

**POLITICAL AWARENESS AND DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION AMONG URBAN  
UNSKILLED LABOURERS: A STUDY ON STREET VENDORS AND DOMESTIC  
WORKERS IN SILCHAR, ASSAM**

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**Abstract:**

Unskilled labourers play as a foundation role for an urban economy, yet their level of political awareness remains understudied, especially in small urban centres. Political awareness can empower them to demand better conditions, access welfare benefits, and hold authorities accountable. The lack of political awareness rips their democratic participation, and their isolated voices remain unheard. The main objective of this study is to explore the levels of political awareness of these workers, identify the factors influencing their awareness, and examine the barriers faced by them in participating in political process. With the help of the purposive sampling technique a total of 30 respondents-15 street vendors and 15 domestic workers- were interviewed, selected from ward 11 and ward 22 of Silchar, Assam. The findings reveal that low level of political awareness, limited knowledge of welfare schemes, and minimal engagement with governance processes, among unskilled labourers. Socio-economic factors like education, economic vulnerability, media access, and gender significantly influenced awareness levels.

**Keywords:** *Political awareness, unskilled labourers, informal sector, street vendors, domestic workers, Silchar urban area, participatory democracy*

**1. Introduction:**

Employment is one of the most important agendas for any government. It helps to get jobs and empowers to earn for the youth increasing domestic consumption. Unemployment is a major challenge for many developing and underdevelopment economies including India. It happens generally due to lack of skills or skill demand-supply mismatch (Gaikwad, 2026). Unskilled labourers form the backbone of the informal sector as well as an entire economy. They are crucial for sustaining the urban economy, especially small centres like Silchar. These workers are usually tangled with issues like low income, harsh working conditions, lack of social security and other problems. Despite their essential role in urban economies, their voices are often absent in political discourse. In urban centres like Silchar, street vendors and domestic workers face not only economic hardships but also political marginalization. Their limited political awareness restricts their ability to access welfare benefits and assert their rights. The several studies while provided a great understanding of the socio-economic challenges and vulnerabilities faced by informal workers in India, however, the specific aspect of political awareness at the local level among these workers focused only by few, Research specifically addressing unskilled labourers' engagement with governance structures in smaller cities like Silchar is scarce. This study aims to assess the levels of political awareness among unskilled labourers- street vendors and domestic workers in the Silchar urban area. It identifies the factors influencing their awareness, the barriers faced by them in participating in political process, and their perceptions of governance. By highlighting the political invisibility of a key segment of the urban workforce, this study contributes to the discourse on inclusive and participatory democracy.

## **2. Literature Review:**

The existing literature clearly brings out the harsh realities faced by informal and unorganized workers in India, especially domestic workers and street vendors. Iyer (2004) points out how these workers are stuck in low-paying, insecure jobs due to weak implementation of laws and lack of government support. Sivakumar (2016) adds that many of these workers, particularly women from marginalized castes, face multiple layers of discrimination, which further limits their access to basic needs like education, healthcare, and housing. Roy and Banerjee (2020) show how the COVID-19 pandemic made things worse for domestic workers, most of whom are women, as they lost their jobs and were excluded from relief programs due to the unrecognized nature of their work. Similarly, Bhowmik (2012) and Assan & Chambers (2014) focus on the struggles of street vendors who, despite contributing to the urban economy, face constant harassment, eviction, and lack of legal rights. Narayana (2010) highlights how gender and caste strongly influence who gets what kind of work and at what wage, pointing out the structural inequalities in the labour market. Reghunathan (2019) brings attention to the everyday challenges of domestic workers who often work without contracts, job security, or social protection. He stresses the urgent need for laws that recognize and protect domestic work, including the adoption of ILO Convention 189. Across all these studies, a common thread is the call for strong, inclusive policies, legal recognition, and social protections that ensure dignity, fair wages, and security for those working in the informal sector. The communication skills, digital literacy, domain knowledge, personality development, team building, problem-solving skills can help to get the dream jobs (Gaikwad, 2021).

## **3. Research Gap:**

The literature provided a great understanding of informal sector workers and their socio-economic challenges and vulnerabilities, working conditions and labour protections. Research scholars highlighted issues like wage insecurity, lack of social security, and unsafe working conditions. However, there remains a significant gap in understanding their political awareness- how informal these workers are about their rights, participation in democratic processes and access to government schemes. Moreover, these literatures are often concentrated in major cities, leaving smaller urban centres like Silchar underexplored. The unique socio-political conditions of such regions- marked by migration, low literacy among labourers, and poor outreach of welfare schemes- demand a localized investigation. This study addresses this thematic and regional gap examining the level of political awareness among unskilled labourers in Silchar, with specific focus on street vendors and domestic workers.

## **4. Methodology:**

Research Design: This study uses mixed method research combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to understand political awareness among unskilled labourers in Silchar. This design helps bridge statistical findings with personal experiences, offering a more complete picture of the political engagement of street vendors and domestic workers.

Study Area: the study was conducted in Ward No. 11 and Ward No. 22 of Silchar town, located in the Cachar district of Assam. These wards were purposively selected due to the high concentration of unskilled labourers, especially street vendors and domestic workers.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique: A total of 30 respondents were selected using purposive sampling technique, including 15 street vendors and 15 domestic workers. The selection was based on accessibility, availability, and willingness to participate.

Data Collection: Both primary and secondary data are used. The primary data was collected through face-to-face interviews using an interview schedule consisting of both structured and unstructured questions. The interview schedule covered topics like political participation, awareness of rights, access to government schemes, and sources of political information. And secondary data were gathered from academic reports, articles, news articles, relevant laws and others. These provided context and supported the interpretation of findings.

Data Analysis: The qualitative responses were thematically analyzed to identify trends, perceptions, and key barriers to political awareness. Responses were categorized by occupational groups and cross-compared to highlight differences in awareness between street vendors and domestic workers.

## **5. Discussion**

Labourers are the backbone of India's economy, actively contributing to sectors like agriculture, construction, and services. Despite this, they suffer from job insecurity, poor wages, unsafe work environments, and limited access to social benefits. Political awareness empowers unskilled labourers by enabling them to claim their rights, demand accountability, and engage in democratic processes. It strengthens their collective voice in governance and policy reforms, paving the way for better socio-economic outcomes. Political engagement can also help combat systemic neglect and exploitation in informal work settings.

