Explore–Journal of Research
Peer Reviewed Journal
ISSN 2278 – 0297 **(Print)**
ISSN 2278 – 6414 **(Online)**
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https://www.patnawomenscollege.in/journal

The Unheard Voices: A Subaltern Study of Voting Behaviour of Women in Patna's Urban Slums

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Received : October, 2025
Accepted : January, 2026
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Abstract: *This research studies the voting behaviour of women living in the urban slums of Patna by using a subaltern, feminist, and sociological perspective. It tries to understand how factors such as gender, poverty, caste, political awareness, and the insecure conditions of slum life influence women's participation in politics and elections. The study is based on a field survey conducted among 85 women from four different slum areas of Patna. Along with the survey, observation and secondary sources were also used to collect information. The research mainly focuses on voter registration, voting participation, decision-making during elections, and the availability of important identity documents required for voting.*

The findings of the study show that women living in Patna's urban slums actively take part in elections and voting processes. However, their political independence and decision-making power are still limited by several social and economic factors. Many women face problems due to the lack of proper identity documents, dependence on family members, influence of local political agents, and reliance on government welfare schemes. These conditions often affect their ability to make free and independent political choices.However, a shift toward issue-based and development-oriented voting is visible, with women prioritising services, safety, and welfare delivery over caste-driven choices. This study focuses on the gap between women's participation in voting and their actual political representation. It highlights the need for better policies to improve access to documents, make electoral processes more gender-sensitive, and create stronger institutional support so that marginalized women can have a meaningful political voice.

Keywords: *voting behaviour, women, urban slums, Patna, political participation, Bihar elections.*

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Introduction:

Voting behaviour is an important way to understand how people take part in democracy, especially those who are socially and economically marginalized. When we study it from a subaltern perspective, it helps us see how people who are often ignored still try to engage in democratic processes. Among such groups, women's voting behaviour is very significant because it is shaped by multiple factors like gender inequality, poverty, class differences, and social exclusion.

The city of Patna provides a meaningful setting for this study. Due to rapid urban growth, many informal settlements or slums have developed in the city. These areas are usually marked by poor living conditions, lack of proper housing, low levels of education, and limited

access to basic services. Women living in these slums face many challenges at the same time. They often depend economically on others, face social restrictions, and experience different forms of inequality. All these factors affect not only their daily lives but also their ability to participate in politics.

This research, titled *"The Unheard Voices: A Subaltern Study of Voting Behaviour of Women in Patna's Urban Slums,"* aims to understand how women in these areas participate in elections. The study examines how actively women from urban slums participate in the voting process, along with the social and economic conditions that shape their political choices. It also studies the different difficulties they face while accessing and taking part in the electoral system. By giving importance to the everyday experiences of these women, the research contributes to a better understanding of inclusive governance, women's political empowerment, and the importance of building a more sensitive and participatory democratic system.The voting behavior of these women is not just about casting a vote; it also reflects their struggles for recognition, their hopes for better living conditions, and their efforts to make their voices heard within the democratic system

Research Gap:

Although women's electoral participation in India has been widely studied, most research treats women as a homogeneous category, overlooking intersections of class, caste, and urban poverty. Studies (Basu, 2016; Banerjee, 2018) note rising turnout but rarely focus on slum-dwelling women. Research on urban poverty (Auerbach & Thachil, 2018) highlights welfare-based political mobilization but seldom disaggregates findings by gender. Similarly, Bihar's electoral studies emphasize caste alignments, leaving urban poor women in Patna underexplored (Kumar & Singh, 2017). While subaltern perspectives such as Spivak's subaltern theory (Spivak G.C., 1988) and Chatterjee's political society (Chatterjee, 2004) offer analytical tools, they remain insufficiently applied to women's voting behaviour in urban slums. This study addresses that gap by combining subaltern theory with empirical field research.

Methodology:

The study adopted a mixed-method approach using both primary and secondary data. The universe consisted of urban slums across East, West, North, and South Patna. Using purposive cum incidental sampling, 85 women were surveyed from R Block (North), City Centre (East), Lohanipur (South), and Raja Bazaar (West). Covering all four directions ensured geographical and socio-cultural representation, capturing both shared and varied experiences of urban poor women.

Structured questionnaires collected data on socio-economic background, awareness, and decision-making autonomy, while semi-structured interviews explored perceptions of voting and family/community influence. Secondary sources included government reports, census data, election commission records, books, journals, newspapers, and online resources. Quantitative data were analysed statistically to identify trends, and qualitative data were analysed thematically to highlight lived experiences.

