

Analyzing The Reasons Behind Low Voter Registration Among Youth: An Exploratory Study For The State Of Maharashtra

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Abstract:

Background: Voter turnout and engagement are vital for healthy democracies, yet participation lag among certain groups like youth, minorities, less educated, and lower income citizens. This disengagement threatens representation of all voices. As polarization and dissatisfaction with government institutions grow, understanding drivers behind voter behavior and perceptions is crucial. This research aims to delve into factors impacting registration, likelihood to vote, trust, and beliefs on impact to identify strengths and weaknesses in the voting process.

Materials and Methods: This study employed a cross-sectional survey design to collect self-reported data on voter engagement, awareness, access, attitudes, and beliefs. The non-random sample of 50 participants was recruited through online panels and social media, targeting a diverse national audience with attention to factors such as age, gender, education, employment, location, and income. The 15-question survey, administered via Google Forms over a 2-week period in March 2023, covered respondent demographics, voter registration status, understanding of the registration process, accessibility of registration locations, trust in the political system, likelihood to vote, and beliefs about the impact of voting on change. Responses, analyzed through generated graphs filtered by key demographics, revealed insights into variations in voter access, awareness, attitudes, and engagement. While the limited non-random sample size hinders generalizability, it serves as an initial benchmark for understanding voter perspectives and participation, emphasizing the need for future research with probability sampling and larger samples for greater representativeness.

Results: The research shows that voter registration rates vary by age and gender, with more females registered in the 18-20 age group but more males registered in the 21-25 group before equalizing in the 25-30 group. Awareness of the registration process increases with age, from low awareness among 18-20-year-olds to high awareness in the 25-30 group. Most find the registration system neutral in terms of ease of understanding across all ages. Higher trust in the political system corresponds to greater likelihood of voting. The majority view voting as somewhat impactful or neutral in its impact. Most are somewhat satisfied with the voter registration process. Higher education levels like a bachelor's degree or higher correlate with greater awareness of the registration process compared to lower education levels like primary schooling. Overall, the results highlight demographic patterns that can inform targeted voter engagement efforts.

Keyword: Voter registration, Voter turnout, Voter awareness, Electoral participation, Voter behavior

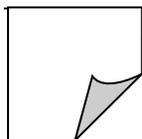
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I. INTRODUCTION

Voter registration is a critical first step in the democratic process that enables citizens to exercise their fundamental right to vote. However, voter registration rates vary significantly across different states in India. Maharashtra, one of the country's most economically prosperous states, has seen declining voter registration and voter turnout in recent elections. This trend threatens to undermine representative democracy by excluding a large proportion of eligible voters.

This research paper seeks to uncover the determinants shaping voter registration in Maharashtra. Voter turnout does not occur in isolation but depends on factors like demographic attributes, socioeconomic status, political efficacy, ease of registration procedures, voter outreach programs, and various cultural elements. By comparing districts and cities across Maharashtra through a mixed methodology approach, the study will identify the most salient variables explaining differential voter registration rates.



Understanding the specific barriers that constrain voter registration can inform evidence-based policy interventions. Removing procedural obstacles and increasing motivation through civic education are promising strategies. Low and unequal participation compromises political legitimacy and policy outcomes. As such, unraveling the causal factors underlying voter registration carries significant implications for strengthening India's democratic fabric overall and cultivating more accountable governance focused on inclusive development in Maharashtra. The comparative approach of this study aims to provide transferable insights that can also inform reforms in other states grappling with weak voter registration.

Prior research on determinants of voter registration and turnout has often focused on socioeconomic status. Yet the trend of declining engagement among more educated and urban voters in Maharashtra suggests cultural and political attitudinal factors may play an equally important role. By surveying voter perceptions, analyzing campaign messaging, and conducting field experiments, this study will provide a more holistic, interdisciplinary perspective compared to previous demographic and resource-based models.

Understanding the intersections between identity politics, political efficacy, trust in institutions, social networks, and voting behavior can point to new solutions. Campaigns emphasizing value expressions tapping into cultural affiliations rather than instrumental policies may be more effective at mobilizing alienated demographic groups. Additionally, fostering participatory subcultures embedding voting as a social norm rather than just relying on institutional reforms alone will help catalyze grassroots-based change. Capturing these sociopolitical and contextual nuances in Maharashtra's specific case is vital.

The regional focus enables granular, actionable analysis while the comparative framework will bolster wider generalizability. As India continues debating extensions of compulsory voting and remote voting to combat declining participation, empirical findings on the ground realities in different states is essential to inform citizen-centric policymaking. This study seeks to add to that evidence base by tracing how diverse historical trajectories, political movements, ethnic tensions, media ecosystems and state capacity jointly shape the vibrancy of local democracies in practice. Unpacking these complex synergies can unlock more targeted and patient long-term solutions.

