

## VOTING BEHAVIOUR AND ITS DETERMINANTS: A CASE OF LOWER SUBANSIRI DISTRICT, ARUNACHAL PRADESH

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This paper provides a concise overview of the unique dynamic of voting behaviour in the Lower Subansiri District of Arunachal Pradesh, a diverse and culturally rich state in North East India. Voting behaviour refers to 'the individual's action and decision-making process that encompasses when casting their vote in the election'. As 'voting behaviour' often reflects the social dynamics, trends, and changes, the present study attempts to shed light on the understanding of how voters decide to vote for a candidate, and why they do so. It also aims to provide insight into a distinctive pattern that influences electoral choices among voters. Using a mixed (quantitative and qualitative) methodologies approach, the study seeks to shed light on various factors influencing electoral outcomes. An in-depth analysis of historical, cultural, political, and socio-economic factors specific to Lower Subansiri of Arunachal Pradesh was carried out. Our findings show that though Arunachal Pradesh is comparatively young in terms of political process, Lower Subansiri shows a primordial tribal form of managing socio-political affairs that has been long functioning and rooted, the reason for distinct political attitudes, values, and beliefs still exist in present tribal politics. Tribal affiliations such as clan, kinship, money culture, etc. are deeply rooted in tribal politics which is visible in electoral outcomes. Further, this paper also discusses the importance of understanding 'voting behaviour' aiding to offer insights for policymakers and political analysts and contributing to policy implications.

**Keywords:** Voting behaviour, social dynamic, policy implication, electoral outcomes

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## **Introduction**

Voting is the essence of shaping and sharing of democratic representative government. It allows individuals to participate in the democratic process contributing to shaping the direction of their community and empowers citizens with immense potential to influence government policies and promote their rights, interests, and the values important to them. However, voting is also considered an outcome of voting behaviour which encompasses the various factors that shape an individual's choice for a particular candidate at the time of voting (Jocelyn, 2004). The study of how and why people make up their minds to mandate their vote for a particular candidate among many alternatives comes under the ambit of the study of voting behaviour. The importance of the study of voting behaviour is, that it includes the psychological processes like perception, emotion, and motivation that help individuals make choices on the day of the election. Therefore, the relationship between voting and voting behaviour is fundamental in understanding individuals' preferences in the electoral context (Samuel, 1951).

Systematic studies on voting behaviour marked its beginning in the year 1940s-1950s. Particularly, 'The Columbia school', led by researchers viz., Lazarsfeld, Berelson & Gaudet, made a crucial contribution. Their studies such as "The People's Choice" emphasized the role of media and interpersonal communication in shaping voter decisions and preferences (Lazarsfeld, Berelson & Gaudet, 1944). Another important research on voting behaviour study is associated with the University of Michigan led by Angus Campbell, Philip Converse, Warren Miller, and Donald Stokes. Their study "The American Voter" (1960) explored the individual-level of voting behaviour, social and psychological factors that influence the voter's voting behaviour (Campbell et al., 1960). The rational choice theory (1950s-1960s) gained prominent attention, especially through the work of Anthony Downs "An Economic Theory of Democracy" (1957) which presented how voters make a rational choice based on their self-interest (Downs, 1957). These schools of studies were later followed by various other important research on the study of voting behaviour such as the Behavioural Revolution of the 1960s which revolutionized the study of political science by giving due importance to the study of individual behaviour (Agarwal, 2004). Consequently, the study of voting behaviour continues to gain more attention in the field of electoral politics. In essence, the study of voting behaviour is an integral part of the study of the political system as it provides insight into how citizens participate in the electoral process and explores the various influencing factors that help them to make choices and express their preferences.

Arunachal Pradesh (formerly known as NEFA, being a part of Assam as North East Frontier Track) is one of the diverse and culturally vibrant states as well as young in terms of political process. The State has a long history of socio-political isolation. It was till 1972 that the erstwhile NEFA turned to union territory with a new name Arunachal Pradesh which later became a full-fledged state of Arunachal Pradesh on 20<sup>th</sup> February 1987. Currently, the state has 60 assembly constituencies with periodic elections. It may be noted that although the modern form of a political institution such as Panchayat Raj was introduced in 1967, the society of Arunachal Pradesh was governed by various tribal forms of village councils which consequently continue to dictate people's voting behaviour. Arunachal Pradesh being a culturally rooted society has been witnessed with an unstable political system. Studies have shown that voter participation is active only at the time of voting and it is the individual social characteristic that determines electoral preferences (Bath, 2009).

