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POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF INDIAN RURAL ELECTORATES WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO MADURAI DISTRICT OF TAMILNADU STATE

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Abstract

There are a great variety of factors that influence the individual's political participation. To define these factors and investigate in what way they affect the individual's possibility to participate is of great importance. In a more abstract way, then purpose of this research is to increase the understanding of factors that influence the individual's possibility to political participation. The research question is: in what way do the individual's levels of socioeconomic resources influence his/her political participation in contemporary Tamilnadu? When discussing socioeconomic resources the researcher is referring to age, gender, education, income and employment. Madurai is an interesting context to do research in regarding this subject because the rather high level of internal socioeconomic variations within the population.

Key Words: Political Participation, Voting, Tamilnadu, Cognitive, Expressive and Partisan Participation.

Introduction

Political participation is a multi dimensional process. According to Olsen's (1982) typology there are six categories of political participation: *cognitive, expressive, organizational, electoral, partisan, and governmental*. Thus, the first three categories (*cognitive, expressive and organizational*) serve as precondition for participation in the next three categories. These three modes of participation – gaining information, talking to others and joining groups- provide a basis for subsequent types of action, either directly through individuals or through their representatives. In addition, these behaviours are part of people's everyday lives, while electoral, partisan and governmental participation are not.

Methodology

In order to make the present study a scientific one, the researcher followed certain research procedures. The present study is an attempt to understand how and to what extent the rural people participated in the political process. The design structured for this study is descriptive design. The main objective of this research is to analyse the extent of political participation of the respondents in rural community during important political occasions. The purpose of this research design is to provide description of an individual, community, a society, an event or of any other unit under investigation. This study was conducted in Thirumangalam Municipality in Madurai district in South Tamil Nadu, India. The study area has been selected on the basis of various strata. The study aims to identify the extent of political participation of rural community. The interview schedule was preferred for collecting primary data because a sizeable proportion of the respondents are unable to use a questionnaire in the study area. Another reason for conducting interview was that the interaction during the interview needed several clarifications, observations of the free flow of responses and the feelings and reactions of the respondents.

Analysis and Interpretations

Cognitive Participation

People obtain information about issues by watching television news, listening to radio, talking with friends and co-workers, reading news papers and magazines, and responding to contacts from the political parties or groups to which they belong. Thus, people participate by developing knowledge of public issues. People do get political information from various sources, the following table exhibits twelve sources from respondent's preferences for getting political information and the stages also categorized based on accessing Regularly, Occasionally, Rarely and Never. This type of categorization was useful to find the right choices of the respondent's preference among various resources.

Table 1.1

Cognitive Participation of the respondents

S.No	Source	Regularly	Occasionally	Rarely	Never	Total
1	Watching Television	416 (69.3)	112 (18.6)	59 (9.8)	13 (2.2)	600 (100)
2	Reading Newspaper	358 (59.6)	109 (18.2)	49 (8.2)	84 (14.0)	600 (100)
3	Family members	297 (49.5)	134 (22.3)	86 (14.3)	83 (13.8)	600 (100)
4	Peer group	229 (38.2)	218 (36.3)	84 (14.0)	69 (11.5)	600 (100)
5	Friends	206 (34.3)	128 (21.3)	185 (30.8)	81 (13.5)	600 (100)
6	Neighbors	88 (14.6)	73 (12.2)	161 (26.8)	278 (46.3)	600 (100)
7	Party members	15 (2.5)	53 (8.8)	146 (24.3)	386 (64.3)	600 (100)
8	Association members	21 (3.5)	13 (2.2)	52 (8.6)	514 (85.6)	600 (100)
9	Listening to Radio	59 (9.8)	53 (8.8)	58 (9.7)	380 (63.3)	600 (100)
10	Reading Magazines	38 (6.3)	92 (15.3)	156 (26.0)	314 (52.3)	600 (100)
11	Film (Cinema)	33 (5.5)	15 (2.5)	12 (2.0)	540 (90.0)	600 (100)
12	Through SMS	12 (2.0)	18 (3.0)	11 (1.8)	559 (93.2)	600 (100)

The individual's exposure to radio, newspapers, magazines, journals, movies and inter-personal discussions with friends, neighbors, family members and colleagues not only accelerate his contact with the external social milieu but also enables him to acquire political education which is essential for participation in democratic process.

The table given above exhibits of the thirteen sources, it is watching television as the major source (69.3 per cent) under regular access, followed by reading newspaper (59.7 per cent) and from family members and peer groups were respectively 49.5 per cent and 38.2 per cent. Some of the medium were never accessed by the respondents for political knowledge, i.e. SMS (93.2%), Internet Browsing (91.6), from Association members (85.7%) and interestingly the cinema (90.0%) radio (63.3%) and Party members (64.3) is also a non-access medium for political knowledge among the respondents. It was observed while TV and newspaper that act as the sources of information, but it is family members followed by peer groups who play a vital role in providing information about politics.