Research Questions

- How do women in urban slums perceive voting as a tool of empowerment and social change?
- How do welfare schemes and party outreach influence their voting behaviour?
- How does the subaltern framework help understand their role in the democratic process?

A Theoretical Framework for Understanding Subaltern Women's Political Participation: Elections are a central institution of democracy, but for marginalized groups voting is shaped by structural inequalities, institutional barriers, and intersecting identities of caste, class, and gender. For women in urban slums, the ballot offers formal inclusion but often coexists with limited political voice.

This chapter develops a framework to examine how structural constraints, mediating social and institutional mechanisms, and individual agency interact to shape electoral behaviour among women in Patna's urban slums. The framework guides the interpretation of empirical findings in later chapters.

Conceptualising Voting Behaviour: Moving Beyond the Individual Voter: Voting behaviour is usually explained in terms of whether people vote and which party they choose. However, in the context of urban slums, voting cannot be seen only as an individual decision. It is closely connected with social relationships and living conditions. Factors such as family influence, community expectations, dependence on welfare schemes, availability of proper documents, and ease of reaching polling booths all play an important role. These factors affect not only whether a person votes, but also whom they choose to vote for.

Because of this, the present study understands voting as a wider decision-making process rather than a single act. Voting behaviour is not shaped by only one factor. It develops through a person's surroundings, daily experiences, and the social conditions in which they live. To understand this in a better way, the study mainly focuses on three related aspects:

Access and Opportunity – This aspect explains how social and institutional conditions affect a person's ability to vote. Factors such as the availability of voter ID cards, proper government documentation, and easy access to polling booths play an important role in deciding whether women can participate in elections or not.

Mediation and Influence – Voting choices are often influenced by people and relationships within society. Family members, neighbours, local political workers, and community leaders can affect the decisions women make during elections. In many situations, relations of support and dependence within the community also influence their political choices.

Agency and Subjectivity – This aspect focuses on how women understand their own role in politics and democracy. It includes their confidence in taking independent decisions, their belief in the value of their vote, and their expectations and hopes from political leaders and the government.

Theoretical Perspectives: A Combined Approach to Understanding Voting Behaviour: To understand the voting behaviour of women living in urban slums, depending on only one theory is not enough. Their lives and experiences are shaped by many social, economic, and political conditions. Because of this, the study uses different theoretical approaches together. This combined method helps in understanding how various factors connect with each other and influence the electoral behaviour of these women.

The sociological perspective explains the importance of caste, class, local surroundings, and community relationships in shaping political participation (Sarkar, A. (2019). It also highlights the role of informal local actors such as ration dealers, party workers, and ward councillors, who often become important links between poor communities and government welfare schemes or basic services.

The psychological approach has limited importance in this study because strong party attachment is not commonly found among many women living in slum areas. Instead, the study uses a modified rational-choice perspective, which can be understood as "survival-based decision-making." In many cases, women vote by keeping immediate needs in mind, such as access to welfare benefits, public services, household support, and everyday security.

Feminist theory helps in understanding that having the legal right to vote does not always mean women have complete freedom in political decision-making. Restrictions on mobility, household responsibilities, and patriarchal social norms often reduce their ability to participate independently in politics.

The subaltern perspective further explains that even though marginalized women take part in elections, their voices and concerns are often ignored in mainstream politics. Together, these different approaches show that women's political participation is shaped by limitations, social pressures, and continuous negotiation within their everyday lives.

Women's Electoral Participation in India: Trends, Progress, and Contradictions: The participation of women in elections in India has gradually increased over time. In the years soon after independence, the number of women voters was much lower than that of men. This difference was mainly linked to factors such as low literacy levels among women, restrictions on their mobility, limited social freedom, and

lack of political awareness and exposure.

However, from the early 2000s onwards, the situation began to change. (Lokniti, 2020) Better systems of voter registration, expansion of government welfare schemes, increased access to media, rapid urban growth, and the rise of self-help groups and civil society efforts have all played an important role (Bharti & Ghose , 2021). These changes helped more women become aware of their voting rights and encouraged them to take part in elections.

By the 2010s, in many states, the number of women voters became equal to or even higher than that of men. Even though this is a positive development, it also shows a contradiction. While more women are voting, their presence in political positions is still very low. Women are not equally represented as candidates or elected leaders. This creates a situation where women are active voters, but they do not have enough power in decision-making processes.

