

## **What economic policies were most influential in shaping the voting decisions of first-time voters in Saharanpur?**

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DOI: 10.46609/IJSSER.2026.v11i01.024 URL: <https://doi.org/10.46609/IJSSER.2026.v11i01.024>

Received: 08 January 2026 / Accepted: 25 January 2026 / Published: 30 January 2026

### **Introduction**

Voting behavior in India describes the ways in which voters make decisions throughout the voting process comprises components including electoral preferences, voter turnout, and other characteristics that influence voting trends. Central aspects of voting behavior in India comprise understanding the demographics of the voter, examining trends and patterns among various communities and regions, and analyzing the impact of technical and sociological developments.

Now we will explore a bit about the historical evolution of voting behavior in India. The post-independence period included the charisma of leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru, which had a significant impact on voters in the early years. The desire for a stable and unified India following partition was reflected in voting trends. Then came the era of the Green Revolution and economic reforms, under which, during the Green Revolution, farmers favored economic prosperity and rural programs. Economic change gained national attention as a result of liberalization in the 1990s, which affected Indian voting patterns. After that a rise of regionalism was seen, where, along with the rise of regional parties, voting patterns also shifted substantially. Now the main focus of the voters was on regional identities and local issues. Nowadays trends consist of the impact of social media on the voting behavior of Indian voters, emerging as a crucial feature in the upcoming years. Younger voters are affected by issue-based debates, online campaigns, and digital platforms.

Multiple factors affect the behavior of voters in India. Factors such as caste, which are sociological in nature, are still prevalent in election decisions. Political parties try to align themselves with one another to appeal to a specific caste. Campaigns and pledges have an impact on voting, especially in India. They decide on their vote according to which temple they worship. Regional factors such as issues of water, language, and cultural pride highly affect voting decisions. Party devotion is one such psychological factor, where many voters show a strong inclination and devotion towards a particular party, which is mostly due to their families' or

societal community's inclination towards that party. Charismatic leadership can also bring a change in voters' decisions notwithstanding the party's political stance. Political campaigns often use emotions like rage, fear, and hope to influence the voters.

Economically backward classes often get influenced by promises made by welfare programs and change their voting behavior, which gives an idea of the economic factors, such as poverty and welfare. Unemployment and inflation concerns have an impact on the choices of Indian voters, and they tend to prefer parties that promise stabilization of prices and creation of jobs. The influence of media also plays a central role in sculpting voter behavior. Traditional media platforms like radio, newspapers, and television still have a profound impact. The influence of social media on Indian voters' voting habits is enhancing quickly, especially among urban and young voters.

The following aspects constitute factors that affect voting behavior. Family beliefs typically influence an individual's voting decisions, particularly in rural areas. Social networks shape mass voting behavior by reinforcing voter preferences. Local and national issues are such that voters prioritize local concerns over national ones, such as infrastructure, education, and water shortages. However, national issues like security and economic expansion also play a significant part. Effective political campaigns that address voter concerns have a direct impact on Indian voters' choices. Door knocking, rallies, and roadshows are still effective. Traditions, historical patterns, and cultural conventions all influence how people vote. In rural India, the influence of village leaders is considerably greater.

Understanding the importance of voting behavior in India is crucial due to the following reasons. First of all, it enhances democracy; voting trends reveal people's participation in elections. Voting trends make it possible to assess how robust democracy is. Transparency can be achieved by analyzing voter decisions. This indicates that policies need to be improved as well. This calls on the leaders to respond to the people more. Secondly, research on voting behavior reveals public needs, which aids in the formulation of policies. It helps governments create policies. The people's worries are known to the rulers. This improves decision-making and governance. It also aids in making sure that national and regional issues are adequately addressed by policy. Thirdly, it reflects social and economic trends by demonstrating how caste, unemployment, and poverty impact elections. This aids leaders and scholars in tackling these issues. It also demonstrates the evolution of voter priorities.

Fourth, it influences election strategies where political parties gain insight from studies on voter behavior. They are able to find problems that appeal to voters and create more effective campaigns. It ensures that election-related campaign pledges address the demands of the populace. The public-politician interaction is strengthened as a result. Fifth, it empowers citizens

by emphasizing their influence; voting behavior research empowers voters. It demonstrates how each vote affects the results of elections. Citizens are encouraged to get more involved as a result. Additionally, it raises awareness of how crucial voting is in democracies. Lastly, voter behavior demonstrates how technology affects elections. Voter decisions are influenced by online campaigning and social media. By analyzing this, leaders and voters can communicate more effectively. Additionally, it guarantees that technology is used responsibly during elections.

### **Literature Review**

A variety of factors that influence voter behavior must be taken into account while talking about the factors influencing voting decisions. These elements fall into two general categories: contextual or situational factors, which include political, social, and economic circumstances, and individual-level factors, which include demographics and personal traits. Voting decisions at the individual level have been found to be influenced by demographic factors such as age, gender, income, education, and race/ethnicity (Evans 2000). For example, younger people are frequently more politically active and more likely to support progressive ideas, although older voters typically have greater voter turnout rates (Goerres 2007). Higher levels of education have been associated with more liberal policy preferences and political participation (Tenn 2007). Furthermore, racial or ethnic identities and gender can influence political beliefs and decisions (Hajnal and Lee 2011).

Voting decisions are also influenced by psychological considerations. Political ideologies, attitudes, values, and beliefs can influence voter decisions and help shape preferences (Converse 1964). These opinions are further shaped by socialization processes, personal experiences, and media and social network exposure to political information (Jennings and Niemi 1981). Circumstantial elements have an equivalent impact. The political climate, including the performance and the reputation of political parties and candidates, affects voters' decisions (Funk 1999). Income inequality and unemployment rates are such economic factors that have a bearing on voters' opinions of their decision-making and personal financial well-being (Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2000). Cultural values, identity politics, and social issues also play an important role in influencing voting decisions (Gidengil et al. 2001). It is central to remember that voting choices are complex and multifaceted, and a number of intercorrelated factors impact them. Going on, it might be difficult to segregate a sole dominant effect because the relative importance of various factors can differ from person to person and in different situations.

### **Research Significance**

A considerable part of the Indian population are casting their first ballots in the biggest democracy in the world. First-time voters are very invested in the process of voting who are

between the ages of 18 and 21. The Indian Election Commission reported that millions of people cast ballots in their first election. The young people voter base increased when the 61st Constitutional Amendment Act of 1989 lowered the voting age from 21 to 18, and they were able to take part in the process of developing the political future of the nation. People in this age group are generally seen as change agents due to their willingness to challenge the existing quo and creative ideas. They can affect the outcome of the election in districts that are highly contested by their active involvement. First-time voters are more concerned about problems like climate change, education, gender equality, and jobs and are less likely to be loyal to traditional political parties. In an economy like India, which is highly diverse, an energetic and youthful populace involvement shows their changing goals through their change in priorities.

