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## VOTING BEHAVIOR OF RURAL PEOPLE IN TAMIL NADU: A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

\*Dr. Ramesh P & \*\*Dr. Buvaneshwaran M

### Abstract

*Democracy and democratic theories present voting as a unique activity which forms the bedrock of political equality and civic rights in our society. People have fought and died for the right to vote, and in some countries still continue to do so. As the pinnacle of power in democratic societies, those who want to become Prime Ministers and Presidents devote much of their lives in pursuit of office, spending time and money to win the support of the voting public. The failure of many to participate in this selection of leaders and their parties leads to indignant and outraged accusations of apathy, and calls for measures to address the decline in interest in precisely the activity which allows all citizens access to the political process. From this perspective, the study finds voting is unique and of paramount importance, particularly rural voters are the deciding factor in the country like India. The study aims to identify the factors responsible for voting in rural Tamil Nadu.*

**Keywords: Voting, Elections, Political Party, Party Affiliation, Voting Behaviour**

### Introduction

In modern democratic countries the citizens are greatly influenced and inspired by several factors while exercising their right to vote. The study of the factors or situations which inspire and influence the voters to exercise their right to vote in favour of a particular candidate is called Voting Behaviour. This article aims at to explain the reasons for favoring to a particular party or candidate and so on. There are many factors behind the voting such as Education, Political Consciousness, Casteism, Economic Conditions, Religion, Linguistic Controversies, Regionalism, Ideological Commitment, and Election Manifestoes etc. Since 1977, governments have been less stable, and a number of Prime Ministers have had to resign as a result of party splits or no-confidence votes before completing their full term.

In democratic political system, the electors and the elected are involved in mutual perceptions of each other's thinking, role and behaviour. What

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considerations shall weigh in the voters' mind in the selection of the candidates are by political parties. Although there is hardly any instance in India of a political party being totally identified with any particular caste group, yet there are cases of certain castes lending strong support to particular political parties. Thus while political parties struggle among themselves to win different caste groups in their favour by making offers to them, caste groups try to pressurize parties to choose its members for candidature in elections.

In many political parties, in place of ideological polarization there occur the determinations of policies and programmes as well as the nomination of electoral candidates and the extension of support to them on caste consideration. Caste exercises its impact in the political field by specific caste groups coming together to vote *en bloc* for a candidate of their own caste, without considering the merits and demerits of the candidate, by appointing the members of influential caste or caste group or groups in the party as well as in the constituency and to offices of profits.

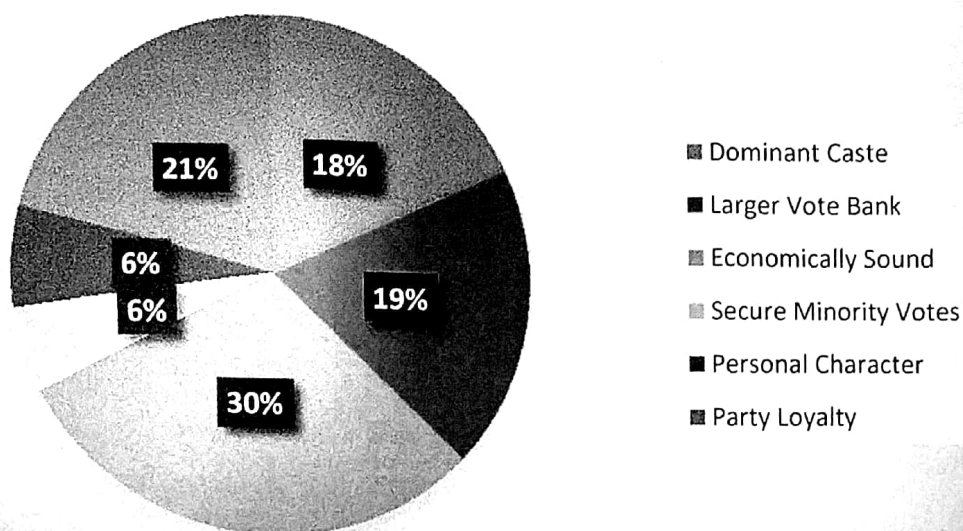
### Methodology of the Study

This study was conducted in Thirumangalam Municipality in Madurai district in South Tamil Nadu, India. After selecting the study area, 600 respondents were disproportionately selected through lottery method under the probable sampling procedure. The sampling procedure adopted for selecting the respondents for this study is disproportionate stratified random sampling. The design structured for this study is descriptive design. The study aims to examine the voting behaviour of the respondents.

