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A Study of Attitude toward Voting among College Students: a Case Study of Vivekanand College, Kolhapur¹

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Abstract: India claims demographic dividend of having a large and substantive share of young population in its total population. The effects of having a large young population (aged 15 to 34 as per the NSSO) on the economic path of the country are well documented and studied. The effects of large-scale enrolment of youth as voters on the election results in the country is a relatively less explored and measured area. There have been suggestions of trends of voting patterns among newly enrolled voters but the those have remained isolated. This paper is a presentation of analysis of a survey carried out in a college in the town of Kolhapur in western Maharashtra. The survey was carried out using convenience sampling method. The analysis of the survey brings out the trend in influences that shape students' attitudes toward political choices.

Key words: Voting, political opinion, political attitude, media and politics

Introduction: The maiden age in India was 27.9 years in the year 2018 (Tiwari, 20 February 2019). 24 million new voters joined the electorate before 2014 Lok Sabha elections. Maharashtra is among the top five States that added the largest number of new voters to the electoral roll between 2014 and 2018 (Tiwari, 20 February 2019). As a populous and large State, it is also among the states that have larger number of Lok Sabha seats (48). The voting attitudes and behaviour patterns in the most populous states affect the trends in the same at the national level more considerably. In 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) received the largest vote share in Maharashtra. It has been observed that the government is making large scale efforts to get young voters enrolled. It is being done through special and consistent programmes led by District Magistrates' office under the leadership of Election Commission. The government machinery is roping in colleges and universities and teacher and student representatives, the college level programmes like National Social Service (NSS) for the purpose. Enrolment of eligible citizens as voters and an increase in voting percentage is a phenomenon on the face of it conducive to democracy. But we can choose to inquire the *political* implications of large voter

¹ This paper is the product of a behavioural study carried out by the Department of Political Science of Vivekanand College, Kolhapur (Autonomous) in the backdrop of Voter Day, 25 January, 2023. I am thankful to Mr. Ajay Patil, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science and Mr. Dattatray Jadhav, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science for inputs of the questions in the questionnaire. The survey questionnaire was circulated among students by students of the department: Apurva, Kalyani, Komal, Samiksha, Pradnya.

enrolment of young citizens. We can ascertain if one or some political parties are favoured by this phenomenon or the implications are neutral in terms of advantages to the political parties. Studying the influences that shape the political attitudes of the young can give us an idea of patterns of political socialization of this population. Further enquiry can also reveal how the young have specific preferences imbibed in them through the social connections (be it peer or family). It is important to understand the political preferences of the young for the sake of understanding them and understanding the phenomenon of how those are formed but it is more important to understand them to understand their effect on the democracy in the country. With this in mind, the current study was planned as a case study of the political attitudes of college going students. The sample of the study is situated in Vivekanand College, Kolhapur (Autonomous) in Maharashtra State.

Review of literature: Sanjay Kumar (2014) in his article notes that there has been a focus on enrolment and engagement of young voters since 2014 Lok Sabha elections both by political parties and the Election Commission of India. According to the study conducted by the Centre for Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), the percentage of young voters (those between 18 and 25 years of age) is 22-25 percent of the total voters (Kumar 2014). The 2014 Lok Sabha election registered 2 percent higher turnout among young voters compared to the average turnout. The study notes that the youth showed decisive inclination toward the BJP. The study interestingly notes gender difference in the young voters' choice of parties where the young women voted more for the INC and the young men shown a preference for the BJP in 2014 LS elections. Kumar also points out that the urban youth prefer the BJP over Congress whereas the popularity of Congress is more among the rural youth. The study claims that we can trace a pattern in the voting of young voters beginning 2014 Lok Sabha elections where such patterns among young voters were absent in earlier elections. The youth have emerged as a distinct electoral group in India and it will impact the nature of mobilization strategies and issues used by the political parties.

The objectives of the study:

- 1) To see if there are streamwise differences political influences and attitudes of college students.
- 2) To see if there is difference in political attitudes of students coming from rural and city background.
- 3) To see what broad ideas shape the political choice of the students as (current or would-be) voters
- 4) To see how independently of the family and other elders/peer, the students think about voting preferences.
- 5) To know what percentage of the eligible college students are enrolled as voters through their choice.
- 6) To comment on the possible party-political influences shaping the political thinking of college students.