### **The Concept of Political Awareness:**

Political awareness is the capacity to understand, evaluate, and engage with political institutions, events, and one's rights. Jefferson aptly stated, "Knowledge is power, knowledge is safety". Meguellati and Alghamdi (2020) describe it as awareness of global and national political structures, while Kavita (2017) emphasizes civic responsibility and rights recognition. Political awareness is vital for making informed decisions, holding leaders accountable, and securing representation. Among unskilled workers, this knowledge fosters empowerment and access to entitlements.

### **Unskilled labourers:**

Unskilled labourers do not require formal training or specialized knowledge and typically perform manual or repetitive tasks. Examples include construction workers, farm labourers, factory workers, and household helpers. They often earn lower wages and work under difficult conditions without social security benefits. The lack of skill development opportunities limits their chances of economic advancement. Unskilled labour, according to Kavita, (2017) refers to "workers engaged in manual, repetitive tasks requiring little or no formal training or skill. They are generally paid lower wages and often work in casual, temporary, or precarious conditions." Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines unskilled laborer as "a person who does unskilled physical work for wages." Therefore, unskilled laborers are those workers who do jobs that do not require any specialized training or skills. They usually do such work that are simple, physical tasks that can be learned quickly on the job. These workers are usually found in the informal sector.

### **Street Vendors and Domestic Workers:**

There are various types of unskilled labourers but this study specifically deals with street vendors and domestic workers, so, their definitions are: According to the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014, a street vendor is defined as "a person engaged in vending of articles, goods, wares, food items or merchandise of everyday use, or offering services to the general public, in a street, lane, sidewalk, footpath, pavement, public park, or any other public place or private area, from a temporary built-up structure or by moving from place to place." And the International Labour Organization (ILO) defines a domestic worker as "a person engaged in work performed in or

for a household or households, within an employment relationship, whether full-time or part-time, and including tasks such as cleaning, cooking, child care, elderly care, and other household duties.”

### **Socio-Economic Conditions of Unskilled Labourers in Urban India:**

Unskilled labourers in urban India form a major part of the informal economy, often earning less than ₹10,000 per month without job security or benefits. They lack access to proper housing, healthcare, and education, particularly among migrant and female workers. A 2022 study found that migrant labourers often face exclusion from government welfare schemes due to the lack of residential proof and proper documentation. Women workers, particularly those employed as domestic workers, street vendors, and daily wage labourers, often earn lower wages than their male counterparts. The average wage gap between men and women in the informal sector is nearly 35%, with women earning significantly less despite performing similar or even more strenuous tasks. Awareness of welfare schemes like Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-Dhan (PMSYM) and Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY) remains low. A 2021 report by NITI Aayog highlighted that only 40% of eligible informal workers were aware of these schemes, and less than 25% had successfully availed benefits. Strengthening labour rights, increasing access to social welfare programs, and ensuring better working conditions are essential steps toward improving the lives of unskilled workers in urban areas. Empowering these workers through education, skill development, and policy reforms will not only enhance their socio-economic status but also contribute to India’s overall economic growth.

### **Legal Provisions:**

Several laws aim to protect unorganized workers. The Minimum Wages Act (1948) ensures minimum compensation, while the Factories Act (1948) governs safe work conditions. The Unorganised Workers’ Social Security Act (2008) provides for health, insurance, and pensions. For street vendors, the Street Vendors Act (2014) mandates licensing and rights-based regulation through Town Vending Committees. Though India lacks a dedicated national law for domestic workers, states like Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Assam include them under the Minimum Wages Act and social security laws. In 2023, Assam introduced a private bill to regulate domestic work, indicating growing recognition of their rights.

### **Associations for Street Vendors:**

Street vendors have formed collectives such as National Association of Street Vendors of India (NASVI) and Federation of Associations of Street Vendors of India (FASVI) to advocate for legal rights, financial access, and policy inclusion. These associations aim to influence urban planning and implement vendor-friendly zoning rules. They act as intermediaries between vendors and authorities, campaigning against eviction and harassment. Such unions also educate vendors on legal rights and facilitate access to welfare schemes. However, participation remains limited due to lack of awareness and bureaucratic hurdles.

### **Associations for Domestic Workers:**

Organizations like the National Domestic Workers Movement (NDWM) and All India Domestic Workers Union (AIDWU) have been instrumental in pushing for legislative protection and better working conditions. These groups advocate minimum wage, paid leave, and grievance redressal. At the state level, Kerala and Tamil Nadu have taken proactive measures in formalizing domestic work and expanding benefits. Despite these efforts, most domestic workers remain unorganized, and state-level initiatives vary widely in reach and effectiveness.

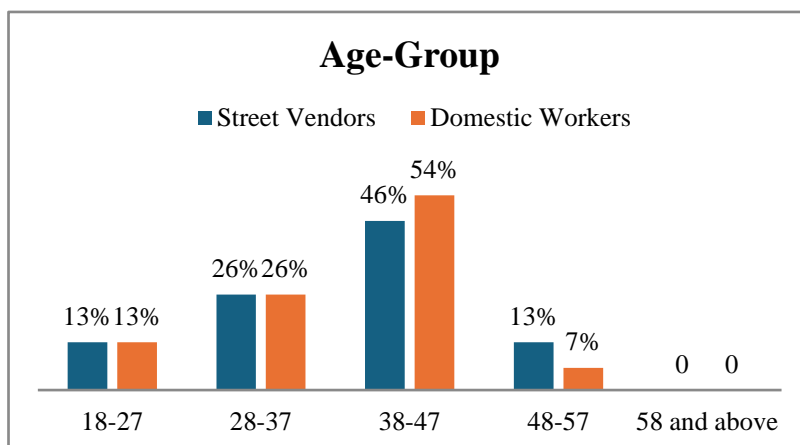
### **Importance of Political Awareness among unskilled Labourers:**

Political awareness enables unskilled workers to understand and claim their rights, participate in policy dialogue, and engage with democratic institutions. A politically aware labour force is better positioned to negotiate fair wages, demand accountability, and access government schemes. A study found that unionized informal workers were 60% more likely to demand fair wages and better working conditions compared to non-unionized workers. Political awareness strengthens democracy and governance. Labourers form a significant portion of the voting population, and their informed participation in elections ensures the selection of representatives who address labour issues. Moreover, collective political engagement can influence legislation and promote labour reforms. Empowering workers through political literacy is thus essential for social justice and inclusive development. Political awareness among unskilled labourers can be a fundamental tool for their empowerment, economic stability, and social progress. It will enable them to fight for fair wages, access welfare programs, contribute to economic growth, and actively participate in democracy.