II. Material And Methods

Study Design: This study employed a cross-sectional survey design to collect self-reported data.

Study Location: Various states of Maharashtra

Study Duration: The survey was administered over a 2-week period in March 2023.

Sample size: The sample size was 50 participants.

Sample size calculation: Sample size was calculated on the basis of responses obtained to the survey.

Procedure methodology: The 15-question survey was administered via Google Forms. The survey covered respondent demographics, voter registration status, understanding of the registration process, accessibility of registration locations, trust in the political system, likelihood to vote, and beliefs about the impact of voting on change.

Statistical analysis: The responses were analyzed through generated graphs filtered by key demographics such as age, gender, education, employment, location, and income. The limited non-random sample size hinders generalizability.

III. Result



Figure 1: Registration status as Voter

The graph illustrates voter registration across three age groups: 18-20, 21-25, and 25-30, segmented by gender. Notably, in the 18-20 range, there are more registered female voters than males. This trend shifts in the 21-25 age group, where registered male voters outnumber females. However, by the 25-30 age group, the number of registered male and female voters is nearly equal.

These findings suggest a dynamic pattern of voter registration between genders and age brackets. Potential reasons for these variations could include differing levels of interest in electoral participation, targeted registration campaigns, and social or cultural factors. Despite these fluctuations, there seems to be a trend towards gender balance in registration rates in the older age groups.

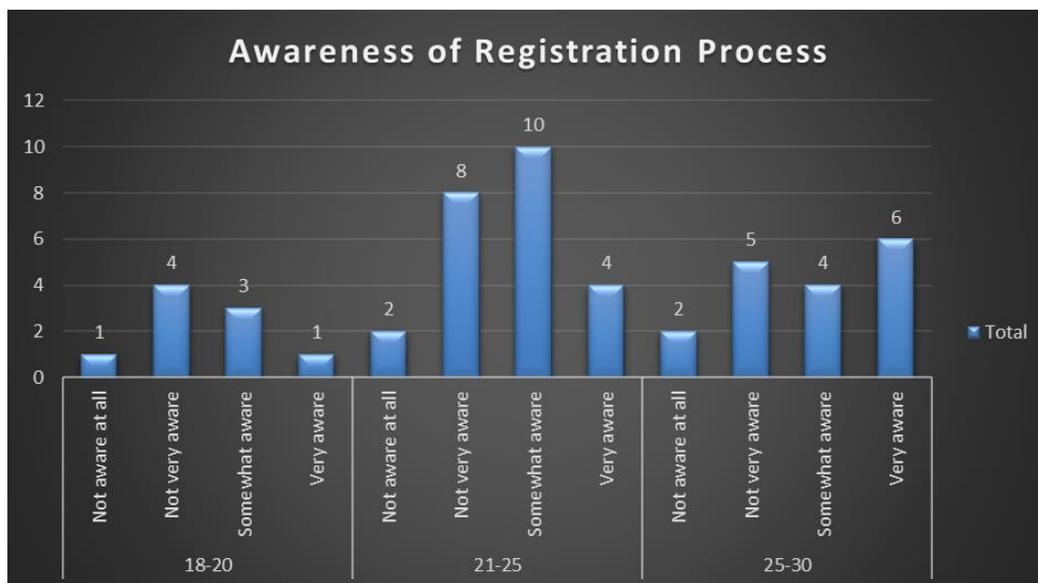


Figure 2: Awareness of Registration Process

The graph depicts the awareness levels about the voter registration process across three age groups: 18-20, 21-25, and 25-30 years old. The awareness levels are categorized as "Not aware at all," "Not very aware," "Somewhat aware," and "Very aware."

In the 18-20 age group, the majority of respondents fell into the categories of "Not aware at all" or "Not very aware" of the registration process. This suggests a lower level of awareness among younger individuals in this age bracket.

Moving to the 21-25 age group, most respondents indicated they were "Somewhat aware" of the registration process. This marks a notable increase in awareness compared to the younger age group.

By the 25-30 age group, the highest number of respondents reported being "Very aware" of the registration process. This indicates a significant improvement in awareness as individuals transition into this older age bracket.

These findings reflect a trend of increasing awareness about the voter registration process as individuals grow older. Possible reasons for this could include greater exposure to information over time, personal experiences with the registration process, or targeted educational efforts.