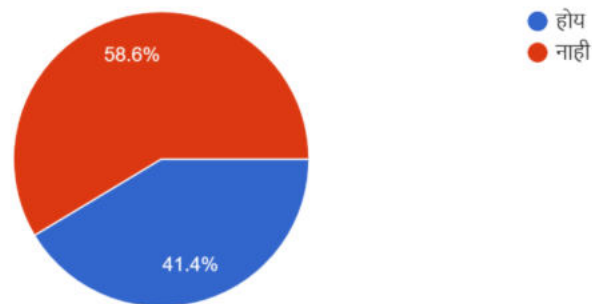
Methodology:

This is a quantitative study using survey research. It uses convenience sampling method. A total of 54 students responded to the survey questionnaire. The responses were analysed using Excel.

Analysis of responses:

तुमच्याकडे मतदार ओळखपत्र आहे.

58 responses

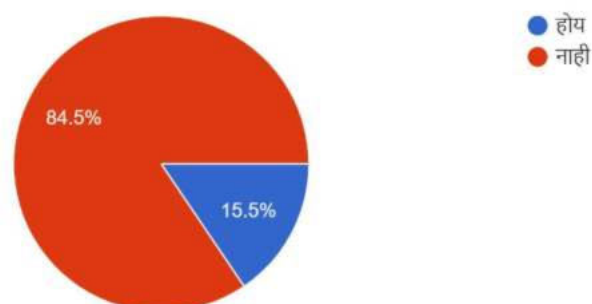


58.6 percent of respondents did not have voter ids. The native place (rural/urban) or gender does not make any difference in terms of possession of voter id. But the stream of education (BA or BBA) does register a difference where BA stream students have more number of students with voter id where the students of professional stream of BBA have less percentage of the same.

(The study registers the importance of Humanities.)

तुम्ही आजवर मतदान केले आहे.

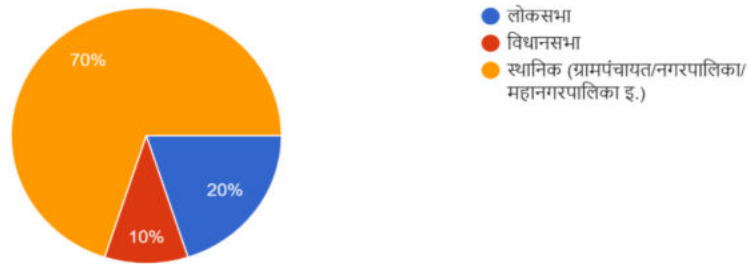
58 responses



Eight out of 24, that is one third of those who had voter id, had voted in any election. Seven out of those eight were male and only one female.

असल्यास कोणत्या निवडणुकीसाठी मतदान केले होते?

10 responses



This shows the relevance of local politics, local leaders and their work and campaigning in bringing them in the fold of politics. Large number of people are locally politically enamoured, whether they are ideologically inclined to a political thought or not. This has a specific learning for the structure and for the ideological structure of politics.

मतदान करताना (किंवा जेव्हा कराल तेव्हा) तुम्ही कोणाचा सल्ला घेतला होता का/घ्याल का?

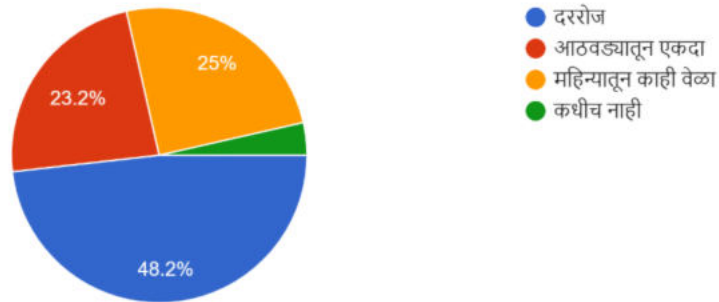
52 responses



Seventy -five percent of the respondents said that they would vote as per their own thinking after receiving advice from other. This reutters what other studies of voting behaviour happened in India have found. The next largest chunk replied that they would take advice from male members of the family.

