

Dynamics of Electoral Process of 2017 Assembly Elections in Punjab

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This paper has two main sections. The first section provides a historical overview on Punjab Assembly elections since its re-organization since 1967, with a view to considering the continuities and discontinuities in election outcomes, before turning to analyzing more recent elections leading to the 2017 Punjab Assembly Election. The second section focuses specifically on understanding voter profiles, behavior and decision making processes in the 2017 election. A post poll survey data, based on responses to several key questions and collected under the auspices of Lokniti-CSDS is used to consider the dynamic voting preferences of different categories of voters in Punjab as well as in assessing the performance of various parties and their leaders. The paper suggests that the electoral processes and politics have undergone fundamental change with the rise of new actors such as the AAP, the growing importance of social media and greater voter preference for development issues that immediately impact the lives of Punjabis.

Introduction

Elections provide a crucial opportunity to assess the actual working of the democracy. The electorate elect their representatives to the legislatures and a government of their choice. In turn, a government so chosen acquires legitimacy and trust of the citizens that enable it to formulate policies and to run the entire gamut of affairs of the country on behalf of its citizens. In a multi-party system and a competitive electoral democracy, as in India, the political preference of voters and voting behaviour get complicated by a number of factors such as religion, caste, community, language, socioeconomic class, money, personal charisma of the leaders, the personal characteristics of the candidates, evaluations of the performance of the government, party identification, and ideology and many others. Voting determines the political process of representatives and brings out the opinions, attitudes, intentions and feedback of the voters in front of society regarding political system. The satisfaction level of people with the performance of government can also be understood with the voting process. Different political parties enter the fray with different issues on of national and local importance and appeal to different segments of society in different manners to vote for them. In India, sometimes parochial issues matter most to voters, at other times it is issues of socio-economic development at the macro/micro or local levels as well as international which becomes the driving forces in voting. And yet, at other times, it is the mix of both that determines voting behaviour of the electorate. Thus an understanding of why people vote the way they do, why some parties are more successful than others and what

does or does not change from one election to another are of abiding academic interest.

The present paper is a modest attempt to explain the dynamics of electoral process in Punjab with special focus on 2017 assembly elections. The paper is divided into five parts. The first part explains brief history of assembly elections from 1952 to 2002. Part 2 provides an analysis of 2007 and 2012 assembly elections and part 3 comprehends the 2017 state elections of Punjab. Part 4 discusses the response of voters on various crucial issues and final part 5 concludes the arguments.

History of Assembly Elections in Punjab

Post independent Punjab was one of the pioneer state in India to have first coalition government in Punjab and East Punjab State Union (PEPSU), an organisation of princely states. On the other hand, the state has witnessed three major changes, firstly in the form of partition of 1947, secondly the merger of princely states in 1956 and finally linguistic reorganization in 1966. These events not only changed the geographical, topographical, demographical, and linguistic basis of the state but also brought changes from the perspective of politics, religion, caste, and economy. This further shaped and reshaped the social and political foundations of the electoral behaviour of Punjab.¹ With three geographical and cultural regions namely Majha, Malwa and Doaba, the present day state is divided into five divisions, namely Faridkot, Ferozepur, Jalandhar, Patiala and Ropar. These divisions are further divided into twenty-two districts and eighty-one sub-divisions. Currently there are 117 seats in Punjab Legislative Assembly and thirteen Parliamentary constituencies and seven Rajya Sabha constituencies.

The delimitation process before the 2012 assembly elections changed the number of constituencies in the regions benefiting the already dominant Malwa by granting it four more seats at the expense of two each from Majha and Doaba. This development further increased the electoral importance of the region for the dominant political parties i.e. Congress and Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) particularly. It must be mentioned here that all the Chief Ministers of the state, except one², have been from Malwa region since the reorganization of Punjab in 1966. There has been a complete dominance of this region in state politics.

The electoral politics of post-independence Punjab can be explained in two phases i.e. pre and post reorganisation of the state. The early two decades (1947-1967) of politics were dominated by the Congress party with little say of others including Akali factions. The reorganisation of Punjab on linguistic basis turned it into Sikh majority state, making the Akali Dal politically relevant and further helped it by entrenching its dominance in state politics since then. Table 1 below shows details of elections held in the state since 1967.

Table-1 Assembly Elections in Punjab (1967-2017)

Year	Winning Party	Vote %	Seats Won
1967	Shiromani Akali Dal led coalition	37.62	46/104
1969	Shiromani Akali Dal led coalitions	46.85	60/104
1972	Congress	42.84	66/104
1977	Shiromani Akali Dal led coalitions	56.49	98/117
1980	Congress	45.19	63/117
1985	Shiromani Akali Dal	38.01	73/117
1992	Congress	43.83	87/117
1997	SAD-BJP alliance	45.97	93/117
2002	Congress	35.81	62/117
2007	SAD-BJP alliance	45.4	68/117
2012	SAD-BJP alliance	44.8	68/117
2017	Congress	38.5	77/117

Source: Compiled from the statistical reports of Punjab Assembly elections.

