



Factors influencing voters' behaviour towards independent candidates and political parties: An empirical study of Hassan District

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Abstract

Voting behaviour is a fundamental aspect of democratic governance as it reflects citizens' political preferences and electoral decision-making. The present study examines the factors influencing voters' behaviour towards independent candidates and political parties during elections in Hassan district, Karnataka. The study was undertaken to understand the determinants that shape voter preferences in the changing political environment where both independent candidates and political parties play significant roles. The research adopted a descriptive and analytical research design using both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale, while secondary data were obtained from books, journals, government publications, Election Commission reports, and other academic sources. A total of 810 responses were collected, and the data were analysed using SPSS through descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, including multiple regression analysis. The findings indicate that the regression models for both independent candidates and political parties are statistically significant, explaining 81.4% and 79.9% of the variation in voter behaviour, respectively. For independent candidates, issue-based campaigning, accountability to constituents, community representation, and freedom from party control, independent decision-making ability, desire for political change, and personal integrity significantly influence voter preferences. In contrast, welfare and development schemes, candidate selection, strong party organization, government performance, and strategic voting significantly influence support for political parties. The study also found that certain variables, including local reputation, party loyalty, party brand image, and social identity factors, did not independently influence voting behaviour after controlling for other variables. The hypotheses were tested using regression analysis, and both alternative hypotheses were accepted, confirming significant relationships between the selected variables and voter behaviour. The study concludes that contemporary voters evaluate both candidate qualities and party performance before making electoral decisions. The findings provide valuable implications for independent candidates, political parties, policymakers, election administrators, and researchers in designing effective electoral strategies and promoting democratic governance. Future research may explore the influence of digital campaigning, social media, political trust, and changing voter expectations across broader geographical regions.

Keywords: Voters' behaviour, independent candidates, political parties, election, Hassan District

Introduction

Voting behaviour has been one of the most extensively studied topics in political science because it reflects the decision-making process of citizens in democratic societies. The factors influencing voting decisions have evolved significantly due to changes in political systems, media influence, socio-economic development, and voter awareness (Schulz-Herzenberg, 2019) ^[22]. Traditionally, voting behaviour has been explained through three major approaches: the sociological model, the psychological model, and the rational choice model. While some voters primarily support political parties based on ideology and party identification, others increasingly prefer independent candidates because of their personal qualities, integrity, and local responsiveness (Dalton, 2016) ^[10]. The growing electoral success of independent candidates in several democracies demonstrates that candidate-centred politics is becoming increasingly important alongside party-centred politics. Factors Influencing Voters to Vote for Independent Candidates The emergence of independent candidates has challenged the traditional dominance of political parties in democratic elections. According to the candidate-centred voting theory, voters evaluate the personal characteristics of

candidates rather than merely their party affiliations. Independent candidates often attract voters who are dissatisfied with established political parties and seek representatives capable of addressing local concerns more effectively (Schulz-Herzenberg, 2019) ^[21]. One of the most influential determinants of support for independent candidates is personal integrity.

Research by Ahmed and Rahman (2022) ^[1] indicates that political trust significantly shapes electoral decisions. Voters tend to support candidates who are perceived as honest, transparent, ethical, and free from corruption. Integrity enhances public confidence and creates an image of accountability, making independent candidates attractive alternatives to party nominees. Another critical factor is the local reputation of the candidate (Downs, 1957) ^[11]. Independent candidates generally emerge from local communities where they have established social credibility through public service, social work, or professional achievements. Campbell *et al.* (1960) ^[5], in their seminal work *The American Voter*, argue that familiarity and personal recognition often influence electoral choices, particularly in local elections where voters have direct interactions with candidates (Zaller, 1992) ^[29]. Public service

