

# **Influence of Geographical Factors (Rural Vs Urban) on Voting Patterns in College-Going Women in India**

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## **Abstract**

This research delves into the intricate dynamics of voting patterns among college-going women in India, with a specific focus on the influence of geographical factors, namely rural versus urban environments. Through a blend of literature review and primary research, the study explores the nuanced factors shaping electoral decisions among young women in the rural town of Padrauna, Uttar Pradesh, and the urban landscape of New Delhi.

The findings highlight significant disparities in voting intentions and considerations between rural and urban women, underscoring the pivotal role of education in enhancing women's political engagement. While women from rural India exhibit a stronger commitment to voting, influenced by factors such as community ties and local engagement, women from urban India prioritize development-related concerns due to the complexities of urban living and heightened awareness of existing inequalities.

The primary research identifies a common challenge faced by women voters in both urban and rural India - a lack of information stemming from low literacy rates, restricted access to educational resources, and limited exposure to political campaigns. Despite access to better education in urban areas, women still struggle to navigate through the overwhelming amount of political information, highlighting the need for targeted awareness programs.

The research paper concludes by emphasizing the critical need for tailored approaches to women's empowerment that address the unique challenges and aspirations of urban and rural Indian women. It calls for inclusive policies and actions informed by a deep understanding of the diverse realities faced by women across the urban-rural spectrum, thereby paving the way for genuine inclusivity and participation in India's political landscape.

## Introduction

In the vast landscape of Indian democracy, a noteworthy shift has taken place—the increasing influence of the "Woman Factor" in electoral dynamics. In the 2019 general elections, women voter turnout was more than men, setting a trend expected to continue.<sup>1</sup> This shift is not confined to national polls; states like Chhattisgarh, and Madhya Pradesh, who have long had a strong community of male voters, have also seen higher woman voter turnout than men, intensifying the competition for the crucial woman vote among political parties.<sup>2</sup>

The significance of this trend was evident in the Indian Prime Minister's post-victory statement, assuring women that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is the guarantor of their security, safety, and dignity. Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, "Women believe only the BJP can guarantee their security, safety and dignity. I want to assure women that all promises made to them will be fulfilled 100%."<sup>3</sup> Other parties, like the Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party, have responded with their own schemes targeting women, such as free bus travel and subsidized cooking gas.

According to the Economic Survey 2022-23, 65% of India's population resides in rural areas, with women constituting 48%, underscoring the need to delve into the nuanced influences shaping their voting decisions.<sup>4</sup> As a 16-year-old anticipating my first voting experience in the coming years, I was keen on understanding the expectations and voting patterns of young women in my home district of Eastern Uttar Pradesh, specifically in the rural enclave of Padrauna and the urban landscape of Delhi where I currently reside. Beyond the surface appeal of political promises and schemes, my research delves into the nuanced factors influencing the electoral choices of young women. Whether considerations revolve around employment prospects, safety

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<sup>1</sup> Bharti Jain / TNN / Nov 26, 2021. "Women Voter Participation Exceeds That of Men in 2019 LS Polls: CEC Chandra: India News - Times of India." *The Times of India*, TOI, [timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/women-voter-participation-exceeds-that-of-men-in-2019-ls-polls-cec-chandra/articleshow/87936542.cms](https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/women-voter-participation-exceeds-that-of-men-in-2019-ls-polls-cec-chandra/articleshow/87936542.cms). Accessed 01 Jan. 2024.

