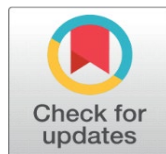
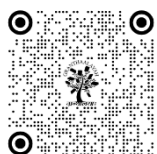


VOTING BEHAVIOUR AND ITS DETERMINANTS AMONG THE ELECTORS IN RURAL ASSAM: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY IN THE DHALPUKHURI DEVELOPMENT BLOCK OF THE HOJAI DISTRICT OF ASSAM

Saiful Islam 

¹ Assistant Professor & Head Department of Political Science Mankachar College, India



Corresponding Author

Saiful Islam, saifulislam.ma@gmail.com

DOI

[10.29121/shodhkosh.v4.i1.2023.6131](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v4.i1.2023.6131)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Copyright: © 2023 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

With the license CC-BY, authors retain the copyright, allowing anyone to download, reuse, re-print, modify, distribute, and/or copy their contribution. The work must be properly attributed to its author.



ABSTRACT

Voting behaviour is a vital aspect of the democratic process, revealing how and why electors exercise their franchise. Individual voting behaviour is influenced by social, economic, psychological, and political factors. In the context of rural Assam, this behaviour is embedded in a matrix of traditional structures, community influences, and emerging political consciousness. This study explores the patterns and determinants of voting behaviour among rural voters in the Dhalpukhuri Development Block of Hojai district, Assam. Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches, this study examines how factors such as caste, religion, education, economic position, political awareness, local leadership, development ambitions, and media exposure influence the electoral decisions of rural voters. The study reveals a dynamic interplay between identity politics and performance-based evaluation, indicating a steady trend toward educated and independent political decisions among specific segments. The paper concludes with policy recommendations to promote democratic awareness and participatory governance at the grassroots level.

Keywords: Voting Behaviour, Rural Electorate, Electoral Determinants, Political Awareness, Dhalpukhuri Block, Hojai District, Assam, Caste, Development Politics

1. INTRODUCTION

Elections serve as the fundamental framework on which every democratic system is built, providing the foundation for governance and representation. Among the various ways citizens can engage in political processes, voting is one of the tremendously important and essential form of participation which can enable individuals to directly influence the decision-making process of the government and can shape the future their country and society as well. The understanding of voting behaviour plays a significant and central role within the disciplines of Political Science, Sociology, and Public Policy as it provides valuable insights into the factors and reasoning influencing the decisions which the voters take during elections and processes that influence their electoral preferences. Voting behaviour refers to a broad spectrum of actions and decisions made by individuals in the electoral process, which includes their preference for specific political parties, their choice of particular candidates, their decision on whether or not to participate in voting and different motivations, reasoning and factors that influence this choice. Within a Nation a nation like India, having huge number of populations following different religions speaking different languages, having variety of culture and

having social, economic political and regional diversity, voting behaviour among its citizens are significantly shaped by a combination of enduring structural factors and dynamic situational influences.

Casting a vote is a crucial means for engaging in democratic processes. In the broad and varied political landscape of India, the voting behavior of the rural electors significantly influence the outcomes of electoral democracy. Assam, especially Hojai district, located in its central and southern regions, offers a valuable context for examining these voting patterns. The Dhalpukhuri Development Block in Hojai District, recognized for its social and religious variety as well as its agricultural-based economy, serves as a relevant example for exploring electoral dynamics in rural Assam.

Elections in this area are not just political events but socio-cultural phenomena shaped by long-standing historical, economic, and identity-related factors. This paper aims to deliver an in-depth examination of voting patterns in Dhalpukhuri Development Block by assessing the primary determinants that influence the choices of rural voters.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To comprehend the voting behavior of constituents in the Dhalpukhuri Development Block
- To examine how socio-economic and cultural factors like caste, religion, and education affect voting preferences.
- To analyze the effect of candidate reputation, party ideology, and political messaging.
- To investigate the significance of local development issues and welfare programs in influencing voter decisions.
- To assess the development of political awareness and participatory democracy in rural Assam.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. AREA OF STUDY