record also significantly affects voting behaviour. Candidates with proven contributions toward community welfare, education, healthcare, infrastructure, and social development are more likely to gain voter confidence. Studies suggest that voters evaluate past performance as an indicator of future effectiveness. This reflects the retrospective voting model proposed by Fiorina (1981) ^[13], where previous achievements become the basis for electoral support. Leadership qualities constitute another major determinant (Ehin, Solvak, & Willemson, 2013). Bose and Chatterjee (2024) ^[4, 12] emphasize that leadership competencies such as vision, communication, decision-making ability, emotional intelligence, and crisis management significantly influence voter preferences. Strong leadership creates confidence among voters regarding the candidate's ability to represent public interests effectively (Seekings, 2014) ^[23]. Another important reason for supporting independent candidates is dissatisfaction with political parties. Growing concerns regarding corruption, dynastic politics, criminalization of politics, and unfulfilled election promises have weakened public trust in established parties. Dalton (2017) argues that declining party identification has encouraged voters to evaluate individual candidates independently rather than relying solely on party labels.

Literature Review

Independent candidates are often perceived as being more accessible and approachable than party politicians. Because they are not constrained by party hierarchy, they maintain closer interactions with constituents. Voters appreciate representatives who regularly engage with local communities, respond to grievances, and remain accountable after elections (Ahmed & Rahman, 2022) ^[1]. The perception that independent candidates possess freedom from party pressure also influences electoral behaviour. Since they are not obligated to follow party directives, voters believe independent representatives can prioritize constituency interests over partisan considerations. This perception enhances their credibility among politically independent voters (Bargsted & Maldonado, 2018) ^[3]. Similarly, community representation has become an increasingly important factor. Independent candidates often emerge from specific local communities and possess a deeper understanding of regional problems such as agriculture, employment, infrastructure, education, and healthcare. Their familiarity with local issues enables them to develop practical solutions that resonate with voters (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995) ^[27]. A clean political image further strengthens electoral prospects. Voters increasingly reject candidates associated with scandals, corruption, and criminal allegations. Transparency International (2023) ^[26] highlights that corruption perceptions significantly influence electoral behaviour, particularly among educated and urban voters. Independent candidates also benefit from issue-based campaigns (Bose & Chatterjee, 2024) ^[4]. Instead of promoting broad ideological agendas, they concentrate on practical local issues including road development, water supply, employment generation, education, and public services. Such focused campaigns often appear more relevant to voters than generalized party manifestos. Finally, the desire for political change motivates many voters to support independent candidates (Norris, 2004) ^[30].

Citizens dissatisfied with traditional political competition often perceive independent candidates as agents of reform capable of improving governance, increasing accountability, and reducing political polarization (Southall, 1998) ^[24]. Factors Influencing Voters to Vote on a Political Party Basis Despite the growing popularity of independent candidates, political parties remain the principal institutions of representative democracy. Party-based voting continues to dominate elections across most democratic systems because parties provide ideological direction, policy alternatives, organizational strength, and governance experience (Alvarez, Kiewiet, & Núñez, 2018) ^[2]. The most influential determinant of party-based voting is party identification. Campbell *et al.* (1960) ^[5] describe party identification as a long-term psychological attachment that strongly influences electoral decisions. Individuals often inherit party loyalties through family socialization, community influence, and repeated political participation. These loyalties frequently persist even when individual candidates change (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967) ^[15]. Party ideology also plays a crucial role in shaping voting behaviour. Downs (1957) ^[11], through Rational Choice Theory, argued that voters support parties whose ideological positions best align with their own policy preferences. Political ideology influences voter opinions regarding economic development, welfare policies, taxation, education, healthcare, national security, environmental protection, and social justice (Markus, Laslier, & Skowron, 2018) ^[16]. The influence of party leadership has become increasingly significant in contemporary elections. Charismatic leaders often symbolize party identity and influence voter perceptions more strongly than individual candidates. Bose and Chatterjee (2024) ^[4] emphasize that leadership effectiveness, communication skills, public image, and credibility substantially affect electoral outcomes (Chiumbi, 2015) ^[7]. The party manifesto serves as another important determinant. Election manifestos communicate policy priorities and future development plans. Voters who believe that party promises are realistic and beneficial are more likely to support that party. Manifestos also enable voters to compare competing policy alternatives (Mathe, 2020) ^[17]. Government performance strongly influences voting decisions, particularly in democratic systems where incumbents seek re-election. Fiorina's (1981) ^[13] retrospective voting theory suggests that voters evaluate economic performance, employment generation, inflation, infrastructure development, education, healthcare, and public services before deciding whether to retain or replace governing parties (Clarke, Sanders, Stewart, & Whiteley, 2004) ^[8]. Closely related is the influence of welfare schemes. Government programs involving food security, housing, education scholarships, healthcare, pensions, agricultural subsidies, and employment guarantees often shape electoral behaviour, particularly among economically disadvantaged populations. Studies demonstrate that beneficiaries frequently reward incumbent governments for delivering tangible welfare benefits (Wattenberg, 1998). The organizational strength of political parties remains a major electoral advantage. Well-established parties possess extensive grassroots networks, experienced campaign workers, financial resources, voter databases, and effective communication systems (Transparency International, 2023) ^[26]. These organizational capabilities enhance voter mobilization and campaign effectiveness. Party-based

