

## ANALYSIS OF VOTING BEHAVIOR IN PUNJAB'S ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS, 2017

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### **Abstract:**

*There are two primary parts to this essay. Before moving to an analysis of more recent elections leading up to the 2017 Punjab Assembly Election, the first part gives a historical review of Punjab Assembly elections since it was reorganized in 1967 with a view to assessing the continuities and discontinuities in election results. Understanding voter characteristics, behavior, and decision-making processes in the 2017 election is the main emphasis of the second segment. In order to take into account the changing voting preferences of different kinds of voters in Punjab and to evaluate the effectiveness of different parties and their leaders, Lokniti-CSDS gathered post-poll survey data based on answers to many important questions. The article makes the case that with the emergence of new players like the AAP, the rising significance of social media, and the increased voter preference for development problems that directly affect Punjabis' daily lives, the election process and politics have experienced fundamental transformation.*

*Keyword: Assembly election, political parties*

### **Introduction**

A important chance to evaluate how well democracy is really functioning is during elections. The people who vote elect their legislators and the governments of their choosing. In consequence, a government that has been thus selected gains the legitimacy and confidence of the populace, enabling it to create policies and manage every aspect of the nation's affairs on behalf of the populace. The political preferences of voters and their voting behavior are complicated in a multi-party system and competitive electoral democracy like India by a variety of factors, including religion, caste, community, language, socioeconomic class, wealth, the personal charisma of the leaders, the personal qualities of the candidates, assessments of the performance of the government, party identification, ideology, and many others. Voting establishes the representatives' political processes and exposes voter views, attitudes, intents, and comments to the public on the political system. The voting process may also be used to determine how satisfied a population is with how well their government is doing. Political parties join the race with a variety of local and national problems, and they use various strategies to woo voters from various social groups. Voters in India sometimes prioritize local concerns above global ones, while other times they are more concerned with issues of macro-, micro-, or local socioeconomic development. However, there are also situations when a combination of the two influences how people vote. Therefore, it is of ongoing scholarly interest to understand why people vote the way they do, why certain political parties are more successful than others, and what changes or does not change from one election to the next.

The current study is a modest effort to analyze Punjab's electoral dynamics with a particular emphasis on the 2017 assembly elections. There are five sections in the paper. A short history of assembly elections from 1952 to 2002 is provided in the first section. The assembly elections of 2007 and 2012 are examined in Part 2, while the state elections of Punjab in 2017 are covered in Part 3. Part 4 explores how voters reacted to several important concerns, and Part 5 wraps up the discussions.

### **History of Assembly Elections in Punjab**

Following India's independence, Punjab was one of the first states to form a coalition government with the East Punjab State Union (PEPSU), a confederation of princely kingdoms. On the other hand, the state has undergone three significant changes: first, the 1947 division; second, the 1956 merging of princely states; and third, the 1966 linguistic

restructuring. In addition to altering the state's geography, topography, demographics, and linguistic foundation, these events also had an impact on politics, religion, caste, and the economy. The social and political roots of Punjab's voting behavior were further moulded and altered as a result. 1 With five divisions, namely Faridkot, Ferozepur, Jalandhar, Patiala, and Ropar, the current state is split into three geographical and cultural zones, namely Majha, Malwa, and Doaba. Twenty-two districts and eighty-one sub-divisions are further split into these divisions. There are now 117 seats in the Punjab Legislative Assembly, 13 parliamentary seats, and 7 rajya sabha seats.

Prior to the 2012 assembly elections, the delineation procedure increased the number of constituencies in the regions, giving the already dominating Malwa four additional seats at the price of Majha and Doaba's two seats apiece. The Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and Congress, the two major political parties, now place a greater emphasis on the region's electoral significance. Since the formation of Punjab in 1966, all of the state's Chief Ministers—there has only been one exception—have come from the Malwa area. In terms of state politics, this area has completely dominated. The post-independence electoral politics Punjab may be analyzed in two stages, namely the pre- and post-state reorganization periods. The Congress party dominated politics in the first two decades (1947–1967), with other parties, especially Akali groups, having minimal influence. The Akali Dal was become politically important once Punjab was reorganized on a linguistic basis, and it was further aided by the establishment of its dominance in state politics ever since. Punjab is now a state with a Sikh majority. Details of the state's elections since 1967 are shown in Table 1 below.

**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.**

In 1967, the first coalition government comprised of the Akali Dal, Jan Sangh, and CPI (with assistance from the CPM) was established, ending Congress Party dominance. The major cause of the Congress' bad performance was essentially factionalism inside the party, with one wing being headed by Swaran Singh and the other by Darbara Singh, as well as its resistance to the Punjabi Suba state. With 48 lawmakers, the Congress became the biggest party and just five more were required to establish the government. But because of how strongly people felt about the Congress, no other parties nor independent members were willing to support it. With 29.6% of the total votes cast and 43 seats, the Akali Dal won the 1969 elections, surpassing the Congress, which received 39.2% of the vote and 38 seats. However, due to the short lifespan of this alliance, midterm assembly elections were conducted in 1972. Together with the CPI, the Congress party ran for office in the elections, winning 66 seats with 42.8% of the total votes cast. Giani Zail Singh was appointed Punjab's Chief Minister. The next election was held in 1977, and the Congress party fared poorly, winning just 17 seats. The central government's declaration of a national emergency in the years 1975–1977 sparked widespread resistance to Mrs. Indira Gandhi's misrule. The

Congress was nonetheless able to win 34.07 percent of the vote in these elections, although suffering a devastating setback. On the other side, the Akali Dal emerged as the single biggest party by winning 58 seats with 31.41% of the vote, and an Akali-Janata coalition government was established. As Punjab's new chief minister, Parkash Singh Badal took the oath of office.

