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## Emerging trends in Punjab politics: An analysis of Lok Sabha elections 2024

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### Abstract

The main objective of this paper is to analyze the emerging trends in Punjab politics in the scenario of Lok Sabha Elections 2024. The secondary sources of information have been used for this study in the form of books, journals, articles, research papers, newspapers, etc. Being the federal system in India, elections are conducted at the central and state level. The state level elections are important because the states have been assigned an important role in the Indian political system. Every state election has to play a significant role in sending its representatives to the legislative assembly of the state and the Indian Parliament. State level parties are also known as regional parties. Punjab is a state in the northwest region of India. Out of the 13 Lok Sabha seats in Punjab, the Congress party secured 7 seats while the ruling Aam Aadmi Party secured 3 seats only. Independent candidates Amritpal Singh and Sarabjit Singh won the Khadur Sahib and Faridkot seats respectively. Along with this Shiromani Akali Dal managed to save its seat in Bathinda only. BJP failed to open its account in the state. But BJP's vote percentage has increased in Punjab. Thus, in the 2024 Lok Sabha Elections, some new trends have been seen in Punjab Politics.

**Keywords:** Democracy, elections, party, government, politics

### Introduction

India is considered the largest democracy of the world. The best description of democracy has been that it provides a political organization of human affairs which gives a government 'of the people, by the people and for the people. Democracy is considered to be the finest form of government in which the people remain the sovereign power to determine their destiny. Thus, in democracy the people are the ultimate source of power and its success and failure depend on their wisdom, consciousness and vigilance (Dahl, 1989) [2]. In a democratic political system, elections are held from time to time after fixed intervals. The quality of any democratic government is based on the nature of free and fair elections. It provides a window to the process and the basis for important political judgments (Pattabhiram, 1967) [15]. Election is a formal group decision making process by which a population chooses an individual to hold public office. Every election is an act of belief; it is an opportunity to cleanse public life of confusion (Kamal and Meyer, 1977) [6]. Elections are essential to the functioning of large scale democracy in which some form of representation is necessary to allow all the individual citizens to participate in the decision making process (Pattabhiram, 1967) [15]. In the Representation of people act 1951, the word election is defined as, "election means to fill a seat in either house of parliament or in the house of legislative of a state" (Representation of People Act, 1951). The term 'Free' and 'Fair' elections have not been mentioned in any provision of the constitution of India. Provision for elections has been included in articles 324 to 329. The election commission of India is a permanent and an independent body established by the constitution of India that is responsible for free and fair elections in the country. India has a proud record of holding parliamentary elections from time to time. These are the political parties which contest the elections and form the government by winning a majority. The parties which cannot win the majority play the role of opposition. Minimum two political parties are necessary to run a democracy. But the founding fathers of our constitution adopted the multi - party system for a true democracy in India. In the absence of organized political parties, elections are not possible.

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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) <sup>[14]</sup>. 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 different regions. Reputation of the candidates, the image of the party, its achievements, core issues of the state and the various religious and economic factors decide the destiny of political parties in India (Neeru, 2013) <sup>[18]</sup>.

### Objective of the Study

The main objective of this paper is to analyze the emerging trends in Punjab politics in the scenario of Lok Sabha Elections 2024. India is a democratic country. It is only in a democratic country that elections have a meaning.

### Methodology

The secondary sources of information have been used for this study in the form of books, journals, articles, research papers, newspapers, etc. Data provided by the Election Commission of India and other government reports have been also used for this paper.

### Emerging Trends in Punjab Politics: An Analysis of Lok Sabha Elections 2024

Being the federal system in India, elections are conducted at the central and state level. The state level elections are important because the states have been assigned an important role in the Indian political system. Every state election has to play a significant role in sending its representatives to the legislative assembly of the state and the Indian Parliament (Neeru, 2013) <sup>[18]</sup>. State level parties are also known as regional parties. Punjab is a state in the northwest region of India and is one of the most prosperous states. The politics of Punjab had faced a lot of ups and downs. Punjab is considered a sensitive state because it shares its border with Pakistan. After independence, the first emergency was imposed in Punjab in 1951. President's rule has been imposed eight times in Punjab. Movements have been taking place in Punjab from time to time due to which the political condition of the state has been in chaos in the beginning. But these movements gave birth to different political parties in the state. Akali Dal is the oldest regional party of the Punjab state. Congress is the oldest national party in India. But the Aam Aadmi Party entered in Punjab as a new party who defeated both the old parties and formed the government in 2022 (Ram, 2017) <sup>[17]</sup>. But in 2024 Lok Sabha Elections, some new trends have been seen in Punjab politics which discussed below:

