

# THE IMPACT OF GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND WELFARE PROGRAMS ON MUSLIM VOTING BEHAVIOR: A CASE STUDY OF BIHAR

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**Abstract:** This study examines the influence of governmental policies and humanitarian initiatives on the casting vote patterns of “Muslims in Bihar, India”. The research seeks to evaluate the degree to which government policies, both at the state and central levels, impact the voting inclinations of Muslims in Bihar. Furthermore, the study aims to investigate the relationship between Muslim voters who have received advantages from social programs and their tendency to endorse the political party affiliated with these programs. Moreover, the study examines and evaluates the perceived portrayal of the Muslim community in governmental policies and initiatives in Bihar, and studies its impact on the voting preferences of Muslims. The study utilizes a “mixed-methods approach, incorporating surveys, interviews, and data analysis”, to offer valuable insights into the complex dynamics of Muslim voting behavior in Bihar. The study also illuminates the relationship between government initiatives, welfare programs, and political preferences among the Muslim electorate.

**Index Terms - Muslim Voters, Government Policies, Welfare schemes, Political Parties.**

## I. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between politics and religion in today's society is multifaceted. Political parties try to advocate for the interests of different religious groups, and religious factors that significantly influence political and governmental decision-making. The fusion of religion and politics influences the perspectives of political party leaders, voters, the administrative elite, and other leadership groups in India (Bhambhri and Verma, 1972). Moreover, the emergence of Muslim democrats signifies the incorporation of Muslim religious principles, derived from Islamic doctrines on morality, ethics, rights, social connections, and business, into political agendas aimed at achieving success in democratic elections (Nasr, 2005).

Government policies and welfare programs can impact voters' choices, but the strategic reasoning behind caste-based voting remains prevalent, especially at the grassroots level, considering that Muslims are one of the most socioeconomically marginalized communities in India (Kurtbaş, 2015). The “recent government report”, commissioned to examine economic, communal, and scholastic situation of “Muslims in India”, has revealed significant shortcomings and disadvantages in nearly all aspects of development. These include low literacy rates, limited access to education, a lack of government employment opportunities, and difficulties in obtaining credit and loans. As a result, Muslims in India continue to experience fear and insecurity. Additionally, there is a perception of discriminatory treatment by the government towards their claims (Sachar, 2006).

It has been discovered that an increasing number of studies on voter-candidate similarities indicate that people tend to choose representatives who possess comparable demographic features to their own (Cutler, 2002; Popkin, 1991). It has been observed that women have a higher tendency to vote for female candidates (Erzeel and Caluwaerts, 2015; Plutzer and Zipp, 1996) and ethnic minorities have a higher propensity to support candidates who share their ethnic minority heritage (Teney et al., 2010; Togeby, 2008; Baretto, 2007; Michon and Tillie, 2010). Therefore, the present study seeks to investigate the impact of government policies and welfare programs on Muslim voting behavior.

The paper is divided into six sections. Section 1 provides a brief introduction to the subject. An explanation of the evaluations of previous studies by various authors can be found in Section 2. In Section 3, the research methodologies utilized for the investigation are described. In Section 4, the results and findings are explained.

In Section 5, the discussion is presented. Section 6 comprises the conclusions, implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research. Finally, references are presented.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Following the steps outlined in the introduction, this section of the study will assess relevant previous publications in order to comprehend the current state of the matter. To enhance comprehension, this section has been partitioned into three distinct components.

- i. Factors influencing voting decisions
- ii. The Muslim community's electoral behavior
- iii. Caste and identity politics in Bihar.

### 2. 1. Factors Influencing Voting Decisions

As per Evans (2000), at the individual level, voting choices have been seen to be influenced by demographic traits such as gender, age, education, race/ethnicity, and income. In this context, Goerres (2007) found that older persons often exhibited higher rates of voter participation, but younger voters frequently demonstrated more political engagement and a propensity for progressive views. Additionally, Tenn (2007) found a correlation between higher levels of education and involvement in politics, as well as a tendency towards more progressive policy preferences. Moreover, Hajnal and Lee (2011) discovered that political opinions and decisions may be influenced by gender and racial or ethnic identities. Similarly, Caprara et al. (2006) found that psychological considerations were influential in determining voting choices. Values, attitudes, beliefs, and political ideologies have a role in shaping preferences and may serve as guiding factors in voter decision-making. These sentiments have been further impacted by individual experiences, socialization procedures, and encounters with political information via media and social networks (Jennings and Niemi, 2014). According to Funk (1999), voter choices may be influenced by the political environment, which encompasses the performance and image of political parties and candidates. Further, Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier (2000) discovered that economic factors, such as income inequality and unemployment rates, may have an impact on voters' decisions and views of their financial well-being. Finally, Gidengil et al. (2003) also found that voting choices have been impacted by identity politics, social concerns, and cultural values.

