
**ELECTORAL PROCESS AND VOTING BEHAVIOUR IN RURAL
TELANGANA: A FIELD-BASED STUDY**

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Doi: <https://doi-doi.org/101555/ijarp.6333>**ABSTRACT**

The electoral process in rural Telangana reflects a dynamic interaction between formal democratic institutions and deeply rooted socio-political structures. Elections are conducted under the supervision of the Election Commission of India, ensuring procedural transparency, universal franchise, and administrative efficiency through mechanisms such as voter registration, campaigning regulations, and Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs). Despite this institutional robustness, voter behaviour in rural areas is significantly shaped by social and economic realities. Caste remains a central determinant, influencing political loyalties, candidate selection, and voting patterns through entrenched community networks. Welfare policies introduced by the state, particularly in agriculture and social security, have fostered beneficiary-oriented voting, where electoral choices are linked to access to government schemes. Leadership—both at the local and state levels—also plays a crucial role, with local elites and intermediaries mobilizing voters through patronage and social influence. Moreover, factors such as poverty, literacy, and occupational dependency affect political awareness and decision-making. Consequently, while the electoral framework promotes inclusiveness and participation, actual voting behaviour is often driven by identity-based mobilization and material considerations rather than purely issue-based evaluation.

KEYWORDS: Election Process, Voter Behaviour, Rural Telangana, Caste, Welfare Politics, Political Participation.**INTRODUCTION**

Elections form the institutional foundation of democratic governance in India, ensuring political representation, accountability, and legitimacy through a constitutional framework

administered by the Election Commission of India. The system of universal adult franchise, periodic elections, and multiparty competition has strengthened democratic participation and expanded political inclusion across diverse social groups, particularly in rural areas.

In Telangana, rural regions exhibit notably high levels of electoral participation, reflecting the deep integration of democratic practices into village society. Elections are widely perceived not only as civic processes but also as important opportunities to influence governance outcomes and access state welfare programmes. The participation of marginalised communities, including women, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and economically weaker sections, further highlights the inclusiveness of the electoral system at the grassroots level. However, voting behaviour in rural Telangana is shaped by a complex interplay of socio-economic and cultural factors rather than purely rational or ideological considerations. Caste structures, kinship networks, and community affiliations continue to influence political alignment, while agrarian dependence and economic insecurity increase reliance on welfare-based governance. Political parties and local elites also play a crucial role in shaping voter preferences through personalised leadership, identity mobilisation, and patronage networks. Empirical patterns show that rural voters generally exhibit higher turnout than urban populations and tend to evaluate governments based on the perceived delivery of welfare schemes, particularly in agriculture and social support. Voting choices are often flexible and influenced more by immediate material benefits and local issues such as irrigation, employment, and infrastructure than by ideological consistency or national political narratives. Informal social mechanisms, including the influence of community leaders and social pressure, further shape electoral behaviour in rural settings. Despite the strength of the electoral system, rural Telangana faces challenges such as vote inducements in some areas, uneven political awareness, and continued dependence on welfare-driven expectations. Additionally, caste and kinship networks remain influential, while limited direct access to candidates can restrict informed voter engagement, affecting the overall quality of democratic choice.

Determinants of Rural Voter Behaviour

Socio-Economic Factors

Socio-economic conditions play a major role in shaping rural voter behaviour in Telangana. Most rural households depend on agriculture and allied activities, which are highly sensitive to rainfall patterns, market fluctuations, rising input costs, and limited non-farm employment opportunities. This economic vulnerability creates dependence on government support,

making welfare measures such as agricultural subsidies, crop insurance, loan waivers, and direct benefit transfer schemes important determinants of voting decisions. As a result, voters in rural areas often prioritise immediate economic security and livelihood protection over ideological considerations, and programmes like Rythu Bandhu further strengthen the expectation of state-led financial assistance in agricultural livelihoods.

Caste and Community Identity

Caste and community identity remain significant influences on voting behaviour in rural Telangana, where social structures are still deeply rooted in traditional affiliations. Electoral choices are frequently shaped by caste-based loyalties, with voters often supporting candidates or parties perceived to represent or protect their community interests. These identities not only guide political preferences but also influence access to leadership positions, networks, and state resources. In many rural constituencies, caste continues to function as a strong social and political organizing force, often shaping electoral outcomes alongside other socio-political factors.

Political Patronage and Welfare Politics

Political patronage and welfare-oriented governance have become central to rural electoral behaviour in Telangana. Voters increasingly evaluate governments based on the delivery and effectiveness of welfare schemes rather than ideological positions or long-term development agendas. Initiatives such as Rythu Bandhu, Rythu Bima, and other direct benefit programmes have strengthened the link between the state and citizens through tangible material support. This has led to a pattern where electoral support is closely associated with perceived performance in welfare distribution, making elections largely a judgement on the effectiveness of government schemes.