- **Downfall of Akali Dal:** Shiromani Akali Dal is a regional political party in Punjab. It is the oldest state-level political party in India. It came into being on December 14, 1920 as the vanguard of the Gurdwara Reform Movement which had been launched to protect the religious interests of the Sikh community. Akali Dal formed its government in Punjab during the 1967, 1969, 1977, 1985, 1997, 2007 and 2012 Assembly elections. But most of the Akali governments were not able to complete their full tenure due to its internal fighting. It is the principal advocacy organization of the large Sikh community in the state and is centred on the philosophy of promoting the well-being of the country's Sikh population by providing them with a political as well as

religious platform (Kumar, 2017) <sup>[13]</sup>. The SAD first contested elections as a political party in 1937, after the Government of India Act of 1935 had authorized the creation of provincial assemblies in British India. In the year 1937, the Akali Dal fought the elections in alliance with the Congress on Congress-cum-Akali ticket. In the Legislative Assembly they shared seats with the Congress (Bhupinder, 2022) <sup>[22]</sup>. In 1942, differences arose between the parties on the issue of supporting the war. The Congress was opposed to participation in the war. The Akali Dal decided on the contrary as they argued it would adversely affect the interests of the Sikhs in the Army. Consequently, a pact was signed between the Muslim League and the SAD and the Akali Dal representative S. Baldev Singh, joined the Cabinet. At the time of partition, the migration of population made a significant impact on the future course of political, economic and social events in Punjab. After 1947, the SAD spearheaded the movement to create a separate state for the Punjabi-speaking (Punjabi Subba) and largely Sikh population of north western India. As a result, the state of Punjab was divided into two regions Punjabi speaking (Modern Punjab) and Hindi speaking (Haryana) States in the year 1966. Giani Gurmukh Singh Musafir, leader of Indian National Congress becomes the first chief minister of modern Punjab (Singh, 1970) <sup>[20]</sup>. From 1967 – 1968 President's rule was imposed in Punjab. In the 1969 assembly elections, the SAD won more seats than it had in 1967. But it was still short of a majority and again formed a coalition government with the Indian National Congress and Gurnam Singh, leader of SAD, became the chief minister of Punjab till the date 27 March 1970. Prakash Singh Badal became the chief minister of Punjab for the first time in March 1970 and headed a coalition government of Akali Dal and Indian National Congress. That government was also short-lived, again marked by intraparty fighting and frequent leadership changes that culminated in the dissolution of the government in mid – 1971. From 30 April, 1977 to 20 June, 1977 President's rule was imposed in Punjab. During this period, the SAD attempted to rebuild and to re-establish itself as the sole representative of the Sikh community. The party nonetheless underwent divisions, with several splinter groups claiming the mantle of the true SAD. The party did win a majority of seats in the 1977 state assembly elections and formed a government with the Janta Party (Now BJP). Parkash Singh Badal, leader of SAD, served as the chief minister of Punjab (head of government). It was Badal's second term in the office, as he had served in 1970 – 71, during the first SAD-led government (Kumar, 2004) <sup>[10]</sup>. Despite continuing factionalism in the SAD, the party won a large majority of seats in the 1985 assembly elections and Surjeet Singh Barnala, leader of SAD formed the government in the state that lasted for almost two years before central rule from New Delhi was re-imposed. From 1987 to 1992 Punjab was under the control of the President for five consecutive years. The Akali Dal boycotted the 1992 assembly elections. Parkash Singh Badal, leader of the largest of the various SAD factions, became president of the party in 1996. As a result, SAD won another large majority of seats in the 1997 assembly elections and formed the government with the BJP. Parkash Singh Badal became the third time chief

minister of Punjab till 2002. The SAD in alliance with the BJP won in 2007 and Badal commenced his fourth term as chief minister. The alliance retained power in 2012, with Badal continuing as fifth time chief minister of Punjab till 2017 (Surinder, 2005) <sup>[5]</sup>. Thus, Parkash Singh Badal, leader and president of SAD, was a popular politician who served as the longest chief minister of Punjab from 1970-1971, from 1977-1980, from 1997-2002, from 2007-2012, from 2012-2017 (D'Souza, 2014). But in Assembly elections 2022, Akali Dal won only three seats. Former CM Parkash Singh Badal, senior SAD leader Bikram Singh Majithia and several Akali leaders also faced defeat. In the Lok Sabha Elections 2024, Akali Dal won only one seat. Out of 13 seats, only Harsimrat Kaur Badal could win. Thus Akali Dal which was the popular regional party of Punjab is almost at its last stage.

