

# **ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION,KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDE AND PRACTICES : A CASE STUDY OF UTTAR PRADESH ASSEMBLY ELECTION 2012 (INDIA)**

***Bupinder Zutshi, PhD***

Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India

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## **Abstract**

The study of voter turnout rates, its composition, characteristics, Knowledge, Attitude, Behavior, Beliefs and Practices (KABBP) is an integral part of election management by the Election Commissions throughout the World. The Office of the Chief Electoral Officer-Uttar Pradesh has taken up a Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) interventions and programme before the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections in 2012, to promote participation of the voter in the electoral process. The present study examines the voter turnout rates across gender groups, age groups, income groups, occupational groups and education levels in Uttar Pradesh state of India. It also attempts to assess knowledge, attitude, practices and satisfaction level of voters about various services and facilities of electoral process/election management and its consequences on voter turnout rates.

The study indicates voter turnout rate of 59.48% in 2012, as compared to 46.07% in 2007 and 47.79% in General Election of 2009. The mean and median voter turnout rates recorded during 1951-2009 has been 50.1%, and 50.5% respectively, with Standard Deviation of 9.4 for the same period. However significant variations in the voter turnout rates were recorded among micro regions within same administrative constituency due to demographic, cultural, socio-economic and institutional management measures. The results point out significant impact in voter turnout rates after interventions under SVEEP were initiated by the Election Commission in 2010. The study also depicts that there is lot of gap between what the voters 'should know' and what they 'actually know' in important areas like registration of voter list, making of Elector Photo Identity Cards (EPIC), Polling Station location, use of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), do's & don'ts with regard to model code of conduct. The results point out that persistent voter education with the kind of seriousness and depth, it deserves by the Election Management bodies should be given due and strong emphasis.

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**Keywords:**Electoral participation, Voter Turnout Rate, Voter Knowledge, Education, and Communication, Election management

## **Context and Objectives**

The study of voter turnout rates, its composition, characteristics, Knowledge, Attitude, Behavior, Beliefs and Practices (KABBP) is an integral part of election management by the Election Commissions throughout the World. Thus voter's participation and turnout rates are widely studied phenomenon in the comparative politics literature. Scholars have studied voter turnout rates and have pronounced that "Political equality and political participation are both basic democratic ideals" (Lijphart, 1997: 1) in flourishing democracies worldwide. Several studies have also indicated that changes in voter turnout rates can affect electoral outcomes and support for a particular party (Radcliff, 1994, 1995; Erikson, 1995a, 1995b). While voter turnout has generally been declining in most Western democracies, it has actually increased in India since its first elections in 1951. This upward trend has been highlighted by scholars

as an important factor in the sustenance of Indian democracy, where citizen's participation has improved in increasing numbers to choose their governments, election after election (Yadav, 2000).

In case of India, voter turnouts have been high in comparison to several Western democracies, despite the presence of a large illiterate and economically backward population. Scholars have pointed out that "The deprived seem to have greater faith in India's elections than the advantaged" (Varshney, 2000:20). Since electoral outcomes have important policy implications, it is vital to understand the degree and reasons for variation in the voter turnout rates among different spatial geographical regions as well as among different composition and social and economic characteristics groups of voters, so that focused target is given to encourage them to strengthen democratic value by exercising their duty of franchise.

### **Factors Affecting Voters Turnout**

High voter turnout is often considered to be desirable (Franklin, Mark, 1999, 2001, 2002). Several models have been developed by scholars for voter turnout differentials across regions, political governance systems, community composition and characteristics and existing institutional frameworks. "Rational Voter Model" (Downs 1957), has been a dominant theory of voter participation in the literature for a long time, and has been extended theoretically and tested empirically by many scholars (Buchanan & Tullock, 1962; Riker & Ordeshook, 1968; Tullock, 1971; Cox & Munger, 1989; Aldrich, 1993; Feddersen, 2004). The rational choice model focuses on the cost-benefit analysis of the voting decision. According to Riker and Ordeshook (1968), since a single vote has virtually no effect on the election outcome, a voter cannot be expected to vote for gaining just material benefits. Instead, the only rational reason to vote is to gain benefits such as expressing an opinion or fulfilling a duty and participate in the governance system. Thus governance trust in voter is an essential requirement for higher voter turnout. Some scholars explain the voting decision based on a habit, which in turn depends on factors such as their social status and education, income, ethnicity, rural/urban character and ease of voting. Verba and Nie (1972) put forward a model of electoral participation based on education and profession, and studies such as Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980), and Parry et al. (1992) use this resource model in their studies of voter turnout. The mobilization model complements the resource model and focuses on how the various parties, interest groups and candidates mobilize people to vote (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993). Low turnout elections have often been referred to as low mobilization elections, and mobilization is a mechanism that works by way of both rationality and socialization (Franklin, 2004). An important variable in the turnout literature focuses on the competitiveness of the elections. According to Blais (2000: 60), "the verdict is crystal clear with respect to closeness: closeness has been found to increase turnout ... There are strong reasons to believe that, as predicted by rational choice theory, more people vote when election is close".

