



CENTRE FOR GENDER
AND POLITICS

20
23

INSIGHTS ON YOUNG WOMEN VOTERS' EXPERIENCES AND DECISIONS

YOUNG WOMEN AT THE BALLOT

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Women for Politics is a flagship initiative of CGAP focusing on empowering women in South Asian politics.
www.womenforpolitics.com | www.cgapsouthasia.org

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ABOUT US

Centre for Gender and Politics (CGAP) aims at increasing awareness of women's leadership in local, state, and national politics in South Asia. For this, in the last three years, we have focused on creating resources that identify areas for policymakers, policy influencers, governments, non-governmental organisations, and researchers on gender and politics.

Through our flagship initiative, Women for Politics, we are committed to replacing narratives that define women as victims, with recognition and celebration of women's achievements as political and community leaders.

CGAP's high-quality scholarship is produced by a community of volunteers that include Ph.D. scholars, Assistant Professors, Professors, Students of Gender Studies, Women's Studies, and Political Sciences. Through our research, we aim to highlight the leadership of gender diverse politicians, and allies to educate people about allyship and gender diversity in leadership.

OUR TEAM & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We want to thank all the survey participants whose names are kept anonymous for taking time during the difficult times of the pandemic to participate in the online survey. We are grateful to the entire CGAP team, who deserve appreciation and acknowledgement for their unparalleled spirit, volunteerism, constant support and contributions during our background research, survey analysis, designing, and outreach. We want to acknowledge the support we received from **Nikore Associates, Women in Economics/Policy (WiEP), North East Network (NEN), Behanbox, Netri Foundation, Citizens for Public Leadership (CPL), and Young Leaders for Active Citizenship (YLAC)** in reaching out to more women of 15-29-year-old, circulating this survey among their networks and making it successful.

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Introduction

Across all levels, the gender gap among voters has significantly closed over the years. By 2019, the percentage voting gap between men and women in Lok Sabha elections became negligible. Studies have indicated that more women voters have become independent in their political choices and are influencing the way political candidates and parties view them.

Although there are fewer studies on this theme, the ones that have surveyed women voters have highlighted various reasons for the increase, such as an increase in literacy rate and access to information through social media that indicate women voters are taking informed decisions.

In May - June 2021, we ran an online survey with 928 young women aged between 15 and 29 across 30 states and Union Territories (UTs) conducted to understand the perception of young women voters about elections and women representatives. The findings could be used by governments to sustain and improve the engagement of women voters, policy influencers, researchers and parties focusing on women voters.

This survey also opens up an inquiry into voters' interests, preferences, and concerns, including the attitudes and behaviour of their local candidates, representatives, and party workers towards sexual harassment and gender-based violence from an intersectional feminist lens. Probably the first of its kind, this study looks at understanding the factors that influence women voters across demographic groups in India.

About the Survey

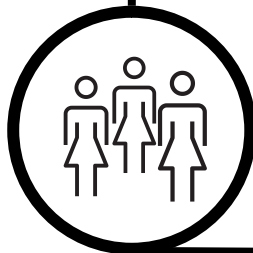
A first of its kind, this study looks at understanding the factors that influence women voters across demographic groups in India. The data is analysed across three themes; *Infrastructural Aspects/ Factors, Socio-political aspects, and Socio-Psychological Aspects* that influence women's voting choices through a survey.

Duration of the Survey: 1 month (to record responses on the google form)

Self-administered quantitative survey rolled out via an online tool, 'Google Forms'. It was in English and live for a month.



928 participants across 30 States/UTs who identified as women in the age brackets of 15 to 29 years were asked to respond.



Survey form was divided into; Demography, Voting Process, and Voting Decisions, for comprehensive analysis.



SURVEY DESIGN

The survey has 3 sections: (a) demography, (b) voting process and (c) voting decisions. In the demography session, data on participants' age, religion, region, community, education, industry, city of residence, and whether they are registered voters and have voted in an election.

The second section on the voting process aims to capture the challenges and motivating factors for voting in an election. The third section on voting decisions aims to understand the factors that impact a young woman voter's decision.

Overall, the questions focused on the challenges that women face while voting and the issues that motivate them to vote.

The survey form was designed to be filled in 5–7 minutes for any participant who qualified following the first question that asks for their gender.

DATA COLLECTION

Our research design comprised a self-administered quantitative survey rolled out via an online tool called 'Google Forms'. The survey was in English and was live for a month, during which participants who identified as women in the age bracket 15 to 29 years filled out the form.

Online mode was chosen to administer the survey because of the challenges of travel restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

DATA PROCESSING

The survey responses were first imported to excel where preliminary data quality checks were conducted and non-qualifying responses (where participants did not identify themselves as women) were removed. The data was then imported to Stata where analysis variables and demographic variables were numerically recorded to appropriate categorical and dummy(yes/no) variables. For example, responses of “Agree” and “Strongly Agree” were combined into one category for ease of representation. Based on the analysis themes decided, the findings were represented visually using bar graphs and pie charts. The participants who indicated their religion as Sikh, Jain, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Zoroastrian and others were clubbed as non-Hindus. The participants who identified themselves as Atheists or preferred not to mention their religion are clubbed as one sub-group.

DEMOGRAPHY

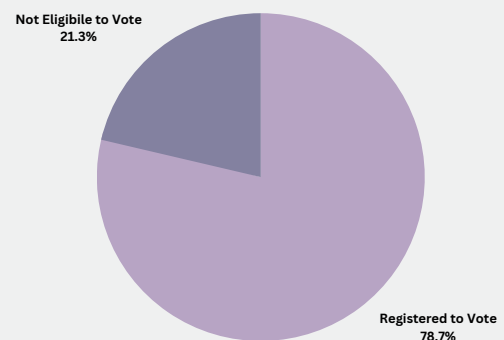
Our team has made deliberate efforts to publicise this survey as widely as possible by collaborating with grassroots organisations and individuals. The diversity of participants' profiles was monitored from time to time during the month when the survey was live to reach out to the under-represented and improve diversity. As a result, **we have participants from across 30 states and UTs in India who completed the survey successfully.**

SAMPLE SIZE AND AREA OF STUDY



- Age Group: 15-29
- States and UTs: 30
- Total Number of Respondents: 928

VOTING PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS



- Registered to Vote: 730 (78.7%)
- Not Eligible to Vote: 198 (21.3%)

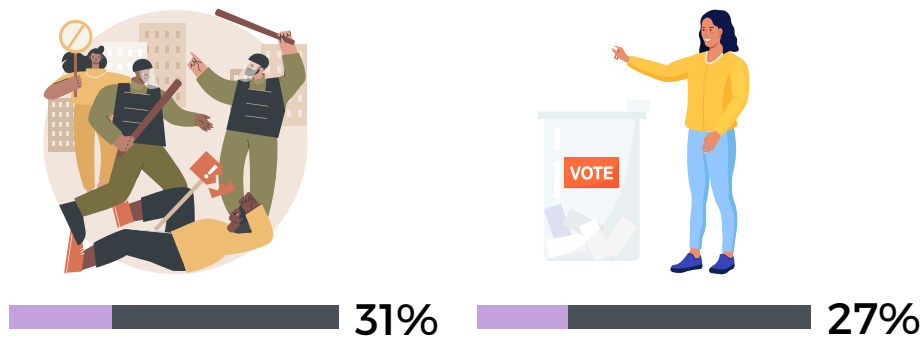
The survey was conducted in the year 2021, between the months of May and July. Because the survey was conducted online and in English, the limitations were that only educated, largely urban and semi-urban young women could fill the survey.

A. Infrastructural Aspects

In terms of infrastructure, we focused on state machinery such as provisions for disability-friendly infrastructure, dynamic registration processes, ease of access, etc.

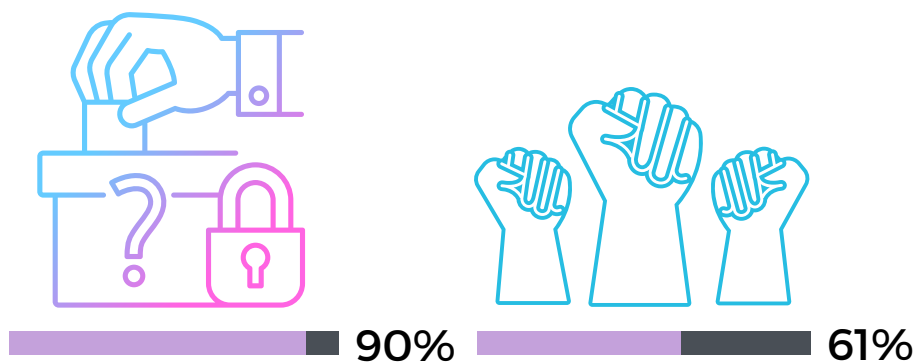
i. Barriers:

Political violence, voter-intimidation, and post-poll repercussions were the most significant concerns, with **31%** of participants citing them as demotivating factors. Further, the absence of a nearby polling booth was also considered a prominent barrier for **27%** of participants. **Absence of postal voting facilities** is a major obstacle for those who don't live in their hometowns.



ii. Enablers:

Exercising the right to vote and supporting a preferred party are factors that motivated more than **90%** of the participants to vote. Expressing anger against the incumbent government is a factor motivating **61%** of the participants.

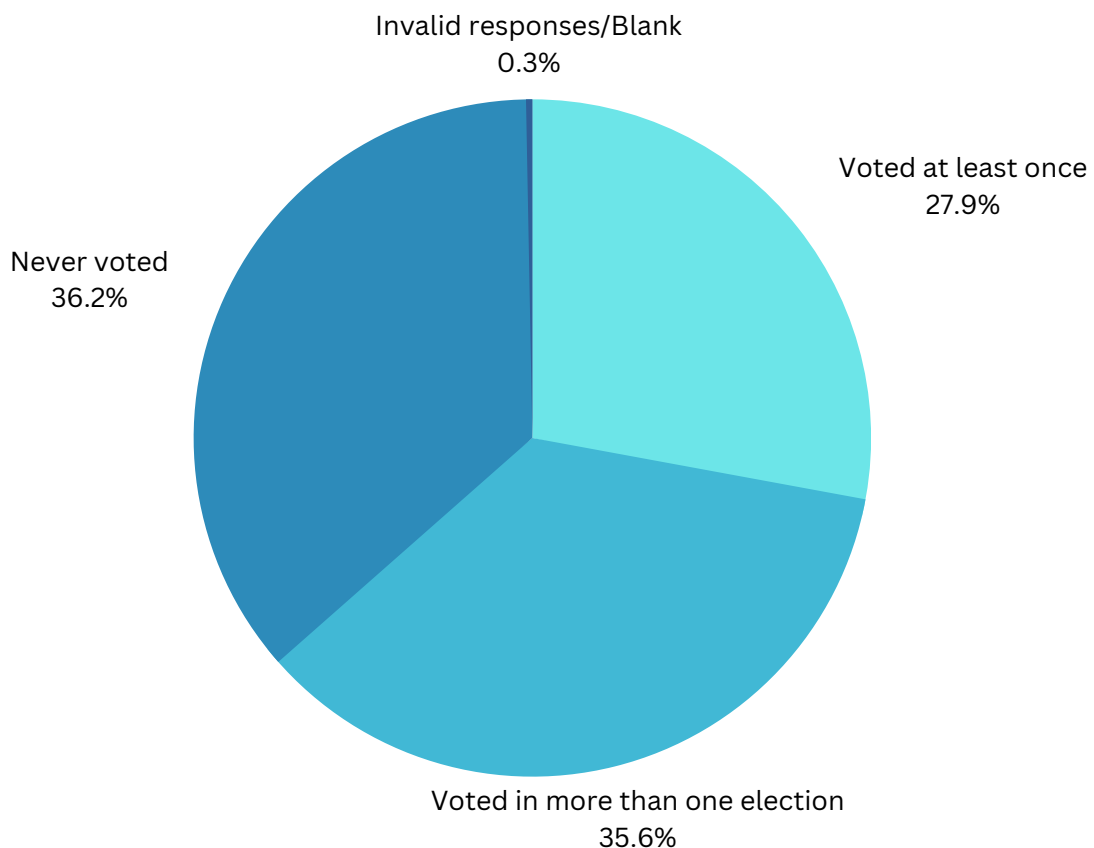


Participation in Elections

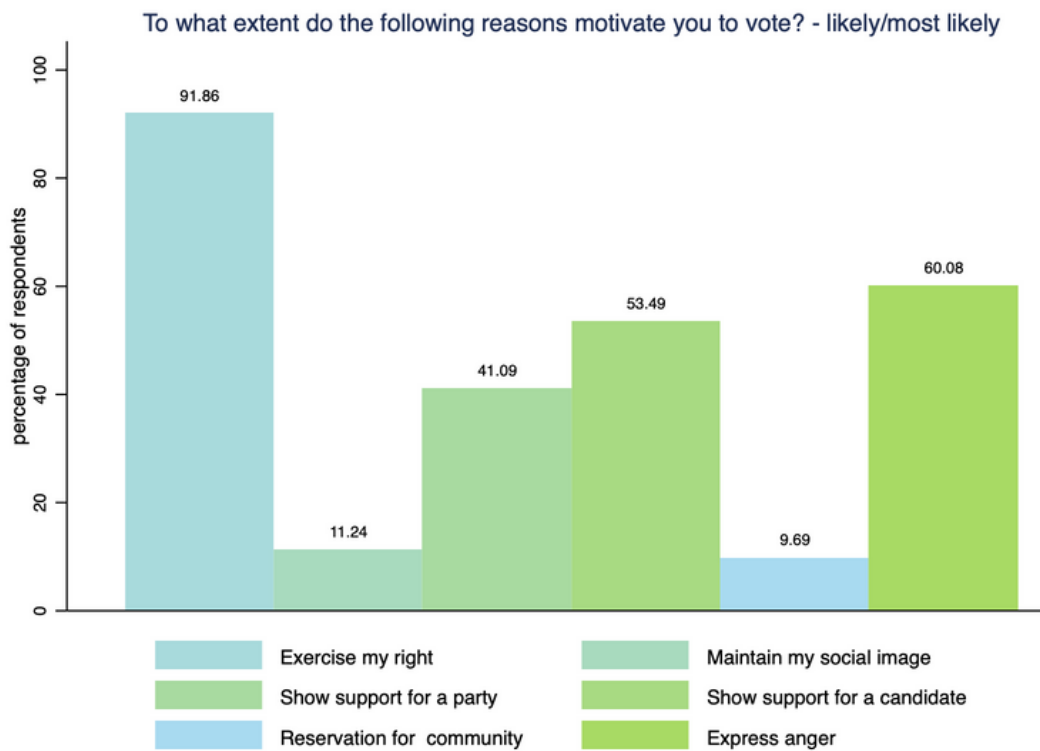
This section outlines the reasons that motivated and demotivated women in participating in the Electoral Process

From the responses received, we found :