▪ **Declining the Popularity of Aam Aadmi Party:**

During the Lok Sabha elections of 2014, a new era started in Punjab politics. This election provided people with a credible third alternative to look for. The AAP's remarkable electoral journey in the state commenced with the 2014 Lok Sabha election when as a debutant, it had surprised everybody by polling 24.4 percent of the vote and winning four out of 13 constituencies and finishing third in eight constituencies. The assembly election 2017 in Punjab was receiving much attention as an exceptional election because the emergence of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) had not only transformed it into a triangular electoral fight but could end the bipolar electoral system in the state. There had been an absence of any third winnable party for a long time in the state. The Punjab electorate was mobilized to choose between the Congress and the SAD. The Indian National Congress (Congress) had its electoral sway over the state until the state underwent reorganization in 1966. The Akali Dal set the political agenda of Punjabi Subba and Sikh minority, whether in power or not. The AAP had emerged as the clear game changer by setting the agenda, identifying and defining important issues and providing a credible challenge to the established parties of the state, namely the Congress and the Akali Dal (Kumar and *et al.*, 2017) <sup>[13]</sup>. The Aam Aadmi Party gained a strong 79 percent majority in the sixteenth Punjab Legislative Assembly by winning 92 seats out of 117 seats. AAP Punjab convener and MP Bhagwant Mann becomes the Chief Minister of Punjab on 16 March, 2022. AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal hailed the party's performance in Punjab as a "revolution". The AAP tsunami made several stalwarts, including three former chief ministers, face defeat. But in the 2024 Lok Sabha Elections, the Aam Aadmi Party could win only three seats out of 13. The party which won with such a huge majority in 2022 to get only 3 seats after 2 years shows the decline in popularity (Ram, 2017) <sup>[17]</sup>. Only Gurmeet Singh Hayer, Dr. Raj Kumar and Malvinder Singh Kang secured the Lok Sabha seats in the 2024 elections.

▪ **Revival of Congress Party:** The INC is the oldest political party in India. After the reorganization of modern Punjab on the basis of language, the first legislative assembly election was held in 1967. After Gurnam Singh, Akali Dal (Sant Fateh Singh Group)

formed the government but in November 1967, Lashman Singh Gill with 16 MLAs defected and with the support of Indian National Congress formed a government which lasted till August, 1968. Conflicts and power struggles within the party, however, led to the government's fall within months. From 1971 to 1972 President's rule was imposed in Punjab. The SAD lost badly in the 1972 assembly elections, and the Congress Party, with a majority of seats, formed the government. Zail Singh, leader of INC became the chief minister of Punjab till 1977 (Kuldeep, 1999) <sup>[11]</sup>. The party again won in the 1980 state assembly elections. Due to differences in the Congress party, first Harcharan Singh Brar and then Rajinder Kaur Bhattal became the chief minister of Punjab till 1977. The Congress Party emerged victorious in the 1992 elections. Beant Singh, leader of INC became the chief minister of Punjab till 1995. After again Congress won in the 2002 assembly polls and Captain Amrinder Singh, leader of INC became the chief minister of Punjab till 2007. From 2017-2021, Captain Amrinder Singh, leader of INC retained the power. But due to internal clashes in the congress party, Charanjeet Singh Channi becomes the chief minister of Punjab till 2022. In the 2022 Punjab Assembly Elections, Congress Party won 18 seats only. Approximately, all senior leaders of the Congress Party like Charanjit Singh Channi, Amarinder Singh, Rajinder kaur Bhattal, Navjot Singh Sidhu etc. faced defeat. But in Lok Sabha Elections 2024, Congress party secured 7 seats in Punjab out of 13. Almost all senior Congress party leaders won. In the 2024 Lok Sabha Elections, the revival of the congress party at the center and state level is seen. Congress showed its strength in the Malwa region, winning four seats: Ludhiana, Ferozepur, Fatehgarh Sahib and Patiala. In the Doaba region, the party secured one out of two seats namely Jalandhar (SC) while in Majha, it emerged victorious in two constituencies, Gurdaspur and Amritsar.

