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### **Findings**

Despite the marginalization they have been facing on multiple fronts, Muslims regularly vote in the elections. Thus, I argue in this dissertation about the sustained engagement of Muslims with the voting process and democratic ethos. I would like to put forward three interconnected propositions argued in separate chapters as findings to the research questions discussed earlier. First, contrary to popular belief, Muslim voters are politically as heterogeneous as any other community of voters. As the numbers and narratives around the voting behavior of Muslims suggest, they are sophisticated individuals as voters who would vote for different parties according to the local electoral context of the party; the data shows that Muslims do not only vote the SP and split their votes and support among parties like the BSP, the Congress, and other smaller parties. They even voted for the BJP; their electoral support for the BJP ranged from 3 to 9 percent in UP. During my fieldwork, I met many Muslim voters who intended to vote for the BJP in the upcoming elections because of multiple reasons: for instance, the party's government in UP provided them more opportunities and helped them rebuild their homes under the *Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana*. Another popular misconception is that Muslims are influenced by the Ulama and vote for a party that the latter supports. The data, however, suggests otherwise: previous academic works and the data from my own fieldwork point out that Muslim voters disagree with religious leaders giving support to political parties at the time of elections. Besides, it is important to note that religious leaders like an *Alim* do hold importance in the religious sphere, but have only a marginal role when it comes to influencing Muslim voters in the elections.

While Muslims do vote for Muslim candidates, they do so only when the candidate has a real possibility of winning. This is an important piece of scholarship that has debunked many myths about the voting behavior of Muslims. But how do Muslim voters arrive at this decision? As I argue in the same chapter on the political heterogeneity observable among Muslims, Muslim voters take into consideration their local electoral *arithmetic* and apply this logic to the probable winner as they do not like to see their votes being wasted. By this logic, if a Muslim-led party wants to win the election in a seat where SCs have a considerable presence, then the party should nominate an SC, rather than a Muslim. Only in that case, voters would support a Muslim-based party, or else, they would switch to a better winnable option. The reading of qualitative data along with the survey's findings resulted in a three-fold understanding of a sophisticated Muslim voter who, unlike the stereotypes he or she is often put into, is a cautious voter who thinks independently as well as on a collective level.

Second, Muslims vote for co-ethnics not because of their religion, but because of other factors like the population context, the concerned party's standing in an area, and the candidate's personal traits; combined, these contexts develop into the winning prospect of a candidate. But this is hardly the whole story; in other words, those findings are insufficient for throwing light on the 'supply' side of an equation. If the findings of earlier works were related to the 'how' questions of the voting equation, my own findings take the argument further and investigate the 'who' question involved in the voting behavior of Muslims. Thus, the next proposition in the dissertation is related to the research question: what does political representation mean to the community? Whom do they vote for? The account tells us that Muslims vote for a politician whose claims struck a chord with the voters; for example, in a particular case in UP, voters of a city have kept a politician in the office for over forty years, because of his time-tested strategy of holding the local Nawab family responsible for all the disadvantages the city faces, which found reception among the voters. Moreover, his deliberate move of identifying with the people has convinced them that he is "like them," which also manifests in the many stories about the victimization he has faced; his strongman attitude and his usage of abuses and slangs have convinced the voters that the man walks the talk; and his importance in the party and his 'formidability' at the local constituency level have convinced the voters that he is indispensable. The comparison between him and his electoral opponents also suggests the reasons for voters to choose him over others. His political 'style' is based on the contested concept of populism which, as I argue, is a *rhetorical* style of politics: a style in which a populist builds rapport with voters to ensure his/her sustained electoral success and looks at society as a sphere divided between the common people and a minority section of elites. This finding provides a conceptual as well as empirical viewpoint to understand representation from the vantage point of the process through which voters view their legislators discussing the issue of welfare and their other problems. This assessment of claims through a framework of populism helps us understand why the leader makes those claims as well as the reason behind the acceptance of those by voters. This account also informs us about the possibility of voters supporting a particular co-ethnic because of the winning prospects of the candidate and his constant endeavor to stay in power.

Third, the 'why' question of the electoral rationale is the final proposition put forward by the dissertation. The reason for discussing how and whom Muslims vote for before dwelling on the primary question of the dissertation is to situate the reasons for Muslims' voting behavior in the overall quotidian understanding of electoral participation, which is not only formed at the times of elections, but is also influenced by the factors coming up between two consecutive elections. I argue that a Muslim would vote in an election to choose his favorite candidate at the polls, which is not a straightforward choice as it seems but is a complex and layered process in which a voter will weigh among many candidates in terms of the local electoral context of the party he/she belongs to, the political style of a candidate, etc.; a Muslim also votes as a way of using a transactional tool, that is, to get something in return from a political candidate. This reason plays out at an individual level as well as at the community level, in which a Muslim chooses a candidate who would further their representation at the policy level. More importantly, Muslims vote as a matter of right; a Muslim will also vote to keep himself/herself and the family safe from riots and general violence in their daily lives. Finally, a Muslim would also vote in an election in the hope of being counted, as I have argued with the help of a vignette

at the outset of this chapter. Their electoral participation is based on hope, their collective sense of belonging, and their belief in the potential of the voting process, of ushering in a better future; and this is what makes the findings interesting.

Another move that I made to arrive at the findings is to explicitly compare the voting rationales of Muslim voters with those of Hindu voters in order to reflect on the distinctiveness between them, if any. The question that may come up at this point is: are Muslim voters a unique class of voters, or are they just like any other voter belonging to any other religion? Both these propositions are meaningless if we would not go for an intentional comparison between Muslim voters and non-Muslim voters. Hence, this comparison has been made for the findings cited throughout the dissertation. I argue that Hindu voters share some commonalities with their Muslim counterparts: strong motivation to vote and their sophisticated process of arriving at their choice of a candidate or party. They vote as a matter of right/as a tool to extract a better deal from a candidate/for their belief that the act of voting would change their future, or for hope as a reason to vote/to choose their favorite candidate/participate for the sake of participation in the act, etc. It is important to note here that the voters I interviewed attached no importance to the candidate's religion. However, in other areas, the religion of a voter affected their voting choices. The Muslim voter would often vote to ensure the safety and survival of his/her family and community. And as I have noticed, this last reason is the most pressing one for Muslim voters. On the other hand, a Hindu voter was not found worrying about this during the fieldwork. Similarly, while a Hindu voter I met would just vote without expecting anything in return, it seemed like a privilege only he could afford. The socio-economic context of the voter has been found to be the most important factor shaping the different motivations to vote in an election.