



Punjab electoral politics and voting behaviour in assembly election from 2012 to 2022

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Abstract The present study investigates the events and circumstances that shape the voter's decisions and their involvement in the electoral process. It also aims to analyze factors that have affected electoral politics and voting behavior in the Punjab Assembly election. India's geo-political, socio-economic, cultural, and religious conditions played an important role in the formation, identity, and growth of the political parties in Punjab. The present study deals with the comparative analysis of the major political organizations and their role in future political developments in the province. This research article also provides a deep political insight into the nature and quality invested in the leadership of the Punjab political parties. The paper analyzes the analytical overview of Punjab's electoral politics from the 2012 to 2022 Assembly elections. Lok Sabha elections 2019 initially seemed to be a direct fight in the State of Punjab between the traditional rivals of politics, i.e., the Shiromani Akali Dal—Bharatiya Janata Party alliance and the Congress Party. But the excellent performance of the newly formed Aam Aadmi Party made it a triangular contest between the Shiromani Akali

Dal—Bharatiya Janata Party alliance, Congress, and Aam Aadmi Party. The study examines the causes for the Aam Aadmi Party's landslide success in Punjab elections and why residents overwhelmingly voted for the Delhi model of development promised by the party in the state's 16th assembly election. The present study is based on secondary data sources and adapted the qualitative and quantitative methods. Participatory research methods, narratives, discourses, and grounded theory are the fundamental approaches besides correlation, technique, and geo-spatial mapping. The data has been analyzed and interpreted with the help of various statistical methods like simple statistics and cartographic techniques for analyzing data like percentages, choropleth, line Graphs, and Arc GIS 10.2. It is being observed that political party-based association, local groupings, language, class, factors of caste, biradari, ideology, and religious identities are the main contributing factors in defining the trend of voting behavior in Punjab. The emergence of Aam Aadmi party as a dominant political force in electoral politics of Punjab is reflected in the crucial adaptation of civic politics based on its profound Delhi Model.

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Abbreviation
SAD Shiromani Akali Dal

BJP Bharatiya Janata Party
INC Indian National Congress
AAP Aam Aadmi Party

Introduction

Democracy is incomplete without political parties because these are the principal agents to aggregate public opinions and represent those opinions in the political decision-making process through representatives (Min & Golden, 2014). Political parties participate in elections by fielding their candidates and giving political choices to the people. Being a federal system, we have central and state elections. The state-level elections are important because the states have been assigned an important role in the Indian political system (Biswas et al., 2021). Every state election has to play a significant role in sending its representatives to the legislative assembly. Elections in a democracy provide a platform for various political formations of a country to obtain people's endorsement of the ideas and policy programs advocated by them. Elections provide a link to the individuals with the political system. Individuals' interests and attitudes toward politics can be understood through elections. Elections are essential processes of political mobilization and participation (Biswas et al., 2022). Elections play a formative role in changing governments under the democratic political system. Participation in elections helps strengthen the people's sense of belonging and shape and influence the nature and work of the political system (Amer, 2014). According to Norman D Palmer, Elections are complex events involving individual and collective decisions that directly affect and are affected by the entire political and social process (Malik & Malik, 2017). They open channels between the polity and the society, the elites, and the masses, and between the individual and the government (Arulampalam et al., 2009). The electoral behavior of one citizen can and does differ from another in terms of voting attitude, polling participation, and deciding choice (Iyer & Shrivastava, 2018). The voting process not only decides the political fate of representatives but also the trends in the political process. It helps to know whether the people are satisfied with their government. The political process is a mechanism for formulating and administering public policy, usually by interacting with political leadership

and public opinion (Javid, 2011). It involves those actively involved in political discourse, like politicians, citizens, members of pressure groups, demonstrators, and dissidents. In other words, it includes many citizens in accepting or peacefully refusing representatives.

Like any other aspect of human behavior, voting behavior takes place in a socio-cultural milieu. It is affected by social structure, economic development, and historical factors combined. The term voting behavior is not limited to voting records, a compilation of voting statistics, and the computation of electoral shifts (Biswas et al 2018). Rather, it is an analysis of individual psychological processes like perception, emotion, and motivation and their relation to the voting decision of a group, structures, and functions, and their relation to political action, as well as institutional patterns, such as the communication process and their impact on elections. The reputation of the candidates, the image of the state ruling party, its achievements, core issues of the state, and the various religious and financial factors decide the destiny of political parties (Biswas, 2022). Elections are never contested in a vacuum. Various regional and socio-political factors play an important role. The family factor remains a significant factor in the Punjab assembly elections. The role of the state is to govern through the enactment and implementation of public policy. In a democracy, public policy formulation is closely related to the satisfaction of the needs of the citizens (Judge, 2012). The key question that this essay attempts to answer is whether elected representatives effectively consider citizens' needs during the formulation of policy outcomes and whether there is a fundamental link between the formulation of 'responsive' public policy and the reflection of an elected representative. The key issues that dominated the assembly elections in Punjab were drug abuse among the youth, the growing incidence of cancer, nepotism, development, corruption, and the misuse of central grants (Chima, 2015). The reputation of the candidates, the image of the state ruling party, its achievements, core issues of the state, and the various religious and financial factors decide voting behavior. In Punjab, as elsewhere, the social structure has a great role to play, such as family, kin, group, caste, and neighborhood, which determine the choice of an alternative in more aspects of life (Iyer & Shrivastava, 2018). Despite rapid socio-economic and political

changes, voting or political behavior has not become free of such influence. However, voting behavior is a complex process, and it isn't easy to analyze the workings of the voters' minds. Voting preference is a result of an interplay of many variables. However, it becomes difficult to determine the key variable determining the voter's behavior toward the early preference. The people of Punjab have not adopted a uniform pattern of voting.

The emergence of the AAP in Punjab raises important questions. A bipolar party system is firmly rooted in the state in the context of thriving identity politics. The political scene in Punjab is vibrant, with high levels of political participation and contestation. How did a party like the AAP, without a definitive ideology or traditional social or regional support base in the state or state-level leadership or resources, manage to mark its presence? Another question that relates to recent developments in the state, with the political landscape of Punjab getting more complex with each passing day and with the AAP being at the receiving end, is whether the party's success will be long-term. The present paper addresses these two questions while taking up the recent political developments in the state for detailed discussion.

Indian National Congress used "Channi Karda Masle Hall" (Channi has solved every matters), Shiromani Akali Dal used "Je chaonde ho vikas Sukbir te Karo Vishvas" (if you have seek development then just have faith in Sukhbir) and Aam Admi Party (AAP) used their famous slogan "Ek Moka Kejriwal nu" (One Chance to Kejriwal). These types of slogans have gained popularity in public and have become a trend in Punjab State elections.

Objectives

The major objective of the present study is to make scientific explanations of the voting behavior of people in Punjab in the state's 2012 and 2022 assembly elections.

- To examine the patterns of voting behavior in the Assembly elections from (2012 -2022) in Punjab.
- To analyze the causes and factors that have led to changes in the voting behavior of the electorates in Punjab.

- To analyze the differences in rural–urban voting behavior in Assembly elections in Punjab.
- To compare voting behavior and outcomes of the 2012 and 2022 Assembly Elections in Punjab.

Research questions

What kinds of group identities-religious and caste, have been prominent in Punjab politics?

Problems and significance of the study

As India is the world's largest democracy, the strength and survival of democracy depend on citizens' political participation i.e. casting the votes and taking an active part in formulating policies and other matters of national importance. The overall purpose of election studies is to find out the electorates' voting behavior and attitudes and to trace the voting patterns and trends based on the opinions and attitudes of the voters. The election studies present a narrative account of various events that take place during elections and scientifically identify and explain the recurring causal dynamic underlying the particular events of that election based on voters' opinions and feedback. The reason for measuring voting behavior is to understand the voting patterns in elections by probing key issues like why people vote or do not vote, how they arrive at voting decisions, and questions connected with voters' engagement and participation in the elections. Thus elections are studied and examined primarily through the prism of voters. Voters are undoubtedly the masters of a democracy. It is very difficult to read the minds of voters. Their change of mind from one election to another, how they decide to vote for a particular party or a candidate, reveals their commitment. The reasons for measuring voting behavior are manifold. Still, the main focus is to understand the voting patterns in elections by probing key issues like why people vote or do not vote, how they arrive at a voting decision, and questions connected with voters' engagement and participation in the elections. Thus elections are studied and examined primarily through the prism of the voters.

Electoral geography is the success story of contemporary political geography if output quality is a gauge of success. In the preceding 20 years, hundreds of studies on the geography of elections, voting

habits, and voter political awareness in various parts of India have been published. Studies on Punjab electoral politics and voting patterns, however, are few. The current research focuses on electoral politics and the political nature of electorates in a regional context. The current analysis helps inform future research on the electoral geography of Punjab by shedding light on voting behaviors, patterns, and trends in assembly elections. The study will also be useful to the legislators, planners, and managers creating the state's citizen development plans.

Review of literature

To provide a comprehensive background to the research topic as well as to know the research gaps, a review of the existing literature on various correlated issues such as elections, the voting behavior of the electorates, participation of people in the political process, the role of the political parties has been undertaken. To address this issue, some common patterns influence electoral behavior. In this literature review, many books, articles, and other academic materials were studied that examined the political process, especially in Punjab. Some of these are:

Jensenius (2013) has discussed the nature and dynamics of Punjab's politics since independence. He has mentioned several aspects of politics, such as the Akali Dal's secessionist demand for a Punjabi-speaking state, repudiation by the Congress party that was the ruling Party in the State and Centre on the ideals of national unity and integrity, Akali politics of protest and movement to accomplish their demand etc. Kumar (2019) the book deals with the major political problem generally confronting every new nation or state, that is, how to create a functioning political system under various internal threats present in the society. He is of the view that if a society is not divided representatively, then the majority sections of the society dominate the minorities. Suppose a society is more diversified. In that case, a minority community has more avenues for their development, and with the help of other groups, it will also restrain the ambitions of any group aspiring for domination in society. Bashir and Khalid (2020), the author, views that Sikhs were a minority in the pre-1966 Punjab. They adopted constitutional means that

included the electoral process, raising the issue in parliament, submitting the memorandum, public rallies, protests, and others. The Akalis also used infiltration politics to join the Congress to achieve political advantages of factional politics of the Congress. (Singh, 2014). He has analyzed the social diversity in the state in a very right way by stating that Punjab is such a state where no political party that clings to a particular caste or religion can rule because each section is divided by different castes and economic parameters. The political party or coalition of parties that adopt secular idealism can rule in the state. (Sharma, 2012) He has explained various factors that contributed to the victory of the Congress party in the state, like the secular image of the party, power at the Centre, and Akali Dal's support to the particular section of society. This is the reason that the Congress party mobilized significant electoral support in the state. It is an important work on the politics of Sikhs as a minority community. Yogendra Yadav and Suhas Palshikar (2009) present the dynamics of political processes in the Punjab states of India. It is a comprehensive framework for understanding and examining their view of state politics. They held the view that the autonomy of state politics means autonomy from national politics. In the present era, state politics has become more and more effective, and the role of regional parties has become more important than ever. As the nature of political choice varies from State to State, similarly, the results of elections also vary from State to State. In the first thesis, they believe that ideologies and political legacies still have relevance in the state. Secondly, they held that the states that have witnessed separatist movements on linguistic, religious, ethnicity, etc., had faced major internal divisions. However, their relationship with the union has not weakened. (Palshikar & Suri, 2014) He relates to political culture, political ideologies, and public opinion, which shape the political activities of the government in a more literal sense. States have developed different cultures of democracy that are more specific to the state concerned. The rise of coalition politics and social and political movements have been discussed. The authors believe that the last three decades of the twentieth century have witnessed the rise of violence and coercion in society due to secessionist movements and communalism, which affect all spheres of life.

