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2014 Lok Sabha Elections in Punjab: Emergence of Aam Aadmi Party

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The most significant aspect of the 2014 Parliamentary elections in Punjab¹ was the unexpected response of the electorates to the debutant Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). The party, which contested seats across India, could win only four seats and all these happened to be from Punjab. Thus Punjab was among the few big states like Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala and West Bengal, which deviated from the national trend in favour of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The ruling SAD-BJP combine in the state managed to add only two seats to its 2009 tally by winning six Lok Sabha seats with SAD winning four and the BJP winning two seats respectively, with the remaining three seats going to the Congress (*See Table 1*).

Table 1
2014 Parliamentary Election Results in Punjab

Party	Seats Contested	Seats won	Change from 2009	Vote (In %)	Change since 2009 (In %)
Congress	13	3	-5	33	-12.23
SAD (Badal)	10	4	-	26.4	-7.25
BJP	03	2	+1	8.6	-1.09
AAP	13	4	+ 4	24.5	24.5

Significance of AAP Success

What underlines the significance of AAP's amazing electoral success is that Haryana was the only state apart from Delhi where the fledgling party,

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which had come into existence in October 2012 in Delhi riding on the popularity wave of Anna Hazare led India against Corruption movement, was expected to make some impact. The party was likely to perform well in Haryana because it had taken up relevant issues like rampant corruption in higher places, nepotism and patronage and the similarity with Delhi in socio-economic terms. In fact two of the party's top leaders Arvind Kejriwal and Yogendra Yadav also come from the state. As it turned out, the party was routed both in Delhi and Haryana despite a significant vote share in the former.

Thinking of Punjab specifically, the success of AAP was important as for the first time since the resumption of 'normal' elections post 1997 in the post-militancy era in Punjab which saw the paradigmatic shift in the electoral agenda from ethno-religious to an agenda for Hindu-Sikh harmony, peace and development, a party fighting with first time contestants managed to secure nearly one-fourth of the total votes polled in the state. For the first time a party emerged as a viable third alternative in what had become an established bi-polar polity (Kumar and Singh, 2014: 139). In the earlier elections, parties like the Bahujan Samajwadi Party (BSP) and the CPI did manage to get a few Lok Sabha and assembly seats either in alliance with the Congress or the SAD.

AAP's success in the state was also remarkable, as it was not confined to a particular electoral region like other smaller players. For example, the Left used to be present primarily in Malwa and the BSP used to exercise influence in Doaba. Similar to the Congress and the SAD-BJP combine, AAP was present in all three regions of the state - Malwa, Doaba and Majha². However, the party's success in terms of winning seats came only from the electorally important region of Malwa, which comprises of as many as 69 out of the 117 assembly constituencies. It was in the Malwa region that the AAP registered all its four victories - Sangrur, Faridkot, Fatehgarh Sahib and Patiala with an overall vote share of 29 percent. Significantly, the party did not fare badly in the other nine constituencies as well. The party finished third in eight constituencies and in seven of these eight constituencies the party polled more votes than the margin of

Table 2
Region-Wise Results and Vote Share

	Total Seats	Congress		SAD-BJP		AAP		Others	
		Seat	Vote	Seat	Vote	Seat	Vote	Seat	Vote
Majha	3	1	44.0	2	42.3	0	9.6	0	4.1
Doaba	2	1	29.1	1	32.8	0	29.1	0	8.9
Malwa	8	1	28.1	3	31.4	4	31.6	0	8.8

Note: Others includes NOTA

Source: Analysis of ECI Data by CSDS Data Unit

victory of thus leaving a distinct impact on the final electoral outcome (See Table 2)

The Research Question

The unexpected electoral success of AAP in the state raises pertinent questions as it defied conventional wisdom about Punjab politics. It is crucial to explain how a nascent party made an electoral presence with untried new faces as candidates and successfully took on established parties with a steady social support base, leadership and vast resources for campaigning. The party also lacked in widely accepted prerequisites for electoral success like developed organizational structure, established state level leadership or a coherent agenda/ideology. Being a debutant, it did not have any traditional social support base in the state. This was quite different from the established parties that had core supporters based on ethnicity and/or ideology. What remains to be answered is that while most of these factors were valid for the party in other states too, why was it able to succeed in Punjab and failed elsewhere.

Related to the success of the AAP is the question about the repeated failure on the part of the Congress to cash on a much visible state level anti-incumbency against the incumbent SAD-BJP government, which has been in power for seven years. Was it simply that the AAP benefitted from double anti- incumbency that harmed both the Congress and the BJP?

