

# **The Role Of Education In Shaping Voting Behavior In Sitamarhi City Of Bihar: A Sociological Study Of The 2024 Lok Sabha Election.**

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## **Abstract**

*Education is the cornerstone of personal, social, and economic empowerment, unlocking individual potential and transforming societies. Emile Durkheim emphasized the importance of education in political life. He believed that education plays a crucial role in shaping the minds of individuals and preparing them for their future roles in society. It is essential for a healthy democracy. According to the 2011 Census, Sitamarhi district's literacy rate has risen to 52.05%, up from 39.38% in 2001. It has resulted in more educated voters critically evaluating the policies and manifestos of various parties and making informed decisions at the polls. Education has also fostered a sense of civic responsibility, encouraged voters to participate in the electoral process and engage with local issues. The aim of the research paper is to examine the role of education and relationships between education & voting behavior in Sitamarhi city. The primary source of the research will be based on fieldwork which is Sitamarhi city of Bihar. For secondary data I will use literature review and report published by professionals, academicians and renowned sociologists.*

**Keywords:** *Education, Voting behavior, Civic responsibility, Critical thinking, Democracy.*

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## **I. Introduction**

Education is widely recognized as a catalyst for both individual empowerment and societal development. It equips individuals with the knowledge, skills, and values required for active civic participation (Schudson, 1998). French sociologist Emile Durkheim emphasized that education fosters moral development and social cohesion, thus supporting the functioning and stability of democratic institutions (Ritzer, 2020). In a democracy, voting stands as a core right and responsibility that enables citizens to select their representatives, shape public policy, and hold governments accountable (Ghai, 2002).

Elections, therefore, are not isolated political events but crucial expressions of the electorate's political consciousness. Voting behavior is shaped by a range of variables including education, caste, religion, the charisma of political leaders, populist rhetoric, and the prevailing socio-political climate (Kumar, 2018). This study focuses on how these factors influence voting behavior in the Sitamarhi district of Bihar, particularly emphasizing the transformative potential of education.

## **Determinants of Voting Behavior**

**1. Education:** Education plays a pivotal role in shaping political awareness and informed decision-making. Educated citizens are more likely to critically evaluate political promises, assess candidates on merit, and make reasoned choices (Lipset, 2003). Education also fosters a spirit of inquiry, making it more likely for voters to question populist claims and resist manipulation based on caste, religion, or other identity markers. In Sitamarhi, historically marked by low literacy, educational reforms and increased access to schooling are gradually altering the political landscape.

**2. Caste:** In the socio-political context of Bihar, caste remains a dominant factor in shaping voting preferences. The caste system, deeply embedded in the social fabric, often determines political loyalties and electoral

outcomes. Despite constitutional safeguards and progressive legislation, caste-based discrimination and political mobilization persist. Political parties frequently select candidates and frame their campaign strategies to appeal to specific caste groups, thereby reinforcing identity-based politics. (Barik, 2006; Kothari, 2004).

**3. Religion:** Although India is constitutionally a secular country, religion continues to play a significant role in electoral politics. Political parties often exploit religious sentiments to garner support, especially in regions with mixed religious populations. The use of communal rhetoric, polarization tactics, and religious symbolism during election campaigns influences the choices of voters who may prioritize religious identity over policy considerations (Ashraf & Sharma, 2003).

**4. Charisma of Political Leaders:** The personal appeal and charisma of political leaders can have a significant impact on voting behavior. Charismatic figures such as Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar have demonstrated the ability to transcend traditional identity boundaries and mobilize support across diverse demographic groups. Charismatic leadership often supersedes caste or religious loyalties, appealing particularly to disillusioned segments of the electorate (Martin, 2019).

**5. Populist Slogans and Election Campaigns:** Slogans and campaign narratives crafted by political parties play a critical role in shaping public opinion. Catchy phrases such as “Abki Baar Modi Sarkar” (2014), “Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas” (2019), and “Abki Baar 400 Paar” (2024) are designed to evoke emotional responses and create a sense of collective mission among voters. These slogans resonate strongly with voters, especially those with limited literacy, by invoking emotional and collective identities (Das & Choudhary, 2002).

**6. Development and Governance:** In recent years, there has been a noticeable shift from identity politics to development-centric governance in several parts of Bihar, including Sitamarhi. Increasing literacy, awareness, and exposure to media have contributed to this transformation. Voters, especially the younger and educated ones, are now more inclined to evaluate political parties based on their performance in areas such as infrastructure, employment, education, and healthcare (Kumar, 2018).

## **II. Literature Review:**

The study of voting behavior has evolved from normative theories to more empirical and interdisciplinary approaches. Eldersveld (1951) argued for the systematic study of voting as both a psychological and institutional phenomenon, emphasizing that voter behavior cannot be understood in isolation from social structures. Barik (2006) examined the political economy of caste and land in Bihar, highlighting how deeply entrenched inequalities influence voting patterns.