Leadership Influence and Local Networks

Leadership influence and local social networks strongly shape voting behaviour in rural Telangana. Village-level leaders, Panchayat representatives, and party workers act as key intermediaries between political parties and voters, guiding political preferences through personal trust and long-standing social relationships. In many cases, voters rely more on the credibility and recommendations of local influencers than on party ideologies or manifestos. This creates a highly personalized form of politics in which electoral choices are influenced by interpersonal ties, community standing, and local leadership dynamics rather than abstract political principles.

Media and Political Communication

Media and political communication in rural Telangana are primarily dominated by traditional and interpersonal channels. Television, political rallies, and face-to-face campaigning remain the most influential sources of political information, while digital media usage is still relatively limited in many rural areas. Information is also widely disseminated through informal networks such as family discussions, village gatherings, and word-of-mouth communication, which play a crucial role in shaping voter perceptions. Consequently, political parties rely heavily on grassroots mobilisation and direct interaction with voters, making rural political communication largely socially embedded rather than technology-driven.

Review of Literature

1. Sanjay Kumar (2013) examines evolving voting behaviour in India and highlights that electoral participation in rural areas is increasingly shaped by performance evaluation of governments along with traditional caste loyalties. He argues that while identity politics remains relevant, governance and welfare delivery are becoming stronger determinants of voter choice.
2. Christophe Jaffrelot and Pradeep Chhibber (2015) analyse the transformation of party competition in India, emphasizing the rise of regional parties and their dependence on caste-based and welfare-driven mobilization strategies. They note that rural electorates respond strongly to targeted welfare schemes and localized leadership.
3. Yogendra Yadav and Suhas Palshikar (2014) revisit Indian electoral democracy and argue that there is a “multi-layered voter behaviour” emerging in rural India, where caste, class, and development aspirations coexist. They highlight the growing political assertiveness of marginalized groups in electoral politics.
4. M.V. Rajeev Gowda (2016) focuses on the impact of welfare policies on voter preferences, stating that direct benefit transfers and subsidy-based governance models significantly influence rural voting decisions, especially among economically vulnerable groups.
5. Suri (2017) studies the changing nature of electoral politics in South India and observes that rural Telangana shows a hybrid voting pattern combining identity politics with welfare-oriented decision-making.

OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the electoral process in rural Telangana
2. To analyse the determinants of voter behaviour
3. To assess changing trends in rural voting behaviour

Hypothesis

1. **H1:** Voter behaviour in rural Telangana is significantly influenced by caste and social identity rather than purely policy-based or rational considerations.
2. **H2:** Welfare schemes and government benefit programs have a positive and measurable impact on voting preferences in rural areas.
3. **H3:** Political leadership and local elite networks play a decisive role in shaping electoral outcomes in rural Telangana.

METHODOLOGY

The study uses an analytical research design to understand voter behaviour in rural Telangana. Bandarupally of Mulugu District was chosen for the study. It is mainly descriptive in nature. Primary data was collected from 70 voters through a structured interview schedule selected on a random basis. This helped in getting direct information from respondents about their voting behaviour and the factors influencing their choices. Secondary data was collected from books, journals, government reports, Election Commission reports, and online sources to support the study. The data collected was analysed using simple percentage method.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

1. Age Group

Age Group	Number	Percentage
18-30 Years	22	31.4%
31-45 Years	21	30%
46-60 Years	19	27.2%
60 Years and above	08	11.4%
TOTAL	70	100%

From the above table, it is clear that out of 70 respondents, most respondents belong to the younger and middle age groups. The highest percentage is in the 18–30 years group with 31.4% (22 respondents). This is followed by 31–45 years with 30% (21 respondents). The 46–60 years group accounts for 27.2% (19 respondents), while the lowest is 60 years and above with 11.4% (8 respondents).

2. Awareness on Electoral Process

Response	Number	Percentage
High Awareness	17	24.3%
Moderate Awareness	19	27.1%
Less Awareness	34	48.6%
TOTAL	70	100%

From the above table, it is observed that nearly half of the respondents (48.6%) have less awareness about the electoral process, which forms the largest group. This is followed by 27.1% of respondents who have moderate awareness, while only 24.3% of respondents reported having high awareness regarding the electoral process. The data indicates that awareness levels about the electoral process in rural areas are relatively low. This suggests the need for greater voter education and awareness programmes to improve understanding of electoral procedures and strengthen informed participation in elections.