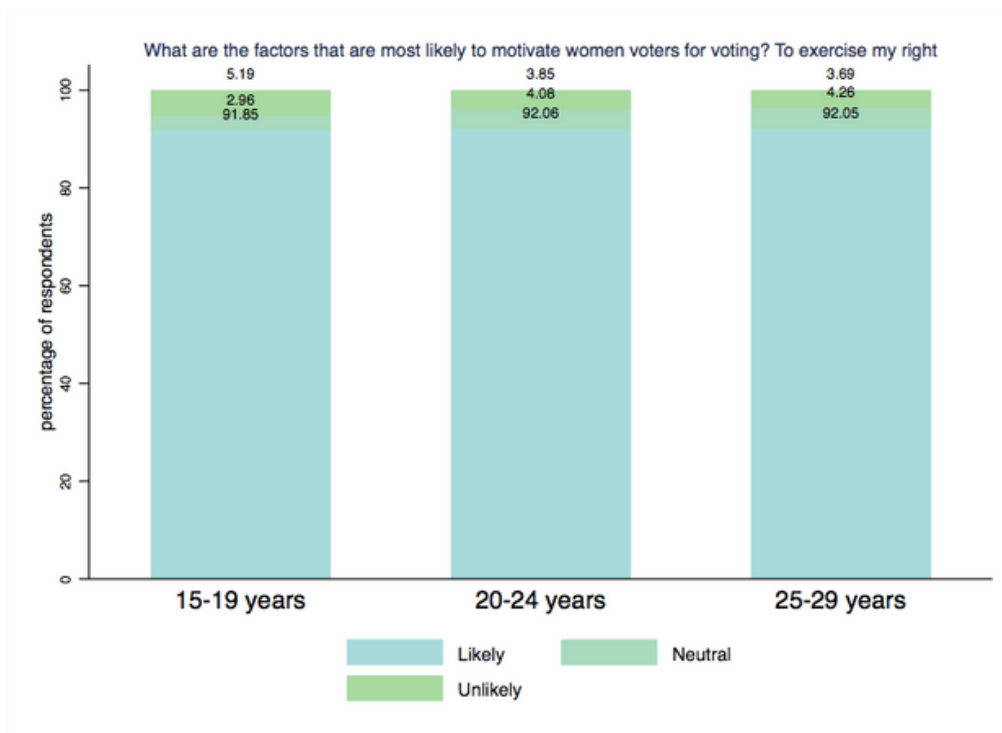
- 92% of the respondents stated that they were likely or most likely to be motivated because they wanted to **exercise their voting right**.
- 61.3% of the respondents stated their **displeasure and discontent with the current government** as a motivating factor.
- 55.8% of the respondents voted to show **support for candidates of their choice**.
- 43.2% of the respondents voted to show **support for a political party**.
- A small section (12.5%) of the sample was likely or most likely to be motivated to vote because it was a way for them to **maintain their social image**.
- Since most of our participants belonged to an urban, educated, upper caste background, voting as a means to secure **reservation** did not seem to be a highly motivating factor for them, with about 12% stating that it would be likely or most likely to motivate them to vote.



Among those who have voted in the past



Distribution among those who are motivated to vote to exercise their right





What Demotivates Women to Vote?

The respondents were provided with 5 possible reasons that demotivate them to vote and were asked to rate those reasons on a scale of **most likely to most unlikely**.

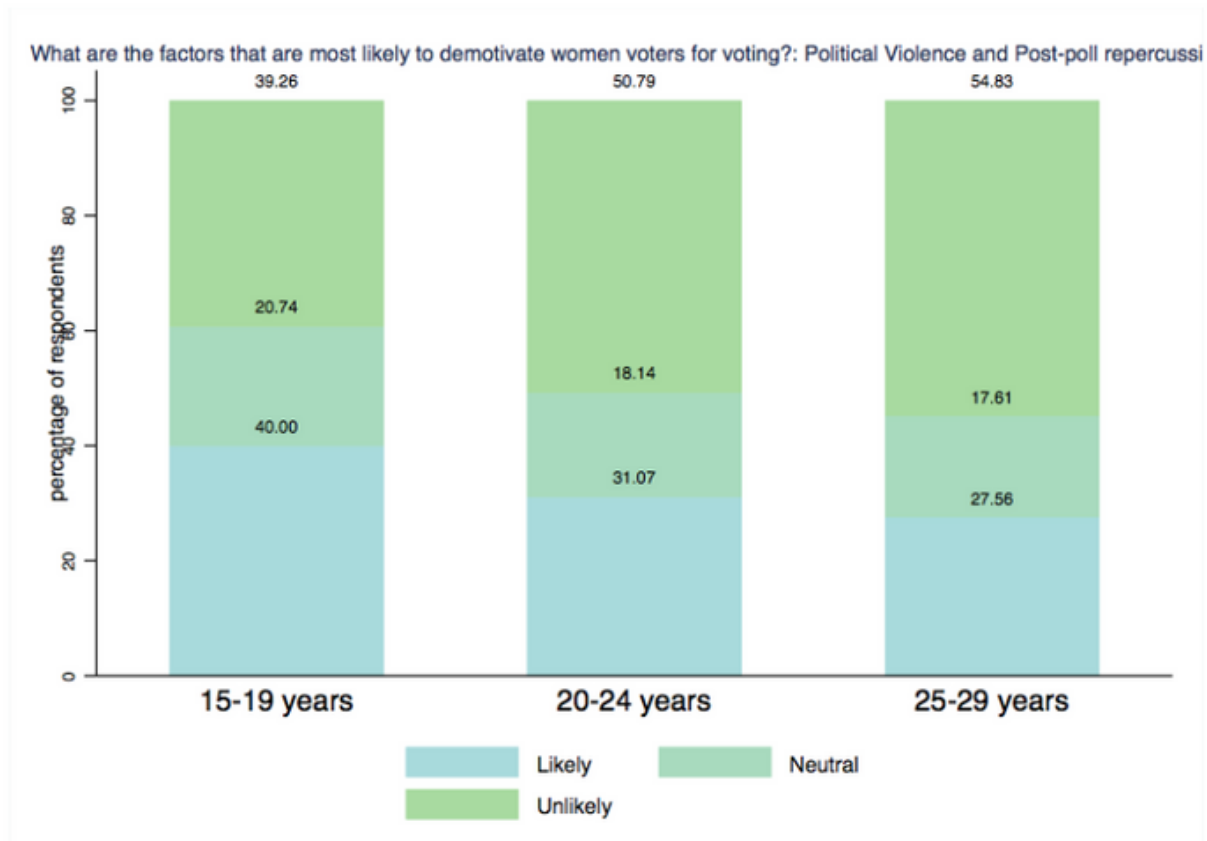
- 31% of the participants stated that Political violence and post-poll repercussions were likely or most likely to demotivate them from voting.
- 27% of the respondents stated that polling booths not being in the vicinity could be a likely demotivating factor for them.
- 25% of the respondents indicated them not being too politically aware about their constituency is likely a demotivating factor.
- “Utilizing a holiday” received similar responses, with only 8.2% of the respondents stating that this was likely to demotivate them from voting.
- Only about 3.5% of the total number of respondents indicated that they did not like to vote.

The additional comments section in the survey also saw respondents mentioning about demotivation due to political violence and post-poll repercussions.

Incidents of booth capture, where votes were forged, or party cadres lined up to look into people’s EVMs, or threatened people to vote for their preferred candidates, also threw off some respondents from wanting to go out and vote. Lastly, the possibility of violence breaking out at polling booths, and the proximity to strange men, also made many respondents feel unsafe, discouraging them from voting.

Distribution by Age Groups

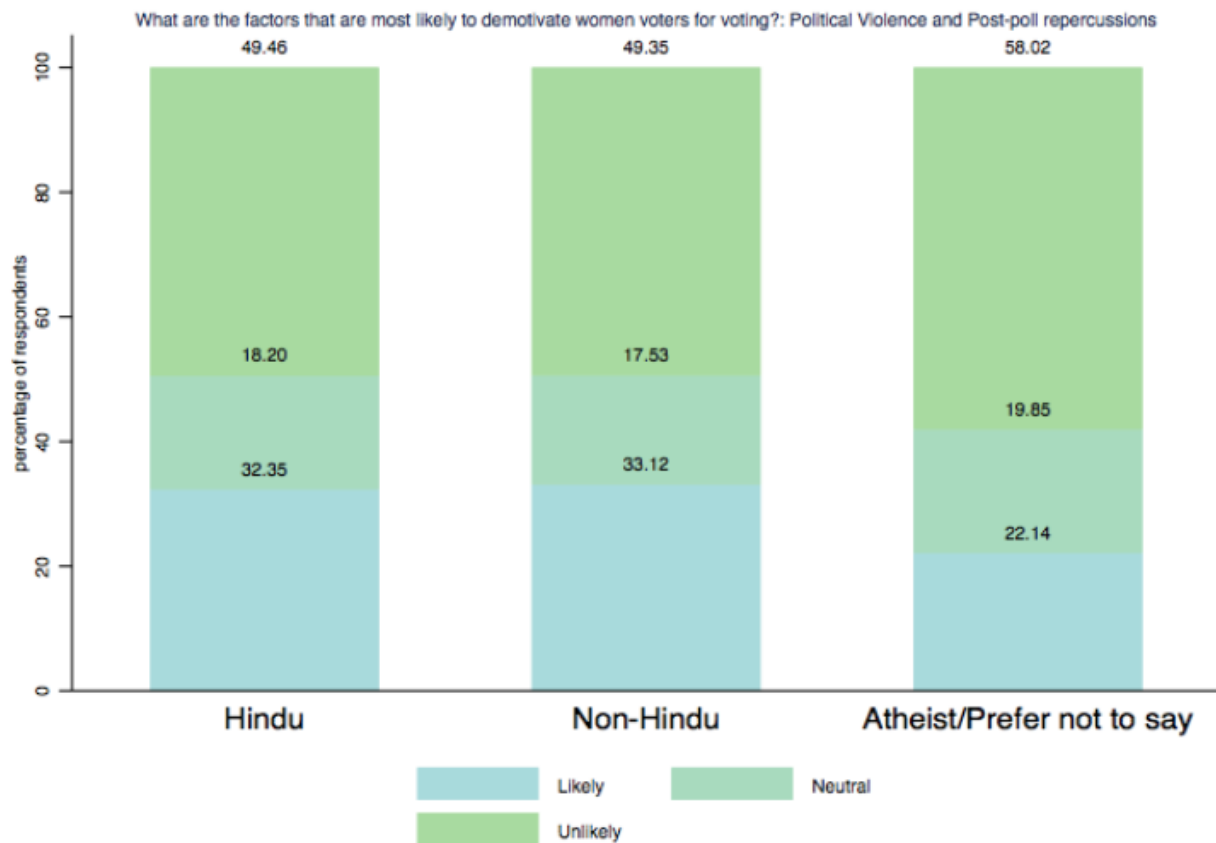
We also looked at how different age groups responded to how different reasons demotivated them, the findings are presented below:



- Among those in the age group of 15-19 years, political violence and post-poll repercussions, not being politically aware of constituencies and not having a polling booth in the vicinity are the top factors that demotivate them from voting.
- Among those in the age group of 20-24 years, political violence and post-poll repercussions followed by not having a polling booth in the vicinity and not being politically aware of constituencies are the top factors that demotivate them from voting.
- Among those in the age group of 20-24 years, not having a polling booth in the vicinity followed by political violence and post-poll repercussions and not being politically aware of constituencies are the top factors that demotivate them from voting.
- Among all age groups, those in 15-19 years were the highest in percentage to vote for political violence and post-poll repercussions as the top demotivating factor to vote.

Distribution by Religion

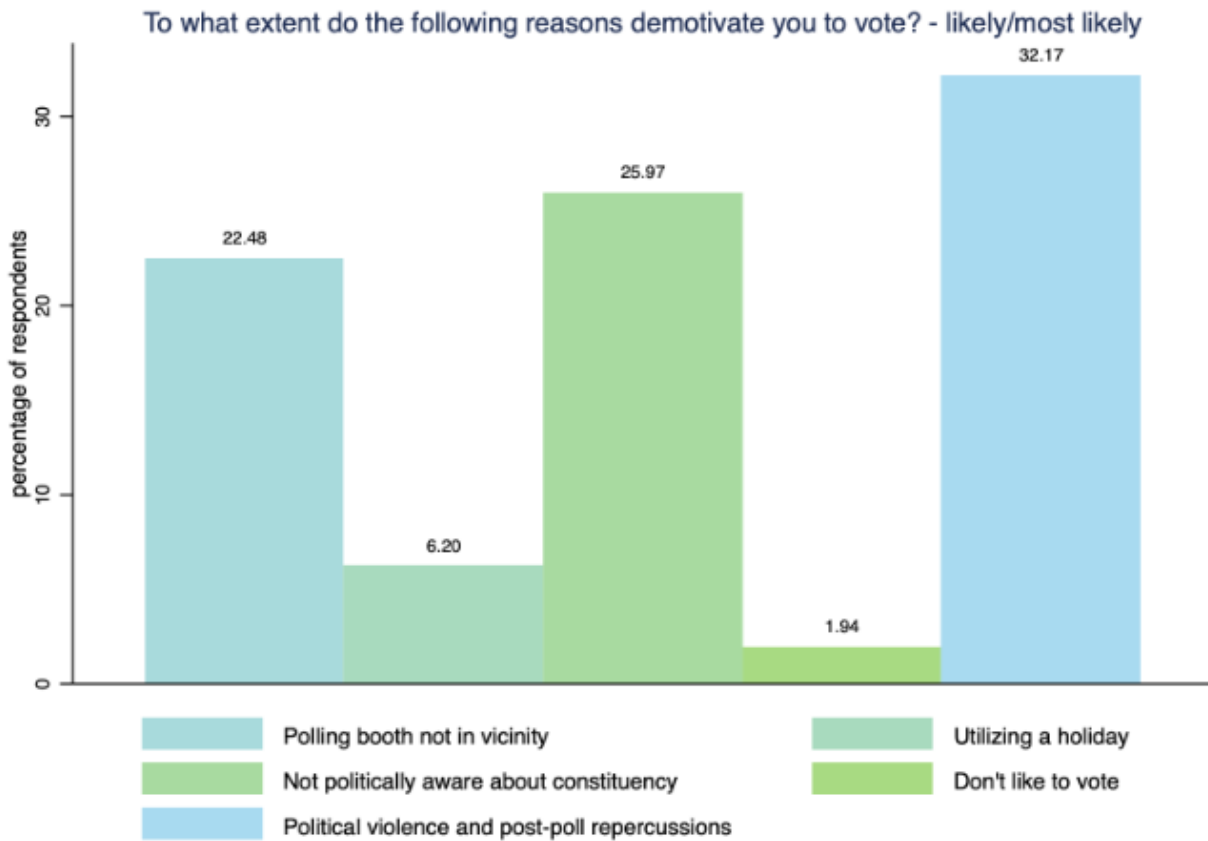
After age groups, we researched how women from different religions vote, and what their prime reasons are that demotivate them from voting. The results for 'Political Violence and Post-poll repercussions' are presented below:



- Participants who indicated their religion as Hindu - political violence and post-poll repercussions, not having a polling booth in the vicinity, and not being politically aware of constituencies are the top factors that demotivate them.
- The participants who indicated their religion as Sikh, Jain, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, or Zoroastrian - for them, we found that political violence and post-poll repercussions, not having a polling booth in the vicinity, and not being politically aware of constituencies are the top reasons that demotivate them.
- The participants who identified themselves as Atheists or preferred not to mention their religion - among them, not having a polling booth in the vicinity, followed by political violence, and post-poll repercussions are the top factors that demotivate them.

Distribution by Voting Status

Among women who have **voted at least once**, Political violence and post-poll repercussions are demotivate them from voting.



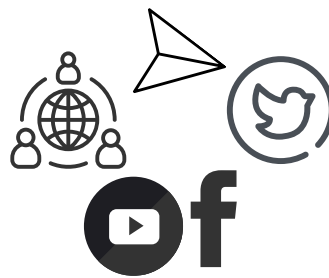
B. Political Aspects

What are the factors affecting the voting choices of young women?