Recent Evidence from Bihar: The 2025 Assembly Elections as an Important Example: The 2025 Assembly Elections in Bihar clearly show these changing trends. The state recorded its highest voter turnout ever at 66.91 percent (ECI, 2025). What is more important is that women's participation was even higher than men's. Around 71.6 percent of women voted, while male turnout was 62.8 percent.

In the first phase of the election, about 69.04 percent of women cast their votes, compared to 61.56 percent of men. In the second phase, women's turnout increased further to 74.03 percent, while men's turnout was 64.1 percent. For the first time, it was reported that the total number of women voters was higher than that of men.

At the same time, differences can still be seen at the local level. For example, in Patna district, male turnout (60.05 percent) was slightly higher than female turnout (57.88 percent). This shows that overall state-level data does not always reflect the situation in every area. It also highlights the importance of studying voting behaviour at a smaller, local level, especially in urban slum areas. High voter turnout alone does not always mean that people have real political influence.

Slum Women in Patna: Living Conditions, Social Factors, and Political Importance: Urban slums in Patna are characterized by difficult living conditions. Many families face problems such as unsafe housing, lack of basic services, irregular income, and heavy dependence on informal work. Women in these areas often carry a double burden—they manage household responsibilities along with work outside the home(PIB, 2025).

Because of safety concerns, limited mobility, and lack of time, women's participation in public activities becomes restricted. In such situations, voting is often influenced more by immediate needs, such as access to government schemes and basic services, rather than by political ideas or ideology.

Local leaders and middlemen also play an important role. They often influence women's voting decisions by helping them access welfare benefits or government support. At the same time, some positive changes are also visible. Self-help groups, savings groups, and NGO activities help women become more aware. They support voter registration and create opportunities for women to discuss issues together. This gives women some level of confidence and independence in making political choices, even if it is limited.

The Participation–Representation Gap: Its Importance for Study and Policy: Even though more women are now voting, their presence in political positions is still very low. They are not equally represented as candidates or elected leaders.

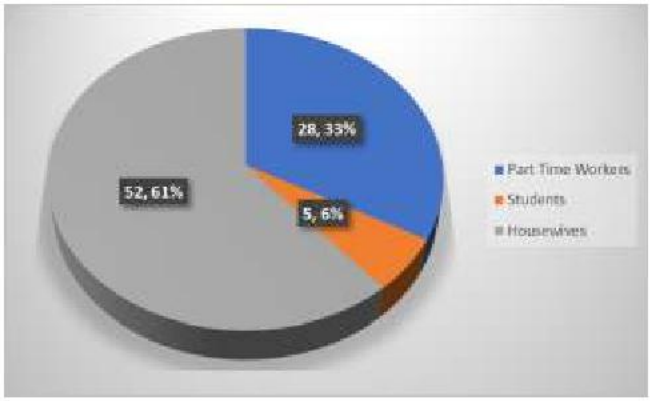
This gap between participation and representation is important both for understanding democracy and for making better policies. It shows that simply increasing voter turnout is not enough. There is a need to create more opportunities for women to take part in leadership and decision-making roles. Only then can their participation become meaningful and lead to real empowerment. Financial barriers, patriarchal norms, and male-dominated party structures restrict entry into electoral politics, particularly for marginalized women.

This participation–representation gap shows that formal inclusion through voting does not guarantee substantive political voice. Recognizing slum women as

a distinct political constituency requires not only voter mobilization but also leadership training, financial support, and institutional reforms to improve representation. Only then can increased participation translate into meaningful democratic empowerment.

Empirical Analysis:

1. What is the demographic profile of women living in the urban slums of Patna?

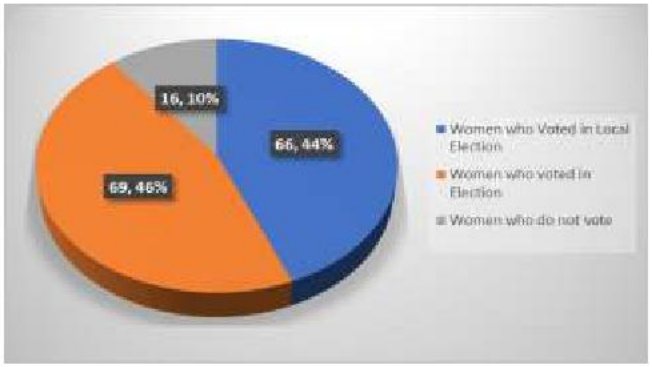


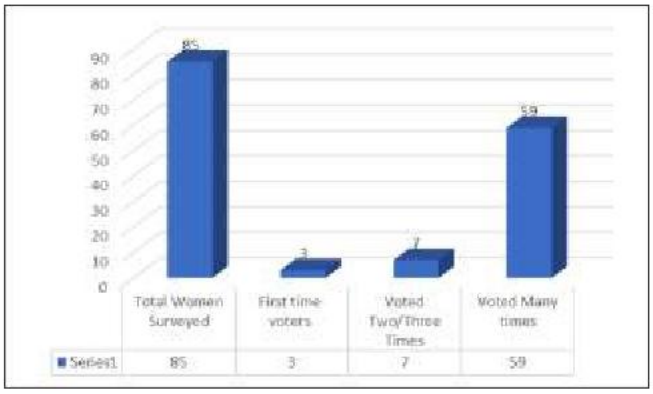
A survey of 85 women in Patna's urban slums shows difficult socio-economic conditions. Most (61%) are housewives, 33% work part-time, and only 6% are students, indicating limited employment and low continuation in education.

Despite strong political awareness, most women have only primary-level education, restricting access to skilled jobs and contributing to poverty. Low participation in government skill programs also suggests poor outreach or awareness.

These findings underline the need to strengthen education, vocational training, and the implementation of government schemes to improve women's socio-economic conditions.

2. Do women in the slums vote, and how consistent is their voting participation?





The pie chart shows high electoral participation among the 85 women surveyed in Patna's urban slums, with 69 voting regularly despite structural challenges such as lack of voter IDs and unstable housing, which prevent 16 women from voting. Around 66 women participate in local elections, though slightly lower engagement at the grassroots level reflects dissatisfaction and weak trust in local institutions.

The bar graph highlights strong voting experience: only 3 are first-time voters, 7 have voted 2–3 times, and a large majority of 59 have voted many times. Together, the data shows that women in these marginalized communities are active, regular, and experienced voters who continue to engage in democracy despite administrative and socio-economic barriers.

3. What are the main factors that discourage women from voting?

Among the 85 women surveyed, the main factor discouraging voting is structural, not social. All 16 non-voters in the 2025 Bihar Assembly elections cited the absence of a voter ID as the reason for not voting, and many of the 69 voters relied on temporary slips, showing administrative gaps in slum areas.

Social pressures and mobility issues played only a minor role, and no safety concerns were reported. In fact, women expressed disappointment at being unable to vote, indicating strong political motivation. Overall, administrative failures, rather than patriarchal norms or fear, are the key barrier to women's electoral participation.

4. Do women feel their vote matters, and are they adequately informed during elections?

The findings show strong electoral awareness among the 85 women, even among those with little or no

formal education. Most understood their right to vote and basic procedures, largely through community discussions rather than literacy.

A large majority believed their vote mattered and linked it to better governance and access to welfare schemes; only a small minority felt it made no difference. While many recognized major parties and candidates, less educated women were less informed about specific representatives. Despite active participation, many reported a gap between voting and actually receiving benefits like ration cards or pensions. They also prioritized performance and welfare over the gender of leaders.

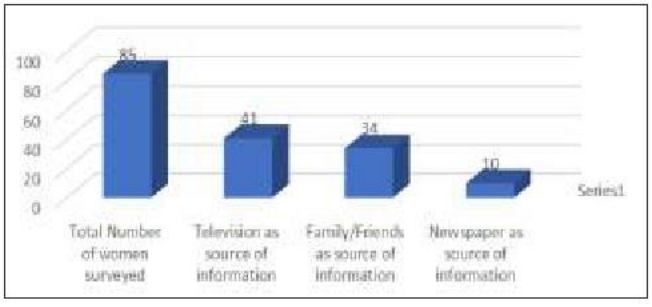
5. What influences women's voting decisions in the community?

Women's voting decisions in Patna's urban slums are influenced by a mix of personal choice, family discussions (especially with male members), caste identity, and government performance.

In R-Block, support for Nitish Kumar reflected both caste identity and appreciation for development work and women's reservations (35% in government jobs and 50% in Panchayati Raj). In Lohanipur, women asserted greater independence in decision-making.

Overall, their voting behaviour is shaped by overlapping social influences and practical evaluation of governance.