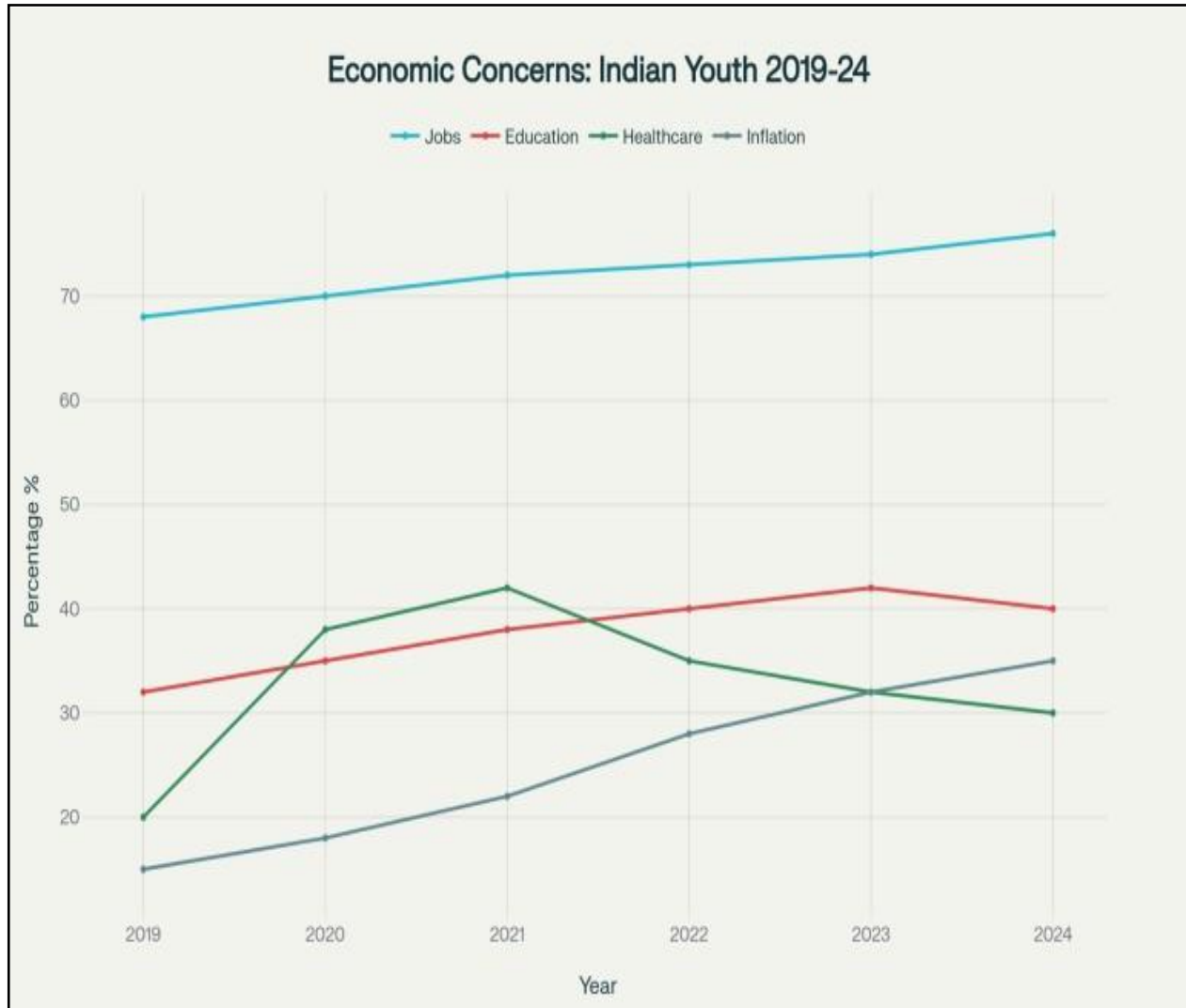
Understanding the importance of this group, political parties engage in digital rallies, influencer-driven marketing, and social media campaigns as some of their conveying strategies.

It is quite possible to have a better grasp of the role that is being played by first-time voters considering the Indian context due to India's vast population and strong democratic past.

Young participants in the election process, which includes individuals between the ages of 18 and 21, might bring new perspectives and ideas that could shape the results of political processes (Harrison, 2020). With a median age of the population of 28 years old, India is considered one of the youngest countries in the world. Young people comprise a considerable part of the electorate in India, and they are consequently an important element of the democratic system that is in existence in the country.

A sizable portion of India's electorate consists of people who have just turned 18 and are eligible to vote going forward. People who have recently turned 18 and are eligible to vote from that date on are considered first-time voters. According to information given by the Election Commission of India (ECI), between 15 and 20 percent of Indian voters are young people. This information is reported by Sitanggang et al. in 2024. For instance, in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, almost 84 percent of the total electorate were first-time election voters. More than 900 million people who were eligible to vote might participate in the election. Members of this demographic group have the power to significantly impact election results, especially in hotly contested districts. This is particularly true in districts where seats are very competitive. The importance of this impact is increased by the fact that in India's first-past-the-post election, even a small number of votes can decide the winner. First-past-the-post is the method used in this election. Because of the new ideas and shifting views they represent in society, political parties usually view young people as a significant group. This is due to the fact that younger voters are more likely than older voters to be younger.

**Evolution of Economic Priorities among Indian Young Voters (2019-2024)**



Citing sources such as CSDS-Lokniti longitudinal youth surveys, multi-year Business Standard polling, Economic Times youth aspiration studies, and PRICE survey research, we come to the following statements regarding the above trend shown in the line graph. Through five crucial years, this trend analysis shows how Indian youth voters' economic concerns changed, exhibiting recurring trends and new priorities. The top concern during this time was jobs, which increased from 68% in 2019 to 76% in 2024. The COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on employment are among the economic disruptions that have compounded to cause this steady increase.

Clearly reflecting the effects of the pandemic, healthcare concerns skyrocketed from 20% in 2019 to 42% in 2021 before leveling off at 30% by 2024. This trend demonstrates how voters'

priorities can momentarily shift as a result of crises. The persistent problems with India's coaching industry and skill development requirements are reflected in the consistently high (32-42%) level of education concerns.

The biggest concern was inflation, which more than doubled from 15% in 2019 to 35% in 2024, demonstrating the increasing influence of price increases on young voters. Although jobs continue to be the main concern, this trend explains why the cost of living has emerged as a significant electoral issue. By 2024, first-time voters' economic anxiety was exacerbated by the combination of inflation and job worries.

### **Concept of Economic Voting**

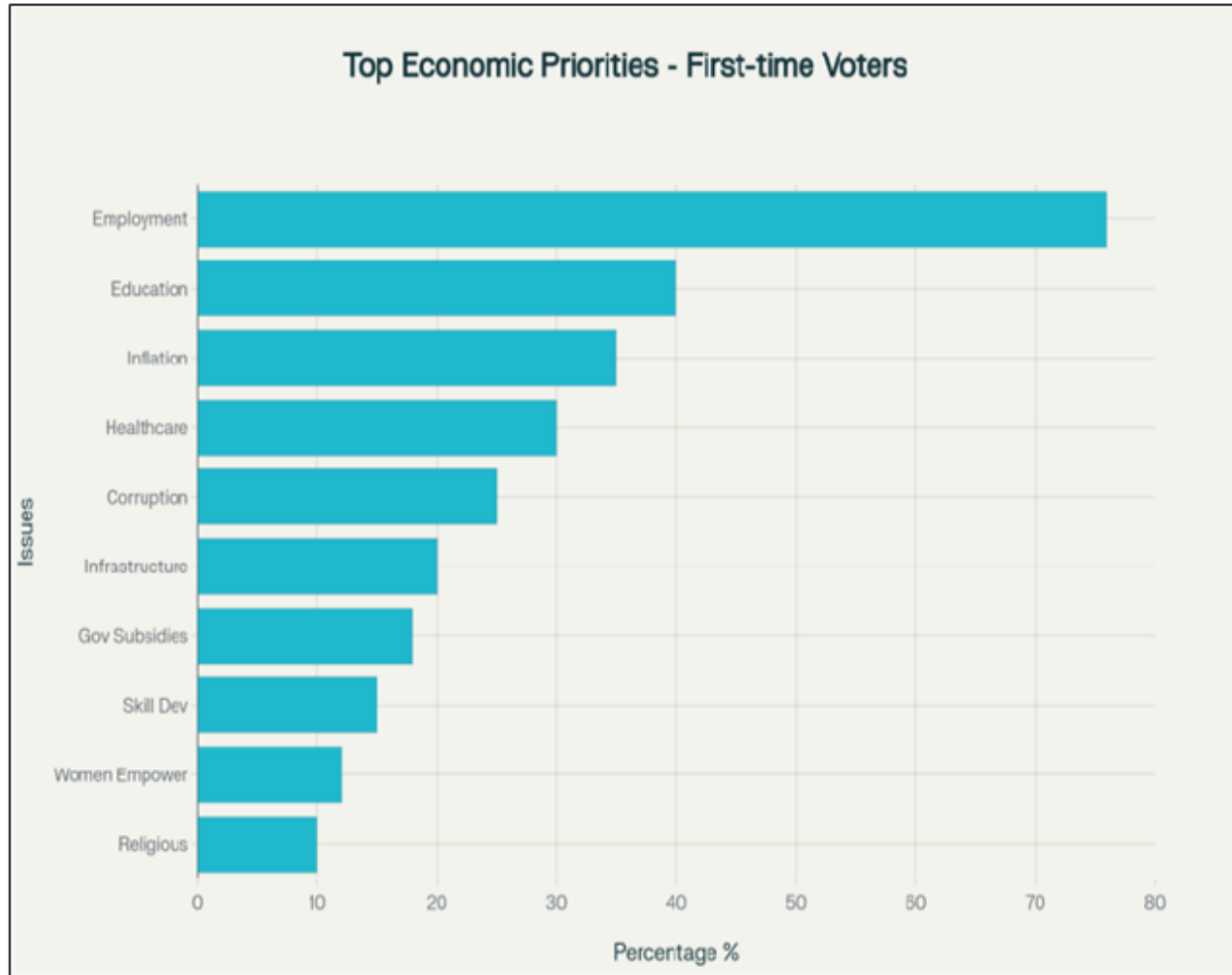
Political economy emerged as a result of decades of scholarly interest in the complex interrelationship between politics and economics. Economic voting, which contends that economic factors have a major impact on election results, is one particularly fascinating idea in this area. Intentionally or unintentionally, voters often hold existing politicians accountable for the current state of the economy. Voters' opinions and perspectives about economic prosperity can affect election outcomes, which is a basic feature of this interaction in democratic systems. However, the question lies in how powerful this relationship is and which certain economic factors voters consider when casting their ballots. Economic voting is a complicated idea that changes depending on the economy, political system, and culture. Various theories examine in what way and for what reason economic factors affect voting decisions in the search for an explanation to the phenomenon. According to some concepts and theories, voters are rational beings who make choices taking into consideration information that is factual, such as inflation,

GDP growth, and unemployment rates. Others say that voters place higher weightage on random assessments of economic health, which may not align with factual economic data.