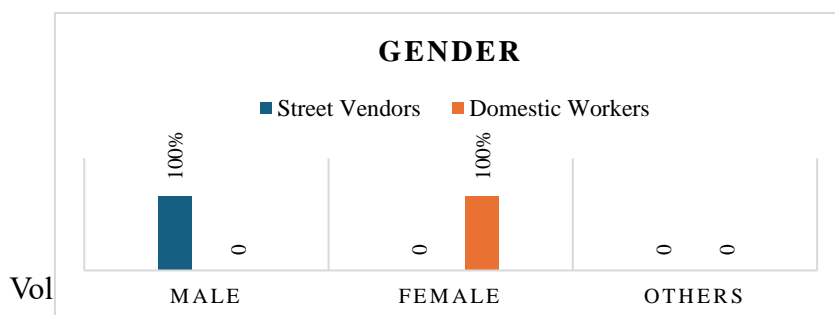
### 6. Data Analysis and Interpretation

This section analyses and interprets the collected data that helps to meet the objectives of the study. The data has been arranged and examined using simple methods like pie-charts, and bar-diagrams.

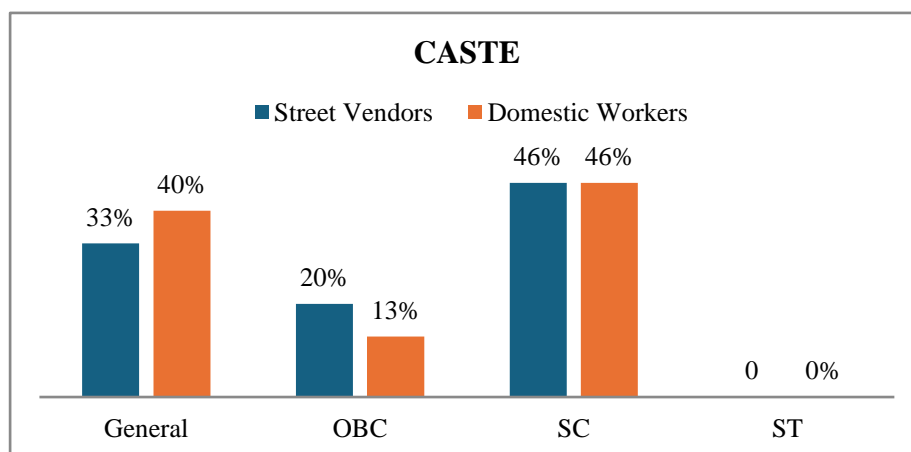
#### Demographic Profile of the Respondents



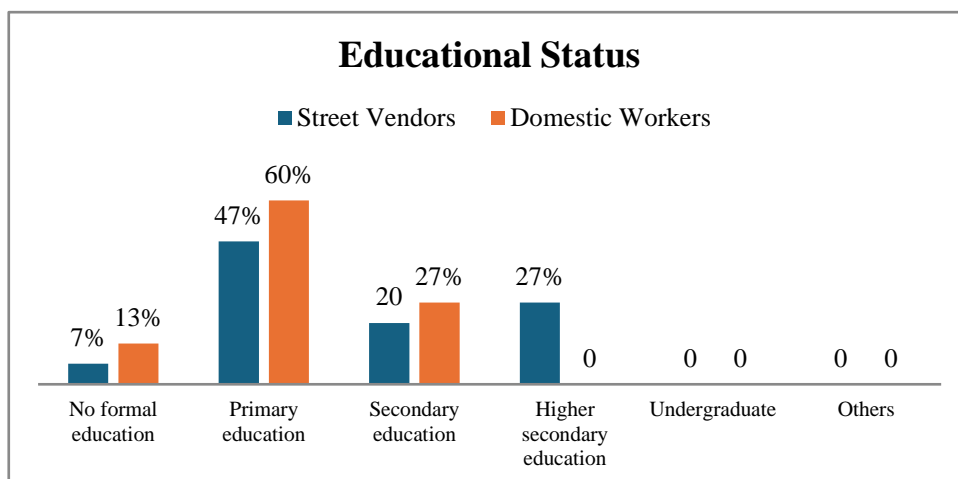
Interpretation: The data shows that most street vendors and domestic workers fall within the age group of 38 to 47 years. Among street vendors, 46% of respondents belong to this age group, while among domestic workers, 54% fall in the same category. This suggests that most people engaged in these occupations are middle-aged, possibly due to a combination of work experience, physical ability, and economic responsibility. The second most represented group is the 28 to 37 age range, with 26% respondents each in both categories. This indicates a fair number of younger adults also take up such work, possibly due to limited job opportunities. The younger age group of 18 to 27 years has the least representation, with only 13% of respondents, each among street vendors and domestic workers, showing that very few young individuals are involved in these jobs. In the 48 to 57 age group, the numbers drop again, with 13% of vendors and only 7% domestic workers, which may be due to the physical demands of the work. No respondents were found in the 58 and above categories in either group.



Interpretation: The data shows that 100% street vendors in the sample are male, and all 100% domestic workers are female. No individuals from the 'others' category were found in either group. This data shows that men are more involved in street vending, while women are more involved in domestic work. It reflects traditional gender roles in society, where men are more involved in outdoor jobs like vending, and women are more involved in household-related work. However, it is also possible that there are female street vendors in the area, but they were not included in this sample.



Interpretation: The data shows the caste-wise distribution of street vendors and domestic workers, along with their percentages. Among street vendors, 33% belong to the General category, 20% are from OBC, and 47% are from the SC category. Similarly, among domestic workers, 40% are from the General category, 13% are OBC, and 47% are SC. No one from the ST category was found in either group. This means that the highest proportion of workers in both occupations come from the Scheduled Castes (47%), showing that people from this socially disadvantaged group are more involved in such informal and low-income jobs. No ST individuals were found in the data, it's possible that they do participate in these jobs but were not included in this sample.