6. Where do women get information about elections and candidates?



Television is the main source of election information, with 41 of 85 women (48%) relying on it, reflecting its accessibility and strong influence in slum households. Family and friends are the second key source, cited by 34 women (40%), highlighting the role of community networks in shaping opinions. Only 10 women (12%) use newspapers, indicating limited literacy and access to print media.

For procedural matters like voter list updates, most women depend on Booth Level Officers (BLOs), showing effective institutional outreach. Overall, women rely on a mix of TV, social networks, and official channels for electoral information.

7. Are women encouraged to participate in elections and represented adequately by political parties?

Women in R-Block slum show a practical and experience-based view of political representation. Most do not believe that having a woman representative automatically ensures better attention to women's issues. Their skepticism comes from repeated experiences of unfulfilled promises and unresponsiveness, regardless of the leader's gender.

While some earlier representatives were seen as more approachable, later experiences of inaccessibility weakened trust. Many women also feel that female leaders are constrained by party structures and lack real decision-making power.

Although women symbolically support women's leadership and value political visibility, they define true representation through responsiveness and action, not gender alone.

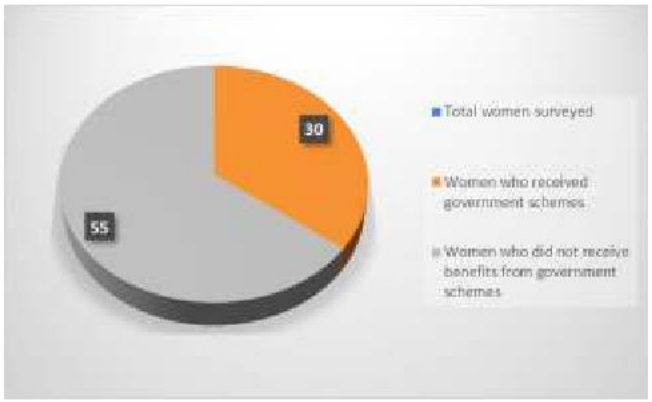
8. What role do political parties and candidates play in engaging women voters?

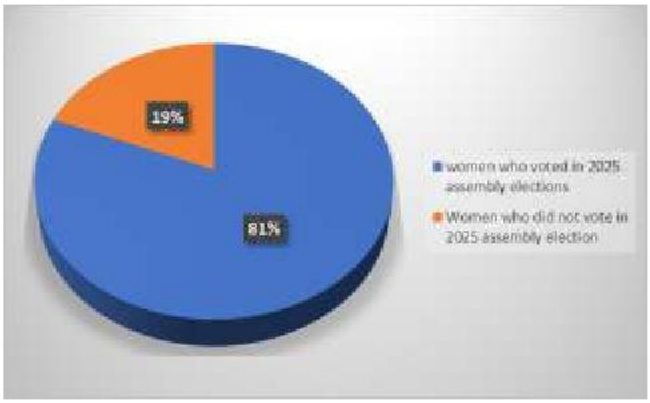
Most women reported that political parties and candidates engage with them only during elections through door-to-door visits, rallies, and promises related to housing, sanitation, water, healthcare, and welfare schemes. This outreach is largely vote-seeking and short-term, recognizing women as an important vote bank in Bihar.

After elections, engagement drops completely. No respondent reported post-election visits or follow-ups, and attempts to contact representatives often fail, leading to distrust and feelings of abandonment.

Overall, parties practice symbolic rather than substantive inclusion; women are mobilized as voters but rarely empowered as active political participants.

9. What government schemes have women benefited from in the last 5 years, and how does that shape political attitudes?





Out of 85 women surveyed, only 30 (35.3%) received benefits from at least one government scheme in the past five years, while 55 (64.7%) received none, showing major gaps in welfare delivery.

Non-beneficiaries expressed frustration and mistrust toward local leaders, citing delays and rejection of applications, and feeling treated as a vote bank. Even among the 30 beneficiaries, benefits were minimal and did not significantly improve living conditions, so political support was not unconditional.

Overall, both exclusion and inadequate welfare shape women's political attitudes, influencing trust, accountability, and perceptions of governance.

10. What are women's primary motivations for voting or not voting?

Women in Patna's urban slums vote mainly out of civic duty, material needs, and hope for development. Many see voting as both a right and responsibility, and as a way to access welfare schemes like ration cards, pensions, PM Awas Yojana, Jeevika, and Ayushman Bharat. They also link voting to improvements in housing, sanitation, water, healthcare, roads, and women's reservation policies.