The Congress party regained control of Punjab in the 1980 assembly elections after capturing 63 seats and 45.19 percent of the vote. Only 37 seats may be won by the Akali Dal. Darbara Singh was appointed chief minister on June 7, 1980, but he was forced to step down on October 10, 1983, after the purported Khalistani terrorists' slaughter of a number of innocent bus passengers. Between October 10, 1983, until September 29, 1985, the President Rule was in effect. The Akali Dal won a resounding victory in the 1985 Assembly elections, winning 73 out of 117 seats and 38.4% of the total votes cast. As a consequence of the Rajiv-Longowal Accord, which was struck in July 1985, these elections were held. On September 29, 1985, Surjit Singh Barnala was sworn in as chief minister despite the Congress winning just 32 seats. Due to an uptick in violence in the state, the Barnala administration was forced to resign in May 1987 before it could serve out even half of its term. President Rule was reinstated in Punjab until the elections in February 1992.

Major Akali groupings, with the exception of Akali Dal (Kabul), abstained from the 1992 Assembly elections. With a voter participation of 21.58 percent, which was lower than it had been for the previous forty years in Punjab, these elections were held in the wake of terrorist violence. As a result, the Congress had an edge and received 43.8% of the votes cast, winning 87 out of 117 seats. Another significant election-related event was the rise of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) as the Congress' primary opponent, winning 9 seats with 16.2% of the total votes cast. In response to his anti-insurgency activities, which eradicated terrorism in the state in the shortest amount of time feasible of a few months, Beant Singh was slain on August 21, 1995. H. S. Brar was sworn in as Punjab's chief minister before being succeeded on November 21 by Rajinder Kaur Bhattal. The SAD-BJP combined won the most seats, 93, in the 1997 assembly elections, handily defeating the Congress. Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal won the election. In all three of Punjab's regions, the BJP performed well in urban and semi-urban seats while the Akali Dal (Badal) had a strong response in both rural and semi-rural areas. With a vote share of 26.3%, the Congress was only able to gain 14 of the 117 seats. It only managed to gain 9 and 5 seats in the Malwa and Doaba regions, respectively, while failing to win any seats in Majha. The BSP likewise saw a significant fall, taking home only 1 seat with a 7.5 percent vote percentage in the 1997 elections as opposed to 9 seats with a 16.2 percent vote share in the 1992 elections.

With 62 seats won in the 2002 Assembly elections and 35.81 percent of the vote cast, the Congress, headed by Amarinder Singh, was elected as the party in power. With 30.97 percent and 5.72 percent of the vote, the Akali Dal and BJP respectively won 41 and 3 seats. The CPI only won one seat, while other parties like the BSP and Panthic Morcha were completely destroyed by this election. Both urban and rural constituencies belonged to the Congress.

**2007 Elections and 2012 Elections**

On February 13, 2007, Punjab conducted its 2007 Assembly Elections. Under Parkash Singh Badal's leadership, the SAD-BJP coalition won 68 of the 117 seats necessary to take control of the government. The BJP received 19 seats with 8.21% of the vote, while the SAD received 49 seats with 37.19% of the total votes cast.

**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 Without forming a coalition, Congress ran for office in 2007 and won 44 out of 116 seats with a 40.9 percent vote share. The leader of Dera Sacha Sauda, who has a sizable following in the area, may have assisted the Congress in achieving an astounding victory in Malwa, which was thought to be the SAD-dominated province.<sup>3</sup>

In Punjab, the incumbent government has always been ousted in elections, but the 2012 assembly elections broke the tradition. Voters did not have faith in the Congress, and its support base became weaker. This occurred for a number of reasons, including a lack of coordination between the leadership at the state and federal levels, the egotistical and feudal conduct of Amarinder Singh and Partap Singh Bajwa, divisions and backstabbing within the party, dissident and unsatisfied candidates, etc. While the populist policies of the Akali Dal's new leadership, such as providing free electricity, social security programs, the atta-dal program, and bicycles to girls in school, helped the party maintain its position in power. The displeasure with the Congress party at the Centre also contributed to the Congress' defeat as it failed miserably to present its future agenda.

Table 3 demonstrates that, with the exception of the BSP, every political party's vote share decreased significantly between the 2007 and 2012 elections. Even though their vote share was declining, the SAD-BJP and its coalition partner were still able to maintain a majority in the Assembly. On the other side, the Akali Dal increased their number of seats from 48 in the 2007 elections to 56 in the 2012 elections, despite the decreased vote share (as shown in Table 2). The BJP, a participant in the coalition, was unable to perform well in contrast to the prior elections, and its vote total decreased from 19 in 2007 to 12 in 2012.