Economic voting is made highly complicated by biases, media impact, and political campaigns. Understanding this process has real-life outcomes along with being intellectually interesting. For campaign planning, policymakers and politicians keep a close watch on the opinion of the public and economic patterns.

Citing data from sources such as the Business Standard survey, the Times of India first-time voters analysis, the Economic Journal, and the CSDS-Lokniti Delhi first-time voters study, we get the following from the above chart. With 76% of Indian first-time voters citing jobs as their top priority, this chart shows how concerns about employment predominate. India's severe youth unemployment crisis is reflected in this figure, which is the most concerning in the world. Indian youth place a higher priority on creating jobs than inflation, in contrast to Western democracies, where this is frequently the main concern.

Socio-Economic Factors Affecting First-Time Voters



At 40%, education comes in second, reflecting the desire of India's youth for high-quality educational systems and skill development. First-time voters' concerns about education have been especially heightened by the crisis facing the coaching industry in places like Kota.

Concerns about inflation and the cost of living come in third (35%), indicating that although they are significant, job anxiety still takes precedence.

According to the data, there is a clear Indian trend where traditional welfare issues like infrastructure development (20%) and government subsidies (18%) are ranked higher than in other democracies, indicating expectations of government involvement in economic development. Ten percent of voters seem to be concerned about religious harmony, suggesting that economically driven concerns even outweigh social ones in this group.

### **Impact of Education on Voting Choices**

First-time voters, through their education, develop and change their political behavior and decision-making. Among several socioeconomic factors, education excels in its virtue to promote informed civic engagement, political awareness, and critical thinking. Voters who are educated more often participate in elections, rationally assess political platforms, and center their decisions on policies instead of influences that are traditional in nature, such as community, caste, or family.

Formal education in a university gives individuals the power of critically assessing governance and distinguishing facts from false hopes and complex policies, which is a very important skill, as nowadays politics is digitally oriented. First-time voters who are exposed to education prioritize issues that are meaningful, such as economic reforms, global warming, and jobs, which help them cast their votes according to their long-term goals and beliefs.

On the other hand, voters who are poorly educated will tend to depend more on emotional appeals and social pressures and are more exposed to misinformation. Without literacy in terms of politics, their choices may be affected by populist discussion rather than analysis that is rational, and this results in democratic engagement that is of worse quality.

Schools are also platforms for political debate and conversation, letting students sharpen their points of view and exposing them to multidimensional opinions. Over and above, media literacy, which is facilitated by education, gives the power to sail through the vortex of information available online and digitally for young voters. Thus, education allows citizens to surpass identity voting politics, which promotes political participation that is issue-based.

Educated first-time voters help build a more active and mature democracy through suggestions on transparency, accountability, and evidence-based policies. We should ensure enhanced access to political education, which is the focus right now in raising politically active and aware citizens.

### **Role of Employment in Shaping Political Preferences**

It is important to keep in mind that first-time voters' decisions on voting are highly affected by their level of employment. Whatever the matter, if they are just starting their careers or are facing trouble being employed, young citizens face numerous concerns that are crucial to them. The execution of economic policies and programs that create job possibilities is one of these issues. Political parties that run their campaigns promising a stronger economy and more jobs have a higher chance of winning over this demographic. This is due to the fact that certain parties are more likely to appeal to members of this particular demographic.

For many years, youth unemployment has been a recurring concern in India, and it significantly affects people's willingness to engage in political processes (Kamil & Indah, 2022). First-time voters who are unemployed are more likely to voice their dissatisfaction with the government and oppose the administration during elections. Demanding accountability and change from the institution is the aim of this action. Nonetheless, young people who are employed and have stable housing can vote according to their priorities about taxes, work-life balance, and professional advancement. This is a result of their ability to vote in the election.

There is some indication that the gig economy is influencing younger generations' political preferences as it continues to grow in prominence. Given the lack of social security, health insurance, and minimum pay regulations in their workplace, it is likely that voters who are joining the gig economy for the first time will be worried.

### **Income Levels and Economic Aspirations**

It is one of the most crucial concepts that tells about political behavior, specifically for people who are going to vote for the first time. Wealth is one of the things that shapes political behavior. Young people who are from lower-income families probably will give higher value to welfare programs, which consist of, let's say, financial aid, subsidies, and affordable housing.

This is the reason behind their decision-making, which is more reasonably affected by these policies. Low-income family voters have more affinity to give votes to political parties that use a mixture of programs to particularly address these problems (Schafer et al., 2020). This is the factual reason that these types of voters are more probably identified as supporters of democracy. On the contrary, first-time voters who are from wealthy households may be more aligned to issues that are of a broader sense and systemic in nature. These issues consist of concerns regarding economic liberalization, opportunities for startup and business endeavors, and technology and infrastructural investment. This group expresses their concerns and makes sure their voice is heard by voting for political parties and candidates that fulfill or promise their long-term vision and economic objectives.

### **Urban Versus Rural Youth Voting Behaviour**

First-time voters, who exist in urban areas, often get exposure to a broader range of political perspectives, which leads to an increased information availability through digital media. There is a high chance that these voters will cast their ballots based on issues like educational opportunities, urbanization, environmental sustainability, and technological advancements.

Moreover, Harrison (2023) posits that exposure to global patterns and a cosmopolitan environment has an enhanced effect on the political decisions made by young people in urban

regions compared to traditional factors such as religion and caste. Nevertheless, policies that will lead to lower traffic, pollution, and the huge cost of housing are increasingly valued by young voters in major metro cities like Delhi, Bengaluru, and Mumbai, for example. It is forecasted that these types of policies will lower these problems. As a firsthand outcome of political social media campaigns, the group of young people in urban spaces who have been curious about political debate that is online and digital efforts has considerably increased.

The socioeconomic hurdles that the first-time voters are dealing with in rural spaces are high unemployment, low educational opportunities, and agricultural issues. But there are other difficulties also that they face. In rural areas, young people are usually more aligned to help political parties that give funding to social programs, subsidies on agricultural goods, and initiatives on the development of rural places. More traditional factors, such as caste, community, and local leadership, affect behaviors in voting in rural spaces, as reported by Razak and Suaheb (2024). Grassroots-level door-to-door canvassing is one of the political campaigns that is used in rural areas as a strategy to captivate young people who have the eligibility to cast ballots. In rural areas, first-time voters are more inclined to be dependent on word-of-mouth and traditional media content compared to digital media content when it is the question of political knowledge because they find these strategies to be more reliable.

### **Intersection of Education, Employment, and Location**

First-time voters are affected and bothered by a complicated model of factors that are created by the interplay among education, employment, and geographical area. To show this fact, it is required that young people who live in urban spaces, can acquire quality education, and get decent employment might be more engrossed in immediate assistance that is financial in nature and social welfare programs compared to policies that are catalyzed by innovation and progressive leadership (Debnath & Hazra, 2023). Political parties in India ought to look into advanced methods that are apt for different plans and issues that the youth of the nation face.

This is specifically important provided the situation's intermix; thus, there is a need to adopt and apply such strategies. In order to encourage political participation from persons from various socioeconomic backdrops, campaigns that are targeted to each community are important. If the objective of enhancing political involvement needs to be achieved, then this is required. Voters who have higher income will more probably support parties that prioritize the welfare of the society and economic growth, as reported by the India Human Development Survey (IHDS).

Economically backward classes' voting preferences are also being influenced by initiatives for financial inclusivity such as Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana.