We attempted to find out how young women make decisions regarding who to vote for; precisely, the factors that go behind constructing their voting 'choices'. The following factors constitute the elements of making a voting decision:

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The survey gauged how young women get access to information about candidates, parties and their election campaigns to make their decisions .



66%



79%

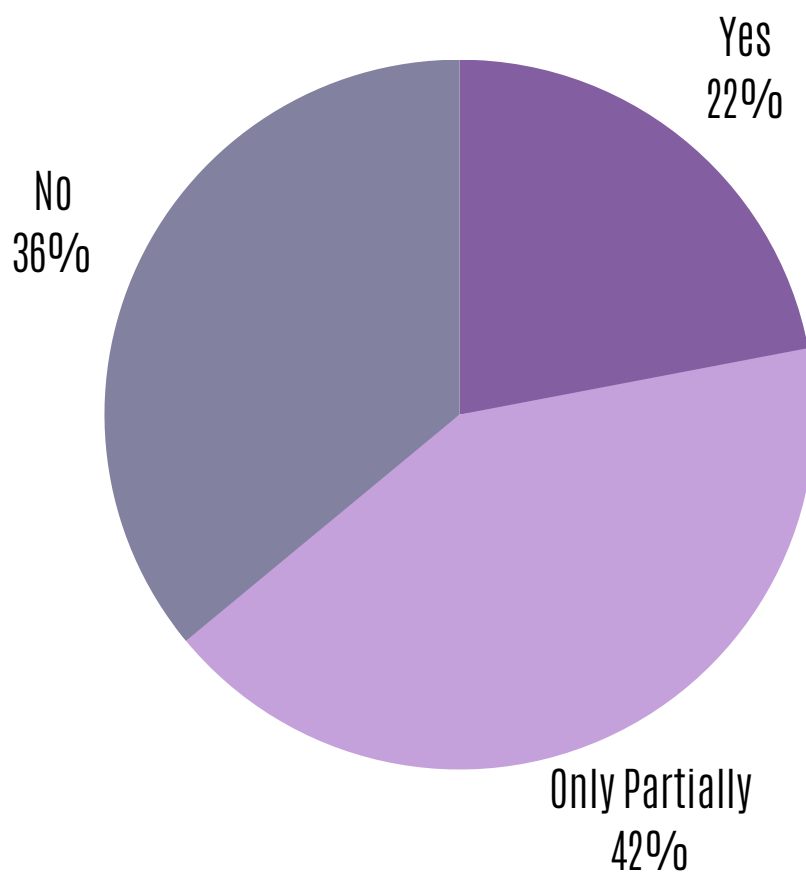


48%

News coverage was the most dominant source of information (79%), followed by **social media posts** (66%), and **political rallies** (48%).

SIGNIFICANCE OF MANIFESTOS

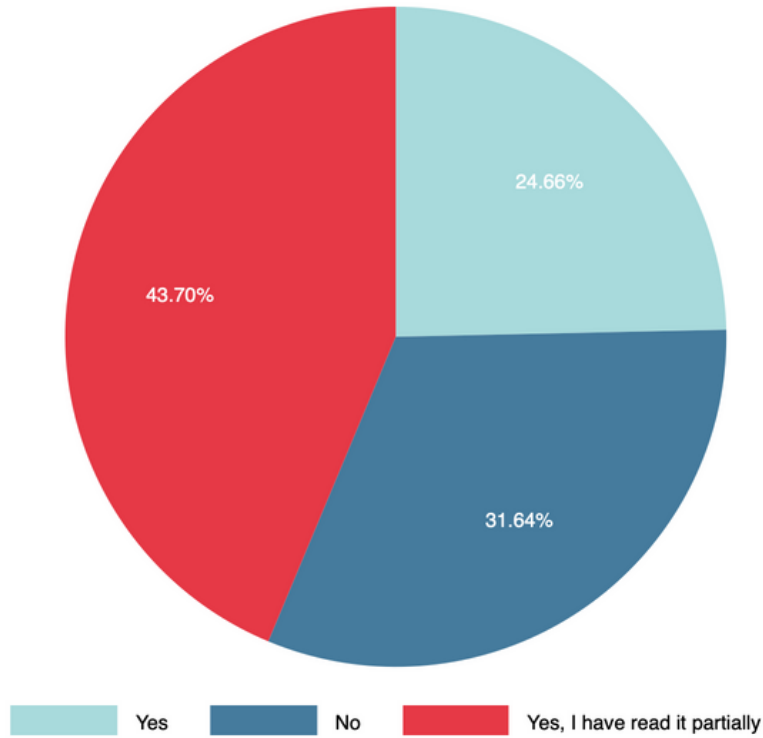
How do **voters perceive manifestos**, a primary document for any election campaign of a party/candidate? Do they **read** it?



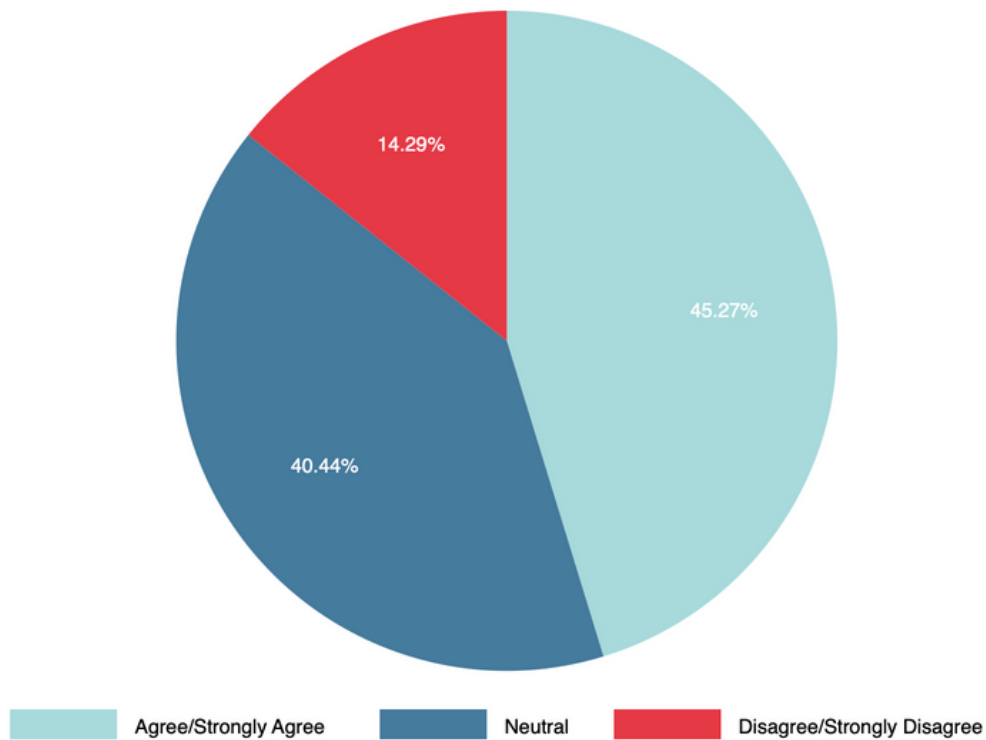
It is significant to note that only 9.1% of the respondents considered manifestos to be comprehensible. However, as described by some participants, factors such as length, language and irrelevant nature of the manifesto made it incoherent.

AMONG REGISTERED VOTERS

Have you ever read the manifesto of candidates in your area? (among registered voters)



If you ever read the manifesto, was it easy to understand? (among registered voters)

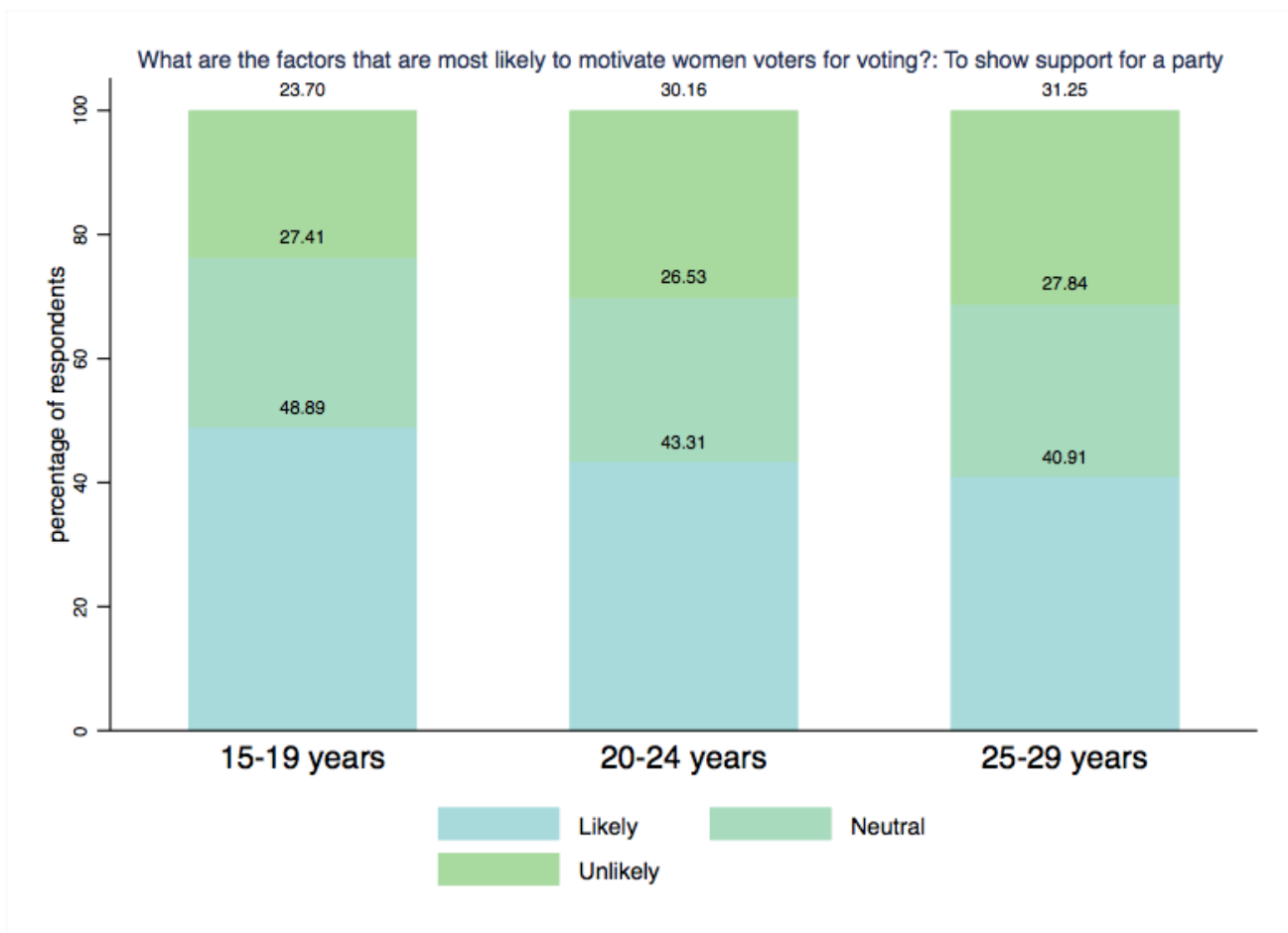


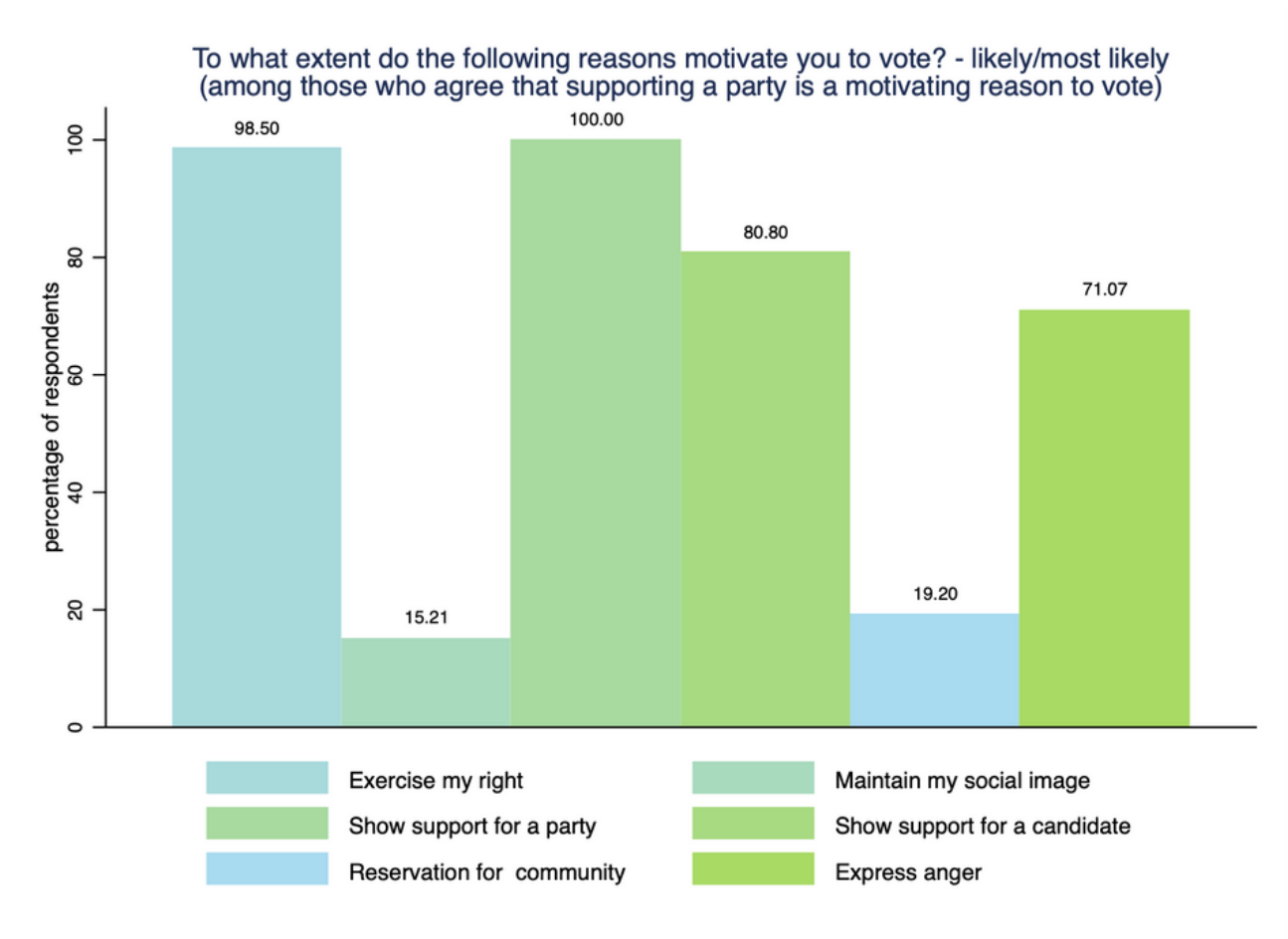
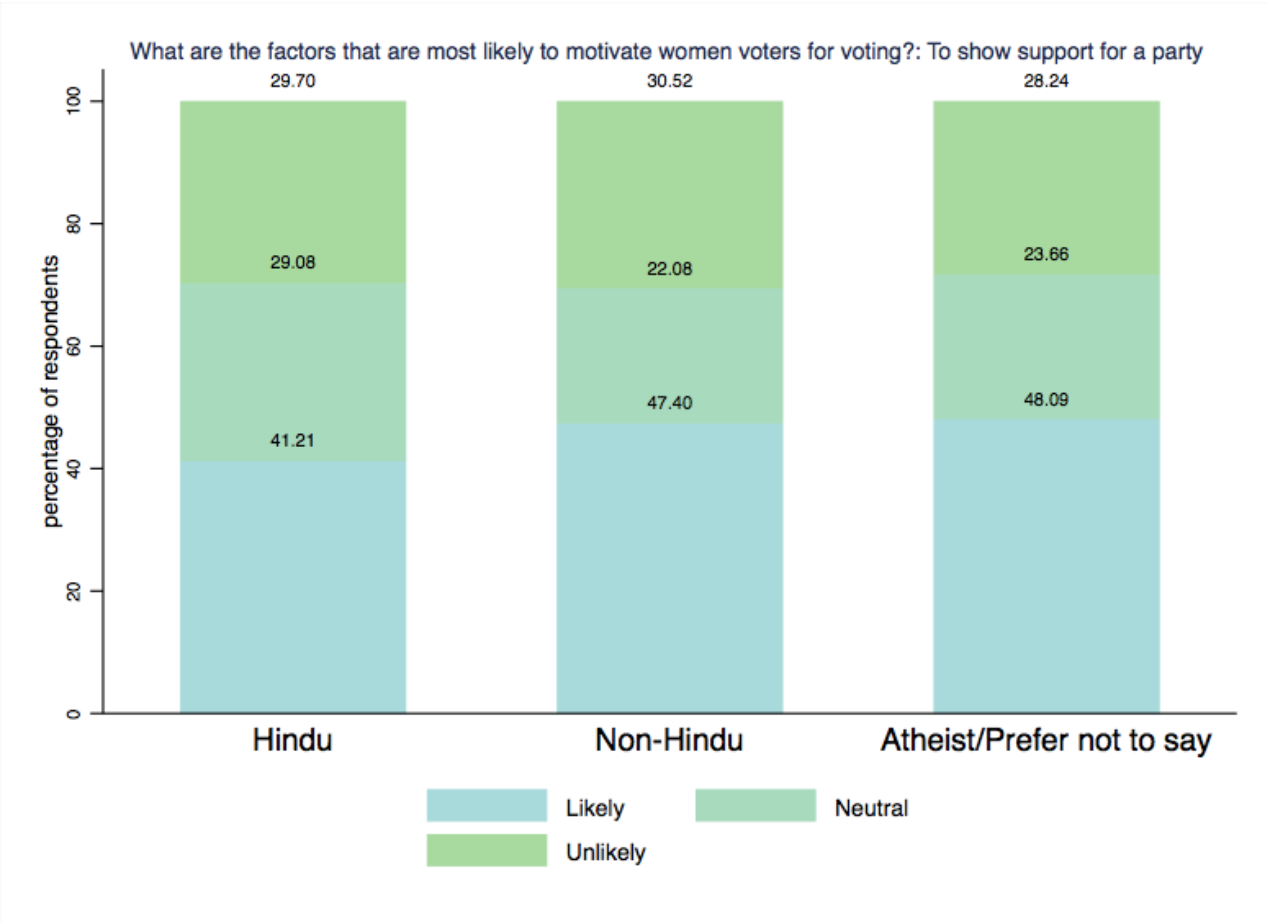
Young Women's support for Political Parties