The Dhalpukhuri Development Block is an important rural administrative area located in the Hojai District of Assam. Located in central Assam, it plays a vital role in influencing local governance and regional political dynamics. Dhalpukhuri Block is situated in the agro-ecological region of Assam's central plains, recognized for its fertile alluvial soil that is conducive to agriculture and related endeavors. It comprises several revenue villages and gram panchayats, with a predominant focus on agricultural activities. Small rivers flow alongside the paddy fields in the block, enhancing biodiversity and supporting traditional rural livelihoods. Its geographical location facilitates connections to neighboring blocks and to the district headquarters of Sankardev Nagar in Hojai, providing accessibility while preserving a distinctly rural character. The population of the Dhalpukhuri Development Block reflects the broader demographic diversity found in Assam. Diverse communities inhabit the area, including Hindus, Muslims, Scheduled Castes (SCs), and Scheduled Tribes (STs), living together within a framework of interdependence and localized social structures that often affect distinct voting behaviors influenced by identity and group affiliations. The region shows linguistic diversity, with Assamese, Bengali, and Hindi Monipuri, Karbi etc. Over the last two decades, there has been a considerable improvement in the literacy rate, and gender equality in primary and secondary education has also progressed. However, challenges persist regarding access to higher education and skill development, with many youths depending on agriculture or seasonal migration for work. The economic activities in Dhalpukhuri predominantly center around agriculture, fishing, animal husbandry, and small-scale businesses. The main agricultural products include paddy, vegetables, and sugarcane. Government initiatives like the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY), MGNREGA, PM-KISAN, and Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have reached the block, significantly impacting livelihoods and fostering greater political awareness and expectations among the rural electorate. While agriculture continues to be the backbone of the economy, the youth in the region are increasingly pursuing alternative employment options such as government positions, private sector jobs, and entrepreneurship. The availability and perception of job prospects significantly impact the political preferences of voters in this area.

3.2. RESEARCH DESIGN

This research employs a descriptive and analytical design, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods for data collection.

3.3. SAMPLING TECHNIQUE AND SIZE

A stratified random sampling approach was implemented. The sample consisted of 250 participants from 10 villages, ensuring that gender, age, religion, caste, and occupation were proportionally represented.

3.4. DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Primary data were gathered through structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions. Secondary data sources included reports from the government, electoral rolls, academic literature, and publications from the Election Commission of India.

3.5. DATA ANALYSIS

Quantitative data were assessed using percentage calculations and cross-tabulation techniques. Qualitative insights were analyzed thematically to understand the subjective aspects of voting choices.

1) Socio-Economic profile of the respondents:

Among the 250 participants, 58% were male and 42% were female. The age distribution revealed that 30% belonged to the 18–35 range, 39% were in the 36–55 range, and 31% were older than 55. Approximately 32% had achieved at least a secondary education, 24% were graduates, and 44% had not completed secondary education. Regarding their occupations, 35% were involved in agriculture, 22% in wage labor, 15% in business or trade, and 28% were homemakers or unemployed. In terms of religious affiliation, Muslims made up 40%, Hindus accounted for 50%, and other religions represented 10%.

4. DETERMINANTS OF VOTING BEHAVIOUR

4.1. INFLUENCE OF CASTE AND COMMUNITY

Caste continues to exert a strong influence, particularly in local and Assembly elections. There is significant intra-caste unity among Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Muslims, with community elders serving as advisers. During election seasons, caste-based mobilizations are prominent, often resulting in Panchayat voting. Nevertheless, younger, more educated voters are starting to challenge these trends.

4.2. INFLUENCE OF RELIGION

Religious identity serves as both a direct and indirect factor in electoral decisions. While open communal mobilization is less common, religious factors are imbedded in the perceptions of party positions. For example, a considerable segment of Muslim voters linked parties like AIUDF and Congress to minority welfare, while some Hindu voters favored the BJP for its cultural-nationalist narrative. Religion also shapes the trust in political commitments.

4.3. EDUCATION AND POLITICAL AWARENESS

Higher education improves the capability to critically evaluate candidates and policies. Participants with advanced education exhibited a stronger inclination to assess manifestos, past performances, and national policy discussions. Educated youth demonstrated notably greater political awareness, actively participating in campaign dialogues and consuming digital political content.

4.4. ECONOMIC STATUS AND MATERIAL FACTORS

Economic instability affects voting behavior through reliance on government-sponsored initiatives and local leaders. Individuals benefiting from programs like PMAY, MGNREGA, and Ujjwala Yojana displayed loyalty to the ruling party. Conversely, unemployed youth and marginal farmers expressed dissatisfaction over unmet job promises, contributing to unpredictability in electoral outcomes.