### **Role of Media and Political Campaigns**

Impressions of the public of the economy are highly affected by media and political campaigns. Voters in present-day democracies particularly highly rely on analysis by the media more than directly dealing with basic information. This is the reason why the media has a considerable amount of influence on economic voting by formulating or reporting on economic issues specifically.

Similar statistics of such economic data might be shown in a completely other manner by media houses with various political stances. For example, a media source that is aligned with the opposition can bring the attention to economical issues like income inequality, while a media site aligned to the incumbent may focus on positive statistics like growth in job opportunities. By reshaping economic indicators according to their narratives, political campaigns further underscore the influences of the media. Candidates structure their assertions to either flaunt economic achievements or show the economic failures of the opposition. It is tough to differentiate between biased judgements caused by the media and true feelings of the voter in the charged electoral atmosphere created by this interrelated process.

### **Partisan Loyalty and Economic Voting**

In economic voting, partisanship is also very relevant. Voters with well-built affiliations with a particular party will be less open to the effects of the economy compared to independent or unpredictable voters. Though the previous point talks about loyalists' performance of the economy, it can be a crucial thing, specifically during acute economic crises when political ridges are not strong. Partisan voters use reasoning that is motivated and show economic data in a way that is biased. For instance, if positive economic data is in the opposition party's favor, a voter may not consider it. On the contrary, if charismatic ideological principles take a place above financial issues, followers may not consider economic faults. Extreme economic turmoil or unprecedented growth can go above party biases and influence voting behavior across the political range in spite of these favoritisms.

### **Price Rise and Inflation**

The middle class and impoverished are most affected by rising costs for necessities. Price increases for gasoline or onions have a direct effect on household budgets and frequently result in anti-incumbency votes. Because a sizable amount of their income is spent on consumption rather than savings, the middle class is especially vulnerable to inflation. Because they are aware of this sensitivity, political parties frequently employ price control policies as a means of winning votes. Food, gasoline, and electricity subsidies become key campaign pledges, particularly in cities where these represent significant household costs.

### **Freebies' Economic Impact on Voters**

According to the statement, "There is no such thing as a free lunch," there are no freebies in economics. Since someone has to pay for the freebies, taxes must be paid for everything, if not now or tomorrow, then the next day. When the government gives out free things, people have to pay for them. Gifts are paid for by the needy, not the wealthy. Thus, taxes are collected by the government on everything. Milton Friedman, Nobel Laureate.

India is now the most populous country in the world. On several levels, two-thirds of the people lived in poverty. The World Bank reports that the pandemic has caused India's impoverished population to more than double to 134 million in only one year. India's unemployment rate is 8.10 percent, and COVID-19 has caused millions of people to lose their jobs, according to CMIE. States are burdened financially by the freebie culture. The government receives taxes from the populace to fund public services, infrastructure, healthcare, development, and national expansion. However, during elections, giveaways are paid for with tax dollars. The honest taxpayer whose money is being used to pay for the freebie is deterred. Compared to the federal government, the state government has fewer funding streams. They depend on the federal government for funding to provide essential services and other facilities, and they are constantly in debt. The state's finances are suffering as a result of this freebie culture.

SR NO.	STATES	REVENUE DEFICIT
1	PUNJAB	8622 CRORES
2	TAMIL NADU	58,692 CRORES
3	HARYANA	29194 CRORES
4	WEST BENGAL	26755 CRORES
5	RAJASTHAN	23750 CRORES
6	KERALA	16910 CRORES

Source: - Budget Documents of the State government, RBI

This statistic indicates that most states have a revenue shortfall. To cover the basic needs of their states, they rely more on handouts from centers and have fewer sources of income.

Bhagwant Maan was recently chosen as the chief minister of Punjab after the Aam Aadmi Party won elections there with a sizable majority. An electoral promise made by the AAP was "free 300 units of electricity." There are currently 8,622 crores in state debt. It is anticipated that Rs 5000 crores will be spent in total to provide 300 units of free power to Punjabi citizens. AAP has

also committed to giving women above the age of 18 Rs 1000 in cash aid. This project is expected to cost Rs. 15000 crores to implement. **How can a political party carry out ambitious plans when the state is already heavily indebted?**

A "*State Finances: A Risk Analysis*" report from the Reserve Bank of India raises serious concerns on the economic well-being of states like West Bengal, Punjab, Kerala, Rajasthan, and Andhra Pradesh as a result of their focus on freebies and social welfare. "While there is no precise definition of freebies, it is necessary to distinguish them from public goods, such as the Public Distribution System, Health and Education Related Schemes, Employment Guarantee Schemes, and so on." Free public transit, free water, free energy, loan forgiveness, and more.

However, freebies are seen as freebies, which can damage credit culture, distort prices through cross-subsidization, and reduce incentives for private investment and labor force participation by discouraging people from working at the current wage rate, according to the RBI report.

The RBI predicts that Punjab will be the most severely affected, with a debt-to-GDP ratio of almost 45% in 2026–2027. West Bengal, Kerala, and Rajasthan are predicted to have a 35% higher GSDP debt ratio in 2026–2027. Four states—Punjab, Rajasthan, West Bengal, and Kerala—had total outstanding liabilities that exceeded the national average of 32%, the RBI report stated. States find it harder to fund welfare services when they have too much debt.

State	As % of GSDP	As % of revenue receipts	As % of own tax revenue
Andhra Pradesh	2.1%	14.1%	30.30%
Bihar	0.1%	0.6%	2.70%
Haryana	0.1%	0.6%	0.90%
Jharkhand	1.7%	8.0%	26.70%
Kerala	0.0%	0.0%	0.10%
Madhya Pradesh	1.6%	10.8%	28.80%
Punjab	2.7%	17.8%	45.40%
Rajasthan	0.6%	3.9%	8.60%
West Bengal	1.1%	9.5%	23.80%

-Sources: Budget documents of the State Government, RBI

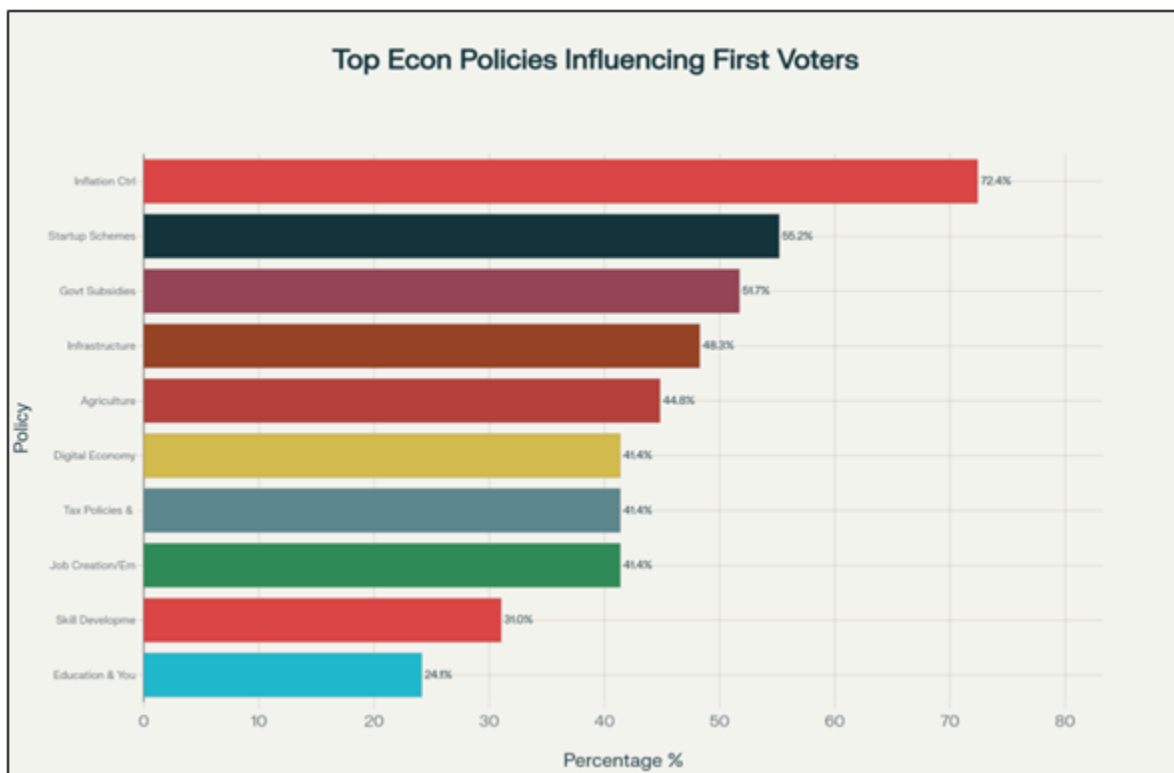
Freebies have topped 2% of GDP in some of the most indebted states, including Punjab and Andhra Pradesh. In Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Punjab, subsidies make up 14.1%, 10.8%, and 17.8% of total revenue, respectively.