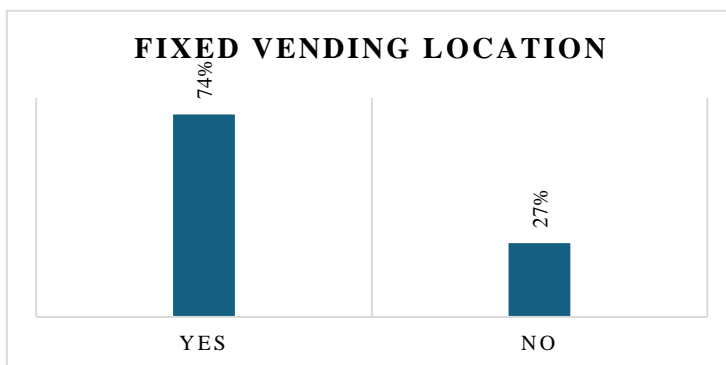


Interpretation: The data shows the educational background of street vendors and domestic workers. Among street vendors, 47% have studied up to the primary level, 27% have completed higher secondary education, while 20% have studied up to the secondary level. Only 7% of them have no formal education, and none have gone to college or have other forms of education. For domestic workers, 60% have only studied up to the primary level. 27% have completed secondary education,

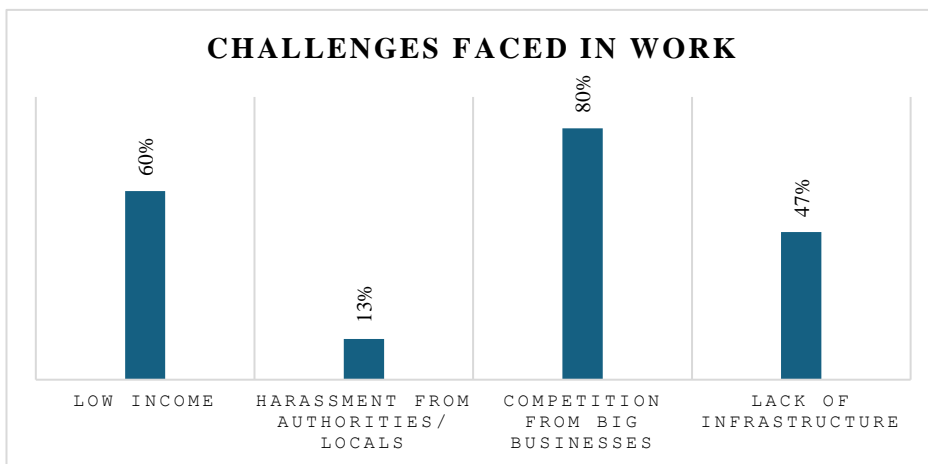
and 13% have no formal education. Interestingly, none of the domestic workers have studied beyond the secondary level. This shows that most people involved in both street vending and domestic work have low levels of education, mainly up to the primary or secondary level. This reflects how limited educational opportunities can push individuals, especially women, into informal and low-paying jobs.

- **Work Conditions and Awareness**

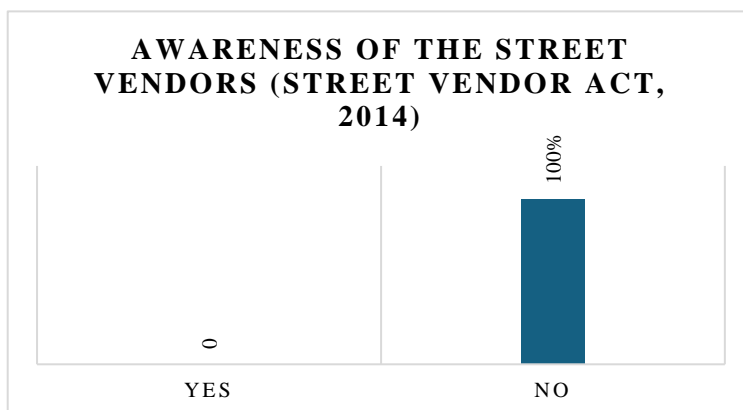
**Street Vendors:**



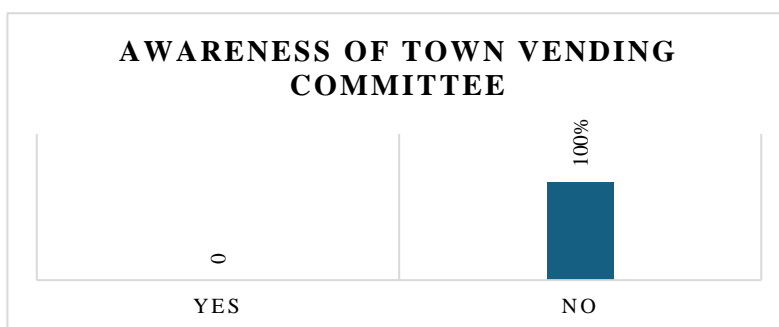
Interpretation: The data shows that 74% have a fixed location where they sell their goods, while 27% do not have a fixed spot and are likely to move around selling. This means that most street vendors prefer to stay in one place, possibly because it helps them build regular customers and makes their work more stable. On the other hand, a smaller number keep changing locations, which could be due to lack of space, police restrictions, or the need to reach more people in different areas.



Interpretation: The data shows that street vendors face several challenges in their daily work. The biggest issue is competition from big businesses, reported by 80% of vendors. About 60% also struggle with low income, showing how unstable their earnings are. Nearly half (47%) mentioned poor infrastructure, like lack of proper vending space or sanitation. A small number (13%) reported harassment from locals. These problems reflect the broader struggles of informal sector workers in India.

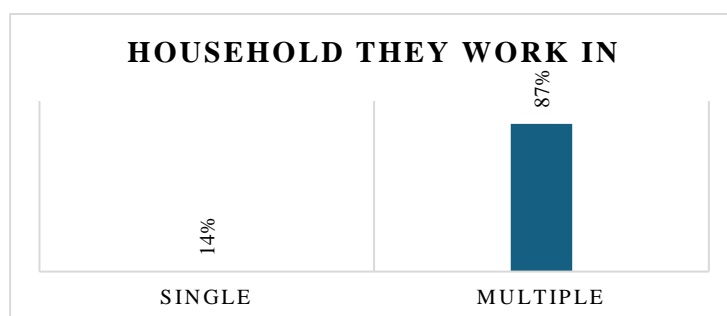


Interpretation: The data shows that none of the street vendors are aware of the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014. This means 100% of them have no knowledge about this important law which is meant to protect their rights and improve their working conditions. This lack of awareness is a serious issue because the Act is designed to help street vendors by giving them legal protection, providing licenses, and preventing harassment. If vendors don't even know about the law, they can't benefit from it.