Lipset (2003) made a seminal contribution by linking education with democratic stability, arguing that educated electorates are more likely to support democratic norms and institutions. Schudson (1998) expanded this framework by proposing a typology of citizens—from the “political man” of early democracy to the “informed citizen” and the modern “monitorial citizen.” According to him, the monitorial citizen remains alert to political developments and uses media and education to make calculated political decisions. This framework is particularly relevant for understanding the evolving behavior of voters in places like Sitamarhi, where digital media and improved education access are reshaping civic awareness.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To examine the relationship between education and voting behavior in Sitamarhi.
2. To analyze evolving patterns in voter preferences and participation.
3. To assess the extent to which educated voters prioritize governance and development over caste and religion.

## **III. Methodology**

The research was conducted using a qualitative approach, involving semi-structured interviews with voters across different age groups, educational backgrounds, and social strata in Sitamarhi. A purposive and stratified sampling technique was used to ensure diverse representation. Ethical research protocols were strictly followed, including obtaining informed consent from all participants.

### **Field Observations and Findings**

Sitamarhi, a district in north Bihar, has historically lagged in educational indicators. According to Census 2011, the literacy rate stood at 52.05%, below state and national averages (Census India, 2011). However, in recent years, there has been a noticeable improvement due to government initiatives such as:

1. Unnayan Bihar: A state-led educational reform initiative aimed at improving learning outcomes in government schools.

2. Mera Doordarshan Mera Vidyalaya: A program that uses television and digital media to deliver educational content to students in remote areas.
3. Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) in Education: A policy where funds for school uniforms, bicycles, and other educational incentives are transferred directly to beneficiaries to prevent corruption and ensure efficiency.

These policies have contributed to higher school enrollment rates, especially among girls and marginalized communities.

### Survey Insights from Sitamarhi

What factors influence your voting decision?

Factor	Respondent		Yes		No	
	Total	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Employment	60	100	30	50	30	50
Govt. Policies	60	100	36	60	24	40
Charisma	60	100	36	60	24	40
Caste	60	100	39	65	21	35
Religion	60	100	36	60	24	40
National issue	60	100	30	50	30	50

The study's field data provided several important insights:

**Voter Turnout:** Around 90% of the respondents reported that they had voted in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, indicating high civic engagement.

**Primary Influencing Factors:**

**Cast:** 65% of respondents acknowledged that caste affiliation played a significant role in their voting decision.

**Religion and Charisma:** 60% indicated that religious identity and the personal appeal of candidates influenced their vote.

**Development Issues:** 50% reported that employment, national security, and educational policies were important factors in determining their choice.

These findings suggest that while caste and religion continue to influence voters, a growing segment - especially among the educated - is shifting toward performance-based evaluation of political candidates.

### Electoral Trends in Sitamarhi (1989–2024)

From 1989 to 2014, Sitamarhi consistently elected Members of Parliament from the Yadav community, reflecting the strong influence of caste-based politics. However, this trend began to change in the last decade. In the 2014 and 2019 elections, BJP candidates won, signaling a shift toward broader political appeal. The 2024 election marked a significant milestone with the victory of Devesh Chandra Thakur of Janata Dal (United), who hails from the general category and has a background in lawmaking and policy advocacy.

### 2024 Lok Sabha Election Results (Sitamarhi Constituency)

**Winner:** Devesh Chandra Thakur (JD-U), receiving 47.14% of total votes.

**Runner-Up:** Arjun Ray (RJD), receiving 42.45%.

**NOTA (None of the Above):** 2.94% of the votes, indicating growing dissatisfaction among a segment of the electorate.

**Total Turnout:** 10,93,992 voters participated, reflecting high engagement levels.

This electoral outcome suggests a significant shift in voter priorities—from identity-based considerations to issues of governance, credibility, and development.

## IV. Conclusion

The case study of Sitamarhi offers a valuable lens through which to examine the evolving relationship between education and voting behavior in a democracy like India. While caste and religion remain deeply influential, the increasing role of education is reshaping political consciousness. Educated voters are more likely to transcend identity politics and demand accountability, transparency, and development-oriented governance.

Government initiatives aimed at improving educational access and quality have begun to bear fruit, as evidenced by the changing electoral dynamics in Sitamarhi. The 2024 Lok Sabha election results reveal a population that is increasingly informed, engaged, and willing to prioritize long-term policy considerations over short-term identity-based appeals.

As educational attainment continues to rise and media penetration deepens, it is likely that Indian democracy will witness a further shift toward mature, issue-based political participation—turning citizens not just into voters, but into informed and responsible stakeholders in governance.

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