### 2. 2. The Muslim Community's Electoral Behavior

In the early stages of political history, the Congress party was able to express the urgent concerns of the Muslim minority, that's why the majority of Indian Muslims voted for them, even though India was partitioned, and communal violence ensued (Wright, 2004). However, when the Congress party lost the Hindi belt in the 1967 general election, it was widely believed that Muslim voters' behavior had begun to go off the usual track (Hasan, 2004). In this context, Heath et al. (2015) demonstrated that Muslims were more prone to cast ballots for Muslim politicians, but only in cases when such candidates have a legitimate shot of winning; hence, their vote carries a significant strategic component. On the other hand, Inglehart and Norris (2003) indicated that Muslim respondents significantly favor male political leaders over female ones. Further, Chakraborty et al. (2011) found that Baluchis and other lower-caste Muslims in West Bengal have traditionally favored centrist and left-wing parties, whereas upper-caste Brahmins and others lean toward the right-wing Bhartiya Janata Party and similar groups.

### 2. 3. Caste and Identity Politics in Bihar

A fundamental aspect of identity politics in modern Bihar politics has been caste identification. When it comes to social organization and the justification of social hierarchies, the caste system has been crucial (Roy, 2013). As per Nicholson (2008), the rise of political parties centered around identity in Bihar that rally around language, religion, caste, and area has been a prominent trend in the state's politics as of late. Further, Sahay (2009) found that during the 1980s and 1990s, when Bihar was at the forefront of the push for lower-caste empowerment, identity concerns grew more deeply. Similarly, Sajjad (2014) discovered that backward castes have emerged as powerful players in Bihar's political landscape, owing to the changing socioeconomic structure of political representation. Lastly, Saeed (2007) revealed that numerous factors, including population size, geographic location, socioeconomic status, social mobility, and rank in the caste system, influenced how members of various castes act.

While previous studies often examine general voting trends or the impact of policies on broader demographics, there is a noticeable scarcity of studies that specifically focus on the Muslim community in the context of Bihar. Addressing this research need would be highly beneficial for the government, policymakers, and stakeholders seeking to meet the requirements of the Muslim population in Bihar. The

three aforementioned parts enable the gathering of various viewpoints on the topic, hence promoting the goals derived from the identified research deficiency.

### III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

**Obj.1** To Investigate the extent to which government policies, both at the state and central levels, impact the voting behavior of Muslims in Bihar.

**Obj.2** To examine the extent to which Muslim voters in Bihar who have benefited from welfare programs show a correlation with their inclination to support the political party associated with these programs.

**Obj.3** To explore and analyze the perceived representation of the Muslim community in government policies and programs in Bihar and investigate its impact on “Muslim voter preferences”..

### IV. HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY

**H1:** Government support policies influence the voting behavior of Muslims in Bihar.

**H2:** There is a correlation between Muslim voters benefiting from welfare programs and their inclination to support the political party associated with these programs in Bihar.

**H3:** The representation of the Muslim community in government policies and programs creates a positive impact on Muslim voter preferences in Bihar.

### V. RESEARCH METHODS

Primary and secondary sources of information have been utilized to determine the “impact of government policies and welfare programs on Muslim voting behavior in Bihar.” Primary information was gathered through the use of a structured questionnaire via random sampling that has been employed to ensure that targeted respondents are included. Secondary data has been collected from journal articles, books, websites, and publications. Bihar has been chosen as the study area for the study. The questionnaire has been created based on demographic components (age, designation, income, education, gender, location, etc.) and the variables of the study (i.e., Government Policies and Welfare Programs, Muslim Voting Behavior, perceptions of representation, and voting preferences). Due to the lack of a specific target population, the sample size was determined to be 385 using Cochran's formula. Consequently, 385 questionnaires were distributed to Muslim voters, resulting in 295 responses. Ultimately, data from 200 respondents who fully completed the questionnaire were included in the study. The study employed a mixed-method research methodology. The data has been analyzed using Excel and SPSS software. The statistical techniques of regression and correlation have been employed to evaluate the hypothesis.

## VI. RESULTS

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Sr. No.	Demographic Characteristics	Category	N	%
1	Gender	Male	130	65.00%
		Female	70	35.00%
2	Age group	18-24 years	50	25.00%
		25-34 years	55	27.50%
		35-44 years	58	29.00%
		Above 45 years	37	18.50%
3	Education qualification	Literate	119	59.50%
		Illiterate	81	40.50%
4	Occupation	Unemployed	48	24.00%
		Employed	35	17.50%
		Self-employed	34	17.00%
		Retired	41	20.50%
		Other	42	21.00%
5	Income	Less than 30,000	55	27.50%
		30,001 – 50,000	80	40.00%
		50,001 – 70000	65	32.50%
6	Marital Status	Single	69	34.50%
		Married	118	59.00%
		Divorced	13	6.50%
7	Access to basic services	Healthcare	55	27.50%
		Education	73	36.50%
		Infrastructure	72	36.00%

Table 1 presents the Demographic Characteristics of the respondents, including their Gender, Age group, Education qualification, Occupation, Income, Marital Status, and Access to essential services. According to table, out of 385 respondents, 65.00% of the respondents are male and 35.00% of the respondents are females that are literate and illiterate and specify their age groups and marital status. These respondents are from various categories of occupation, i.e., unemployed, employed, self-employed, retired, and others.