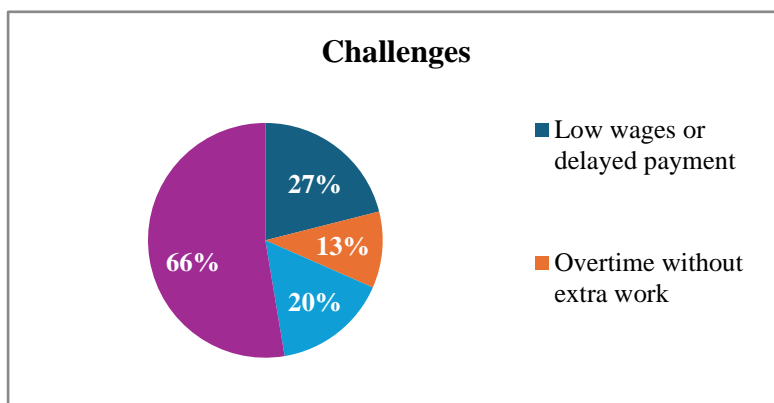


Interpretation: The data shows that none of the street vendors are aware of the Town Vending Committee (TVC). This means all of them (100%) do not know that such a committee exists. The Town Vending Committee is supposed to represent street vendors, help issue licenses, and make decisions to improve their working conditions. But since none of the vendors know about it, they are missing chances to be part of important decisions that affect their livelihood. This lack of awareness shows a gap in communication between the authorities and the vendors.

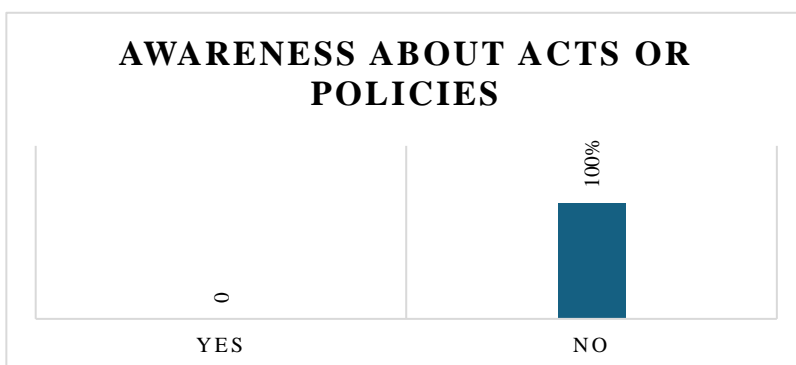
- **Domestic Workers:**



Interpretation: The data shows that 87% of domestic workers work in multiple households, while only 14% work in a single household. This means that most domestic workers must work in more than one household to earn enough money. It also shows how domestic work is often low-paying, and workers need to take up jobs in several houses to make a living which often leads to longer working hours and more physical stress, especially when they must travel between different locations throughout the day.



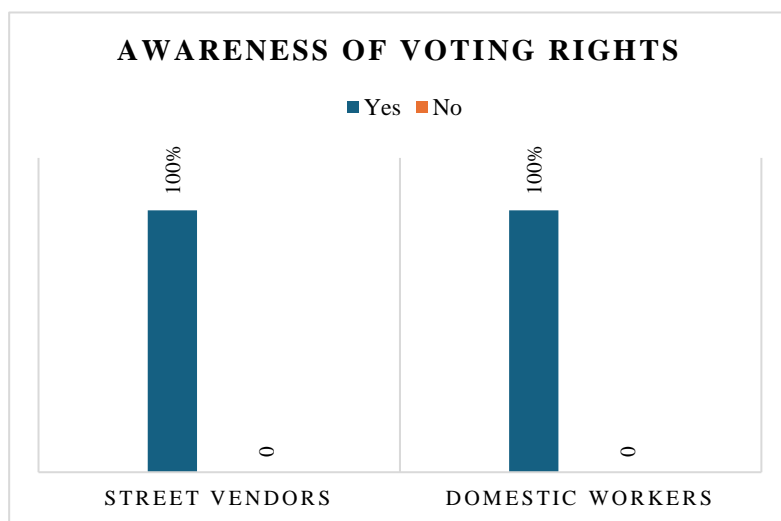
Interpretation: The data shows different challenges faced by domestic workers in their jobs. The most common problem is workplace insecurity, with 66% saying they fear sudden job loss and have no job security. This means that many domestic workers are worried about losing their jobs at any time without warning or support. Low wages or delayed payment is another issue, faced by 27% of workers, showing that some employers don't pay on time or pay less. Denial of leave is also a concern for 20%, workers meaning they are sometimes not allowed to take time off when needed. 13% of workers said they must work extra hours without getting extra pay. Interestingly, none of the workers reported verbal abuse or disrespect, which is a positive sign, but it may be underreported due to hesitation. Overall, the data highlights that the biggest struggle for domestic workers is job insecurity, followed by issues related to wages and working conditions.



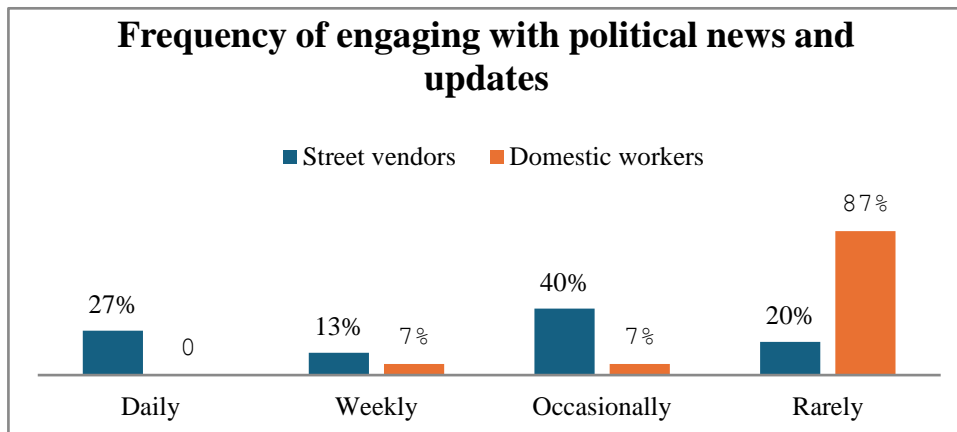
Interpretation: The data shows that none of the domestic workers are aware of any Acts or policies related to their rights and protection. This means 100% of them do not know about the laws that could help them get better wages, job security, or safe working conditions. This lack of awareness is a serious issue because without knowing their rights, domestic workers are more likely to face exploitation or unfair treatment.