The biggest danger to freebies is when a nation's economy collapses, as was the case with Sri Lanka, which declared a financial emergency as a result. Freebies impose pressure on the government's budget because they don't create capital or provide future returns. As the deficit widens, interest payments will become more burdensome. Economic inflation resulted from the distribution of free products. Freebies that include free water, electricity, and other consumer items have an effect on public transportation networks, renewable energy, and sustainable and environmental growth. When something is given away for free, people have a natural tendency to abuse or overuse it.

### Case Study of Saharanpur

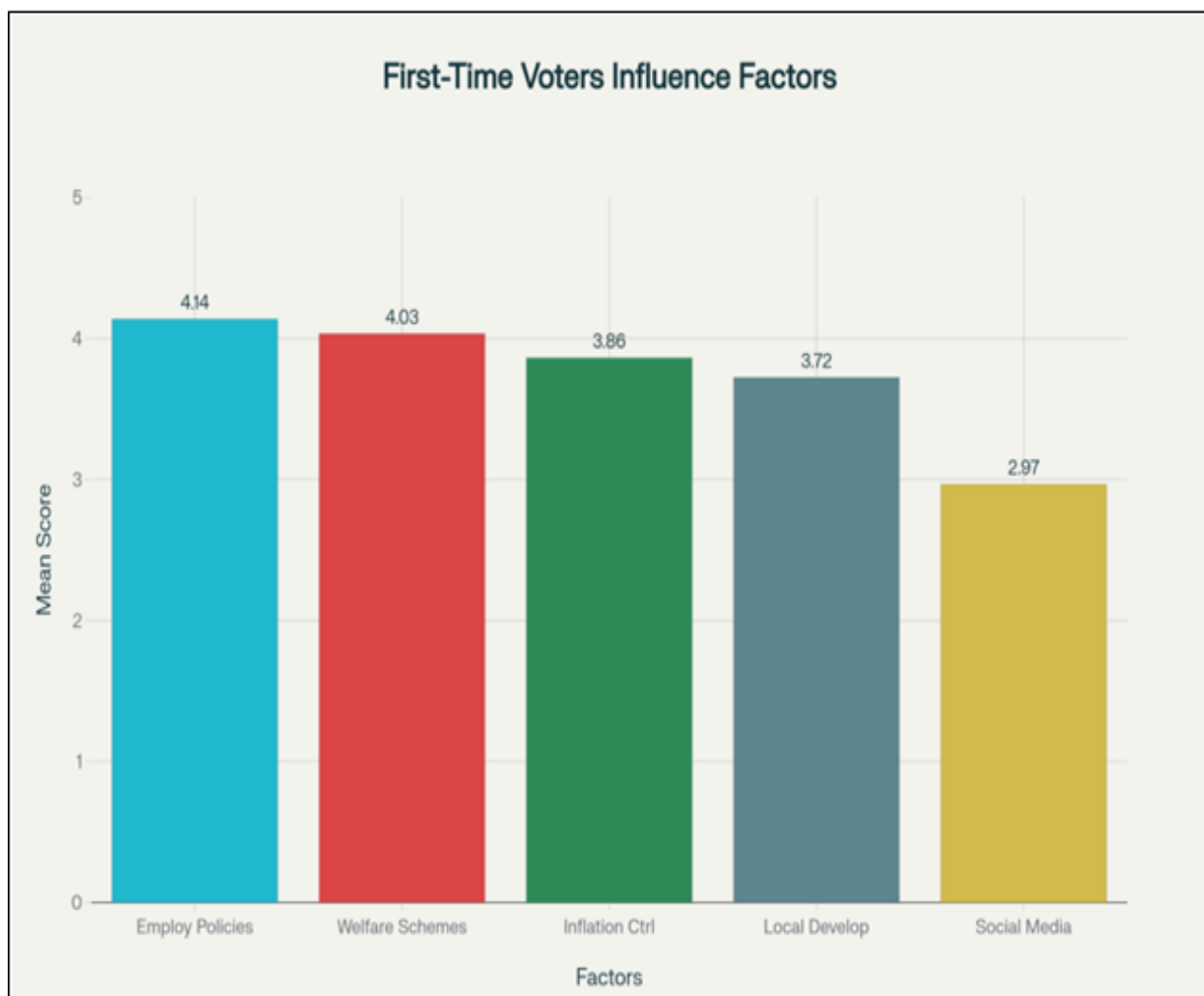
In this we will show some graphical analysis from a primary survey conducted to show how or what economic policies were most influential in shaping the voting decisions of first-time voters.

#### First-time voters' top ten economic policies that influenced their choice of vote, along with the proportion of respondents who mentioned each policy



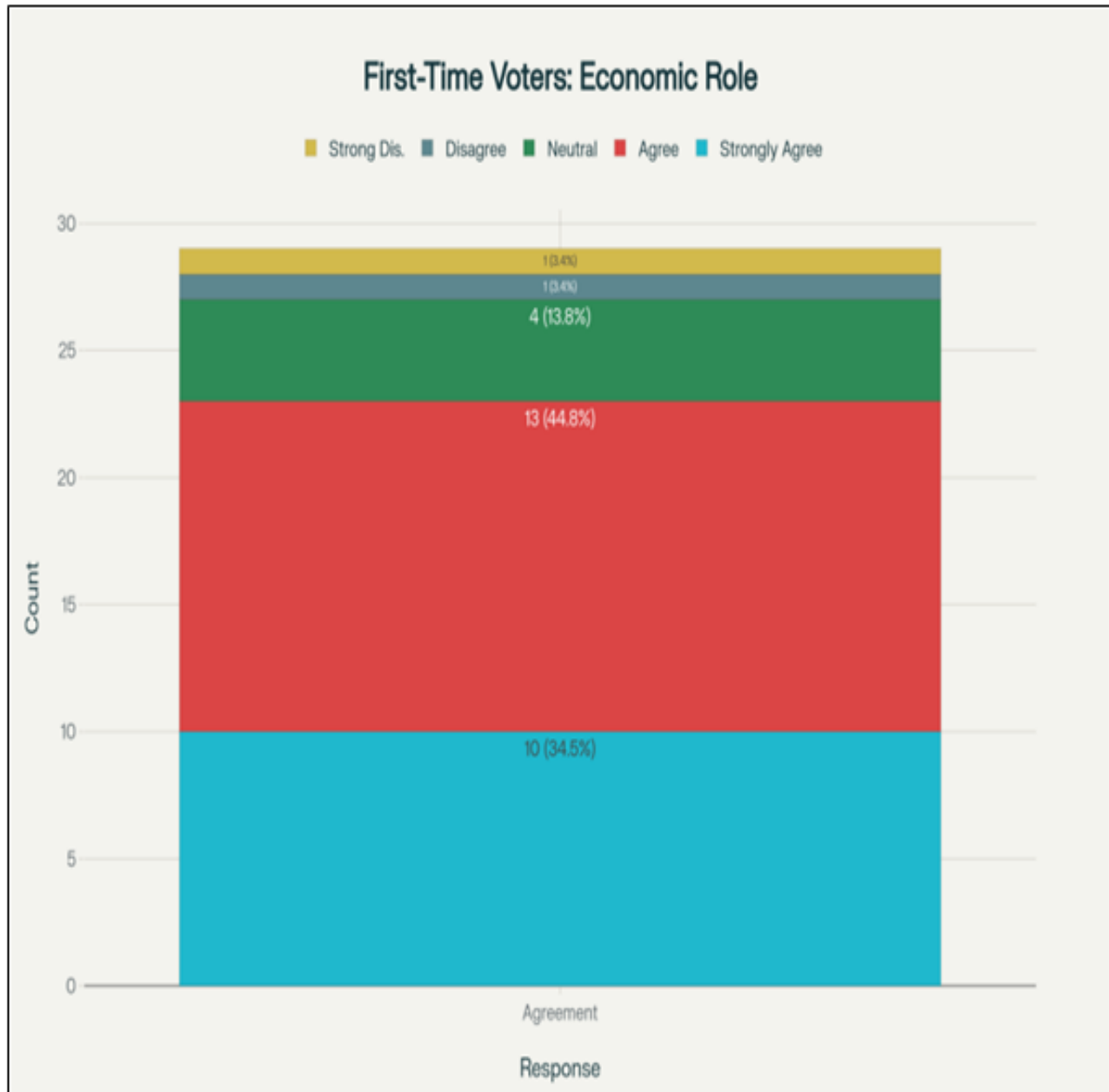
Of first-time voters, 72.4 percent cited inflation control as the most important economic policy concern. This overwhelming focus on inflation reflects the immediate economic pressures facing young voters, particularly given that 52 percent of respondents earn below ₹10,000 monthly. The importance of inflation worries is consistent with the difficult economic climate during the 2024 election season.