Research methodology

Qualitative methods and approaches are the dominating tools and techniques of this research work. Participatory research methods, narratives, discourses, and grounded theory are the fundamental approaches for this study. It analyses the grounded theory of cultural space and places identity influencing electoral behavior and its variations across the state. The study is also based on historical and analytical methods. The historical method helps understand the past experiences of electoral behavior of certain issues and challenges pertaining to voting behavior and party performances in Punjab. This study is based upon secondary sources of data that have been collected from the Election Commission of India, New Delhi. The data has been analyzed and interpreted with the help of various statistical and cartographic tools and techniques like percentage, choropleth, line Graphs, and Arc GIS 10.2. The Newspaper report, election documents, and manifesto are the archival sources consulted to explain political parties' role in the electoral campaigns and mobilization.

Study area

The location of Punjab in the northwest of the Indian Sub-continent is a matter of great geographical and historical Significance. In Punjab, 57.69% of the population is Sikh by religion. Its capital is Chandigarh, in the west-central part of the state. Punjab has a total area of 50,362 Km² sq. Which is 1.6% of the total area of India. 75.8% literacy rate. Sex ratio 895. Population density 551. As two-thirds of its population and 70% of its workers live in villages, Punjab remains predominantly a rural economy. Further, 39.4% of Punjab's workers are engaged in agriculture. The corruption and size of the black economy in the state are highly correlated with each other. This, along with the high degree of corruption, should be a serious concern of all the political parties in the state. There are 117 MLAs and 20 MPs from Punjab, including 7 in the Rajya Sabha and 13 in the Lok Sabha (Fig. 1).

History of political process in Punjab

In Punjab, agitation and protest politics have their origins in the Khilafat/Hijrat (1920) and Gurdwara

reform (1920) movements (Chopra, 2012). Congress extended its mediation to these movements and used their popularity to increase mass participation in the national movement. Gurdwara and Khilafat people were responsible for the origin of the Communist Party and other forms of Left politics in Punjab (Singh, 2014). Sikh politics was the direct outcome of the Gurdwara reform movement (Sharma, 2009). These political formations extensively used the strategy of civil disobedience against British colonialism. Left organized a number of peasant agitations, and both Communists and Akalis stepped in and out of the Congress stream from time to time. Punjab after 1921 was lukewarm to Gandhian movements, and both Left and Akalis did not support the Quit India movement (1942) on different grounds. This way, Left and Sikh formations had experienced agitation politics in Punjab before independence which was quite autonomous from the command of the Congress (Sharma & Kalra, 2013). After independence, they also extensively used agitation politics for various issues against the Congress rule.

In pre-partition Punjab, Muslims constituted half of the population. After partition, Punjab comprised over 60% Hindu population and 31% Sikh population. After reorganization into Himachal, Haryana, and Punjab, Punjab became a Sikh majority state with exactly the reverse: the Sikh community constituted 60%, and the Hindus constituted 37% of the population (Javid, 2011). While partition and resulting riots momentarily witnessed the rise of anti-Muslim sentiment, the demand for the creation of a Punjabi sabha contributed a great deal to shaping the contemporary Sikh identity. While partition and resulting riots momentarily witnessed the rise of anti-Muslim sentiment, the demand for the creation of a Punjabi sabha contributed a great deal to shaping the contemporary Sikh identity. The Akalis sought to demand a state that would satisfy aspirations to uphold 'Punjabiyaat'. But notions of punjabiyat got inextricably linked to 'Khalsa ka bolbala'. Mobilization of Hindu segments by the Arya Samaj, its appeal to Hindus to register Hindi as their mother tongue, emphasis on the Vedic tradition, and attempts to distance the Hindus from Sikh tradition contributed to the crystallization of Sikh identity as the basis of punjabiyat sowing the seeds of communal identity and politics based on that identity. Thus, the language controversy was symptomatic of a 'deeper quest for recognition and

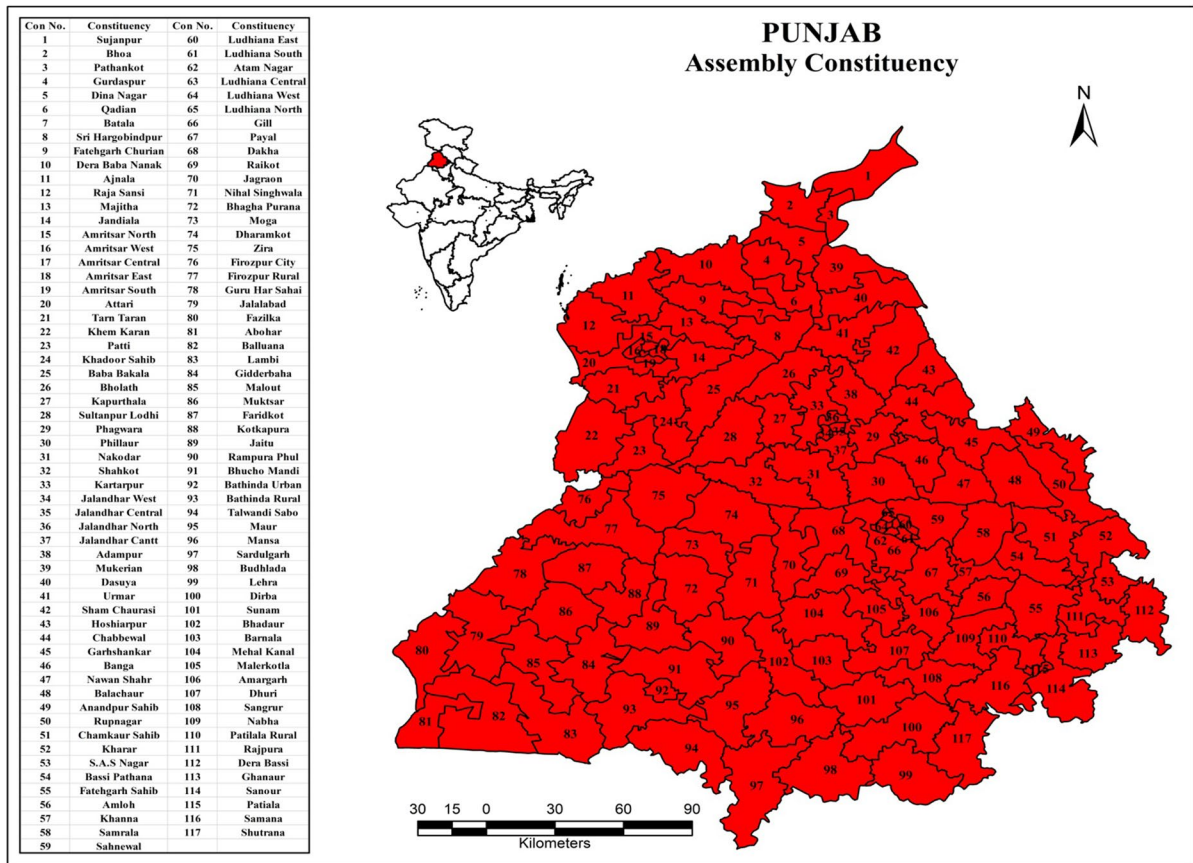


Fig. 1 Location map of the study area

power.’ (Sharma & Kalra, 2013). The fallout of these developments was the concern of both communities (Hindu and Sikh) for their distinct identity (Kumar, 2017). This is not to say that Sikh identity politics emerged only after independence. The creation of Akali Dal as an institutional-political arm of the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) marks the beginning of this politics. The Akalis continued to project themselves as a protector of the Punjabi language and the Sikh religion against the deliberate pursuit of the policy to assimilate the language and culture of a minority group. In the landscape of the Punjab assembly election, the political alliances headed by the Shiromani Akali Dal under the management of Jat Sikh leadership were lost in the battle by Captain Amarinder Singh of INC Domination of SAD in the electoral strength was challenged through an aggregate of recent political management, actors of BJP, AAP, and INC.

Cultural spaces, identities, and elections in Punjab

The critical point is that democracy may be about numbers, but people and cultures are not. There is enough work on the census, its politics of numerals, and how it has failed to reckon with the fuzziness of our world, especially its caste-ridden religious landscape since its beginning as a colonial tool in mid-19th century India. Even now, in Punjab, the expression 32% SC population fails to indicate the marginality of Dalit politics. Besides the economy, however, cultural divisions also play an important role in Punjab politics. Identity is a discrete and bounded unit rather than an all-encompassing abstract idea. Culture can be conceived as “a way of life” and a system of shared values that legitimate preferred social relationships (Javid, 2012). Identity usually can be defined as when a customer easily identifies a product and can also differentiate a product or service

from other products and relate to it (Singh, 2021). A political party identity would be the party's vision, political slogan, party logo, colors used, and others. Organizational identity or identity of a brand is the combination of organizational history, culture, characteristics, position, structure, and reputation with the entrant, clients, and society; it is formed with a link over a long period of time.

Culture matters in Punjab politics because it helps shape people's social identities, societal norms of behavior, and prevailing standards of political legitimacy. To determine why some voters support ethnically-defined political parties, we have to understand what exactly it is that ethnic voting offers. To understand how democracy can function in ethnically diverse societies, we explore how voting decisions are made under conditions of ethnic diversity. Election results are the product of interactive decision-making by two groups of actor voters and politicians. When ethnic identities are politicized, it is because both sets of actors have chosen to politicize them. In other words, when ethnicity is politically relevant, it is because elites have chosen to mobilize voters based on ethnic identities, and voters have chosen to support candidates who do so. Why do politicians choose to campaign on ethnic platforms? What strategies are available to politicians who politicize ethnicity, and why do voters support candidates? In asking this question, we hope not only to further our collective understanding of elections, democracy, and political development but also to explore the role of ethnicity and identity in the human experience. Questioning the link between individual-level ethnic identities and group-level political mobilization ultimately speaks to fundamental issues regarding the role of the individual in society and how an individual's experience is integrated into a societal whole.