- **Political Awareness and Participation**

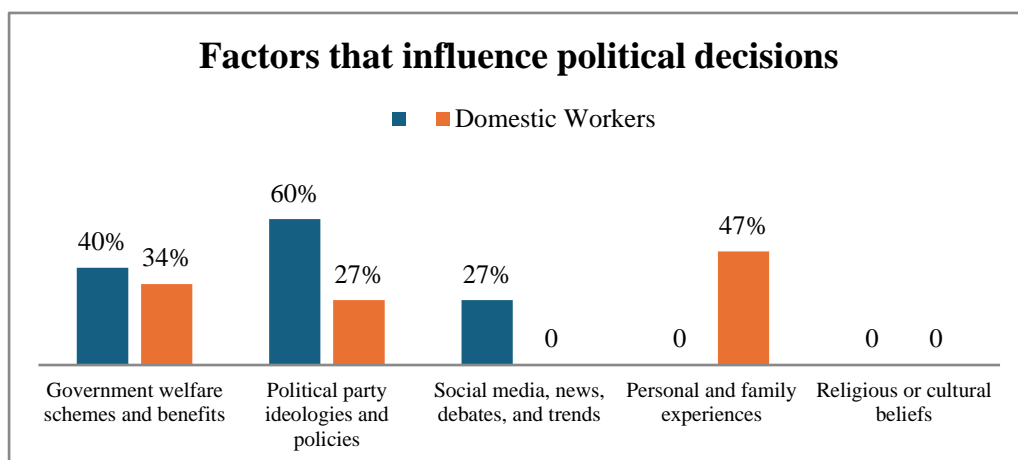
**For Both Groups:**



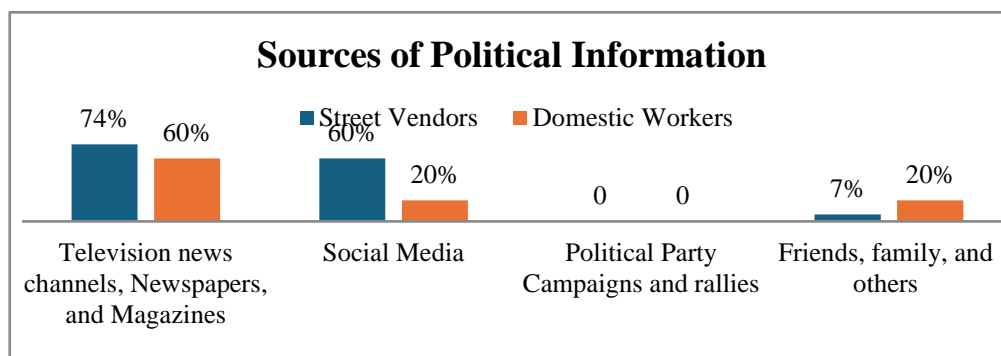
Interpretation: The data shows that all street vendors and domestic workers are aware of their voting rights. This means 100% of the respondents know that they have the right to vote in elections. It shows that even though these workers are part of the informal sector and face many challenges, they are still aware of their role and power as citizens in a democracy.



Interpretation: The data shows how often street vendors and domestic workers engage with political news and updates. Among street vendors, a small number, 267%, follow political news daily, 13% vendors follow it weekly. 40% of vendors engage with it occasionally, and 20% of vendors follow it rarely. This means that most street vendors have at least some levels of interest in political news. On the other hand, the situation is quite different for domestic workers. 87% of workers said they rarely follow political news. Only 7%, each, said they follow it weekly or occasionally, and none reported daily engagement. This shows that street vendors are generally more or more interested than domestic workers. The reasons could include more access to public spaces, social interactions, or greater exposure to current affairs in their work environment. In contrast, domestic workers may have less time, access, or interest in following political news.

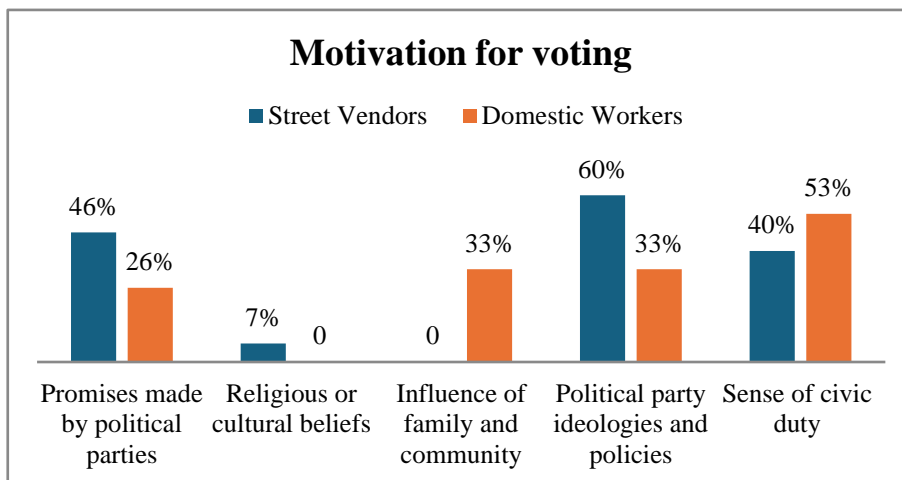


Interpretation: The data shows the different factors that influence the political decisions (mainly voting) of street vendors and domestic workers. For street vendors, the most important factor is political party ideologies and policies, with 60% saying this affects their decisions. 40% of vendors are influenced by government welfare schemes and benefits, and 27% said they follow social media, TV news, debates, and trends which might influence political thought or somewhat decision, none of them mentioned personal or family experiences or religious or cultural beliefs as influencing their political choices. In contrast, domestic workers are most influenced by their personal and family experiences, with 47% selecting this. 34% of workers are influenced by government schemes and benefits, while 27% are influenced by party ideologies and policies. None of them mentions religious or cultural beliefs or media trends affect their choices. Overall, this shows that street vendors focus more on political policies and media, while domestic workers base their decisions more on personal and family experiences.

