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18th parliamentary elections in Punjab: An analysis

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Abstract

Regular elections are a lifetime of any functional democracy. Since independence, India has successfully held 18 Lok Sabha (General Elections) to select national Governments and numerous elections in different States to elect state Governments. An important indicator of elections being accepted as free and fair is the fact that elections over the last seven decades have resulted in a change of governments several times both at the national level and in different states without any significant protest. In 2024, the Indian general elections, the biggest ever democratic process in the country's history were conducted in seven phases. Our greatest positive achievement has been that we have survived as a democratic nation. Although every election in itself is significant, yet Lok Sabha elections are important in the sense that these are held all over India and decide the destiny of the government of country. Therefore, the whole process right from notification of elections to the declaration of results remains very interesting. Every state has to play an important role in sending its representatives to the Parliament. Reputation of candidates, the image of the ruling party, state ruling party's performance, core issues, factors at play and other non-political Issues vary from state to state. Keeping this in view, a modest attempt has been made in this paper to analyse the outcome of 18th Lok Sabha elections 2024 in the state of Punjab. The requisite data for this study has been obtained from newspapers, magazines and websites.

Keywords: Election commission, parties, performance, Punjab, poll analysis

Introduction

In 1947, the province of Punjab was partitioned between India and Pakistan. Again, under the Punjab Reorganisation! Act, a Punjabi speaking state was carved out in 1966. Now the present Punjab has 5 divisions, 23 districts, 97 subdivisions/tehsils, and 153 development blocks. The state has total area of 50, 363 sq. km ^[1]. Agriculture is the biggest contributor to Punjab Gross Domestic Product as this region is best for wheat growing. Infact, Punjab is known as India's bread basket. Geographically, Punjab is divided into three regions- Majha, Malwa and Doaba. Majha is a region of the Punjab comprising the modern districts of Amritsar, Gurdaspur and Tarn Taran. Malwa is a region between Sutlej and Yamuna river, Barnala, Bathinda, Faridkot, Firozpur, Ludhiana, Mansa, Ropar Anandpur Sahib, Muktsar, Patiala, Sangrur and Fatehgarh Sahib districts form the Malwa region. Doaba is the region of Indian Punjab surrounded by Beas and Sutlej rivers. It is one of the fertile regions of Punjab. Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur, Kapurthala, Shaheed Bhagat Singh Nagar are important areas of this region ^[2]. According to the 2011 census, although Hindus constitute 38.15 percent of the state's population, the state remains predominantly Sikh, comprising over 57 percent of its population.

Politics in Punjab: Background

Punjab has always played an important role in the formation of all central Governments. State has given the nation its Prime Minister I.K. Gujral, who contested elections from Jalandhar Lok Sabha seat. Since the Parliamentary elections in 1967 - the first after Punjab was divided on linguistic basis (1966), the state has recorded a high percentage of voter turnout, ranging between 50 percent and over 70 percent. The 1992 elections were the only exception when Punjab recorded 23.96% polling on account of a boycott call by the SAD. Every party had fluctuating fortunes here ^[3].

In 1977 and 1988, the Congress was wiped out with no seat, but in 1980 and 1992 it won 12 seats. Similarly, the best performance of the Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP), earlier Jan Sangh had been In 1967, 1977, 1998 and 2004. But it scored a duck in 1971, 1980, 1985, 1989 and

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1996. The Communist Party of India CPI won two seats In 1971 and one in 1999. The Janta Dal got one seat to 1989 and I. K. Gural became the Prime Minister. In the same year SAD won 6 seats. Among the regional parties, the SAD had its best performance In post emergency era when it won seven seats in 1985, six in 1987, eight seats each In 1996, 98, 2004. In the 2009 elections, it won four Seats, the BJP one and Congress eight. In 2014 Lok Sabha elections, Congress won 8 seats, SAD 4 and BJP 1. In 2019 Lok Sabha elections, Congress won 8, BJP 2, SAD 2 and AAP 1.

From Nominations to Campaign: Factors at Play

The Election Commission of India decided that Lok Sabha elections in Punjab would be held on 1st June 2024 in the last phase. Punjab has 23 districts, 117 assembly seats and 13 Lok Sabha constituencies. Each Lok Sabha constituency comprises 9 assembly segments.

The nomination process for Punjab’s 13 Lok Sabha seats began on 7th May and continued till 14th May. Scrutiny of papers was held on 15th May and 17th May was fixed for withdrawal of nominations. A total of 466 candidates filled 598 nomination papers from May 7 to May 14, 2024. After scrutiny 355 nomination papers were found valid and 243 invalid^[4].