Cultural voters can be seen as individuals who vote for political candidates and identify with political parties primarily based on their cultural identifications, i.e., their racial-ethnic and religious identities. Punjab has the largest proportion of the Dalit population (31.9% as per the 2011 census) as compared to other parts of the country. It is generally argued that in Punjab, there is discrimination without untouchability due to the significant influence of Sikhism as an egalitarian religion. Punjab is a land of saints and gurus who rejected the caste system and taught a lesson of equality and fraternity (Javid, 2011). Sikh ideology

influenced society, and Sikhism started the path of *Sangat* and *Pangat* to eradicate casteism to make society equal. Still, it also could not achieve this goal in its entirety. The Sikh community, which is only 2% of India's total population, is a majority in this state as it constitutes 63% of the population in Punjab. As far as the demographic spread in the region is concerned, it is uneven, with 37% in Doaba, 31% in Malwa, and 29% in Majha. However, in absolute numbers, Malwa has the highest Dalit population. There are variations within the community as far as their economic condition is concerned. For instance, the Mazhabi Sikhs, who constitute nearly one-third of the Dalit population in Punjab, primarily depend on agriculture, which, in any case, is limited. Political parties and their leaders are interested in Dalit votes. But unfortunately, they miss out on ground realities and the diverse issues affecting them. "The caste system among the Sikhs is largely based on power and privilege paradigm, whereas the Hindu caste system has a strong ideological basis, supporting and legitimizing the given inequality system." In the early twentieth century, the Ravidasi and Ad-Dharmi movement played an important role in Dalit empowerment.

The larger discourse of Dalit politics that calls upon different caste groups to come together under a common political banner has also played some role in identity formation. The BSP's first step in politics was establishing an independent Dalit political leadership in a party that was led and dominated by the Dalits with an independent agenda. The BSP leadership in Punjab could not evolve an integrated ideology that could unite the Dalit castes under one umbrella. Despite the high concentration of Dalit populations, the inability of the BSP to gain electorally politically can be attributed to the party's failure in terms of its organization and strategy. The absence of coordination among the various organizations of the party and the failure of the party leadership to focus on regional social, and economic discrimination in egalitarianism continue to haunt Dalits. The next largest proportion is that of the Dalits, which about 30% is. However, Dalits are divided along caste and religious lines resulting in the absence of any visible pattern in their voting behavior. However, Dalits are divided along caste and religious lines resulting in the absence of any visible pattern in their voting behavior. The Chamars and

the Bhangi/Choorh castes are important in terms of numerical preponderance. Among the Chamars, the Ad-dharmis and the Ravidas have traditionally voted for the Congress, and now they are divided in terms of their votes for the Congress and the BSP (Singh, 2014). The Ramdas Chamars have been voting for the SAD. Among the Bhangis, the Valmikis voted for the Congress, the Mazabis for the SAD, and the Christian Masihis for the Congress. Besides these predominant patterns, there is also some concentration of the Megh caste in Amritsar and Jalandhar cities and the villages of Kapurthala district. They are religiously divided into Kabirpanthis, Arya Samajis, and Sikhs. Their voting behavior is also religiously divided. Noticeably, except among the Ad-dharmis and the Ravidasias, the Dalits do not show any preference for the BSP. Even though certain castes, namely, Rajput, Saini, Mehton, Lobana, and Kam, both have low numerical strength, due to their concentration in certain pockets, they have become effective players in electoral politics despite being politically divided. What is most notable is that their caste identities override the religious divisions among them. Caste consideration in the choice of the candidate is an important factor with regard to the numerical domination of certain caste communities in particular areas.

In Punjab, Dalit support for Congress remains an established fact. Congress was the only party that enjoyed the support of all sections of Dalits (Hindu or Sikh, Ravidasi or Balmiki, Mazhabi Sikh, or Ramdasias Sikh). They attached themselves to Congress because of its monopoly over the authoritative allocation of values. State-building and Congress dominance strengthened each other. Khaddar-clad Congress leaders became the symbols of state authority in villages and cities. Government jobs, education, permit quota, licenses, appointments and transfers, lands and plots, cheap loans, police stations, and bureaucracy were finally pulled by the Congress leaders. One institution that contributed significantly to mediating between Congress and Dalits was the introduction of a universal adult franchise (Nayar, 2015). This led to the historical empowerment of Dalits, and at the same time, it created a lasting vote bank for Congress. During elections, common Dalits tasted dignified treatment from so-called upper castes.

Role of Arya Samaj in Punjab politics

Arya Samaj continues to influence Punjab politics profoundly. To understand Punjab politics, the role of the local Arya center is particularly important. The local Arya centers bring together people who not only share their belief in the doctrine of Arya Samaj but are also in agreement over certain political issues and in their commitment to political parties (Raza, 2011). The question that needs attention here is why politicians take an interest in the affairs of local Arya centers. In a political system based on an adult franchise, every politician has to have a following to get elected, irrespective of his party affiliation. For this purpose, he must depend on various relationships, such as caste, kinship, locality, and religion. As each local Arya center recruits most of its members from the same locality, the members have multiple relationships with other residents. That is to say, the members of a local Arya center are, at the same time, members of various other groups such as caste, kinship, locality, and occupational groups. The local Arya centers act as vote banks. Every center has a hierarchy of leaders, each having his following among members of the center and other residents of the locality. Each enjoys a certain standing, depending upon the number of votes he can pledge to a candidate in a particular context. The importance of understanding the role of Arya Samaj in Punjab politics cannot be overemphasized. Arya Samaj has influenced Punjab politics and continues to do so. What is of significance here is to note the role of local Arya centers in the modern political set-up of Punjab.

The control over local Arya centers helps the leaders hold large sections of people in different localities. Every political party in Punjab, except the Akali Dal, strives to gain control over Arya Samaj in general and the local Arya centers in particular by claiming some similarity, real or fictitious, between its political ideology and the principles of Arya Samaj (Sharma, 2012). For instance, the Congress party claims that it was due to its long association with Arya Samaj that Congress became a socialistic party. Jan Sangh also claims a similar Arya Samaj on the ground that both regard the cow and the -Hindi language as sacred. However, unlike the Congress party and the Jan Sangh, who claim similarity only with the principles of the Arya Samaj, the Communists claim a similarity both with its principles and with its method of work.

Both the Arya Samajists and the Communists are militant. Moreover, both are said to be working for the same goal, creating a classless and casteless society.

Malwa region and AAP politics

The Malwa region's social, economic, and political set-up where AAP did so well. Malwa is between the Sutlej and Ghagar rivers and comprises Punjab's central and south-western districts. The socio-economic composition of Malwa is different from that of the Doaba and Majha regions. The region's urban areas comprise Hindu upper castes, artisan castes, and lower castes. However, its rural areas are dominated by big landlords and a Jat Sikh landed peasantry. There are also marginal farmers and landless laborers who invariably are Dalits. The literacy rates of the districts in the region are very low compared to the other two regions. The economic conditions of marginal farmers and laborers in the Malwa region are pitiable, with many in debt for a major part of their lives. Farmers and agricultural laborers have committed suicide in every village, particularly in the cotton belt of Sangrur, Barnala, Bathinda, Faridkot, and Mansa. The people of the region also face the menace of drugs. The delivery of basic amenities such as health, education, social security, roads, transportation, and employment is very poor. The political elite, however, is from farming families with large holdings or the business class. They have little interest in providing basic amenities to marginal farmers and laborers.

A conflict of interests can be seen between the two socio-economic segments of society. The first has big landowners from the upper castes, who are politically dominant and exert control over mainstream religion. The second has marginal peasants and laborers, who are Dalits. They are educationally backward, socially excluded, and politically marginalized. Given this, conditions were very much in favor of AAP, particularly in rural areas (Malik & Malik, 2017). The marginalized sections of Malwa were disillusioned with mainstream political leaders who had not paid adequate attention to their demands (Mughal, 2020). The ordinary people suffered from the effects of various ills such as corruption, red tape, lack of potable water, insufficient security for women, drugs, poor health services, inflation, unemployment, rising corruption costs, and indebtedness. AAP leaders, particularly

Mann, a comedian turned politician, effectively highlighted such issues in their campaigns. Drug trafficking is a major challenge in the state, and they blamed the government for not controlling it while pointing to the catastrophic consequences it has had on the youth.

The electoral dynamics of Urban and rural spaces in Punjab

Punjab's rural power-holders continue to play a significant role in Punjab politics. The concept of class is crucial to understanding the social structure of Punjab not only due to the economic stratification of rural Punjab but also due to the enduring relationship between class and political power in the province (Bashir & Khalid, 2020). Historically, land control was the core of rural India's political authority. Another important aspect of the demographic composition of religious communities in Punjab is their uneven rural–urban distribution (Mahajan & Jodhka 2010). Despite being in the minority at the state level, Hindus overwhelmingly dominate urban Punjab, while the Sikhs are concentrated in rural areas. In the 2011 Census, the proportion of the Hindu population was as high as 76.46% in Jalandhar and 76% in Gurdaspur. On the other extreme, Sikhs constituted 89% of the rural population in Amritsar and roughly 87% in Bhatinda.

Differences between rural and urban areas are particularly strong in Punjab. In the urban regions, which gained most from the economic transition and globalization, we may expect a greater focus on economic capital than cultural capital or (bonding) social capital dominating rural areas. Cities are also places where cultural norms are more often and more openly contested. In rural areas, on the contrary, traditional values are usually less questioned. The differences between cosmopolitan cities and rural areas should be most clearly visible, where rural areas are less affected by social change and are more traditionalistic. Both urbanization and the unemployment rate may help us understand the turnout level in a given county, the level of support for parties can be better explained by urbanization (Martin, 2015) (Figs. 2, 3, 4 and 5).