**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 side, while losing vote share in the 2012 elections, the SAD-BJP coalition was nevertheless able to win 22 more seats than its competitor Congress Party. One of the primary factors that neutralized any anti-incumbency that existed in the state was the Sanjha Morcha, which was headed by the People Party of Punjab (PPP). By maintaining the Hindu Dalits of Doaba, who had previously been the Congress Party's traditional support base, the BSP also contributed to the SAD-BJP triumph. <sup>4</sup>

**2017 Assembly Elections: Issues and Trends**

Punjab conducted its 2017 Assembly elections on February 4th. These elections were unique

in a number of ways since they would determine the future of the state's long-serving incumbent government—something that had never before occurred. Another significant component of the election was the fact that the SAD-BJP and the Congress were directly challenged by the Aam Adami Party (AAP), a new political party. The 2017 assembly elections had the greatest voting turnout ever with 19.8 million voters (78.62%). With 69 seats in Malwa, 25 in Majha, and 23 in the Doaba area, Punjab has 117 seats up for election. The Malwa belt's Mansa district had the highest voter participation rate in the state at 87 percent. Overall, more over 80% of voters cast ballots in 42 of the 69 seats in the Malwa area. This area changed the game since it not only had the most seats but also the greatest voter turnout 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**

The details of the Punjab Assembly elections in 2017 are shown in Table 4. By capturing 77 seats, the Congress party won handily. With just 18 seats won, the SAD-BJP coalition finished third in the election. AAP gained 20 seats, making it the biggest opposition party. Despite winning these elections by a landslide, the Congress vote share decreased by around 1% as a result of the emergence of new parties like the AAP and Lok Insaf Party (LIP). For a newly formed party, the AAP's vote share of 24 percent is an impressive achievement. In contrast, the SAD coalition partner BJP only managed to win 3 seats with a meager 5 percent of the vote. The table also shows that all of Punjab's old parties' vote shares fell overall, but the vote shares for the new parties managed to change in their favor. The conventional parties, which rely on caste, religion, and other regional considerations to win votes in elections, should take note of this worrying development.

**Table 5: Region wise seat division**

Party	Malwa		Majha		Doaba
	(69)Swing	(25	Swing (23	Swing	
	seats)	seats)	seats)		
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**

The results of the 2017 Assembly elections are shown by region in Table 5. The Congress party's triumph in the Majha area, where it won 22 out of 25 seats with a 14-seat swing since the 2012 Assembly elections, was notable. The area is a center for religious activity and was formerly seen of as the bastion of the Akalis, therefore the SAD used to play the religion card there to win over votes. However, the party was only able to gain 2 seats in the 2017 elections, namely Majitha and Batala. By capturing 15 of the 23 seats, or nine more than in the last elections, the Congress party also did surprisingly well in the Doaba area. For the Congress, the Malwa area had several surprises. The Congress party got the most seats in the area—40 out of the 69—and it is the largest

region in the state. On the other side, the AAP and its alliance partner's success in the area is also significant as they gained 20 seats, which is more than the SAD's 8 seats and the biggest number ever for the party's individual record. Additionally, with a negative swing of 25 seats, this is the area where SAD suffered its greatest loss. In the 2017 elections, women made up 79 percent of all voters, compared to 78 percent of men. The most recent assembly elections in 2012 marked the beginning of this ongoing growing trend among female voters.

**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**

According to the respondents' age groups, Table 6 displays the vote shares for the various parties. It is evident that voters of all ages overwhelmingly supported the Congress in contrast to the combined support for the SAD-BJP coalition, the AAP, and its partner Lok Insaaf Party. Young voters up to the age of 25 were shown to favor the AAP over 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**

Given that this caste group itself is an upper caste group, it is necessary to explain why Khatri Sikhs are distinguished from Upper Caste. The vote distribution by caste for the various political parties in these elections is shown in Table 7. It demonstrates how the higher castes and Dalits in the state gave the Congress party the most support. In this election, the APP and its allies had a bigger vote share than the SAD-BJP coalition among the upper castes. However, the SAD-BJP coalition continued to have a monopoly over the rural peasantry's support base, i.e. Jat-Sikh voters made up the greatest share of this group's voters (38%) and, as with the upper caste, the AAP came in second with 31 percent of the vote, 2 percentage points ahead of the Congress, which could only get 29 percent of the vote. Again, Akali Dal was the top candidate among Khatri Sikhs, and as the chart indicates, 29% of the respondents supported it. However, a sizable portion of Khatri Sikhs (18%) also expressed support for other parties. Additionally, the OBCs supported the Congress party, with 39% of respondents saying it was their preference. However, just 19 percent of voters in this group preferred the SAD coalition, whilst 24 percent of voters preferred the AAP. After a very long time, the Congress was finally able to win over Dalit voters in Punjab. This was made possible in part

by the BSP's near-elimination from Punjab's political scene and the strong anti-incumbency sentiment against the governing coalition.

Religion has long played a significant role in the state's political affairs. The Sikh community dominates the state's religious population, and they are the center of political power. Hindus are the next group, making up a significant portion of the state's overall population.