Among all participants, 43.2% indicated that they are motivated to vote to show support for political parties

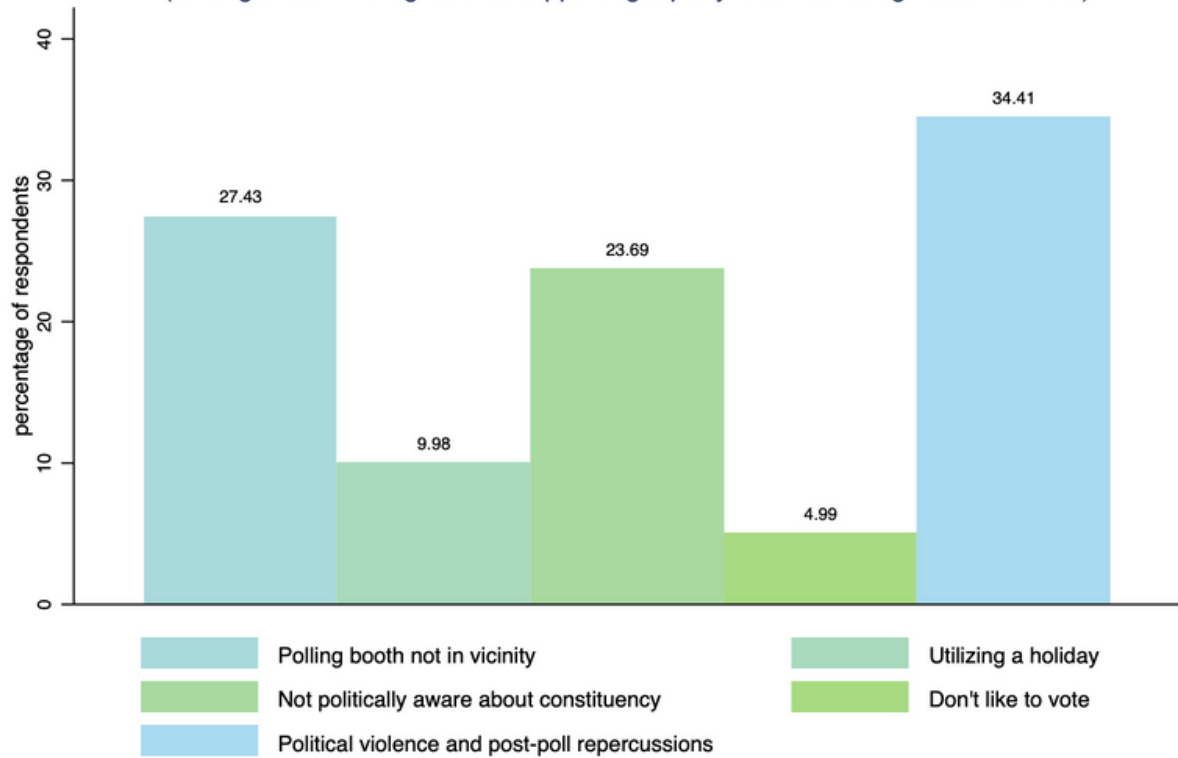


Distribution among different groups

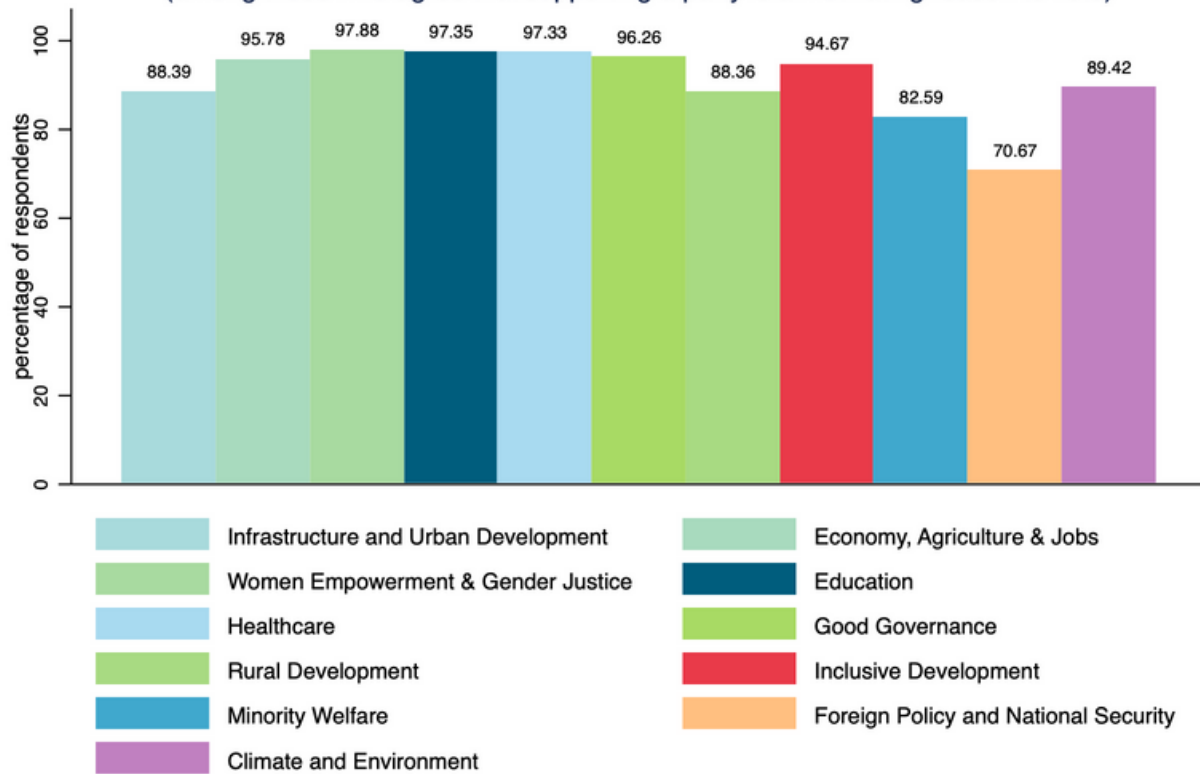




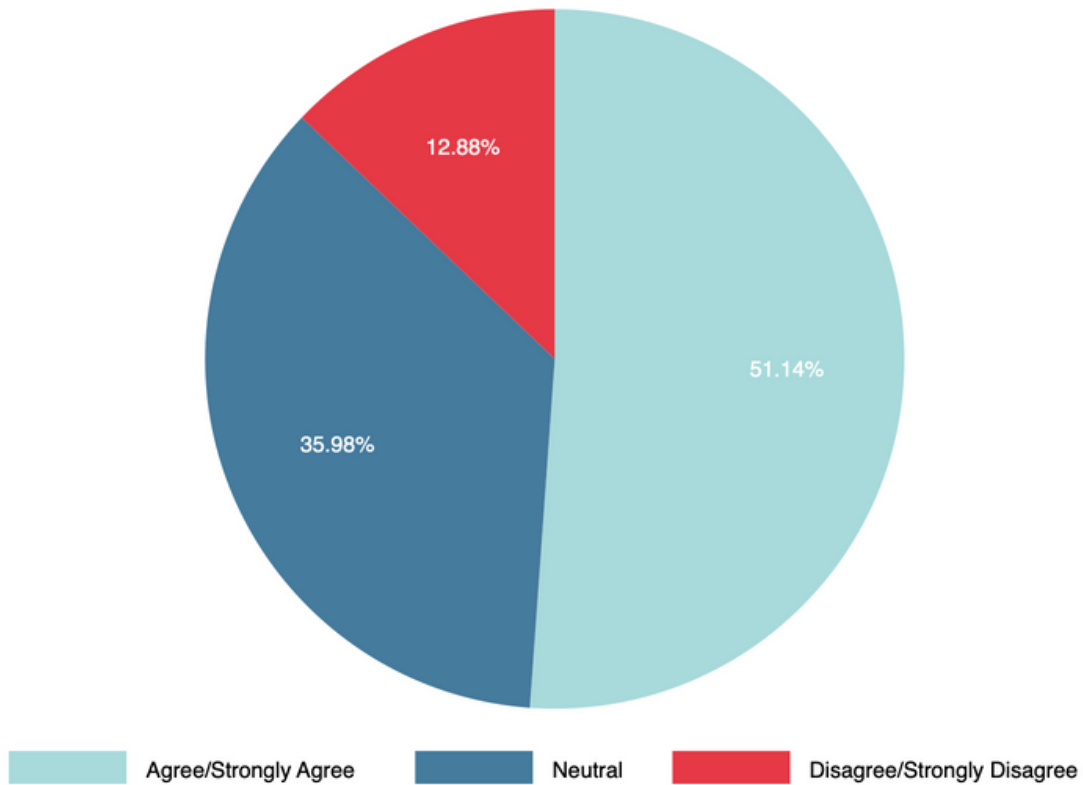
To what extent do the following reasons demotivate you to vote? - likely/most likely
(among those who agree that supporting a party is a motivating reason to vote)



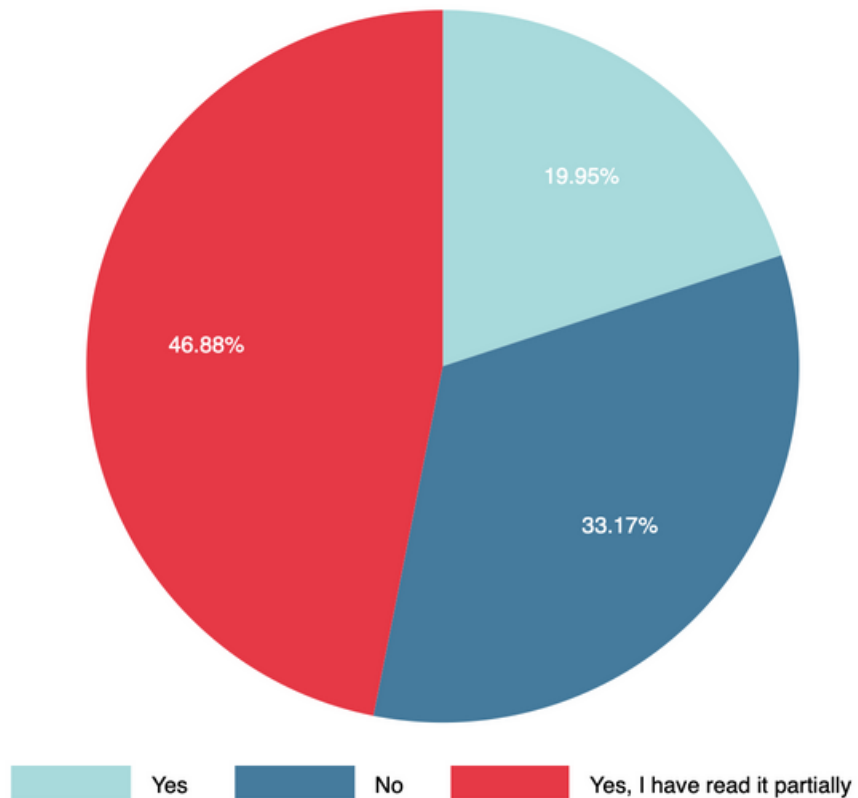
How likely do the following issues/matters motivate you to vote? - likely/most likely
(among those who agree that supporting a party is a motivating reason to vote)



If you ever read the manifesto, was it easy to understand?
(among those who agree that supporting a party is a motivating reason to vote)



Have you ever read the manifesto of candidates in your area?
(among those who agree that supporting a party is a motivating reason to vote)

