is the pillar of Indian democracy. The system consists of various levels of elections to the Lok Sabha (the House of Representatives of the Union), State Legislative Assemblies, and Panchayati Raj Institutions (local self-governing bodies under State Governments). This article includes a review of studies related to the elections of Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies conducted up to the present time. Studies are divided into those based on aggregate data and those based on survey data of the individual electorate. This division has the advantage of providing data that may be used in different analytical areas. Voter turnout and votes polled by party are the two main variables to be explained. This review article thus shows what has been explained in voting behaviour in India up to the present time.

Keywords: India, election, review, statistical analysis, Lok Sabha, State Legislative Assembly

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Election Studies in India

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I. Introduction

Since her independence in 1947, parliamentary democracy has been the central political mechanism governing India. Between 1975 and 1977, there was a brief disruption during the National Emergency Period. This disruption resulted from the crisis of the political economy beginning in the latter half of 1960's. The election system returns representatives of the people to the Lok Sabha (House of the People in the Union) as well as to State Legislative Assemblies (House of the People in the State) every five years. This system has been the pillar of the Indian democratic regime. In a sense, elections form the essence of Indian democracy.

Elections are conducted at various levels of the federal structure in India. There is the nation-wide election for Lok Sabha (House of the People) that consists of 545 members. Of these, 543 are elected directly by the people from constituencies on the basis of the single-member electorate system (or so-called first-pass-the-post system), and the President from the Anglo-Indian community selects the remaining two members. At the State level, there is an election for the State Legislative Assembly. Members of this body are also elected directly by the people of the constituencies in the same manner as that of the Lok Sabha.¹ At present there are in total about 4000 Members in the Legislative Assemblies. What is unique about these elections is that there are seats exclusively reserved for the socially weak and discriminated stratum of people: Scheduled Castes (= SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (= STs). Seats are reserved on the basis of the proportion of the population of these groups. The former are people of castes that were historically and are even now discriminated against on the basis of untouchability. The latter are those from socially backward communities living in rather isolated areas and with particular cultural traditions. In line with constitutional provisions, the Central Election Commission of India presides over elections for these two tiers of the election system.

At the grass-roots level, there are elections for local bodies like the three-tiered Panchayati Raj system in rural areas and municipal governments in urban areas. But the elections and functions of these local bodies were inactive in many States until the 1980's because of political inertia or pretexts of State governments. In view of such a state of affairs in local bodies, the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments were passed by Parliament in 1992 to provide a constitutionally mandated status for local bodies. As a result, by enactment of each State government, the three-tiered Panchayati Raj System, consisting of the *zilla parishad* at the district level, the *panchayat samiti* at the block level, and the *gram panchayat* at the village level, was regularised for rural areas. The five-year term was prescribed to be the term of office, and the election at the end of the term was to be conducted strictly under the State Election Commission. The reservation for socially weaker sections of people was also prescribed for SCs, STs, and women. The devolution of financial resources from the State government to the Panchayati Raj bodies was also prescribed.² On the basis of the 74th constitutional amendment, municipal bodies were similarly regularized.³ With the full establishment of the Panchayati Raj system and municipal bodies based on the constitution, the competitive election system was extended to the grass-roots level.⁴

One level of election is related to other level of election. As a whole, this constitutes a network of election politics in contemporary India, and is the basic framework of India's democratic regime. Any research related to the politics of India necessitates study of the electoral process in one way or another. There are so many electoral studies, if "electoral study" is defined as one with at least some analysis of the electoral process.

Table 1. Major Parties in the Lok Sabha Elections, 1952-2004

| Year | No. of Seats | Turn-out (%) | Congress | | Communist Party of India | | Communist Party of India (Marxist) | | Jana Sangh / Bharatiya Janata Party (= BJP) | | Janata Party | | Janata Dal | |
|------|--------------|--------------|------------------|----------------|--------------------------|----------------|------------------------------------|----------------|---|----------------|------------------|----------------|------------------|----------------|
| | | | Votes polled (%) | Seats obtained | Votes polled (%) | Seats obtained | Votes polled (%) | Seats obtained | Votes polled (%) | Seats obtained | Votes polled (%) | Seats obtained | Votes polled (%) | Seats obtained |
| 1952 | 489 | 45.7 | 45.0 | 364 | 3.3 | 16 | | | 3.1 | 3 | - | - | - | - |
| 1957 | 493 | 47.7 | 47.8 | 371 | 8.9 | 27 | | | 5.9 | 4 | - | - | - | - |
| 1962 | 494 | 55.3 | 44.7 | 361 | 9.9 | 29 | | | 6.4 | 14 | - | - | - | - |
| 1967 | 520 | 61.2 | 40.8 | 283 | 5.0 | 23 | 4.4 | 19 | 9.4 | 35 | - | - | - | - |
| 1971 | 518 | 55.3 | 43.7 | 352 | 4.7 | 23 | 5.1 | 25 | 7.4 | 22 | - | - | - | - |
| 1977 | 542 | 60.5 | 34.5 | 154 | 2.8 | 7 | 4.3 | 22 | | | 41.3 | 295 | - | - |
| 1980 | 542 | 56.9 | 42.7 | 353 | 2.6 | 11 | 6.1 | 36 | | | 18.9 | 31 | - | - |
| 1984 | 542 | 63.6 | 49.1 | 405 | 2.7 | 6 | 5.7 | 22 | 7.7 | 2 | 6.9 | 10 | - | - |
| 1989 | 543 | 62.0 | 39.5 | 197 | 2.6 | 12 | 6.6 | 33 | 11.4 | 86 | - | - | 17.8 | 142 |
| 1991 | 543 | 55.2 | 36.5 | 232 | 2.5 | 14 | 6.2 | 35 | 20.1 | 120 | - | - | 11.9 | 56 |
| 1996 | 543 | 57.9 | 28.8 | 140 | 2.0 | 12 | 6.1 | 32 | 20.3 | 161 | - | - | 8.1 | 46 |
| 1998 | 543 | 62.0 | 25.8 | 141 | 1.8 | 9 | 5.2 | 32 | 25.6 | 182 | - | - | 3.2 | 6 |
| 1999 | 543 | 60.0 | 28.3 | 114 | 1.5 | 4 | 5.4 | 33 | 23.8 | 182 | - | - | - | - |
| 2004 | 543 | 58.1 | 26.5 | 145 | 1.4 | 10 | 5.7 | 43 | 22.2 | 138 | - | - | - | - |

Source: Election Commission of India, Reports of General Election of various Lok Sabha elections (<http://www.eci.gov.in/ARCHIVE>, accessed on 28 August, 2005).