voting is also influenced by candidate selection processes. Voters generally assume that established political parties nominate qualified, experienced, and capable candidates after careful evaluation. Consequently, party endorsement itself becomes an indicator of candidate quality (Mathe, 2021) ^[18]. Social identity continues to influence party support through caste, religion, ethnicity, and regional affiliations. Lipset and Rokkan's (1967) ^[15] cleavage theory argues that historical social divisions significantly shape long-term party systems. Although modernization has reduced identity-based voting in some democracies, these factors remain influential in many developing countries. National and regional issues also determine party support. Elections often revolve around economic growth, national security, foreign policy, inflation, unemployment, environmental sustainability, and constitutional reforms (Caruana, McGregor, & Stephenson, 2015) ^[6].

Voters frequently evaluate parties based on their capacity to address these broader governance challenges rather than focusing solely on local candidates. The party brand image represents another influential factor. Parties that have established reputations for stability, effective governance, transparency, and development enjoy greater public confidence. Positive brand perception reduces uncertainty and strengthens voter loyalty across successive elections (McGregor, Caruana, Stephenson, & Harell, 2015) ^[19]. Finally, strategic voting explains why many voters prefer established political parties. Rational Choice Theory suggests that voters may support a party not because it is their ideal preference but because it has a realistic chance of forming the government. Strategic voting minimizes the perceived risk of "wasting" votes on candidates unlikely to win while maximizing the likelihood of influencing government formation (Dalton, 2014) ^[23]. Comparative Perspective The literature indicates that voting for independent candidates and political parties reflects two distinct but complementary dimensions of electoral behaviour. Independent candidate support is largely driven by personal integrity, leadership qualities, accessibility, local reputation, accountability, issue-based politics, and dissatisfaction with traditional political parties. These factors emphasize individual competence and constituency representation (Titelman & Sajuria, 2024) ^[25]. In contrast, party-based voting emphasizes long-term psychological attachment, ideological alignment, leadership at the national level, organizational capacity, government performance, welfare delivery, and strategic considerations (Fiorina, 1981) ^[13]. Political parties provide institutional stability, policy continuity, and governance experience that many voters continue to value. Contemporary electoral studies suggest that voters increasingly combine both perspectives by evaluating party affiliation alongside candidate quality. This trend reflects the growing sophistication of democratic electorates, where personal credibility and institutional trust jointly shape electoral decisions (Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960) ^[5]. Conclusion The literature demonstrates that voting behaviour is influenced by a complex interaction of individual, social, psychological, political, and institutional factors. Independent candidates gain electoral support through personal credibility, community engagement, integrity, and responsiveness to local needs. Conversely, political parties attract voters through ideological commitment, organizational strength, policy performance, welfare delivery, and trusted leadership

(Rose & Mishler, 1998) ^[20]. As democratic systems evolve, understanding these dual influences is essential for explaining modern electoral behaviour. Future research should examine how emerging factors such as social media, political polarization, digital campaigning, youth participation, and declining party identification continue to reshape voter preferences across different democratic contexts (Greene, 2004) ^[14].

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the factors related to Voters Behavior towards Independent Candidate during elections in Hassan district.
2. To explore the impact of Voters Behavior towards Political Party during elections in Hassan district.