**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 displays the political parties' vote shares by religion. The Congress party received the support of the biggest percentage of Sikh respondents (30%), followed by the Akali Dal, which bills itself as the Sikhs' official party with 28% of the vote. A similar pattern of increased vote for the Congress party was seen among Hindus. Additionally, the AAP outperformed the SAD-BJP coalition in winning Hindu voters by a little margin. As it received more votes than the combined vote shares of the SAD-BJP coalition and the AAP, the Congress was well in front while also winning the support of other groups (42%) including Muslims and Christians.

**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 reveals that the AAP received a significant percentage of votes (43%) among professionals, such as physicians, scientists, and engineers. In a similar vein, the AAP emerged as the most well-liked party among government workers, with 42% of all voters in this group claiming to have supported it. With just 14% of respondents supporting the party, Congress and the AAP had an identical vote share of 29% each, making Akali Dal the least popular among wealthy businesspeople. An key factor in this might be Punjab's inability to implement business-friendly policies and regulations. 35 percent of respondents in this group who were small company owners chose the Congress party, making it their favourite party. Farmers, the SAD's traditional basis of support, accounted for 32% of the vote. 31 percent of the working force continued to support the Congress party, while just 29 percent supported the SAD. Housewives supported the Congress over the AAP by a margin of 33 percent to only 20 percent.

The voter profile in terms of education is described in Table 10. Both the educated and illiterate segments of the electorate continued to favor Congress. It took a while for the nonliterate to embrace the Congress since the SAD-BJP combination relied on them as voters in the most recent elections. In all categories, Congress received between 37% and 40% of the vote.

**Table 10: Educational Level and Vote Share**

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

Educational Level	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**

Higher educated voters favoured AAP over SAD, as seen by the fact that 29% of all respondents with higher education levels chose AAP as opposed to 27% who chose the SAD-BJP combination.

**Table 11: Locality wise Vote Share**

Locality Vote Share by Locality (in percent)

Locality	Congress	SAD+	AAP+	Others
Rural	35	36	23	6
Urban	43	23	28	6

**Source: CSDS Data Unit**

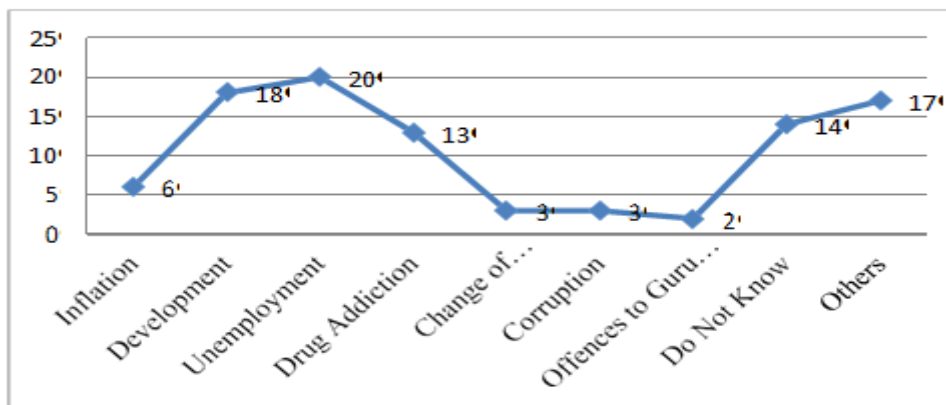
Table 11 displays the respondents' vote shares by location. The Akali Dal continued to rule among voters in rural areas. 36% of all voters in rural areas supported the SAD+BJP, compared to 35% who supported the Congress. With regard to urban voters, the Congress was well in front with a vote share of 43%, followed by the AAP (28 percent). Due to the SAD-BJP government's poor performance, there was a significant transfer of Hindu votes toward Congress and AAP, which contributed to the alliance's defeat in urban areas.

**Issues Important to Voters**

The respondents' perceptions on the problems that remained vital to the assembly elections in 2017 are explained in this section.

The problems cited by the respondents are shown in Figure 1. The question, "What was the most essential topic for you in deciding whom to vote for" was posed to the respondents. Twenty percent of all respondents ranked unemployment as the most significant problem, while just 18 percent said that development was their top concern. But the other. 13 percent of the respondents said they were concerned about the growing drug problem. The concerns described above lagged far behind the religious and other problems, such as corruption. It is crucial to note that just 2% of all respondents named disrespect for the Guru Granth Sahib in recent months as their top concern when it came to the elections.

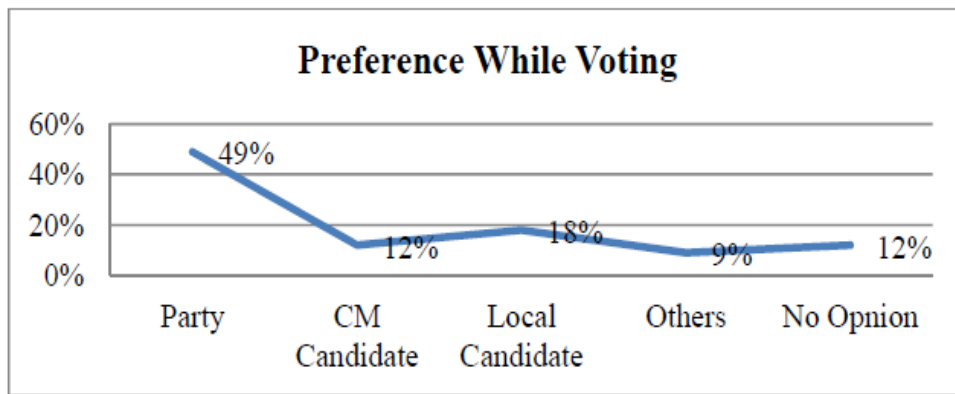
**Figure 1: Major Issues in 2017 Elections**