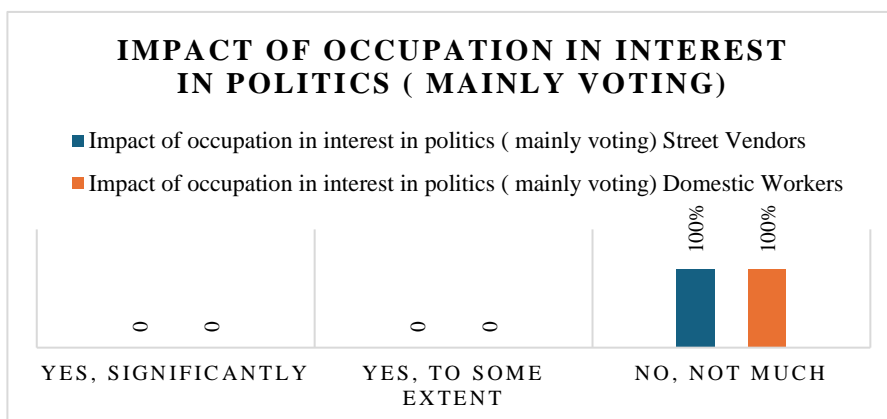


Interpretation: The data shows how street vendors and domestic workers get their political information. For street vendors, the most common source is television news, newspapers, and magazines, with 74% relying on these traditional media. 60% of vendors also get political updates from social media, but very few, just 7% mentioned friends or family as a source. None reported getting information from political party campaigns or rallies. For domestic workers, 60% depend on TV news, newspapers, and magazines. But only 20% use social media, and another 20% rely on friends, family, or others for political information. Like the vendors, none said they attend political rallies or campaigns for

information. This means both groups mainly get their political information from TV, with street vendors using social media more than domestic workers. Political rallies do not seem to be a source for either group.



Interpretation: The data shows what motivates street vendors and domestic workers to vote. For street vendors, the biggest motivation is political party ideologies and policies, with 60% saying this influences their decision to vote. 47% of vendors are also motivated by the promises made by political parties, and 40% feel a sense of civic duty, that means they vote because they believe it's their responsibility as citizens. Only 7% mentioned being influenced by religious or cultural beliefs, and none mentioned family or community influenced their vote. For domestic workers, the top reason for voting is a sense of civic duty, with 54% mentioned this. 33% are motivated by political party ideologies and policies, and the same number 33% said they are influenced by family and community. 27% vote because of promises made by political parties, and none mentioned religion or culture. So, it seems street vendors are more influenced by party policies and promises, while domestic workers are more driven by a sense of duty and the influence of their family and community. This shows that while both groups take voting seriously, the reasons behind their choices vary based on their daily lives and social surroundings.



Interpretation: The data shows that all street vendors and all domestic workers said their occupation does not have much impact on their interest in politics, especially in voting. That means whether they work as street vendors or domestic workers, they do not feel that their type of work plays a big role in how they think about or take part in political activities like voting.

**7. Findings of the Study**

The findings of the study are mentioned below:

- Many unskilled labourers are middle-aged, have low education, and work in gender-specific roles, which make it hard for them to use smartphones or understand government schemes. Poverty affects people from all castes, and due to low awareness, they can be easily misled in politics.
  - Street vendors and domestic workers face low and unstable incomes, harsh working conditions, and little job security, which leaves them struggling just to survive. These daily challenges limit their time, energy, and opportunity to engage in politics or learn about government schemes. For domestic workers, the burden is even greater due to their double workload at home and work.
  - Unskilled labourers are aware of their voting rights and familiar with political parties and leaders, showing basic political interest. However, they lack awareness of specific government schemes meant for their welfare and mainly rely on TV and social media for political information, with little to no direct contact with political campaigns.
  - The political engagement of unskilled labourers is influenced by multiple factors such as party ideologies, family opinions, and access to media. Street vendors appear to be more politically active and informed compared to domestic workers. However, both groups lack critical awareness of government schemes and legal protections available to them.
  - Although street vendors and domestic workers know they have the right to vote, they are unaware of key laws meant to protect and support them. Their political choices are influenced more by family and media than by their own workplace issues, leaving them unable to claim their rights or seek proper help.
  - Unskilled labourers face several barriers to political awareness, including low education, lack of knowledge about their legal rights, daily economic struggles, and absence of collective representation. These challenges limit their political engagement to basic voting, leaving them disconnected from policies that affect their lives.
- **Objective-wise Findings**

Objective1: To assess the level of political awareness among unskilled labourers in Silchar urban area.

Findings Related to Objective 1: It would be unfair to assume that unskilled labourers like street vendors and domestic workers lack political interest. Data from this study shows a more layered picture. About 40% of street vendors and 53% of domestic workers believe that voting is a civic responsibility, indicating a basic awareness of their democratic rights. Many respondents were familiar with major political parties such as BJP and Congress and could name key national and local leaders like Narendra Modi, Rahul Gandhi, Dilip Paul, and Rajdeep Roy. This suggests that they are somewhat engaged with mainstream political discourse. Among domestic workers, political views are often shaped by family and community influence—34% said they form opinions based on what their families believe. However, a significant gap lies in their awareness of specific government schemes or welfare policies aimed at supporting informal workers. None of the respondents reported knowledge of any such policies or acts. This reflects a disconnect between procedural participation (like voting) and informed political engagement. Television remains the primary source of political information used by 74% of street vendors and 60% of domestic workers. Social media is also gaining popularity, especially among street vendors (60%), while 20% of domestic workers rely on friends and family for political updates. Surprisingly, none mentioned party campaigns or manifestos as sources of information, suggesting that formal political outreach fails to reach or resonate with them. These trends align with Political Mobilization Theory, which suggests that political participation among marginalized groups is often externally driven through unions, NGOs, or parties. In Silchar, the absence of such efforts

keeps these workers under-informed. Political Participation Theory further explains that mere voting isn't enough it should be paired with informed engagement. The study reveals shallow participation, where people vote without understanding how policies impact them. Assan & Chambers (2014) reinforce this by arguing that informal workers lack representation and organized support, limiting their political empowerment. Similarly, Reghunathan (2019) highlights how domestic workers remain outside the reach of protective legislation due to weak outreach and implementation. These findings point to structural neglect as a major barrier in transforming unskilled labourers from passive voters into empowered political agents.

**Objective 2:** To identify the major factors influencing or uninfluencing political awareness among unskilled labourers.

Findings related to Objective 2: The data shows a clear contrast between street vendors and domestic workers in terms of political engagement. Only 27% of street vendors regularly follow political news, while 40% do so occasionally. In contrast, a striking 87% of domestic workers rarely follow political updates, suggesting limited engagement due to factors like time, education, or access to information. When it comes to political motivation, 60% of street vendors reported being influenced by party ideologies and policies, compared to only 27% of domestic workers. This reflects a higher level of political responsiveness among vendors. Family and community play a key role in shaping political opinions. Around 40% of street vendors and 34% of domestic workers cited influence from their immediate social circle, with 47% of female domestic workers specifically referring to family opinions. Despite some level of participation, none of the respondents were aware of key laws such as the Street Vendors Act, 2014 or the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, highlighting a critical gap in legal and policy awareness. This trend reflects Political Socialization Theory, which explains how political attitudes are shaped through family, media, and community. In the case of unskilled labourers, television and family are dominant influences, but formal sources like party campaigns or manifestos are almost absent. Their engagement remains surface-level—participating in voting without deeper policy understanding. Participatory Democracy Theory further emphasizes that true democratic participation requires informed involvement. While many of these workers do vote, their exclusion from policy discussions and issue-based campaigns undermines the quality of their participation. Roy & Banerjee (2020) highlight that informal workers often remain invisible in digital and institutional outreach, reducing their ability to claim their rights. Kavita P. similarly argues that real political awareness involves not just voting but understanding citizenship and access to entitlements. Overall, while street vendors appear somewhat more engaged than domestic workers, both groups lack the critical awareness needed for meaningful democratic inclusion.