II. Indian Election Studies

1. Politics of India and Election Studies

The trend of election studies in India has been influenced by the evolution of actual electoral politics, especially those of Lok Sabha and the State Legislative Assembly elections. In addition, theoretical development of election studies in developed countries, especially the United States, has inspired an upward trend in election studies in India. Studies on voting behaviour, notably the Columbia and Michigan studies, have had an impact on studies in India relative to determining what the important research questions are. Party identification, issues, candidates, campaigns, socio-economic status of voters, and other areas have been recognised as important realms for studies in voting behaviours. But because of peculiar elements that are characteristic of Indian society, such as caste, electoral studies in India have unique features. In this section, actual electoral politics are discussed as the context for election studies.

Elections of both Lok Sabha and State Assemblies were conducted simultaneously and regularly till the 1967 elections.⁵ Both levels of elections are considered to be pacesetters, not only in electoral politics but also in India's overall political process. Politics during the Nehru era was, basically, stable, in spite of the occasional failure and turmoil, such as in the border war with China in 1962. The relatively stable politics until Nehru's death in 1964 seems to be one of the main reasons why the election studies were not so flourishing in this period in comparison to the period after the 1967, though studies of these elections were conducted on every major election.

The strength of the "Congress system" until mid-1960s, named by Kothari (1964), could be explained by the capacity of the organisation of the Congress party networking the dominant social groups through, for example, factions, and linking them with the party structure. The "Congress system" was considered to be, in a sense, an effective channel for mobilising popular support in the election, and also putting popular demand on a higher political level, like the State Legislative Assembly or Lok Sabha. With the electoral performance of the Congress party being stable, the "Congress system" could be understood as the very essence of Indian political system. Many scholars thus studied it extensively, including, Brass (1965), Weiner (1967), Sirsikar (1970), Sission (1972), and many others.

The stability of the Congress-centric "one party dominant system" was shaken in the 1967 general election, when the Congress Party for the first time suffered a major setback both in the centre and in

many States. The possibility of change in the ruling party of the centre thus grew large. For the first time since India had become independent, destabilization of the “Congress system” and the increasing possibility of changes in the ruling party through elections attracted the interest of many political scientists and journalists. This resulted in an upsurge in election studies. Thus, it can be seen that election studies proliferated in the latter half of the 1960’s.

Destabilization of the “Congress System” was at its highest in the declaration of a national emergency in 1975. This lasted until 1977 when Congress, led by Mrs. Indira Gandhi, lost the Lok Sabha election for the first time at the centre. The period between the 1967 Lok Sabha election and that of 1977 was a period of increasing turbulence and fundamental transformation of Indian politics in accordance with deep-rooted socio-economic changes in Indian society. Hitherto downtrodden people, like SCs, STs, and so-called “Other Backward Classes”⁶ began to assert themselves in a more dignified manner within the context of a weakening tie of feudalistic social relations and social modernization. With increasing social conflict and political turmoil, this period of transformation was also a period of decline in the ruling party’s ability to govern, whether in Congress or elsewhere. Kohli (1991) provides a good illustration of the turbulent process of transformation. Instability in Indian politics had gradually settled down, to some extent, by the 1990’s.

Within the above process, the Congress System finally disappeared, and an era of frequent changes in the ruling parties, development of a multi-party system, and formation of a coalition government at the centre emerged at the end of the 1980’s. Scholarly interest in party politics and elections increased once again after the Lok Sabha election of 1989, indicating a second upsurge in election studies. The structural transformation of the party system and frequent changes of the ruling party/coalition through elections probably attracted scholarly attention to electoral politics. Research intensified again, and many election studies, especially on the Lok Sabha election, emerged.

Before proceeding to that, I would like to mention the problem of reliability of the election statistics of India. The reliability of election statistics may not be perfect. There are many cases of corrupt practice in the election process such as booth capturing, violence or intimidation against weaker sections of people, provocation of communal sentiments, distribution of money among the electorate, personation, misuse of official power and machinery by the political party in power.⁷ The power of the Central Election Commission is, by and large, strong enough to contain major incidents related to these corrupt practices. It is very difficult for any party to systematically interfere with the electoral process, manipulate electoral results, or win elections against the control of the Election Commission. Some studies show that the police, who have an important role in controlling electoral malpractice, are by and large neutral in conducting their duties.⁸ But the case of Jammu and Kashmir may be an exception. It is said that many elections in Jammu and Kashmir in the past were not free and fair, except for those conducted in 1977 and the most recent one.⁹ Thus, except for the problematic State of Jammu and Kashmir, it is legitimate to use aggregate electoral statistics maintained by the Election Commission for election studies.

In the following sections, studies based on aggregate data are first examined because these election statistics are well documented from the first general election to the present. Further, on the basis of these statistics, it is easy for many scholars to study basic and long-term trends of elections such as the level of electoral participation or the electoral strength of each party. Although the aggregate data cannot reveal details of the voting behaviours of the electorate, they can show most accurately how voters behaved as a whole. Studies that were based on detailed surveys of individuals using large-scale sampling and conducted continuously for several elections did not emerge until the 1960’s.

2. Studies Based on Aggregate Data

Many studies of Indian elections are journalistic and descriptive. They tend to be based on case studies or surveys of individual voters looking into various aspects. Such aspects include among others the selection of candidates, the electoral campaign process, actual voting behaviours of individual voters like political perceptions and party preferences, and socio-economic status. These studies are very useful for understanding the electoral processes of parties and the voting behaviours of individual voters such as who votes for whom, for which party, and how. The period and scope of the studies are usually very limited because there is little data coverage in each study. Usually, each study includes examination of only several case studies simultaneously or only a few hundred or thousand individual voters (using questionnaire surveys) at maximum and on the basis of one or two elections. So, based on these studies, it is difficult to understand the over-all structural patterns of electoral behaviours and/or long-term changes in patterns. The only exceptions to this are surveys of the Centre for Studies of Developing Societies, and this is discussed later.