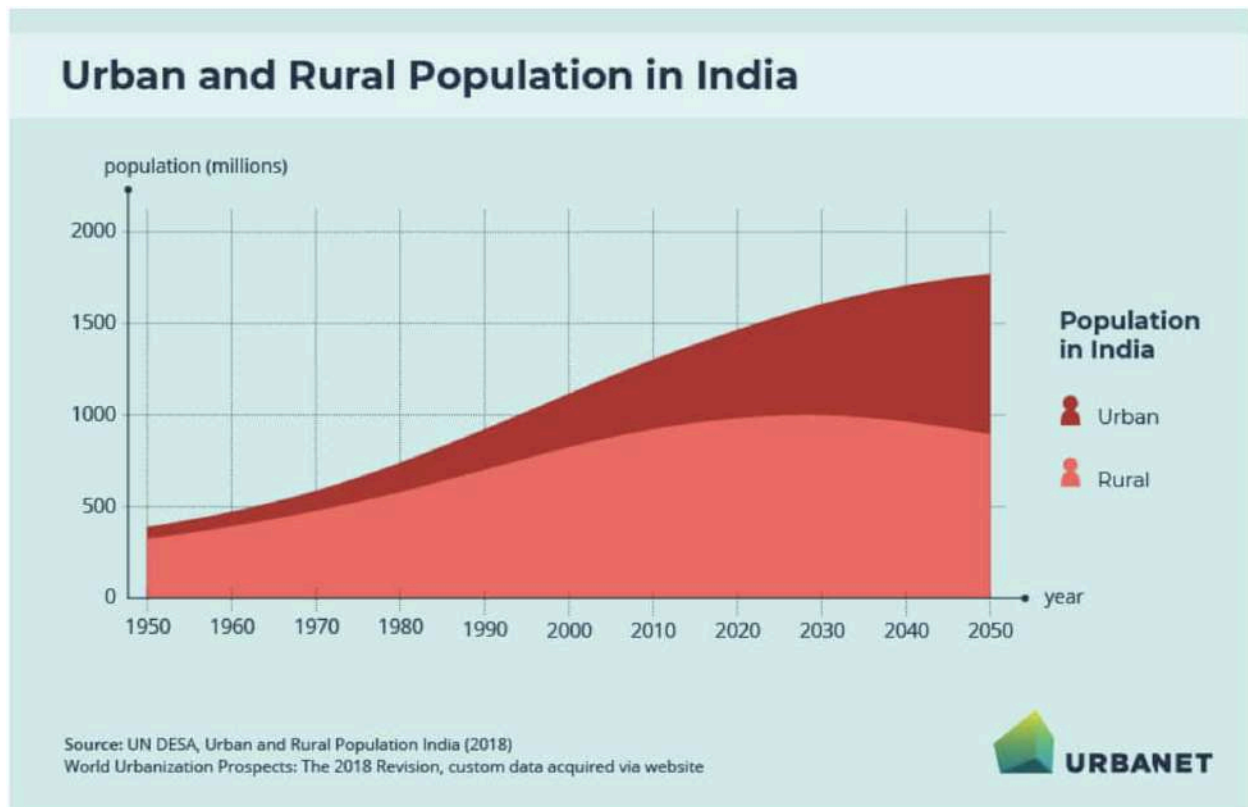
<sup>2</sup> "Why Women's Votes Are Crucial in MP and Chhattisgarh Elections ." *India Today*, 20 Nov. 2023, [www.indiatoday.in/diu/story/why-womens-votes-are-crucial-in-mp-and-chhattisgarh-elections-2465449-2023-11-20](https://www.indiatoday.in/diu/story/why-womens-votes-are-crucial-in-mp-and-chhattisgarh-elections-2465449-2023-11-20). Accessed 17 Jan. 2024.

<sup>3</sup> Bharti Jain / TNN / Dec 4, 2023. "PM Modi Thanks 'Behnon', Signals 'naari Shakti' Role in BJP's Victory: India News - Times of India." *The Times of India*, TOI, [timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/pm-modi-thanks-behnon-signals-naari-shakti-role-in-bjps-victory/articleshow/105711885.cms](https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/pm-modi-thanks-behnon-signals-naari-shakti-role-in-bjps-victory/articleshow/105711885.cms). Accessed 17 Jan. 2024.

<sup>4</sup> "Economic Survey Highlights Thrust on Rural Development." *Press Information Bureau*, [pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1894901](https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1894901). Accessed 20 Dec. 2023.

concerns, or policies tailored for women, I aim to uncover the driving forces behind their decisions.