Punjab is a rural state; the rural people are more attached to local issues than to national issues. A place can be conceptualized in a variety of ways. However, from the political point of view, the

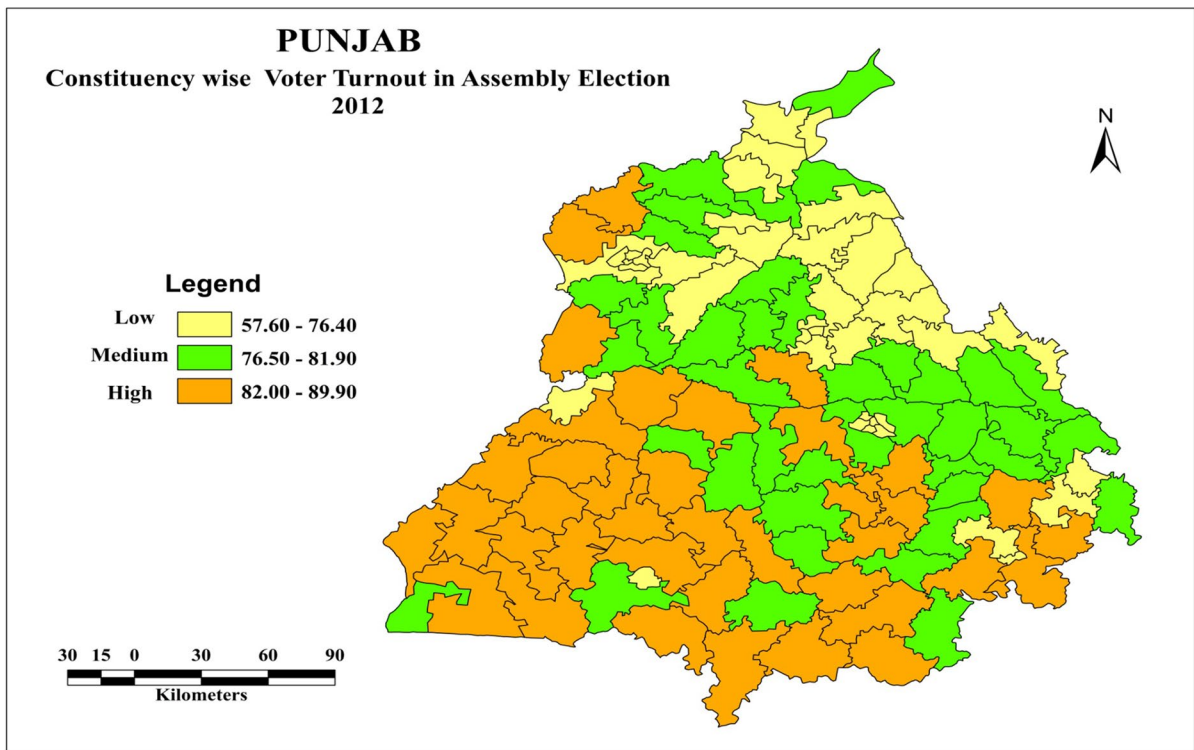


Fig. 2 Constituency wise voter turnout in assembly election 2012

construction of political space in terms of neighborhood region, and state, could be useful, especially in the Indian context (Bangash 2022). It is possible to argue that residents of a particular geographical region within a state may develop some common identity predisposing them to vote in a specific way compared to the other areas' problems like the construction of link roads, the opening of a village dispensary, the establishment of a school, drainage system, demand for technical educational institutions, transport facilities, etc. often influence the electorates. Since 1967, the rural people have been voting for the Akali Dal largely because of the party's commitment to rural development programs. The 15th general election results show that Congress got more votes from the urban areas, whereas Akali-Dal got more votes from rural areas. The urban voters blamed the ruling alliance government that it worked for the development of rural areas and ignoring the urban areas. So the performance of the government also affects the voting pattern.

In terms of urbanization on a community basis, we can observe that the Sikh proportion residing in urban centers varies from 36 to 40%. Hence in the 2012 election, about 13 urban constituencies were represented by the Non-BJP Party. However, apart from the influences of the voting line, other factors like anti-incumbency to SAD, the political strength of INC, and caste-based identity politics have also controlled the 2017 assembly elections. However, in 2022, we can observe the larger electoral victory of the AAP dominating rural and urban constituencies in Punjab. Only those seats traditionally belonged to the leadership stature of INC, SAD has been preserved. The poor in India vote more than the rich, which is an inverse relationship between political participation and economic and social well-being (Ahmad et al., 2019). The turnout in urban constituencies is less than in rural constituencies. At the same time, there is some disagreement over the period when urban electorate turnouts began to decline, particularly for the national elections. The voting behavior

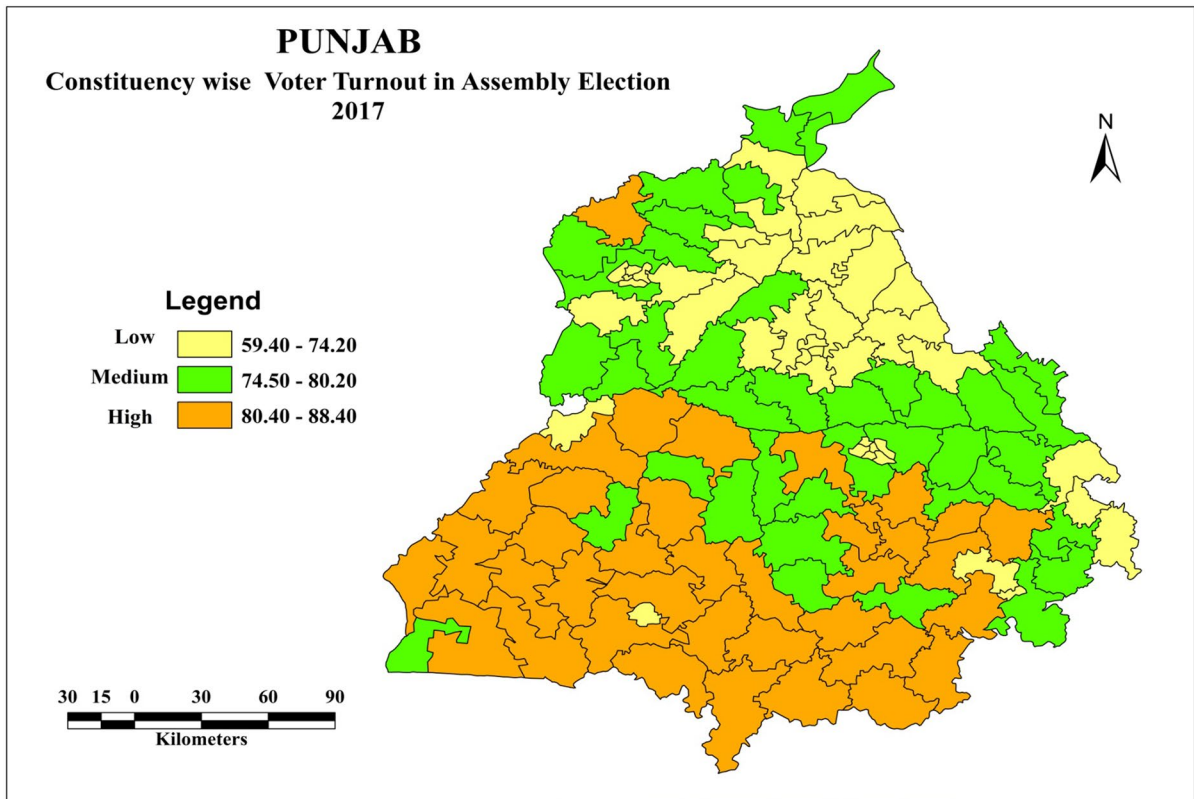


Fig. 3 Constituency wise voter turnout in assembly election 2017

of the rural people has been considerably influenced by local leaders such as village Sarpanch, village Panchayats, and members of Panchayat Samities and Zila Parishads. These leaders often remain in touch with the voters in many ways. They remain actively involved in their social ceremonies, such as at the time of birth and death in families, religious congregations, cultural fairs, religious fairs, etc. To get the voters' loyalty, the leaders help them in their day-to-day activities, such as work related to the police station, judiciary, revenue, banks, cooperative societies, etc. The local leaders play the arbitrator between the people and the MLA or MP. In this way, most parties approach these village leaders who work as 'vote banks' for various parties.

Patterns of voting behavior

The article presents an overview of the electoral politics of Punjab. Our study deals with the spatial and temporal variations of electoral behavior in the three

assembly elections in the political space of Punjab. It covers the elections of 2012, 2017, and 2022. This paper's main focus is on identifying, describing, and analyzing patterns of participation and associated parameters with the help of electoral data, maps, and empirical observations. The degree of success of a political party is a measure to be taken as the proportion of seats won by it to the total number of seats contested. Punjab state has witnessed a regular power oscillation between Congress and the SAD in the assembly elections.

Hence, we can easily observe that in the 2007 state Assembly election, SAD won 48 out of 117 seats and the vote percentage was 40.9; in the 2012 election, SAD got 56 out of 117, and the vote percentage was 37.7, and in the 2017 election it loosed 17 out of 117. The vote percentage was 25.4, and in 2022, SAD got 3 out of 117, and the vote percentage was 18.5, so the SAD party performance is declining in trends. The poor electoral performance of the Akali Dal during these assembly elections