Expressive Participation

In addition to obtaining information, voters also express opinions to others. Such exchanges are political acts in that people mutually inform and persuade each other.

Table 1.2
Expressive Participation of the respondents

S.No	Discuss political matters with whom	Regularly	Occasionally	Rarely	Never	Total
1.	Friends	298 (49.6)	106 (17.6)	151 (25.2)	45 (7.5)	600 (100)
2.	Family members	153 (25.5)	154 (25.6)	139 (23.2)	154 (25.6)	600 (100)
3.	Peer group	168 (28.0)	108 (18.0)	144 (24.0)	180 (30.0)	600 (100)
4.	Neighbors	28 (4.6)	155 (25.8)	131 (21.8)	286 (47.6)	600 (100)
5.	Party members	154 (25.6)	189 (31.5)	88 (14.6)	169 (28.2)	600 (100)
6.	Association members	24 (4.0)	131 (21.8)	118 (19.6)	327 (54.5)	600 (100)

Personal interaction and sharing with others play a pre-dominant role in not only shaping the personality of an individual but also influencing the voting behaviour of the respondents as well. The table presented exhibits that of the seven sources, it is friends who top the rank with 49.7 per cent, followed by peer groups 28.0 per cent. Discussion with family members and party members were 25.5 per cent and 25.7 per cent respectively.

It was observed that family members were the interacting group for women and peer group and friends were for men. It was observed that women and aged people discuss politics with the family members and youngsters of both male and female discuss more about the peer group outside the family. Among the six sources Neighbors were insignificantly 4.7 per cent; this shows that the respondent's nature of expressive participation.

Partisan Participation

Political supporter identify with and work for a candidate. The range of participation varies from writing voter slip to contest elections. The electorates have high sense of political participation because of the facilities for education, mass media, roads and the like, activate their political thinking and make them politically more articulate and active. These sources also provide stimuli to the process of electioneering and mobilization of the electorate for participating in the electoral politics.

The greater the participation of the public in the election syndrome through canvassing, attending public meetings, casting votes and taking interest in the poll activities. To measure the extent of political participation of the electorate the researcher limited to the study to certain activities of the electorate on the eve of elections. Information was collected about both conventional and unconventional participation specially relating to the electoral process of the system and the level of non-electoral participation as well.

Extent of electoral participation

Extent of electoral participation varies from castes to caste, state to state and region to region in India. It is in this context various electoral process had been assessed on the basis of identifying the extent of electoral participation of the Rural community.

The indices have been analysed to identify the extent of electoral participation of rural community. The responses of the respondents were categorised into 4 point scales with maximum score of five points to zero point to their participation in electoral process like frequent, as and when needed, occasional and never participated. Based on the points scored by the respondents the extent level of electoral participation was assessed as low, medium and high i.e., 0-15 points was low, 16-50 points was medium and more than 50 points was high. The extent of electoral participation varies from individual to individual according to their political interest.

Table 1.3
Percentage scored by the respondents according to their political participation

S.No	Participation level	Respondents	
		Number	Percentage
1	High	96	(16.0)
2	Medium	73	(12.2)
3	Low	431	(71.8)
	Total	600	(100)

Most of the respondents had (94.5 per cent) exercised their votes. When the extent of electoral participation is taken into consideration 71.8 per cent of the respondents hailed in low extent of electoral participation. 12.2 per cent of the respondents were medium extent level of electoral participation. 16.0 per cent of them participated in the electoral process at high level.

The table shows that only 16 percent of the respondents have scored a high rank of participation while the percentage of medium and low ranks of participation decreased and rose to 12.2 and 71.8 percent respectively. This indicates that more than a majority of respondents fell in the category of low-level political participation. Further these categories have also been analysed in the context of age, gender, education, income and occupation status.

The socio-economic variables are the most often researched determinant of political participation. Socio-economic characteristics are the important indicators to assess one's political attitude and behaviour and it provide clues about personality traits and attitudes. Among the social background factors often studied are the age, gender, education, income, occupation and organisational involvement.

Gender and participation

Previous studies show that, politics has been almost everywhere a male dominated movement. One of the most thoroughly substantiated research findings is that women all over the world participate less in politics than men do. Milbrath (1965) cites twenty-one studies with data drawn from nine countries that support this proposition. The only exception to this rule has been found to exist in Argentina, where women voted slightly more often than men.