Use of aggregate election data cannot be avoided if macro and long-term patterns of voting behaviour are to be understood. Fortunately, because of the efforts of the Election Commission, such aggregate data are almost complete in India. The web site of the Election Commission provides all the necessary data concerning both levels of elections.¹⁰ Constitution-wise voter-turnout, details of votes polled by each party, and other details of the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assembly elections are available for analysis. In terms of the number of publications, studies based on aggregate electoral data occupy a rather minor portion of election studies. However, it is best to examine them first in order to understand the outline of elections in India. Although aggregate data usually describes only a few aspects of macro trends or patterns, such clearly depicted aspects can provide a firm context for understanding Indian elections.

Studies based on statistical analysis of aggregate election data, especially those of the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies, began to emerge after the 1970's. Major studies include those of Elkins (1975), Dasgupta and Morris-Jones (1975), Weiner (1977), Blair (1979, 1990 and 1993), Brass (1980 and 1993), Dikshit's collection of papers (1995), Chhibber (1999), Chhibber and Nooruddin (1999), and Kondo (2003). These studies correlate voter-turnout, votes polled by major parties, and other variables with various socio-economic aggregate variables. These studies are included in the category of "ecological studies".

Elkins' research was carried out on State Legislative Assembly election data and it was early pioneering ecological analysis in India. His study was based on data of four southern States from 1952 to 1967. It showed the importance of the State political context, literacy rate, the development of regional communication in explaining turnout, and the number of candidates.

Dasgupta and Morris-Jones conducted another major study of the early period. They also tried to discover a socio-economic basis for electoral data and examined the relation between socio-economic data and election data of State Legislative Assemblies from 1952 to 1967. The latter included data on electoral participation, competition, and party preference. However, their study seems to have been unsuccessful in finding a meaningful correlation between socio-economic and electoral data, except in the case of electoral participation or turnout.

The series of Blair's studies on Bihar focused on the socio-economic basis of elections. For example, he examined ethnicity variables such as caste, religion, and others as explanatory variables for the votes polled by candidate and party, or turnout. He showed that the Muslim population tended to vote for candidates of the same community, and that the more Muslims or SCs, the lower the turnout. This was based on data for the period up to 1972.¹¹ He also examined data of both the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies from 1977 to 1985 in Bihar. This showed a lack of continuity of the support base of major parties between elections, the importance of caste and religion, and the relevance of the

size of landholding as explanatory variables for the support base of party.¹² However, although he frequently applied sophisticated statistical and multivariate analysis, his analysis may not have been successful because of the inadequate specification of formulas and other such matters.

Dikshit considers his studies to belong to the field of “electoral geography.”¹³ His research on the Punjab Legislative Assembly elections for the period before 1980, using the ecological method, provided an interesting analysis of turnout and votes for Congress in relation to the variables of social development, reservation, and linguistic and religious factors. The correlations between electoral data and socio-economic variables are not stable in his studies. This may be due to the peculiar socio-political context of Punjab and the possibility of multi-colinearity among the socio-economic variables.

Other interesting ecological studies are those of Chhibber, who insisted that the increased competitive nature of electoral politics and the decline of the Congress party’s electoral fortunes after 1967 were due to the decreasing loyalty of the Congress party’s supporters that resulted from the generational change of people in the context of socio-economic transformation. According to him, the mobilization of new voters by major parties reached a saturation point by the end of 1960’s. Chhibber indicated that “in national elections after 1971, new voters were not brought into the electorate, but voters were switching allegiances between the Congress and other parties.”¹⁴ In another article on party competition and fragmentation, he showed that the increased competitiveness between parties was not a result of turnout but rather the increased vitality of second parties. He further emphasised the importance of regional context.¹⁵

Kondo used multivariate as well as regression analysis in Lok Sabha elections for the period from 1957 to 1999 to examine correlations between electoral participation namely voter turnout, and number of candidates on the one hand, and socio-economic variables like literacy, agricultural development, and urbanization on the other. Kondo’s analysis was conducted on data including both electoral and socio-economic variables. The two sets of variables were adjusted through proportional distribution so that the geographical boundaries of both categories of data would be consistent with one another. Scrutinizing past studies, analyses were carefully conducted to avoid failure resulting from the “ecological fallacy”. The long-term analysis produced interesting findings including: (1) the positive correlation of development variables such as literacy and agricultural development for the electoral turnout, (2) the significant change of the sign of correlation of urbanization for the turnout from positive to negative, (3) the weak but positive contribution of party competition toward increase in turnout, (4) increasing significance of the State as political unit, and (5) the overall decreasing trend of significance of socio-economic variables as explanatory variables for turnout.

Several important points can be made about these studies:

- a. The magnitude of correlation or the power of explanation of aggregate socio-economic variables is higher when explaining the level of electoral participation, namely, turnout, in comparison to votes polled by parties. The percentage of votes of a party is more difficult to explain using aggregate socio-economic variables. For voters, whether or not to participate in an election seems to be a different psychological process than party preference. The former is more likely to be restricted by macro socio-economic structure, while the latter is not. The psychological process of party selection may be a more individualistic process depending on the socio-economic status of the individual voter, such as caste, ideology or value system. This is very difficult to examine using aggregate data. Analysis based on survey data of individuals seems to show such relations better than analysis based on aggregate data.
- b. Among socio-economic variables, development variables such as literacy or economic development correlate positively with voter’s electoral participation. This is shown by many studies. However, the explanatory power of these variables seems to gradually decrease in the

long term.

- c. Urbanization was positively correlated with turnout before the 1960's. Its explanatory power has gradually decreased and became negative after the 1990's.
- d. "State" as a unit of integrated polity based on common social and cultural traditions has become a significant variable prescribing voting behaviours as a whole, including electoral participation. This is seen in many studies. It is not strange that "State" has becoming more important as an explanatory variable when it is taken into consideration that patterns of social mobilization of the electorate have developed in line with the socio-economic variety and vastness of States. In the era of multi-party system and coalition governments, regional parties, which are closer to the people, have become more important. Their importance in elections is not only for turnout but also for the party-preference also, which is to be mentioned later.

