

5. Upper Caste Voting Trends in Bihar and the Road Ahead

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Caste arithmetic has always been one of the driving forces of elections in Bihar since decades. Getting the right caste composition in place has always been a priority for political parties in the state. Various dimensions of the election process like distribution of tickets, building the campaign strategy etc are influenced by caste considerations. The upcoming Bihar assembly elections may not be much different in this regard.

One of the most dominant social groups in Bihar politics currently are the Upper Castes. This caste group in the state largely consists of the Brahmins, the Bhumihars and the Rajputs. These three sub groups with other relatively smaller upper castes comprise of about 15 percent of the state's population (As per the estimates from multiple CSDS surveys). This makes them a very potent vote bank which every party would like to capture. Upper caste voting trends, not only in Bihar but all over the country, have generally been unidimensional and they have mostly supported the BJP and its allies (Sardesai et al 2014).

This paper aims to analyze the upper caste voting trend that has prevailed in the state of Bihar. It also looks as to what has been the trend of voting by the upper caste for various regional and national parties in the state. It would look at how certain alliances in the recent years have helped political parties in gaining support among the Upper Castes. The paper, by analyzing voting behaviour of Upper Castes since 2000, would examine how they are likely to vote in the 2015 assembly election.

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For the purpose of analysis, data has been used from various Post Poll Surveys conducted by the Centre for the study of Developing Societies (CSDS). The post poll surveys were conducted after each Assembly and Lok Sabha Election.

In case of Bihar, it has been the Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) that has always managed to consolidate the upper caste votes in its favor. Historically, since the late 80s and the early 90s, when the Janta parties mobilized the OBC votes through Mandal politics, the BJP's strategy of counter mobilizing the upper castes through Kamandal ensured that they maintain a strong hold on the upper caste even till date.

Voting Pattern of Upper Castes in Bihar

In the assembly election of 2000, BJP on its own managed to secure 31 percent of the upper caste votes (*See Table 1*). The number rose slightly to 32 percent in 2005. However, the figures dipped in 2010 elections, with the party securing a little more than one fourth (27%) of the upper caste votes. The 2014 Lok Sabha election was a wave election as the BJP managed to secure 63 percent of the votes among Upper Castes. Till 2013, the BJP had an alliance with Janata Dal United (JDU). As a result, JDU also managed to get substantial upper caste votes. In 2000 JDU managed to get 19 percent of the upper caste votes whereas in October 2005, JDU's vote share amongst the upper caste rose substantially to reach 33 percent. In 2010 assembly polls they had to settle down with 27 percent votes. However, when the JDU contested on its own in the 2014 Lok Sabha Election, it could not even manage to get one tenth of the Upper Caste votes. This indicates that the Upper Castes can be considered to be a core support base of the BJP in the state and support for the JDU was mainly due to the alliance.

The performance of the Congress party in Bihar amongst the upper caste shows some interesting trends as the figures are quite volatile. In 2000, the party secured a decent vote share of 22 percent. This figure came down to just 5 percent in 2005. However, in the next assembly election in 2010 support for the Congress among Upper Castes increased substantially by 9 percentage points to reach 14 percent. In 2014, only 1 percent of the Upper Castes had voted for the Congress. It is interesting to note that Congress has performed decently amongst the upper caste

whenever it has fought alone. There could be two potential reasons possible for this, one that whenever they had allied with the RJD, the Congress had contested on less number of seats and hence the less vote share or this could also be possible due to an association with the RJD which is traditionally not a preference for the upper caste and hence a negative shift. Rashtriya Janta Dal (RJD) has not got much support among upper castes since 2000. The party's vote share among them has remained in single digits with the highest being 9 percent in 2000. Despite allying with the Congress on various occasions, it has been unable to expand among the Upper Castes. In 2005, its vote share among the community came down to 5 percent. Since then it has almost remained constant.

Table 1
Upper Caste Voting Patterns in various elections in Bihar
(2000 -2014)

Party	2000	Oct 2005	2010	2014
BJP	31	32	27	63
Congress	22	5	14	1
RJD	9	5	6	5
JDU	19	33	27	8

Note: All figures are in percentage; For 2000, JDU includes Samata Party.

Source: CSDS Data unit.