3. Participation in Voting

Response	Number	Percentage
Regularly	59	84.3%
Sometimes	09	12.9%
Never	02	2.8%
TOTAL	70	100%

From the above table, it is observed that the majority of respondents (84.3%) participate regularly in voting, which indicates a very high level of electoral participation among rural voters. A small proportion of respondents (12.9%) stated that they vote sometimes, while only 2.8% reported that they never participate in voting. The data clearly shows that voting participation is very high in the study area. This reflects strong democratic engagement among rural voters in Telangana and indicates that most respondents consider voting an important civic responsibility.

4. Elections Conducted Fairly

Response	Number	Percentage
Yes	59	84.3%
No	11	15.7%
TOTAL	70	100%

From the above table, it is observed that the majority of respondents (84.3%) feel that elections are conducted fairly in their area. Only a small proportion of respondents (15.7%) expressed that elections are not conducted fairly. The data indicates a positive perception of

the electoral process among rural voters. It suggests that most respondents have confidence in the fairness and transparency of elections in their locality, although a small section still holds negative views.

5. Influence of Voting Behaviour

Response	Number	Percentage
Welfare Schemes	47	67.1%
Money	51	72.9%
Caste	39	55.7%
Local Leaders	52	74.3%
Media	19	27.1

From the above table, it is observed that multiple factors influence voting behaviour among rural respondents in Telangana. The most significant influence is local leaders, with 74.3% of respondents indicating their impact on voting decisions. This is followed closely by money (72.9%) and welfare schemes (67.1%), showing that material benefits and economic considerations play a major role in electoral choices. Caste influence is also considerable, with 55.7% of respondents acknowledging its impact on their voting behaviour. In contrast, media has the least influence, with only 27.1% of respondents reporting its role in shaping their decisions. The data reveals that rural voting behaviour is strongly influenced by local leadership, financial inducements, welfare benefits, and caste factors, while media plays a comparatively limited role in electoral decision-making.

6. Impact of Social Media on Voting Behaviour

Response	Number	Percentage
High Impact	06	8.6%
Moderate Impact	37	52.8%
Less Impact	21	30%
No Impact	06	8.6%
TOTAL	70	100%

From the above table, it is observed that more than half of the respondents (52.8%) stated that social media has a moderate impact on their voting behaviour. This is followed by 30% of respondents who feel that social media has less impact; while an equal proportion of 8.6% each reported high impact and no impact respectively. The data indicates that social media has a limited but growing influence on rural voting behaviour. While it is not the primary source of political decision-making for most respondents, it still plays a role in shaping opinions to some extent, especially among a section of the electorate.

7. Impact of Family Members

Response	Number	Percentage
High Impact	31	44.3%
Moderate Impact	18	25.7%
Less Impact	21	30%
No Impact	0	-
TOTAL	70	100%

From the above table, it is observed that family members have a strong influence on voting behaviour in rural Telangana. A large proportion of respondents (44.3%) reported that family members have a high impact on their voting decisions. This is followed by 30% of respondents who stated that family influence is less, while 25.7% reported a moderate impact. Notably, none of the respondents reported no influence of family members on their voting behaviour. The data clearly indicates that family plays a significant role in shaping voting decisions in rural areas. It reflects that voting behaviour is largely influenced by close social relationships and household-level decision-making.

8. Influence of Money Power in Local Elections

Response	Number	Percentage
Agreed	57	81.4%
Partially Agreed	07	10%
Disagreed	06	8.6%
TOTAL	70	100%

From the above table, it is observed that a majority of respondents (81.4%) agreed that local elections are influenced by money power. A small proportion of respondents (10%) partially agreed with this statement, while only 8.6% disagreed. The data clearly indicates that money power is widely perceived as a major influencing factor in local elections in rural Telangana. This suggests that financial inducements play a significant role in shaping voter decisions and electoral outcomes in the study area.

9. Influence of Dominate Castes

Response	Number	Percentage
Increased	08	11.4%
Same	27	38.6%
Reduced	35	50%
TOTAL	70	100%

From the above table, it is observed that half of the respondents (50%) feel that the influence of dominant castes has reduced in recent times. Around 38.6% of respondents stated that the influence has remained the same, while only 11.4% feel that it has increased. The data indicates a gradual decline in the dominance of caste influence in voting behaviour, although a significant proportion of respondents still believe it continues at the same level. This suggests that while caste remains an important factor, its role may be slowly changing in rural Telangana electoral politics.

10. Role of Head of the Caste in Voting

Response	Number	Percentage
Increased	10	14.3%
Same	19	27.1%
Reduced	41	58.6%
TOTAL	70	100%

From the above From the above table, it is observed that a majority of respondents (58.6%) feel that the role of caste heads in influencing voting has reduced. About 27.1% of respondents stated that it has remained the same, while only 14.3% feel that their influence has increased. The data indicates a declining influence of caste leadership in voting decisions in rural Telangana. This suggests a gradual shift in voter behaviour, where traditional caste-based leadership is becoming less dominant compared to other influencing factors in elections.