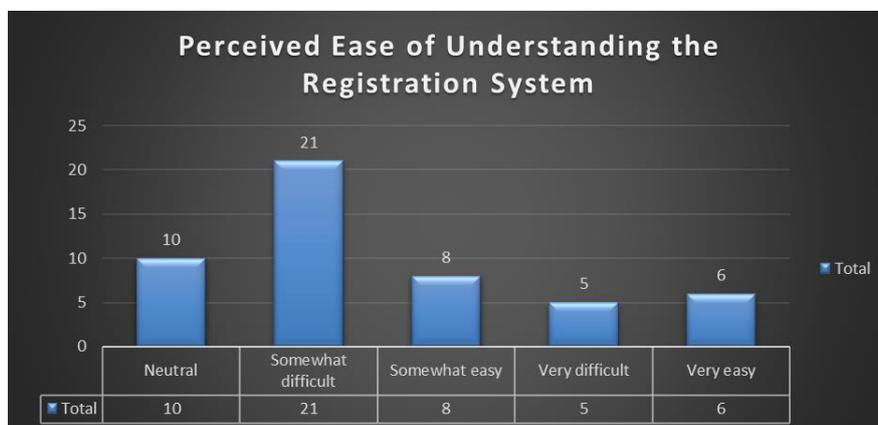


Figure 3: Perceived ease of understanding the registration system

The graph presents perceptions of the ease or difficulty in understanding the voter registration system across three age groups: 18-20, 21-25, and 25-30 years old. According to the data, the majority of respondents, irrespective of age group, rated the system as "Neutral" in terms of ease of understanding. Following this, the next most common response was "Somewhat easy," with "Somewhat difficult" being the third most common perception.

Interestingly, very few respondents indicated finding the registration system either "Very difficult" or "Very easy" to understand. This suggests a general consensus among the surveyed individuals that the voter registration system falls within the middle range of complexity.

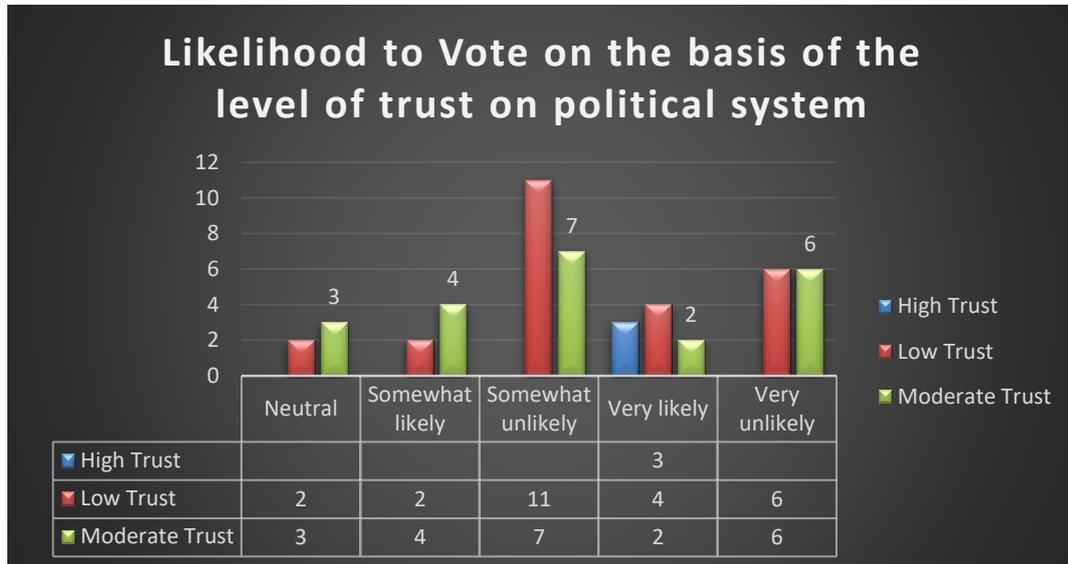


Figure 4: Likelihood to vote on the basis of the level of the trust on political system

The graph illustrates the likelihood of voting based on the level of trust in the political system, categorized as "High Trust," "Moderate Trust," and "Low Trust." Across these trust levels, respondents' likelihood of voting was measured as "Very unlikely," "Somewhat unlikely," "Neutral," "Somewhat likely," and "Very likely."

Among those with "High Trust" in the political system, the majority expressed either "Somewhat likely" or "Very likely" to vote. This suggests a positive correlation between a high level of trust in the political system and the likelihood of voting.

For respondents with "Moderate Trust," the most common responses were "Neutral" or "Somewhat likely" to vote. This indicates a more balanced stance compared to those with high trust, with a notable number expressing willingness to vote.