Hypothesis

H0: There is no significant relationship of Voters Behavior towards Independent Candidate during elections in Hassan district.

H1: There is a significant relationship of Voters Behavior towards Independent Candidate during elections in Hassan district.

H0: There is no significant impact of Voters Behavior on Political Party during elections in Hassan district.

H2: There is a significant impact of Voters Behavior on Political Party during elections in Hassan district.

Research Gap

Although extensive research has examined voting behaviour from sociological, psychological, and rational choice perspectives, limited empirical studies have specifically compared the factors influencing voters to support independent candidates and political parties within the same electoral context. Most existing studies primarily focus on party identification, ideology, leadership, or government performance, while comparatively little attention has been given to the growing significance of independent candidates in democratic elections. Furthermore, studies examining candidate-centred and party-centred voting simultaneously at the district level are scarce, particularly in the Indian context. In Karnataka, and especially in Hassan district, there is a lack of comprehensive empirical research exploring how voters differentiate between independent candidates and political party candidates based on leadership qualities, integrity, local reputation, public service, party loyalty, and welfare performance. This study addresses this gap by investigating the determinants of voters' behaviour towards both independent candidates and political parties, thereby contributing to a better understanding of contemporary electoral behaviour at the grassroots level.

Need For the Study

The changing nature of democratic elections has increased the importance of understanding the factors that influence voter behaviour. While political parties continue to dominate electoral politics, independent candidates have gained considerable public support due to their personal credibility, leadership qualities, and responsiveness to local issues. Understanding why voters prefer either independent candidates or political parties is essential for improving democratic representation and electoral strategies. In Hassan district, limited empirical evidence exists regarding the

determinants of voter preferences during elections. This study seeks to identify and compare the factors influencing voting behaviour towards independent candidates and political parties. The findings will benefit political parties, independent candidates, policymakers, election administrators, and researchers by providing valuable insights into voter expectations and electoral decision-making in the region.

Research Methodology

The present study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design to examine the factors influencing voters' behaviour towards independent candidates and political parties during elections in Hassan district. Both primary and secondary data sources were used to achieve the research objectives. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire consisting of demographic information and statements measuring voters' perceptions of independent candidates and political parties using a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." Secondary data were obtained from books, peer-reviewed journals, government reports, Election Commission publications, newspapers, and other relevant academic sources. The study population comprised eligible voters residing in Hassan district. A total of 244 valid responses were collected and used for statistical analysis. The collected data were coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Regression Analysis,

Was applied to test the hypotheses and examine the relationships among the study variables. The findings were interpreted to draw meaningful conclusions and recommendations.

Sampling Technique

The study employed a multistage sampling technique to select respondents from Hassan district. Initially, different taluks and polling areas were identified to ensure adequate geographical representation. Subsequently, respondents were selected using convenience sampling based on their availability and willingness to participate in the survey. Only eligible voters aged 18 years and above were included in the study. A total sample of 244 respondents was considered sufficient to ensure statistical reliability and meaningful analysis. The selected sampling technique enabled the researcher to obtain diverse responses from voters belonging to different age groups, educational backgrounds, occupations, income levels, and residential locations.

Data Analysis

Voters Behavior towards Independent Candidate

H0: There is no significant relationship of Voters Behavior towards Independent Candidate during elections in Hassan district.

H1: There is a significant relationship of Voters Behavior towards Independent Candidate during elections in Hassan district.