Studies have indicated that in each country, some parts of society are more likely to vote than others. In high-turnout countries, these differences tend to be limited, but in low turnout nations the differences between voters and non-voters can be quite marked. These differences appear to persist over time; in fact, the strongest predictor of individual turnout is whether or not one voted in the previous election. (Fowler, James H. 2006). Much of the impetus to vote comes from a sense of civic duty, which takes time and certain social conditions to develop that, can take decades to develop. Scholars have found ethnicity, caste, income, education levels, rural/urban character of electorates have affected voter turnouts. But these factors do not have straight forward linkages. As education levels are found to be closely linked with voter turnout in developed societies, while they are in reverse linked in South Asian Countries especially in India. The dominant view in the existing studies points

toward the primacy of institutional variables in affecting the variation in turnout across nations, although some authors also include sociological variables as well as economic variables in their analyses. However the factors affecting voter turnout can be classified as follows:

Multiple factor affects voter turnout rates. These factors are institutional management, cultural, social, economic, laws and governance. Making easier rules and laws for registration of eligible voter has helped in increasing registration of high numbers of eligible voters in voter lists, which naturally result in higher turnouts. Rolling registration (Registering eligible voters as closer to the date of polling) has helped in increasing eligible voter lists, as updating is regular, without creating barriers of cutoff dates. Online registration of eligible voter in the voter list has also improved voter turnouts. Creating awareness by Election Commission through mass media, advertisements and other intervention have increased eligible voters registration in voter lists. Simply making it easier for candidates to stand through easier nomination rules is believed to increase voting. Conversely, adding barriers, such as a separate registration process, can suppress turnout. Other factors include ease of voting is a factor in voter turnout. Increasing the number of possible voting locations, lowering the average time voters have to spend waiting in line, or declaring holidays on voting day for workers has helped in increased voter turnouts. Many countries have looked into internet voting as a possible solution for low voter turnout. Similarly Voter fatigue can lower turnout. If there are many elections in close succession, voter turnout will decrease as the public tires of participating. Holding multiple elections at the same time can increase turnout. Voter suppression affects voter turnout because citizens are prevented from voting. Prevention could be for legal, racial, or political reasons. Often the aim of suppression is that the people in power remain in power. In other cases, supporters of candidates who cannot get elected through fair means or have their nominated candidature listed on the ballot paper often self-suppress in protest. Voter also perceives security threat which suppresses their voting rights. Not all voters who arrive at the polls necessarily cast ballots. Some may be turned away because they are ineligible as they do not find their names in the voter list or do not possess accepted identification cards, some may be turned away improperly by opposing candidates due to lack of security personnel.

### **Lack of Trust in Governance**

Early studies (Gosnell, 1927) assume that turnout depends on the character of the election itself, rather than on the voters. Thus, for example, lower turnout is expected where parties do not clearly communicate their policies to the voters, and a high turnout is expected when policies are well presented, or where electoral competition is expected to be close. Political parties on increase in turnout focus less on the characteristics of the elections, and more on the motivation of the individual voter and on parties' efforts to mobilize support for its policies through unfair means. However generally trust in government, interest in politics, beliefs in efficacy of voting, political parties' efforts to motivate electorates, suitability of candidate have been other factors affecting voter turnouts.

Literature focusing on determinants of turnout in India is limited, and consists mainly of the works by Yadav (2000), McMillan (2005), Ahuja, A and Pradeep Chibber (2012), Diwakar, R (2008). Yadav (2000) disaggregates turnout statistics in India in terms of regions and prominent social groups to understand the changing nature of political participation in India in the 1990s. Yadav's key thesis is that although overall turnout figures have not increased dramatically in India, yet the composition of those who vote has undergone a major change. He found socially underprivileged- the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have increased voter turnouts but the same has not been true of other disadvantaged groups like minorities and women. He points out that India is perhaps the

country where voter turnout rates for underprivileged community is higher than most privileged groups. He also finds that voters in rural areas are more likely to vote than those in urban areas. Scholars have also analyzed that young voters and women have higher voter turnout rates especially during last decade.

A lot of attention has been paid to the decline in voter turnout rates in the World democracies, and scholars have debated the reasons and the effects of this decline. Declining voter turnout tends have been associated with citizens' lack of interest in the democratic process which dilutes the legitimacy of the governance. Scholars have also related the decline in voter turnout to disenfranchisement of socially and economically backward groups, and questioned whether democracy in such a scenario is truly representative. In such situations it is imperative on the Election Commission and political parties to encourage electorates to participate in the election processes by inculcating KABBP among the voters.

### Objectives of the Present Study

- To evaluate the voter turnout rates during Uttar Pradesh Assembly Election 2012 and analyse the outcomes of voter turnout across gender groups, age groups, income groups, occupational groups and education level.
- To assess knowledge and satisfaction level of voters about various facts of electoral process/election management.
- To suggest for strategic communication with the voter in order to improve registration and voter turnout.

### Research Methodology

The present study is based on both secondary and primary sources of data. Secondary data was collected from Election Commission of India (ECI) record like voter turnout during Assembly Election 2012 for Uttar Pradesh state of India.. Primary survey was conducted during July to December 2013 in Uttar Pradesh. A total of 20,154 households from rural areas (10,585 households from High turnout polling booth areas and 9,569 households from Low turnout polling booth areas) and 5,207 households from urban areas (2193 households from High turnout polling booth areas and 3014 households from Low turnout polling booth areas) were stratified and randomly selected for the detailed survey from the 380 Assembly segments. These stratified randomly selected household recorded 86,720 eligible voters (aged 18 year and above). Thus the survey covered 86,720 eligible voters representing 0.068 percent of total electorate of the state for the survey. Eligible voters aged 18 years and above recorded per household were 3.57 for rural areas and 2.83 for urban areas. 43,171 eligible voters were recoded from High turnout polling booth areas and 43,549 eligible voters were recorded from Low turnout polling booth areas. However only 62,735 eligible voters responded for the survey (30,973 voters from High turnout polling booth areas and 31,762 voters from Low turnout polling booth areas) and others were reluctant to provide detailed information required for the survey. (Refer Table No.1)