**Among the factors influencing first-time voters' decisions, employment policies and welfare schemes had the highest mean influence scores (1–5)**



Employment policies have the highest influence score (4.14/5), closely followed by welfare schemes (4.03/5), even though inflation control is mentioned the most. This suggests that although voters often talk about inflation, policies pertaining to employment have the biggest influence on their choices.

**79.3% of the first-time voters agree or strongly agree that economic issues play a role in their voting decisions**



With 44 percent agreeing and 34 percent strongly agreeing that economic factors influenced their voting decisions, the data shows noteworthy agreement among first-time voters regarding the significance of economic issues. Only 68% of respondents disagreed that economic issues played a major role, indicating that almost all of them agreed that economic policy was important.

**Key policy priorities are revealed by the scatter plot illustrating the correlation between the frequency of economic policy mentions and their influence scores**

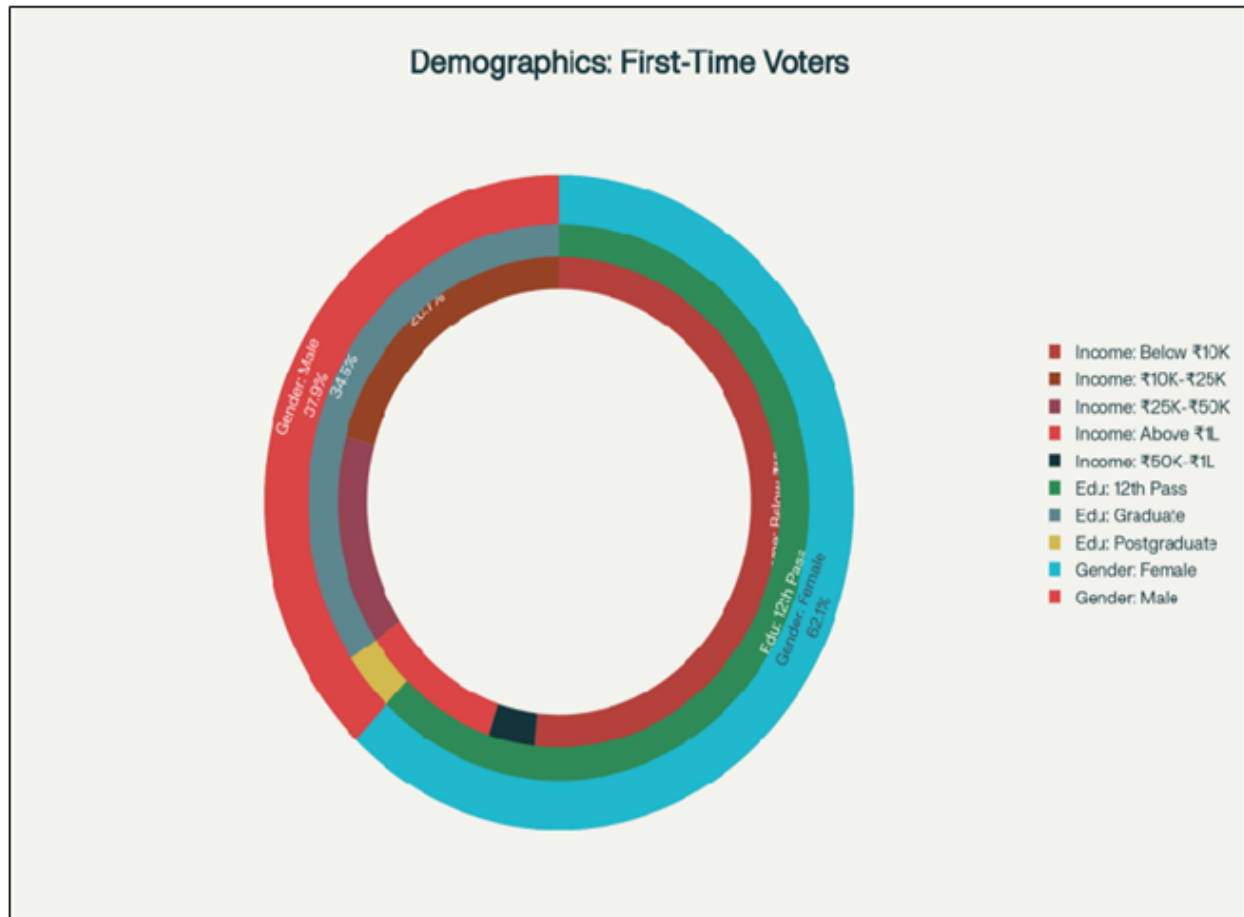


Analyzing the correlation between influence scores and policy mentions reveals some intriguing trends. Although it has received the most mentions (21), inflation control has moderate influence scores (3.86), indicating that it is a topic that is frequently discussed but could be considered a given concern.

On the other hand, employment policies with the fewest mentions (12) have the highest influence score (4.14), suggesting that they play a significant role in voting decisions. According to first-time voters, the following five economic policies are the most significant.

The mention rate for inflation control is 72.4%. Schemes for Startups and Entrepreneurship had 55.2% of mentions. 51.7% of people mention government subsidies. The mention rate for infrastructure development is 48.3%. Agricultural Support has a mention rate of 44.8%.

**According to a multi-level demographic breakdown, 42% of the population is female, 62% have completed their 12th grade, and 52% make less than 10,000 rs. per month**