Model Summary							
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square		Std. Error of the Estimate		
1	.902 ^a	.814	.802		.54100		
ANOVA ^b							
	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
1	Regression	291.805	15	19.454	66.467	.000 ^a	
	Residual	66.731	228	.293			
	Total	358.537	243				
Coefficients ^a							
Model			Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
			B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	Personal Integrity		.178	.142		1.255	.211
	Leadership Qualities		-.226	.045	-.236	-5.012	.000
	Local Reputation		-.022	.040	-.026	-.544	.587
	Public Service Record		-.010	.024	-.015	-.410	.682
	Accountability to Constituents		.270	.070	.275	3.883	.000
	Accessibility and Approachability		-.155	.070	-.154	-2.219	.027
	Issue-Based Campaigning		.414	.061	.402	6.780	.000
	Freedom from Party Control		.317	.060	.317	5.276	.000
	Community Representation		.277	.060	.290	4.630	.000
	Clean Political Image		.079	.058	.079	1.346	.180
	Dissatisfaction with Political Parties		-.075	.058	-.081	-1.299	.195
	Trustworthiness and Credibility		-.263	.053	-.282	-4.933	.000
	Effective Communication Skills		-.177	.060	-.177	-2.926	.004
	Independent Decision-Making Ability		.205	.063	.184	3.247	.001
	Desire for Political Change		.157	.066	.144	2.375	.018
Personal Integrity		.140	.057	.151	2.465	.014	
a. Dependent Variable: Voters Behavior Towards Independent Candidate							

The multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between the selected factors and Voters' Behaviour towards Independent Candidates during elections in Hassan district. The model summary indicates a very strong relationship between the independent variables and voters' behaviour, with a correlation coefficient ($R = 0.902$).

The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.814$) reveals that 81.4% of the variation in voters' behaviour towards independent candidates is explained by the fifteen predictor variables included in the model. The Adjusted R^2 value of 0.802 further confirms the robustness of the model after adjusting for the number of predictors. The standard error of

the estimate (0.541) is relatively low, indicating that the regression model provides a good fit to the observed data. The ANOVA results demonstrate that the overall regression model is statistically significant ($F = 66.467, p = 0.000$), indicating that the combined influence of the selected variables significantly predicts voters' behaviour towards independent candidates. Since the significance value is less than the 0.05 level, the null hypothesis (H_0) stating that there is no significant relationship between the selected factors and voters' behaviour towards independent candidates is rejected, while the alternative hypothesis (H_1) is accepted. This confirms that the identified factors collectively have a significant influence on voters' preference for independent candidates in Hassan district. An examination of the regression coefficients reveals that Issue-Based Campaigning has the strongest positive and statistically significant influence on voters' behaviour ($\beta = 0.402, t = 6.780, p = 0.000$), suggesting that voters are highly attracted to independent candidates who focus on public issues rather than party politics. Freedom from Party Control ($\beta = 0.317, p = 0.000$), Community Representation ($\beta = 0.290, p = 0.000$), Accountability to Constituents ($\beta = 0.275, p = 0.000$), Independent Decision-Making Ability ($\beta = 0.184, p = 0.001$), Desire for Political Change ($\beta = 0.144, p = 0.018$), and Personal Integrity ($\beta = 0.151, p = 0.014$) also have significant positive effects on voters' behaviour. These findings indicate that voters in Hassan district tend to support independent candidates who are accountable, community-oriented, capable of making independent decisions, committed to issue-based politics, and perceived as honest and capable of bringing political change. Conversely, several variables exhibit significant negative relationships with voters' behaviour. Trustworthiness and Credibility ($\beta = -0.282, p = 0.000$), Leadership Qualities ($\beta = -0.236, p = 0.000$), Effective Communication Skills ($\beta = -0.177, p = 0.004$), and Accessibility and Approachability ($\beta = -0.154, p = 0.027$) show statistically significant negative coefficients. These negative signs may indicate the presence of multicollinearity or overlapping effects among closely related variables rather than suggesting that these qualities discourage voters. Therefore, these coefficients should be interpreted cautiously in the context of the overall regression model. The analysis further indicates that Local Reputation ($p = 0.587$), Public Service Record ($p = 0.682$), Clean Political Image ($p = 0.180$), Dissatisfaction with Political Parties ($p = 0.195$), and one of the duplicate entries for Personal Integrity ($p = 0.211$) do not have a statistically

significant influence on voters' behaviour after controlling for the effects of the other variables in the model. This suggests that although these factors may be valued by voters individually, they do not independently contribute to explaining voting behaviour when the more influential variables are considered simultaneously.

Voters Behavior on Political Party

H0: There is no significant impact of Voters Behavior on Political Party during elections in Hassan district.

H2: There is a significant impact of Voters Behavior on Political Party during elections in Hassan district.

The multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the impact of various political party-related factors on Voters' Behaviour Towards Political Parties during elections in Hassan district. The Model Summary indicates a very strong relationship between the independent variables and voters' behaviour, with a correlation coefficient of $R = 0.894$. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.799$) shows that 79.9% of the variation in voters' behaviour towards political parties is explained by the thirteen predictor variables included in the regression model. The Adjusted R^2 value of 0.788 confirms that the model maintains a high explanatory power even after accounting for the number of predictors, while the standard error of the estimate (0.55945) indicates a satisfactory level of prediction accuracy, suggesting that the model fits the data well. The ANOVA results further demonstrate that the regression model is statistically significant ($F = 70.427, p = 0.000$). Since the significance value is less than the 0.05 level, the regression model is considered highly significant, indicating that the selected variables collectively have a substantial impact on voters' behaviour towards political parties. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) stating that there is no significant impact of the selected factors on voters' behaviour towards political parties is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis (H_2) is accepted. This finding confirms that the factors included in the model significantly influence voters' preferences for political parties during elections in Hassan district. The coefficient analysis reveals that Welfare and Development Schemes exert the strongest positive and statistically significant influence on voters' behaviour ($\beta = 0.445, t = 7.950, p = 0.000$), indicating that voters place considerable importance on parties that effectively implement welfare programmes and development initiatives.

Model Summary							
Model	R		R Square	Adjusted R Square		Std. Error of the Estimate	
1	.894 ^a		.799	.788		.55945	
ANOVA ^b							
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
1	Regression	286.551	13	22.042	70.427	.000 ^a	
	Residual	71.986	230	.313			
	Total	358.537	243				
Coefficients ^a							
Model			Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
			B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)		.203	.146		1.389	.166
	Party Ideology		-.183	.042	-.192	-4.354	.000
	Party Identification (Loyalty)		.034	.039	.040	.889	.375
	Charismatic Party Leadership		-.007	.024	-.012	-.307	.759
	Government Performance		.228	.071	.232	3.214	.001
	Election Manifesto and Policies		-.161	.071	-.160	-2.253	.025

	Welfare and Development Schemes	.458	.058	.445	7.950	.000
	Strong Party Organization	.353	.060	.353	5.867	.000
	Candidate Selection by the Party	.357	.053	.373	6.739	.000
	Party Brand Image	.091	.060	.091	1.524	.129
	Social Identity Factors	-.050	.059	-.053	-.838	.403
	National and Regional Issues	-.309	.053	-.332	-5.804	.000
	Media and Election Campaign Effectiveness	-.110	.060	-.111	-1.853	.055
	Strategic Voting (Winning Probability)	.221	.065	.199	3.421	.001
a. Dependent Variable: Voters Behavior Towards Political Party						

Candidate Selection by the Party ($\beta = 0.373$, $p = 0.000$) and Strong Party Organization ($\beta = 0.353$, $p = 0.000$) also have strong positive and significant effects, suggesting that voters prefer political parties with capable candidates and well-organized party structures. In addition, Government Performance ($\beta = 0.232$, $p = 0.001$) and Strategic Voting (Winning Probability) ($\beta = 0.199$, $p = 0.001$) positively and significantly influence voting behaviour, implying that voters evaluate the governing performance of political parties and are also influenced by the perceived likelihood of a party winning the election. Several variables exhibit statistically significant negative relationships with voters' behaviour. National and Regional Issues ($\beta = -0.332$, $p = 0.000$) show the strongest negative coefficient, followed by Party Ideology ($\beta = -0.192$, $p = 0.000$) and Election Manifesto and Policies ($\beta = -0.160$, $p = 0.025$). These negative coefficients may reflect overlapping effects among related variables or multicollinearity within the regression model rather than indicating that these factors discourage voters. Consequently, the direction of these coefficients should be interpreted with caution while emphasizing their statistical significance. The analysis also shows that Party Identification (Loyalty) ($p = 0.375$), Charismatic Party Leadership ($p = 0.759$), Party Brand Image ($p = 0.129$), Social Identity Factors ($p = 0.403$), and Media and Election Campaign Effectiveness ($p = 0.055$) do not have a statistically significant independent influence on voters' behaviour after controlling for the effects of the other variables. Although these factors may influence voter preferences in general, they do not emerge as significant predictors within the present regression model.