Table 1: Position of Nomination Papers

District	No. of Candidates	Nominations	Accepted
Amritsar	43	53	33
Gurdaspur	40	60	29
Hoshiarpur	23	27	19
Khadoor Sahib	35	43	30
Jalandhar	27	35	20
Anandpur Sahib	41	56	29
Ludhiana	57	70	44
Fatehgarh Sahib	23	33	15
Firozpur	41	48	33
Bathinda	30	40	20
Sangrur	38	43	26
Patiala	34	49	27
Faridkot	32	40	28

Source: Dainik Jagran, 16 May 2024, P.2.

In these elections 219 candidates contested elections as independent. After scrutiny 186 candidates were in fray, 33 nominations were rejected.

Table 2: Number of Independent Candidates

District	No. of Candidates
Amritsar	24
Gurdaspur	20
Hoshiarpur	5
Khadoor Sahib	22
Jalandhar	9
Anandpur Sahib	17
Ludhiana	30
Fatehgarh Sahib	8
Firozpur	23
Bathinda	13
Sangrur	17
Patiala	16
Faridkot	12

Source: Dainik Bhaskar, 16 May 2024, P.2.

After withdrawing 328 candidates were in fray for the elections to 13 Lok Sabha seats in Punjab. Among the

candidates 22 of them have declared assets worth more than Rs. 10 crore in their affidavits. These Include six from SAD, five each from the BJP and the Congress, four from the AAP and two from SAD Amritsar. With assets worth Rs. 198.51 crore along with husband Sukhbir Singh Badal, SAD's Harsimrat Kaur was the richest candidate. BJP's Praneet Kaur was the second richest Candidate^[5].

Table 3: Richest Candidates In Punjab

Name of Candidate	Party	Assets
Harsimrat Kaur Badal	SAD	198.51 Cr.
Praneet Kaur	BJP	55.83 Cr.
Sukhpal Khaira	INC	50.02 Cr.
Taranjit Sandhu	BJP	39.92 Cr.
N.K. Sharma	SAD	32.21 Cr.
Kush Pal Singh Mann	SAD(A)	30.04 Cr.
Jeet Mohinder Singh Sidhu	INC	27.38 Cr.
Arvind Khanna	BJP	27.04 Cr.
Vijay Inder Singh	INC	26.29 Cr.
Rana Gurmeet Sodhi	BJP	24.29 Cr.

Source: Indian Express, 22 May 2024, P.8.

In these elections 3 Ph.Ds, 6 doctors, 3 advocates, 3 bureaucrats, one former Chief Minister, 7 legislators, 2 artist, 2 Union State ministers contested Lok Sabha elections in Punjab. Women make up less than 12% of the candidates announced by the mainstream Political parties Of the 52 candidates named by the Congress, AAP, BJP and SAD, only 6 were women. The BJP fielded three women candidates, Congress two and SAD just one. The AAP did not field any women candidates.

The main contest was between four political parties i.e. Akali Dal, Congress, BJP and AAP party. Contrary to its image of being a pro-hindu party, the BJP fielded Sikh faces on six of the total seats. This is for the first time since 1996 that the BJP and the SAD, one of the oldest constituents of the NDA which parted ways over the 2020-21 farm laws protests, contested Lok Sabha elections alone in the slate. The move was seen as the saffron party's efforts to woo Sikhs, who account for 21% of the vote share.

In Malwa, illicit drug abuse, Increasing unemployment, farmers dissatisfaction with Union government; in Majha, package for border areas, revival of industries, trade with Pakistan and in Doaba illegal mining, lack of irrigation facilities, anger over Agneepath scheme were the main Issues in Punjab.

Different political parties started its election campaign by Inviting its star campaigners in different election rallies, Commerce and Industrial minister Piyush Goyal did campaign for Taranjit Sandhu and supported farmers' issue, Shashi Throor from Congress came to Jalandhar to support Charanjit Singh Channi. Rahul Gandhi, Malikarjun Khadge, Priyanka Gandhi, Sachin Pilot were other star campaigners in Punjab from the Congress party. From BJP Amit Shah, Rajnath Singh and J. P Nadda; from AAP Bhagwant Mann, Sanjay Singh Raghav Chaddha; from SAD Sukhbir Singh Badal remained star campaigners.