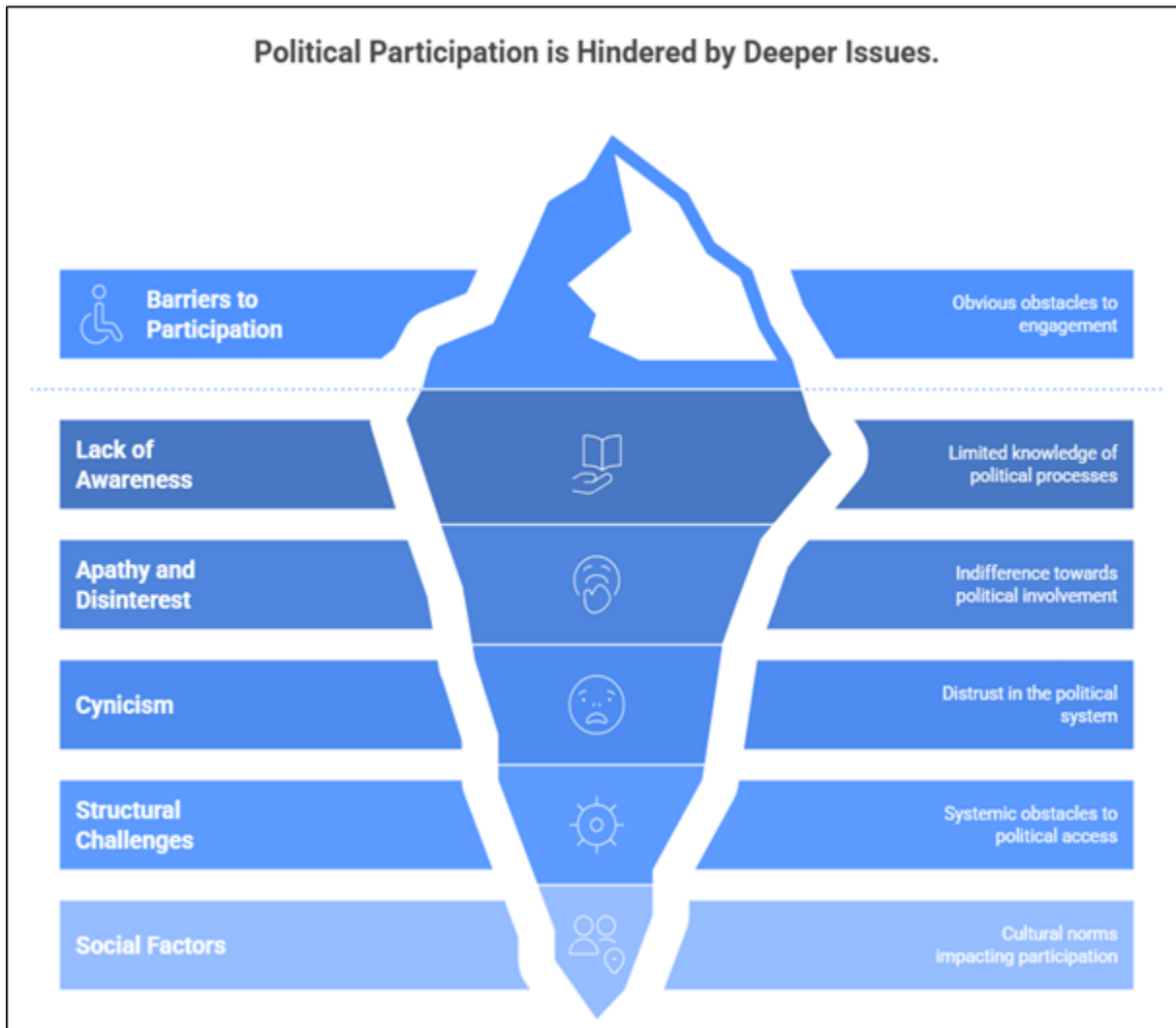


According to the survey demographic, these policy preferences are driven by a primarily young, lower-income population. With 62% of respondents being female, 62% having completed their 12th grade, and 52% making less than 10,000 rs. per month, the emphasis on immediate economic relief measures like employment programs and inflation control reflects the financial realities that this group endures.

According to the analysis, first-time voters have a sophisticated understanding of economic policy and can differentiate between things that are personally important (employment policies) and things that are frequently discussed (inflation). Despite their digital nativity, voters appear to rely more on substantive policy considerations than social media campaigns when casting their ballots, as evidenced by social media's lowest influence score (2.97/5).

Economic policies played a crucial role in the decision-making process of first-time voters, as

evidenced by the data. While some policies were universal concerns (like inflation), others were key differentiators between political options (like welfare and employment programs).



## Challenges

### Barriers to Participation

Democratic engagement is hampered by several factors from realizing its full potential. The low level of political participation among Indians casting their first ballots is one of these challenges. There are several obstacles that young people must overcome in order to take part in elections. Among these difficulties are cynicism, indifference, disinterest, and a lack of political literacy and knowledge (Ling, 2023). Young people encounter these difficulties even though they are a

population that has a significant impact on election results. Because of our ability to understand these difficulties, we must be able to devise measures that will support a more robust and inclusive democratic process.

### **Lack of Awareness and Political Literacy**

Youths usually encounter hindrances in political participation as a result of poor political knowledge and awareness. New voters do not necessarily have an understanding of how elections are conducted, why their vote matters, or where political parties stand. This is mostly because of scarce civic education as well as missing out on exposure to political debate within the home or community. In rural regions, poor educational infrastructure exacerbates the issue, but urban youth can be overwhelmed by sophisticated political jargon and muddled messages.

The prevalence of disinformation and low media literacy makes things even more complicated. Social media may engage young people, but at the same time, it exposes them to unbalanced or false information, causing confusion and disengagement. These challenges underscore the imperative for programs that inform and empower young people with the knowledge and skills required to become informed, active citizens.

### **Apathy and Disinterest**

One of the most significant issues influencing voter turnout is the general issue of first-time voters' disinterest and indifference. A sizable section of the younger generation believes that politics is either a sphere beset by corruption and inefficiency or has no bearing whatsoever on their lives. People are less likely to cast a ballot when they are unaware of how their vote would improve their socioeconomic status (Hersi & Ali Addo, 2022). Another reason why individuals become disillusioned with politics is the lack of compelling political narratives or people to aspire to as role models. Politics is viewed as uninteresting and unpleasant due to the imbalance in the representation of youth and the dominance of older lawmakers. Political parties' failure to address concerns that are specific to young people, like mental health, unemployment, and insufficient educational possibilities, only helps to further alienate this group. In their own right, the family and the community are important in promoting political engagement. Children are less likely to learn about politics or develop an interest in the topic if they grow up in homes where political conversations are either disregarded or never mentioned. Depending on the views that are common in social circles, peer groups can either inspire people to get more involved in their communities or make them even less interested (Bazurli & Portos, 2021).

### **Cynicism Toward the Political System**

Another major obstacle that prevents young people from voting is their skepticism. Many first-

time voters believe that problems like nepotism, corruption, and broken promises afflict the political system. In the event that individuals begin to lose faith in the government and think their ballots will have no impact, they may completely lose interest in voting. Cynicism rises as a result of the pervasive belief in electoral malpractices, including vote-buying, voter suppression, and slanted media coverage. Additionally, young voters lose faith in their capacity to effect democratically meaningful change due to the absence of accountability and transparency in political institutions (Watunglawar et al., 2024). One of the many reasons why people have a bad opinion of Indian politics is that it is incredibly ruthless and full of assaults on individuals and divisive campaigns. First-time voters may feel excluded if there is no meaningful conversation and a focus on party arguments, especially if they are searching for workable answers to important problems.

### **Structural and Logistical Challenges**

First-time voters usually face a variety of obstacles, some of which are psychological in character and others of a structural and logistical kind. Younger individuals who have just turned 18 or who have moved to a city for work or education usually have a harder time registering to vote. There are many difficulties, such as people not knowing when to register, the complexity of the process, and the lack of support at registration centers. There are several logistical problems that lead to poor voter turnout on election day. These problems include long queues, hard-to-get-to polling stations, and insufficient resources to deal with heavy traffic (Kamil & Indah, 2022).

Because the infrastructure is less established in more rural and distant places, these problems tend to be more severe there. Additionally, because election dates usually conflict with other commitments like work schedules, school schedules, or exams, young voters may find it challenging to prioritize voting. Even though online and early voting are flexible voting options that could address these problems, neither of these approaches has received much attention in India.

### **Social and Cultural Factors**

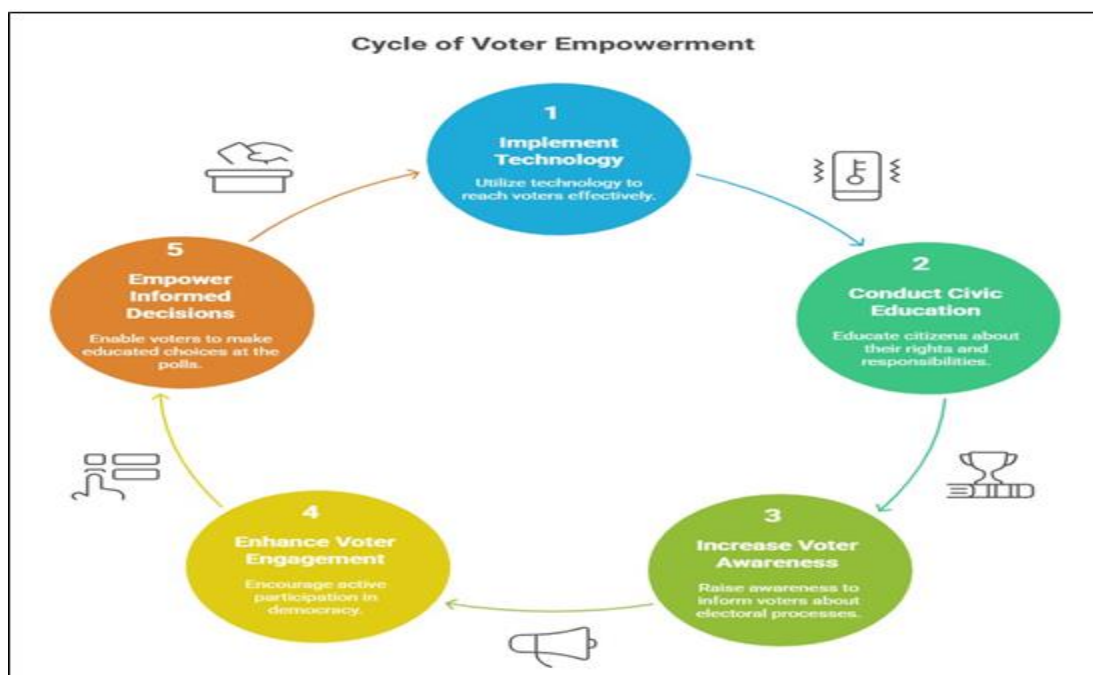
Social and cultural barriers are among the many challenges faced by those casting their first ballots. Certain societies' traditional hierarchies and conventions prohibit young women, in particular, from being involved in politics. Female voters often find themselves unable to fully participate in political processes due to gender factors that limit their autonomy and mobility (Harrison, 2023). The issue is made worse by the marginalization or exclusion of particular groups from the mainstream political discourse due to geographical differences and caste-based prejudice. The issue is made worse by the unequal playing field this produces. This kind of exclusion keeps underprivileged kids and teenagers stuck in a never-ending cycle of

disengagement and helplessness and prevents them from speaking up.