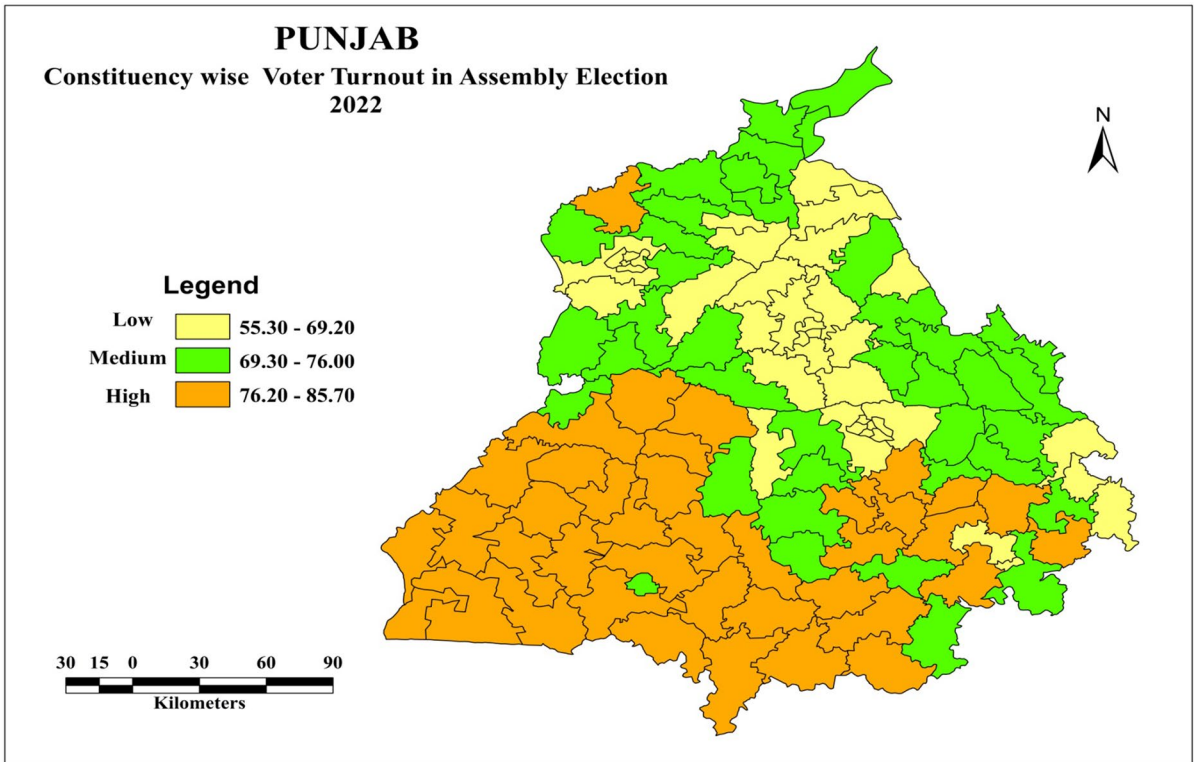


Fig. 4 Constituency wise voter turnout in assembly election 2022

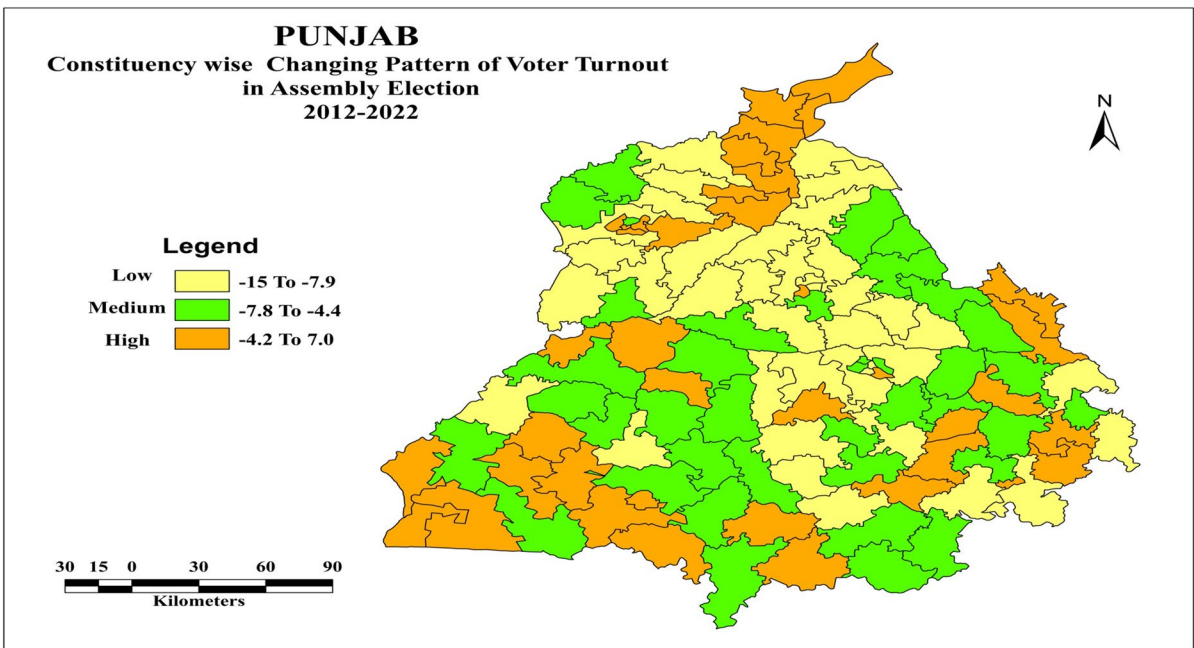


Fig. 5 Constituency wise changing pattern of voter turnout in assembly election 2012- 2022

in Punjab forced its leadership to relook at its approach and agenda. Because since the 1967 election it was among the worst electoral performance by the SAD. By now, it has become clear in the eyes of the public that religion is an integral part of Akali politics. After assuming power, the Badal government emphasized the development of rural areas, agriculture, health sources, marketing centers, focal points, etc., as the Akali Party had drawn support mainly from the rural areas. Subsequently, the measures and policies adopted by the Akalis benefitted the peasantry, especially the rich farmers. It has resonance in the current political degeneration of SAD (Figs. 6, 7 and 8).

During the 2007 and 2012 assembly elections, The Akali-BJP alliance, as mentioned, promised to provide a clean, corruption-free, and efficient regime. They assured to bring transparency to the administration. The alliance made many promises in their manifesto, such as an increase in power generation, more employment avenues, construction of houses for the poor, abolition of octroi, and simplification of sale

tax, etc. All these things acted as magic on the voters and culminated in the electoral outcome.

However, in 2022 INC is the second-largest Party in Punjab’s recent assembly elections under Charanjit Singh Channi. In the 2007 assembly election, INC won 44 out of 117 seats, and the vote percentage was 37.1; in 2012, elections won 56 out of 117, and the vote percentage was 42.1; and in the 2017 election, they owned 77 out of 117. The vote percentage was 38.8, and in the 2022 election, INC owned 18 out of 117, and the vote percentage was 23.1, so the INC party’s performance is stagnant due to the traditional Dalit and Sikh voters. In the 2012 elections, perhaps for the first time in the electoral history of Punjab, the politics of vendetta was unleashed by the two prominent leaders of Akali Dal and Congress as Parkash Singh Badal and Captain Amarinder Singh were fiercely contesting against each other. At the time of the campaign, both the stalwarts used the poster-war and bad-mouthing each other through advertisements in newspapers and election rallies. This was never witnessed earlier in the politics of Punjab. Electronic

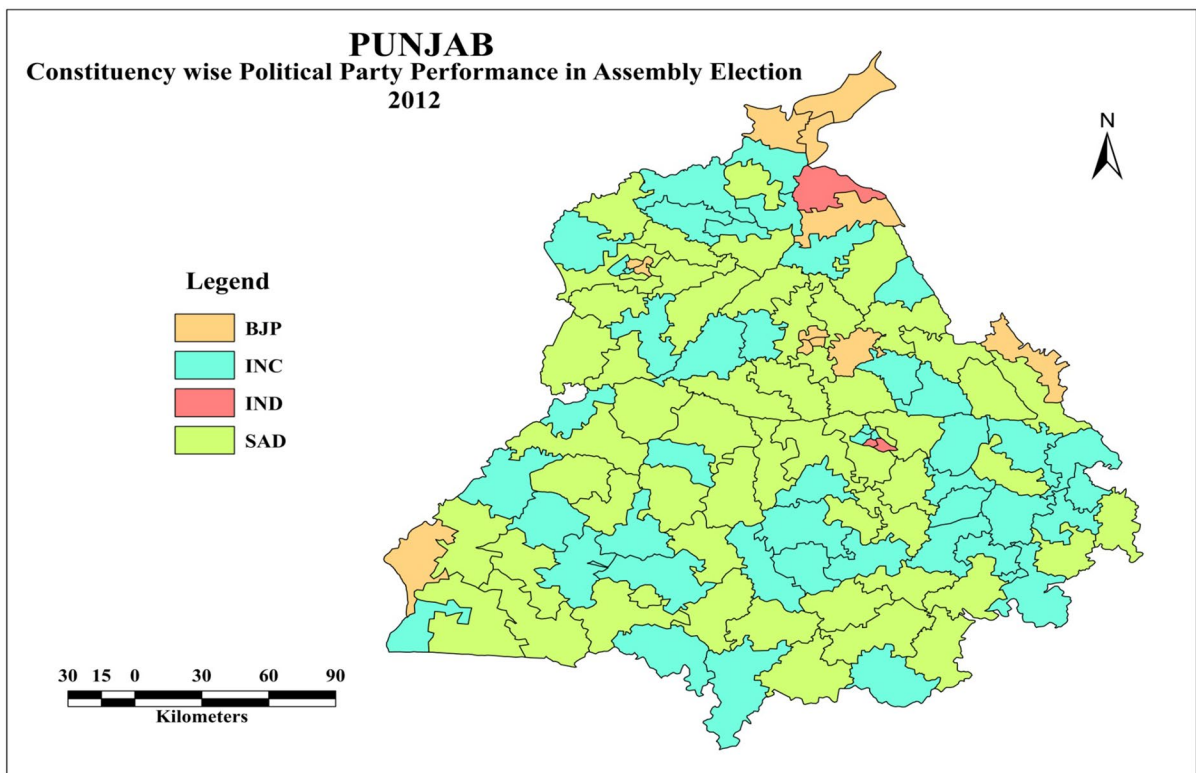


Fig. 6 Constituency wise political party performance in assembly election 2012

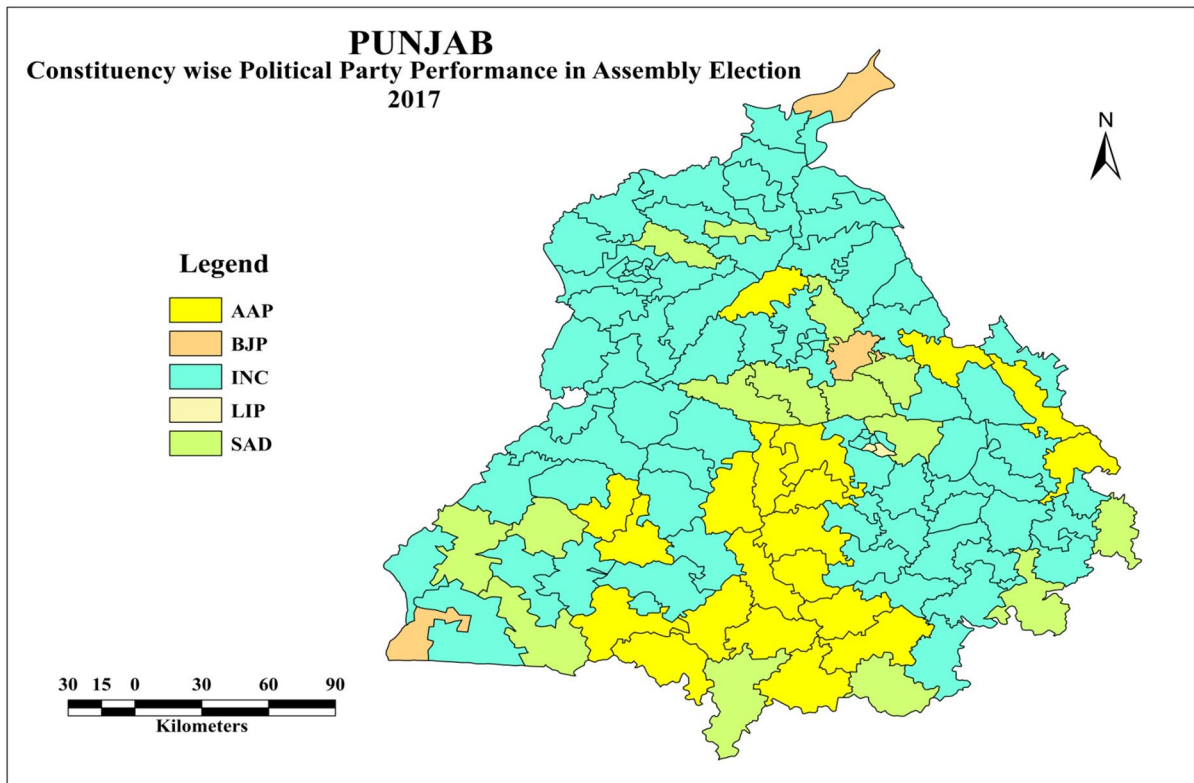


Fig. 7 Constituency wise political party performance in assembly election 2017

media and TV channels were extensively used to influence the electorates. This was also the first time that the votes were polled through Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs). Besides this, candidates used social media, computers, mobiles, and glamorous film stars to mobilize support. On the other side, the victory of the Congress Party in the Adampur Lok Sabha bye-election before the 2016 General Elections gave a boost to Congress leadership. The rallies organized by national leaders, especially Rahul Gandhi, filled enthusiasm in the rank and file of the party. INC strongly criticized the Badal government on the issues of corruption, unemployment, and other failures of the ruling alliance in the state.

The victory of the Congress and the defeat of the Akali Dal in these elections were affected by several factors. The dismal performance of the SAD-BJP government and intra-party conflict reduced its legitimacy among the public. The police agitation, communal disturbances, and caste conflict created an unfavorable situation for governance.