Moreover, a crucial aspect of my inquiry involves examining the evolving role of women in the political arena — transitioning from passive recipients of political initiatives to active participants in shaping the discourse. In essence, my research seeks to unravel the complexities of young women's voting patterns, shedding light on the multifaceted elements that guide their decisions as they engage with the political process.



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<sup>5</sup> URBANET. "Urbanisation in India: Infographics." *Urbanet*, 2 Jan. 2024, [www.urbanet.info/urbanisation-in-india-infographics/](http://www.urbanet.info/urbanisation-in-india-infographics/). Accessed 27 Jan. 2024.

## Literature Review

A multitude of studies done on this particular topic help one better understand and play simultaneously with the findings of this study. A paper written by Gangeswar Kalita on 'Rural Women's Participation in Electoral Politics' stated that "though the participation of women in politics is, however, slightly increasing, it is not to the level of satisfaction."<sup>6</sup> Moreover, this served as an explanation to the findings of this paper which suggested that education is a crucial tool to reach this level of satisfactory participation by women.

Other studies conducted around the world also highlight the difference between an urban and rural demographic. In a 2008 study titled 'Rural Voters and the Polarization of American Presidential Elections' by Seth C. McKee,<sup>7</sup> it was disclosed that the influence of location on politics is substantial. The distinctive social networks present in rural and urban areas contribute to notable variations in economic, religious, racial, and political aspects among voters. The study underscored the considerable divergence in political preferences between urban and rural voters.

A parallel study by Martin Plesivcak, titled 'The Regional Dimension of the Socio-Political Urban-Rural Conflict in Slovakia,' echoed similar findings. It highlighted significant disparities in the nature of electoral support demonstrated by rural and urban electorates, particularly in various regions of south and south-western Slovakia<sup>8</sup>. However, certain regions in Eastern Slovakia exhibited similarities in their electoral preferences.

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<sup>6</sup> Kalita, Gangeswar. "Rural Women's Participation in Electoral Politics." *IJCAES SPECIAL ISSUE ON BASIC, APPLIED & SOCIAL SCIENCES, VOLUME II, JULY 2012*, July 2012, [citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=8e00522bc134df3a114a91fc2afc776b5d6f54bc](http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=8e00522bc134df3a114a91fc2afc776b5d6f54bc). Accessed 21 Dec. 2023.

<sup>7</sup> McKee, Seth C. "Rural Voters and the Polarization of American Presidential Elections: PS: Political Science & Politics." *Cambridge Core*, Cambridge University Press, 11 Jan. 2008, [www.cambridge.org/core/journals/ps-political-science-and-politics/article/abs/rural-voters-and-the-polarization-of-american-presidential-elections/71C4FBB47155E49B8EAEBF112160ACF2](http://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/ps-political-science-and-politics/article/abs/rural-voters-and-the-polarization-of-american-presidential-elections/71C4FBB47155E49B8EAEBF112160ACF2). Accessed 05 Dec. 2023.

<sup>8</sup> PDF) *Regional and Social Cleavages in the Slovak Elections After ...*, [www.researchgate.net/publication/309670733\\_Regional\\_and\\_social\\_cleavages\\_in\\_the\\_Slovak\\_elections\\_after\\_the\\_change\\_of\\_the\\_regime](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/309670733_Regional_and_social_cleavages_in_the_Slovak_elections_after_the_change_of_the_regime). Accessed 20 Dec. 2023.

## **Primary Research: Method**

To explore the research question, surveys were conducted to gather primary data. Surveys were chosen because they suited the specific region being studied - Padrauna in Uttar Pradesh. Direct contact was crucial to get reliable results. Hence, independent samples were used to avoid any external influences on the observations.

A series of steps were taken to minimize bias. Firstly, the surveys were anonymous, and any doubts participants had were clarified while assuring them of confidentiality. The surveys focused on females aged 18 to 23, who were high school graduates, and included participants from both Padrauna (UP) and Delhi, taking into account different socioeconomic backgrounds.

The research employed a self-designed printed questionnaire in a multiple-choice format. In Uttar Pradesh, surveys were administered in person at a college. A brief introduction preceded the distribution, offering insights into my background and the research's purpose. Participants were given 45 minutes to complete the survey, with opportunities for clarification.