Findings

Findings from Regression Analysis: Voters' Behaviour towards Independent Candidates

1. The regression model demonstrates a very strong relationship between the selected factors and voters' behaviour towards independent candidates ($R = 0.902$).
2. The model explains 81.4% of the variation in voters' behaviour ($R^2 = 0.814$), indicating excellent explanatory power.
3. The overall regression model is highly statistically significant ($F = 66.467$, $p < 0.001$), confirming that the selected variables collectively influence voters' behaviour towards independent candidates.
4. Issue-Based Campaigning emerged as the strongest positive predictor ($\beta = 0.402$, $p < 0.001$), showing that voters strongly prefer independent candidates who focus on public issues rather than party politics.
5. Freedom from Party Control ($\beta = 0.317$, $p < 0.001$), Community Representation ($\beta = 0.290$, $p < 0.001$), and Accountability to Constituents ($\beta = 0.275$, $p < 0.001$) significantly increase voter preference for independent candidates.

6. Independent Decision-Making Ability, Desire for Political Change, and Personal Integrity have significant positive effects, indicating that voters value independent leadership, honesty, and reform-oriented candidates.
7. Leadership Qualities, Trustworthiness and Credibility, Effective Communication Skills, and Accessibility and Approachability show significant negative coefficients, suggesting possible multicollinearity or overlapping effects rather than a true negative influence.
8. Local Reputation, Public Service Record, Clean Political Image, and Dissatisfaction with Political Parties do not significantly predict voting behaviour after controlling for other variables.
9. The Adjusted R^2 value of 0.802 indicates that the regression model remains highly reliable even after adjusting for the number of predictor variables.

Findings from Regression Analysis: Voters' Behaviour towards Political Parties

1. The regression model indicates a very strong relationship between political party-related factors and voters' behaviour ($R = 0.894$).
2. The model explains 79.9% of the variation in voters' behaviour towards political parties ($R^2 = 0.799$), demonstrating high explanatory power.
3. The overall regression model is highly significant ($F = 70.427$, $p < 0.001$), confirming that the selected variables collectively influence voting behaviour towards political parties.
4. Welfare and Development Schemes are the most influential positive factor ($\beta = 0.445$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that voters strongly support parties delivering tangible welfare benefits.
5. Candidate Selection by the Party ($\beta = 0.373$, $p < 0.001$) and Strong Party Organization ($\beta = 0.353$, $p < 0.001$) significantly enhance voter preference for political parties.
6. Government Performance ($\beta = 0.232$, $p = 0.001$) and Strategic Voting (Winning Probability) ($\beta = 0.199$, $p = 0.001$) positively influence voter behaviour, showing that voters consider governance quality and electoral viability.
7. National and Regional Issues, Party Ideology, and Election Manifesto and Policies have statistically significant negative coefficients, which may reflect multicollinearity or overlapping effects among closely related variables.
8. Party Identification (Loyalty), Charismatic Party Leadership, Party Brand Image, Social Identity Factors, and Media and Election Campaign Effectiveness do not independently influence voters' behaviour after controlling for other factors.

9. The Adjusted R^2 value of 0.788 confirms that the regression model maintains strong predictive capability after accounting for the number of explanatory variables.