The shortage of essential goods and inflation tarnished the image of the ruling government. The constant infighting within the Akali leadership also affected the image of the alliance. Harchand Singh Longowal, a senior Akali leader, opined that the party's defeat was not due to the voters' rejection but because some of the dissident leaders within the party actively supported Congress candidates in Bathinda, Faridkot, and Tarn Taran constituencies. On the other side, Congress defeated the rulliang alliance in the 2017 assembly elections under the leadership of Captain Amarinder Singh. BJP-SAD regime was bitterly criticized on the issue of corruption and non-performance. The nepotism in the form of the rule of 'Badal Parivar' comprising of his son, wife, son-in-law, and nephew became a major cause of resentment among the voters. Moreover, the failure of the BJP to retain the support of its traditional upper-caste Hindu urban voters also led to the defeat of the SAD. (B)-BJP coalition in the 2017 assembly election.

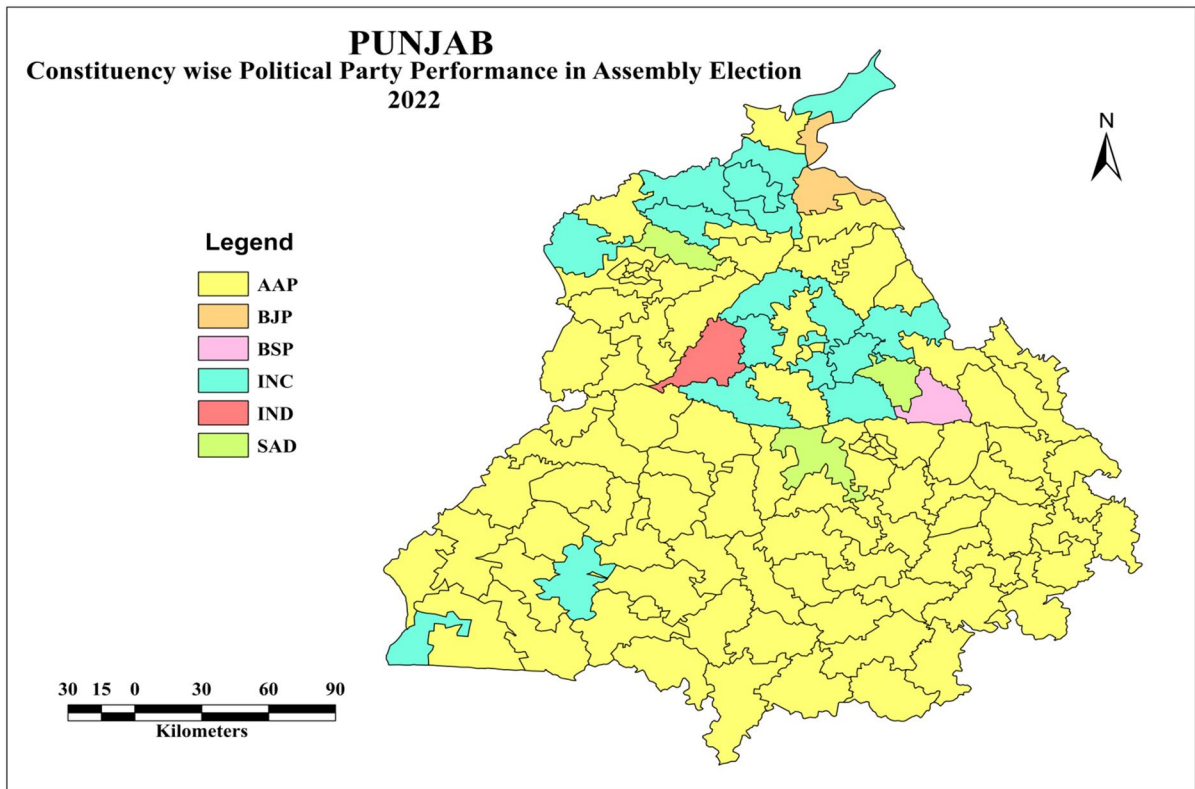


Fig. 8 Constituency wise political party performance in assembly election 2022

It is clear from the above analysis that these elections were primarily a contest between two parties i.e. Congress Party and the SAD-BJP alliance. During the campaign process, no religious issue was raised by any party. Both parties fought on common and secular issues of economic growth, corruption, unemployment, mounting debt on the state, farmer suicide, etc. So far as the Congress party was concerned, it made inroads into the Malwa region of Punjab, which hitherto was considered the stronghold of the Akali Dal. The success of Congress in the Malwa region was largely attributed to the support of Dera Sacha Sauda. The leaders of the Dera were said to have instructed their followers to cast their vote in favor of the Congress party. Besides, Captain Amarinder Singh was also credited for lifting the crops timely during his five-year term. The success of Bt. Cotton and Water Termination Act 2004 made Congress popular in the Malwa region.

Lack of development in the border regions, the inability of the Congress government to check the

rampant drug addiction among the youth, and the rebel factor led to the defeat of Congress in the Majha region. Also, a slightly well performance of the BJP in the Doaba region eroded the vote bank of the Congress party. The Congress could win only three seats in the Doaba region. On the contrary, SAD. (B) remained successful in wooing the Dalit vote bank by including their representatives in the ‘Reconstituted Political Affairs Committee and by giving tickets to the leaders of the community in large numbers. In general, Akali Dal promised in his manifesto to give freebies in the form of free electricity, water, etc., which profoundly influenced different sections of society.

Identity Politics has become a prominent subject in Punjab politics in recent years. The rise of low castes, religious identities, linguistic groups, and ethnic conflicts has contributed to the Significance of identity politics in Punjab. BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) or the Hindu Mahasabha to claim that India is a Hindu State. These claims generate homogenizing myths about

India and its history (Sharma, 2012). Religious and caste identities are rooted in early childhood socialization for many people, particularly of the ‘higher’ castes. Both caste and religious affiliations may have many positive functions for the individual’s sense of identity, social support, and integration. Whereas in villages, membership of a caste is generally more salient in people’s lives, specific religious identities may be more important in town (Kumar, 2014). In expanding, anonymous urban areas, religious sects, and cults, as well as caste and regional associations, may function like ethnicity in Punjab cities. Presently the Scheduled Castes (also known as Dalits) in Punjab and within Sikhism, Dalits are divided into two segments. The first segment includes Dalits, whose profession is scavenging and cleaning, and are called Mazhabhis and Rangretas. Mazhabhis and Rangretas were the Chuhras who converted to Sikhism (Martin, 2015). The other segment of the Dalit Sikhs consisted primarily of the Chamars. The Ad-Dharmis are predominant among Chamars and are mainly leather workers. Chamars (including the Ramdasias and AdDharmis) and Mazhabhis (including Chuhras and Balmikis) constitute nearly three-fourths of Punjab’s total scheduled caste population. Sikh identity politics emerged in an institutionalized form with the organization of a political party called Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) in December 1920 (Usman, 2016). Rapid social mobilization, economic development, party competition, and factionalism have, however, also led to political divisions within the Jat Sikh community. The Congress has sizable support within the community along with the Akali Dal. The Jat Sikhs, for instance, averaged 37.47% among the Congress MLAs elected. The Bahujan Samaj Party (hereafter BSP) has become their first choice all over India, and in its absence, the Left Front and regional parties are preferred in the states where they dominate. However, Punjab, in this sense, is unique as all the options, that is, the BSP and Left Front, are available to the scheduled caste groups, but the Congress continues to be their first choice, and their preference for the BSP still carries the status of a third force (Javid & Martin, 2020). Biradari determines voting behavior in Faisalabad’s rural areas like Punjab’s other areas. The overall emerging pattern of Punjab suggests that wherever the SCs found a viable alternative, they prefer it to the Congress Party. But in 2022, the Assembly elections play a different role than the previous elections.

Identity politics does not play a crucial role in the 2022 Assembly elections. The impressive electoral gains of the AAP in Punjab was not only the popularity of Arvind Kejriwal but also the local ‘new’ leaders, projected as the party candidates, that helped the party in a big way. All the AAP candidates had a clean public image; most were ‘amateur’ politicians in the sense that they dabbled into electoral politics for the first time though as professionals/artists, they enjoyed peoples’ goodwill on the strength of their impeccable records of community service. Here they were, pitted against what in the public eyes were the ‘professional’ politicians, many of them tainted and held responsible or even culpable in the people’s perception for the steady decline in the state’s economic fortunes as the spread of social evils and crimes (Figs. 9, 10, 11 and 12).

The result of the 2022 Assembly election in Punjab was different from that in the rest of the country. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) put on an impressive performance that stunned the mainstream political parties in the State, the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and Congress. In this election, the performance of the AAP was highly impressive. There was a landmark increase in both the spatial support and strength of the party. The average vote share of the AAP party was 30%. The newly emerged Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) had initiated a good beginning by winning 20 seats out of 117 in the 2017 assembly election, and the vote percentage was 23.9 in the 2022 assembly election owned 92 seats out of 117, and the vote percentage was 42.3. It got more support from the state’s youth, particularly in the Malwa region. Drug mafia, liquor mafia, transport mafia, cable mafia, farmers’ distress, corruption, illegal sand mining, and rising state debt are other key issues highlighted by APP in the elections. On the other hand, the Aam Aadmi Party tried to promote the interests of the urban industrial, civic, and trading sections of town voters.

The performance of AAP also raises several questions about Punjab politics. How did it manage to win ninety-two seats in the state while it was not able to win a single one in the rest of India? Why did people vote for AAP? Is it an alternative to, or a substitute for, the dominant political parties in the state? Will it affect the political parties in the state? Will it affect the politics of the state in the future? Is there any space for it to progress in the present political