In Delhi, a Google Form was utilized to facilitate flexibility, allowing respondents to answer at their convenience. The online format offered convenience and adaptability in response time. The surveys were introduced with a concise online context regarding my identity and research objectives.

The language of the survey aligned with participants' preferences, utilizing Hindi for UP and English for Delhi. These methodological variations aimed to capture diverse perspectives while maintaining a focused study on voting patterns among college-going women in distinct geographic contexts.



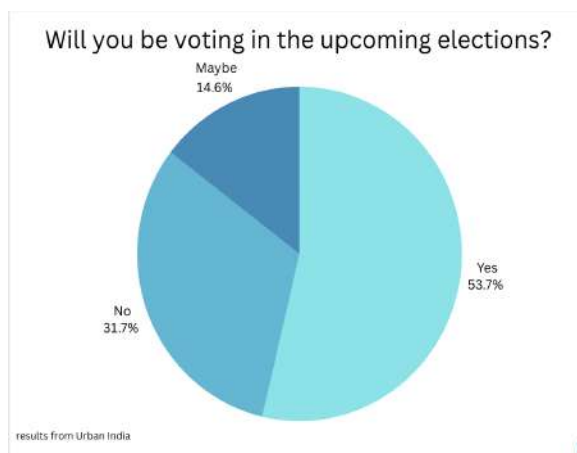
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- Padrauna is a town located in the Kushinagar district of the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. It is located in the eastern part of the state, near the border with Nepal. The town sits on the banks of the river Rapti.
- Delhi, on the other hand, is the capital city of India and is situated in the northern part of the country. It is a major metropolitan area and is bordered by the state of Haryana on three sides and by Uttar Pradesh to the east. The city is situated on the banks of the river Yamuna.

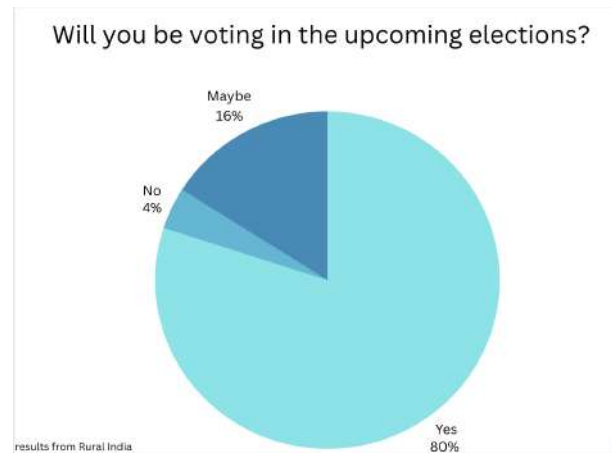
<sup>9</sup> GeeksforGeeks. "Explore the Political Map of India: Detailed Regions and States Guide." *GeeksforGeeks*, 18 Dec. 2023, [www.geeksforgeeks.org/political-map-of-india/](http://www.geeksforgeeks.org/political-map-of-india/). Accessed 22 Jan. 2024.

## Research Findings

The first question in my survey straightforwardly probes participants' intentions to partake in the upcoming elections, shedding light on the profound role voting plays for women in rural India. For them, voting goes beyond personal choice; it becomes a potent instrument for societal change. This is evident as a striking 80 percent of respondents from rural areas expressed their commitment to voting in the upcoming elections. In contrast, urban respondents, standing at 53.7 percent, while still a majority, lag behind their rural counterparts. The dynamics in rural areas often place women at the crossroads of tradition and modernity, where political decisions have a direct impact on their daily lives.



- Pie Chart on Urban response to question 1 of the survey.



- Pie Chart on Rural response to question 1 of the survey.

This trend is consistent with earlier research, such as Sidharta Mukherji's 'Understanding Urban–Rural Patterns of BJP Campaigning in UP (Lok Sabha Elections 2014)', which found that rural women consistently exhibit higher voter turnout than their urban counterparts.<sup>10</sup> In rural settings, women grapple with unique challenges, including limited access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. Consequently, the electoral process becomes a crucial avenue for them to voice concerns and advocate for policies addressing their specific needs.