तुम्ही वर्तमानपत्र किती वेळा वाचता?

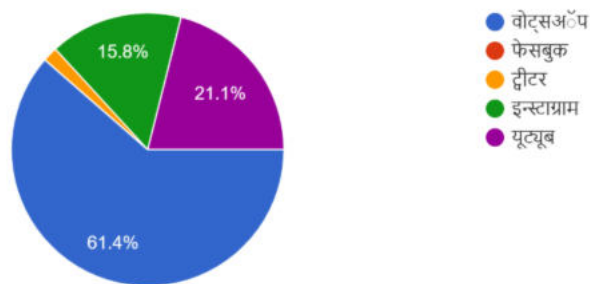
56 responses



Half of the respondents say that read newspaper daily. Only a small percentage said they never read newspaper.

खालीलपैकी कोणत्या समाजमाध्यमांचा वापर करता?

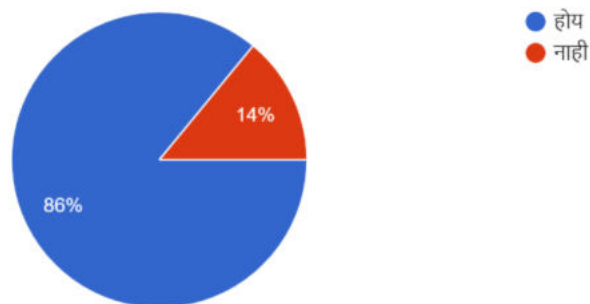
57 responses



The largest number of respondents use WhatsApp more that any other social media.

समाजमाध्यमांतून राजकीय बातम्या वाचता/पाहता का?

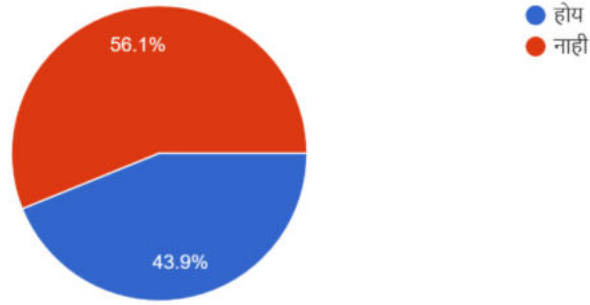
57 responses



The largest number of respondents use WhatsApp more than any other social media. 86% that is a large majority say that they consume and/or pass on political news on social media. This underlines the importance of social media in shaping the political discourse among the young.

समाजमाध्यमांवर वाचलेल्या राजकीय बातम्या पुढे पाठवता का?

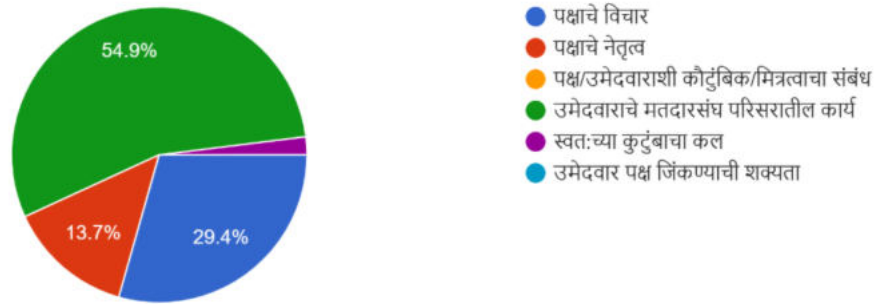
57 responses



A substantial percentage (43.9) of total respondents said they pass on the political news read or watched on social media.

तुम्ही मतदान करताना काय पाहून मतदान करता?