Table No. 1 Sample Coverage -KABBP Survey -2013, Uttar Pradesh

	Total Households Covered for Sample Survey		Total Eligible Voters found/ Covered for Survey				Total Eligible Voters Responded during Survey			
	Rural	Urban	Rural		Urban		Rural		Urban	
			M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
High turnout Polling Booth Areas	10585	2193	17962	19088	2901	3220	13058	13703	1985	2227
Low Turnout Polling Booth Areas	9569	3014	16586	18341	4175	4447	12125	13133	3061	3443

Both Combined	20154	5207	34548	37429	7076	7667	25183	26836	5046	5670
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Source: Sample Survey Conducted 2013

### **Interventions by Election Commission of India (ECI)**

Election Commission of India (ECI) realized the importance of infusing greater vigor for high voter turnout rates for healthy democratic processes. The theme chosen for the Diamond Jubilee Year of the ECI in 2010 was “Greater Participation for a Stronger Democracy”. ECI realized that it needed to reach out to complete electoral rolls, urban apathy, women’s participation deficit and youth indifference to the electoral. It felt that educating voters and effective management of election machinery holds the key to motivate voters for greater participation. (Election Commission of India- ECI -2013, Compendium of Rules) The Commission thus decided to bring Voter education to the center table of election management and allocated it necessary attention and resources. Several measures were directed by ECI to meet this objective. Some of the measures taken were

- Improve participation of all sections of the electorate, awareness levels needed to be enhanced, especially amongst the newly eligible youth, the uneducated, residents of inaccessible and remote areas, socially and economically weaker/ deprived sections of society.
- ECI envisaged systematic, strategic and scientific processes in understanding the voter participation and engagement dynamics so as to facilitate the processes of increased and informed participation.
- Effective partnerships with educational institutions like Universities, Colleges, Senior Secondary Schools, and Vocational Institutes etc. were built, in order to educate the students on subjects related to democratic electoral practices and participation.
- Large segments/ sections of the electorate who were not covered by the formal educational system or those who had developed an apathetic attitude or those who are physically cut-off from the mainstream due to various reasons were brought under the ambit of focused voter education. Such segments/ sections were reached through civil society organizations, special agencies of volunteers, govt. departments working for the welfare of deprived and vulnerable sections or marginalized groups etc.

### **Uttar Pradesh Elections 2012, Voter Turnout Rates**

The Uttar Pradesh Assembly Election 2012 recorded voter turnout of 59.48% as compared to 46.07% in Assembly Election 2007 and 47.79% in General Election of 2009. The mean voter turnout for Uttar Pradesh Elections (both assembly as well as General elections) from 1951- 2009 has been 50.1 %, while median turnout rates for the same period was 50.5% with Standard Deviation of 9.4 for the same period. Thus significant increase has been recorded in the voter turnout in Uttar Pradesh during last five decades. The results point out significant impact in voter turnout rates after interventions under SVEEP were initiated by the Election Commission of Uttar Pradesh in 2010.

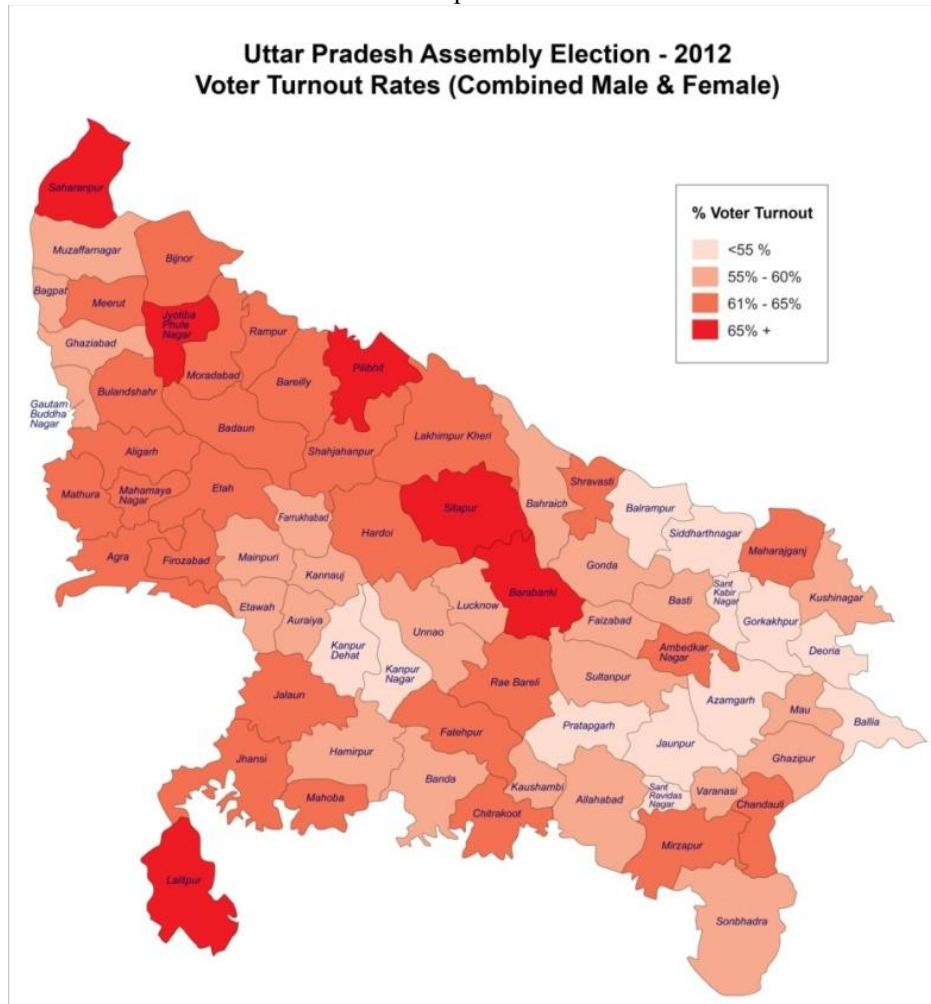
However significant variations in the turnout rates for Assembly Election 2012 were observed geographically (Map No. 1). The map indicates Eastern Uttar Pradesh recorded lower voter turnout rates as compared to Central and North-Western Districts of Uttar Pradesh. The districts of Kanpur, Pratapgarh, Jaunpur, Azamgarh, Ballia, Deoria, Gorakhpur, SantKabir Nagar, SantRavidas Nagar, Siddharthnagar and Balrampur recoded least turnout rates, while Districts of Saharanpur, JyotiPhule Nagar, Philibhit, Sultanpur and Barabanki recorded higher turnout rates.