**Source: CSDS Data Unit**

**Figure 2: Preference While Voting**

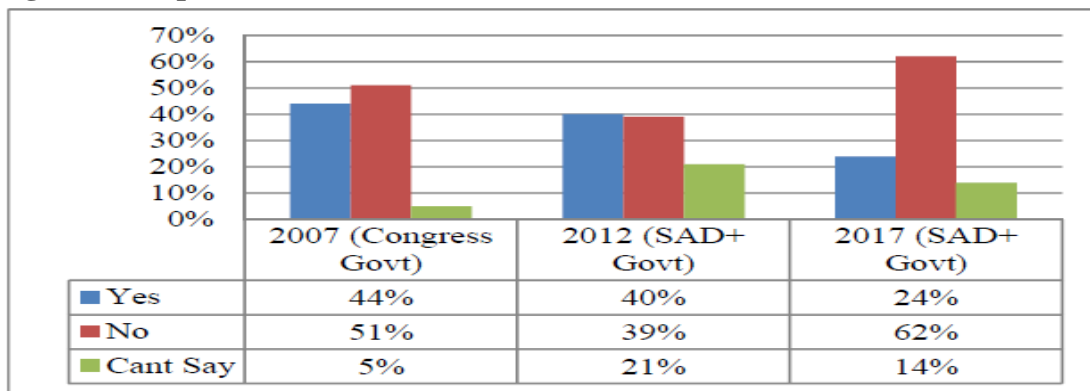




Source: CSDS Data Unit

There are several reasons for why people choose certain candidates. Some claim that the party counts more than the leader, while others hold a different perspective. 49 percent of the total respondents preferred the party and its programs above its candidate, as seen in Figure 2, when deciding whether to cast a ballot in the elections. However, local candidates were favoured by 18% of respondents.

Figure 3: Response to Incumbent Government

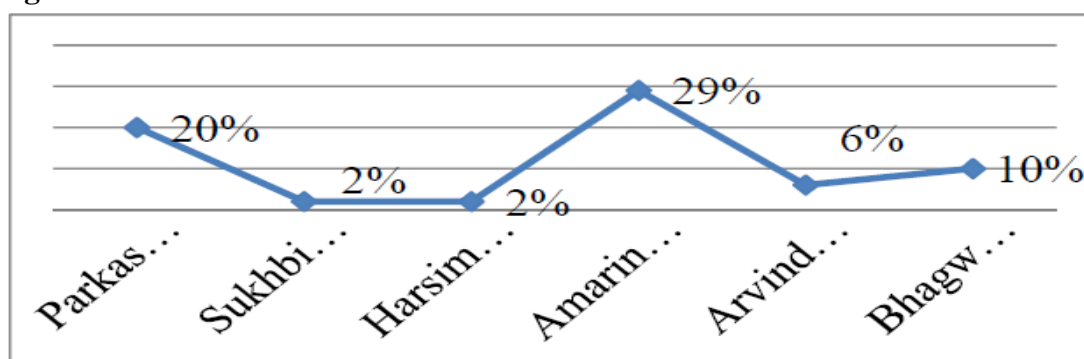


Source: CSDS Data Unit

Figure 3 depicts respondents' attitudes regarding current administrations since the 2007 state assembly elections. The respondents were asked, "Should the current government be given another chance?"

Indicators of public support for political change often include high voter participation, however this was not the case in Punjab's most recent assembly elections. But this time, there was a definite signal even before the polls that the people of Punjab would choose a new administration. Figure 3 depicts respondents' perceptions on whether they would give the current administration another opportunity after the previous three elections in Punjab. Three-fifths of all respondents favored overthrowing the current administration.