Table 1.4
Gender and Level of Political Participation

S. No	Level	Gender		Total	
		Male	Female		
1	High	72 (75.0)	24 (25.0)	96 (100%)	(16.0)
2	Medium	51 (69.9)	22 (30.1)	73 (100%)	(12.2)
3	Low	189 (43.9)	242 (56.1)	431 (100%)	(71.8)
		312 (52.0)	288 (48.0)	600	(100)

It is interesting note that only 16 percent of them have high participation in political process. Out of 16 percent, male respondents have 75.0 per cent of participation while the percentage of female participation was only 25.0 Similarly 12.2 percent of the total respondents have medium participation, within the medium participation 69.9 percent representing male population whereas the percentage of female remained only 30.1 percent. Thus, it becomes clear that there exists a vast gap in the level of political participation between the male and female electorate in the selected area. So we find that one's sex has an apparent relationship with political participation in India.

Unequal participation by women and men in electoral politics is evident in the predominance of men among parliamentarians, cabinet ministers, and heads of government. In most countries (although not all) women and men have equal rights to vote and to stand for electoral office. Why, then, are they so few among elected representatives? According to a recent handbook, *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*, the main obstacles stem from political structures, processes and parties:

Other obstacles to women's participation include: inadequate financial resources, illiteracy and limited access to education, the double burden of family and work responsibilities, ideologies or cultural patterns opposing women's participation in public life, and unsupportive attitudes on the part of the media. Women may face difficulties securing the support of other women. It is not always just men who are unconvinced of women's right to participate. Equal rights to vote that exist in law can also be denied in practice. For example, in some countries, women's ability to exercise the vote may be restricted by hostility among male community leaders and officials to women's participation. Women may face cultural constraints to public contact between women and men or other limits on their mobility. As well there may be practical constraints that limit women's ability to vote – for example, women may not have the time required to stand in line on Election Day or participate in campaign discussions. With regard to voting, women participate as much as men. Beyond voting, however, women's participation rates fall below the participation rates of men.

Age and Participation
Table 1.5
Age Group and level of political Participation of the respondents

S. No	Level	Age Group					Total	
		Below 25	25-35	35-45	45-55	Above 55		
1	High	24 (25.0)	35 (36.5)	20 (20.8)	9 (9.4)	8 (8.3)	96 (100)	(16.0)
2	Medium	21 (28.8)	25 (34.2)	20 (27.4)	4 (5.5)	3 (4.1)	73 (100)	(12.2)
3	Low	61 (14.2)	151 (35.0)	138 (32.0)	56 (13.0)	25 (5.8)	431 (100)	(71.8)
	Total	106 (17.7)	211 (35.2)	178 (29.7)	69 (11.5)	36 (6.0)	600	(100)

The above table explicates the relationship between age and political participation, it can be seen that the respondents in the younger age group i.e. below 25 and 25-35 have considerably higher participation in the high category than older age group; their representation among high level of participation is respectively 25.0 per cent and 36.5 per cent. In the medium and low category also the young age groups get high representation, but, compared to middle age and old age it is slightly lower than others. This indicates that the participation by the old age people was slightly low in compared to the younger age group. There are a lot of reasons behind this difference; particularly the older could not reach political office or polling booth because of their mental and physical ability is poor than the young.

Education and Participation

Education enhances participation more or less directly by developing skills that are relevant to politics—the ability to speak and write, knowledge of how to cope in an organizational setting—by imparting information about government and politics, and by encouraging attitudes such as a sense of civic responsibility or political efficacy that predispose an individual to political involvement. In addition, education affects activity indirectly: those who have high levels of education are much more likely to have higher incomes, to be exposed to more mass media, to occupy higher-status positions, to be more informed about government and politics, and to feel more efficacious. Almond and Verba (1963) comment, in each nation the educated classes are more likely to be cognitively aware of politics.

Table 1.6
Educational Status and level of political Participation of the respondents

S. No	Level	Educational Status				Total	
		Illiterate	Up to Middle School	Up to Hr.sec	Degree & Diploma		
1	High	14 (14.6)	26 (27.0)	29 (30.2)	27 (28.1)	96 (100)	(16.0)
2	Medium	11 (15.1)	21 (28.7)	30 (41.1)	11 (15.1)	73 (100)	(12.2)
3	Low	83 (19.3)	163 (37.8)	127 (29.5)	58 (13.5)	431 (100)	(71.8)
	Total	108 (18.0)	210 (35.0)	186 (31.0)	96 (16.0)	600	(100)

The above table depicts that education is the resource variable most strongly correlated with political participation. This indicates that there has been an increase in participation according to the level of education in the high category and the educated people had a higher sense of participation than the illiterates; at the same time in the medium level of participation, the illiterates (15.1%) and the graduates (15.1%) were equal representation to participation.

This shows that the illiterates also having more participation than up to middle school and higher secondary level respondents. In India, education showed a small negative correlation with voting. In the cross-national study by Verba, Nie, and Kim (1971), only in the United States was education found to relate significantly to voting; in India, the correlation was -.04, in Austria -.09, in Japan, .03, in Nigeria, -.03, and in the United States, .21.