▪ **Emergence of Radical Politics in Punjab:** The equations emerged in Punjab's two Lok Sabha seats Khadur Sahib and Faridkot have confused the politics of the state. The rise of radical politics has been seen in Punjab during the Lok Sabha elections 2024. Amritpal Singh secured the Khadur Sahib seat with 38.6% votes and Sarabjit Singh Khalsa secured the Faridkot seat with 29.4% votes. Initially, the competition between the political parties on these two seats seemed to be easy but at the last moment it became more complicated. Experts were seeing this as a battle of the "emotional vote" against the "organizational vote". Amritpal Singh, the leader of "Waris Punjab De" organization from Khadur Sahib, was contested as an independent candidate. He is a Khalistan supporter and has been lodged in Dibrugarh Jail, Assam for a year under NSA. Sarabjit Singh Khalsa was also contested as an independent candidate from Faridkot Lok Sabha Constituency (Reserved). The presence of Sarabjit Singh Khalsa, son of Beant Singh, who was involved in the assassination of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, had changed the political equation of this seat (Sarabjeet, 2024) <sup>[24]</sup>. Simranjit Singh Mann, President of the Shiromani Akali Dal (Amritsar) and Khalistan supporter, who had defeated the AAP candidate in the



2022 Sangrur bypoll contested from Sangrur again, faced defeat at the hands of AAP's Gurmeet Singh Meet Hayer. Interesting thing is that in the year 1989, when militancy was at its peak in Punjab, the people elected Simranjit Singh Mann as their Member of Parliament from the Tarn Taran Lok Sabha constituency (Kumar, 2004) <sup>[10]</sup>. Tarn Taran now falls in Khadur Sahib Lok Sabha constituency. Simranjit Singh Mann was in jail at that time and contested the Lok Sabha elections in absentia. Almost 25 years after this incident, Amritpal Singh contested as an independent candidate in absentia. This constituency came into the headlines at the national level with the entry of Amritpal Singh. Amritpal Singh's election campaign had been run by his father Tarsem Singh, mother Balwinder Kaur, uncles and aunts, Sikh organizations, NRIs and some other local people. Election campaigning in favor of Amritpal Singh had been done on a large scale through social media platforms. People associated with him said that, "there is a huge amount of drugs in Tarn Taran and Patti. That is why the main issue for them is drugs and they are going to the people only with this issue." Amritpal has no political background. On the other hand, in Faridkot constituency, Sarabjit Singh Khalsa has changed the political scenario of this seat. He had contested the Lok Sabha election from Bathinda in 2004. He has been prominently raising issues related to Sikhs, especially the issue of release of Sikh prisoners who have completed their sentences and the restrictions imposed by the government. Along with this, Sarabjit Singh Khalsa used to talk about his father Beant Singh to the voters. People have discussed that the traditional parties of Punjab and the newly emerged Aam Aadmi have been tested. Now it is time to test the leaders who sacrificed for the nation (Surinder, 2024) <sup>[23]</sup>.

- **Performance of BJP:** "I have a blood relation with Punjab" despite Prime Minister Narendra Modi's plea, the people of Punjab did not win and sent any BJP candidate to the Lok Sabha in 2024. The Prime Minister made the above statement during the Patiala rally. However, BJP's vote percentage has definitely increased in Punjab and it has also left Shiromani Akali Dal behind in this matter (Gagandeep, 2024). For the first time since 1996, the BJP contested the Lok Sabha elections alone. In the 2024 general elections, Punjab is the only state in North India where BJP's account has not been opened. BJP tried to attract the Hindu and Dalit community with every trick but without success. Even the four rallies of the Prime Minister could not prepare any political ground for the BJP. Of course BJP lost in Punjab but its vote percentage has definitely increased. BJP has faced two challenges in Punjab like farmers' opposition and entering the election field alone.

### Conclusion

The emerging trends in Punjab politics during the Lok Sabha Elections 2024 show that the people of Punjab want change. The result of Punjab elections shows a different trend than the rest of the country. This trend started to be visible from 2014, when the people of Punjab gave victory to the AAP in four seats. It was a time when the people of the whole nation rejected the AAP but the people of Punjab

stood in favor of this party. After this, one seat in the 2019 Lok Sabha Elections and 92 seats in the Assembly Elections 2022 gave a chance to form a government and rejected the popular regional party Akali Dal and the national Party Congress. But when people got fed up with the AAP party in a short time, after about three months, Simranjit Singh Mann, radical leader, was sent to the Lok Sabha. In the Lok Sabha Elections 2024, the people of Punjab rejected the Akali dal as well as AAP. Apart from this, BJP got good vote share in the whole country but could not open its account in Punjab. Only the Congress party secured 7 seats. So, people of Punjab are fed up with the political leaders regularly, due to which hot – minded leaders secured two seats during 2024 elections in Punjab. Thus, during the Lok Sabha Elections 2024, some different emerging trends were seen in Punjab politics.

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