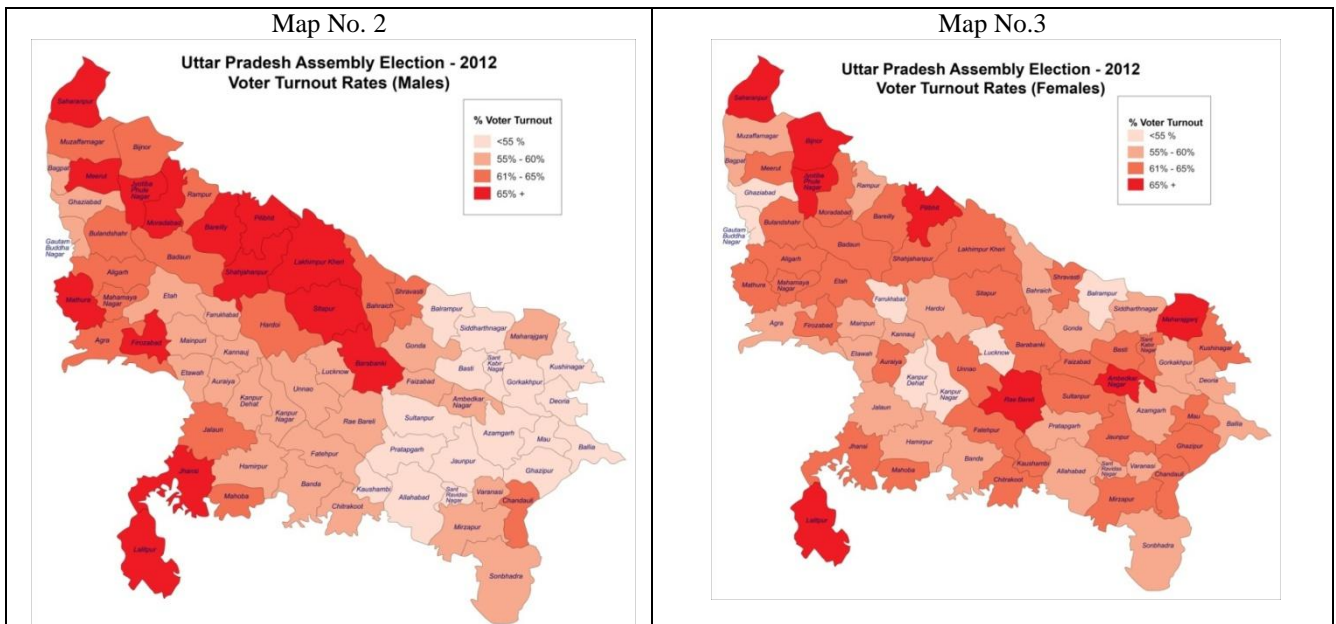
Gender wise voter turnout rate for Assembly Elections 2012 was 58.82% for male voters and 60.29% for women voters. District variations for gender voter turnout rates were also recoded. Male voter turnouts depict very low rates in majority of Districts in Eastern

Uttar Pradesh and high turnout rates in Central, North-West and South Districts. (Refer Map No. 2). Female voter turnout rates were higher in North-West Districts and some pockets of South and Eastern Districts (Refer Map No. 3). Thus voter turnout indicates strong regional influences of political parties and economic developmental issues.

Regional variation at micro level within the Districts were also observed in the voter turnout rates indicating multiple factors play important role in determining voter turnout rates. District wise Voter turnout, separately for District as well as for High Polling Booth and Low Polling Booth within the District, depict variations in voter turnout rates. The table indicates that voter turnout for polling booths within the same districts has been as high as 75% and as low as 45%. The multiple factors within the same District determine voter turnout rates. These multiple factors could be institutional (ease of registering voters in voter list, location of polling booths, security arrangements at the polling booth, services at polling booth like time taken to cast vote), demographic and social and economic characteristics of voters, motivational encouragement by Election Commission, political parties and candidates and suitability perception of candidate by voter.