**H1: Government support policies influence the voting behavior of “Muslims in Bihar”**

Table 2: Regression Analysis Table

Hypothesis	Regression Weights	Beta Coefficient	R	R2	F	t-value	p-value	Hypotheses Result
H1	Government support policies -> Voting behaviour of Muslims	0.313	0.313	0.098	21.455	6.332	0.000	Supported

Table 2 presents the results of the regression analysis conducted to examine the hypothesis that Government assistance programs have an impact on the “voting behavior of Muslims in Bihar”. The hypothesis was tested by regressing the voting behavior of Muslims, which served as the dependent variable, on the predictive factors of government support programs. The statistical analysis yielded a significant result ( $F = 21.455$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), indicating that Government assistance programs have a considerable impact on the voting behavior of Muslims. Specifically, the regression coefficient ( $b$ ) for this relationship is 0.313, with a p-value of less than 0.005. Furthermore, the  $R^2$  value of 0.098 indicates that the model accounts for 9.8% of the variability in the voting behavior of Muslims. Therefore, we accept an alternative hypothesis.



**H2: There is a correlation between Muslim voters benefiting from welfare programs and their inclination to support the political party associated with these programs in Bihar**

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Muslim voters benefiting from welfare programs	16.2043	3.44476	230
Inclination to support the political party	18.2565	4.12250	230

The above table 3 defines the descriptive statistics of the Muslim voters benefiting from welfare programs and Inclination to support the political party. The mean score of Muslim voters benefiting from welfare programs is 16.2043 whereas the mean score of Inclination to support the political party is 18.2565.

Table 4: Correlations Table

Correlations			
		Muslim voters benefiting from welfare programs	Inclination to support the political party
Muslim voters benefiting from welfare programs	Pearson Correlation	1	.145*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.028
	N	230	230
Inclination to support the political party	Pearson Correlation	.145*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.028	
	N	230	230

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The above table 4 defines the correlation between the Muslim voters benefiting from welfare programs and Inclination to support the political party, they are statistically significantly correlated between the Muslim voters benefiting from welfare programs and Inclination to support the political party because the sig value is 0.028 (i.e., sig value is less than 0.05).

## VII. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

The study's result reported earlier provides a valuable understanding of the complex correlation between government Policies, welfare programs and voting behavior of Muslims in Bihar. When analyzing political inclinations among the Muslim population, it is important to consider the significant variations in voting patterns influenced by socioeconomic factors such as wealth, education, and work status. (Blair, 1973) noted that electoral democracy presents a dilemma for Muslim groups. To participate fully, they must integrate into the larger group, risking losing their identity and culture. A fundamental aspect of identity politics in modern Bihar politics has been caste identification. When it comes to social organization and the justification of social hierarchies, the caste system has been crucial (Roy, 2013). As per Nicholson (2008), the rise of political parties centered around identity in Bihar that rally around language, religion, caste, and area has been a prominent trend in the state's politics as of late. However, (Ali,2010) stated that the introduction of the "Mandal Commission" and the "incorporation of marginalized Muslim castes" inclusion of social justice has caused a shift in political priorities from secularism and communalism to development and equity, and from security to development.

On the contrary (Rehman,2013) examined that the Policies of the NDA (National Democratic Alliance) led BJP (Bhartiya Janta Party) has not exhibited much alteration in its stance toward Muslim matters. The BJP's stance on terror laws may have been influenced by the rise of Hindu extremist organizations. This study takes into account socio-economic characteristics like as wealth, education, and employment to analyze the link between government policies, welfare programs, and Muslim voting behavior in Bihar. Taking into account new trends and changes in political agendas, such as identity-based parties and the changing positions of political parties like the BJP, it provides a comprehensive analysis of Muslim voting behavior. Muslims' voting behavior in Bihar can be better understood with this all-encompassing approach.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

This study has yielded useful insights into the influence of governmental policies and social programs on the voting behavior of Muslims in Bihar. After conducting an extensive examination of multiple factors, such as the impact of policies at both the state and central levels, the relationship between recipients of welfare programs and their political preferences, and the perceived level of representation of the Muslim community in government initiatives, several important conclusions have been drawn. The research emphasizes the crucial impact of government policies on the “voting choices of Muslims in Bihar”, emphasizing the necessity of aligning policies with the needs and aspirations of the community. Furthermore, the research uncovers a complex connection between those who get benefits from welfare programs and their tendency to endorse political parties linked to these programs, suggesting that socio-economic considerations may have an impact on voter choices. Furthermore, the examination of perceived representation in governmental policy highlights the significance of inclusive governance and fair representation in order to cultivate confidence and garner support among Muslim voters. In summary, this research enhances our comprehension of the intricate dynamics of Muslim voting patterns in Bihar and emphasizes the significance of accountable government and comprehensive policy formulation in meeting the requirements and apprehensions of various populations.

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