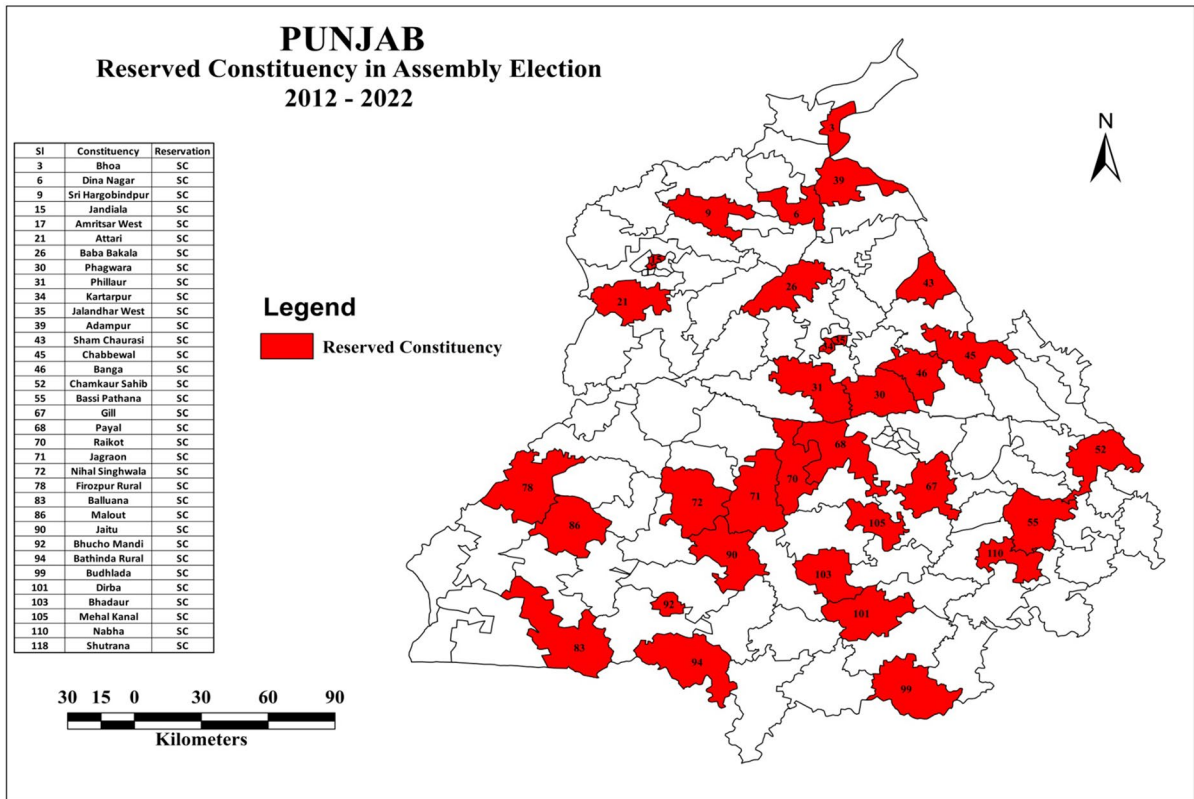


Fig. 9 Reserved constituency in assembly election 2012–2022

scenario of the state? Slightly seat sharing and vote sharing are declined. What happened to electoral politics? How has AAP situated its 1st rank higher than other political parties? The answer lies in the Inclusive development policy.

The ‘Delhi model’ of the AAP is proving to be the most winning votes: this model played a big role in providing better public services, high-quality schools, and hospitals, which helped the AAP win two consecutive terms in Delhi, remained a continuous campaign topic for Arvind Kejriwal’s Party in Punjab, where it swept the assembly elections. In a three-cornered race with the Congress and the Shiromani Akali Dal in the State, Kejriwal introduced a 10-point ‘Punjab Model,’ based on the Delhi model of administration, and promised voters a new-age, prosperous, and forward-looking Punjab. While Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia claimed that the entire country was now looking up to Kejriwal’s governance model in Delhi, senior AAP leader Gopal Rai stated that individuals in Punjab had given the

party their mandate based on the work of the party’s government in Delhi under Kejriwal.

Strong support from Women and Young People: The AAP received a surge of support from young and female voters who wanted to give a new party and the “Aam Aadmi” a chance. Young people were enthralled by Kejriwal’s promise to “change the system” and usher in a new administration that would improve education and employment. Similarly, AAP’s vow to deposit Rs 1,000 per month into the accounts of women in the state endeared him to this group, even though many agreed that such populist promises are frequently unfulfilled. However, in the strongly patriarchal state, the fact that he courted women as a separate vote bank rather than as extensions of their dads or husbands struck a chord.

No Dalit integration: another major reason is that Dalits, who make up 32% of Punjab’s population, dominated the poll narrative. It was claimed that Congress’s choice of Charanjit Singh Channi as the Dalit CM would help them consolidate their votes. Channi,

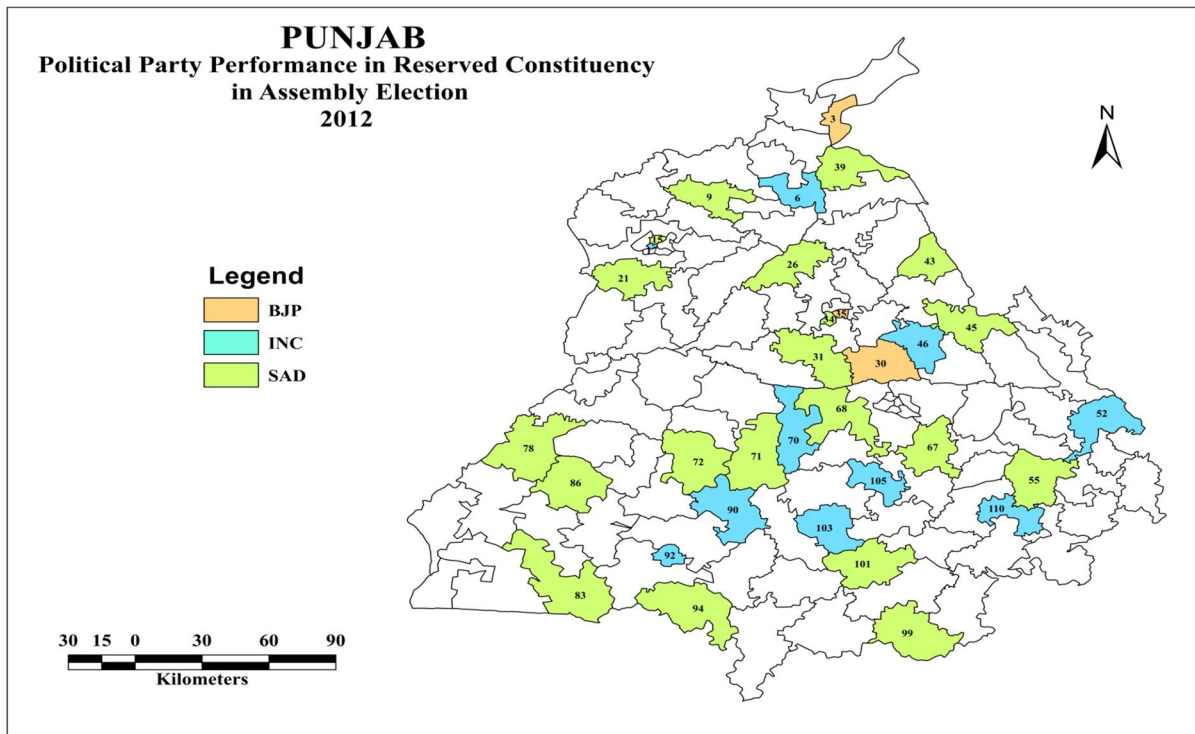


Fig. 10 Political party performance in reserved constituency in assembly election 2012

on the other hand, was ejected from both of his seats. Also, Dalits did not vote in large numbers.

Concerns of the Employee as a Game Changer

Promised jobs have been a recurring theme in Punjab's elections for years if not decades. In election after election, political parties have assured unemployed young people that they will create jobs if voted to power. But the situation remains the same, no matter which political party forms the government. It is election season again in Punjab, and parties are back to promising 'lakhs' of jobs and a job per family, but there is little hope among the youth. A surprising thing noticed during these elections is the role of employees working in the various sectors of Punjab in the politics of Punjab directly. A few months after the elections, multiple unions of employees started opposing the current State Government (Congress) due to their negligence towards their interests. Issues like 6th pay Commission implementation and delinking of UGC pay scales of teachers working in colleges and Universities. Most of the employees, Regularisation of Contract workers, and Union PFUCTO, PCCTU, Punjab Roadways Employees Union,

Pensioners Union, etc., Started agitation against the government and warned the government of significant losses in the upcoming elections (Kumar, 2022). These things were seen clearly in the elections. This new tendency altered the Punjabi electoral politics of 2022.

The failure of the Indian National Congress government is a possible reason for a rising anti-incumbency sentiment into two categories—rising accountability pressures because of changes in voter characteristics and greater governance failures, as perceived by voters. Local leaders and voters were asked to express the extent of their dissatisfaction on the following dimensions Resolution of household disputes, socio-economic injustice, participation in school education, participation in government centers, participation in irrigation construction and other public workers, contract and rapport with local traders, and the honesty of political workers. Government failures include rising dissatisfaction among voters with local incumbents on corruption and the provision of education, health, or other local public goods (such as roads and irrigation) or the delivery

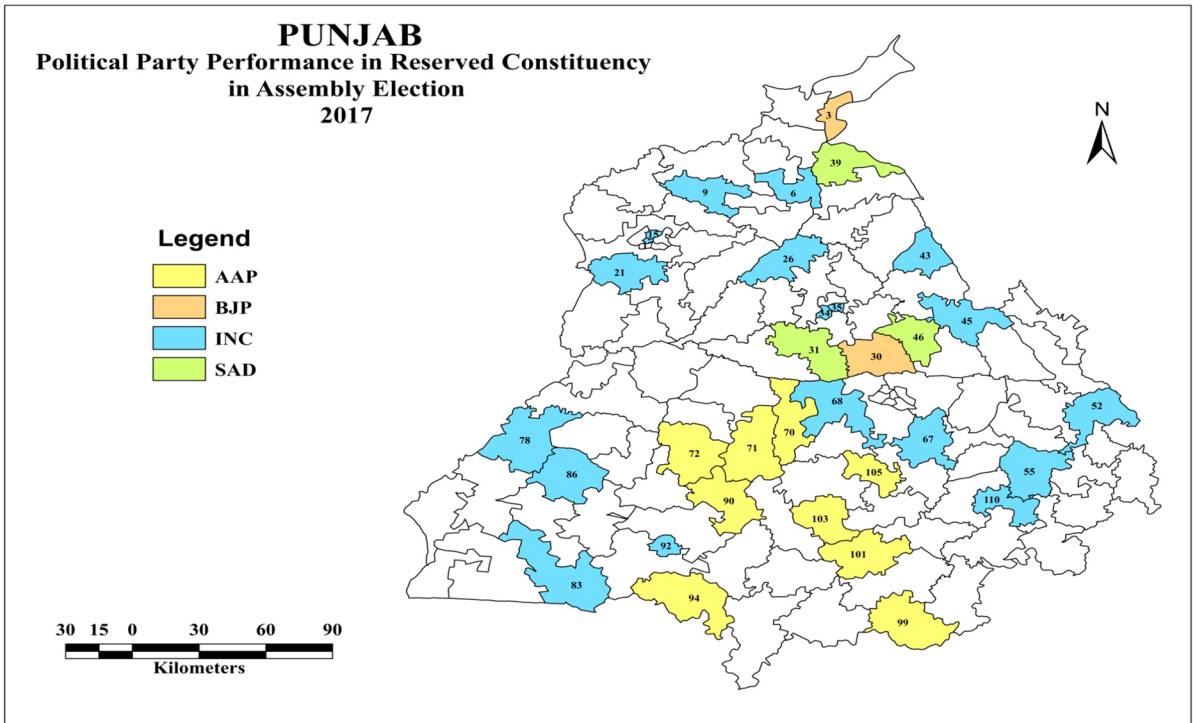


Fig. 11 Political party performance in reserved constituency in assembly election 2017