Role of ECI and Voting

According to the electoral roll released by the Election Commission of India (ECI) the total number of voters in Punjab was 2,14,61, 741 of which 1,12,86,726 were males, and 1, 01,74,240 females. As many as 5,38,864 people were the first time Voters (FTVS). 158718 Divyanjanh and 773

transgenders also participated [6]. Patiala was declared the biggest constituency according to voters.

ECI issued 6 apps i.e, C-vigil app, Suvidha candidates app, KYEC app on know your candidate, Divyang Saksham app and voters helpline app for getting information regarding complaints, candidates, criminal records and voters turnout etc. Over 20% polling stations were Identified as vulnerable. Of the total 24,451 polling Stations, 4976 polling stations were susceptible to misuse of money and muscle powers to Influence voters. 7934 polling stations were established in urban areas and 16517 in rural areas [7].

ECI appointed 13 IAS as General Observers and 7 IPS Police Observers for smooth elections. Punjab recorded 62.8% voter turnout across 13 Lok Sabha constituencies. This turnout In Punjab saw a decline of nearly 4.8 percentage points from the 2019 General elections, when the state recorded 67.6% polling. Of the 13 seats in Punjab, Bathinda recorded the highest 69.36% polling followed by Ferozepur 67.02% and Gurdaspur 66.67%. According to ECI though Bathinda registered highest polling but their was lowest since 2014 elections. In 2014 elections, Bathinda's turnout was 77.16% and in 2019 it was 74.14%, that was also highest in the state. 1,34, 78, 134 voters, out of 2,14, 61, 741 turned up at Polling stations. As per the ECI's data, the assembly constituency of Sardulgarh falling In Bathinda recorded the highest polling of 73.72% among all 117 assembly constituencies followed by 73.71% in Sujampur (GSP) and 71.83 in Fazilika (Ferozepur) [8].

Table 4: Constituency-Wise Polling

S.no	Constituency	% of Polling
1	Bathinda	69.36%
2	Ferozepur	67.02%
3	Gurdaspur	66.67%
4	Sangrur	64.63%
5	Patiala	63.63%
6	Faridkot	63.34%
7	Khadoor Sahib	62.55%
8	Fatehgarh Sahib	62.53%
9	Anandpur Sahib	61.98%
10	Ludhiana	60.12%
11	Jalandhar	59.86%
12	Hoshiarpur	58.86%
13	Amritsar	56.06%

Source: Hindustan Times, 3 June 2024, P.2.

Election Outcome and Performance of Political Parties

Congress party regained its lost glory by bagging seven of the 13 seats in Punjab. The Congress won the Amritsar, Jalandhar, Ludhiana, Fatehgarh Sahib, Ferozpur, Patiala and Gurdaspur seat. The ruling party AAP could get only three seats - Hoshiarpur Anandpur Sahib and Sangrur. The SAD managed to secure Bathinda Seat and BJP failed to open its account. A prominent feature of this election was the rise of radical Sikhs. Amritpal Singh won by over 1-9.7 Lakh votes in Khadoor Sahib, and Sarabjit Singh in Faridkot won by 70,000 votes.

Table 5: Exit Poll

Platform	AAP	CONGRESS	BJP	SAD
Matrize	3-4	5-6	2	0
India Today Axis	0-2	7-9	2-4	0-2
Times Now	4	5	4	0

Source: The Economic Times, 1 June 2024

The Congress got 26.30% votes, while AAP got 26.02%. The BJP however, made its presence felt by bagging a higher share of voter (18.56%) than the SAD which got 13.42%. The Congress party has been able to demolish the citadel of the BJP and SAD In Gurdaspur and Ferozepur respectively. In Ferozepur, the party ended the 40-year spell of the SAD dominance and in Gurdaspur, it ended the BJP's 26-years spell barring one term of Partap Singh Bajwa in 2009.[9] The votes from three big ‘deras’ seemed to have worked well for the Congress. AAP party failed to address key issues such as agrarian unrest, drug trade, law and order and corruption. Party president and Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann's prediction of winning all 13 seats during his high-decibel political campaign proved wrong. The only solace for AAP is that they have witnessed back their Capital of Sangrur with a thumping majority of 1.72 Lakh votes, besides winning Anandpur Sahib and Hoshiarpur. Through BJP could not won any seat but it's vote share is third highest behind the Congress and AAP. Only one woman has won election from Punjab [10].