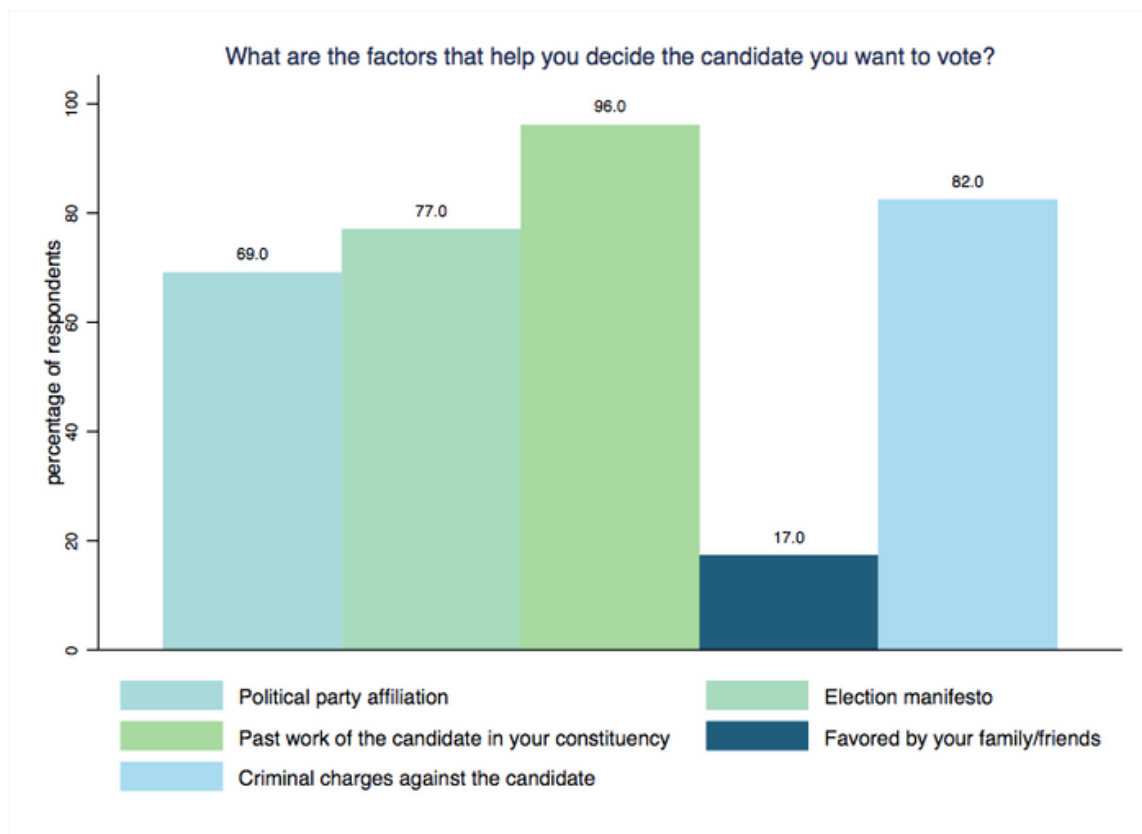


Young Women's support for Candidates

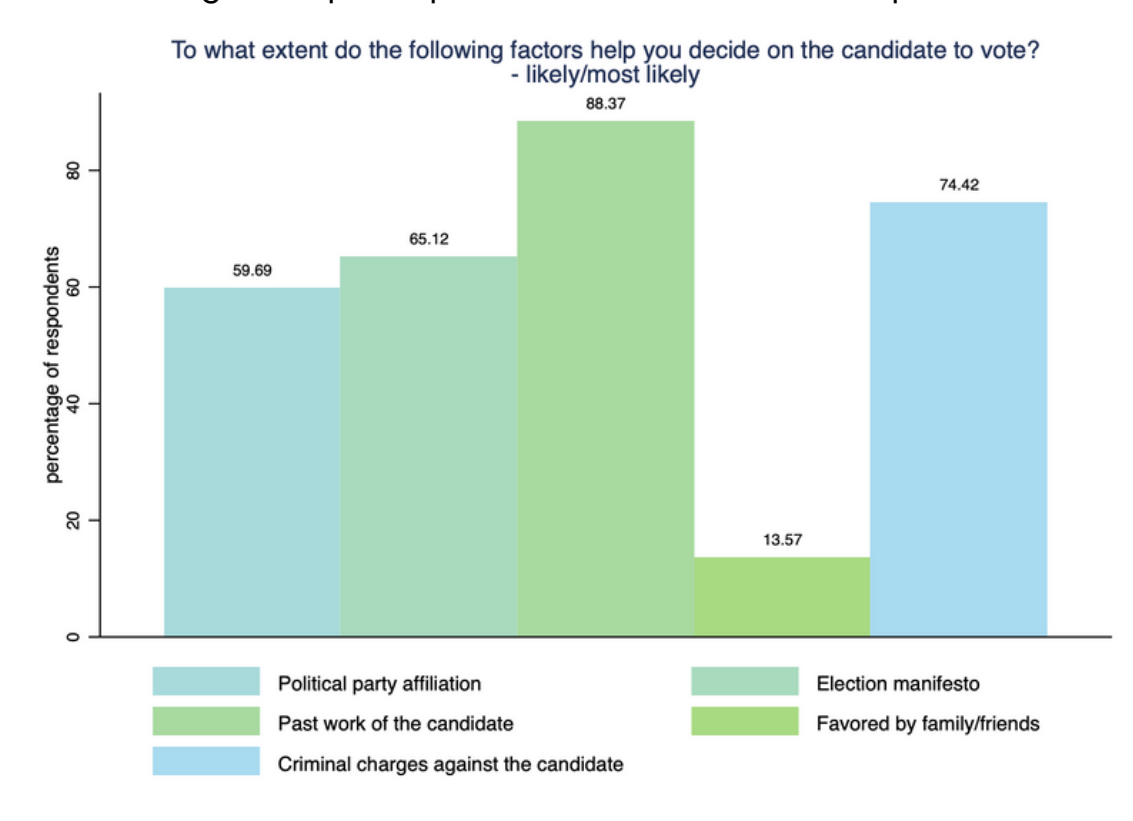
Among all participants, 55.8% indicated that they are motivated to vote to show support for a candidate.



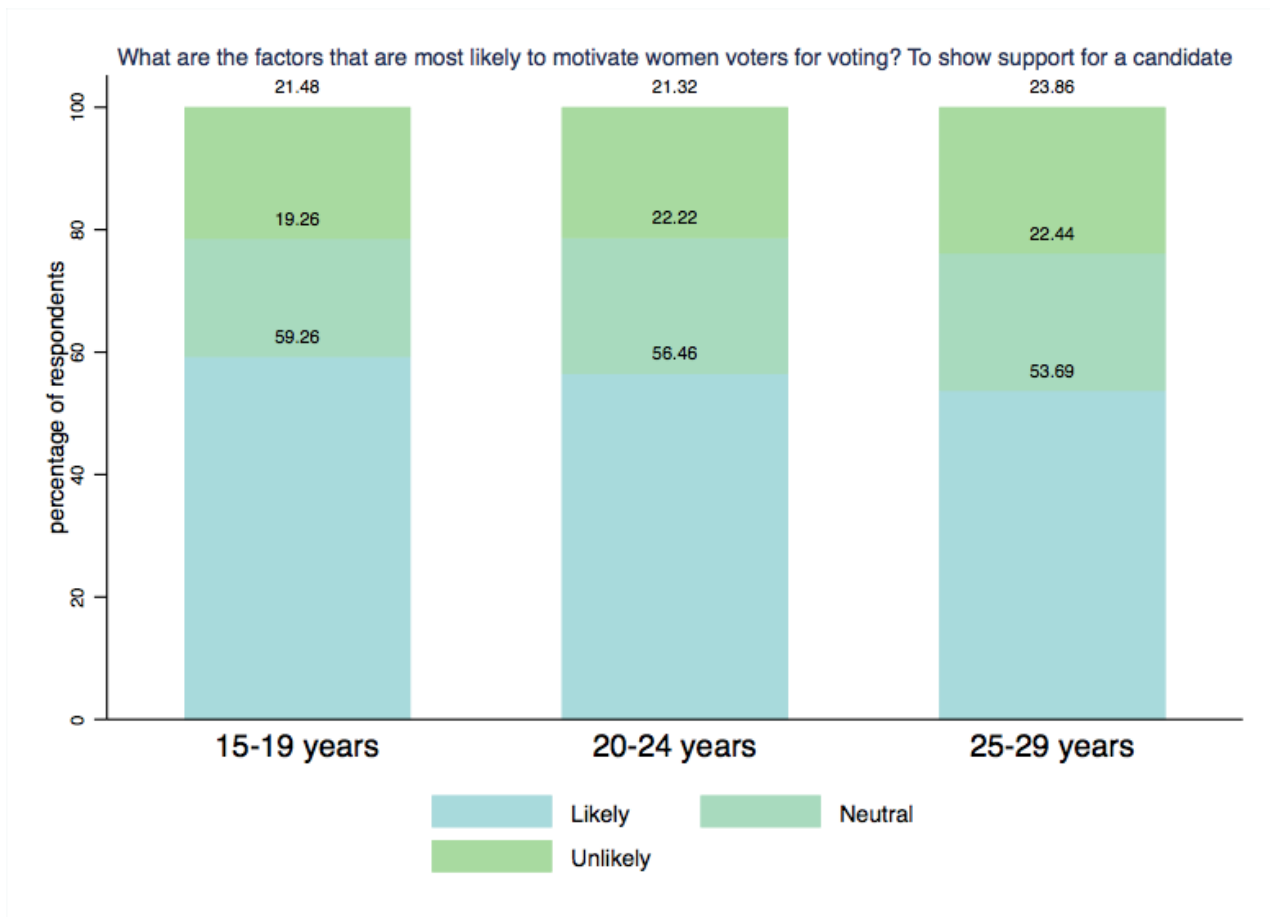
To understand the factors in taking a decision about a candidate, we asked the participants the criteria for their selection.

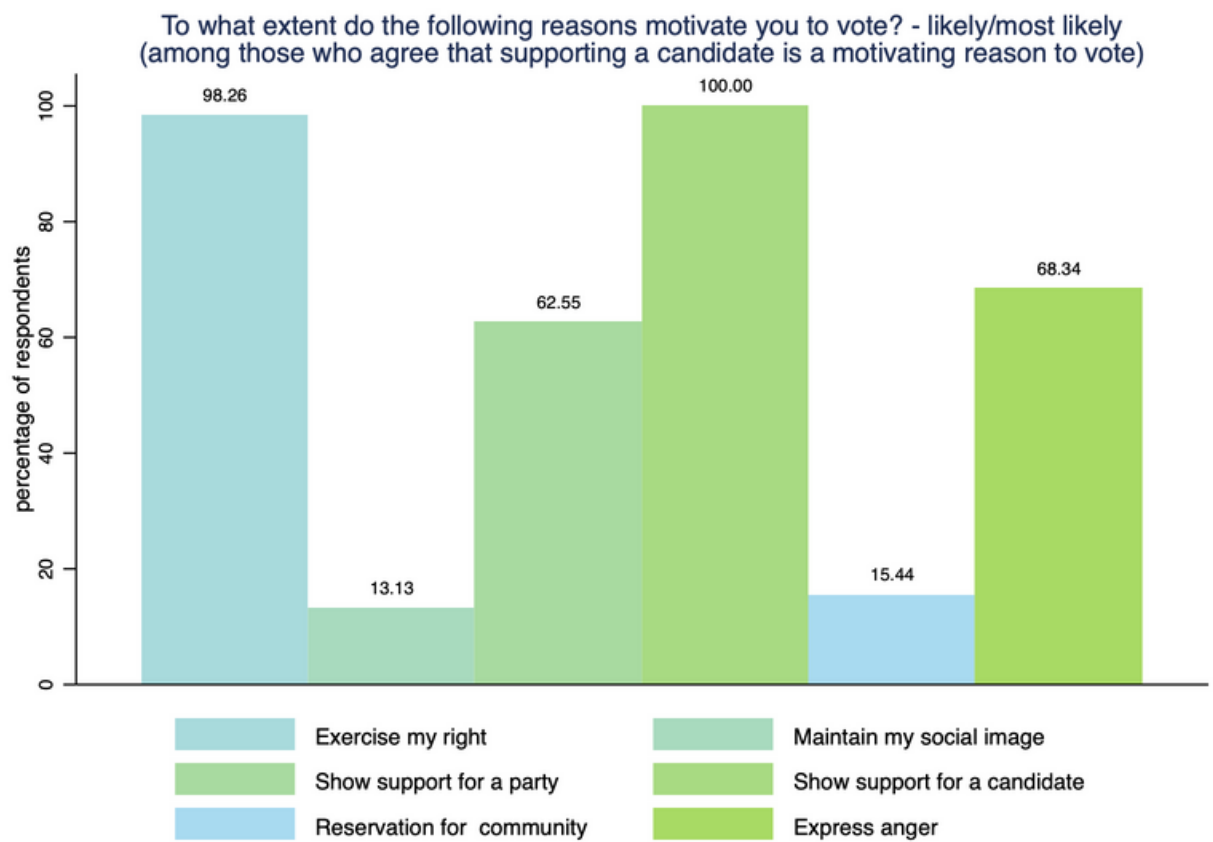
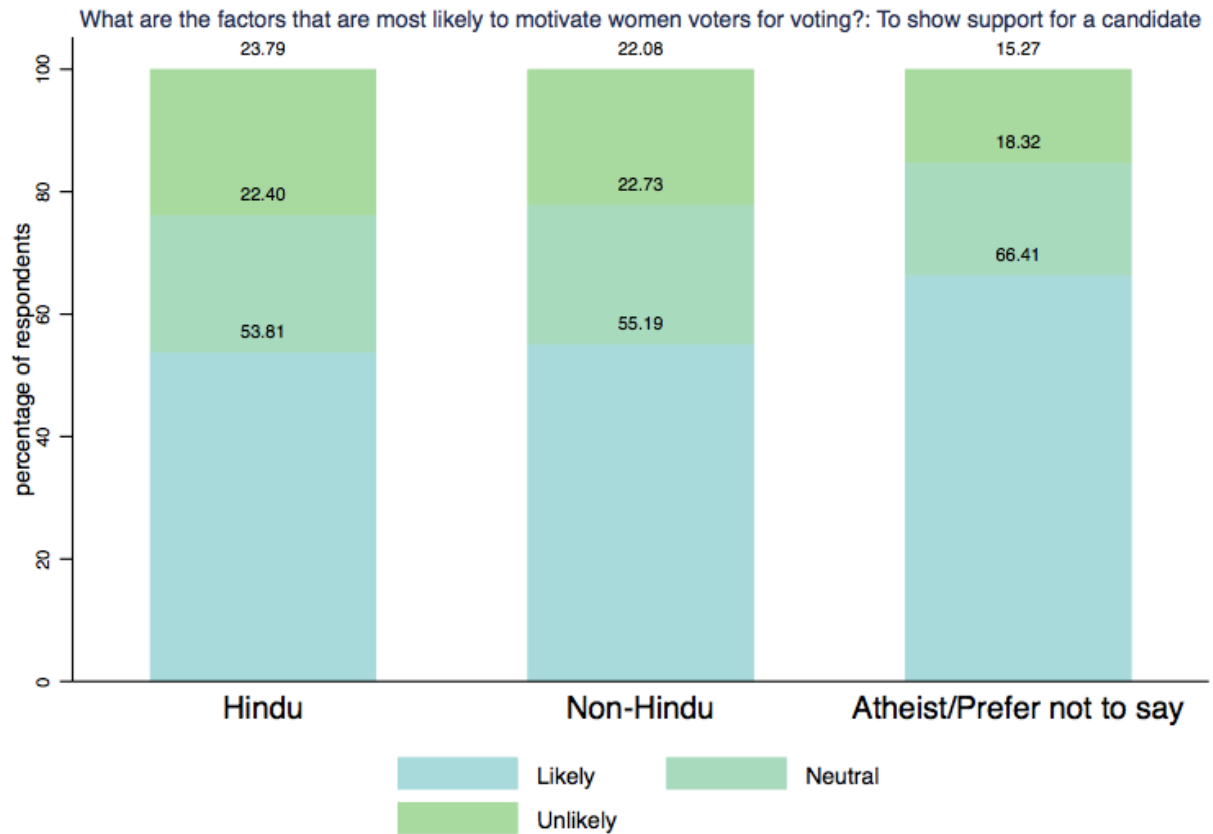