### Way Forward

Changes in education, policymaking, and increased collaboration between the government and civil society are necessary to overcome these issues. One strategy to assist children in understanding their rights and obligations as citizens at an early age is to make civics education mandatory in schools. Voter turnout can also be increased by programs that assist first-time voters and facilitate voter registration. Utilizing technology to combat misinformation and educate people on voting is another crucial tactic (Razak & Suaheb, 2024). Campaigns that encourage young people to vote using interactive tools, relatable material, and social media influencers can help combat fake news. Political parties must emphasize youth-friendly policies and involve young leaders in party decision-making if they hope to win over young voters. It is recommended that young people and politicians participate in workshops, town hall meetings, and debates. This will provide first-time voters with a sense of command and enhance their participation in the political processes.

India's humongous population of young voters, especially those voting for the first time, has a huge probability of affecting the nation's future democratically. In order to minimize the gap in participation and opportunity maximization, today's youth should necessarily participate actively in the political processes in which they are invested. Civic education and awareness campaigns, integrated with technology, have a high potential when it comes to onboarding young voters.



### **Use of Technology to Mobilise Young Voters**

The arrival of digitally powered platforms has been an efficient tool for mustering India's first-time voters. With the relevancy of the online world within young people, social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube are highly employed by political parties, NGOs, and the Election Commission of India (ECI) to spread political information in engaging formats, for instance, through live sessions, memes, short videos, and infographics.

Trends, along with hashtags and influencer endorsements, further magnify voter engagement.

Mobile applications, such as ECI's Voter Helpline, simplified registration of voters and provided us with vital information on polling stations and candidatures. Other applications and tools that are gamified, such as quizzes and simulations, making education regarding politics much more engaging and fun, bringing up deeper interactions and discussions amongst peers.

Digital support groups also use panel discussions, podcasts, and webinars in order to raise awareness among young voters. Leveraging advanced software like AI and data science helps campaigns to personalize targeted messaging for different demographic situations. Along with false information being a threat that is still prevalent, solutions that are technology-driven, such as sites for fact-checking, literacy in media initiatives, and partnerships between social media firms and regulators, are building a trustworthy digital landscape. Altogether, these advancements will empower first-time voters to make decisions that are well-informed choices and emerge as participants who are engaged in the process of democracy.

### **Role of Civic Education and Awareness Campaigns**

Civic education is central in leveraging young, first-time voters to have active participation in democracy. To ensure long-term involvement in politics, civic education provides them with the voting rights awareness, the process of election, and the result of their decisions. Colleges and schools are fundamental platforms for ingraining political consciousness through courses regarding civics and political science, which lay the foundation for democratic values and voting processes. Activities such as mock elections and debates also help in enhancing engagement even more by making the process interactive and tangible in nature.

In order to engage rural and deprived youth, the need of the hour is workshops, community outreach programs, and seminars. These programs are organized by NGOs and youth organizations, which provide registration of voters' information, the significance of voting, and how to take well-informed decisions. The Election Commission of India's Systematic Voter Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) program is an outstanding initiative for spreading awareness with the help of school collaborations, corporates, and the media, considerably

increasing youth voter turnout.

Media also plays a key role in civic education. Traditional media such as newspapers and television, along with social and online media platforms, help assist in diffusing crucial information. Popularizing voting as a civic duty among the youth is done through influencer, celebrity, and material-led campaigns, which are relatable. Making these campaigns to be inclusive in nature, targeting and breaking gender, language, and disability norms, enables each and every young person to engage at an optimal level. Not only do successful campaigns need to bring people to the polls but also promote intuitive voting. Giving light on the ways in which elections influence real-life matters like healthcare, education, and employment makes them understand as citizens, particularly young citizens, the individual importance of their vote. Voter education, education on political platforms, and analysis of the candidature make more informed and aware voters.

Summarizing, socially inclusive civic education awareness campaigns are the key to making a generation of active citizens. If we amalgamate formal classroom education with local community outreach and actions of the media, we can make youth voters confident while having a purpose, reinforcing democracy not only in India but also the world as a whole.

### **Bridging the Gap Between Technology and Education**

It is workable to develop an end-to-end strategy for pushing people to vote thanks to the special matrix of civic education and technology. Resources available online, like quizzes, webinars, and interactive instructional materials, can make political education even more accessible for everyone and fun. Another way that gamified tools and applications can be incorporated into school programs is by supplying students with instant access to information and assistance. To continue with these initiatives, educational institutions, government, and tech firms need to coordinate with each other. For example, Coursera and YouTube website collaborations can be used to give free civic engagement courses. Then, to spread the news and awareness about these free courses, personalized ads may be posted on Twitter and Instagram.

### **Conclusion**

Young voters are crucial for India's democratic functions. Their indulgence could be the difference in the outcome of elections and would pave a new course in the political journey of our nation. India has a crucial responsibility to guide and count its young population to uphold the democratic roots incorporated in its Constitution, as it is the most youthful and biggest democracy in the world. The learning's ending focuses on the important need to overcome the hindrances preventing young voters from totally indulging in the political procedure. To assure that this setup of people is an important part of the nation's democratic formation, specific

interference is needed to break free from roadblocks like political indifference, little political information, and socioeconomic limitations. The biggest problem that arises is young voters' political knowledge gap. Some youths don't like to be tied to politics for the reason that it doesn't have an effect on their daily life, or it barely solves their issues. Common civic sense needs to be inculcated in them to reduce this gap through teaching political knowledge and responsibilities. Customized workshops need to be introduced to schools and colleges as part of the curriculum so that democratic rights, voting processes, and the need for active indulgence in governance can be understood. Providing our youth with sound knowledge might turn out to be a positive approach and would, in turn, increase engagement among them.

The participation of inaugural voters is reduced due to socioeconomic and financial issues. Different responses are seen in the rural areas due to multiple factors, such as limited access to education and career options, as well as limited access to technology. To increase economic growth and digital education, policymakers are required to put extra care into paving an equal platform for everyone. Notably in less privileged areas, reducing the digital gap can improve equal access to information and resources that help the youth to make calculated decisions. Furthermore, technology helps open new ways to connect with the young generation. Different digital adoptions, such as campaigns, mobile apps, and social media, are now very important resources for political engagement. These platforms provide an indulging engagement, the latest information, and a stage for debate and discussion. Reaching out to the inaugural voters on these digital platforms makes engagement and inculcates meaningful interactions, which aligns their agendas, political groups, and civic communities.

Curated outreach programs are very important for helping young voters to overcome any challenges. Influencers, political teams, and civic organizations should work with synergy so that youngsters can feel they are making a difference with their votes. These programs can be made more approachable through engaging structures like town halls, live discussion sessions, and voter education workshops. Also, answering the questions of the young crowd can nurture confidence by adhering to things such as internet accessibility, job opportunities, and global warming, which may show that they are given importance and that their opinions are heard in political platforms and restructuring of policies.

Lastly, it is the responsibility of all parties who are involved in the democracy of India to empower first-time voters. The knowledge underneath needed for literacy regarding politics must be coached in schools and other educational platforms. Political parties should create campaigns that are inclusive in nature, youth-focused, and integrated with the ever-changing needs of young voters. To keep political parties accountable to their work, civic society must serve as a connection to look into the needs and rights of first-time voters. Democracy in India is equally strong in its capacity to pertinently involve its citizens who are the youngest. In terms of the

political landscape of the country, first-time voters reflect both the present and the future. In order to create policies that represent the interests and aspirations of the nation's diverse people, their active participation is crucial. India can establish a setting where first-time voters feel appreciated and encouraged to participate by tackling obstacles, seizing opportunities, and encouraging cooperation among many sectors. By ensuring their active and knowledgeable engagement, India's democracy would be strengthened and preserved for future generations.

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