The first Akali Dal-Jan Sangh-CPI (with CPM support) coalition government was formed in 1967 which ended the monopoly of Congress Party rule. The main reason for the poor performance of the Congress was basically factionalism in the party i.e. one led by Swaran Singh and the other by Darbara Singh along with its opposition to Punjabi Suba state. The Congress emerged as single largest party with 48 legislators and needed support of just five legislators to form the government. But, the anti –Congress sentiment was so strong that it failed to muster support from other parties and independent members. In the 1969 elections, Akali Dal emerged as the single largest party with 29.6 percent votes of the total votes polled and 43 seats while the Congress got 39.2 percent votes and 38 seats. However, this coalition could not last long and midterm assembly elections were held in 1972. The Congress party contested elections in alliance with the CPI and won 66 seats with 42.8 percent of the total votes polled. Giani Zail Singh became the Chief Minister of Punjab. The next election took place in 1977 in which the Congress party got marginalised, able to muster only 17 seats. It was the result of national emergency (1975-77) declared by the Central government leading to large scale opposition against the misrule of Mrs. Indira Gandhi. Even after its severe defeat the Congress could still retain 34.07 per cent vote share in these elections. On the other hand the Akali Dal, by capturing 58 seats with 31.41 per cent of votes, emerged as the single largest party and Akali-Janata coalition government was formed. Parkash Singh Badal was sworn in as the Chief Minister of Punjab.

In the 1980s Assembly Elections, the Congress party was again in power in Punjab by winning 63 seats with 45.19 percent vote share of the total votes polled. The Akali Dal could win only 37 seats. Darbara Singh became the Chief Minister on June 7, 1980 but had to quit on October 10, 1983 in the wake of massacre of some innocent bus passengers by the alleged Khalistani terrorists. President Rule was imposed from October 10, 1983 till September 29, 1985. In the 1985 Assembly elections, the Akali Dal achieved landslide victory by

capturing 73 out of 117 seats after securing 38.4 percent of the total votes polled. These elections were the result of the Rajiv-Longowal Accord signed in July 1985. Surjit Singh Barnala was sworn in as Chief Minister on September 29, 1985 whereas the Congress could achieve only 32 seats. The Barnala government could not complete even its half tenure and was dismissed in May 1987 because of increased violence in the state. Punjab was again brought under President Rule till Feb 1992 until the elections were held.

In 1992 Assembly elections, major Akali factions except Akali Dal (Kabul) boycotted the elections. These elections took place in the shadow of terrorist violence with voter turnout at 21.58 percent, which was lower than the last four decades in Punjab. This gave advantage to the Congress which won 87 out of 117 seats with 43.8 per cent of the votes polled. Another important development of the election was the emergence of Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) as the main rival party of the Congress which won 9 seats with 16.2 percent of the total votes polled. Beant Singh became the Chief Minister of the state but he was assassinated on August 21, 1995 in retaliation against his anti-insurgency operations which eliminated terrorism in the state in the shortest possible time of few months. H. S. Brar was sworn in as the Chief Minister of Punjab but was replaced by Rajinder Kaur Bhattal on November 21, 1996. The Congress lost the 1997 assembly elections badly as the SAD-BJP together secured the highest number of seats i.e., 93. Parkash Singh Badal was elected as Chief Minister. The Akali Dal (Badal) got tremendous response in both rural and semi-rural constituencies whereas the BJP did well in urban and semi-urban constituencies in all the three regions of Punjab. The Congress could win only 14 out of 117 seats with 26.3 percent vote share. It could not win a single seat in Majha whereas it won only 9 and 5 seats in the Malwa and Doaba region respectively. The BSP also faced a major decline by winning only 1 seat with 7.5 percent vote share in 1997 as compared to 1992 elections in which it got 9 seats with 16.2 percent of votes.

In the 2002 Assembly elections, the Congress became the ruling party under the leadership of Amarinder Singh by securing 62 seats with 35.81 percent of the total votes polled. The Akali Dal and BJP won 41 and 3 seats with 30.97 and 5.72 per cent votes respectively. The CPI got only one seat, whereas this election brought a complete burn down of other parties like the BSP and *Panthic Morcha*. The Congress dominated in both urban as well as rural constituencies.

2007 Elections and 2012 Elections

The Assembly Elections of 2007 in Punjab were held on February 13, 2007. The SAD-BJP alliance captured power by winning 68 seats out of 117 seats under the leadership of Parkash Singh Badal. The SAD won 49 seats with 37.19 percent of total votes polled and the BJP got 19 seats with 8.21 percent votes.

**Table 2: Region wise Seats won by Political Parties in 2007 and 2012
Punjab Assembly Elections**

Party	Majha			Doaba			Malwa		
	2007	2012	Change	2007	2012	Change	2007	2012	Change
Congress	03	8	+5	04	06	+2	37	32	-5
SAD	17	12	-5	13	11	-2	19	33	+14
BJP	07	5	-2	07	05	-2	05	02	-3
Independent	0	0	0	01	01	0	04	02	-2
Total	27	25	-2	25	23	-2	65	69	+4

Source: Punjab Assembly Election Study, 2007 and 2012 Lokniti-CSDS, Delhi) The Congress fought the 2007 elections without an alliance and got 44 out of 116 seats with 40.9 percent vote share. However the Congress made an impressive victory in Malwa region, which was regarded as the SAD dominated region possibly with the help of the head of Dera Sacha Sauda who has a mass following in the region.³

Punjab has always voted out the incumbent government but 2012 assembly elections changed the convention. The Congress failed to get the confidence of voters and its support base deteriorated even further. This happened because of various reasons like the lack of co-ordination among the state and national level leadership, feudal and arrogant behavior of Amarinder Singh and Partap Singh Bajwa, factions and leg pulling in the party, rebellious and dissatisfied candidates etc. Whereas, the populist agenda of the new leadership of Akali Dal helped it to continue in government by using issues of free electricity, social security schemes, atta-dal scheme, bicycles to school age girls etc. The Congress failed miserably to project its future agenda and the dissatisfaction with the Congress party at the Centre also played an added role in their loss.