Do Upper Caste Sub Groups Vote Differently?

Segregating various Upper Caste sub groups also shows some intriguing trends. We analyze three main sub groups – Brahmins, Bhumihars and Rajputs. In the 2000 Bihar Assembly elections, the Congress party had received a sizable vote share among Brahmins - 44 percent (*See Table 2*). They were closely followed by the constituents of the National Democratic Alliance – BJP, Samata Party and the JDU who stood second with a combined vote share of 41 percent. However in 2005 the Congress had to pay a heavy price of aligning with the RJD as their vote share amongst the Brahmins crashed by 41 percentage points to end up with just 3 percent. The BJP managed to secure 29 percent of

the Brahmin vote while its alliance partner - JDU got 37 percent of the votes. A similar trend continued even in the 2010 assembly election as the BJP managed to secure 30 percent of the Brahmin votes and helped the JDU, its alliance partner, in getting a quarter of their votes. Congress managed to regain some of its previous vote share as it contested alone in the 2010 polls as its vote share went up to 19 percent. In 2014 Lok Sabha elections, BJP rode on the Modi wave and secured more than half of the Brahmin votes in Bihar (54 %). JDU had to suffer badly as it broke the alliance with the BJP and ended up securing only 5 percent of the vote share. Congress's alliance with the RJD yet again ensured a miserable performance for the party as it got only 1 percent of the Brahmin votes in 2014.

Table 2
Brahmin Voting Patterns in various elections
in Bihar (2000 -2014)

Party	2000	Oct 2005	2010	2014
BJP	17	29	30	54
Congress	44	3	19	1
RJD	3	4	7	10
JDU	24	37	25	5

Note: All figures are in percentage. For 2000, JDU votes also include Samta Party votes.

Source: CSDS Data unit.

Unlike the Brahmins, the Bhumihar vote has not seen much of a split since 2000. The BJP has been the primary choice of Bhumihars in the state. The party managed to secure 43 percent of the vote share in the 2000 Vidhan Sabha election while its allies JDU and Samata Party secured 16 percent of the vote share (*See Table 3*). BJP retained its vote share in 2005 while the JDU managed to double its Bhumihar vote from the previous election to 30 percent. However, in 2010 the Bhumihar vote of the BJP and JDU dropped to 16 percent and 28 percent respectively. The congress gained some ground amongst the Bhumihars in 2010 as it managed to secure 12 percent votes, a 5 percentage point

rise as compared to 2005. The 2014 General election was by far the best performance for the BJP amongst the Bhumihars as close to 70 percent of them voted for it. Congress and RJD vote share was almost negligible while the JDU managed to get only 8 percent of the Bhumihar votes. Similar to the Brahmins, the RJD has failed to appeal to the Bhumihar voters in Bihar in the recent past. Their vote share among them had dropped consistently from 10 percent in 2000 to just 1 percent in the 2014 Lok Sabha election.

Table 3
Bhumihar Voting Patterns in various elections in Bihar 2000 -2014

Party	2000	Oct 2005	2010	2014
BJP	43	43	16	69
Congress	7	7	12	Negligible
RJD	10	4	4	1
JDU	16	30	28	8

Note: All figures are in percentage. For 2000, JDU votes also include Samta Party votes.

Source: CSDS Data unit.

The BJP's edge among Rajputs is relatively lower as compared to the Bhumihars. Although the BJP – JDU/Samata Party alliance managed to get a sizable 46 percent of the votes, The Congress and the RJD also managed to secure 17 percent votes each. In 2005, BJP's share of the Rajput vote came down drastically by 15 percentage points. However, this did not hamper the NDA as the JDU was able to secure a massive 45 percent vote share amongst them. The rise of BJP – JDU coalition vote share directly came at the cost of the Congress and RJD amongst the Rajputs. Assembly elections of 2010 were even better for the BJP – JDU alliance as they secured 57 percent of the Rajput votes. Despite a split with the JDU, the BJP received a massive 63 percent vote share amongst the Rajputs. JDU had to pay the price of the split as it ended up with just 8 percent of the Rajput votes.

Table 4
Rajput Voting Patterns in various elections in
Bihar 2000 -2014

Party	2000	Oct 2005	2010	2014
BJP	38	23	31	63
Congress	17	2	14	1
RJD	17	6	10	3
JDU	8	45	26	8

Note: All figures are in percentage. For 2000, JDU votes also include Samta Party votes.