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<sup>10</sup> Mukerji, Siddhartha. "Understanding Urban–Rural Patterns of BJP Campaigning in U." *Studies in Indian Politics*, 1 Jan. 1970, [ideas.repec.org/a/sae/indpol/v3y2015i1p111-123.html](https://ideas.repec.org/a/sae/indpol/v3y2015i1p111-123.html). Accessed 17 Jan. 2024.



The significance of the rural vote is exemplified by initiatives like the 'Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana' (PMUY), launched in 2023 by the Modi government. This scheme aimed to provide clean cooking fuel, such as LPG, to rural and deprived households that traditionally used firewood and coal.<sup>11</sup> The anonymity afforded by the electoral system, allowing women to express their true opinions, is a notable draw for rural women, known to be more constrained in their expressions. Over time, these women have recognized the transformative potential of their votes, viewing elections as a means to secure improved infrastructure, better education for their children, and enhanced healthcare services.

The survey's next question, 'If yes, why will you vote?' uncovered a fascinating facet of rural voting dynamics. Remarkably, half of the surveyed rural women expressed a specific candidate preference, revealing the nuanced factors shaping electoral decisions in these communities. In rural settings, where personal connections hold substantial sway, women tend to base their voting choices on a blend of personal relationships, trust, and familiarity with candidates.

Candidates engaging directly with residents, participating in local events, and conducting door-to-door campaigns foster a sense of accessibility and personal connection. Unlike urban areas, the close-knit nature of rural communities facilitates recognition based on shared geography, background, and culture, cultivating a sense of familiarity. Social and community influences, including endorsements from local leaders, also play a pivotal role in shaping perceptions. Furthermore, women in rural areas may be swayed by candidates addressing issues directly relevant to their lives, which can vary significantly between regions.

For instance, concerns about under-five mortality rates in Uttar Pradesh and literacy rates in Bihar are crucial issues in these respective regions. Additionally, factors such as the empowerment of women, cultural sensitivity, and promises of regional development further impact voting decisions. The survey findings highlight the intricate interplay of personal relationships, community ties, and local engagement in shaping the voting preferences of women in rural India.

Conversely, the survey conducted in urban India revealed dissatisfaction as a prevalent reason for voting. This distinction between rural and urban perspectives can be attributed to diverse challenges and opportunities. In urban India, rapid development coexists with heightened competition, resource scarcity, and infrastructure constraints, contributing to a general sense of discontent. Urban dwellers, grappling with the

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<sup>11</sup> "About PMUY." *PMUY*, [www.pmu.gov.in/about.html](http://www.pmu.gov.in/about.html). Accessed 18 Jan. 2024.

complexities of urban life, aspire for improved governance and a better quality of life, fostering a heightened awareness of existing inequalities and a desire for change.

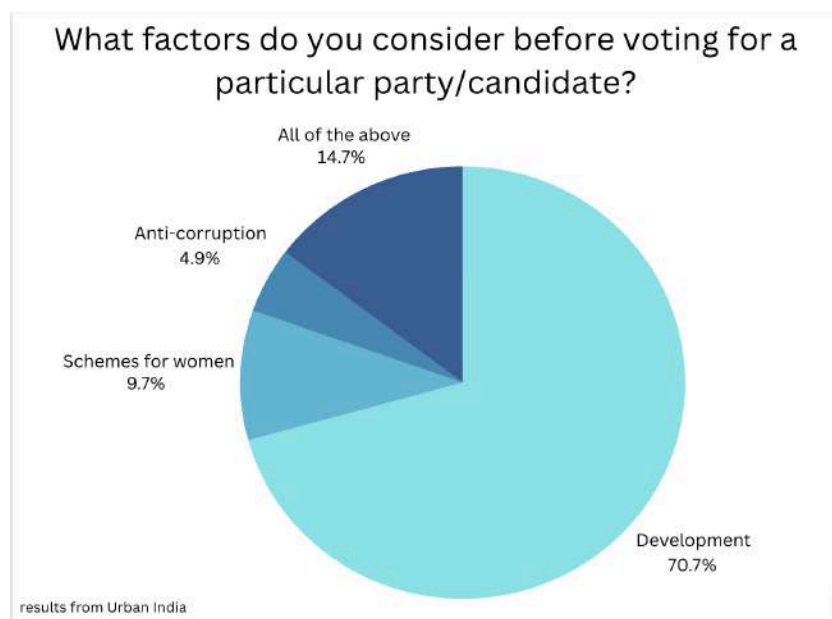
On the contrary, factors influencing contentment in rural India may differ, encompassing challenges in agricultural productivity, availability of basic amenities, rural development, and pace of life. However, the strong community bonds, lower cost of living, and connection to traditional ways of life contribute to a prevailing feeling of stability and comfort in rural settings.