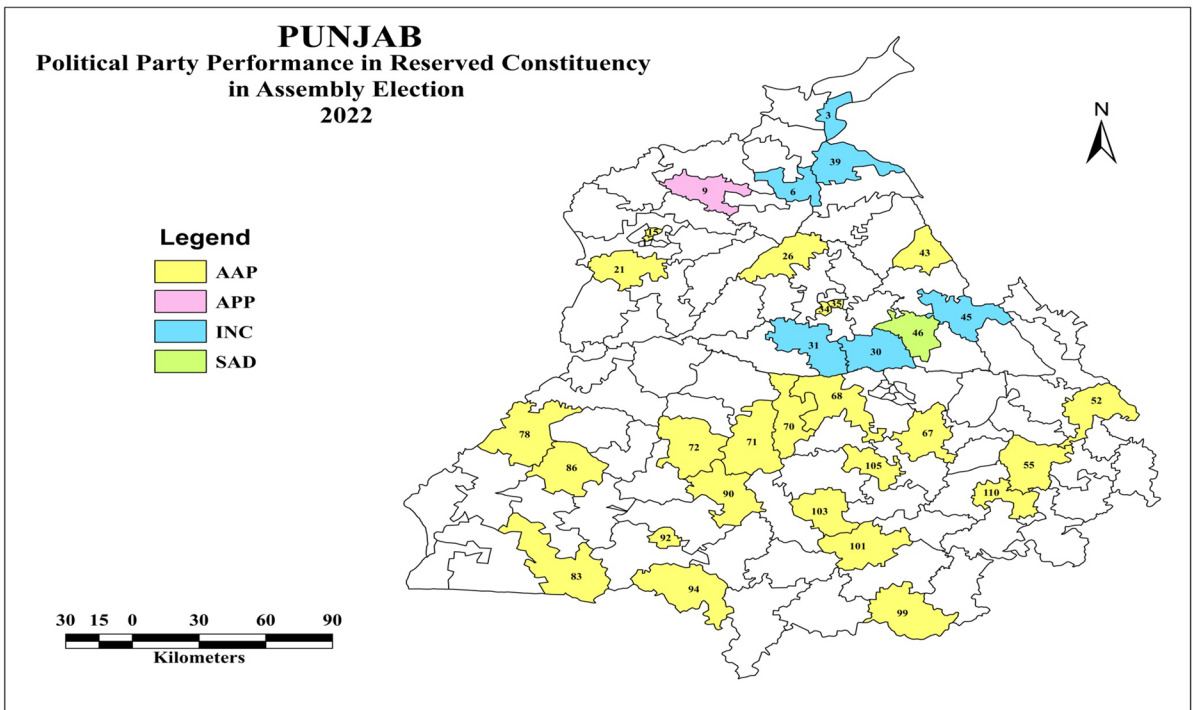


Fig. 12 Political party performance in reserved constituency in assembly election 2022

of private benefits programs such as MGNREGA, Indira Awas Yojana, Drug mafia, liquor mafia, transport mafia, cable mafia, farmers' distress, corruption, illegal sand mining.

Conclusion & discussion

The socio-economic changes in Punjab have not only brought about a revolution in the people's political awareness but also led to the emergence of many educated and dynamic leaders. The democratic process offers opportunities to all sections of society, but the political process is bound to be influenced by socio-economic forces. Till 1966, Punjab politics was manipulated and controlled by the urban elite (comprising the urban educated Hindus and a few big landlords). They have now been replaced by the new rural elite (mostly the big landlords and owners of medium-sized farms). Most of the Legislators come from rural areas and are agriculturists by profession. They identify their interest with the realities. They not only happen to dominate the Punjab Assembly but also control the decision-making process in the state. As they happen to be holding positions of power, they are keen to initiate rural development schemes to strengthen their support base. The identities of religion, nation, language, class, and caste have been particularly at play in this dynamic arena of Punjab politics.

It may therefore be noted that the people of Punjab have developed a distinctive voting behavior. There is no single pattern of voting behavior; rather, a variety of patterns have emerged that are the product of the division of the people on account of religion, caste, and language (Sinha 2020). So many factors have been shaping and influencing their voting decision. No doubt some of the voters gave preference to the party, some liked the candidates, and some preferred the socio-economic issues. Apart from this, other factors, such as caste, religion, region, age, education, locality, etc., impact the voters' decision. In addition to the personal charisma of the leaders, the performance of the governments both at the center and state levels, electorates' good relation with the candidates, traditional support for the party, policies, and programs of the party, factionalism or infighting within the party have their impacts upon the electorates. The analysis of the 2012 and 2022 assembly elections also shows

that a number of variables determined the voters' voting decisions. It can be inferred that voting behavior is a complex phenomenon. There is no single factor that affects voters' decisions rather, a variety of factors play a role at the time of casting votes. The selection of candidates is made with an eye to the presence of a religious majority in a particular constituency. The candidates do not hesitate to seek votes by playing the religious card with co-religious voters and the secular card with members of other religious communities. The use of religious places for political ends is also standard practice, particularly during elections (Rai 2017). Political parties and other groups again resorted to the religionization of sociopolitical issues. The voters very often vote on religious considerations. Religious considerations have become one of the key factors in influencing the voting behavior of the country's people, and Punjab is no exception in this regard. Religious symbols play a dominant role in molding people's psychology and mental outlook.

What also helped the AAP were the following factors: the non-acceptability of Charanjit Singh Channi as a leader, factionalism within Congress, and the failure of the party organization to generate an effective anti-incumbency mood among the voters. Through strategic alliances and effective social engineering, the AAP plugged its weak points, whereas Congress suffered because of misperceived estimation of its strength by its state-level leaders. The verdict was a clear reaffirmation of the faith in the AAP government. The extraordinary performance of the AAP was based on the solid platform created by 'Kejriwal Magic.' It was a completely presidential form of an election where the opposition was feeble and fragmented head-on with Kejriwal's charisma, oratory, analogy, and narrative. What did not help the Congress was its organizational weaknesses, further accentuated by an intense turf war for supremacy among the Congress sub-regional satraps like Siddhu, Jakhar, and Charanjit. The Congress's top leadership failed to enlist the support of the sizable backward castes and the Hindu votes despite resentment against the incumbent BJP government.

AAP was thus able to strike an emotional chord, psychologically attracting voters to its agenda. Social media such as Facebook and WhatsApp helped in the party campaign. Video and audio clippings of campaign speeches by Mann were circulated among voters of other constituencies through social media. The

party thus managed to capture the votes of the youth, poor laborers, women, and marginal farmers. The future of AAP in the state will depend on its organizational structure, issue-based campaigning, and its ability to take the people into confidence. Mann was severely critical of the SAD-BJP government's policy of depending on liquor excise to generate more and more money. He was also uncomplimentary of the public education system, which catered to the children of poor and marginal farmers. Mann argued that the unwillingness and failure of the government to provide quality education and employment opportunities had lured the youth to drugs or made them want to go abroad for jobs. AAP's message was that the people had to vote for a change in politics. Mann emphasized the power of the people in a democracy. He stated that in a democracy, the people made their leaders and pointed out that voters had rejected the regimes of the Laloo Prasad Yadav family in Bihar and the Chautala family in Haryana (Javid & Martin, 2020). He said freedom fighters such as Bhagat Singh had tried to usher in a revolution in the political system through bullets. However, the AAP revolution would come through the ballot when people voted. AAP campaign asked people to change for better education, health, and jobs. It also stressed the safety of women. Mann was withering about the dynastic politics in the state, both in the SAD and Congress. He said that the leaders of these parties were treating their constituencies as their riyasats (empires) and that there was already a Dhindsa Riya-sat, Bhunder riyasat, Bhattal riyasat, and so on.

Political formations do not form a homogenous identity. At the same time, their identity politics has a definite interest in believing that all its members' identities are uniform and unproblematic. The Akali Dal in Punjab is an illustration of a party trapped at the crossroads of region and religion. This particular location of the party always constrains the policies and political positions of the Akali Dal. Electoral politics also frequently forces the Akali Dal to look beyond the regional-sectarian interests and project it as a part of Punjab's ordinary 'people'. If we look at the political parties' support base at the urbanity level, we find that the SAD-BJP draws support among the rural voters, while Congress draws support from the urban voters. The voting pattern of the voters suggests that despite the defeat of the SAD-BJP, most of them voted for the alliance during the elections. Compared

to the 2012 assembly elections, the Co alliance managed to increase its support base among rural voters, but still, most of the rural voters voted SAD-BJP alliance. The victory of the Congress alliance in the 2012 assembly election was largely credited to the increasing presence of the alliance among the urban voters. The changing nature of Punjab politics during the last 10–15 years is reflected in the declining dominance of national parties and further rise of regional and sectional parties, and the stabilization and acceptance of coalition politics. It is also seen in the weakening of anti-incumbency at the state level, a state government being voted out of power at the time of elections. Other interesting features of the election results suggest that previous results should not be the basis for predicting the future.

AAP came into existence in 2012 following the anti-corruption movement led by Anna Hazare and Arvind Kejriwal's successful emergence on the political scene. One of the contributing factors to the victory of AAP was the support of the Punjabi diaspora. The Punjabi diaspora has always taken a keen interest in Punjab's political development. The Punjabi diaspora, with their live links with the state, is an important stakeholder in Punjab's politics and economy. With its anti-corruption agenda, AAP drew their support, and the result was the party's victory in the ninety-two constituencies. With the emergence of AAP, the politics of Punjab have fundamentally changed from being a two-party contest to a triangular one and have thus become unpredictable. However, in the analysis of the political dynamics of Punjab, there is a need to understand the socio-economic changes that are taking place in the state. In short, religion will remain relevant regardless of which angle one forges an entry point to Punjab politics. This is especially true for any aspiration of a consolidated Dalit political presence in the state.

To solve the day-to-day problems of people, AAP propounded a 70-point manifesto, which talked about concrete issues such as access to drinking water, cheaper electricity, better sanitation in colonies, regularization of contract workers, ensuring women's safety, quality governance-sponsored primary and higher education, better health care by improving the conditions of the existing hospitals, dispensaries and opening new hospitals, and Internet facilities at public places. The victory of AAP represents the global phenomenon of the growing trend toward democratic

assertion by people against the concentration of economic and political power. Therefore, the challenge is to fulfill its poll promise of free water and cheap electricity, among other things. The emerging political scenario indicates that the necessary initiatives are required to tackle the basic shortcomings of Indian democracy; otherwise, the political leadership will pay a heavy price for it because the electorates are not the mute spectator, rather, they have become active partners in decisions making process. Ultimately, elections are the platform where people punish those politicians who promise but do not deliver. The story of AAP so far clearly shows that there is still space in the Indian political scene, but it is very hard to establish a visible, powerful, and long-lasting presence on the national scale; it is much easier to create a local party.

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Declarations

Compliance with ethical standards The present study ensures that objectivity and transparency are followed in this research and acknowledges ethical and professional behavior principles. The present research confirms that:

Ethical approval Therefore, for this research, compliance with ethical standards is not applicable.

Research involving human participants and animals Human Participants or Animals were not engaged or involved in the present research.

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