Table 3 shows that vote share of all political parties', except for the BSP, has considerably come down in the 2012 elections as compared to the 2007 elections. Although the SAD-BJP topped the decreasing card of the vote share but together with their alliance partner they managed to retain their majority in the Assembly. On the other hand in spite of the reduced vote share Akali Dal increased its number of seats from 48 in 2007 to 56 in 2012 elections (as shown in Table 2). However, its alliance partner BJP could not perform well in comparison to the previous elections and its tally came down from 19 in 2007 to 12 in 2012 elections.

Table 3: Party Wise Vote Percentage in 2007 and 2012 Punjab Assembly Elections

Party	2012 (in percent)	2007 (in percent)	Change (%)
Congress Party	40.11	40.94	-0.83
Akali Dal (SAD)	34.75	37.19	-2.44

BJP	7.13	8.21	-1.08
PPP	5.17	-	-
CPM	0.16	0.28	-0.12
CPI	0.82	0.75	-0.07
SAD(M)	0.28	0.51	-0.23
BSP	4.30	4.10	+0.20
Others	7.28	8.02	-0.74
	100	100	

Source: (Punjab Assembly Election Study, 2007 and 2012, Lokniti-CSDS, Delhi)

On the other hand, the SAD-BJP alliance managed to get 22 seats more than their rival Congress Party in spite of its loss in vote share in the 2012 elections. The People Party of Punjab (PPP) led *Sanjha Morcha* became one of the main reasons which neutralized whatever anti-incumbency was in the state. The BSP also helped the SAD-BJP victory by retaining the vote share of Hindu Dalits of Doaba which otherwise has been the traditional support base of the Congress Party.⁴

2017 Assembly Elections: Issues and Trends

The 2017 Assembly elections of Punjab were held on February 4, 2017. These elections were special from many perspectives as it were to decide the fate of the incumbent government which ruled in the state for ten years which had never happened previously. Another important aspect of the election was that this time a new political force i.e., the Aam Adami Party (AAP) posed a direct contest to the two traditional combatants that is the SAD-BJP and the Congress. With 19.8 million electorate, 2017 assembly elections recorded the highest ever voting of 78.62 percent. Punjab voted on 117 seats with 69 seats in Malwa, 25 in Majha and 23 in Doaba region. Mansa district of Malwa belt saw the highest voting turnout of 87 percent in the state. Overall, 42 of the 69 seats of the Malwa region recorded more than 80 percent voting. This region turned out to be the game changer as it not only has the largest number of seats but also highest percentage of voting in the 2017 elections.

Table 4: 2017 Assembly Election Results

Party	Seats Contested	Seats Won	Seat Change	Vote Share (percent)	Vote share Swing (percent)
INC	117	77	+31	38.5	-1.42
SAD	94	15	-41	25.2	-9.36
BJP	23	3	-9	5.4	-1.75
AAP	112	20	+20	23.7	+23.7
BSP	117	0	0	1.5	0

LIP	5	2	+2	1.2	+1.2
NOTA	--	--	--	0.7	+0.7

Source: Election Commission of Punjab

Table 4 illustrates the details of the 2017 Assembly elections of Punjab. The Congress party swept the elections by winning 77 seats. The SAD-BJP alliance could only win 18 seats and became third in the election contest. The AAP became the main opposition party by winning 20 seats. Though having a landslide victory in these elections, the Congress vote share came down by around one percent because of the coming up of new parties like the AAP and Lok Insaf Party (LIP). The AAP managed to get 24 percent of the votes which in itself is a substantive number for a debut party. On the other hand, the SAD alliance partner BJP could win only 3 seats with a mere vote share of 5 percent. The table also illustrates that there was an overall decrease in vote share of all the traditional parties of Punjab and the new parties managed to shift the vote share in their favor. This is also an alarming situation for the traditional parties which use religion, caste and other parochial factors to garner votes in the elections.

Table 5: Region wise seat division

Party	Malwa		Majha		Doaba	
	(69 seats)	Swing	(25 seats)	Swing	(23 seats)	Swing
Congress	40	+8	22	+14	15	+9
AAP+	20	+20	00	--	02	+2
SAD	08	-25	02	-10	05	-6
BJP	01	-1	01	-4	01	-4

Source: Election Commission of Punjab

Table 5 shows the region wise result of the 2017 Assembly elections. The Majha region turned out to be remarkable in the victory of the Congress party as the party won 22 out of the 25 seats with a swing of 14 seats since 2012 Assembly elections. Earlier the SAD used to play the religious card in the region to attract the voters as the region is hub of the religious activity and was also considered to be the stronghold of the Akalis. However in the 2017 elections the party could only win 2 seats i.e., Majitha and Batala. The Congress party also performed remarkably well in the Doaba region by winning 15 out of the 23 seats which is 9 seats more than the last elections. The Malwa region brought many surprises for the Congress. It is the biggest region in the state and the Congress party won the highest number of seats in the region i.e., 40 out of the 69. On the other hand the performance of the AAP and its alliance partner in the region is also

noteworthy as it won 20 seats which is not only the highest for the individual record of the party but it is also higher than the 8 seats of the SAD. This is also the region where SAD faced its biggest loss with a negative swing of 25 seats. The female vote share in 2017 elections was 79 percent of the total women voters against 78 percent of the males. This continuous upward trend among female voters began in the last assembly elections of 2012.

Voter Profiles

This section of the paper deals with the profile of the voters in 2017 assembly elections in Punjab. People belonging to different social backgrounds have direct bearing on their political choices or voting decisions. Some of the important variables of age, caste, religion, occupation, educational level and locality are discussed here.