Map No 1

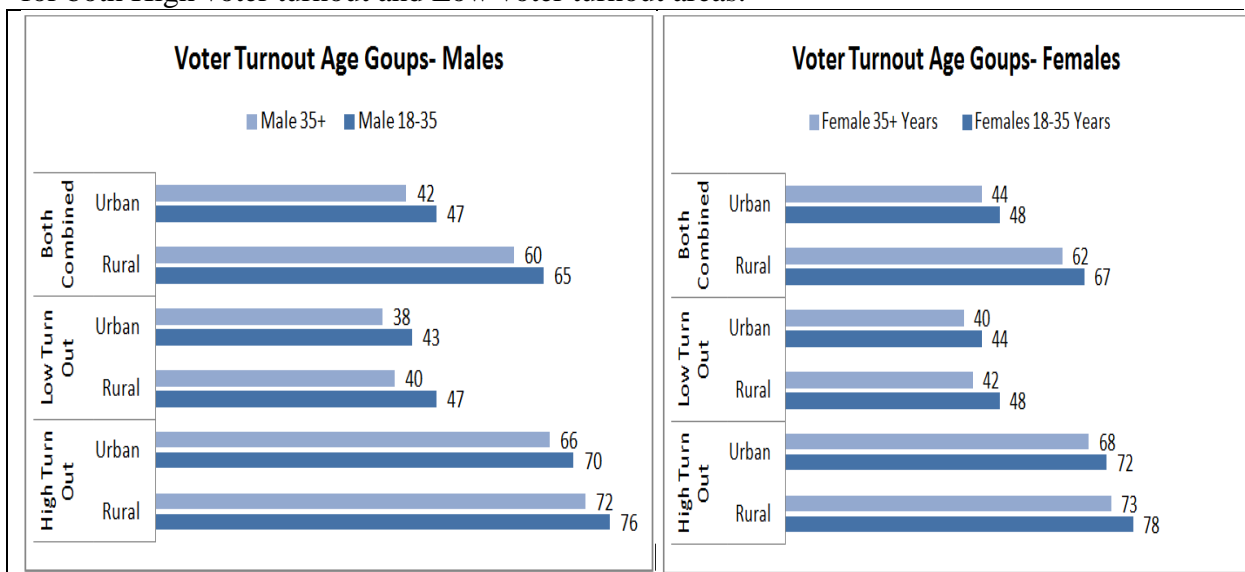




Thus the results clearly indicate that although significant improvement has been recorded in voter turnout rates in Uttar Pradesh during last one decade but regional variation still exists at micro, meso and macro level with the state. A combination of interventions by Election Commission has shown positive results which require to be expanded or even strengthened through participatory methods.

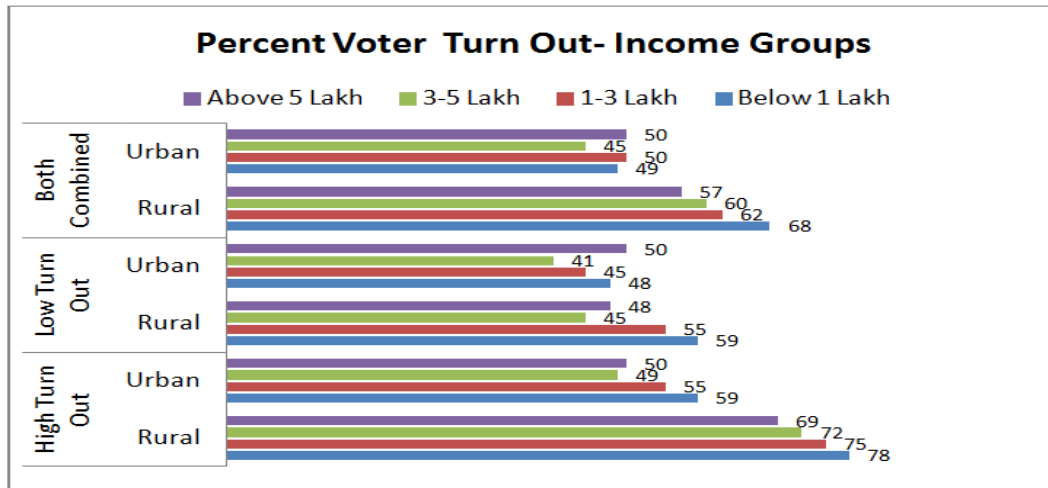
**Voter Turnout (Age Groups)**

The sample survey results for Uttar Pradesh Assembly Elections 2012 also confirm that voter turnout rates were higher among younger voters aged 18-35 years as compared to voters aged 35 + years. These results even hold true for both gender groups for both rural and urban areas. In case of rural areas the gaps in the voter turnout among the two age groups was 5 percent point both for men and women respectively, while the gap between the two age groups was 4 percent point for women and 5 percent point for men respectively in case of urban areas. The variation in the voter turnout among the two age groups was also recorded for both High voter turnout and Low voter turnout areas.