A similarity was found in question 3 where in both rural and urban India, the majority of responses were that people do not vote as a result of lack of information. In both urban and rural India, women voters face a major knowledge gap that affects their capacity to make informed decisions during elections. Women's access to information about political candidates, their policies, and the voting process may be hampered in rural areas by low literacy rates and restricted access to educational resources. Furthermore, women's engagement in public areas may be restricted by cultural norms and societal expectations, which could limit their exposure to political campaigns and discussions. In urban India there seems to be a growing trend that as a result of social media there is a somewhat abundance of information. However, there still seems to be a lack of factual, unbiased information. Most information online tends to be unfactual or manipulated factually by containing bias. Hence, regardless of whether women are from urban or rural India, there is still information asymmetry in this country, making it difficult for women to make informed decisions.

Even though educational materials may be easier to obtain in urban areas, there can be an overwhelming amount of knowledge available, frequently through a variety of media platforms. It can be difficult for women in cities to sort through the vast amount of political material and separate reliable sources from false ones. Women living in rural and urban areas may find it difficult to learn about politicians' stances on matters that directly affect them, such as healthcare, education, and women's rights. There may be little to no political debate that explicitly tackles these topics, depriving women of the knowledge they need to assess politicians' positions on matters that are important to them. Improving literacy rates, expanding educational opportunities, and launching focused awareness programs that take into account the unique difficulties experienced by women in both urban and rural settings will solve the problem of women voters lacking information.

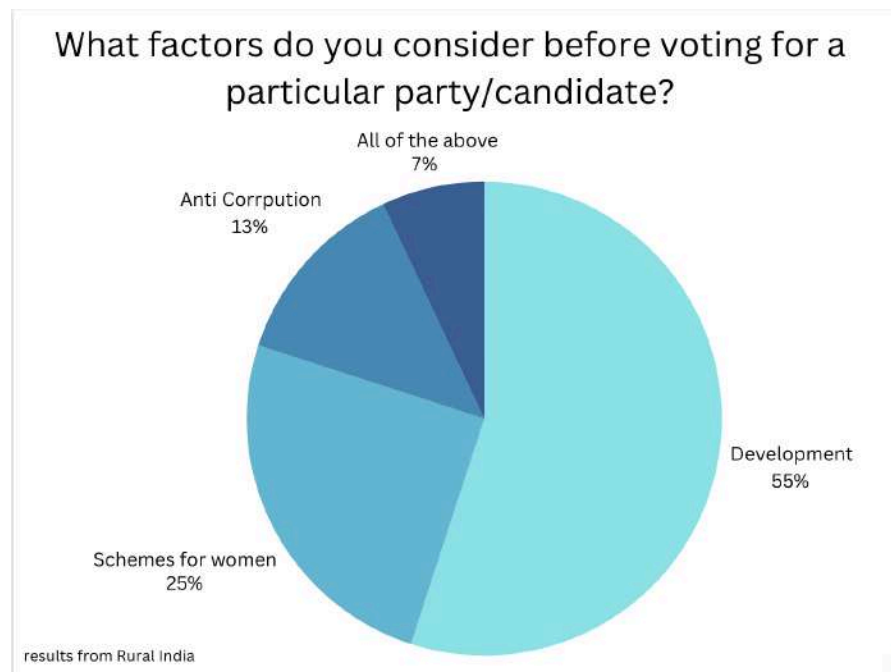
Another question of the survey asked 'What factors do you consider before voting for a particular party/candidate?' In the survey conducted in urban India, 70.7% of the respondents said they voted on development schemes. Owing to a confluence of