### Caste factor

A caste, wishing to exercise political power must have a considerable number of its members elected. This involves putting pressure on some particular party and different castes struggling against each other in a bid to have a majority of their caste candidates elected. The electoral field witnesses both competition as well as alliances between various caste groups in order to get a substantial number of their caste-men elected. Caste, therefore dominates the political field, especially at the lower level. Therefore it is essential to study the opinion of the respondents about the selection of candidates for contesting elections.

## Opinion about selection of candidate



The above data reveals the financial position of candidate (30.3%) have been viewed by the important factor influencing selection of the candidate. The most revealing fact is that the party while nominating a candidate for general elections considered 'party loyalty' as an insignificant factor, only 20.8 percent of the respondents think that party loyalty is a consideration in party nominations. One of the important considerations for the party in nominating its candidates is that the later should have the capacity to win.

### Factors stimulating caste based mobilization

Since winning election is a legitimate function of a political party, primordial loyalties are exploited by them for this purpose. Hence, caste arithmetic is an important consideration for nomination purposes and political parties keep this variable in their mind in selection of their candidate for contesting elections. And this factor is more important than loyalty as revealed by the present study.

By proving this statement out of 600 respondents nearly 50 percent of the respondents have opined that the selection of the candidates are based on next to financial position the dominant caste (18%), high voter population (19.2%) and to catch minority and others votes (5.3%) are the major preferences of the parties for contesting candidates.

**Table 1**  
**Opinion about stimulators of caste based political mobilization**

S. No	Stimulators	Yes	No	Total
1	Politicians	318 (53.0%)	282 (47.0%)	600 (100%)
2	Caste leaders	221 (36.8%)	379 (63.2%)	600 (100%)
3.	Caste based political parties	336 (56.0%)	264 (44.0%)	600 (100%)
4.	Others	125 (20.8%)	475 (79.2%)	600 (100%)
<b>Total</b>		<b>1000</b> <b>(41.7%)</b>	<b>1400</b> <b>(58.3%)</b>	<b>2400</b> <b>(100%)</b>

The caste system, by and large, has been broken down. Castes ceased to be communities in the sense they were earlier, caste cohesiveness or homogeneity have been diluted due to urbanization, migration and occupation mobility. Caste is still important factor in analyzing Indian politics. For this purpose the politicians and political parties are stimulating caste based sentiments and emotions.

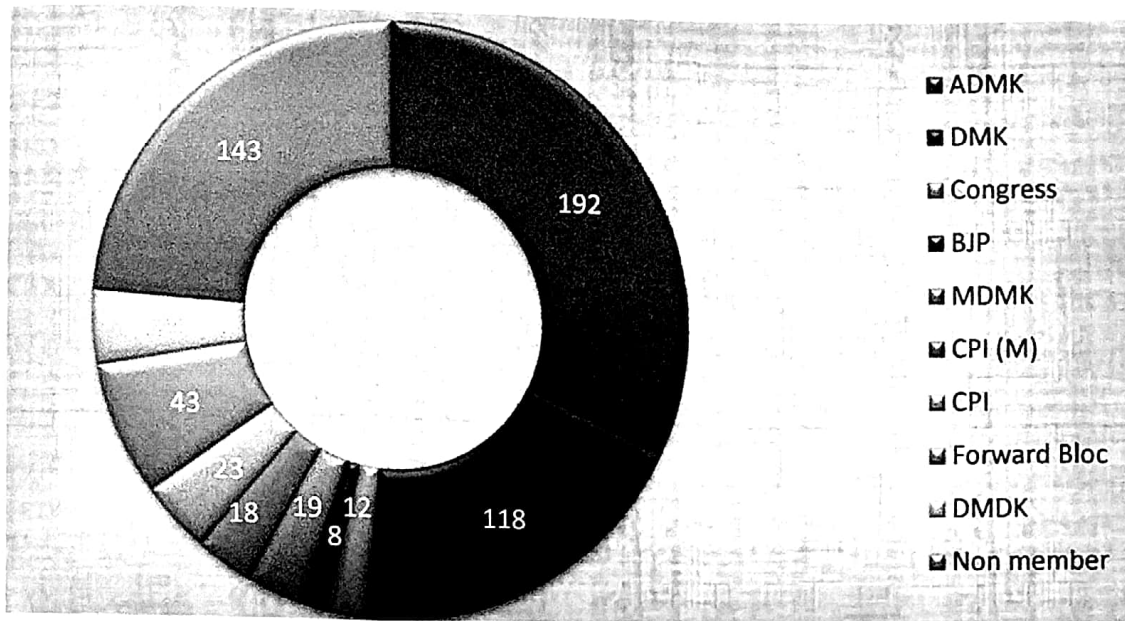
The above table depicts that politicians (53.0%) and caste based political parties (56.0%) are the major stimulators of caste based political mobilization as revealed by the respondents. Interestingly 63.2 per cent of the respondents disagree with the opinion of caste leaders who stimulate caste based mobilization, and overall response more than majority (58.3%) of the respondents opined that no one stimulate caste based mobilization.