Table 6: Winners and Party in Punjab

Constituency	Winner	Party
Gurdaspur	Sukhjinder Singh	Congress
Amritsar	Gurjit Singh Auja	Congress
Khadoor Sahib	Amritpal Singh	Independent
Jalandhar	Charanjit Singh Channi	Congress
Hoshiarpur	Dr. Raj Kumar Chabbewal	AAP
Ludhiana	Amrinder Singh Raja Warring	Congress
Fatehgarh Sahib	Dr. Amar Singh	Congress
Faridkot	Sarabjit Singh Khalsa	Independent
Ferozpur	Sher Singh Ghubaya	Congress
Bathinda	Harsimrat Kaur Badal	SAD
Sangrur	Gurmeet Singh Meet Hyer	AAP
Patiala	Dharamvir Gandhi	INC
Anandpur Sahib	Malwinder Singh Kang	AAP

Source: The Tribune, 5 June 2024, P.6.

Generally, it is believed that freebies and subsidies declared by political parties will help them to come into Power but it has been proved wrong in Punjab election results. AAP party in Punjab declared 300 unit per month free electricity but couldn't win maximum seats. Even in 1997 Congress Party started this concept of subsidies In Punjab Assembly elections and was defeated. In 2002 BJP/ Akali alliance continued same policy but lost the elections. In 2007 Congress party declared such subsidies but couldn't win the elections. From 2007 to 2017 Akali announced such subsidies and free electricity facilities and were defeated in 2017 assembly elections [11].

SAD which came into existence in 1920, is at crossroads. Patron of SAD, S. Parkash Singh Badal served Punjab as Chief Minister for five times. After the Assembly elections in 2022, the SAD suffered another blow in Lok Sabha elections. Despite a three months long ‘Punjab Bachao Yatra’ by the SAD, 10 of its candidates lost their deposits [12]. The SAD Left NDA after more than 700 farmers lost their lives during agitation against farm laws of Union Government. As far as SAD is concerned, the leadership crisis in the party and its ten years misrule (2007-17) are among the factors responsible for the loss of its core support in the state. The overall apathy was also reflected in the lower turnout, which was surprising as Punjab is known for recording a consistently highest turnout than the national

average, whether it is Lok Sabha or Assembly elections. Though BSP put up its candidates from all seats, it failed to make Its presence felt despite the fact that ‘Dalits’ account for 1/3 of the state’s population.

The results of these elections are worrying as they have ramifications for the polity and social order in the border state, The Statewide protests by farmers also impacted the BJP's performance. The BJP paid the price for the centre's inaction on a host of demands from farm unions, including the MSP guarantee^[13].

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Table 7: Vote Share and No. of Seats

Party	2019 Seats & Vote Share	2024 Seats & Vote Share
BJP	2 - 9.63%	0 - 18.56%
INC	8 - 40.12%	7 - 26.30%
AAP	1 - 7.38%	3 - 26.02%
SAD	2 - 27.76%	1 - 13.42%
OTHERS	0 - 15.4%	2 - 15.97%

Source: Frontline, June 2024, P.87

The State which is famed for its contrarian streak, also showed party hoppers their place. Of the 14 turncoats from four major political parties, 12 lost. Another significant takeaway was the dominance of the local issues and the appeal of the individual candidates that determined voting preferences. The falling stock of the Mann Cabinet's popularity can be gauged by the fact that four out of the five cabinets ministers lost the election this time.

Conducting Observation

The 2024 Lok Sabha outcome is a new marker in the Punjab political landscape. A first election with multi cornered contests and without any alliance in the state's history, a stunning downturn in the AAP party's fortunes, failure of BJP, a remarkable rebound by the Congress and victory of two independents wedded to radical ideology. It is clear that the verdict of the Punjab electorate in favour of the Congress was against the broad national trend. This is not a new phenomenon as the party had won eight seats in the 2019 elections amid a Modi wave in the country.

These elections are a warning signal for the oldest political regional party Akali Dal to regain Its lost glory. Akali Dal formed the government in Punjab during 1967, 1969, 1977, 1985, 1997, 2007 and 2012 assembly elections. When all over India regional political parties are gaining popularity in India, it is a matter of worry that party has come down and got marginalised. The formation of the new parliament has given new hopes, People expect a lot from their leaders and representatives. Hope our elected representatives will raise crucial issues of Panjab in the Parliament. A matured and experienced leadership can only ensure good governance and help in the growth of Punjab. Let's hope that.

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