socioeconomic considerations and increased consciousness regarding the influence of government on their lives, women in urban India frequently give vote preferences based on development. Rapid development is common in urban regions, where women are more likely to be educated, involved in the economy, and involved in a variety of public life activities. They consequently tend to be more conscious of the significance of advancements in infrastructure, employment chances, healthcare, and educational opportunities—all essential elements of progress. Women are more inclined to support candidates who support inclusive and sustainable development in metropolitan environments, where problems like pollution, traffic congestion, and poor urban planning are more noticeable. When metropolitan women vote, factors including women's safety, accessibility, and the caliber of public services become crucial concerns.



- Pie chart on the question 'What factors do you consider before voting for a particular party/candidate?'

Overall, women prioritize development-related concerns while voting because of the complicated and dynamic character of urban living, as well as their higher degree of awareness and varied roles. With their votes, they may now promote sustainable development and a higher standard of living in metropolitan areas. Likewise, in the survey conducted in rural India, 55% said they consider development the main factor. This is because over the years as a result of the implications of government schemes such as *Swach Bharat*, the expectations of people living in rural India have increased and they seek a higher standard of living. This standard of living is more closely achieved in urban parts of India and therefore the desire for development among women has also increased.



-Pie chart on the question 'What factors do you consider before voting for a particular party/candidate?'

Lastly, when asked what respondents would think will encourage more women to vote, despite the demographic difference both respondents stated that education should be focused on. This is credited to the fact that education promotes empowerment by raising understanding of civic rights and the value of political involvement. Women with education develop critical thinking skills that help them choose candidates and policies with knowledge. Education also promotes civic participation, which motivates women to take an active role in public affairs. Overcoming social expectations, educated women fight for their freedoms and advance an inclusive democracy. This view is based on the knowledge that education not only benefits individual women but also has a beneficial knock-on effect that benefits future generations and increases the influence of women in politics.

## Discussion

In comparison to previous research findings, particularly studies focusing on rural women's participation in electoral politics, our research aligns with the notion that education plays a crucial role in enhancing women's engagement in the political process. Kalita's study highlighted the growing but still insufficient participation of rural women in politics, emphasizing the importance of educational empowerment to address this disparity.

Moreover, international studies such as McKee's exploration of rural voters in American presidential elections and Plesivcak's analysis of urban-rural conflicts in Slovakia underscored the substantial influence of geographical location on political preferences. Our research echoes these findings by revealing distinct voting patterns between urban and rural contexts in India. These disparities are rooted in varied socio-economic realities, community dynamics, and developmental aspirations, shaping women's perceptions and priorities in electoral decision-making.

While the research provides valuable insights into female voting patterns, certain limitations warrant consideration. The study's focus on college-going women may not fully capture the perspectives of women outside this demographic, necessitating broader sampling strategies for comprehensive insights. Additionally, the research primarily examined voting intentions rather than actual voting behaviors, leaving room for further investigation into the factors influencing voter turnout among women in different geographic contexts.

Future research could explore longitudinal trends in female voting patterns, considering the evolving socio-political landscape and policy interventions aimed at enhancing women's political participation. Moreover, comparative analyses across diverse regions and demographic groups would enrich our understanding of the complex interplay between geography, education, and gender in shaping electoral dynamics in India.

## **Conclusion**

This research serves as a compelling testament to the evolving landscape of inclusivity for women in India. While strides are being made, the findings underscore the critical

need to ensure that opportunities are extended beyond regions traditionally associated with progress. The disparities between urban and rural mindsets, as revealed in the survey, accentuate the diverse considerations influencing women's voting patterns.