11. Observed any Changes in Voter behaviour

Response	Number	Percentage
Yes	49	70%
No	21	30%
TOTAL	70	100%

From the above table, it is observed that a majority of respondents (70%) have noticed changes in voter behaviour in recent years. In contrast, 30% of respondents stated that they have not observed any such changes.

12. If Yes, What are the Changes

Response	Number	Percentage
Increased Voter Awareness	25	51%
More focus on Community Development	14	28.6%
Increased Money Demand	08	16.3%
Any others	02	4.1%
TOTAL	49	100%

From the above table, it is observed that among respondents who reported changes in voter behaviour, the majority (51%) stated that there is increased voter awareness. Around 28.6% of respondents felt that there is now more focus on community development issues while voting. About 16.3% reported an increase in money demand during elections, and a small proportion (4.1%) mentioned other changes. The data indicates a positive shift towards greater awareness and development-oriented voting behaviour in rural Telangana. However, some negative trends such as increased monetary influence are also observed, showing a mixed pattern of change in voter behaviour.

Key Findings

1. The study shows that rural voter participation in Telangana is very high, with 84.3% of respondents voting regularly, indicating strong democratic engagement.
2. Awareness of the electoral process is relatively low, as 48.6% of respondents reported less awareness, highlighting the need for voter education programmes.
3. Voting behaviour is strongly influenced by local leaders (74.3%), money power (72.9%), and welfare schemes (67.1%), showing the dominance of local and material factors.
4. Caste continues to influence voting behaviour (55.7%), although its role is gradually declining in some aspects of rural politics.
5. Family members play an important role in voting decisions, with 44.3% of respondents reporting high influence.
6. Social media has only a moderate impact on voting behaviour, with 52.8% reporting limited influence in rural areas.
7. A large majority (81.4%) believe that money power influences local elections, indicating the presence of electoral inducements.
8. Most respondents (70%) have observed changes in voter behaviour, especially increased awareness (51%) and more focus on community development (28.6%).
9. The influence of caste leadership is decreasing, with 58.6% reporting reduced role of caste heads in voting decisions.
10. Overall, rural voting behaviour is gradually shifting towards awareness and development-oriented voting, though social identity and patronage factors still remain significant.

Testing of Hypothesis

1. H1: Voter behaviour in rural Telangana is significantly influenced by caste and social identity rather than purely policy-based or rational considerations.

Result: Accepted

The findings support this hypothesis. Table 5 shows that caste influences voting behaviour for 55.7% of respondents, and other strong influences such as local leaders (74.3%) and family members (44.3%) further confirm the dominance of social and identity-based factors. Although caste influence is gradually declining in some aspects, it still remains a significant determinant. Hence, voter behaviour is still largely shaped by social identity rather than purely rational evaluation.

2. H2: Welfare schemes and government benefit programmes have a positive and measurable impact on voting preferences in rural areas.

Result: Accepted

This hypothesis is strongly supported by the data. 67.1% of respondents reported that welfare schemes influence their voting behaviour. Additionally, respondents identified increased focus on welfare and development-oriented voting patterns in recent changes. This clearly indicates that government welfare programmes such as Rythu Bandhu and other benefits have a direct and measurable impact on electoral choices in rural Telangana.

3. H3: Political leadership and local elite networks play a decisive role in shaping electoral outcomes in rural Telangana.

Result: Accepted

The hypothesis is also supported by the findings. A significant majority (74.3%) reported that local leaders influence their voting decisions. Furthermore, 44.3% of respondents indicated strong family influence and 81.4% agreed that money power affects elections, which is often mediated through local elites and networks. These findings confirm that political leadership and local-level networks play a decisive role in shaping voter behaviour in rural areas.

CONCLUSION

The study proved that the electoral process in rural Telangana is well-organised under the framework of the Election Commission of India and ensures high levels of voter participation. Rural voters actively engage in elections, reflecting strong democratic values. However, voter behaviour is largely shaped by socio-economic and local factors rather than

ideological or policy-based considerations. Influences such as local leaders, money power, welfare schemes, caste identity, and family networks play a dominant role in determining voting decisions, with local leadership and financial influence emerging as the most significant factors. At the same time, the study highlights a gradual transformation in rural voting behaviour. There is an increasing level of voter awareness and a growing focus on community development issues, indicating a shift towards more informed and development-oriented voting patterns. The influence of caste leadership is also declining to some extent. Despite these positive changes, challenges such as vote inducement, patronage politics, and uneven political awareness continue to exist. Therefore, strengthening voter education and ensuring fair electoral practices are essential for improving democratic quality in rural Telangana.

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