Figure 4: Preference for Chief Minister

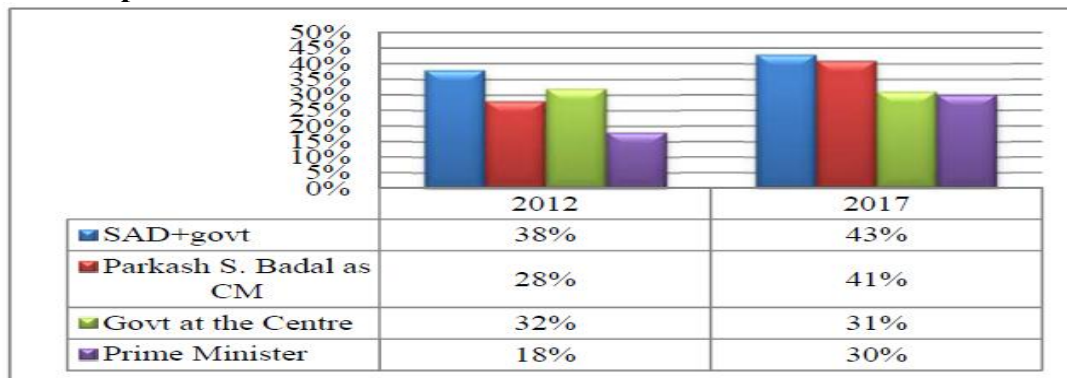


**Source: CSDS Data Unit**

Since 1997, respondents have ranked Parkash Singh Badal as their top choice for Punjab's chief minister or chief ministerial candidate in all of the state assembly elections. Only in this election did Amarinder Singh gain a nine percent advantage over him. Figure 4 displays the respondents' preferences for their potential Chief Minister. In contrast to the incumbent Deputy Chief Minister Sukhbir Badal and his wife Harsimrat Kaur Badal, who were preferred by only 2% of the total respondents surveyed for this study, many new leaders of the AAP, such as Bhagwant Mann and Arvind Kejriwal, enjoyed higher levels of support (10% and 6% respectively).

The degree of voters' happiness or displeasure with their respective administrations has a significant impact on how they vote. The degree of discontent of the people of Punjab with the performance of the national and state administrations in the 2012 and 2017 elections is seen in Figure 5. People's unhappiness with Parkash Singh Badal as chief minister increased, going from 28% in 2012 to 41% in 2017, according to research. The rise in levels of discontent with the work of the state government coincided with a similar trend. The state's residents did seem to be less pleased with Prime Minister Narendra Modi than with his predecessor Manmohan Singh, however.

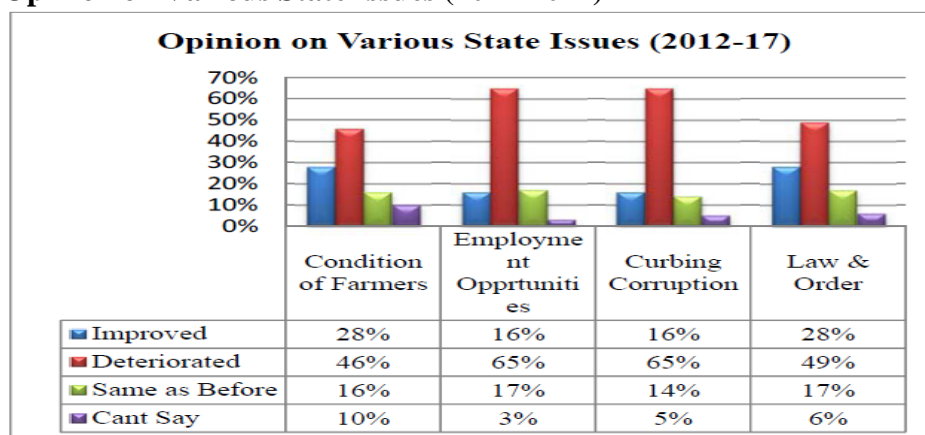
**Figure 5: Level of Dissatisfaction (%) with State and the Central Government and Leadership in the 2012-17 Elections**



**Source: CSDS Data Unit**

During the SAD-BJP alliance's five-year rule, numerous controversies persisted, including those involving law and order, the monopolization of the transportation, alcohol, and transportation industries, corruption, political vendettas, the abuse of the police force for private gain, farmer suicides, etc. The following topic, which dominated the narratives in the election process, was asked of the respondents.

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



**Source: CSDS Data Unit**

Figure 6 displays respondents' perspectives on numerous topics during the course of the SAD-BJP coalition government's five-year tenure (2012–2017). The graph demonstrates that

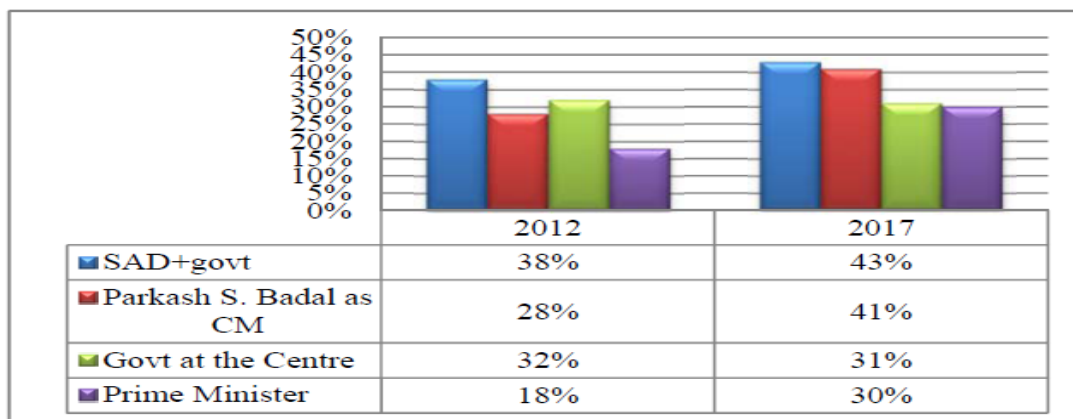
the majority of respondents believed that during the previous five years, both law and order and the state of farmers' conditions had become worse. In a similar vein, over two thirds of all respondents (65%) believed that the state administration had failed to promote job opportunities and fight corruption. This perspective on many topics was shown to be consistent with the overall discontent of the populace with the state administration. This is mostly due to the government's unsuccessful policies as well as its leaders' haughtiness and goondagardi, "taken for granted" attitude toward the Akali-BJP leaders. The current administration failed to address developmental challenges and was elected on populist platforms.