The distinct perspectives observed in urban and rural demographics highlight the nuanced challenges and aspirations shaping women's choices. These variations, while rooted in socio-economic contexts, underscore the need for a tailored approach to women's empowerment that transcends a one-size-fits-all solution. While certain similarities in responses echo shared gender-based challenges, acknowledging the unique circumstances faced by urban and rural women becomes imperative. To truly integrate women into the political discourse, it is crucial for policymakers to recognize and address these distinctions at the heart of governance. The call for inclusive policies, actions, and solutions should be informed by the varying landscapes that urban and rural women inhabit.

In passionately advocating for women's rightful place at the political table, this research implores the nation to delve deeper into the diverse realities of its female citizens. It underscores that achieving genuine inclusivity requires an unwavering commitment to understanding, appreciating, and addressing the unique challenges faced by women across the urban-rural spectrum. Only then will India be able to truly empower its women.

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# APPENDIX

## 1- Survey conducted in Delhi(Urban India)

- [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdvkJXHew2mD5mc55M1SrS36JmvyItucJHQxchGbXjjhtAK-g/viewform?usp=sf\\_link](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdvkJXHew2mD5mc55M1SrS36JmvyItucJHQxchGbXjjhtAK-g/viewform?usp=sf_link)

The screenshot shows a Google Form titled "QUESTIONNAIRE FOR FIRST TIME VOTERS IN 2024 (WOMEN)". The form includes a greeting: "Hi, I am a student of 11th and I am currently working on a research paper talking about the differences between women voters in urban and rural India. It would be really helpful if you could take less than two minutes to fill out this form." The first question is "Will you be voting in the upcoming elections?" with radio button options: "yes", "no", and "maybe". The second question is "If yes, why will you vote?" with radio button options: "for a particular party", "for a particular candidate", "for a particular scheme being offered", and "desire for change - unhappy with current situation". The third question is "If no, why will you not vote?" with radio button options: "not interested in politics", "don't expect any change", and "lack of information".

The continuation of the Google Form shows the fourth question: "Are you planning to participate in all elections in the future?" with radio button options: "yes", "no", and "maybe". The fifth question is "What factors do you consider before voting for a particular party/ candidate?" with radio button options: "development", "schemes for women", "anti-corruption", and "Other...". The sixth question is "What do you think will encourage more women to vote?" with radio button options: "education", "outreach", "women specific campaigns", "accessibility", and "any other".



2- Survey conducted in Uttar Pradesh (Rural)

पहले समय में मतदान करने वाली महिलाओं के लिए प्रश्नावली 2024 -

1- क्या आप आगामी चुनाव में मतदान करेंगी?

- (A) - हाँ
- (B) - नहीं
- (C) - शायद

2- अगर हाँ, तो आप क्यों मतदान करेंगी?

- (A) - किसी विशेष पार्टी के लिए
- (B) - किसी विशेष उम्मीदवार के लिए
- (C) - किसी विशेष प्रस्तावित योजना के लिए
- (D) - परिवर्तन की इच्छा - मौजूदा स्थिति से असंतुष्ट
- (E) - कोई अन्य (विस्तार से बताएं)

3- अगर नहीं, तो आप मतदान क्यों नहीं करेंगी?

- (A) - राजनीति में रुचि नहीं
- (B) - किसी भी परिवर्तन की आशा नहीं
- (C) - जानकारी की कमी
- (D) - कोई अन्य

4- क्या आप भविष्य में होने वाले सभी चुनावों में भाग लेने की योजना बना रही हैं?

- (A) - हाँ
- (B) - नहीं
- (C) - शायद

5- किसी विशेष उम्मीदवार / पार्टी के लिए मतदान करने से पहले आप कौन से कारणों को महत्व देती हैं?

- (A) - विकास
- (B) - महिलाओं के लिए योजनाएं
- (C) - भ्रष्टाचार-विरोधी
- (D) - कोई अन्य

6- आपके अनुसार, महिलाओं को अधिक से अधिक मतदान करने के लिए क्या प्रोत्साहित करेगा?

- (A) - शिक्षा
- (B) - संपर्क
- (C) - महिला-विशेष के अभियान
- (D) - सुलभता
- (E) - कोई अन्य