### **Party Identification**

Party identification is a central concept in many models of voting behaviour. Party identification was regarded as an exogenous variable in models of party choice, coloring attitudes about issues and candidates as they are formed and thus affecting the vote both directly and indirectly.



**Fig.1 - Party Affiliation of the Respondents**



Party identification, however, provides a potential map of reality, given that voting does not appear in any sense to be random. Simply, from one's socialization experiences in early life and the social situation that one finds oneself in throughout life, a basic psychological affinity with a certain party provides sufficient cues to at least vote for that party. At the extreme, one need not understand any of the party's policies or anything about how the system works – to return to the religious analogy, one simply puts one's faith in the party.

Voters have recently become politically more knowledgeable. Whatever the changes that have occurred, it is clear that there still persists a large group of voters with very little political information. Consequently, it is difficult to reconcile this lack of political cues and knowledge with patterns of essentially stable voting.

It seemed that there are members from all the parties but among 600 respondents in the study 32.0 percent of them belong to AIADMK party followed by DMK constituting 19.7% next comes the Forward Bloc with 7.2 per cent, BJP and Congress have similar strength with 1.2 and 2.0 per cent respectively. The surprising information gathered from the field is that there are 4.0 per cent of the respondents who belong to DMDK, the recently emerged party founded by the Cine Actor. This is higher per cent than Communists and MDMK.

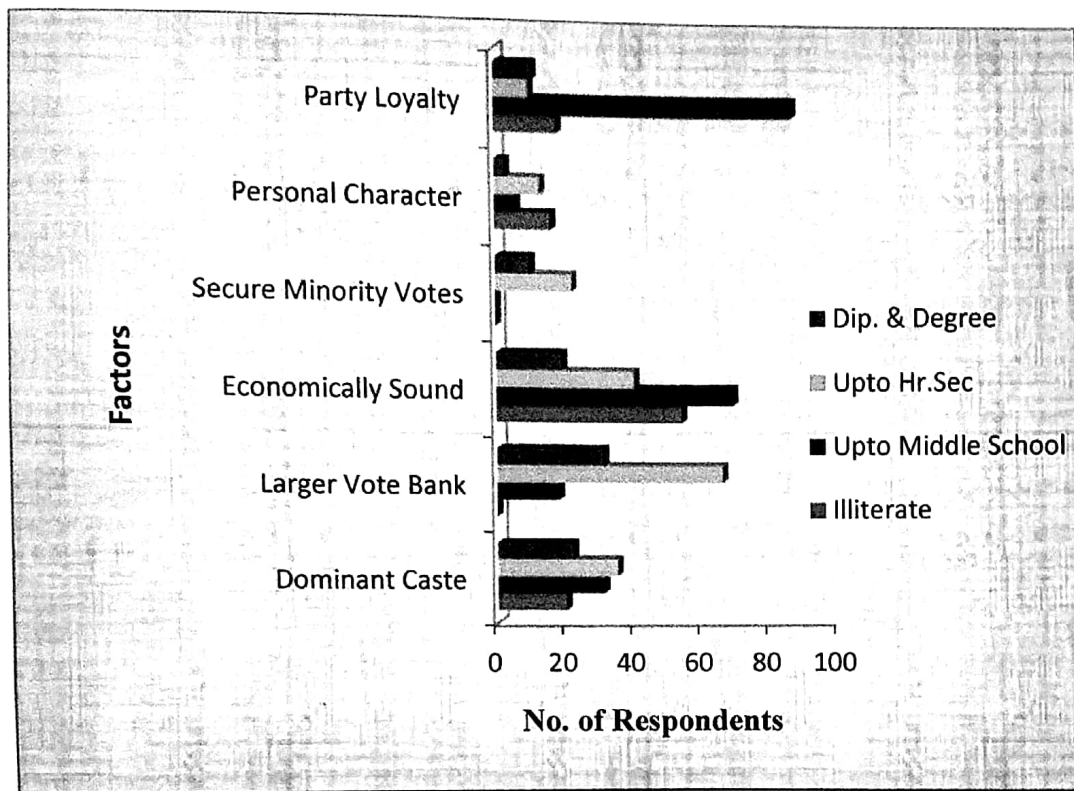
**Table 2**  
**Party affiliation and perception of party consideration for selection of candidates**