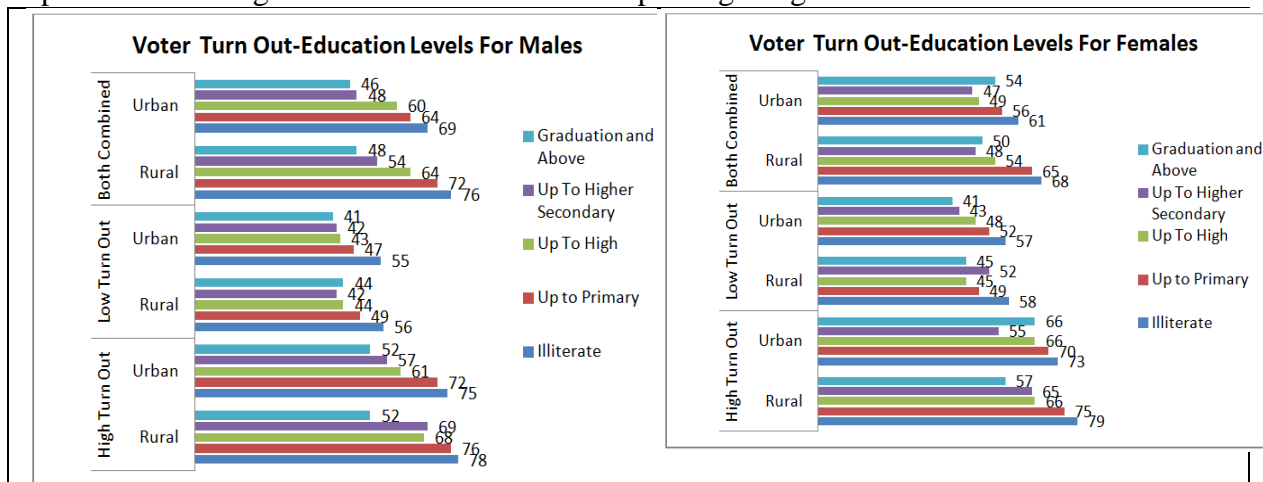
### Voter Turnout Rates – Income Groups

The survey indicates that economically disadvantaged groups also tend to have higher voter turnout rates, as respondents in lower income groups recorded high voter turnout rates across both gender groups in both rural and urban areas<sup>149</sup>. Lower income group voters feel that a support to particular candidate/ party candidate might turn their fortunes as such candidates/ parties also give allurements and promise freebies in the election campaigning period.



### Voter Turnout Rates – Education Levels

Education levels of voters also seem to be correlated with voter turnout rates. Contrary to the Western democracies model, where more educated turnout in large numbers for voting, the situation was different in case of Uttar Pradesh. Voter turnout rates for illiterate men and women were higher than the educated men and women both in case of rural and urban areas. However with SVEEP interventions by Election Commission, the trend has improved as with more awareness and better services even educated voters now are of the opinion that voting for better candidates will improve good governance.

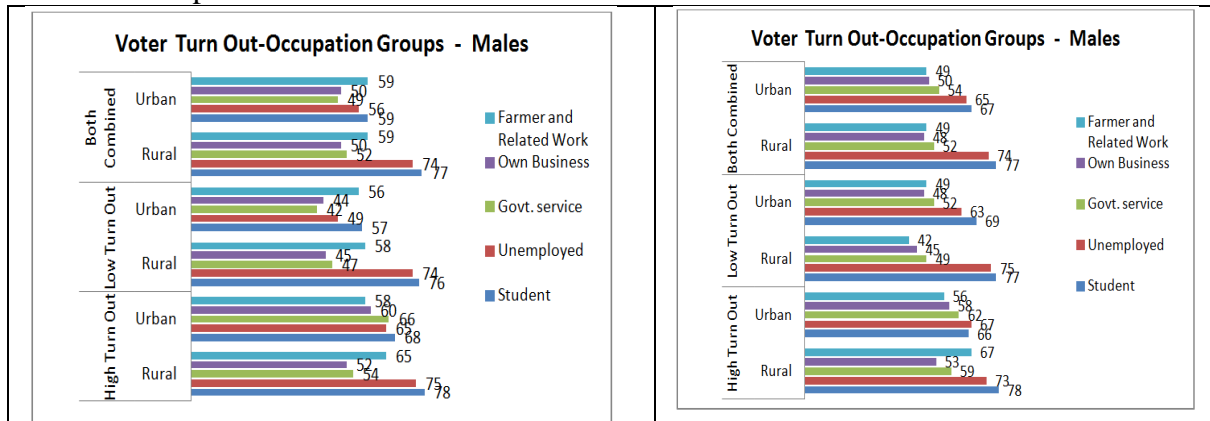


<sup>149</sup> The income groups considered was those having annual income of Indian Rupees (1 lakh Indian Rupees is equal to Indian Rupees 100,000 ( US\$ 1750 )



### Voter Turnout Rates – Occupation Groups

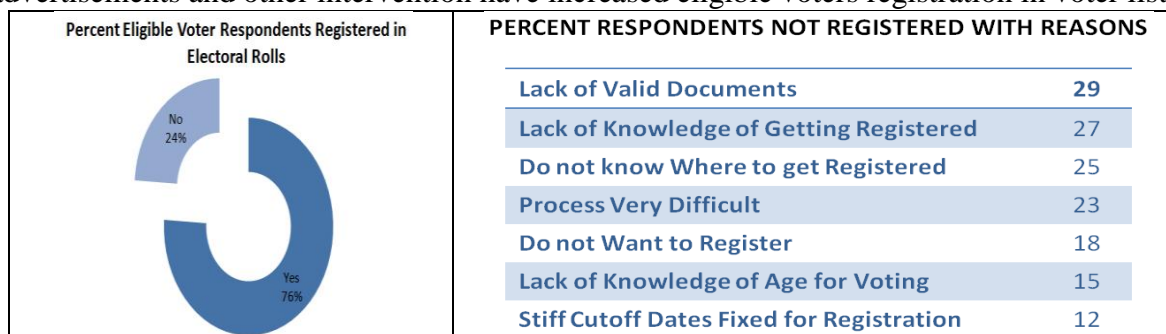
The results of voter turnout among students and other occupational groups indicate mixed results as students tend to have higher voter turnout rates followed by unemployed youths, farmers and low class labourers. The voter turnout rates were lower for government employees and voters engaged in their own business activities. On the whole the proportion of voter turnout rates across all occupational groups was lower in case of urban areas as compared to the rural areas. Women farmers in rural areas recorded lower voter turnout rates compared to their men farmer counterparts in rural areas. Unemployed men and women also recorded higher voter turnout rates, depicting that they have hope as candidates/ party manifestoes encourage them to vote and give them hopes for better greener pastures if they are voted into power.