In contrast, respondents with "Low Trust" in the political system were primarily "Somewhat unlikely" or "Very unlikely" to vote. This group showed a clear trend of decreased likelihood to participate in the electoral process, likely due to their lower level of trust in the system.

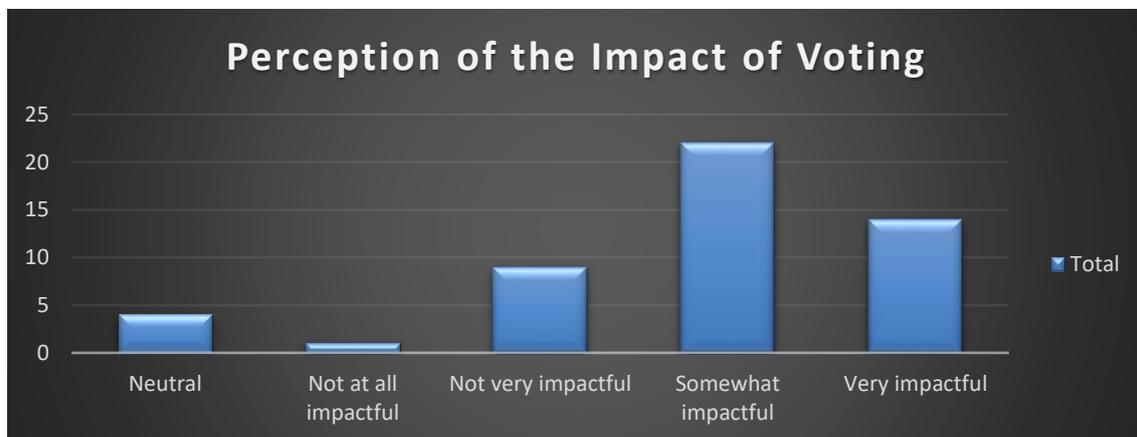


Figure 5: Perception of the impact of voting

The graph illustrates respondents' perceptions of the impact of voting, categorized as "Not at all impactful," "Not very impactful," "Neutral," "Somewhat impactful," and "Very impactful." According to the data, the majority of respondents perceived voting to be either "Neutral" or "Somewhat impactful."

A smaller number of respondents considered voting to be either "Not very impactful" or "Very impactful." This suggests a range of perceptions among respondents regarding the impact of voting, with a notable portion seeing it as having at least some level of impact.

Interestingly, very few respondents believed that voting was "Not at all impactful." This indicates a general consensus among the surveyed individuals that voting does have some level of impact, even if it may not always be perceived as highly impactful by everyone.

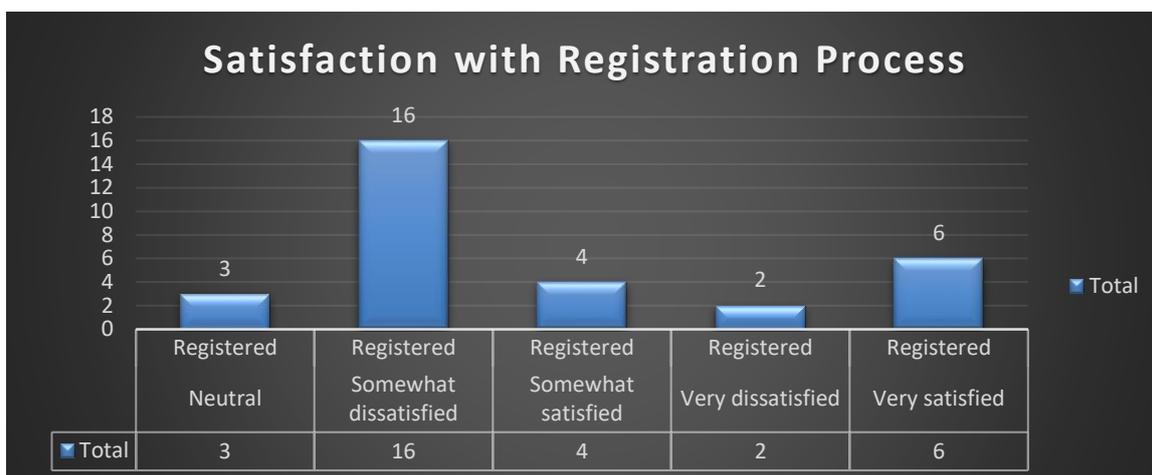


Figure 6: Satisfaction with the registration process

The graph displays respondents' level of satisfaction with the voter registration process, categorized as "Very dissatisfied," "Somewhat dissatisfied," "Neutral," "Somewhat satisfied," and "Very satisfied." According to the data, the majority of respondents were "Somewhat satisfied" with the registration process.