Table 6: Vote Share by Age Group

	Vote Share by Age (in percent)			
	Congress	Akali+BJP	AAP+	Others
Upto 25 Yrs	35	26	31	8
26-35 Yrs	39	27	25	9
36-45 Yrs	40	34	26	0
46-55 Yrs	41	30	22	6
56 Yrs & above	38	35	20	6

Source: CSDS Data Unit

Table 6 shows the vote share of different parties on the basis of age group of the respondents. It is clear that the Congress got massive response from the voters of all age groups against the combined share of SAD-BJP alliance and AAP and its ally Lok Insaf Party. The AAP was found to be more popular among the young voters up to the age of 25 than the alliance partner.

Table 7: Vote Share by Caste

	Vote Share by Caste (in percent)			
	Congress	SAD+	AAP+	Others
Upper Castes	49	22	24	5
Jatt Sikh	29	38	31	2
Khatri Sikh	27	29	26	18
OBCs	39	19	24	17
Dalits	47	25	24	4

Source: CSDS Data Unit

There is a need to explain why Khatri Sikh are considered separate from Upper Caste as this caste group itself is upper caste group. Table 7 demonstrates the caste basis vote share of different political parties in these elections. It explains that the Congress party achieved maximum support from the upper castes as well as Dalits in the state. The vote share of AAP and its allies is also higher among the upper castes than the SAD-BJP alliance in this election. But, the SAD-BJP alliance retained its monopoly over the support base of the rural peasantry i.e. Jat-Sikh as the largest percentage of voters (38 percent) in this category voted for the party and similar to the upper caste, the AAP again scored second in the tally with 31 percent votes which is 2 percent more than the Congress which could gain 29 percent votes only. For Khatri Sikhs, again Akali Dal was the first choice for the voters and as the table shows, 29 percent of the respondents responded in its favor. However, a significant number (18 percent) of Khatri Sikhs also showed their support for other parties as well. The Congress party also attracted the votes of the OBCs as 39 percent respondents responded it to be their choice. However a low preference was given to the SAD alliance by this category (19 percent), but AAP gained a comparatively higher support with 24 percent votes. The Congress succeeded in garnering the traditional votes of Dalits in Punjab after a very long period, particularly with the almost elimination of BSP from the electoral scene of Punjab and a very powerful anti-incumbency against the ruling alliance.

Religion has always acted as an important factor in affecting the electoral politics of the state. The Sikhs are a numerically dominant religious group in the state and political power mostly revolves around them. This is followed by Hindus which also remain a substantial part of the total population of the state.

Table 8: Religion based Vote Share

	Vote Share by Religion (in percent)				
	Congress	SAD+	AAP+	Others	No Opinion
Sikh	30	28	25	10	7
Hindu	35	19	20	10	17
Others	42	30	10	5	13

Source: CSDS Data Unit

Table 8 shows the religion wise vote share of the political parties. The largest number of Sikh respondents (30 percent) voted for the Congress party followed by 28 percent respondents voting for the Akali Dal which claims to be the party of the Sikhs. In the case of Hindus, a similar trend of higher voting for the Congress party was found. The AAP was also slightly ahead of the SAD-BJP alliance in securing Hindu votes. The Congress was far ahead while securing the

votes of other communities (42%) i.e. Muslims and Christians as it secured more votes than the combined vote share of the SAD-BJP alliance and AAP.

Table 9: Occupation based Vote Share

Vote Share by Occupation for Assembly Elections 2017 (in percent)					
	Congress	SAD+	AAP+	Others	No Opinion
Professionals	7	29	43	7	14
Government Employees	26	22	42	0	1
Big Businessmen	29	14	29	14	14
Small Businessmen	35	20	22	16	7
Farmers	26	32	27	6	9
Laborers	31	29	18	6	15
Housewives	33	28	20	7	13
Others	32	30	26	9	11

Source: CSDS Data Unit

Table 9 shows that the AAP secured a high percent of vote share (43 percent) among the professionals which included doctors, scientists, engineers etc. Similarly the AAP turned out to be most popular among government employees, as 42 percent of the total voters from this category said they voted for the party. In case of big businessmen Akali Dal seems to be the most unpopular as only 14 percent respondents supported the party whereas an equal vote share of 29 percent each was in favor of Congress and the AAP. The failure of policy towards business and in creating a business-friendly environment in Punjab can be an important reason for this. For small businessman Congress party became the preferred one as 35 percent of the respondents from this section voted for the party. With farmers being the traditional support base of the SAD, 32 percent voted for the party. The Congress party remained the first choice of 31 percent of the laborers against 29 percent for SAD. In case of Housewives, 33 percent preferred in favor of the Congress against only 20 percent for the AAP.

Table 10 explains the education profile of the voters. Congress remained the preferred choice of literate and non-literate sections of the voters. Support for Congress among the non-literate happened after a long time as this category was the support base of the SAD-BJP alliance for the last few elections. The vote share of Congress in all the categories hovered around 37-40 percent.

Table 10: Educational Level and Vote Share

Vote Share by Educational Level (in percent)				
	Congress	SAD+	AAP+	Others

Non Literate	40	35	19	6
Upto Primary	40	35	20	4
Upto Matric	38	30	26	5
College & Above	37	27	29	7

Source: CSDS Data Unit

The College and Above educationally qualified preferred AAP over the SAD, as 29 percent of the total respondents with higher educational level voted for AAP as compared with the 27 percent voting for the SAD-BJP alliance.