Among these participants who have voted in the past,

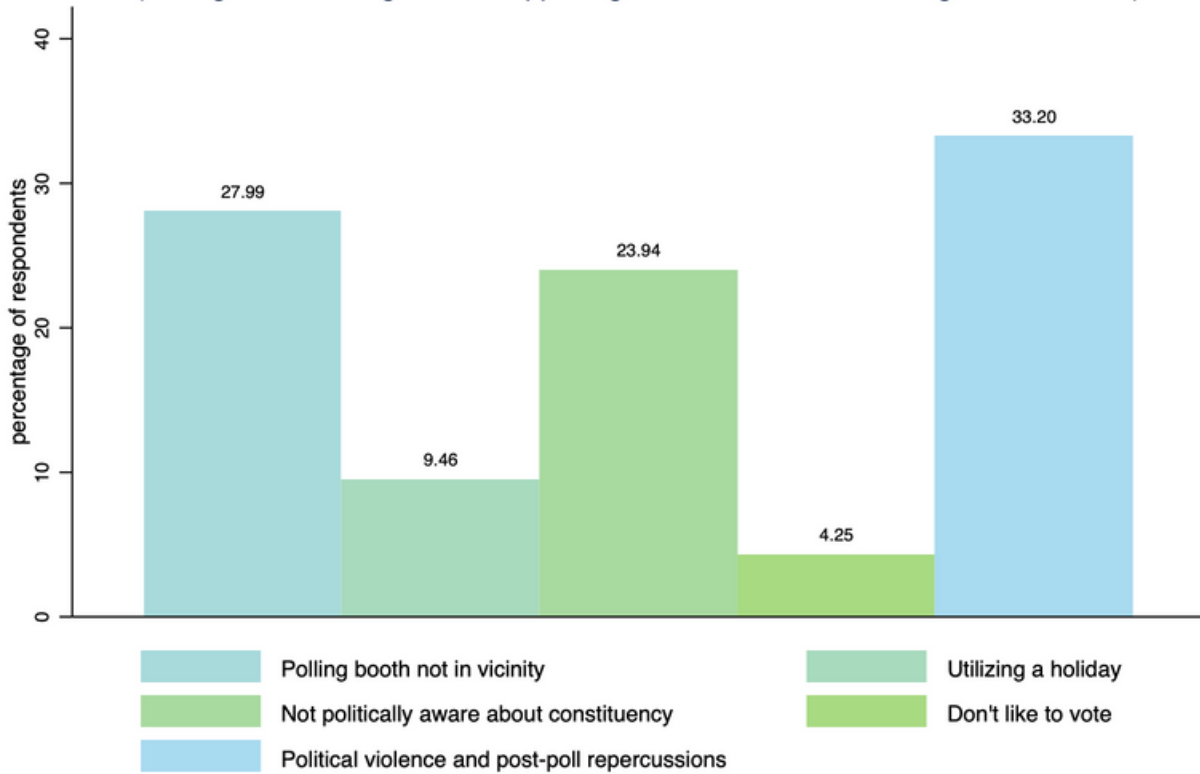


Distribution among different groups

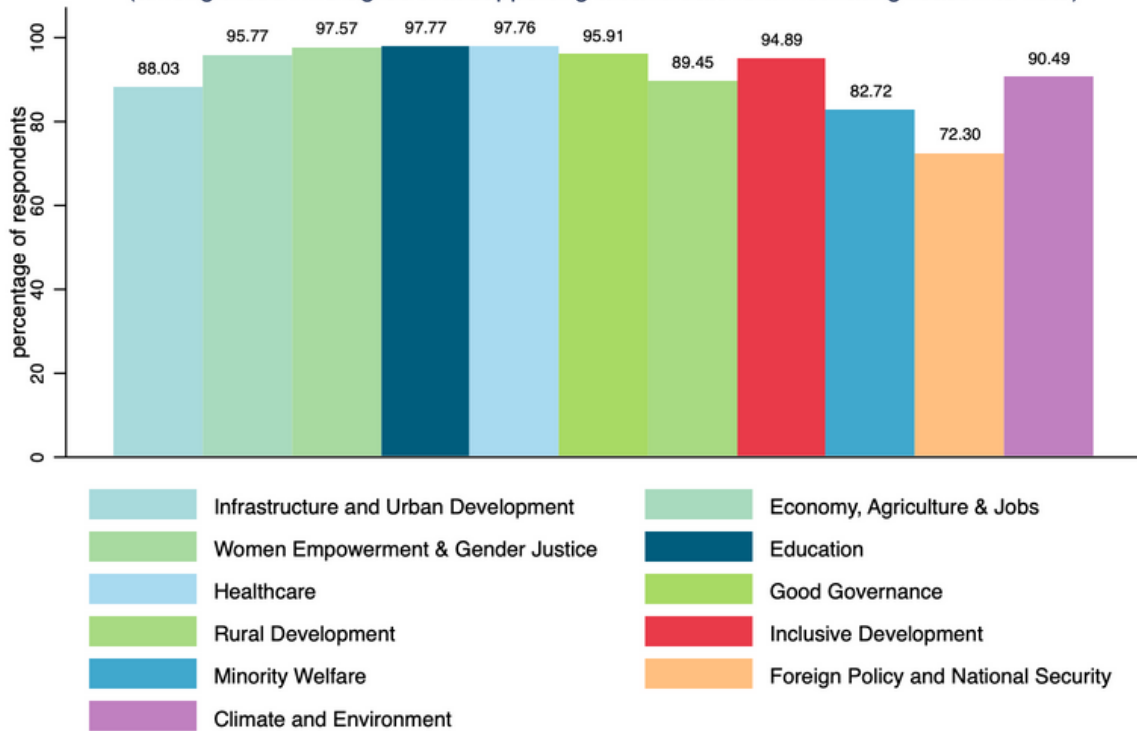




To what extent do the following reasons demotivate you to vote? - likely/most likely (among those who agree that supporting a candidate is a motivating reason to vote)

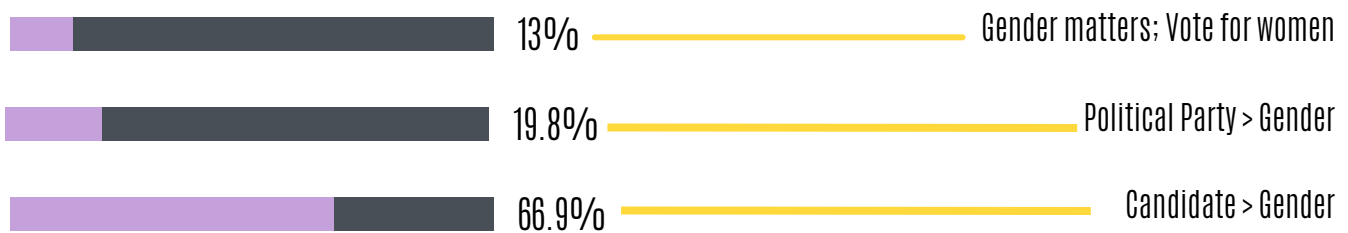


How likely do the following issues/matters motivate you to vote? - likely/most likely (among those who agree that supporting a candidate is a motivating reason to vote)

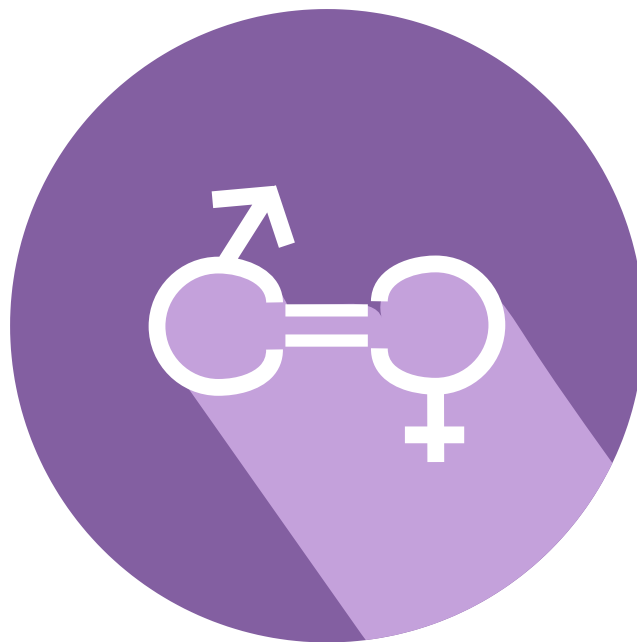


IMPORTANCE OF CANDIDATE'S GENDER

We asked the participants if the gender of the candidate matters while making a voting decision. Overall, the majority (66.9%), the candidate mattered more than their gender.

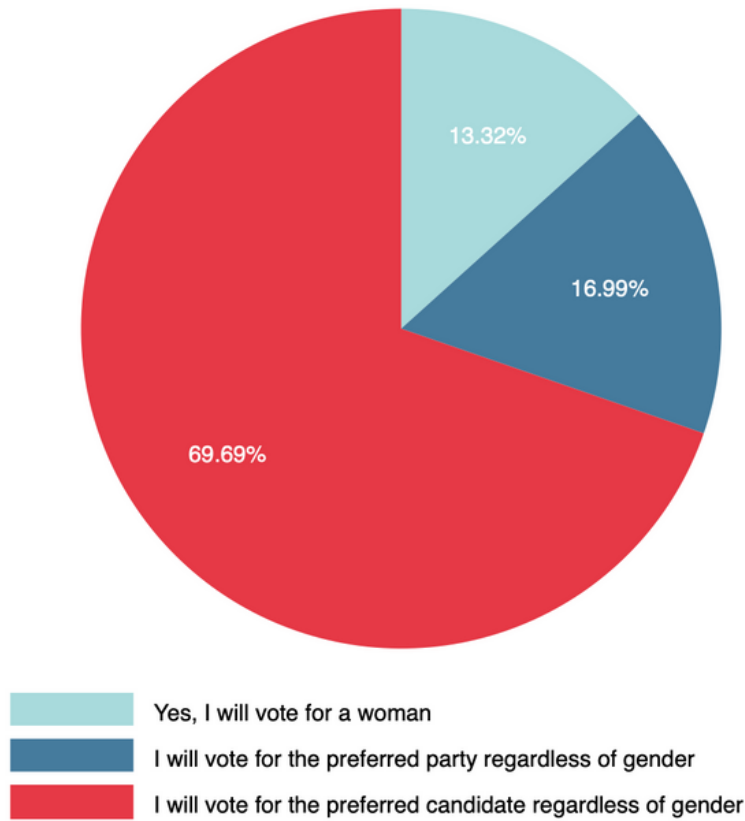


However, according to 73.4% of the respondents, women candidates have a better understanding of women-related issues.



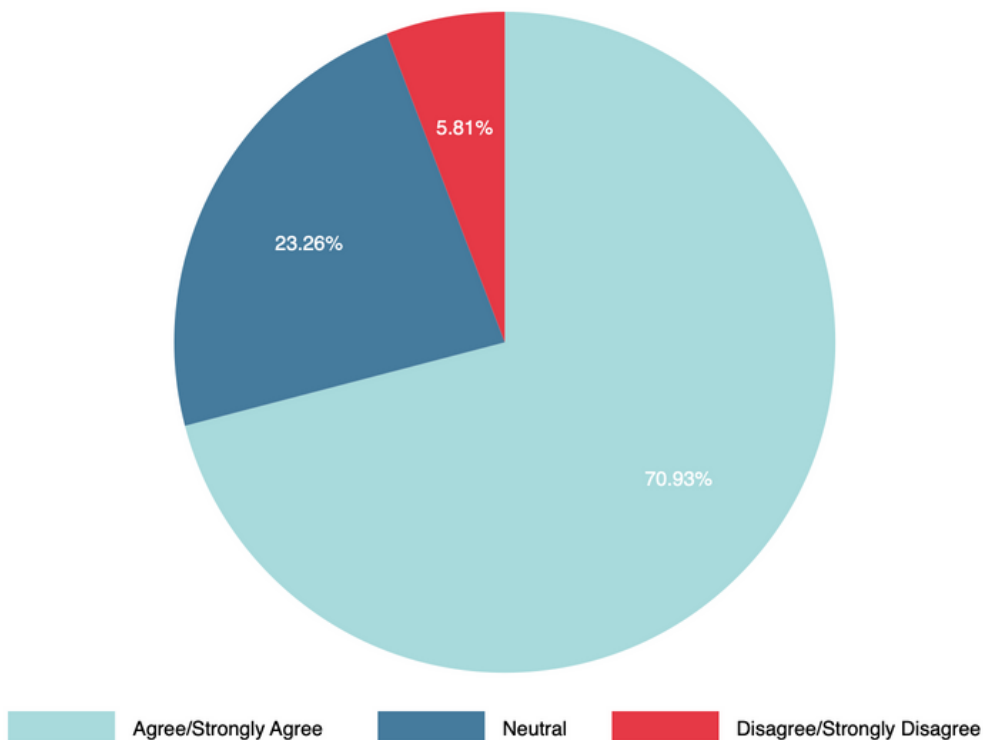
Among those who are motivated to vote to show support for a candidate.

Does the gender of the candidate motivate you to vote
(among those who agree that supporting a candidate is a motivating reason to vote)



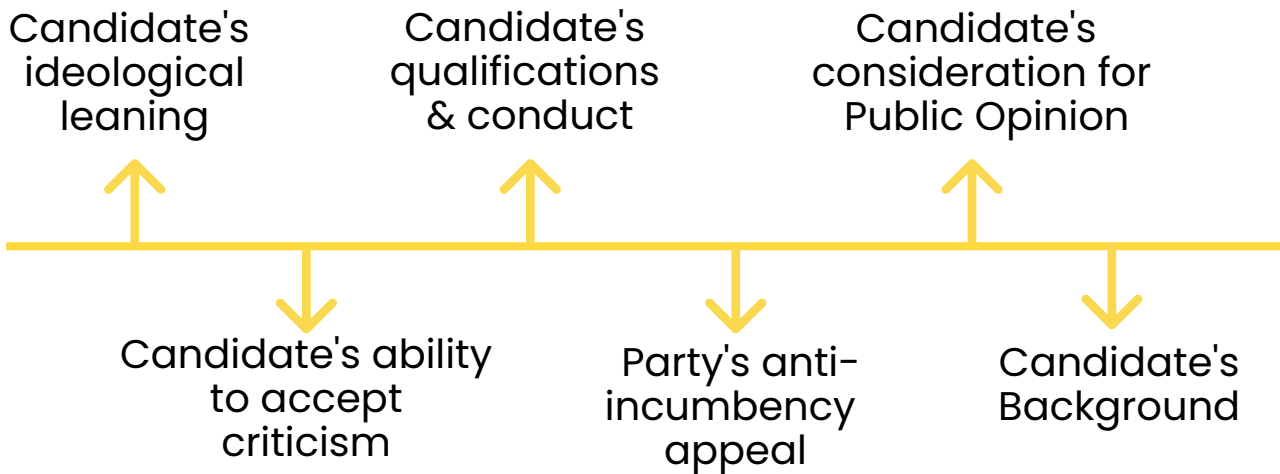
Among the participants who have voted in the past

Does a woman candidate have a better understanding of women-related issues?

