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Q6(a)

Electoral behaviour of voters is governed more by the social and economic factors than the political factors. Explain

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2022 · PSIR GS 1 · 20 marks · Party System

Party System: National and regional political parties, ideological and social bases of parties; patterns of coalition politics; Pressure groups, trends in electoral behaviour; changing socio-economic profile of Legislators.

Core demand of the question

- Electoral behaviour of voters is governed more by the social and economic factors than the political factors. Explain. (20 marks)

Revision summary

Indian voters use caste, religion, region, and household economy as the default map.

Lipset-Rokkan cleavages and Mandal identity politics explain the social pull.

Prices, jobs, and transfers explain the economic pull.

Leadership, FPTP coalitions, and events remain political governors of the margin.

The ranking social-economic over purely ideological politics is sound; organisation still converts those factors into seats.

Introduction

Indian voting is never only a choice among manifestos. Caste, religion, region, class, and household economy structure who is trusted. Political factors-leadership, organisation, welfare delivery, and events-still swing margins. The statement is a strong tendency, not a law that politics is epiphenomenal.

Body

Social factors

- **Lipset** and **Rokkan** treated cleavages of religion, class, and centre-periphery as the frozen bases of European parties. India analogously votes through caste blocs, language, and minority security.
- The **Rudolphs** described caste associations as modern political actors. Mandal politics after **Indra Sawhney** (1992) made OBC identity a durable electoral grammar.
- Communal polarisation and riot memory can realign whole states, which is social fear organised as a vote.
- Kin, village faction, and gender of the household head still cue many ballots, especially where information is costly.

Economic factors

- Class in the Marxist sense is weaker as a nationwide party cleavage than caste, but farm prices, inflation, jobs, and migrant remittances are felt in the household.

- **Pranab Bardhan** and later political economists linked anti-incumbency to economic disappointment.
- Targeted transfers, farm loan waivers, and MGNREGA are economic facts that become political credit when they arrive before polling.
- Urban informal labour and agrarian distress explain why dominant-caste reservation movements also become vote banks.

Political factors that still govern

- **Duverger's first-past-the-post** rewards coalitions and local brokers, a political-institutional filter on social blocs.
- Leadership image, campaign money, booth organisation, and the **Election Commission's** model code are political, not social, variables.
- 1977 after the Emergency, 1984 after Indira **Gandhi's** assassination, and several "waves" show event politics overriding routine social arithmetic.
- Welfare branding and media, which **Foucault** would call government of conduct, are political technologies that use social data.

How to explain the statement

- **Social identity often supplies the default heuristic:** who is "our" party. Economy supplies valence: who can feed and protect.
- Political factors operate on that ground. A party that ignores caste geography usually loses, which is why the statement is largely true at the micro level.
- **Easton's** inputs include demands from the social environment; conversion is still political.
- Regional parties such as **DMK, TMC, and AAP** win by mixing linguistic or urban social bases with distinctive political offers (Dravidian welfare, Bengal regionalism, Delhi services).

Limit

- **If political factors meant only high ideology, the statement is clearly right:** few Indian voters are programmatic liberals or socialists first.
- If political factors include organisation and leadership, they are co-governors, not a residual.
- **Ambedkar's** warning remains: political democracy sits on social inequality, so the social will keep structuring the vote until that inequality thins.

Flow diagram

Vote -> Caste religion region
 Vote -> Household economy
 Vote -> Leadership organisation welfare
 Caste religion region -> Default heuristic
 Leadership organisation welfare -> Swing and wave

Conclusion

Electoral behaviour in India is governed first by social identity and household economy, which elitist and cleavage theories both predict. Political organisation, leadership, and welfare delivery work upon that base and sometimes override it. The statement is a correct ranking of routine causes, not a claim that campaigns do not matter.

Facts & figures

Mandal and Indra Sawhney

OBC reservation politics restructured party systems in North India in the 1990s.

First-past-the-post

Institutional rule that makes social geography and alliances more decisive than vote share alone.

Emergency, 1977

A political event that produced a nationwide anti-Congress verdict beyond routine caste arithmetic.

AAP, TMC, DMK

Regional parties that convert social bases plus service or linguistic politics into durable wins.

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