Table 11: Locality wise Vote Share

Locality	Vote Share by Locality (in percent)			
	Congress	SAD+	AAP+	Others
Rural	35	36	23	6
Urban	43	23	28	6

Source: CSDS Data Unit

Table 11 shows the locality-wise vote share of the respondents. Akali Dal maintained its dominance among the rural voters. Among the rural voters 36 percent of the total voters voted for the SAD+BJP against 35 percent who voted to the Congress. In case of the urban voters, the Congress was far ahead with 43 percent of total vote share followed by the AAP (28 percent). The loss of the SAD-BJP alliance in the urban area was due to the large scale shift of Hindu voters towards Congress and AAP because of poor performance of alliance government.

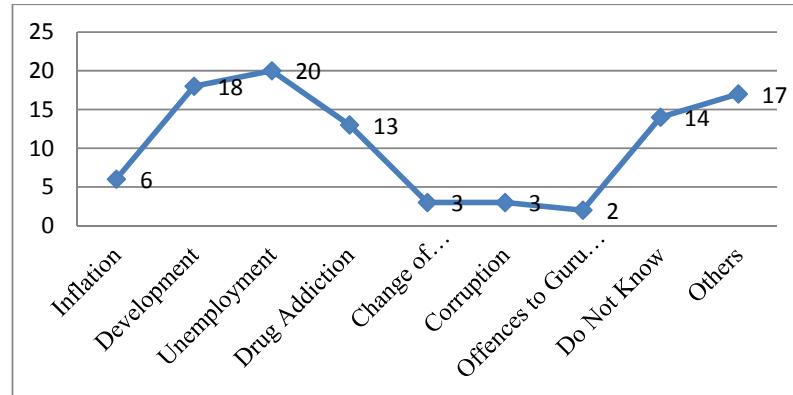
Issues Important to Voters

This section explains the respondents' perception about the crucial issues which remained central to the electoral process in the 2017 assembly elections.

Figure 1 shows the issues raised by the respondents. The respondents were asked, "What was the most important issue for you while deciding whom to vote for"? 20 percent of the total respondents opined that unemployment as most important issue, whereas 18 percent regarded development as the most important issue for them. On the other hand, 13 percent of the respondents considered the increasing drug problem as a serious issue for them. The religious and other issues like corruption were far behind the above mentioned issues. It is worth mentioning here that only 2 percent of the total respondents stated

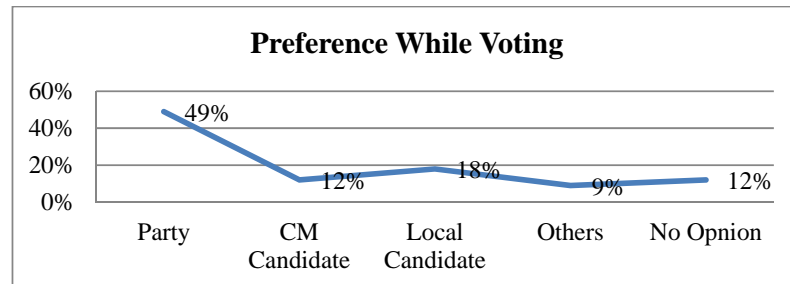
disrespect shown to the Guru Granth Sahib in recent months as the most important issue for them in these elections.

Figure 1: Major Issues in 2017 Elections



Source: CSDS Data Unit

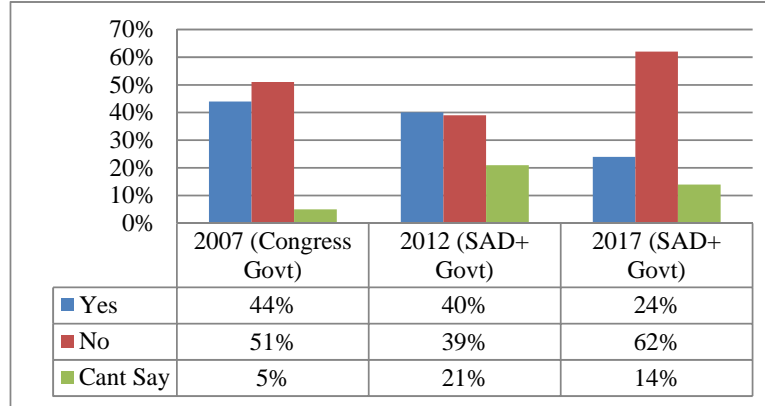
Figure 2: Preference While Voting



Source: CSDS Data Unit

There are many explanations about the preference of voters while casting their votes. Some people say it is the party which matters the most than the leader while others think in different way. Figure 2 shows that when making the decision to vote in the elections, respondents considered party over the candidates as 49 percent of the total respondents favored party and its policies than its candidate. However 18 percent respondents preferred local candidate as their choice.

Figure 3: Response to Incumbent Government

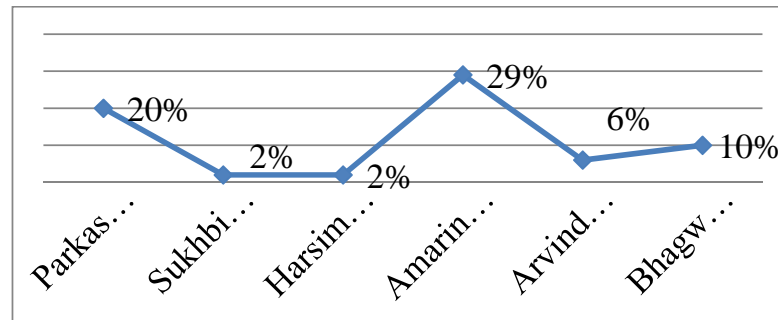


Source: CSDS Data Unit

Figure 3 shows the response of the respondents towards incumbent governments since 2007 state assembly elections. The question asked to the respondents was, “Should the incumbent government get another chance?”