India is a highly heterogeneous and fragmented sub-continental society. It is, therefore, impossible to ignore the problems of social cleavage based on language, caste, religion, class, and other such variables. It is usually very difficult to analyse these problems for ecological studies based on aggregate data. It is probably better to rely on the precise information that individual-based survey or case studies can provide. For example, such information includes data on who votes for which party. Individual-based or case study-based research can effectively check possible ecological fallacies in aggregate data based studies. Individual-based or case study-based research, as a whole, constitutes a rich depository of information on electoral behaviour. It would be very useful to utilise information to make up for the shortcomings of studies based on aggregate data and to check the possibility of ecological fallacy.

In the next section, we would like to examine what the studies of aggregate data can not tell by reviewing studies based on survey data.

3. Studies based on Case Studies and Survey Data

In India, election studies began to grow after independence but did not thrive until the mid-1960's. Of course, several election studies were conducted in the first to third general elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. These include: Kogekar and Park's collection of papers (1952), Poplai's collection of papers (1962), Weiner and Kothari's collection of papers (1965), Pathak, Parekh, and Desai (1966), and others. But these studies were either rather brief analyses, reports of the overall political process, or simple case studies of the elections. In the 1967 general elections, there were several studies of this kind such as Karnik (1967), Shastri (n.d.), Pattabhiram's collection of papers (1967), Varma and Narain's collection of papers (1970), the Indian Council of Social Science Research collection of papers (1972), and others. From the 1967 general elections, the number of studies began to increase, and the quality of analyses got better. Accordingly, more sophisticated studies emerged that were based on survey data using more complex statistical methods.

Excluding journalistic or simple reports, there are still many studies based on surveys of individual voters or case studies of election politics. Those studies include: Atal (1971), Dastur's collection of papers (1972) that was sponsored by the Research Programmes Committee of the Planning Commission with coverage over major parts of the country, Sirsikar (1973), Kini (1974), Eldersveld and Ahmed (1975), Ganguly and Ganguly (1975), Kaushik (1982), Jena and Baral's collection of papers (1989), Mayer (1990), Sission and Roy's collection of papers (1990) including Chhibber and Petrocik (1990), Isaac (1991), Gould and Ganguly's collection of papers (1993), Meyer (1993), Chhibber (1999)¹⁶, Wallace and Roy's collection of papers (2003), Chandra (2004), and others. The main findings of salient studies are summarized below.

Sirsikar studied the Poona Lok Sabha constituency in the 1967 election using a questionnaire survey

of 913 people based on the study of the 1962 Lok Sabha election. His analysis showed following points: (1) the majority exhibited faith in the efficacy of elections and parties, but the higher the educational level of voters, the less faith they had in democracy. This may be partly related to the fact that there may be higher caste people, like Brahmins, in the category of the highly educated. (2) The higher the educational level of voters, the more capable they seemed to be in discriminating between political parties, especially the Congress party. (3) Minority voters, linguistic or religious, tended to support the Congress. (4) The lower the level of education of the family, the higher the influence of the family-head on the voting behaviours of other family members. (5) Influence of candidate, party loyalty, and caste loyalties influence voting. (6) Occupation, income, and age of voters, by and large, do not influence voting behaviours. (7) Concerning the values of the voters, it was found that the values of authoritarianism, national pride, and political stability go together.

Kini studied the election in Nagpur during the 4th General Elections in 1967 using panel data collected from interviews of 281 people. He found various important psychological processes through analysis of the detailed questionnaire. For example, "split-vote", in which the respondent divides his votes into votes for one party to the State Legislative Assembly and another party to the Lok Sabha, was related to image conflict relative to parties. Issues, whether domestic and foreign, were not important for those who voted for Congress. Identification with leadership was significantly related to voting choice. People who were exposed to higher level of party campaign tended to change their original vote intention. Nevertheless, there was remarkable stability in original voting intention. Socio-economic status such as gender, caste, religion, education, and income, were important in explaining political awareness, exposure to political propaganda, political involvement, caste identification, sense of personal effectiveness in politics, and exposure to modernization. Those who were ranked high in political awareness, exposure to campaign propaganda, political involvement, caste identification, sense of personal effectiveness in politics, and exposure to modernization, were more likely to vote for non-Congress parties. In addition, socio-economic status of voters was significantly related to choice of parties. He thus found close relations among the sets of variables of political perceptions, socio-economic status, and party-preference.

Eldersveld and Ahmed's study was based on the nation-wide sample survey of the 1967 and 1971 general elections. They first compared data in India with data in more developed countries. According to their analysis, the Indian voters were as perceptive and interested in political issues and parties in elections as were voters in developed countries. They also found: (1) Political cultures between rural and urban areas were basically continuous, but there were discernable differences between States. (2) Variables of socio-economic status, including education and castes, were important variables for the formation of political perception such as a sense of political efficacy. (3) Those who were more exposed to the campaign, more educated, and who voted regularly, were more interested in politics and more likely to support multi-party democracy with a clearer sense of political efficacy. (4) As in the USA, family was influential in the formation of party identification. (5) Some degree of congruence was found between voters' party-preference on the one hand, and voters' concern for political issues on the other, especially among supporters of the Communist Party and Jangh Sangh. (6) The formation of perceptions toward party was susceptible to voters' party identification, socioeconomic status, exposure to political communication, and psychological orientations toward society. (7) Those that were highly educated or in high castes were less likely to be politically involved and participatory.