4.5. PARTY AFFILIATION AND LEADERSHIP

Long-standing party loyalty remains especially strong among older voters. Many still hold Congress in high regard due to its historical significance. However, newer parties such as the BJP have gained popularity through strategic welfare delivery and compelling leadership. The perception of leadership, notably at the state level, is crucial. Himanta Biswa Sarma's proactive persona has bolstered the BJP's appeal in certain areas of the block.

4.6. CANDIDATE REPUTATION AND PERSONAL IMAGE

The social conduct, visibility, and attentiveness of candidates greatly influence voter preferences. Voters showed a preference for candidates viewed as honest, non-corrupt, and accessible. A candidate's local presence, including their engagement outside of election periods, was a fundamental criterion. Those with a record of community engagement or reliable crisis support (e.g., during floods or the COVID-19 pandemic) were seen in a positive light.

4.7. DEVELOPMENT CONCERNS AND LOCAL NEEDS

Primary infrastructure issues, including roads, electricity, irrigation, drinking water, and educational facilities, ranked among the top voter concerns. Voters evaluated parties and candidates based on their previous contributions to village development. Unfulfilled promises from prior terms resulted in electoral consequences. However, perceptions of development are often subjective, influenced by media portrayals and peer pressure.

4.8. MEDIA, SOCIAL MEDIA, AND POLITICAL COMMUNICATION:

The advent of smartphones and increased internet connectivity has transformed political communication in rural areas. Platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube are widely used for political communications. Misinformation spreads easily, affecting public perception. Television continues to hold sway, especially among older groups. Political ads, speeches by leaders, and news discussions significantly shape opinions during campaign cycles.

5. FINDING OF THE STUDY

- Caste and religious affiliations remain prominent, particularly among older individuals and those with lower levels of education.
- Young people with education are increasingly turning away from identity-based politics in favor of a focus on development and transparency.
- Female voters are emerging as a powerful group, favoring candidates who prioritize welfare and security.
- A candidate's personal connection and visible engagement with their constituency are crucial factors in voter decision-making.
- The rise of media exposure has notably enhanced political awareness and responsiveness to campaign issues.
- The trend of switching political parties is on the rise, reflecting a declining loyalty to traditional affiliations and an increasing demand for accountable governance.

6. DISCUSSION

The findings reveal a slight transformation and evolving pattern of voting behavior in rural areas. While traditional factors such as caste and religion still play a significant role, they are increasingly balanced by practical considerations such as governance, performance, and communication. The growing assertiveness of the youth and women points to a more mature electorate that is beginning to demand accountability from leaders.

The research also reveals the limitations of purely symbolic political campaigns. Voters are becoming more responsive to discussions centered on specific issues, promises of employment, and noticeable improvements in infrastructure. Social media is acting both as a platform for raising awareness and a battleground for shaping narratives.

7. CONCLUSION

Voting behavior in the Dhalpukhuri Development Block illustrates both persistence and transformation. Although social identities continue to influence many electoral decisions, there is a notable shift towards rationality, informed discussion, and performance-oriented judgment among a substantial segment of voters. To further develop this trend, democratic institutions should prioritize civic education, enhance political transparency, and promote inclusive governance. Empowering local leaders and ensuring consistent development can help strengthen trust in democratic processes.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

REFERENCES

- J.C. Johari, "Indian Government and Politics," Political Dynamics, Vishal Publications, 1998.
- Parmatma Sharan, "Comparative Politics and Government," Electoral Process and Voting Behaviour, Meenakshi Prakashan, 1995
- B.B. Jena, J.K. Baral, "Election Politics and Voting Behaviour in India, Discovery Publishing House, New Delhi, 1989
- J.C. Johari, "Indian political System," Anmol Publication, New Delhi, 2002.
- Yadav, Y. (1999). Electoral Politics in the Time of Change. Economic and Political Weekly, 34(34/35), 2393–2399.
- Kumar, S. (2009). Patterns of Political Participation. Indian Journal of Political Science, 70(1), 133–144.
- Baruah, S. (2005). Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India. Oxford University Press.
- Government of Assam. (2023). Human Development Report. Planning and Development Department.
- Verma, R. (2012). The Curious Case of Rural Voting Behaviour. Journal of Rural and Social Sciences, 28(3), 45–64.