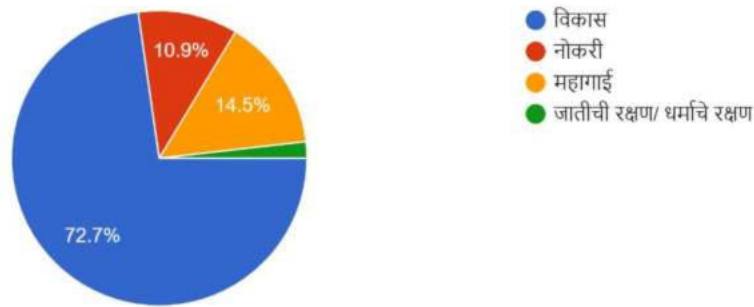
51 responses



For 54.9% respondents the candidate's work in the constituency is the major factor that influences or would influence their decision of whom to vote. This again show a mark of the importance of local politics for these voters or would-be voters.

खालीलपैकी कोणता मुद्दा तुम्हाला सर्वाधिक महत्त्वाचा वाटतो?

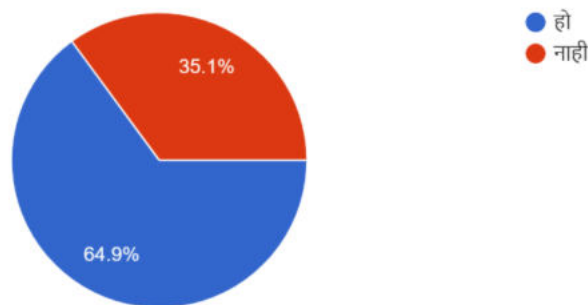
55 responses



The fact of 72.7% identifying with 'development' as the most important issue and only 10.9% considering it employment indicates the hold of perception versus the immediate concern among the young voters.

तुम्हाला NOTA विषयी माहिईत आहे का?

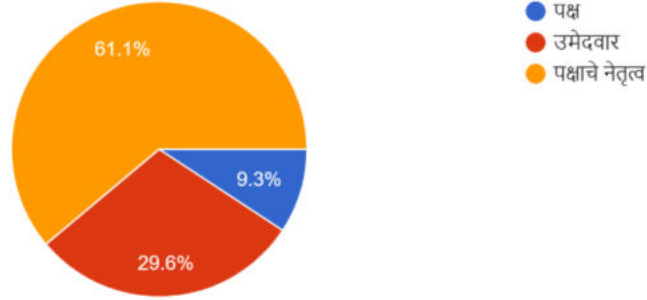
57 responses



64.9 % voters know about the NOTA option on the ballot. This question was asked to assess the awareness or information on voting scenario, the number indicates a good awareness among the responding students.

तुम्हाला काय महत्त्वाचे वाटते?

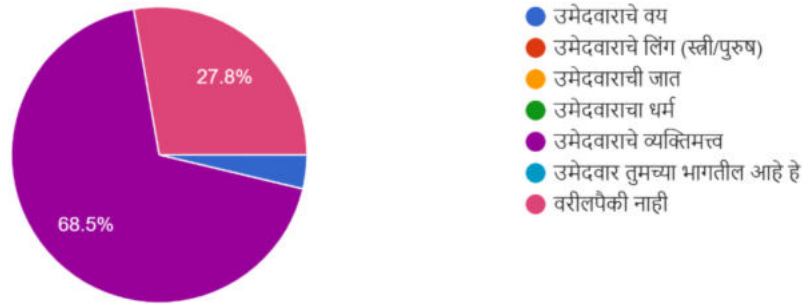
54 responses



The responses contradict with the earlier ones where the work of candidate was voted the first place among deciding factors. For 61.1% respondents, the party leadership is very important compared to party or candidate. This underlines the importance of or hold of the idea of leader vis-à-vis ideology for this category of voters.

खालीलपैकी कोणत्या गोष्टीला तुम्ही महत्त्व द्याल/देता?

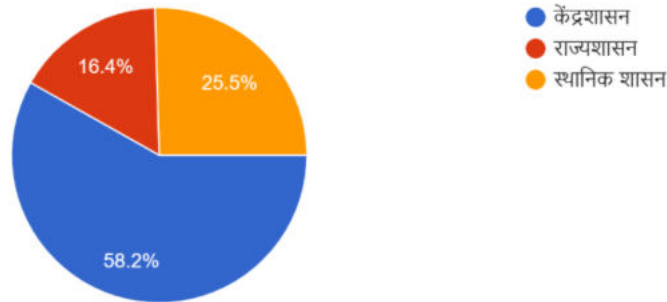
54 responses



The responses to this question are interesting. 68.5 % think the personality of the candidate matters the most to them. No respondent chose caste or religion of the candidate as the answer. A large chunk has chosen 'none above' as their response. This might not be the real picture. This shows a peculiar difference the young age of the respondents might make.