### **Review of Literature**

Several studies on 'voting behaviour' have been conducted by different scholars. The work of Bath (2009) gives a comprehensive insight into the electoral politics of Arunachal Pradesh focusing on the genesis of electoral politics of the state Parliamentary as well as Assembly election with who, how, and why. It also briefed on the administrative growth of the state and highlighted the various responsible factors of different voting patterns in the state. Similarly, Jocelyn (2004) in his *Voters & Voting: An Introduction* delved into specific approaches to voting behaviour which explained why people vote the way they do. Using various methods to measure 'voting behaviour', the study further shed insights into the various factors i.e., socio-psychological, political, and economic, and their influence on voting behaviour. Other authors such as Jena and Baral (1989) discussed the various determinants for the measure of voter voting behaviour in developing societies of the state of Orissa taking into account caste, language, religion, ethnicity, and other social forces as influencing factors to voting behaviour and the politics. On the importance of elections, Singh (1981) discussed how a systematic study of voting behaviour could help in understanding state politics and various methods to meet the challenges in the state of Manipur.

Kumar and Rai (2013) delved into the historical overview of election studies in India and its methods. Their study focussed on the various methods to measure the voters' voting behaviour and the validity and challenges of various scientific tools for the collection of data. Similarly, Palanithurai and Nanda (2007) provide various influencing factors to measure voters'

voting behaviour in Tamil Nadu which include perspectives of their leaders, expectations from the government, and the quality of service from the state. The authors also gave an account of how people behave politically and their political participation in the state. A similar study by Mishra et al. (1982) on voting behaviour among the tribal communities of Chotanagpur shows that the level of political consciousness, participation, candidate, and party orientation of tribal voters are the strong determinants of voting behaviour and are useful to generalize the voter's voting behaviour.

### **Statement of the problem**

Although there is a presence of many author's writings on the politics of North East India, there are only countable writings specifically focused on the field of Arunachal Pradesh politics. Prof. Nani Bath's works on electoral politics and party politics in Arunachal Pradesh (which also gives a brief highlight of voting behaviour and some of its determining factors) are few records of the dynamics of Arunachal Pradesh politics (Bath, 2009). Beyond Bath's contribution, however, there is a lack of in-depth research in the area of voting behaviour and its determinants in Arunachal Pradesh generally and of the Lower Subansiri District specifically to be mentioned. Lower Subansiri District is generally known as one of the highest election expenditure districts during elections. Additionally, beyond the influence, other factors such as tribal affiliation, kinship, and other social factors are considered to play a crucial role in electoral outcomes. To better understand the link between voters' and voting behaviour, which sheds light on individuals' preferences in the electoral context, a systematic investigation is needed. This research will examine the psychological, social, political, and economic factors that shape voting behaviour among the people of the Lower Subansiri District, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the electoral dynamics of the Lower Subansiri region of Arunachal Pradesh.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The rational theory of Anthony Downs believes that voters are always motivated by the outcome of their electoral actions. They will undertake such action whose outcome would benefit them the most or cost them the least. Anthony Down (Jocelyn, 2004) argues that the electoral arena is like a marketplace, and for this, it is essential to have supply (parties) and demand (voters). On the other hand, the proponents of the Social Structural Theory of Voting Behaviour view that individual voting preferences are an outcome of various cross-pressures in a social milieu. The voters' electoral choices are influenced by societal beliefs, values and attitudes which are imbibed through the process of socialization.

A study undertaken by the Michigan Survey Research Centre such as the Voter Decides and American Voters would link voting behaviour and party preference to psychological variables or the subjective world of the individual voter-his interpretation of candidates, and issues associated with particular events (Narain, 1978). Campbell et al. (1960), assert that the primary motivation behind voting in the US is party identification. It is the socialization process and individual's social context which provide the psychological pre-disposition towards a certain party.