S. No	Factors	Party of the respondents									Total
		ADMK	DMK	Congress	Communist	MDMK	DMDK	F.B	BJP	Non-member	
1	Dominant caste	36 (6.0)	12 (2.0)	-	-	-	4 (0.7)	9 (1.5)	-	47 (7.8)	108 (18.0)
2	High voter population	50 (8.3)	27 (4.5)	-	-	6 (1.0)	6 (1.0)	10 (1.7)	-	16 (2.7)	115 (19.1)
3.	Financial position	52 (8.7)	39 (6.5)	3 (0.5)	-	4 (0.7)	6 (1.0)	6 (1.0)	4 (0.7)	68 (11.3)	182 (30.3)
4.	To catch minority and others votes	12 (2.0)	5 (0.8)	4 (0.7)	2 (0.3)	-	4 (0.7)	-	2 (0.3)	3 (0.5)	32 (5.3)
5.	Personal qualities character and ability	13 (2.2)	2 (0.3)	-	11 (1.8)	4 (0.7)	2 (0.3)	6 (1.0)	-	-	38 (6.3)
6.	Party loyalty	29 (4.8)	33 (5.5)	5 (0.8)	28 (4.7)	5 (0.8)	2 (0.3)	12 (2.0)	2 (0.3%)	9 (1.5)	125 (20.8)
<b>Total</b>		<b>192 (32.0)</b>	<b>118 (19.7)</b>	<b>12 (2.0)</b>	<b>41 (6.8)</b>	<b>19 (3.2)</b>	<b>24 (4.0)</b>	<b>43 (7.2)</b>	<b>8 (1.3)</b>	<b>143 (23.8)</b>	<b>600 (100.0)</b>

It is clear from the above table that among the AIADMK party members majority of them opine that financial position (27.1%) of the members in the party and high voter population (26.0%) are main consideration for selecting the candidates for contesting elections. Whereas in DMK, majority of the respondents (33.1%) opine that the candidates are selected based on their financial status and 28.0 per cent of the respondents report that party loyalty is the main factor. National parties like Congress gives priority to the candidates who can catch minorities vote.

Nearly 50 percent of the non-members feel that financial position is the main factor for selection of candidates for contesting elections.

**Fig.2 - Educational Status of the respondents and their perception about party consideration for selection of candidates**



The relationship between education and political participation holds most forms of political activity, with the possible exception of voting. It can be a strong base for choosing political party to be affiliated. The above table depicts the relationship between education of the respondents and their perception of party consideration for selection of candidates to contest election.

The educational status is categorized into four, from illiterate to degree and diploma level. The table presents the information that the majority of the respondents belong to Middle school level stated that party loyalty (40.9%) was the major quality for candidate selection. The interesting finding is that the respondents from an illiterate to degree level of education were stated that personal qualities character and ability has not an important factor for selection of candidate. Next to party loyalty, financial position (11.5 per cent) and high voter population (11.0 per cent) were the major factors for consideration. Irrespective of educational status



majority of the respondents were of the opinion that high financial position is the main factor for selection of candidates for contesting elections.

### Role of non-political organizations

The close relationship between organizational and political activity occurs not only because any of the same characteristics and attitudes lead to both organizational and political participation, but also probably because organized voluntary groups are important mobilisers of political activities. In addition, organizational participation increases political participation because it broadens one's sphere of interests, concerns, interpersonal contacts, leadership skills and social concern.