Chhibber's models of the Congress party in electoral politics is a coalition of State-level parties that in turn consist of local groups with heterogeneous social bases. Chhibber argues that the Congress appears to be a "catch-all" party of "national consensus" only at the national level. In the State level, the Congress is not a heterogeneous "catch-all" party but a party of representation in a divided society based on caste, religion, class, and other such attributes.¹⁷ After the latter half of the 1960's, it was difficult for the Congress to simultaneously maintain its heterogeneous social base. One of the most

important examples was the case of Uttar Pradesh where the backward castes saw Congress as a party of the forward castes, and the forward castes saw the Congress as a party of the backward castes and dalits. This resulted in the collapse of the Congress system in the state. After the 1970's, the social base of parties in a State got clearer. The important factors that distinguish the social base of a party include caste, religion, and class. Chhibber's analysis of the survey data of the 1991, 1993, and 1996 elections at national and State levels, shows that a respondent's caste was one of the most salient factors in determining voter party preference. In support bases of the Bharatiya Janata Party (=BJP), for example, those who were better educated, rich, in white-collar jobs, in the forward castes, and those who did not want Muslims as neighbours were likely to vote for the BJP. Once other political parties could divide society differently, the Congress party found it difficult to defend its catchall politics. Most likely, this led to the transformation from a catchall to a cleavage-based party system. It was, according to Chhibber, a basic reason for the downward trend of the Congress Party.¹⁸

Chandra, in her detailed study of the electoral politics of the Bahujan Samaj Party (=BSP) in Uttar Pradesh, revealed the mechanism by which the shift to a cleavage-based party system and the politics of patronage might reinforce each other, resulting in the successful growth of the ethnic party through electoral politics. Based on ethnographic research on the BSP and other political parties conducted between 1996 and 1998, mainly in Uttar Pradesh, she showed that in a patronage-based democracy like India, voters expect co-ethnic elites of the party to favour them in the distribution of benefits; elites expect co-ethnic voters to favour them in the distribution of votes under the condition of limited information and ethnic favouritism. This is a self-enforcing and reinforcing equilibrium. She insists that if strategic SC voters are sure their party will win on the basis of "ethnic head counting",¹⁹ namely, the counting of expected votes for BSP due to the same ethnic attribute, they vote for the party en masse to maximise their payoff in the form of favouritism. Her study has contributed to better understanding of the successful emergence of the BSP in Uttar Pradesh. However, it seems to be difficult to apply her theory to States other than Uttar Pradesh because of the different political and social situations.

These studies, as a whole, are valuable in revealing various factors influencing voting behaviour in the electorate. They include socio-economic status like education, caste, occupation, and class, value systems, and other important characteristics of voters, as well as issues in the elections, ideological positions and strategies of mobilization on the part of parties. Scholars like Chhibber and Chandra have shown the direction in which the party system may go. Chhibber has revealed the transformation of a catchall party system centering on the Congress party to a cleavage-based party system, while Chandra has empirically and theoretically revealed the process of growth in an ethnic party in the context of cleavage-based patronage politics. The analyses of the two scholars are consistent with one another and succeed in showing the mechanism through which the present multi-party system has emerged. But the scope and time-span for most of these studies are primarily limited to a few States or areas and cover a relatively short period. What is needed in order to understand the basic and long-term undercurrent in Indian politics is a database covering major parts of India over long periods of time. In this respect, the series of surveys by the Centre for Studies of Developing Societies (=CSDS) are important in terms of coverage, consistency, and continuity.

A large-scale sample survey of electorate by the CSDS was started in the critical general election in 1967. Sheth's collection of papers (1975) reported analyses of the 1967 election and the State Assembly elections of four States conducted in 1969. Since then, CSDS has been conducting election surveys every major election, not only Lok Sabha, but also State Assembly elections.²⁰ It has also published insightful articles and reports based on the surveys.²¹ The series of surveys and analyses by the CSDS has revealed various important facts through which the direction of the transformation of people's political perceptions can be understood. Among them, Information compiled in the series of surveys concerning the long-term transformation of the support bases of major parties is very important for determining to what extent and how the Upper caste, Other Backward Classes (OBCs), SCs, STs,

Muslims, Christians, the rich, the poor, the illiterate, the educated, and other groups have shifted their support from the Congress party to other parties in the four decades and assessing in which social stratus the BJP increased its support.

The quantitative information answering these questions cannot be found in other studies based on a specific survey. The series of surveys by the CSDS are valuable because of the continuity and consistency of methods and contents applied in the surveys. For example, the series shows that one of the major changes resulting in long-term erosion of the support base of the Congress party is the shift of allegiance of the OBCs from Congress to other parties, including the BJP.²² It also shows that although the situation is different depending upon time and place, castes and religions of voters are probably the most important determinants of party support. Economic status is less important compared to these ethnic attributes. Other social attributes such as level of education are not significant in explaining voter party preferences.²³ Tables 2 and 3 are examples of the tabulation of the recent Lok Sabha election in 2004, and they give basic information as to which stratum of people support which party. Although aggregate data can be used to make an estimation of the percentage of a particular stratum supporting a particular party,²⁴ the accuracy of the estimation is less when compared to estimations made on the basis of survey data.

Table 2. All-India Vote for Major Political Formations by Caste/Community, 2004

| Caste/Community | UPA | Congress | Congress Allies | NDA | BJP | BJP Allies | Left | BSP | SP | N |
|---------------------|-----|----------|-----------------|-----|-----|------------|------|-----|-----|-------|
| Upper caste | 24 | 21 | 3 | 56 | 43 | 13 | 9 | 1 | 3 | 3552 |
| Peasant proprietors | 37 | 23 | 14 | 47 | 25 | 22 | 4 | 1 | 3 | 1907 |
| Upper OBC | 36 | 23 | 13 | 39 | 21 | 18 | 4 | 3 | 8 | 4516 |
| Lower OBC | 36 | 23 | 13 | 39 | 23 | 16 | 10 | 3 | 4 | 3602 |
| Dalit | 37 | 28 | 9 | 23 | 12 | 11 | 10 | 21 | 3 | 3632 |
| Adivasi | 42 | 35 | 7 | 33 | 26 | 7 | 8 | Neg | Neg | 1697 |
| Muslim | 53 | 37 | 16 | 11 | 7 | 4 | 7 | 3 | 16 | 2227 |
| Sikh | 26 | 25 | 1 | 47 | 18 | 29 | 8 | 5 | 3 | 559 |
| Christian | 54 | 39 | 15 | 21 | 6 | 15 | 11 | 1 | - | 767 |
| Others | 27 | 22 | 5 | 30 | 16 | 14 | 23 | 3 | 1 | 113 |
| Total | 36 | 26 | 10 | 36 | 22 | 14 | 8 | 5 | 5 | 22567 |

Note: 1. 'Neg'. Less than 1.