Non-voting is rare and mostly due to administrative barriers such as missing or incorrect voter IDs. A few women expressed dissatisfaction with unfulfilled promises, but most still view elections as a means for change.

Overall, voting reflects a mix of citizenship, survival needs, and developmental aspirations.

11. Are women prepared and able to participate in the 2025 Bihar Assembly Elections (Registration, Revision, Eligibility)?

Out of 85 women, 69 (over 80%) voted in the 2025 Bihar Assembly Elections, while 16 did not due to missing or incorrect voter IDs and absent names on voter lists. Their non-participation was administrative, not due to disinterest, and many said easier registration would help.

The 69 voters faced no major polling issues. None were aware of the Election Commission's SIR, showing weak outreach. In R-Block, support for Nitish Kumar and visible development (roads, safety, reservations, welfare) boosted participation.

Overall, documentation access and better information outreach remain crucial for inclusion.

12. What issues do women want political parties to prioritize in urban slum communities?

Women in Patna's urban slums want political parties to prioritize secure and permanent housing, as many face eviction threats on government land. They also demand better sanitation, drainage, toilets, healthcare, and basic infrastructure, which directly affect their daily lives. Improved access to welfare schemes like ration cards, pensions, Ayushman Bharat, and PM Awas Yojana is another key concern, along with employment opportunities. Many also seek proper voter ID cards and better information outreach.

Overall, women want housing security, basic services, welfare access, jobs, and accountable leadership to ensure dignity and genuine inclusion.

Hypothesis Testing:

The analysis of women's voting behaviour in Patna's urban slums reveals a complex relationship between socio-economic vulnerability, access to basic services, and electoral participation. The study initially hypothesized that higher poverty, informal employment,

and insecure living conditions would reduce political participation among slum-dwelling women. However, the findings challenge this assumption. Despite structural disadvantages such as unstable income, limited education, restricted mobility, and dependence on informal work, more than 80 percent of surveyed women actively participate in elections. This suggests that electoral participation among marginalized women is not determined solely by economic stability but is shaped by community networks, civic responsibility, hope for improved services, and neighbourhood social pressure. Their high turnout shows that women in urban slums see voting as a key mechanism to express expectations, negotiate survival needs, and seek state recognition.

The second hypothesis proposed that better access to essential services sanitation, water, housing security, and safety would lead to higher and more informed political participation. This was only partially supported. Women with better services demonstrate stronger issue-based engagement and more critical evaluation of political performance. However, those facing severe service deficits are equally likely to vote; the difference lies in motivation, not participation. Women in service-poor areas often vote with aspirational expectations for improvement, while those in better-served areas make more policy-driven choices. Thus, access to services affects the quality of political engagement rather than the likelihood of voting. Overall, both hypotheses only partially reflect lived realities: women's electoral engagement remains resilient, driven by survival needs, community ties, and aspirations for better governance.

Findings and Policy Recommendations:

Findings from the Survey of Urban Slum Women in Patna: The survey conducted among 85 women living in urban slums of Patna gives important insights into their social and economic conditions. A large number of women (61%) are housewives or do not have any formal employment. Around 33% are involved in part-time or informal work, while only 6% are students. This shows that very few women are connected to higher education or skill development opportunities.

The findings of the study clearly indicate that factors such as low levels of education, unstable sources of income, and fewer employment opportunities create major barriers to the economic development and financial independence of women.At the same time, the study also shows that despite these challenges, women continue to participate actively in society and politics, although they remain structurally disadvantaged.

Socio-Economic Profile: Most of the women in the survey (61%) depend financially on their families, as they are housewives. About 33% are engaged in informal work such as domestic help, small vending, or manual labour. These jobs are usually low-paid, irregular, and do not provide any job security or benefits. Only a very small number (6%) are students, which reflects low involvement in education or training.

The level of education among these women is also quite low. Many have studied only up to primary level or have no formal education at all. Because of this, they face difficulties in dealing with official systems, accessing government schemes, and using financial services like banks or loans. Even though many government skill-development programs exist, very few women are able to benefit from them. This shows a gap between policy and actual reach.

Access to Basic Services: Access to basic facilities such as water, sanitation, housing, and healthcare is not equal across all slum areas. Some families have slightly better conditions, while others struggle with poor infrastructure, irregular water supply, overcrowding, and unsafe surroundings.

