

## REVIEWER'S REPORT

Manuscript No.: IJAR-53685

Date: 04/09/2025

**Title: How Caste-Based Identities Shape Economic Aspirations and Political Alignment in India.**

### Recommendation:

**Accept after minor revision.**

Rating	Excel.	Good	Fair	Poor
Originality	✓			
Techn. Quality			✓	
Clarity			✓	
Significance		✓		

Reviewer Name: Dr. Bishwajit Rout

Date: 04/09/2025

### Reviewer's Comment for Publication.

*(To be published with the manuscript in the journal)*

*The reviewer is requested to provide a brief comment (3-4 lines) highlighting the significance, strengths, or key insights of the manuscript. This comment will be Displayed in the journal publication alongside with the reviewers name.*

- Significance:** This paper highlights how caste identities continue to shape economic aspirations and political alignments in India despite rapid growth and social change. By synthesizing evidence on intergenerational mobility, networks, and electoral behavior, it shows how caste influences education, occupations, migration, and party choice. Its policy implications stress the need for inclusive representation, transparent welfare delivery, and data-driven approaches to reduce inequality.
- Strength:** The strength of this study lies in its comprehensive synthesis of existing literature, combined with an illustrative village pilot survey. It integrates insights from economics, political science, and sociology to build a conceptual framework linking identity, aspirations, and alignment. By connecting national-level evidence with local perceptions, it demonstrates both macro patterns and micro realities, making its findings relevant for research and policy.
- Key Insight:** The key insight is that caste acts as both a constraint and a motivator: networks, discrimination, and policies shape aspiration windows, while political alignment emerges through brokers who mediate access to resources. The unanimous village finding that caste drives voting reinforces national evidence. Ultimately, aspirations rise and caste salience softens when inclusive policies expand exposure, representation, and transparent access to opportunities.

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### *Reviewer's Comment / Report*

The paper titled “*How Caste-Based Identities Shape Economic Aspirations and Political Alignment in India.*” synthesizes evidence on caste's influence on India's economic aspirations and political alignment, using a literature review and a pilot survey of 33 villagers (all affirming caste's role in voting). It explores caste's impact on education, occupation, migration, and political behavior, mediated by policies like reservations. Strengths: robust theoretical grounding, policy relevance; weaknesses: small, non-representative sample, limited primary data. Overall, a compelling overview advocating for transparent welfare and inclusive education, needing larger-scale empirical validation.

#### **Suggestions for Improvement:**

1. The introduction could better highlight the novelty of this study (what gap it fills relative to existing literature).
2. It might also outline how the paper integrates the literature review, framework, and pilot evidence into a coherent argument.
3. The review sometimes summarizes rather than critically synthesizes.
4. More explicit discussion of contradictions in the literature (e.g., convergence vs persistence; descriptive vs substantive representation) would strengthen the analysis.
5. The framework could be visually represented (diagram/figure) for clarity.
6. It would also benefit from hypothesized relationships or testable propositions, which could guide future empirical research.
7. The Methods section could detail sampling bias risks (e.g., why this particular village, potential social desirability bias in unanimous responses).
8. Including more qualitative quotes from respondents would enrich understanding beyond the yes/no result.
9. Findings could be expanded with frequency counts (e.g., how many cited each reason) or illustrative verbatim quotes.
10. The discussion could explicitly address alternative explanations (e.g., regional political culture, class factors intertwined with caste).
11. Could include feasibility considerations e.g., challenges in implementing transparent welfare systems in weak-capacity settings

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This paper offers a thoughtful synthesis of how caste identities shape economic aspirations and political alignment, enriched by a clear conceptual framework and illustrative pilot evidence. Its strengths lie in connecting literature, theory, and local perspectives, while limitations include the narrow empirical base and need for deeper critical engagement. With revisions addressing these gaps, the paper holds strong potential for advancing debates in political economy. Addressing the identified weaknesses will make it suitable for publication in IJAR.

I recommend this paper for publication after minor revision.