According to Kumar and Rai (2013), understanding voters voting behaviour in an election helps to find some inferences of the outcome of election results because measuring voting behaviour not only helps to understand voters' mood but also significantly helps to understand the voter's intention during the election and also reflect the crucial issues and other voters consideration during election by the voters.

### **Objectives**

The objectives of the study are:

- i. *To investigate the voters' electoral participation*
- ii. *To analyse the determining factors of voters' voting behaviour*

### **Methodology**

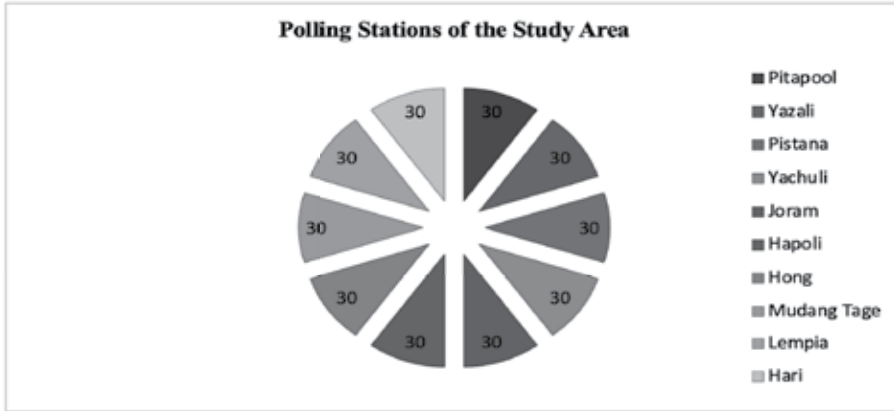
#### ***Sample***

The present study is both empirical and descriptive in its approach. For the collection of data, a purposive sampling technique was employed. To ensure fair sample representation of the diverse social, cultural, and political background of the study population, and to include cross-section samples representative of the universe of study, sampled respondents were further divided using a multi-stage stratified sampling technique.

The first stage of sampling involves the selection of Assembly Constituencies. The past election results and demographic characteristics of the sampled constituencies were rigorously matched with the overall results of previous elections in the state, provided by the Election Commission of India. The second stage was the sampling of Polling Stations within each sampled constituency. Polling Stations were again sampled by employing the PPS method. The PPS method ensures that locations with larger populations are sampled, and the underlying assumption is that locations with larger populations will be representative of the diversity within the universe. The survey covered 300 voters 150 from each constituency of Lower Subansiri.

Structured schedules (close/open-ended) were used to collect the requisite information on voters’ electoral participation and the influencing factors of their voting preferences. Respondents consist of graduate/post-graduate students, Panchayat members, village elders, and political leaders. Supplementary information was referred from books, journals, internet sources, etc.

**Study Area**



The 16-Yachuli Assembly Constituency and 17-Ziro-Hapoli Assembly Constituency of Lower Subansiri District were covered for this study. Lower Subansiri District of Arunachal Pradesh is located approximately between 92°40’ and 94°21’ East Longitude and 26°55’ and 28°21’ North Latitude<sup>2</sup>. According to the 2011 census, the district has 83,030 persons comprising 41,843 males and 41,187 females. The Apatanis and Nyishis are the two dominant tribes in the district. The total number of voters recorded at the 16-Yachuli Assembly constituency and 17-Ziro-Hapoli Assembly constituency was 15,976 and 23,349 respectively<sup>3</sup>. The district has 3 subdivisions viz., Ziro, Yachuli, and Raga, and 8 administrative circles with its district headquarters at Ziro.

**Results**

**Demographic Profile of Voters**

The presented data is based on the field survey. A demographic profile is an essential study while conducting a study on voting behaviour for many reasons, such as understanding voter characteristics, identifying a voting

<sup>2</sup> District statistical hand book of Lower Subansiri District 2011-12, on 23/01/2024

<sup>3</sup>Retrieved from <https://resultuniversity.com/election/yachuli-arunachal-pradesh-assembly-constituency> on 23/01/2024

Retrieved from <https://resultuniversity.com/election/ziro-hapoli-arunachal-pradesh-assembly-constituency>. on 223/01/2024.

pattern, and exploring the socioeconomic factors responsible for their political preferences. According to sources<sup>4</sup>, the 2019 election voter turnout was recorded at 76.7% in the 17-Ziro-Hapoli Assembly constituency, and overall district voter turnout was recorded as 45.5%. There was no voter turnout record for the 16-Yachuli Assembly constituency since the 2019 assembly election was uncontested. The district literacy rate is recorded at 76.3%. It was found that 91.6% of sampled voters were those who attended formal education institutions and 8.3% who had not attended formal education institutions. Arunachal Pradesh is a tribal state, and most of its livelihood is dependent on agriculture (*Table 1*).