### Registered Voters in Electoral Rolls

The survey results indicate that in spite of several positive interventions initiated by Election Commission, only 76% eligible voter have registered in the voter lists in rural areas and only 77% eligible voter were registered as voters in urban areas with marginal variations in registration among males and females. Upon quizzed about the reasons for not getting registered in electoral rolls, a significant number of respondents who were not registered (both men/ women residing in rural and urban areas in high/low voter turnout areas) reasons such as, lack of knowledge of electoral rolls/ voter list, lack of knowledge of age for registering as voter in voter list, lack of valid identification documents, lack of knowledge of places where to get registered, stiff dates fixed for registration period, perception of difficult registration process and shortage of time.

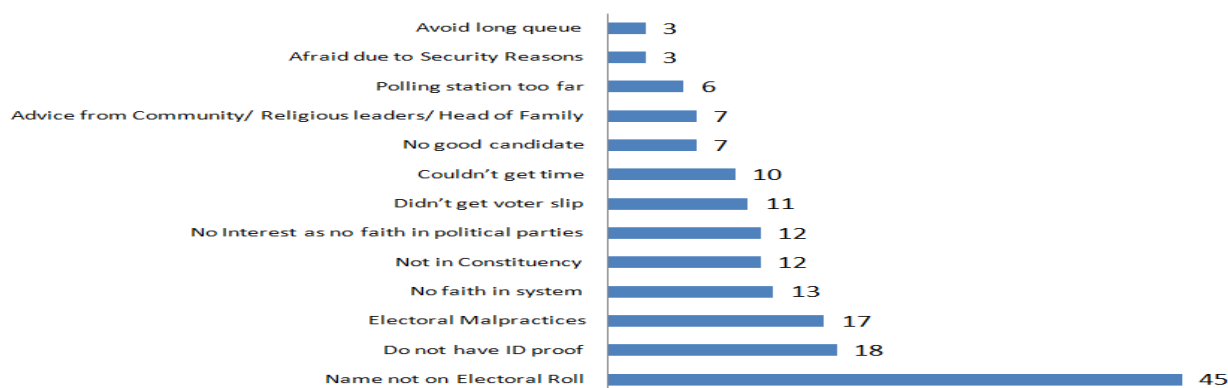
Making easier rules and laws for registration of eligible voter will help in increasing registration numbers of eligible voters in voter lists, which naturally will result in higher turnout rates. Rolling registration (Registering eligible voters as closer to the date of polling) has helped in increasing eligible voter lists in many countries, as updating is regular, without creating barriers of cutoff dates. Online registration of eligible voter in the voter list has also improved voter turnouts. Creating awareness by Election Commission through mass media, advertisements and other intervention have increased eligible voters registration in voter lists.



### Demotivating Factors for Voter Turnout Rates

The single most factor for demotivating voter turnout rates was name not on the electoral rolls and lack of documents like appropriate ID cards and voter slips for voting. Other demotivating factors include electoral malpractices, lack of faith in the political system and in political parties. Significantly 7% respondents also cited inappropriate candidates in the fray as demotivating factor. Some of the institutional management issues were also stated as demotivating factors like polling station not appropriately located, long queue taking too much of time and security measures at the polling stations.

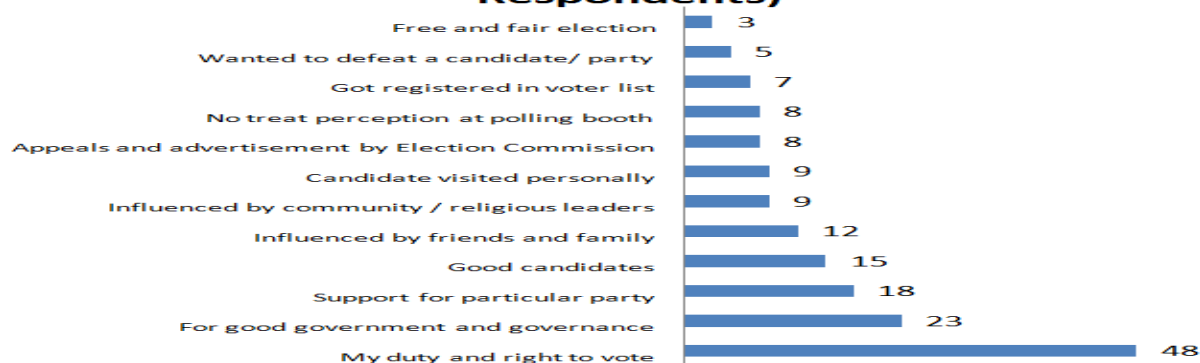
**Factors Demotivating Voters to Vote (Percent Respondents)**



### Motivating Factors for Higher Voter Turnout Rates

A majority of electorate who participated in the voting say that they are motivated to vote as they see it as their duty/ right in democratic processes. Other motivating factors narrated by respondents were support for particular candidate/ candidates of particular party, influence by family and community member. In the wake of several interventions under SVEEP program made by ECI it was expected that respondents would be motivated to vote in large number, which has actually happened but only 8% respondents indicated role of ECI for their motivation to vote. Hence more efforts need to be taken by ECI to create awareness for higher turnout rates. It is interesting that in spite of media projection of threat and coercion to vote only 8% reported threat as demotivating factor.