Although these conditions do not directly reduce voter turnout, they do influence how women think about the government. Women who have better access to services are often more critical of political leaders. On the other hand, women facing poor conditions may vote with the hope that their situation will improve or may be influenced by their community.

Safety is another major concern, especially in crowded areas or for women who travel for work or public activities. Limited mobility due to safety issues reduces their participation in community life and also creates difficulties in accessing polling booths, voter ID services, and other government facilities.

Participation in Government Schemes: Even though many government schemes are designed to support women's employment and financial independence, actual participation remains low.

Awareness about schemes such as SULM, DAY-NULM, and Mukhyamantri Mahila Rojgar Yojana is limited among the respondents.

Many women face practical difficulties in accessing these schemes. Problems like lack of proper documents, travel issues, and absence of guidance from officials make it hard for them to benefit. Only a few women reported receiving training, financial help, or support for small businesses. This clearly shows that there is a gap between government policies and their actual implementation.

Social and cultural factors also play a role. Household responsibilities, lack of support from family, and restrictions on movement reduce women's ability to join training programs or take up income-generating work. These findings point towards the importance of developing policies that are practical, easily available at the local level, and more understanding of the everyday challenges and real-life conditions faced by women.

Electoral Awareness and Participation: Even though women living in slum areas face many social and economic difficulties, their participation in elections remains quite strong. Out of the 85 women included in the study, 69 said that they vote regularly, while 16 women reported that they are unable to vote mainly because they do not have proper documents or because of unstable living conditions.

Most of the women who participate in voting have taken part in many elections over the years. This shows that voting has become an important and regular part of their lives. Their involvement also reflects their continued connection with the democratic process.

The study further shows that many women have a basic understanding of voting rights and election procedures. In most cases, this awareness does not come from formal education but from conversations within families, neighbours, and the local community. Even women with limited education often know how to register themselves and cast their vote, which highlights the importance of community learning and shared social knowledge.

Challenges in Electoral Participation: Although women's participation in elections is significant, many difficulties still remain. The voter revision process introduced in Bihar in 2025 brought stricter rules related to documentation and verification. Many women living in slum settlements do not possess complete or updated documents, which increases the possibility of exclusion from the electoral process.

Apart from documentation problems, issues such as unstable housing, lack of permanent addresses, restricted mobility, and limited access to public support services also create barriers for women in participating fully and independently in elections.

Political Expectations and Community Influence: The voting choices of women in slum areas are generally shaped more by practical needs and everyday experiences than by political ideology. Their decisions are often influenced by family members, neighbours, local leaders, and community networks. Even in situations where basic facilities are poor or insufficient, many women continue to participate in elections, although their expectations and reasons for voting may differ from person to person.

Local community groups, self-help groups, and neighbourhood leaders also play an important role in spreading political awareness and encouraging participation. Most women expect improvements in basic areas of life such as sanitation, housing facilities, employment opportunities, skill development, healthcare, and other essential public services.

Intersection of Socio-Economic Status and Electoral Behavior: Socio-economic vulnerability does not reduce turnout; even women facing poverty and insecure housing vote consistently. Electoral engagement is shaped more by communal norms and survival-oriented expectations than by economic stability.

However, better-educated and financially stable women show more issue-based voting, while economically disadvantaged women rely on collective platforms for information and access.

Implications of Findings: High civic participation indicates readiness for deeper inclusion, but low education, limited livelihoods, and bureaucratic barriers require targeted intervention. Policies should integrate skill development, micro-enterprise support, SHGs, and voter facilitation mechanisms. There is a strong need to improve awareness programs and provide support at the local level. These efforts are important for bringing

long-term social, economic, and political empowerment among women living in urban slums. Without proper guidance and support systems, many women are not able to fully benefit from existing opportunities.

Conclusion of Findings: The findings of the study show that women living in urban slums of Patna face economic hardship but remain actively involved in the democratic process. Even though they have low levels of education, depend on informal work, and face problems related to documentation, they regularly participate in elections and show strong awareness about their voting rights.

The study also highlights that better income and access to basic services do not necessarily increase voter turnout, but they do improve the quality of participation. Women who are more stable economically tend to think more critically about political choices.

Support systems within the community, including neighbourhood relationships and collective group activities, play an important role in helping women manage their daily livelihood as well as remain connected to political activities. Many women also continue to participate because they hope for better opportunities and improved living conditions in the future. These hopes encourage them to stay involved in the democratic process.