Following "Somewhat satisfied," the next most common response was "Neutral," indicating a moderate stance on satisfaction with the registration process. "Very satisfied" was the third most common response, showing a notable level of positive sentiment.

Conversely, very few respondents expressed being either "Somewhat dissatisfied" or "Very dissatisfied" with the registration process. This suggests that the majority of individuals surveyed had a generally positive or neutral perception of their experience with voter registration.

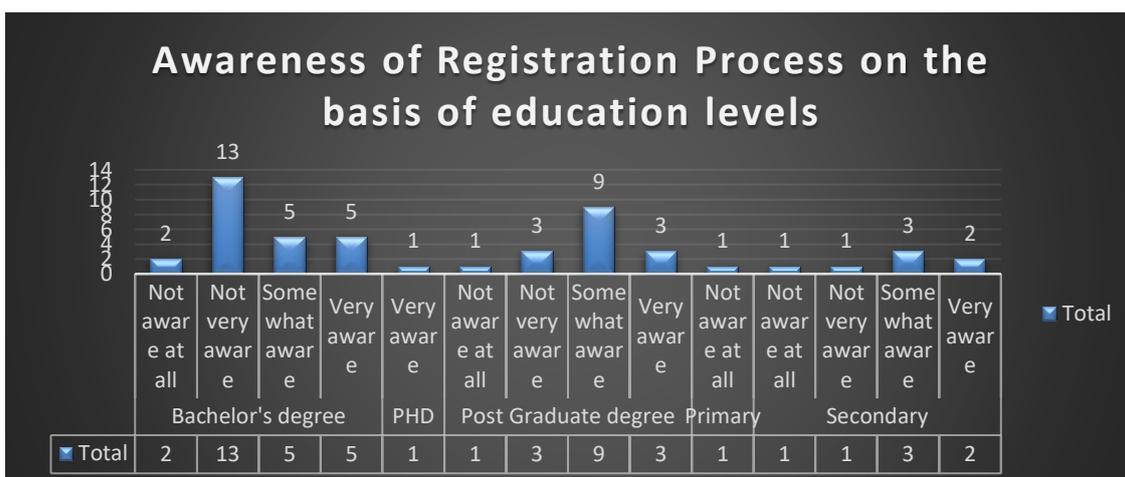
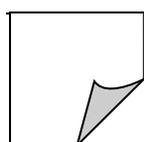


Figure 7: Awareness of registration process on the basis of education level

The graph illustrates the awareness of the voter registration process across different education levels: Primary, Secondary, Bachelor's degree, Post Graduate degree, and PhD. The awareness levels are categorized as "Not aware at all," "Not very aware," "Somewhat aware," and "Very aware."



Among respondents with a Primary education level, the majority were either "Not aware at all" or "Not very aware" of the registration process. This suggests a lower level of awareness among those with a Primary education background.

For individuals with a Secondary education, the predominant awareness level was "Somewhat aware" of the registration process. This indicates a moderate level of understanding among this group.

In contrast, respondents with a Bachelor's degree or a Post Graduate degree were mostly "Very aware" of the registration process. This suggests a higher level of awareness among those with higher education levels.

Interestingly, for respondents with a PhD, the data shows an equal distribution across all levels of awareness. This implies that having a PhD does not necessarily correlate with higher awareness of the voter registration process, as the distribution is fairly even across the categories of awareness.

IV. Conclusion

The study provides valuable insights into voter registration patterns and perceptions among youth in the state of Maharashtra. The findings reveal a dynamic interplay between age, gender, education level, trust in the political system, and awareness of the registration process, all of which influence the likelihood of voter registration and participation. Notably, awareness of the registration process increases with age, suggesting a need for targeted outreach and education efforts to engage younger demographics effectively. Furthermore, higher education levels correlate with greater awareness, underscoring the importance of accessible and widespread civic education programs.

While the majority of respondents perceive the registration system as relatively user-friendly, the varying levels of trust in the political system emerge as a crucial factor impacting the likelihood of voting. Those with higher trust tend to be more likely to vote, while those with lower trust express greater reluctance to participate. Additionally, most respondents view voting as somewhat impactful or at least having a neutral impact, indicating a general acknowledgment of the significance of electoral participation. Overall, the findings highlight the need for concerted efforts to enhance voter awareness, foster trust in democratic institutions, and reinforce the belief in the power of individual votes to shape societal outcomes. By addressing these key factors, targeted policies and initiatives can be developed to increase youth engagement and strengthen the foundations of representative democracy in Maharashtra.

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