*Table 1: Demographic profile of voters*

<i>Age</i>	<i>17-Ziro-Hapoli</i>		<i>16-Yachuli</i>	
18-30	28	18.6%	30	20%
31-50	42	28%	78	52%
50 and above	58	38.6%	42	28%
<b><i>Gender information</i></b>				
Male	82	54.6%	80	53.3%
Female	68	45.3%	70	46.6%
<b><i>Education level</i></b>				
No education	15	10%	10	6.6%
Primary, graduation, PG	135	90%	140	93.3%
<b><i>Occupational information</i></b>				
Employed	16	10.6%	12	8.0%
Unemployed	13	8.6%	10	6.6%
Students	10	6.6%	10	6.6%
Farmer	97	64.6%	70	46.6%
Others	14	14.9.3%	20	13.3%

Out of 300 sampled respondents, 55.6% are farmers, 9.3% are employed in Govt service, and 7.6% are unemployed. As per the distribution of the total worker report recorded in the 2011 census, out of 30,202 workers, 13,656 belonged to cultivators’ sectors which is 45.2%.

***Electoral Participation of Voters***

The total response and its numerical interpretation are presented in respective tables. The reason behind the question on electoral participation is to provide insight into the level of democratic engagement within a population. It also reflects the political culture of the society and gives insight

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.indiavotes.com/district/ac/273/2024>

into prevailing attitudes, values, and norms regarding political engagement. The voters' participation was analysed based on interviews conducted during the field survey. Our findings show that for both constituencies, the voter's response to whether they cast their vote is 100% (*Table 2*).

*Table 2: Percentage of votes in the 2019 Assembly/Lok-Sabha election*

<i>Constituency</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>%</i>
16-Yachuli	100	100
17-Ziro-Hapoli	100	100

In other words, all the sampled voters of the district cast their vote not only in the 2019 assembly election but also in the 2014 election. The voter turnout during 2014 was recorded as 81% in the Lower Subansiri district and 45% in the 2019 election<sup>5</sup>. In the 2019 assembly election, there was no voting in the 16-Yachuli assembly constituency as the year witnessed an uncontested election in the constituency.

Regarding their political participation and advocacy, the survey found only 17% participation records out of 300 total respondents. 75% of respondents are those who are not involved in political activities and 7.3% are the group of people who participate occasionally at the time of election (*Table 3*). The survey also found that the voters' political participation is high only at the time of voting and they treat political activities more socially than political.

*Table 3: Participation in political activities or advocacy*

<i>Constituency</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>%</i>
16 Yachuli	30	20	108	72	12	8.0
17-Ziro-Hapoli	21	14	119	79	10	6.6
Total	51	17	227	75	22	7.3

### ***Voter's Considerations and Determinants of Voting Behaviour***

When voters were asked about their political affiliation while voting for a particular candidate, 86% voted their affiliation to a candidate. As per the respondents' statements, the candidate belonging to a blood relative proved an advantage (*Table 4*).

*Table 4: Factors influencing the decision to vote*

<i>Affiliation</i>	<i>16-Yachli</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>17-Ziro-Hapoli</i>	<i>%</i>
Candidate/kinship	129	86	115	76.6
Political party	10	6.6	11	7.3
Party ideology	-	-	-	-
I don't know	11	5.3%	39	26

<sup>5</sup> Retrieved from statistical abstract of Arunachal Pradesh-2018 published by Directorate of Economics and Statistical Government of Arunachal Pradesh, Itanagarh.p.125

Comprehending the motivation and factors that contribute to party loyalty helps researchers analyse voters' behaviour factors responsible for shaping their voting behaviour. On that account, when sampled voters were asked if they were members of any political party. Out of 300 hundred respondents, only 25 which is 8.3% said 'Yes', and 275, which is 91.6% Said 'No' (Table. 5).

