

Punjab Vidhan Sabha Elections 2012: Beginning of the Trend of Second Consecutive Term in Punjab Politics

Dr. Satnam Singh

Assistant Professor in Political Science & HEAD

P.G. Department of Political Science

Mata Gujri College (An Autonomous College)

Fatehgarh Sahib (Punjab) Pin-140407

Abstract

Punjab Vidhan Sabha election 2012 was the first election since post-reorganization of Punjab in 1966 that any political party has retained power for two consecutive terms. The 14th Punjab Vidhan elections which were held in 2012 reversed the trend of the history of electoral politics of Punjab by beating anti-incumbency pattern in the state. The Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) the main regional political party of the state and Bhartiya Janata Party (SAD-BJP) alliance has defeated the Congress Party for second consecutive term. The present paper is an attempt to analyze the significant phenomena of beginning of the trend of second consecutive in Punjab politics

Key Words: SAD-BJP, Sanjha Morcha, SGPC, PPP, PPCC

Punjab Vidhan Sabha elections 2012, initially, seemed that it would have a triangular fight in the state but the poor performance of Sanjha Morcha a combined group of People's Party of Punjab (PPP), CPI, CPM and Akali Dal (Longowal) in the elections made it a direct contest between the traditional rivals of politics i.e. SAD-BJP alliance and the Congress. Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) which contested this election without any electoral alliance has put up its candidates in all assembly constituencies but failed to open even its account in spite of the highest percentage of schedule caste population in the state particularly in Doaba region of the state. The architect of Sanjha Morcha, Manpreet Singh Badal (President of People's Party of Punjab now merged in the Congress party), nephew of Parkash Singh Badal, who left SAD in October 2010 due to ideological differences with his uncle S. Parkash Singh Badal, the then Chief Minister of Punjab formed a new party i.e. People's Party of Punjab, was defeated along with his father S. Gurdas Singh Badal from two assembly constituencies i.e. Gidharbaha and Lambi. He had made alliances with CPI, CPM and Akali Dal (Longowal) but none proved beneficial.

Performance of Political Parties in 2012 Punjab Vidhan Sabha Elections

The electoral performance of political parties in terms of seats won and votes polled in Punjab Vidhan Sabha election 2012 has been shown in the following table;

Table-1

Party	2012	2012	2007	2007	Change (Seats)	Change (%)
Congress Party	46	40.11%	44	40.94%	+2	-0.83%
Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD)	56	34.75%	49	37.19%	+7	-2.44%
BJP	12	7.13%	19	8.21%	-7	-1.08%
PPP		5.17%		-		-
CPM		0.16%		0.28%		-0.12%
CPI		0.68%		0.75%		-0.07%
Shiromani Akali Dal (Maan)		0.28%		0.51%		-0.23%
BSP		4.30%		4.10%		+0.20%
Independents	03	7.28	05	8.02%	-2	-0.74%
	117	100.00%	117	100.00%		

Source:- Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, Punjab, Chandigarh, 2007 & 2012 Punjab Vidhan Sabha Elections.

Table no.1 shows that except for a minor increase in the BSP vote share, the vote percentage all other political parties has come down in 2012 elections in comparison to the 2007 elections. Though the SAD-BJP was a bigger loser in terms of vote share but the alliance arithmetic helped them to retain its majority in the assembly. Rather, the strength of Akali Dal in the assembly has increased from 49 seats in 2007 to 56 seats in 2012 elections. The BJP came down from 19 seats in 2007 to 12 seats in 2012 elections. The Congress failed to take advantage in the decline of popularity of the ruling alliance as it mostly relied upon anti-incumbency historic formula, waiting its term to form the next government in the state. On the other hand, the SAD-BJP alliance in spite of its loss in vote- share managed to get 22 seats more than their rival Congress Party only with a small margin of 1.77 percent votes. The Left parties' alliance with Sanjha Morcha became a net loss for the Congress Party while the PPP helped SAD to neutralize whatever anti - incumbency was there in the state. The BSP helped the SAD-BJP by retaining Hindu Dalits of Doaba which has otherwise been the support base of the Congress Party.