Since the 2014 legislative elections, the problem of drug addiction and hooliganism has been a top priority for opposition parties. It is important to note that AAP especially addressed these two concerns during the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, which brought the party significant rewards in the shape of 4 seats in the legislature. Opposition parties have often blamed the Akalis and, in particular, Cabinet Minister Bikram Singh Majithia (the Deputy Chief Minister's brother-in-law) for their links to the state's drug cartel. The latter has also been identified, along with other Akali leaders, for their alleged involvement in all levels of hooliganism.

In these elections, voters were questioned on whether drug abuse and hooliganism had risen, decreased, or stayed the same throughout the previous five years of the SAD-BJP coalition's administration.

Figure 7 demonstrates how individuals reacted to these two crucial concerns. During the previous five years of alliance administration, it was discovered that a very high number of respondents agreed that drug addiction and goondagardi had increased in the state. As a result, the public have shown a strong dislike for the current administration since they not only failed to regulate these issues but also had several key alliance members take part in them. On the other hand, 39% of all respondents said that the Congress administration was the only one capable of resolving these problems successfully.

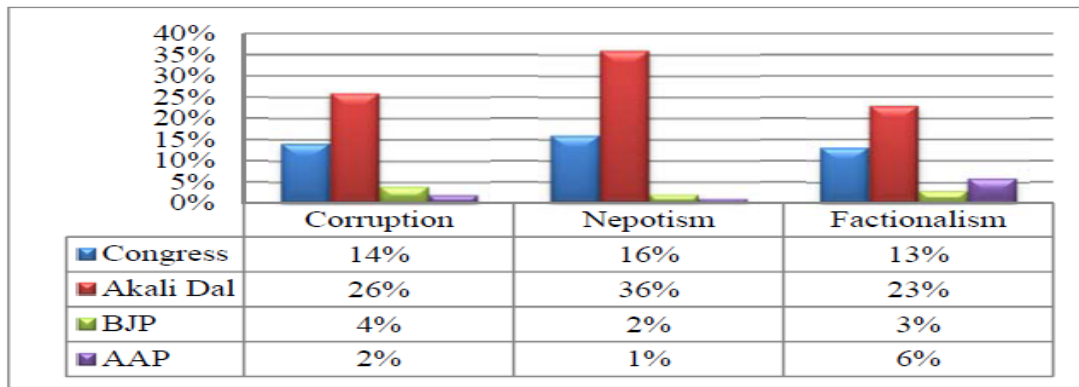
**Figure 7 Issue of Drugs and Hooliganism (2012-17)**



**Source: CSDS Data Unit**

The political parties in the nation are said to be tarnished by many scandals and wrongdoings. Rarely does a political party, national or regional, stick to its philosophy or history. As a consequence, the public's confidence and trust in the parties have decreased. The respondents were questioned about their thoughts on the different documented wrongdoings by the state's major parties.

**Figure 8: Level of Malicious Practices in Political Parties**

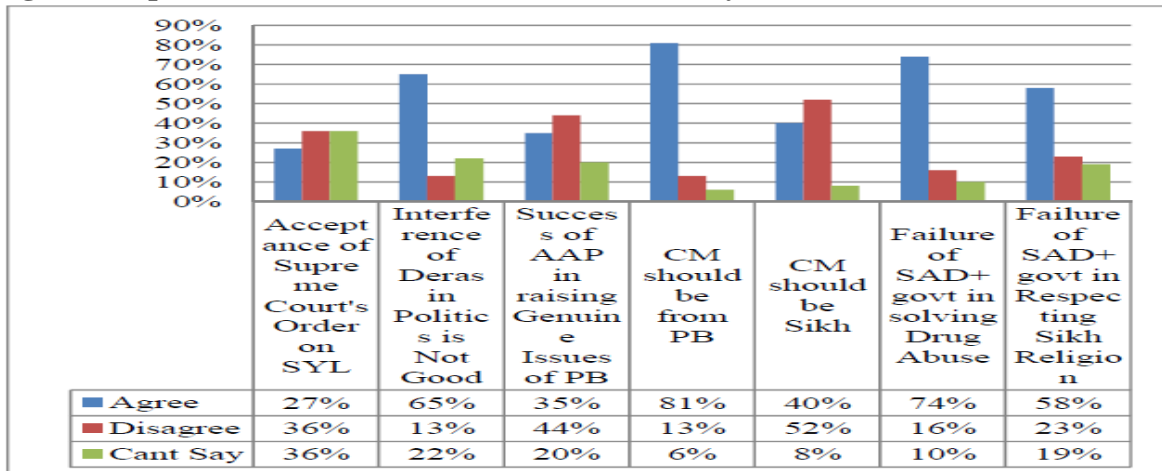


**Source: CSDS, Data Unit**

Figure 8 depicts the respondents' views on the dishonest behavior seen in Punjabi political groups. According to the statistics, the Akali Dal outperforms all other political parties in the state in terms of corruption, nepotism, and factionalism.