खलीलपैकी कोणत्या शासनाला तुम्ही अधिक महत्त्व देता?

55 responses



A percentage of 58.2 think the Central government is the most important layer of government. Twenty-five percent think it is the local government and 16.4% think it the State government. This contradicts the fact that the maximum number who have voted have voted in the election of local-self-government. This difference or dissociation can be attributed either to the constitutional knowledge or to the perception created by the advertisement and nature of political discourse. The former attribution would not be in sync with the responses received for the many of the rest of the answers. Hence it shows the penetration of the established political discourse where the national leadership holds place of prominence.

खलीलपैकी कोणती गोष्ट तुम्ही केली आहे का?

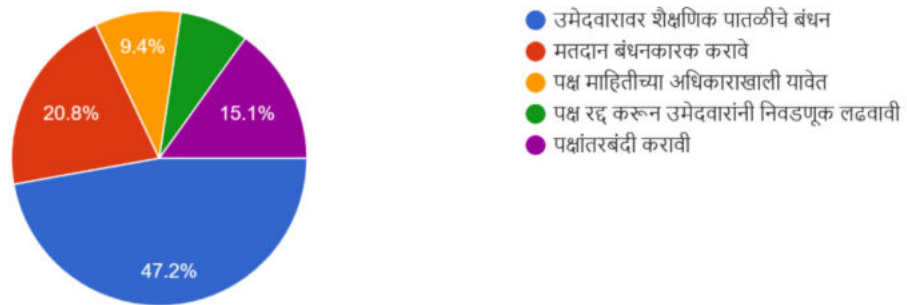
54 responses



Though 37 percent say they have done no political act mentioned, the respondent students cannot be called politically *apathetic*. 16.7 percent have participated on electoral campaigning, listened to political campaigning speeches, read political news/information, told others positively about party or candidates. A further 18.2% have done either two of the above-mentioned things. 7.4 % have participated on electoral campaigning.

खालीलपैकी कोणती सुधारणा तातडीने करावी असे तुम्हाला वाटते?

53 responses



Forty-seven percent respondents indicated making a prescribed educational qualification an eligibility requirement of candidates as their choice for the most urgent electoral reform. The second largest chunk chose making voting mandatory as the most needed electoral reform. The least percentage (9.4%) of respondents chose bringing political parties in the purview of right to information as the most urgently needed reform. This pattern of thinking is in line with the popular beliefs regarding the causes of ills in the political system; these beliefs don't align with the academic and deeper analysis of the ills of our politics. The former political opinions are suitable to the interests of the establishment, less threatening to the sustenance of the core problems.

Conclusion: This small study brings out some important patterns and learnings about attitude toward political discourse and voting among college students in the institution. It shows a clear hold of dominant narratives on them – the narrative of undefined 'development', the narrative of significance of leadership as opposed to political values, the narrative of supreme place of Central government in democracy. This learning coincides with the observation presented in Kumar (2024) that the youth favour the ruling party at the national level.

The study also underlines the importance of having Social Sciences as prominent stream of study in education system of the country. The students studying in BA show better awareness of their voting rights.

The study has reasserted the influence of social media as a source of formation of political opinions among students. Social media is a not a valid source of knowledge and hence this conclusion of the study comes as a challenge to the democracy where knowledge is a necessary condition for forming free opinions.

The voting attitudes and patterns among the youth and the sources of their political socialization need to be studied and taken seriously as they form the basis of the present and future of our democracy.

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- 2) Tiwari Soumya. 2019. Data Check: 45 Million new young voters could play a key role in 2019 elections. *Scroll.in*. <https://scroll.in/article/913411/data-check-45-million-new-young-voters-could-play-a-key-role-in-2019-elections>