2. "OBC"=Other Backward Classes, "UPA"=United Progressive Alliance, "NDA"=National Democratic Alliance, "SP"=Samajwadi Party

Source: Yogendra (2004), p. 5390.

Table 3. All-India Vote for Major Political Formations by Class, 2004

| | UPA | Congress | Congress Allies | NDA | BJP | BJP Allies | Left | BSP | SP | N |
|--------------|-----|----------|-----------------|-----|-----|------------|------|-----|----|-------|
| Upper middle | 33 | 26 | 7 | 42 | 31 | 12 | 7 | 3 | 4 | 3630 |
| Lower middle | 36 | 28 | 8 | 38 | 25 | 13 | 8 | 4 | 4 | 4334 |
| Poor | 38 | 27 | 11 | 36 | 22 | 14 | 7 | 5 | 6 | 7783 |
| Very poor | 38 | 25 | 13 | 31 | 16 | 15 | 9 | 8 | 5 | 6803 |
| Total | 36 | 26 | 10 | 36 | 22 | 14 | 8 | 5 | 5 | 22550 |

Note: 1. "UPA"=United Progressive Alliance, "NDA"=National Democratic Alliance, "SP"=Samajwadi Party

Source: Yadav (2004), p. 5391

Data compiled by the CSDS are basic materials for constructing India-specific voting behaviour models or for examining the psychological models of voting behaviours developed in United States and other developed nations. In addition, the analysis of the data may, in the future, contribute to the development of the theory of voting behaviours of developing countries with multi-faceted cleavage like castes, religions, and classes. India's heterogeneity and societal complexity may be a rich repository of information waiting to be tapped in order to construct a more generalised theory of voting behaviours.

Finally, there is another valuable source of information on voting behaviour of individuals, that is, the public opinion surveys.

Some institutions, like the Indian Institute of Public Opinion, conducted opinion surveys on the

general election with large-scale sampling,²⁵ but such surveys grew in the 1980's in line with the development of mass media. Especially noteworthy was the dramatic evolution resulting in the Lok Sabha general election after the assassination of Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi in 1984. This made the election a drama to be shown in front of the people. Some attempts at forecasting election results were conducted by a few journals, and some opinion surveys were also conducted. Although such surveys might not strictly follow systematic sampling procedures, the huge number of samples and extensive geographic coverage made them attractive for understanding "quantitatively" the perception of the people. Table 4 for example, shows answers to the question "What are the Most Important Issues Facing the Country?" *India Today* has continuously conducted this poll in every major election up to the present time. The table shows that except for extraordinary elections like those in December 1984 or December 1992, the most important issues for people are those concerning daily lives, like "prices" or "unemployment". The opinion poll conducted in December 1984 just after the assassination of Mrs. Indira Gandhi and the massacre of Sikhs reflected an extraordinary mood of the people. The survey in December 1992 was also a reflection of the tense mood on the part of people just after the demolition of the Babri Masjid and a large-scale communal riot. It is evident that except for these extraordinary cases, the issues of most concern to people are those related to their daily lives. In this manner, consecutive surveys provide information on quantitative changes in the perception of the people, and this is useful for understanding the basic undercurrents in the politics of the masses.

Main points of the studies based on the survey of individuals are as follows:

- a. Most studies which examined the confidence of people in the election system or the efficacy as citizens showed that people had faith in the election system.
- b. Socio-economic status like gender, caste, religion, education, and income were important in explaining political awareness, exposure to political propaganda, sense of personal effectiveness in politics, and party preference.
- c. Caste, religion, and to a lesser degree, economic status, are especially important variables for explaining party preference.
- d. According to studies before the 1970's, issues were not so important for those who voted for Congress. Identification with leadership was significantly related to voting for the Congress party. Linguistic or religious minority voters tend to support the Congress. The long-term shift of allegiance of the OBCs from the Congress party is one of the main reasons for the long-term decline of the Congress party.
- e. Long-term transformation of the party system has been from the Congress-centric catchall party system, that is, a one-party dominant system, to a cleavage-based party system based on the ethnic situation of each State.
- f. Opinion polls of large-scale samples conducted after the 1980's are important indicators of overall popular issues and sentiments. The most important issues of the electorate are those related daily lives of people such as rising prices or unemployment. These are undercurrents affecting the party preference of people.

Table 4. People's Perceptions of Important Issues at the Time of Lok Sabha Elections and Other Events of National Importance after the 1980s: *India Today's* Opinion Polls

| Survey Period and Number of Samples | Respondent Distribution (%) | | | | | |
|--|-----------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Question: Most Important Issues Facing Country? | | | | | | |
| December 7-14, 1984 (N=11297) | Unity | Inflation | Corruption | Regional Autonomy | | |
| | 47 | 30 | 18 | 5 | | |
| August 1987 (Details of Sampling not Available) | Corruption | Prices | Communalism | Law and Order | | |
| | 36 | 32 | 23 | 9 | | |
| February 1988 (N=10338, Villagers: 72.5%) | Prices | Corruption | Communalism | Law and Order | | |
| | 48 | 34 | 12 | 6 | | |
| August 2-7, 1988 (N=13166) | Prices | Corruption | Communalism | Law and Order | | |
| | 46 | 35 | 14 | 5 | | |
| Jan. 25 to Feb. 1, 1989 (N=10929) | Prices | Corruption | Communalism | Law and Order | | |
| | 46 | 32 | 16 | 6 | | |
| Question: Two Major Issues Facing Next Government? | | | | | | |
| November 22-27, 1989 * (N=77107) | Inflation | Corruption | Communal Harmony | Panchayati Raj | | |
| | 37 | 33 | 21 | 9 | | |
| Question: Most Important Problems Facing Country? | | | | | | |
| August 8-16, 1990 (N=10239) | Prices | Corruption | Terrorism | Communalism | | |
| | 54 | 22 | 13 | 11 | | |
| May 7-10, 1991 ** (N=20312, Villagers: 70.6%) | Prices | Political Instability | Ayodhya | Reservation | No Opinion | |
| | 47 | 16 | 15 | 15 | 12 | |
| April 2-8, 1992 (N= 8627) | Inflation | Corruption | Terrorism | Communalism | | |
| | 53 | 23 | 13 | 11 | | |
| Question: Most Important Problems in the Next Lok Sabha Election? | | | | | | |
| December 17-23, 1992 (N=12592) | Ayodhya | Inflation | Unemployment | Corruption | Other | |
| | 44 | 25 | 13 | 6 | 9 | |
| Question: Most Important Problems Facing Country? | | | | | | |
| July 14-20, 1993 (N=11172) | Inflation | Corruption | Law and Order | Ayodhya | Other | |
| | 37 | 23 | 16 | 14 | 10 | |
| Question: What Is the Most Important Issue that Concerns You Today? | | | | | | |
| March 27-31, 1996 (N=12810) | Poverty & Unemployment | Corruption | Prices | Political Stability | Communal Harmony | Kashmir Problem |
| | 36 | 27 | 25 | 5 | 4 | 3 |
| Question: Most Important Issues to be Tackled? | | | | | | |
| June 6-9, 1996 (N=12777) | Poverty | Employment | Corruption | Unity of Country | Law and Order | Economic Reform |
| | 42 | 22 | 16 | 9 | 6 | 5 |
| Question: Most Important Problems Facing Country? | | | | | | |
| February 4-8, 1998 (N=8938) | Basic Needs | Corruption | Instability | Violence | | |
| | 42 | 14 | 13 | 12 | | |
| Question: Which issues concern you the most? | | | | | | |
| July 26 – August 5, 2004 (N=17885) | Unemployment | Rising Prices | Corruption | Law & Order | Stability | Security |
| | 42 | 31 | 10 | 5 | 4 | 3 |