The high voter turnout is usually considered an indicator of people’s demand for change of government but this did not turn out to be true in the last assembly elections in Punjab. But this time there was a clear indication even before the elections, people of Punjab are going to vote for new government. Figure 3 shows the opinion of respondents of Punjab on whether they were going to give another chance to the incumbent government in the last three elections. Three fifth of the total respondents wanted the incumbent government to go.

Figure 4: Preference for Chief Minister

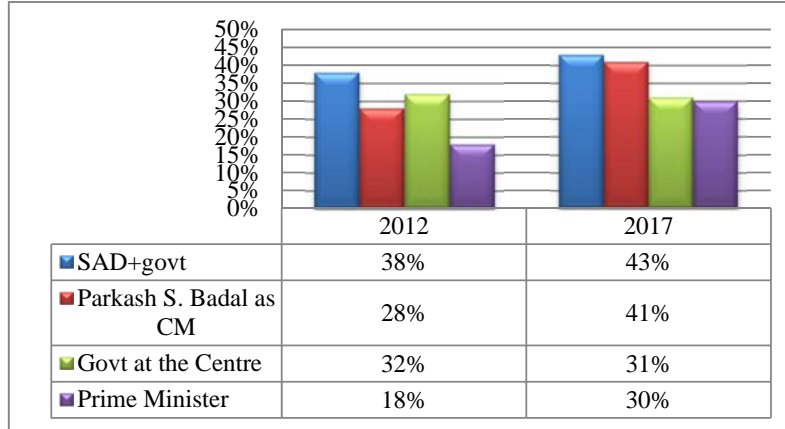


Source: CSDS Data Unit

Parkash Singh Badal remained number one choice of the respondents as Chief Minister or chief ministerial candidate since 1997 in all the state assembly elections in Punjab. It was only in this election that Amarinder Singh took the lead of nine percent over him. Figure 4 shows the preference of the respondents about their future Chief Minister. It is noteworthy that the popularity of many new leaders of the AAP like Bhagwant Mann and Arvind Kejriwal (with 10 percent and 6 percent respectively) was greater as compared to the incumbent Deputy Chief Minister Sukhbir Badal and his wife Harsimrat Kaur Badal who were preferred by only 2 percent of total respondents surveyed for this study.

The level of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with their respective governments plays an important role in the voting behavior of the voters. Figure 5 explains the level of dissatisfaction of the people of Punjab with the leadership and the performance of the governments both at the centre and state in 2012 and 2017 elections. It was found that the dissatisfaction level of the people rose in the case of Parkash Singh Badal as Chief Minister from 28 percent in 2012 to 41 percent in 2017. A similar trend was also seen with the increase in the level of dissatisfaction regarding the performance of the state government. However, people of the state seemed to be more dissatisfied with Prime Minister Narendra Modi than against his predecessor Manmohan Singh.

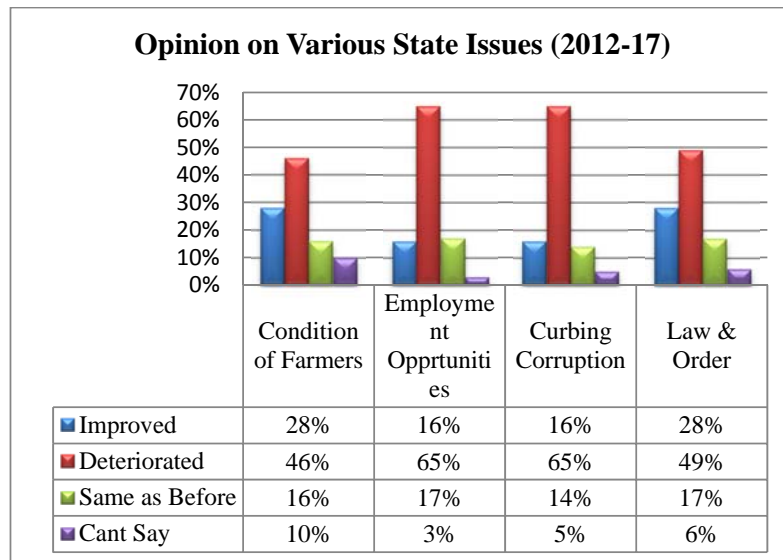
Figure 5: Level of Dissatisfaction (%) with State and the Central Government and Leadership in the 2012-17 Elections



Source: CSDS Data Unit

The last five year rule of SAD-BJP alliance remained embroiled in various controversies particularly law and order issue, cartelization of transport, liquor, transport, corruption, political vendetta, misuse of police force for personal interests, farmers’ suicide etc. The respondents were asked to give their opinion to the following issue which dominated the narratives in electoral process.

Figure 6: Opinion on Various State Issues (2012-2017)



Source: CSDS Data Unit

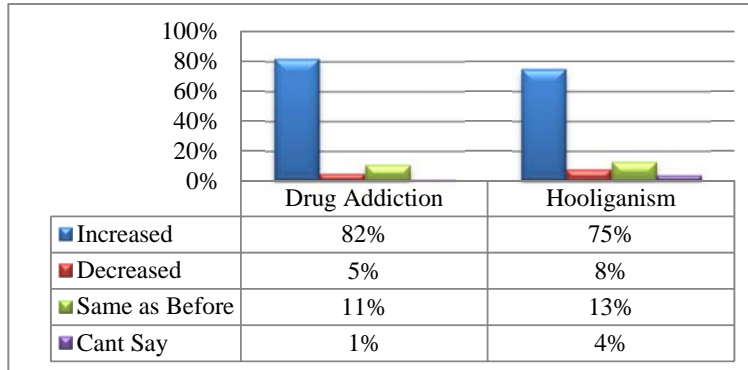
Figure 6 shows opinions of respondents on various issues during the last five years rule (2012-2017) of the SAD-BJP alliance government. The figure shows that largest number of respondents opined that the condition of the farmers and law and order have deteriorated over the last five years. Similar to this almost two third of the total respondents (65 percent) agreed to the fact that the state government failed in creating employment opportunities and curbing corruption. This outlook on various issues was found to be in tune with the general dissatisfaction of people towards the state government. The major reason for this can be found in the arrogance and *goondagardi*, 'taken for granted' attitude towards the Akali-BJP leaders, along with failed schemes of the government. The incumbent government was elected on populist schemes to allure the voters and failed to work on developmental issues.