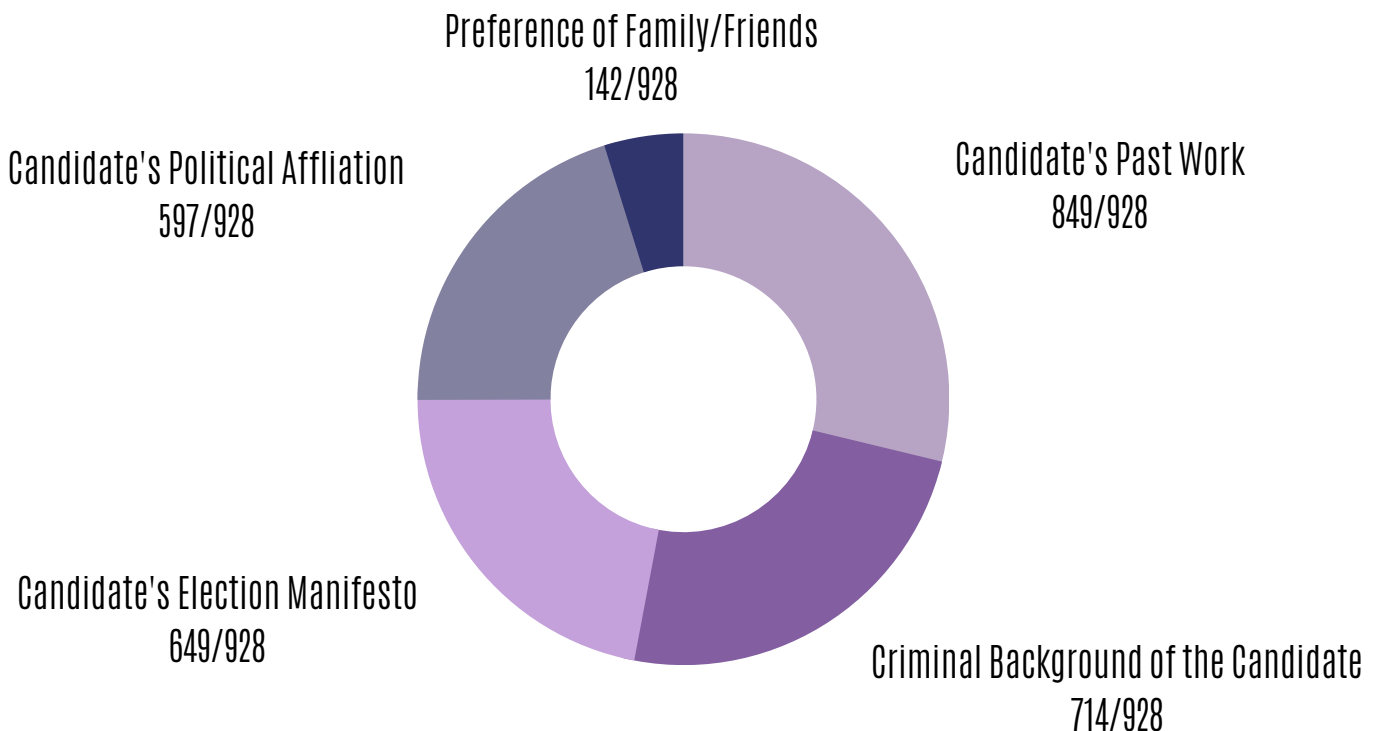


OTHER FACTORS

Below are the factors mentioned by the respondents in addition to the survey options -



Other factors that influence the choice of candidate for our participants in an election are mentioned below.



C. Social Aspects

What Issues Matter?

In order to further understand motivations and behaviours of young women voters, we asked them about the issues that matter while voting in an election. The survey had the following options: education, healthcare, women empowerment, welfare, economic, rural and urban development, minority and inclusive development, good governance, foreign policy and national security. Respondents also had the option to write about issues other than the ones mentioned in the survey.



90.7%



90%



89.6%



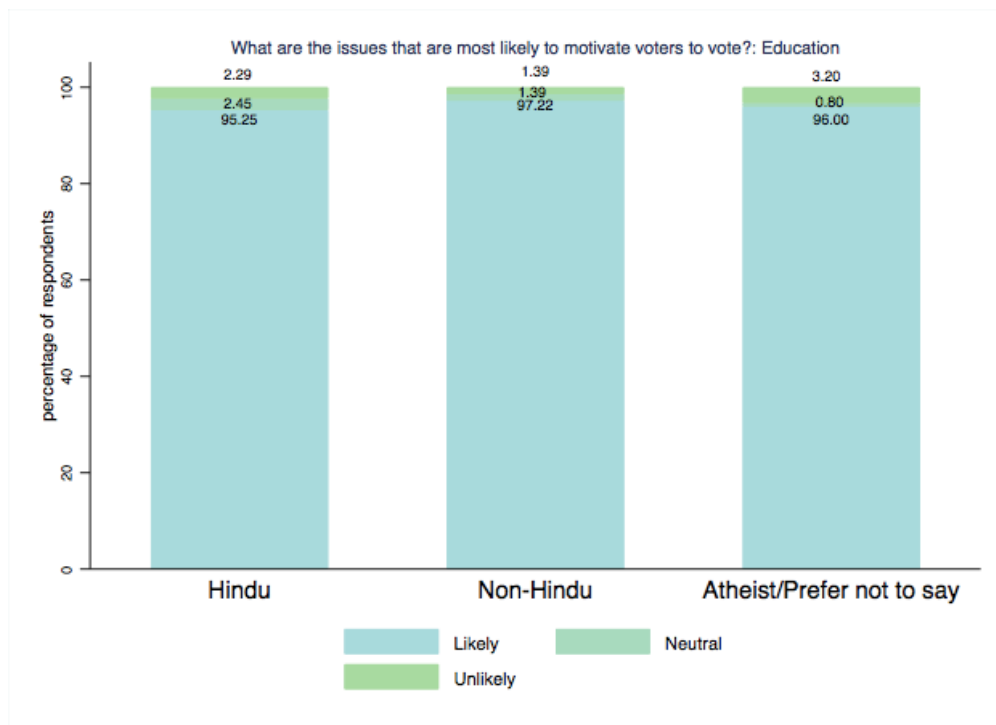
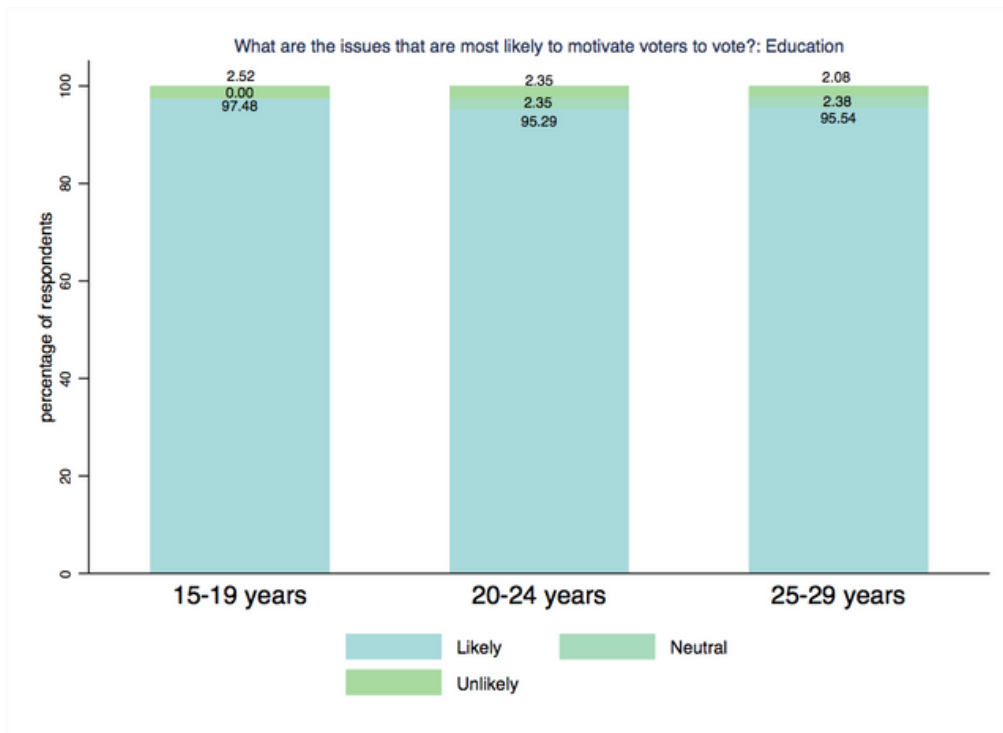
65
%

Education, Healthcare, and Women Empowerment & Gender Justice were rated the most important, each by 90% of the participants. With only 65% saying **Foreign Policy and National Security** is important to them, this came last.

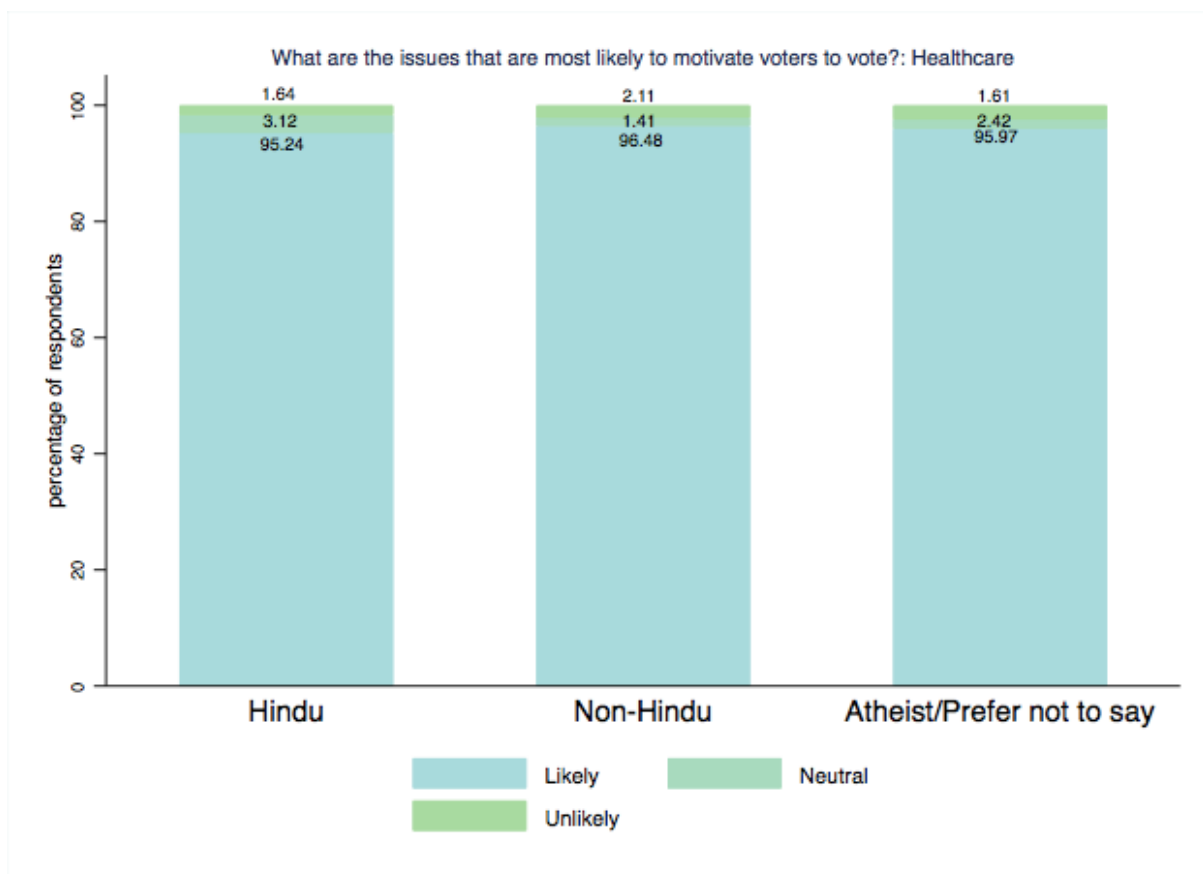
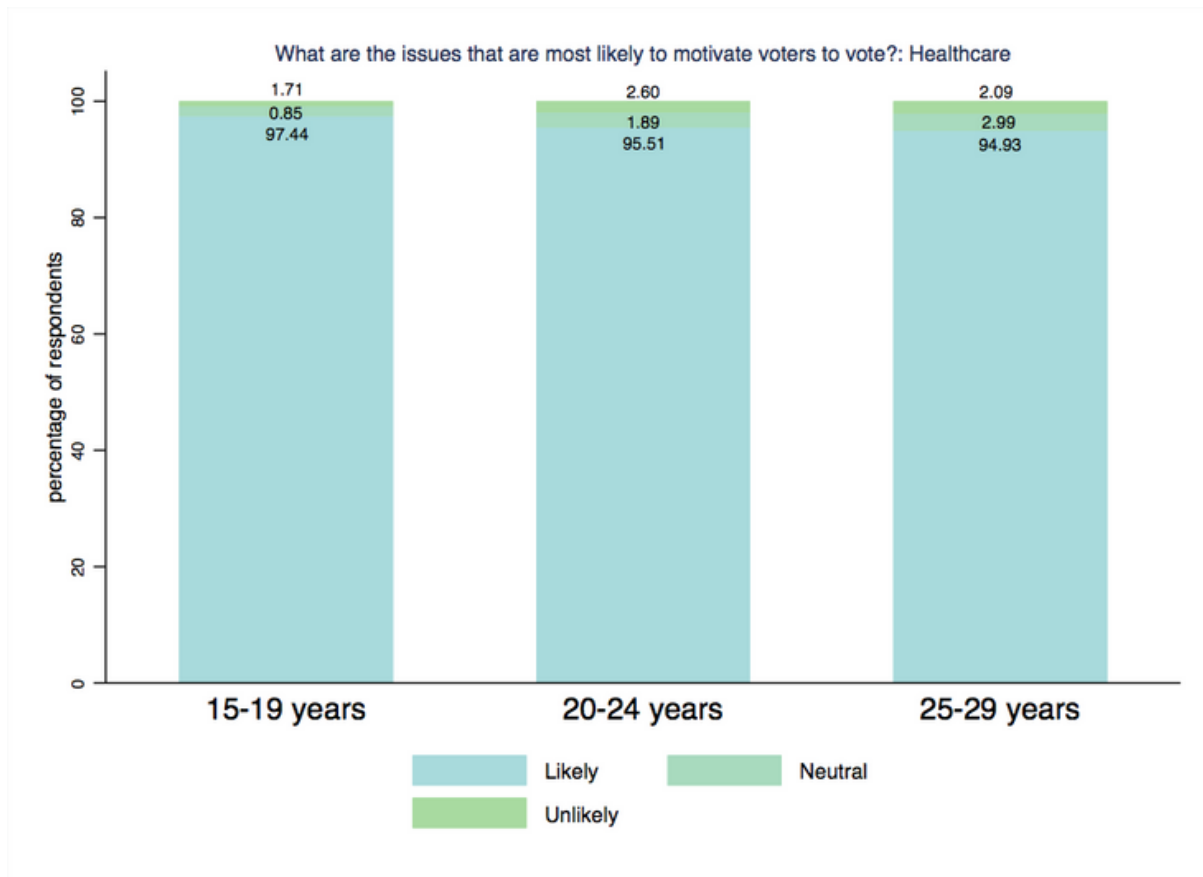
OTHER IMPORTANT ISSUES MENTIONED BY THE RESPONDENTS :

Mental health awareness, development of a scientific temper, elderly and animal care, sexual and reproductive health and rights, indigenous land and forest rights, better working conditions for the working class, and LGBTQ rights.