Source: CSDS Data unit.

Disaggregating Upper Caste by Class

Analyzing the upper caste voting patterns of Bihar after disaggregating based on economic class gives a rather surprising picture. Contrary to popular perception, more lower class voters amongst the upper caste voted for the BJP in Lok Sabha elections 2014 as compared upper class upper castes. A mammoth 71 percent of the lower class-upper caste voted for the BJP as compared to 53 percent of the upper class-upper caste (*See Table 5*). The recent step of setting up of an expert committee by the Bihar state government to assess and finalize the recommendations made to provide adequate financial assistance to the upper caste poor (TNN, 28th May 2015), has been seen by many as a desperate attempt to stop the flow of the lower class upper caste votes towards the BJP. The shift of the Lower Class- Upper Caste voters towards the BJP has been recent as the pattern was opposite in the 2010 Election.

Table 5
Class Wise Voting Patterns of Upper Castes in Bihar

	Party	2010	2014
Upper Class	BJP	29	53
	Cong	15	Negligible
	RJD	5	7
	JDU	27	11
Lower Class	BJP	25	71
	Cong	12	1
	RJD	8	3
	JDU	28	5

Note: All figures are in percentage.

Source: CSDS Data unit.

The importance of the upper caste in Bihar also stems out from the social influence of the community. This can be examined through the profile of the elected representatives in the state. The proportion of upper caste MLAs was very high during the 70s and 80s but dropped substantially after the Mandal mobilization as the Congress declined and the Janta Dal gained in the state. But since 1995, the proportion of upper caste MLAs in Bihar has been on the ascendance. It increased from slightly less than one fifth (17 %) in 1995 to close to one third (32 %) in the 2010 assembly elections (*See Table 6*). The proportion of upper caste MLAs in 2010 was almost double than the proportion of the upper castes in the electorate. This rise in the number of upper caste MLAs in the assembly can be attributed to the continuous improvement of the BJP's performance in the state. The party has been giving a very large proportion of tickets to upper caste candidates. In 2010 assembly election, BJP gave 47 percent of its tickets to upper castes (*See Table 7*). They were followed by the Congress which gave 40 percent tickets to the upper castes. RJD and JDU gave 16 percent and 26 percent respectively. If the BJP has to do well in the 2015 Bihar elections, it has to broaden the social profile of its candidates and find more candidates from OBC groups. If they do this, it would be interesting to see if they are able to strike a

balance between holding their upper caste vote bank and making decent inroads among OBC and Dalit votes of the Janta Pariwar.

Table 6
Upper Caste Profile of Legislative Assembly of Bihar 1995 - 2010

Caste	1995	2000	2005 Feb	2005	Oct 2010
Overall Upper	17	17	21	24	32
Brahmin	3	2	3	4	5
Bhumihar	6	6	7	9	12
Rajput	7	8	10	9	14

Note: All figures are in percent and rounded off.

Source: Kumar, Sanjay (2014), 'Coalition Politics in Bihar', in 'Coalition Politics in India: Selected Issues at the Centre and the State', ed. by E.Sridharan, Academic Foundation, New Delhi.

Table 7
Proportion of Tickets Given to the Upper Caste Candidates in 2010 Bihar Assembly Elections

Party	Total Contesting Candidates	Upper Caste Candidates	Proportion of upper Caste Candidates (%)
BJP	102	47	47
Cong	243	96	40
RJD	168	27	16
JDU	141	37	26

Source: CSDS Data Unit.

Conclusion

Overall, it looks likely that the BJP will continue to retain its upper caste vote, thereby carrying on the momentum that it had managed to build for the 2014 Lok Sabha election. Moreover, the strategy of the Janata Pariwar to restart Mandal Politics could lead to counter mobilization of upper castes in favour of the BJP. If the earlier trends continue then the Congress, which has announced its alignment with

the Janta Parivar, is less likely to make any substantial inroads amongst the BJP's upper caste support base. However, it will be very interesting to see whether BJP's likely attempt to capture OBC, EBC and Dalit vote, will have any kind of impact on its traditional and core vote – the upper caste?

References :

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