The issue of drug addiction and hooliganism remained high on the agenda of opposition parties since 2014 parliamentary elections. It is relevant to mention here that these two issues were specifically articulated by AAP during the 2014 Lok Sabha elections which gave the party major dividends in the form of 4 seats in the parliament. Time and again the Akalis and particularly Cabinet Minister Bikram Singh Majithia (brother-in-law of Deputy Chief Minister) were accused by opposition parties for his relations with the drug mafia in the state. The latter, along with other Akali leaders have also been named for their alleged hooliganism at all levels.

In these elections the respondents were asked to give their opinion, "Whether in the last five years of the SAD-BJP coalition rule, the drug addiction and hooliganism has increased, decreased or remained the same?"

Figure 7 explains the response of the people on these two vital issues. It was found that a very high percentage of the respondents identified with the increase of drug addiction and *goondagardi* in the state during the last five years of alliance rule. Hence, a clear disliking for the incumbent government has been expressed by the people as they not only failed to control these problems, rather some of the important members of the alliance were involved in the same. On the other hand, 39 percent of the total respondents opined that only the Congress government is capable of tackling these issues in an effective way.

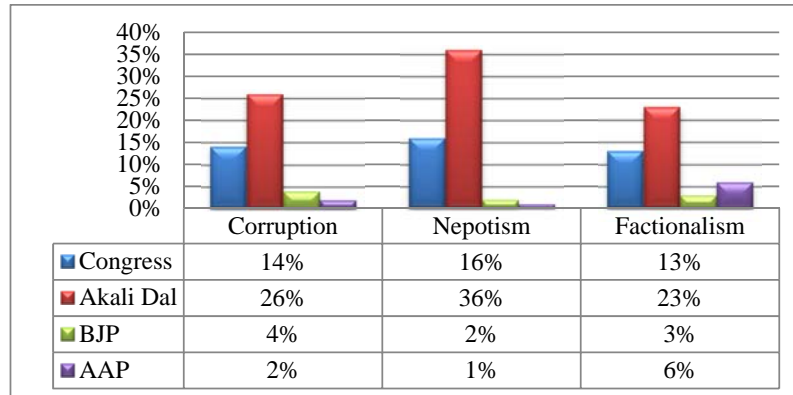
Figure 7 Issue of Drugs and Hooliganism (2012-17)



Source: CSDS Data Unit

The political parties in the country are perceived as marred in many controversies and malpractices. There is hardly any political party i.e. national or regional, which adheres to its ideology or legacy. This has resulted in a decline of public faith and trust in the parties. The respondents were asked to give their opinion about the various reported malpractices among the political parties in the state.

Figure 8: Level of Malicious Practices in Political Parties



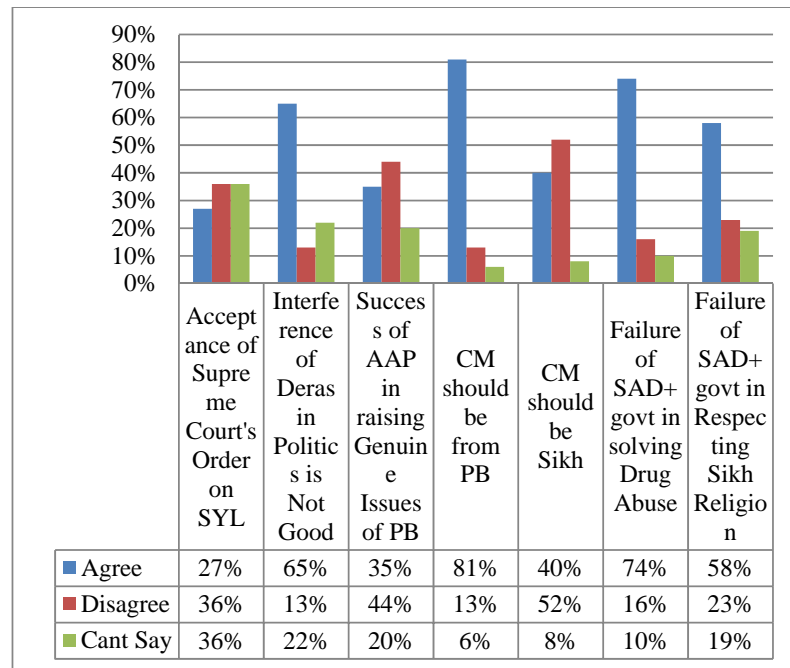
Source: CSDS, Data Unit

Figure 8 illustrates the opinion of the respondents about the malicious practices found in political parties of Punjab. The data shows that the Akali Dal is leading in corruption, nepotism, factionalism vis-à-vis all other political parties in the state.