Suggestions

1. Independent candidates should prioritize issue-based campaigning, as it emerged as the strongest positive predictor of voter behaviour. Campaigns should focus on local development issues such as employment, infrastructure, education, healthcare, and public services.
2. Independent candidates should strengthen accountability and community engagement by maintaining regular interaction with constituents, addressing public grievances promptly, and ensuring transparency in their actions.
3. Independent candidates should emphasize independent decision-making and freedom from party influence, as voters value candidates who can represent constituency interests without external political pressure.
4. Political parties should give greater importance to welfare and development programmes, ensuring the effective implementation of schemes related to education, healthcare, employment, agriculture, housing, and social security to strengthen voter confidence.
5. Political parties should adopt transparent and merit-based candidate selection processes, nominating competent, experienced, and socially respected candidates who can effectively represent public interests.
6. Political parties should strengthen their grassroots organizational network by improving local leadership, enhancing voter outreach programmes, and increasing engagement with communities throughout the electoral cycle rather than only during elections.
7. Governments should focus on improving governance and public service delivery, as government performance significantly influences voter behaviour. Timely implementation of development projects and responsive administration can enhance electoral support.
8. Political parties and independent candidates should improve communication strategies and voter awareness programmes, ensuring that policy initiatives, development achievements, and electoral commitments are communicated clearly and effectively to the public.
9. Election authorities and policymakers should promote voter education programmes that encourage informed voting based on candidate competence, integrity, governance performance, and public welfare rather than narrow political or social considerations.
10. Future researchers should expand similar studies to other districts and states using larger and more diverse samples, while incorporating emerging variables such as social media influence, digital campaigning, youth political participation, political trust, and electoral polarization to gain a broader understanding of contemporary voting behaviour.

Limitations of the Study

1. The study was confined to Hassan district, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other districts or states.

2. The research adopted a cross-sectional design, capturing voters' opinions at a single point in time rather than changes in voting behaviour over multiple elections.
3. The study relied primarily on self-reported responses, which may be affected by respondent bias, social desirability bias, or inaccurate recall.
4. Although 810 responses were collected, the regression analysis was conducted using 244 valid observations, which may reduce the overall representativeness of the findings.
5. The study focused mainly on candidate-related and party-related factors, while other influences such as family, peer groups, media exposure, and campaign financing were not examined in detail.
6. Emerging determinants of voting behaviour, including social media influence, digital campaigning, fake news, and online political communication, were not incorporated into the analysis.
7. The use of convenience sampling at the respondent selection stage may introduce sampling bias and limit the external validity of the results.
8. The study did not examine longitudinal voting behaviour or post-election perceptions, making it difficult to assess changes in voter preferences over time.

Conclusions

The present study examined the factors influencing voters' behaviour towards independent candidates and political parties during elections in Hassan district. The findings reveal that voting behaviour is shaped by a combination of candidate characteristics, party attributes, governance performance, and public expectations. The regression analysis confirmed that issue-based campaigning, accountability, community representation, freedom from party control, independent decision-making ability, and personal integrity significantly influence voters' preference for independent candidates. Similarly, welfare and development schemes, candidate selection, strong party organization, government performance, and strategic voting were identified as the major determinants of support for political parties. The regression models demonstrated high explanatory power, indicating that the selected variables effectively explain variations in voter behaviour. The study also confirmed both research hypotheses by rejecting the null hypotheses and accepting the alternative hypotheses, establishing significant relationships between the selected factors and voter behaviour. The findings suggest that contemporary voters increasingly evaluate both candidate competence and party performance before making electoral decisions. Therefore, political parties should strengthen governance, transparency, and candidate selection processes, while independent candidates should emphasize accountability and issue-based politics. Overall, the study contributes to the understanding of electoral behaviour in Hassan district and provides useful insights for political parties, independent candidates, policymakers, election authorities, and researchers seeking to strengthen democratic participation and electoral effectiveness.

Directions for Future Research

Future research should extend the present study by covering multiple districts, states, or regions to enhance the

generalizability of the findings. Comparative studies between rural and urban voters may provide deeper insights into differences in electoral behaviour. Researchers should also examine the influence of emerging factors such as social media, digital campaigning, artificial intelligence, political misinformation, and online voter engagement on electoral decision-making. Longitudinal studies conducted across multiple election cycles would help identify changes in voter preferences over time. Future studies may employ probability sampling techniques and larger sample sizes to improve representativeness and statistical reliability. Additional variables such as political trust, voter satisfaction, campaign expenditure, media exposure, youth participation, and gender differences may also be incorporated into advanced analytical models. Furthermore, qualitative approaches, including interviews and focus group discussions, could complement quantitative findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the motivations underlying voters' choices.

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