The level of political participation is affected by the level of political stimuli that the individual experiences. This kind of stimuli might influence the individual at an early stage of the personal development. Stimuli may also arrive from the mass media, campaign literature or political meetings at a later stage of the personal development.

In either way, economic privileged individuals generally receive a higher level of stimuli than less privileged individuals. Economic privileged individuals are therefore more likely to be interested and involved in politics. It increases the quantity and quality of political knowledge, stimulate interest and create a closer attachment to political parties.

It is almost universally true that more prosperous persons are more likely than the less prosperous to participate in conventional politics. This relationship is supported by studies in several countries. Milbrath (1965) cites data from fourteen studies in support of the thesis. Several more recent studies further corroborate in the income-participation thesis.

The following table proves that the positive relationship between income and political participation among rural community respondents.

Table 1.7
Income Status and level of political Participation of the respondents

S. No	Level	Income Status				Total	
		Below 24,000	24,001-48,000	48,001-72,000	Above 72,000		
1	High	12 (12.5)	28 (29.2)	35 (36.4)	21 (21.9)	96 (100%)	(16.0)
2	Medium	9 (12.3)	22 (30.1)	25 (34.2)	17 (23.3)	73 (100%)	(12.2)
3	Low	112 (25.9)	131 (30.4)	90 (20.9)	98 (22.7)	431 (100%)	(71.8)
	Total	133 (22.2)	181 (30.2)	150 (25.0)	136 (22.7)	600 (100%)	(100)

Income was more strongly related to communal and partisan activities than to voting or parochial participation. In India, income level showed no positive correlation with voting, but it did correlate positively with higher-level activities. The above

table explains the extent of political participation of the respondents according to their income level. As stated in the previous discussions the extent of political participation is classified into three categories. Similarly the income level of respondent is grouped into four for table analysis. This table gives a picture that high level of political participation was identified among the third level of income group that is Rs.48,001-Rs.72,000 per annum constituting 36.4 per cent followed by the second category i.e., income group falls under Rs.24,001-Rs.48,000 per annum (29.2 per cent). High income group respondents show both high and low level of participation in politics.

To probe it further, an attempt is also made to find out the relationship between occupational status of the respondents and their level of participation. The trend of relationship can be seen in the following table

Table 1.8
Occupational Status and level of political Participation of the respondents

S. No	Level	Occupational Status				Total
		Unemployed & Students	Agriculture & Coolie	Business	Employed	
1	High	17 (17.7)	23 (24.0)	48 (50.0)	8 (8.3)	96 (16.0)
2	Medium	14 (19.2)	19 (26.0)	29 (39.7)	11 (15.1)	73 (12.2)
3	Low	42 (9.7)	131 (30.4)	124 (28.8)	134 (31.1)	431 (71.8)
	Total	73 (12.2)	173 (28.8)	201 (33.5)	153 (25.5)	600 (100)

It can be seen that the Business based respondents have a participation in high category than other occupational groups. For instance, 50.0 percent of the Business based respondents scored high while the percentage of Agriculture, coolie and employed remained only 24.0 and 8.3 respectively. The unemployed and students (17.7%) were high participation next to agriculture. On the other hand, the percentage of agriculture and unemployed was higher than that of the businessman in the low category. For instance, 9.7 per cent of unemployed fell in the low category while such percentage of Business groups declined 33.5 per cent. Thus, it can be said that the participation of the Business class was at the top and the next to it was that of the Agriculture and coolies whereas the unemployed and students and employed remained in the low category.

Conclusion

The extent of political participation of the people is the extent to measure the political maturity of people. Political participation is the activity that has the consequence of affecting the government's action. India is the largest democracy in the world; therefore a study of Indian political system and people's political participation has significance in the field of political sociology. The political participation of the individuals depends upon four kinds of participation such as cognitive, expressive, organizational, and partisan participations.

The extent of participation in the political process starts from registering the name in the electoral roll, writing voter's slip, distributing booth slip, drawing the party symbols and flag, campaigning for party, pasting wall posters, canvassing people, erecting boards and cut-outs, pasting wall posters and even distributing money/kind and liquor for getting votes. Political participation as a matter of interest and involvement by the party members depends upon the position in the party and society. Among the respondents only few of them are actively involved in all the political process. Unconventional political participation plays only a meagre role.

The political participation of the respondents differs on the basis of various socio-economic factors, a man belongs to middle age group had more participation in the political process. The individual's educational qualification influences the extent of participation, especially study is concerned contrary to these findings more educated respondents had participated less in the politics. Overall the study establishes the fact that political participation of rural community is low except they cast their vote. It is in this context further studies should be made in other areas of Tamilnadu in future to probe the reasons why most of the rural community remain mere voters and what are the reasons behind their low level of participation in the political process.

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