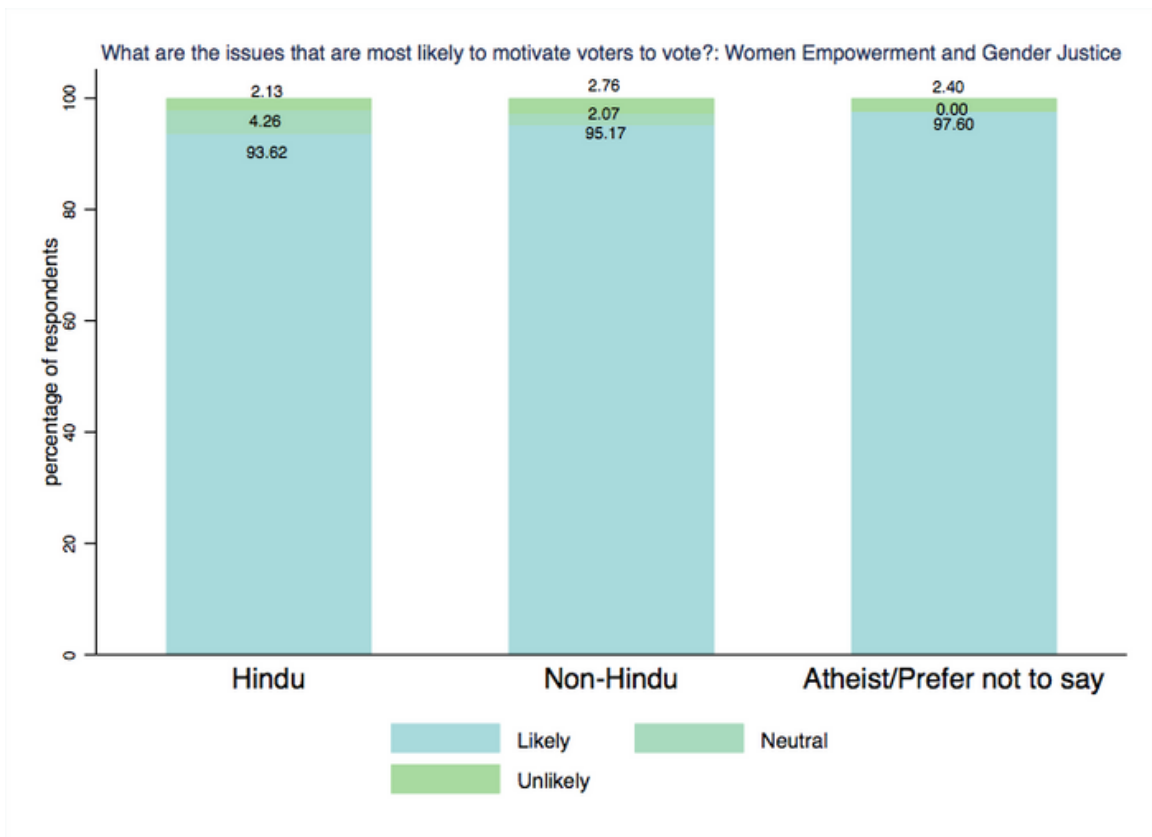
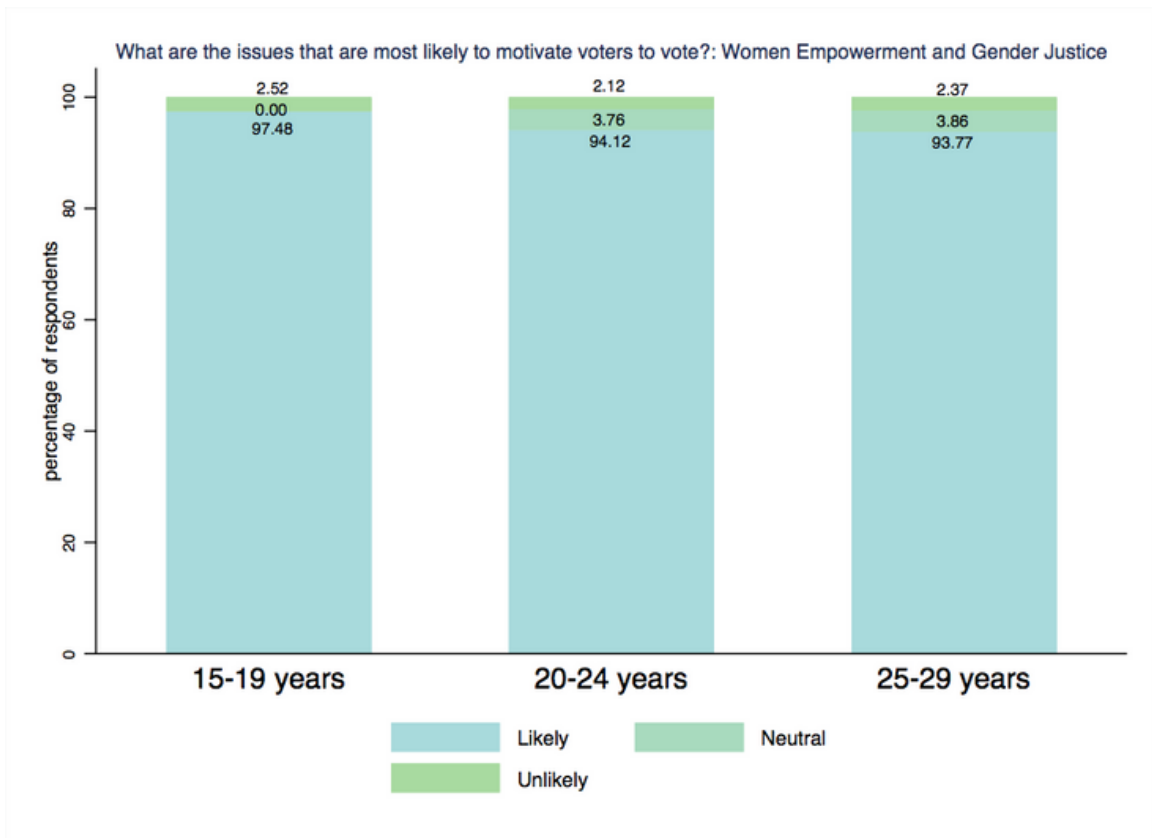
Education: By Age Group and Religion



Healthcare: By Age Group and Religion

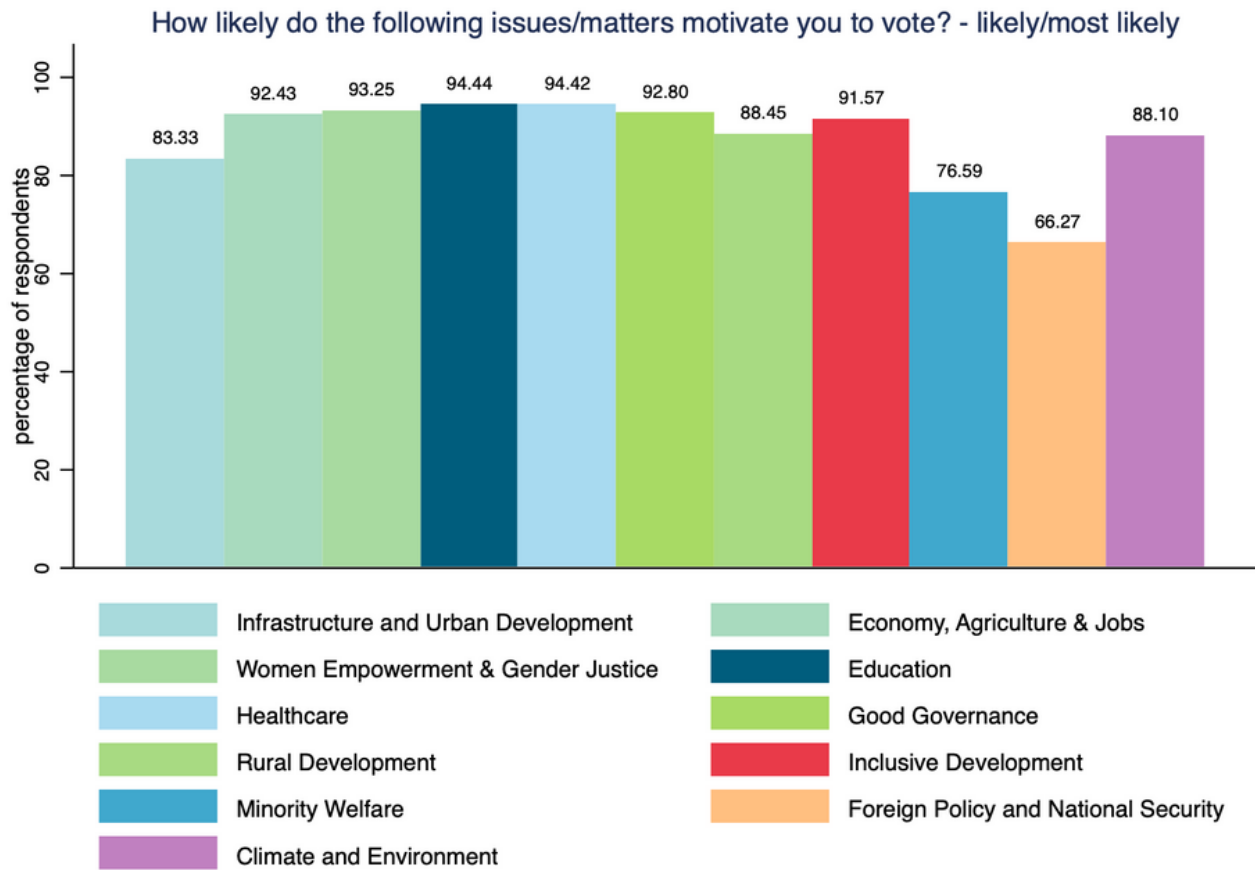


Women Empowerment & Gender Justice: By Age Group and Religion



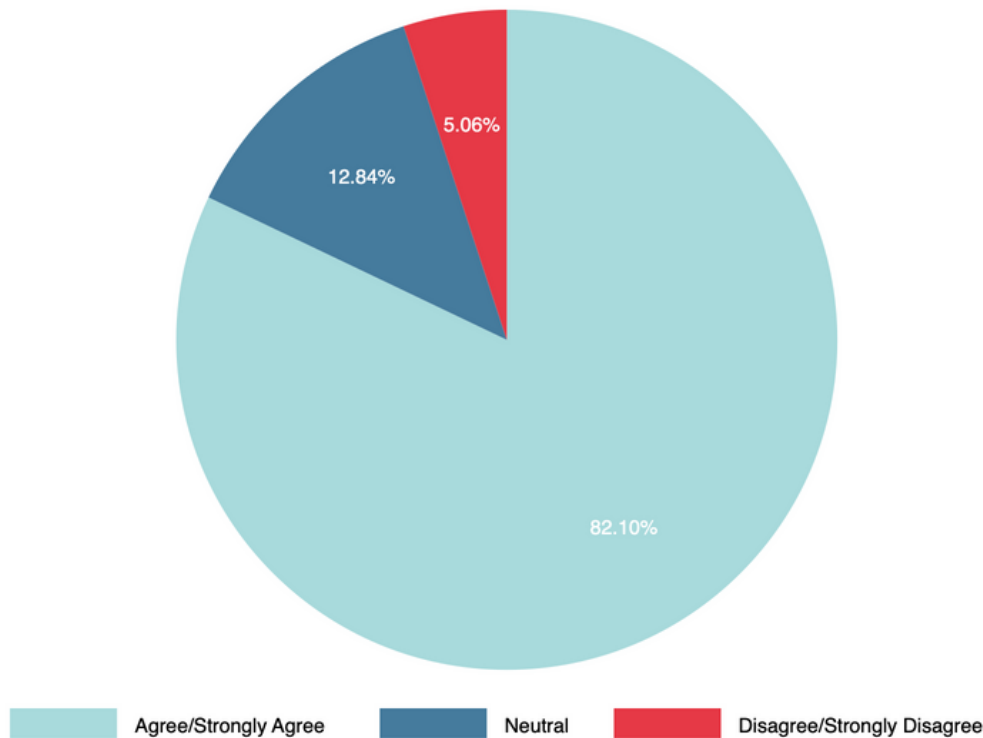
Issues that matter the most to young women voters

Among those who voted in the past



Women Voters' experiences and views on Voting

If you have ever voted in the past, did you find the process easy?



Additionally, participants indicated other factors that they were demotivated by such as the **lack of postal voting services** (especially Non Resident Indians), **lengthy bureaucratic processes** that included getting registered for a Voter ID, or going through a process where there was an error made by the government while registering the voter's name in the voters' list. For a few, voting timelines and processes were confusing.

Lack of suitable representatives also made many women feel that they did not really have a choice when it came to voting because everyone was equally bad. The fact that there was no diversity in representation and NOTA was not a real option available to them also demotivated several women.

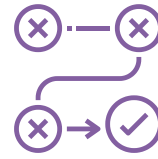
The lack of adequate facilities at polling booths – non-observance of Covid 19 protocols, having to stand in long queues in excessive heat, and the fear of possible violence – also keeps many women from wanting to vote.



Lack of postal voting



Lengthy bureaucratic processes



Lengthy error correction processes



Lack of faith in electoral politics



Lack of suitable representatives



NOTA not being a real option



Non-observance of Covid-19 protocols



Fear of possible violence



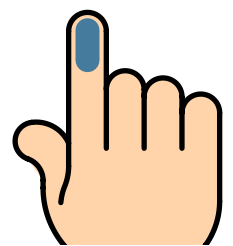
Long queues in excessive heat

Above mentioned reasons were taken from the responses of the participants who mentioned these barriers beyond the ones listed in survey options. **Two participants reported that a lack of faith in the system of electoral politics, and their inability to believe that voting can initiate any change, demotivated them from wanting to cast their vote.**

E. Key Recommendations

We hope that this study would provide direction to candidates, political parties and the Election Commission of India to work on areas that would lead to an inclusive electoral experience for young women voters.

- Candidates and Parties must look at sections C and E that outline the enablers and disablers for young women voters while making their voting decisions. A key call out is making manifestos accessible and considering the digital divide, linguistic diversity and access to information for women while drafting the manifestos.
- There is a huge scope for improving processes, such as provisions for postal voting facilities and/or making the process of switching constituencies simpler for those who don't live in their hometowns.
- Improving communication about the process for getting Voter IDs or correcting or adding names (in case of omission error) in Electoral Rolls could improve participation for many.
- Provide adequate drinking water facilities and toilets for voters who are waiting in line to vote.
- Ensure that the polling station is disability-friendly and that there is easy access for people with disabilities.
- Provide shade or other shelter for voters who are waiting in line to protect them from the sun or other adverse weather conditions.
- Regrettably, the issue of Public Safety continues to be a major obstacle to women's participation in public engagement activities. Enhancing the security measures at polling stations and ensuring transparency and reliability in the process would greatly enhance women's confidence and increase their participation.



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