Figure 9 displays the respondents' opinions on numerous topics. In sum, 36% of respondents disagreed with the Supreme Court's most recent order to let water to Haryana via the Satluj-Yamuna Link (SYL) canal, while 26% agreed with the ruling. Deras' political function has recently become murky due to the proliferation of deras in Punjab. The state's vote bank has transformed the deras and babas into ATMs. In order to win the support of the heads of the deras, political leaders from all parties have begun to compete with one another. According to the statistic, the majority of respondents (65%) were opposed to deras meddling in Punjabi politics. In terms of bringing up important problems that concern people during these elections, the AAP seems to have lost its appeal (unlike in the 2014 parliamentary elections).

**Figure 9: Opinion on Common Issues of 2017 Assembly Elections**



**Source: CSDS Data Unit**

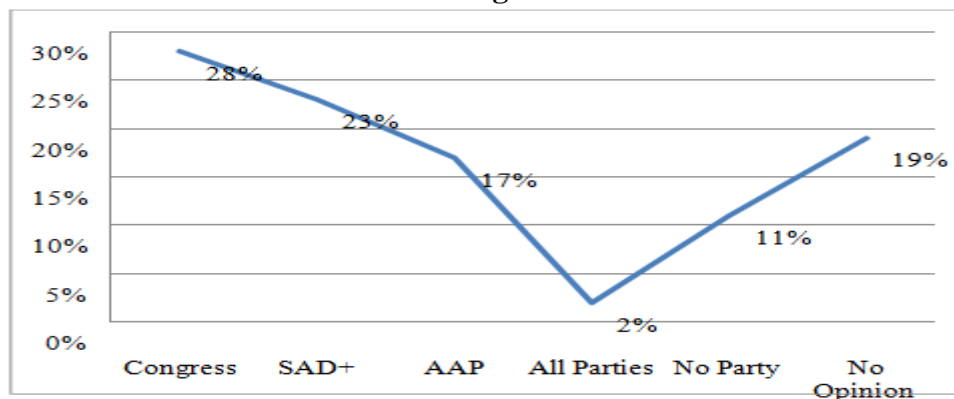
Four in five respondents wanted their future chief minister to be a Punjabi citizen. The idea that the Chief Minister of Punjab should be a Sikh, on the other hand, was rejected by the majority of respondents, adding a new dimension to future politics in the state. The responses of respondents to the critical questions of drug misuse and respect for Sikh emotions under a Panthic administration may be used to further evaluate the success of the government. The data clearly shows that 58 percent of respondents accused the government of failing to guarantee respect for the Sikh religion's religious emotions.

The contentious Satluj-Yamuna Link Canal deal continued to be a significant topic in the state elections. There was a lot of controversy around the recent Supreme Court ruling both before and during the 2017 elections. Which Party do you believe has the ability to address the SYL Issue, according to the respondents?

According to Figure 10, the respondents had a lot of faith in the Congress party to resolve the Satluj-Yamuna Link Canal dispute between Punjab and Haryana. It is important to note that

Amarinder Singh, the Congress's nominee for chief minister, resigned from the Lok Sabha in November 2016, only a few months before the polls, after the Supreme Court's ruling on the SYL issue.

**Figure 10: Preference to Parties for Resolving SYL**



**Source: CSDS Data Unit**

### Conclusion

Even though a political shift was anticipated as a consequence of the Punjab assembly elections in 2017, this time the incumbency issue was one of the contributing factors. Elections in Punjab were conducted quite differently after the AAP's arrival than they had before. Even though AAP was unable to generate a wave in its favor, it was still able to cause a swing in the votes of both the Congress and the Akali-BJP coalition. Instead of identity politics and religion dominating the topic of the current assembly election, the people of the state gave significant weight to development and associated problems when deciding how to cast their ballots. A vote was made.

More topics than only the typical pantheistic agenda were discussed. Even the national pan-Hindu identity issue brought up by the BJP, an Akali coalition partner, was unable to win them support among the urban Hindu community. Voting in the assembly elections resulted in a victory for the Congress because of the worsening economic circumstances, notably for businesses and farmers. Because of this, when people were choosing who to vote for, they included development, unemployment, and drug abuse as major factors.

A number of changes in agendas and mandates were seen with the AAP's entry. But for a variety of reasons, including a weak organizational structure, a lack of political experience, the failure to nominate a candidate for chief minister, the selection of the incorrect candidates, decision-making from Delhi, etc., the party was unable to achieve the desired objectives. Even with these gaps, the launch party grew to become the second-largest in the state. It not only gave the populace a third option, but it also served as a forum for political leaders and activists who, although doing outstanding work for the established parties, were unable to further their careers. Additionally, it served as a voice for matters that were overlooked and on which both conventional parties agreed. The results of the 2017 elections demonstrated that old methods of establishing agendas and working procedures would not be effective in the future, and that every administration would now need to focus on developmental objectives. Politicians are being held accountable for their previous commitments as a result of the advent of social media, which has also increased people's political awareness. The people of the state seek solid economic prospects, good administration, and progress; they are no longer readily swayed by the emergence of regional political interests. A better period with the people's economic, political, and social progress is anticipated to arrive in the future, when democracy can really be implemented by the genuine power holders, who are the people themselves. The age of local problems and plans has passed.

### Notes



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

<sup>2</sup> 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.

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

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