**Objective 3:** To study the perception of unskilled labourers about their rights, government policies, and welfare schemes.

Findings related to Objective 3: Although both street vendors and domestic workers are aware of their voting rights, they remain largely unaware of the legal protections available to them. None of the street vendors interviewed had heard of the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014 or the existence of Town Vending Committees (TVCs), despite their direct relevance. Similarly, domestic workers lacked awareness of key laws like the Minimum Wages Act, 1948 and the Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act, 2008, which are specifically meant to ensure their welfare and workplace security. This lack of awareness prevents them from claiming rights or seeking help in cases of exploitation. Their political engagement, while present in the form of voting, is not informed by their occupational needs. Instead, voting decisions are influenced by family, party image, and media rather than actual policy relevance or personal experience. Political Participation Theory explains this disconnect by linking low political awareness to low education levels and

economic vulnerability. With limited access to formal education and policy information, unskilled workers participate only at a symbolic level. Political Socialization Theory also helps interpret these findings—political behavior among these groups is largely shaped by informal sources like family, TV, and social media, rather than structured political education or direct engagement by political parties. This gap is further supported by scholars. K.G. Iyer (2004) points to the failure of policy outreach as a reason why unorganized workers remain unaware of their rights. S.K. Bhowmik (2012) emphasizes the absence of legal recognition and institutional support for street vendors. Reghunathan (2019) critiques the lack of enforcement and weak legal protections for domestic workers, arguing that these systemic failures leave them vulnerable. Altogether, while these workers do vote, they do so without a clear understanding of policies that could impact their lives. Their participation remains largely passive, shaped more by social influence than informed political engagement—highlighting a critical gap between democratic inclusion and actual empowerment.

Objective 4: To examine the barriers faced by unskilled labourers in participating in the political process.

Findings related to Objective 4: The political awareness of unskilled labourers like street vendors and domestic workers remains limited due to four major barriers identified in the study. First, low educational levels are a key constraint most respondents had only primary or secondary schooling, with none completing higher education. This affects their ability to grasp political news, laws, and government schemes, limiting participation to surface-level voting without deeper understanding. Second, there's a lack of awareness about laws and policies specifically meant for them. None of the street vendors were aware of the Street Vendors Act, 2014 or Town Vending Committees, and domestic workers didn't know about the Minimum Wages Act, 1948 or the Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act, 2008. Without knowledge of such laws, they cannot demand rights or protection, reinforcing a cycle of silence and dependency. Third, economic vulnerability shapes their political disengagement. Street vendors cited low income, competition from big businesses, and lack of infrastructure, while domestic workers reported job insecurity, delayed or unpaid wages, and long hours. Their day-to-day survival takes precedence over political participation. Fourth, the absence of collective platforms or representation means neither group is involved in rallies, campaigns, or unions. This lack of organized support leaves them voiceless in political spaces and unable to influence decisions that affect their lives. These findings align with Political Participation Theory, which identifies structural exclusions that limit engagement among marginalized groups. Political Mobilization Theory also helps explain their disengagement, the absence of unions, NGOs, or political outreach results in minimal participation. Participatory Democracy Theory critiques this pattern of procedural inclusion (voting) without substantive influence, showing how democracy fails when citizens can't shape policy. Scholars like Srivastava (2020) stress the importance of legal identity and welfare access as foundations for political empowerment. S.K. Bhowmik (2012) and Sivakumar (2016) highlight how lack of legal protection and institutional neglect reinforce the political invisibility of informal labourers. Together, these arguments suggest that the barriers to political awareness are not accidental but rooted in deeper structural inequalities that require urgent policy and institutional intervention.

## **8. Observations**

There is a need to start legal literacy programs for unskilled labourers to help them understand important laws like the Street Vendors Act (2014), Minimum Wages Act (1948), and Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act (2008). These programs should be done in local languages and use simple ways like pamphlets, videos, and street plays so that even people with low literacy can understand. Encouraging street vendors and domestic workers to form and join labour unions or self-help groups

gives them a collective voice to raise their concerns. It helps them take part in political activities and demand better working conditions. Most government services are now online, but many unskilled workers lack the digital skills to access them. Basic training should be provided so they can use smartphones to get welfare information, apply for schemes, and stay updated with political news. Television and mobile phones are the main sources of information for unskilled labourers, so they should be used more effectively to spread awareness. The government and civil society can create simple, easy-to-understand content on worker rights and political participation. This content can be shared through TV programs, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Facebook in local languages. To enhance political awareness among women unskilled labourers, especially domestic workers, women-only awareness sessions can be organized in local communities. These sessions should focus not only on their voting rights, but also on welfare schemes, and legal protections.

## **9. Conclusion**

To conclude, if people are not equipped with the knowledge and resources to make informed decisions, they remain formally included in democracy but are substantively excluded from its benefits. This is especially true in the case of unskilled labourers in the informal sector who, despite being key contributors to the urban economy, remain politically invisible and powerless. To address this democratic deficit, it is important to go beyond providing voting rights. Unskilled labourers need legal literacy programs to help them understand their rights and protections under the law. They also need access to skill development and education, which will not only improve their livelihoods but also enhance their capacity to participate in political life. Equally important is the need for organizational representation through unions, and NGOs that can help raise their voices and connect them to political processes. Finally, information about government schemes and policies must be communicated in accessible and user-friendly formats, especially through local languages, visual media, or community outreach. Unless these changes are made, the political participation of unskilled labourers will remain shallow and disconnected from their actual needs and struggles. They will continue to be excluded from the benefits of democracy, even though they work tirelessly to sustain their lives, but it also reflects on the local economy that supports urban life. Empowering them politically is not just a matter of fairness, it is essential for building an inclusive and truly participatory democracy.

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