Table 5: Whether a member of any political party

<i>Constituency</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>%</i>
16 Yachuli	15	10	135	90
17-Ziro-Hapoli	10	6.6	140	93
Total	25	8.3	275	91.6

The eldest of the family in a tribal society like Arunachal Pradesh is a matter of great responsibility, whether it is a father or husband, etc. The survey shows that the eldest of the family of tribal people plays a crucial role in electoral preferences as well. Out of the total 300 respondents, 52% agreed that the eldest decides the political course of the family (Table 6). Our findings also indicate that the age group 18-30 years of voters which is 8% out of 300, total respondents is influenced by the decision of the eldest in the family. A group of voters belonging to the age group of 31-50 which is 52% of voters most of them either being eldest of the family or influenced by the decision of the eldest. The 25 % of the population belongs to women voters whose political preferences are influenced by their husbands' decisions. Whereas, the only countable number which is 12.6 % of voters voted by their own choice (Table 6).

Table 6: Who decides your vote?

<i>Affiliation</i>	<i>16-Yachuli</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>17-Ziro-Hapoli</i>	<i>%</i>
Eldest the family	87	58	70	46.6
Father	13	8.6	11	7.3
Husband	30	20	47	31.3
Own choice	13	8.6	25	16.6
Social group/peer group	7	4.6	-	-

Party members often have a strong affiliation with their party which can influence their voting behaviour. The results also showed 100% agreement when respondents were asked whether the ruling party ticket is an important factor in influencing voting behaviour. In their opinion the party affiliation and choice of the candidate of the party can play a significant role in influencing voting behaviour for many reasons such as; incumbency advantage: being a ruling party often provides an advantage (Table 7). Being a party choice has some extent of influencing potential or bargaining power. Apart from that, it gives the advantage of stability and continuity. According to the respondents,

Arunachal being a centre-dependent state, contesting independence might cost heavy financial and policy disadvantages. As a result, they considered already winner the one who had the party ticket.

*Table 7: Whether the ruling party ticket influences the voters*

<i>Constituency</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>%</i>
16-Yachuli	100	100	0	0
17-Ziro-Hapoli	100	100	0	0
I don't know	-	-	-	-

On the question, *of whether they had been offered any money/incentives at the time of the election*, the general responses indicate that it is normal to be offered money in the name of voter beneficiaries at the time of election. The money is offered from Rs. 3000 and goes up to Rs. 60,000 per vote, or even above depending on voters and situation. Similarly, on the question of *how the offer of money or incentives influence voting decisions*, most beneficiaries opined that money culture is a recent practice but it is deeply rooted now. They are compelled to accept the money as candidates after being elected they never bother to develop policies for the people or area (*Table 8*). As per their opinion, they accept and sometimes demand because they did not expect from the leaders. However, countable respondents responded that voting for money creates corrupt leaders. This leads to a lack of accountability and irresponsible representatives.

*Table 8: Whether ever been offered money/incentives in exchange for the vote*

<i>Response</i>	<i>16-Yachuli</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>17-Ziro-Hapoli</i>	<i>%</i>
Yes	129	86	115	76.6
No	11	7.3	16	10.6
I don't know	10	6.6	19	12.6

The approximate expenditure incurred by candidates during the last assembly election is given in *Table 9*. A case response estimated a spend of around Rs. 45- 50 crore in the election, where candidates offered a minimum of 10,000 per voter from 16-Yachuli constituency (15,976 voters) and at Rs. 3,000-10,000 per vote from 17-Ziro-Hapoli constituency (23,349 voters). Further, respondents are also of the opinion that money culture has already been diluted in tribal society in such a way that they perceived money culture as a political culture which is an inseparable trend.

