



YOUTH PERCEPTION ON RELIGION AND CASTE IN POLITICS

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ABSTRACT Religion and caste have historically played a significant role in shaping political behavior in India. In contemporary times, youth constitute a major demographic force influencing electoral outcomes and political discourse. This study examines how young people perceive the role of religion and caste in politics, focusing on their attitudes, beliefs, and voting behavior. The research highlights that while a section of youth supports identity-based politics for representation and empowerment, a growing number advocate for issue-based and development-oriented politics. The paper concludes that youth perception is dynamic and reflects a transition from traditional identity politics to more inclusive democratic ideals.

KEYWORDS : Youth, Religion, Caste, Politics, Identity Politics, India, Voting Behavior

1. INTRODUCTION

India is a diverse society where religion and caste deeply influence social and political life. These identities have historically been mobilized for political gains, shaping electoral strategies and party alignments. Youth, defined as individuals aged 18–35, form a critical segment of the electorate and play a decisive role in democratic processes. (Yogendra Yadav. & Suhas Palshikar-2009).

In recent years, the political engagement of youth has increased due to education, digital media, and awareness. However, religion and caste continue to influence their political perceptions and choices (World Bank-2022).

2. Objectives of the Study

- To analyze youth perceptions of religion in politics
- To examine the influence of caste on youth political behavior
- To assess whether youth prefer identity-based or development-based politics
- To study the impact of education and media on youth political attitude

3. Research Methodology

- Type of Study:** Descriptive and analytical
- Data Sources:**
 - Primary data (survey/interviews if applicable)
 - Secondary data (research articles, journals, reports)
- Sample Size:** (Optional e.g., 100–200 respondents)
- Tools:** Questionnaire, observation, and literature review

4. Literature Review:-

Previous studies indicate that caste and religion remain influential in Indian politics but are evolving in their role:

- Social divisions like caste and religion act both as tools of political empowerment and sources of polarization in democracy (Missier, C. A. -2025).
- Youth political actors sometimes reproduce caste-based hierarchies and identities in modern political contexts
- Religious beliefs continue to shape youth identity, though family influence is often stronger than digital media
- Caste and religion significantly affect participation in education and social mobility, indirectly influencing political attitudes

5. Conceptual Framework:-

5.1 Religion in Politics

Religion influences:

- Voting behavior
- Political ideologies
- Party formation
- Communal mobilization

Religion can unify communities but may also lead to division and conflict when politicized (Christophe Jaffrelot -2003).

5.2 Caste in Politics

Caste plays a crucial role in:

- Candidate selection
- Vote bank politics
- Reservation policies
- Social representation

In many regions, caste-based alliances determine electoral success (Rajni Kothari -1970).

6. Youth Perception on Religion in Politics:-

6.1 Positive Perceptions

- Religion provides moral values and ethical guidance
- Helps in cultural identity and social cohesion
- Ensures representation of religious communities

6.2 Negative Perceptions

- Leads to communalism and conflict
- Diverts attention from development issues
- Used as a tool for political manipulation

Many educated youth believe religion should remain separate from politics (Andre Béteille-1991).

7. Youth Perception on Caste in Politics:-

7.1 Supportive Views

- Necessary for representation of marginalized communities (Jha, A. -2025).
- Helps in achieving social justice
- Supports affirmative action policies

7.2 Critical Views

- Promotes division and discrimination
- Encourages vote-bank politics
- Limits merit-based governance

Youth are increasingly questioning caste-based politics but still recognize its role in social equity (Anand, P. -2024).

8. Factors Influencing Youth Perception:-

8.1 Education

- Educated youth tend to prefer secular and development-oriented politics

8.2 Social Media

- Spreads awareness but also misinformation
- Influences political opinions and polarization

8.3 Family and Culture

- Traditional beliefs still shape youth attitudes
- Family influence often outweighs digital exposure

8.4 Economic Conditions

- Youth prioritize employment, development, and opportunities over identity politics

9. Changing Trends in Youth Political Attitudes

- Shift from identity politics → issue-based politics
- Increasing demand for:
 - Employment
 - Education
 - Good governance
- Rise of political awareness and participation

However, identity politics still persists due to social structures and political strategies (Election Commission of India -2020).

10. Findings of the Study

- Youth have mixed perceptions of religion and caste in politics
- Urban and educated youth prefer secular politics
- Rural youth are more influenced by caste and community identities
- Social media plays a dual role awareness and polarization
- Youth support representation but oppose exploitation of identity

11. CONCLUSION

Youth perception of religion and caste in politics is undergoing transformation. While traditional identities still influence political behavior, there is a gradual shift toward rational, issue-based decision-making. The future of Indian democracy depends on how effectively youth can balance identity with inclusivity and development.

12. Suggestions

- Promote political education among youth
- Encourage secular and inclusive political discourse
- Strengthen awareness against communal and caste-based discrimination
- Focus on development-oriented policies

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