Region - Wise Electoral Performance of Political Parties

Punjab comprises three regions namely Majha (Districts of Amritsar, Tarn Taran, Pathankot and Gurdaspur), Doaba (Districts of Jalandhar, Kapurthala, Nawanshar and Hoshiarpur) and Malwa (Districts of Patiala, Ludhiana, Fatehgarh Sahib, Faridkot, Ferozepur, Fazilka, Moga, Muktsar, Sangrur, Barnala, Ropar, Bathinda, Mansa and Mohali). There are 117 assembly constituencies in the state. The delimitation process 2008 changed the number of constituencies in the regions benefiting the already dominant Malwa by increasing four seats two each from Majha and Doaba. This development not only increased the electoral importance of the region but also became beneficial to the SAD politically because this region had proved strong support base of Akali Dal since 1966.

The Majha region, which lies sandwiched between the Indo-Pak border in the north and river Beas in the south, contains 25 assembly seats. It is a mixture of Hindu, Sikh and Dalit population. The demographic character of this region made it a traditional stronghold of the Congress party.

The north eastern part of Punjab, Doaba which literally means the land between two rivers, accounts for 23 assembly seats, is traditionally a strong hold of the BSP and the Congress party because of its large concentration of Dalit population.

The southern part of Punjab, Malwa, is geographically the biggest and politically the most significant region of the state which accounts for 69 out of 117 assembly seats of Punjab. Though it has some pockets of Hindu population but it has traditionally remained a stronghold of the Akalis. Since 1966 all the Chief Ministers of the state except Darbara Singh hailed from Malwa region.

The region-wise electoral performance of political parties in 2012 Punjab Vidhan Sabha election is recorded in the following table;

Table-2

Sr. No.	Party	Majha			Doaba			Malwa		
		2007	2012	Change	2007	2012	Change	2007	2012	Change
1.	Congress	03	8	+5	04	06	+2	37	32	-5
2.	SAD	17	12	-5	13	11	-2	19	33	+14
3.	BJP	07	5	-2	07	05	-2	05	02	-3
4.	Independent	0	0	0	01	01	0	04	02	-2
	Total	27	25		25	23		65	69	

Source:- Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, Punjab, Chandigarh, 2007 & 2012 Punjab Vidhan Sabha Elections.

Table no. 2 indicates that in the Majha region the Congress party won 8 seats in 2012 election while it secured only 3 seats in 2007 elections. SAD won only 12 seats in 2012 election while it secured 17 seats in 2007 election. BJP won 5 seat from this region in 2012 election while it secured 7 seats in 2007 election.

In the Doaba region, the Congress party won 6 seats in 2012 election while it could manage only 4 seats in 2007 election. SAD won 11 seats in 2012 election while it secured 13 seats in 2007 election. BJP won 5 seat from this region in 2012 election while it had led in 7 seats in 2007 election. The independents got 1 seat in both 2012 and 2007 election from this region.

In the Malwa region, the Congress party won 32 seats in 2012 election while in 2007 election it could manage to win 37 seats from this region. SAD won 33 seats in 2012 election while in 2007 election it could manage to win 19

seats from this region. BJP won 2 seats in 2012 election and it got 5 seats in 2007 election. The independents secured 2 & 4 seats in 2012 & 2007 elections from this region respectively. Neither the BSP nor the others secured even a single seat from any of the regions in these elections. It is worth mentioning here that in 2012 election the SAD gained good seats in its own stronghold region the Malwa region as compare to 2007 election.