*Table 9: Approx. Expenditure incurred by candidates during the last assembly election*

<i>Response</i>	<i>16- Yachuli</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>17-Ziro-Hapoli</i>	<i>%</i>
5-10 crore	-	-	-	-
10-20 crore	-	-	5	3.3
More than 30 crores	19	12.6	-	-
I don't know	131	87.3	145	96.6

### **Discussion**

The findings show that voters’ participation apart from ‘during the election time’ is comparatively low. Further, the findings of the study indicate that tribal voters of Lower Subansiri District, Arunachal Pradesh acted socially in response to political preference, and their political preferences are influenced by socioeconomic factors such as kinship, family values such as the decision of the elders of the family, and importantly money factor remains one of the dominating factors of voters’ voting behaviour.

The study also takes gender distribution into account for equal representation, to shed light on the dynamics of political participation and decision-making within the demographic group. To analyse political preference, questions were put up on political participation and preferences. It was found that women’s political participation is low in comparison to their male counterparts and their political preferences are mainly influenced by either the elder of the family or their husband in the case of married women. The study also reveals that money culture is often considered normal practice in the state during the time of election. The survey also reveals that political ideology doesn’t have much impact on voters voting behaviour in the state. However, the ruling political party at the centre plays a decisive role in changing the political scenario of the state. At this point only valid reason that comes up is lack of economic independence made Arunachal Pradesh a state of dependence and reduced state into a puppet in the hands of the centre. The state is also facing unemployment and this is leading the young generation into the political arena for easy earning. As a result, mushroom booming association in the state, whereas old and experienced leaders remain unaccountable and irresponsible. According to the voters’ opinion, the sense of irresponsible and unaccountable representatives is the reason for the growth of the money culture in the state and there is no way to blame the public.

## Suggestions

- Voter Awareness Campaigns must be focused on Grass Root Level as Arunachal is still in its underdeveloped period.
- The importance of political participation must be widely campaigned through various platforms such as awareness campaigns, and through various online social media platforms.
- Women's participation must be encouraged through various awareness programs especially in rural areas, regarding political activities and leadership.
- Awareness related to unethical money culture in the electoral process must be widely covered through all possible sources be it awareness camps, social media, etc. as unethical practices that hamper the accountability of leaders and put constraints on the developmental process.
- The government must initiate modern technology in farming, and open trade to neighbouring countries to encourage trade, and entrepreneurship, which might help natives for financial sustainability as well as revenue generation for financial independence and less central dependency, etc.

## Conclusion

Active electoral participation is considered indicative of a healthy democracy where citizens actively contribute to the selection of their representatives and the decision-making process. Encouraging and widespread participation is essential for the legitimacy and effectiveness of democratic government. However, the understanding and practice of democracy in tribal societies have a vast difference, especially in a state like Arunachal Pradesh. As earlier mentioned, tribal ethos dominates all other ideologies. Political participation is confined to those who hold the post. Voters' participation is high only at the time of the election, and the conduct of free and fair elections remains mere theoretical, booth capturing is still in practice, someone else votes on behalf of others, and high electoral expenditure in an election leads to irresponsible representatives. As a result, an emerging trend of un-contested elections is considered and encouraged as it is assumed to save time and money which later can be directed to developmental activities. Similarly, mostly eldest of the family decides who one would vote for, candidate affiliation is regarded, and kinship continues to be an influencing factor. Further, having a ruling party ticket is considered an advantage for being a centre-dependent state, etc. Hence it is safe to assume that tribal people of Arunachal Pradesh electoral activities are driven by socioeconomic factors as Lazarsfeld describes, "*Social characteristics determine political preference*" (Lazarsfeld et al., 1968, 69).

Despite the alarming political situation, nevertheless, there are some sections of people who have faith in change and working on various initiatives such as fighting against corruption, and movement against money culture in elections where various leaders encourage the young generation to fight against unethical electoral practice in the state, etc. Therefore, it is to see how these initiatives will have an impact on the next election and if there will be any change in the political patterns or will there be a change in voters' voting behaviour. The Theory of Rational choice explains voters and political parties act directly according to their interests (Sato, 2013). Hence, there is no denying that human nature is unpredictable, and dynamic, and tends to change over time according to changes in interest. Consequently, this gives due importance to the study of voting behaviour and will continue with more sophisticated tools, and methods. The understanding of voting behaviour became a crucial factor in understanding the political culture of a particular political environment. Analysing voting behaviour is an important source for the policy-makers to direct their interest to the interest of the electors which may lead to smooth policy implementation and a better and more stable political system.

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