Sources: *India Today*, December 31, 1984 / February 29, 1988 / August 31, 1988 / February 28, 1989 / December 15, 1989 / September 15, 1990 / May 31, 1991 / April 30, 1992 / January 15, 1993 / August 15, 1993 / April 30, 1996 / June 30, 1996. / February 23, 1998 / August 30, 2004.

Notes:

- 1) The surveys were conducted by *India Today* and the Market and Research Group, except for the last survey of February 4-8, 1998 which was conducted by *India Today* and the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies.
- 2) * The survey of November 22-27, 1989 was an exit poll.
- 3) ** Before the Rajiv Gandhi assassination.

4. Studies Related to the Elections

Almost all the studies of politics in India after Independence seem to touch upon the elections. Of course, all studies cannot be reviewed. However, in this section, some characteristic studies that analyse Indian politics on the basis of electoral data will be examined.

The first category of studies is closely linked with election studies and concerns social mobilization. Elections are the most important channel through which a social group can project their representative or interests to higher political stages. There are several comprehensive studies that have accumulated data related to the social origins of legislators. These include research by Jaffrelot (2003) and Jayal (2006). These studies show what kinds of people come out in the legislatures and from which party. The rise of the lower and middle stratum of castes and classes has always been a significant factor in

major political change. The transformation of the social stratum in the legislature may be good indicator of such change. On the basis of compiled information, Jaffrelot characterised the rise of the lower castes of North India as a kind of late “Sanskritisation”.

In the rise of the lower castes or strata, the Indian election system has a special channel in the form of a reservation of seats for weaker sections, that is, SCs and STs. All levels of elections including Lok Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies, Panchayats, and municipalities, have reserved seats according to the percentage of the population of these groups. Further, some States have reservations for OBCs, and in the Panchayat and municipality level elections, seats are reserved for women as well. The voices of weaker sections have been expected to come out into public space through the reservation systems.

The reservation system has given greater opportunity to the SCs and STs populations. They have actually occupied the reserved seats but have not gone beyond the reserved seats. It is still rare for the SCs/STs candidates to be elected to general seats. It is also said that legislators from reserved seats tend to be relatively passive, playing a limited role in the legislatures, debates, or committees.²⁶ It may also be true that reserved seats and the struggle to take the positions in them have precipitated political competition among people in corresponding strata, and this has resulted in a higher political consciousness among these groups. Such a process seems to be especially important in the case of STs. These points are discussed in the collection of papers edited by Lama-Rewal (2005). Concerning the degree of political passivity in terms of turnout of SCs and STs, analysis made by McMillan (2005), based on the CSDS data, shows a distinct tendency for lower turnout among STs in the early period. It also shows the importance of reserved seats that are likely to change voting behaviours of the people in comparison with the general seats.

Other social strata, which draw attention, are OBCs and women. The reservation for OBCs in admission to central services and public undertakings under the central government started in 1993. But there is no reservation for OBCs in the election of Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. At the Panchayat or municipality level, many States have reserved seats for OBCs. Thus, there is no study of the reservation of Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies for OBCs simply because there is no reservation for them. Institutions of reservation for women are in the Panchayat and municipality levels but not in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. In a conservative society like India, political awakening of women is an important issue for social modernization. As the study by Shukla (1988) reveals, in many cases women are most likely to follow the male member of the family. Education seems to make women behave more independently. Education is the one of the most important factors for establishing self-reliance among women. But there is the idea that in order to accelerate the political awakening among women, there should be a special institute for female political participation, that is, a reservation for women. At present, the debate is going on in the Parliament as to how to implement a reservation system for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies.

Another category of studies involves the investigation of the relation between elections and conflict or violence. As mentioned, elections of the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies are considered to be pacesetters, not only for electoral politics but also India’s overall political process. There is some evidence that electoral politics precipitate violence and conflict. The most conspicuous example is communal violence. According to Varshney (2002), Hindu-Muslim violence is primarily an urban phenomenon, and within urban India too, Hindu-Muslim riots are for the most part, locally concentrated. He insists that the structure of civil society, or the pattern of the network of social association, is very important in determining whether a small communal conflict is limited to a small circle or spread extensively and rapidly. If the social association of the people is structured with an *intra-ethnic* line, that is, if ethnic groups are highly segregated, the possibility of extensive spread of communal violence will be high. If, on the contrary, the *inter-ethnic* linkage is strong, the possibility will be much lower. He argues that the key determinant for peace is *inter-communal* civic life, not civic life per se.