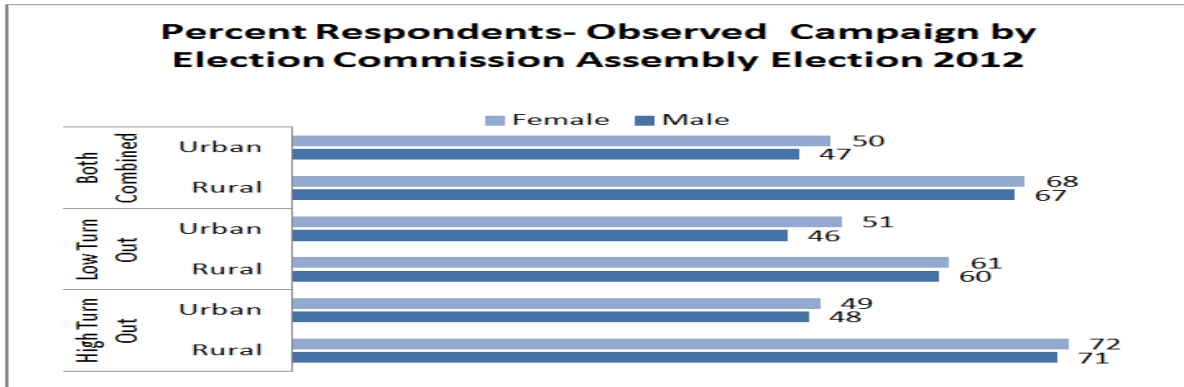
**Factors Motivating Voters to Vote (Percent Respondents)**



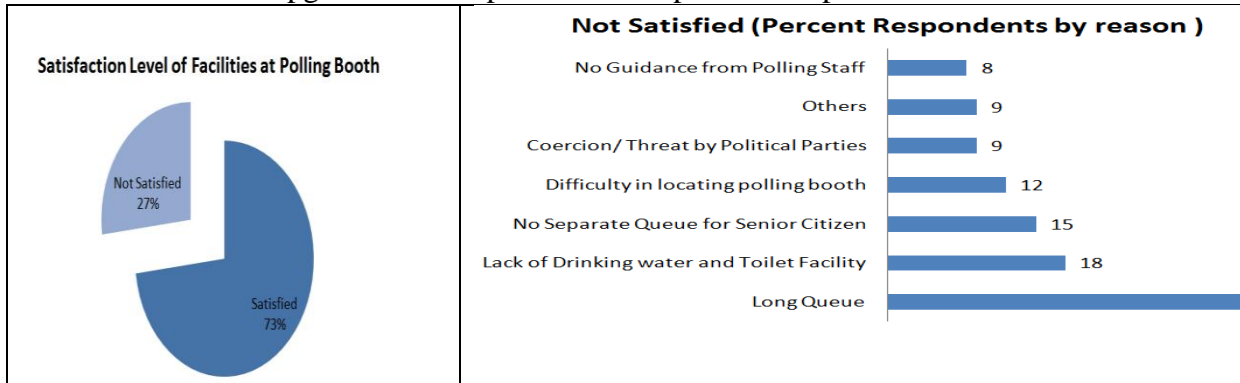
### Recall about Election Commission SVEEP Campaign

About 65% respondents recalled that they have observed and witnessed a campaign launched by the Election Commission with regards to electoral process knowledge, and activities associated to increasing voter turnout rates. The recall rate was higher in rural areas as compared to urban areas. There was huge gap in the recall rate point percentage between

rural areas (67%) and urban areas (48%). Marginal variations were observed in the recall of campaign between men and women. The proportion of recall rate among high voter turnout areas was much higher than in case of low voter turnout rates. It thereby signifying the importance of campaign conducted by Election Commission under SVEEP initiative.



In the wake of several interventions under SVEEP program made by ECI it was expected that respondents would be motivated to vote in large number, which has actually happened but only 8% respondents indicated role of ECI for their motivation to vote. Hence more efforts need to be taken by ECI to create awareness for higher turnout rates. It is interesting that in spite of media projection of threat and coercion to vote only 8% reported threat as demotivating factor. The satisfaction level at the polling booth center in terms of services, functions and facilities were appreciated by voters. 73% respondents were satisfied with the services provided at the polling booths. Marginal variations were observed by respondents for both high and low voter turnout areas in terms of satisfaction level of services at polling booths. However high proportion of respondents from urban areas expressed that services need to be upgraded and improved as compared to respondents from rural areas.



There is lot of gap between what the voters ‘should know’ and what they ‘actually know’ in important areas like registration, making of Elector Photo Identity Cards (EPIC/ and the acceptance of other identity proofs for voting, Polling Station location, use of EVMs, timings of the poll, do’s & don’ts with regard to Model Code of Conduct. ECI requires making available this knowledge pool with a sense of urgency. Experience showed that even greater awareness does not necessarily get converted into greater participation, thus along with generating awareness necessary steps should be taken on the voting day to ensure implementation of the knowledge imparted to voters. Persistent voter education with the kind of seriousness and depth it deserves by the election management bodies should be given due and strong emphasis.

## Conclusion

The study points there is high degree of voter turnout and high degree of satisfaction especially after the SVEEP programme. However the study also found, lack of information about process amongst unregistered voters, low levels of awareness about ECI campaigns, a significant proportion of non-registered eligible voter in the electoral rolls and exclusion of specific communities, socio-economic groups from voter turnout. Major threats are perception of cumbersome documentation and lack of knowledge for registration in voter lists, lack of interest due to mal-practices, poor candidates and trust deficit with political parties/ candidates and governance, Frequent polling. The opportunities from ECI campaign shows, voters perceive voting as their right/duty, the perception that facilities and services at polling booths are satisfactory and there is scope of betterment of facilities at polling stations. There is Increase in voter turnout percentage among poor, disadvantaged and marginalized communities and section especially women, scheduled caste/ scheduled tribes population. However the study points out that there is a need to strengthen electorate knowled, education and communication and Election Commission must revise constantly electoral rolls and efforts should be made for inclusion of on-line registration.

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