Figure 9 shows the response of the respondents about various issues. A total 36 percent of the total respondents did not agree with the latest decision of the

Supreme Court to allow water to Haryana through the Satluj-Yamuna Link (SYL) canal, however, 26 percent agreed with the decision to allow. The mushrooming of deras in Punjab has muddled their political role in recent times. The deras and babas have become ATMs of vote bank in the state. There is also emergence of competition among the political leaders of all parties to appease the heads of the deras to gain their support. The figure shows that majority of the respondents (65 percent) were against the interference of deras in Punjab politics. The AAP seems to have lost its appeal (unlike in the 2014 parliamentary elections) as genuine sympathizers of people in terms of raising serious issues which affect people in these elections.

Figure 9: Opinion on Common Issues of 2017 Assembly Elections



Source: CSDS Data Unit

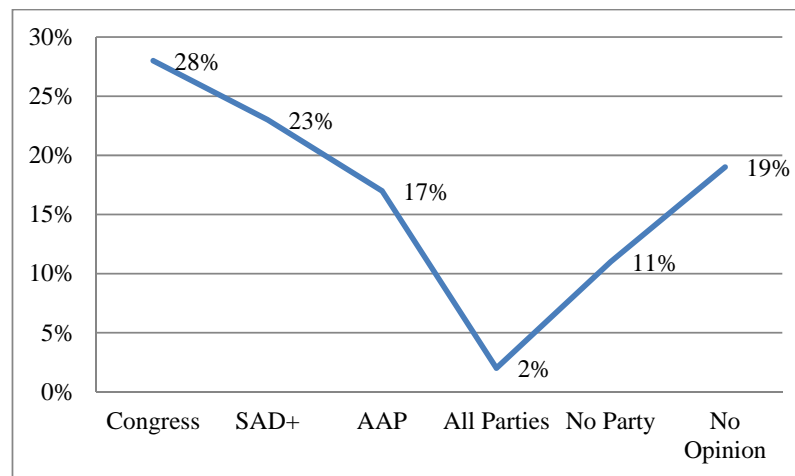
Four-fifth of the total respondents wanted to have their future Chief Minister hailing from Punjab. On the other hand, majority of the respondents disagreed with the argument that the Chief Minister of Punjab should be a Sikh, giving a new dimension to future politics in the state. The performance of the government can be further gauged from the response of respondents on the crucial issues of drug abuse and respect for Sikh sentiments under a Panthic government. The

data clearly indicates that 58 percent of the respondents blamed the government of failing in assuring respect for the religious sentiments of the Sikh religion.

The controversial Satluj–Yamuna Link Canal agreement remained a crucial issue in the elections in the state. The recent order of the honorable Supreme Court created lot of heat before and during the 2017 elections. The respondents were asked to answer the question “Which Party you think is capable to resolve SYL Issue”?

Figure 10 shows that the respondents showed a high level of trust in the Congress party to solve the issue of the Satluj-Yamuna Link Canal between Punjab and Haryana. Here it is worth noting that Amarinder Singh, the Chief Ministerial candidate of the Congress had resigned his Lok Sabha seat after the Supreme Court verdict on SYL issue in November 2016, just a few months before the elections were due.

Figure 10: Preference to Parties for Resolving SYL



Source: CSDS Data Unit

Conclusion

The 2017 assembly elections of the Punjab, although resulted in an expected political change, this time the reasons for this change was not solely the incumbency factor. The entry of AAP definitely affected the ways in which elections were fought in Punjab, compared with earlier ones. Though AAP was not successful in whipping away a wave in its favor, nevertheless it managed to create a swing in the votes of both the Congress as well as Akali-BJP alliance. The agenda of the present assembly election did not hover around identity politics and religion rather development and related issues were important considerations for people of the state in their decision to vote. The election

debates were far more than the traditional *panthic* agenda. Even the pan-Hindu identity issue raised by the Akali alliance partner BJP at the national level could not secure them votes of the urban Hindu population. Keeping in mind the deteriorating economic conditions, particularly for business and equally for the farmers, voting in the assembly elections resulted in a win for the Congress. It is due to this reason people considered development, unemployment and drug addiction as among the important issues when deciding whom to vote for.

With the AAP as a new entrant a lot of changes were seen in agendas as well as in the mandate. However, the party could not fetch the expected results due to a number of reasons, such as lack in the organizational structure, lack of political experience, not declaring a Chief Ministerial candidate, wrong choice of candidates, Delhi-based decision making etc. In spite of these lacunas the debut party became the second largest party in the state. It not only provided a third alternative to the people but also became a platform for political activists and leaders who could not reach higher levels in spite of their excellent work for the traditional parties. It also acted as a voice for the unheard and unconsidered issues on which both the traditional parties had a mutual understanding. The 2017 elections have shown that the traditional way of setting agendas and working patterns will not work in the future and now every government will need to work on developmental goals. People have not only become more politically aware but due to rise of social media, politicians are made answerable for their promises of the past. Good governance and development along with secured economic opportunities are the demand of the people of the state, now they may not be easily distracted by raising of regional political interests. The age of parochial issues and schemes have faded away and a brighter era with economic, political and social growth of the people is expected to come in the future where democracy in real terms can be executed by the real power bearers and that is the people themselves.

Notes

¹ Jagrup Singh Sekhon and Sunayana Sharma, "Evaluation of SAD-BJP Government (2007-17)", *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol. LII, No.3, January 21, 2017.

² Darbara Singh was the Chief Minister of Punjab from 1980-83. He was born in Jandiala, Amritsar District and happened to be the only Chief Minister who did not belong to the Malwa region in the re-organized Punjab.

³ Ashutosh Kumar, "Punjab Elections Exploring the Verdict", *Economic & Political Weekly*, (June 2007): 2243-2045.

⁴ Jagrup Singh Sekhon, "Punjab Assembly Elections-2012," Lokniti Editorial, accessed from: <http://www.lokniti.org/editorialapril.php>