Whether or not the scale of communal violence is related to the structure of civil society, there seems to be a certain relation between electoral mobilisation of religious sentiment by Hindu nationalist parties and the incidence of communal violence, and this appears to create a synchronization of election and communal violence to some extent. According to Wilkinson (2004), there is statistical evidence for a correlation between electoral incentives and communal riots, and he recognises a pivotal role for the leadership of State government in controlling such communal riots.

Finally, elections as pacesetters may have periodical influence in other areas. One of the most relevant may be economic policy. Elections, which reveal the cumulative preference of people, may affect economic policy. Thus, there can be an election-budget cycle in India also. Lalvani (1999) found the political budget cycle in the government's budget formation, namely, in allocation of subsidies, developmental expenditures on capital account, and other such matters. However, in view of his study, economic variables beyond those based on the budget do not seem to easily follow the political budget cycle model.

III. Conclusion

As studies of aggregate data reveal, in spite of the decreasing importance of the effect of urbanisation, the level of electoral participation has been increasing with socio-economic development. Such a pattern of increase is in line with the particular socio-political situation of each State. Some studies based on the survey of individuals show the basic faith of the electorate in the election system. Thus, the increasing electorate reflects confidence in electoral politics. It can be said that, though there are several defects, the electorate has fundamental faith in the electoral system. It is important that such fundamental faith in the core of the democratic regime, namely the election system, has been maintained for five decades, despite several political crises.

As the popularity of the once dominant Congress party has gradually decreased, the peculiar pattern of party preference of each State in line with the particular socio-political situation, especially castes, religions, backwardness, and others, has come to the surface. As a result, there has been a clear differentiation of the party system since the 1980's, and the era of multi-party systems and coalition governments has come. Many parties have grown based on particular ethnic groups such as castes and religion. But such increase and strengthening of regional parties based on some particular ethnic group has not necessarily exposed the problem of national integration because of the aforementioned basic faith in the democratic regime.

Many ethnicity-based parties are also likely to be patronage-based parties. In a very heterogeneous country like India, a party may be based on some specific ethnic groups, but it also must articulate and integrate other ethnicities in order to grow. In order to articulate and integrate other ethnicities, one effective strategy is to take moderate policy and distribute patronage or interests to other ethnic groups. Conversely, if an ethnicity-based party takes a radical and disintegrative policy with no patronage to be distributed, it cannot attract the support of other ethnicities.

Thus, the electoral process in a heterogeneous country has two effects on the party system: (1) differentiation on the basis of a particular ethnic as well as a socio-economic situation and (2) an integrative effect. These two effects interact with each other at the State level, and this leads to the fluctuating but basically stable party system in the State.

Finally, I would like to mention a few agendas of the future election studies.

In view of the quantity and quality of election studies in India, it may be said that relative to other developing countries, India is advancing. But compared to studies in developed countries, there is still much to be done. A systematic accumulation of data for individual voting behaviours seems to be

necessary. CSDS has been conducting surveys continuously, and this may be a rich repository for studies of voting behaviours. However, the raw data are not open to all scholars, and the framework of questionnaires is not, of course, perfect.

India has a nearly complete aggregate data set in terms of the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies elections. Many scholars have successfully used the Lok Sabha data, basically because the sample size is less and therefore manageable. Data of the State Legislative Assemblies elections have not yet been used to their fullest extent. There is a possibility that a study based on the data of the State Legislative Assemblies elections may give more sophisticated and accurate estimations of voting behaviours because the size of the unit of data is much smaller than that of the Lok Sabha constituency data, and correspondence between the election data and data of socio-economic attributes is thus much clearer.

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- ¹ At the national level there is also Rajya Sabha which is the upper house of parliament. Its main character is as a representative of the States. The Legislative Assembly of State is the lower house of the State legislature. Some big States, like Uttar Pradesh, have an upper house called the Legislative Council.
 - ² See, "Part IX The Panchayat", Constitution of India.
 - ³ See, "Part IX-A The Municipalities", Constitution of India.
 - ⁴ There is an exception. Jharkhand State, which was separated from Bihar in 2000, has not yet established the Panchayati Raj System because of the improper provision of the Jharkhand Panchayati Raj Act, 2001. This case is in the Supreme Court.
 - ⁵ Even before 1971, on some occasions such as the premature fall of the State Government or dissolution of the State Legislative Assembly, an election to the Legislative Assembly had to be conducted before the general election of the Lok Sabha. Elections on both levels are separate from the 1971 midterm Lok Sabha election. Perhaps Prime Minister Indira Gandhi wanted to "delink" the local and parochial issues from the Lok Sabha election. See Tameri (1971), p. 71.
 - ⁶ The Other Backward Classes are those who are socially and educationally backward, similar to SCs and STs, but who do not have the social stigma of untouchability, segregation, or alienation.
 - ⁷ See, Jhingta (1996).
 - ⁸ See, Alexander (1989) for the case of Kerala.
 - ⁹ See, Lyngdoh (2004).
 - ¹⁰ See, <http://www.eci.gov.in/ARCHIVE>
 - ¹¹ Blair (1979)
 - ¹² Blair (1990)
 - ¹³ Concerning the concept of "Electoral Geography," see, Shelley and Taylor (1990).
 - ¹⁴ Chhibber (1999), p.112.
 - ¹⁵ Chhibber and Nooruddin (1999), p. 53.
 - ¹⁶ Chhibber (1999), Chapter 5 "Building Coalitions in the Indian States."
 - ¹⁷ Chhibber and Petrocik (1990), p.115-116.
 - ¹⁸ Chhibber (1999), p. 183
 - ¹⁹ Chandra (2004), pp. 82-98
 - ²⁰ Although the CSDS database seems to be very useful for understanding precise individual behaviours, the individual-level raw data are not available to ordinary researchers.
 - ²¹ See, for example, Singh (1997) and articles by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (1999) team in the *Economic and Political Weekly* and *Frontline*.
 - ²² Singh (1997), p. 63.
 - ²³ See, for example, Heath (1999).
 - ²⁴ The method developed by Gary King (King, 1997) seems to be very useful. Application of his method to India's aggregate data seems to be worthwhile.
 - ²⁵ See, for example, Indian Institute of Public Opinion (1971) and Indian Institute of Public Opinion (1996).
 - ²⁶ See, Galanter (1979).

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