Overall, the findings of the study create an important foundation for making policies that promote inclusion, women's empowerment, and more effective governance. Despite facing several social and economic difficulties, women continue to show willingness and interest in participation. This suggests that with proper support, awareness, and accessible opportunities, their role in both society and politics can become stronger and more meaningful.

Recommendations:

The following suggestions aim to connect livelihood improvement with existing government programs and systems, such as DAY-NULM, SULM, Mukhyamantri Mahila Rojgar Yojana, SVEEP, and SIR.

1. **Improving Livelihood Opportunities through DAY-NULM and SULM:** Local government bodies in Patna should increase efforts to spread information about skill training and financial support programs under SULM and DAY-NULM. Awareness campaigns can be organized in slum areas with the help of ward members, NGOs, and local leaders to ensure that information reaches more women.

   Training programs should focus on practical and market-relevant skills such as tailoring, beauty services, basic computer knowledge, food processing, waste management, and small business skills. After training, women should also receive help in finding jobs or starting their own work.

   Combining voter awareness programs like SVEEP with livelihood programs can be useful. This will help women improve both their economic condition and their political participation at the same time.

2. **Promoting Women's Small Businesses through Mukhyamantri Mahila Rojgar Yojana (2025)**

   The Mukhyamantri Mahila Rojgar Yojana provides financial support starting from ₹10,000 and can go up to ₹2 lakh. This is very helpful for women who want to start small businesses but do not have enough money.

   Local authorities should help women in applying for this scheme, preparing business plans, and getting proper guidance. Small businesses like tailoring, grocery shops, beauty parlours, food stalls, and handicrafts can help families move towards stable self-employment.

   To make the process easier, systems like single-window application, simple document verification, and quick complaint handling should be introduced. This will improve transparency and ensure that benefits reach women on time.

3. **Strengthening Financial Inclusion and Social Progress**

   Many women still do not have access to proper banking facilities. Strengthening connections between self-help groups and banks under NULM can improve this situation. Opening Jan-Dhan accounts and promoting digital payment methods can also increase financial independence.

Workshops on financial literacy should be organized to help women understand savings, loans, and government benefits. When women become financially independent, they are also more confident in making political decisions based on their own understanding.

4. **Improving Safety, Mobility, and Access to Important Documents**

   Problems related to safety and limited mobility often prevent women from participating in training programs, community meetings, and political activities. To improve this situation, slum areas should have better street lighting, CCTV facilities, and safer public transport services. These steps can help women move more freely and confidently in public spaces.

   Along with this, it is also necessary to make the process of getting important documents easier for women. Documents such as Aadhaar cards and voter ID cards are essential for accessing welfare schemes and participating in elections. Special documentation camps can be organized together with voter awareness programs so that women can become more involved in governance and electoral activities.

5. **Expanding SVEEP Programs through Women's Community Networks**

   SVEEP activities should be linked with local community groups such as Anganwadi centres, Mahila Mandals, self-help groups, and health workers. These local networks can help spread electoral awareness in a more effective and relatable way among women living in slum communities.

   Women should receive clear and simple information about checking their names in voter lists, locating polling booths, understanding the use of NOTA, and thinking critically about political promises made during elections. If voter awareness activities are connected with livelihood and skill-development programs, women may find the learning process more practical and meaningful in their everyday lives.

6. **Strengthening Basic Services through Institutional Reforms**

   Institutional reforms can help improve essential public services in slum areas, including sanitation, water supply, drainage systems, and waste management. Although better services may not directly change voting behaviour, they can increase women's awareness, confidence, and trust in the political process.

   There is also a need to strengthen systems related to public complaints, ward-level monitoring, and citizen feedback. Such measures can help ensure that the concerns and daily problems faced by women are properly heard and addressed by local authorities and institutions.

Conclusion:

The findings reveal that despite socio-economic hardship, women in Patna's urban slums demonstrate strong electoral participation driven by resilience, community influence, and aspirations for improved living conditions. Their political engagement is not diminished by poverty; instead, it is shaped by survival needs and hope. Policy recommendations must therefore align livelihood generation, service delivery improvements, and civic empowerment. Integrating NULM/SULM, the Mahila Rojgar Yojana, SVEEP, and SIR into a unified approach can significantly enhance women's economic independence, political awareness, and overall social mobility that is strengthening both democratic participation and urban development in Patna.

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