Reasons for the Performance of Political Parties in these elections

The victory of the SAD-BJP alliance in the elections was even more significant because the SAD won more seats than the Congress in spite of the Dera Sacha Sauda's support to the Congress Party. The Congress failed to recover losses in Majha and Doaba because of various reasons. The Congress Party remained complacent waiting for its turn to rule the state. Lack of co-ordination at state level, feudal and arrogant behavior of state leadership, coterie culture, rebel candidates etc. were seen as some of the reasons for the defeat of the party. Reasons for defeat and successes of parties in detail could be listed as bellow:

1. **Too much expectation from incumbency factor by Congress party :-** Too much expectation from incumbency factor and over confidence of PPCC chief Capt. Amrinder Singh regarding sure victory is one of the major reasons for the defeat of congress party in these elections.
2. **Autocratic style of functioning of PPCC Chief Capt. Amrinder Singh :-** The Congress party leadership had not been serious on issuing the party tickets, campaign and revengeful and unparliamentarily wording adopted by Capt. Amrinder Singh for defeating the Congress candidates.
3. **Populist Policies of SAD-BJP Government :-** The Populist policies adopted by Akali Dal government like free electricity, social security schemes, atta-dal scheme and bicycles to school going girls etc. helped to manage its victory in these elections.
4. **Congress Factionalism :-**The Congress failed miserably to project its future agenda and remained a divided house throughout the elections. Some candidates of the party worked against their own party candidates to stop them from becoming ministers in the future Congress government.
5. **Religious dears supported SAD :-** Though the development and secular agenda of the government worked well but the role of Babas and Deras remained crucial for the victory of the ruling SAD-BJP alliance. The SAD successfully managed the support of many religious organizations, including Dam Dami Taksal of Bhindranwale under new social engineering to avoid raising "Panthic" or religious issues. Additionally, it secured the support of various Dera heads and Babas in this election. SAD also managed to secure one third votes of the followers of Dera Sacha Sauda and almost half of the votes of the followers of Radha Soami sect.

It must be mentioned here that the followers of these Deras were traditional vote banks of the Congress and are spread all over Punjab. Another Dera Sachkhand Ballan located in Doaba also played a crucial role in the victory of the alliance candidates in the region, as BSP emerged as a spoiler for the Congress by securing 21 percent of the total votes of the followers of this Dera.

6. **Victory of SAD in SGPC Election :-** The landslide victory of SAD in Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) elections a few months prior this election proved to be a successful semi-final which helped its victory in the final i.e. 2012 Assembly Elections. The leadership began the process of gearing up the party to reach the masses to muster support at grass-root level. Secondly, the SAD by making alliance with various Panthic and religious organizations in SGPC elections consolidated its support base among the Sikh masses.
7. **Popularity of S. Parkash Singh Badal :-** The acceptance of Parkash Singh Badal as a leader of the masses remained high in these elections. He was the most preferred choice for Chief Minister (38%) against his main rival Amrinder Singh (33%).The former was more popular among women voters also. Our post-poll survey shows that SAD was preferred by 43% women voters in comparison to the Congress (39%).
8. **Price Rise issue before elections :-** The price rise remained the most important issue for 41% respondents in Punjab. The SAD-BJP alliance succeeded to put blame of the price rise on the Congress by arguing that it was the result of anti-people policies of the Congress -led UPA government in Delhi.

References:

1. Lakhwider Singh Sidhu, Gurpreet Singh Brar & Sumandeep Kaur Punia, Politics in Punjab 1966-2008, Unistar Books, Publications, Chandigarh, 2009.
2. Bhupinder Singh, Punjab Politics Retrospect and Prospect, Readworthy Publication, New Delhi, 2010.
3. Pritam Singh, "Punjab's Electoral Competition," Economic and Political weekly, Vol. 42, Issue No. 06, 2007.
4. Bhupinder Singh, "Punjab Assembly Elections 2007: An Analysis", Indian Political Science Association, Vol. 70, Issue No. 1, 2009.
5. Ashutosh Kumar, Jagroop Singh Sekhon, "Punjab: Resurgence of the Congress", Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 44, Issue No. 39, 2009.
6. Satnam Singh, "Punjab De Chon Nateje Ate Parbabh," Rozana Punjabi Jagran, Editorial Article, March 22, 2012.
7. Ashutosh Kumar, "2012 Assembly Elections in Punjab, Ascendance of a State Level Party," Economic and Political Weekly, XLVII (14) April 7, 2012.