**Table 3**  
**Non-political organization Members and their political party affiliation**

S. No	Non-political organization membership	Political Party Membership						Total
		ADMK	DMK	Communist	MDMK	DMDK	Non-member	
1	NGO	1 (0.2)	3 (0.5)	-	2 (0.3)	-	9 (1.5)	15 (2.5)
2	SHG	38 (6.3)	41 (6.8)	8 (1.3)	6 (1.0)	11 (1.8)	-	104 (17.3)
3.	Caste Associations	20 (3.3)	4 (0.7)	-	-	-	-	24 (4.0)
4.	Community organizations	-	2 (0.3)	2 (0.3)	-	2 (0.3)	-	6 (1.0)
5.	Religious Institutions	5 (0.8)	4 (0.7)	-	-	-	-	9 (1.5)
6.	Fans Associations	8 (1.3)	5 (0.8)	-	-	13 (2.2)	-	26 (4.3)
7.	Labour Association	3 (0.5)	4 (0.7)	5 (0.8)	2 (0.3)	-	-	14 (2.3)
8.	Others	4 (0.7)	-	-	2 (0.3)	-	-	6 (1.0)
<b>Total</b>		<b>79 (13.2)</b>	<b>63 (10.5)</b>	<b>15 (2.5)</b>	<b>10 (1.7)</b>	<b>28 (4.7)</b>	<b>9 (1.5)</b>	<b>204 (34.0)</b>

The organizations can mobilize their membership without first changing attitudes. Organizational members choose to participate in politics or not necessarily

more informed, nor do they feel more efficacious or more dutiful than the general community.

The above table shows that majority of the SHG members (17.3%) are affiliated to the political parties. More than 50 per cent of the Fans Association members are affiliated to DMDK party. And majority of the SHG and labour association members are having affiliation to communist party. Cent per cent of the non political party members are associated with NGO's.

**Table 4**  
**Opinion about motivating factor to join the political party**

S. No	Motivating factor	Total	
1	Party Ideology	156	(26.0%)
2	Leader's attraction	202	(33.7%)
3	Compulsion	7	(1.2%)
4	Family loyalty	28	(4.7%)
5	Caste affiliation	56	(9.3%)
6	Religion	8	(1.3%)
8	Non Member	143	(23.8%)
Total		600	(100%)

The table presented here reveals the classification of the respondents according to the factors which influenced them to join the political party. There are six major reasons as seen in the table. It is understood from the table that the attraction towards parties' founders and the leaders is the predominant (33.7 per cent) factor responsible for the initiation of the respondents in the party membership, followed by party ideology (26 per cent) which remains as the reason given by the respondents to affiliate themselves to that political party.

Though there are other reasons like caste feelings, compulsion by friends, and relatives and other reasons, they are only a meager percent. The analysis of the

table says that majority of the respondents joined to the party not by ideology but the charismatic power of founder or leaders of that party. Even if the caste seemed to be a predominant influencing factor in rural areas that does not play a major role for the respondents to become party men.

An attempt has been made to ascertain the views of the sample electorate on issues like contestants, voting preference and factors determining their voting choice. The respondents were asked to indicate for whom they were going cast their vote in the last parliamentary, assembly and local body elections at Tamil Nadu and what factors which would determine their choice while casting votes in favour of a particular candidate. The response of the respondents have been classified into four broad categories in the below table no.6.

Voting is clearly a choice, certainly in terms of the motivations which drive individuals, electoral choice is very similar to the other choices we make in our daily lives. Voters choose parties and candidates on the basis of the benefits they think or are told they will derive. The nature of such benefits vary according to the theories in question – it may simply be an affirmation of identity, or conversely a concrete calculation of material benefit – but just as in any choice that an individual makes, voters have a set of criteria which they wish their choice to satisfy, these criteria vary from voter to voter.

### Conclusion

There is some evidence that even in rural areas voters are acting more independently, and are less influenced by group pressures and considerations. A study of Sheth (1970, p.148) shows that 2,287 persons were 'drawn from a stratified sample of all accessible constituencies of India'. The findings of this study indicates a surprising degree of individual decision on the part of rural voters, a high degree of influence from family and kinship groups, and small degree from caste affiliations.

It is obvious from the study the importance of the political determinants of voting decisions provides further evidence in support of the proposition that social determinants including family, caste, etc. are not an important voting determinants but the party affiliation and symbol of the party are more important in state and national election while in local election kinship plays a vital role to determine the respondents voting behaviour.



Decades after B R Ambedkar criticized its use as a political plank, caste continues to be among the key determinants of electioneering, and Tamil Nadu could be one of the more striking examples of caste leanings playing a part in the choice of representatives. The state may have witnessed the anti-caste, self-respect movement led by E V Ramaswamy Naicker, respectfully known as Periyar, but at the ground level, caste feelings have always been palpable. Every party should nominate their candidates on the basis of caste to catch caste votes.

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