Explaining the Electoral Verdict

Looking back at the electoral verdict in the state, one can argue that unlike most states of the north 'Modi wave' failed to sweep across the state despite the mammoth efforts of the ruling combine which were evident in the distributed campaign material and advertisements in print and electronic media. The seeming lack of 'Modi wave' was most visible in the case of high-profile Amritsar seat where the BJP-SAD alliance suffered a humiliating defeat as Arun Jaitley, one of the senior-most BJP national leader and close confidant of Modi, lost to former Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh. Amritsar, the holiest seat of the Sikhs, is also considered to be a citadel of the SAD as two powerful political families now with the Akalis namely the Majithias and Kairons belong to the Majha region. Overall, even though the combine increased its number of seats, their combined vote share came down as compared to the last Lok Sabha election (*See Table 1*). Thinking of the leadership factor, it was probably the famed ability of the SAD president and deputy chief minister Sukhbir Badal to 'manage' the elections, among other usual factors that benefit the parties in power, that saved the beleaguered SAD-BJP from complete rout.

As for the Congress, the projection of Rahul Gandhi as the prospective Prime Ministerial candidate of the party and the candidature of warring senior state level Congress leaders like state party President Pratap Singh Bajwa, leader of Congress legislative party Sunil Jakhar along with Captain Amrinder Singh enthused the party workers but it could not help the party in avoiding a decline both in terms of seats and votes.

The decisive gain of the AAP in Punjab at the cost of both the Congress and the SAD-BJP combine has to be related to the leadership factor. It was not only the popularity of Arvind Kejriwal but also the 'new' leaders, projected as the party candidates that helped the party in a big way. All the AAP candidates most of them were amateur politicians in the sense that they had dabbled into politics for the first time. Most of them enjoyed an impeccable record of community service as professionals/artists. Here they were, pitted against 'professional' politicians, many of whom were tainted and responsible along with their fellow political class for the steady decline

in the economic fortune of the state.

Arguably, it was the issues raised with fervour during the campaign, which helped AAP electorally (Sekhon, 2014). The party having an advantage of being a first-timer raised usual issues like unemployment, price-rise, corruption, agrarian crisis, farmer suicides and marginalization of small and poor peasantry. It focused specifically on the widespread drug menace and blamed the political leadership of the state cutting across the party line as well as successive governments for criminally conniving with the drug mafia and ruining the youth of the state. That the drug menace has been glaring for almost a decade now and none of the parties had made it an electoral issue so far allowed the AAP to put the blame squarely on both the Congress and the SAD-BJP combine for the dismal situation in the state and gain electorally even as the Congress also tried to capitalize on the issue taking a clue³³ Amarinder Singh gained by raising the drug issue in a big way during his campaign in this election blaming Akali leader Bikram Singh Majithia, brother-in-law of Sukhbir Singh Badal. Majithia was also accused of being a patron of the sand mafia.

The survey covered all the parliamentary constituencies in the state. The students of Panjab University, Chandigarh and Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar acting as field investigators interviewed 1026 sampled voters. Researchers from both University Political Science Departments namely Madan Lal, Malkit Singh, Surinder Singh, Rajiv Kumar, Hardeep Kaur and Yogesh Kumar played significant role in conducting the survey. Ashutosh Kumar and Jagrup Sekhon coordinated the survey.

AAP leaders spoke about the alleged monopoly of the ruling party politicians and businessmen close to the seat of power over sand and gravel, liquor, cable and transport and the widespread use of vendetta politics against the opposition. AAP leaders publically named important members of the ruling SAD, who according to them were complicit in the liquor, drug, construction and transport mafias. The wealth amassed by the ruling combine leaders including the top leadership was also a major issue in the elections (Sekhon and Kumar 2014).

The failure of the Congress was much worse than the SAD-BJP as the party could not take advantage of the lack of performance of the SAD-BJP government in an election where local issues dominated. The party also failed to gain from its alliance with Manpreet Singh Badal's Punjab Peoples Party and the continued decline of the BSP whose loss of Dalit support base should have benefitted the Congress. Besides the AAP factor, internal conflicts between factions led by Pratap Singh Bajwa and Amarinder Singh harmed the party's fortune. Party candidates, mostly senior party leaders, seemed to have contested the election for their own political survival as they confined themselves to their own constituencies. Hardly any leader showed any intent or made an effort for synergizing a collective effort for overall gain of the party.

NES Post-Poll Survey: Empirical Evidence

The NES data concerning Punjab⁴ confirms that even though there was no 'Modi wave' sweeping the state, yet Narendra Modi had a clear lead over the Congress party leader Rahul Gandhi. While 16 percent of the respondents preferred Rahul Gandhi as the Prime Minister of India after the elections, Modi was preferred by 25 percent. Significantly Kejriwal's rating was equal to Rahul Gandhi's at exactly 16 percent. The respondents thought that as compared to Modi and Rahul Gandhi; Kejriwal was more trustworthy and capable of tackling corruption. That the anti-incumbency factor was very much there against the Congress was evident in the form of the decline in support for fellow Punjabi Manmohan Singh, the outgoing Prime Minister. Almost half (49 percent) of the respondents were either partially or fully dissatisfied with the performance of the UPA government. The data shows that the AAP gained at the cost of both the Congress as well as the SAD-BJP alliance. It also reveals that 13 percent of traditional Congress supporters and 17 percent of SAD-BJP supporters voted for the AAP. To its credit, the AAP performed much better than expected across all the age groups, classes, castes and communities and regions/localities if we generalise on the basis of going by the social background of the respondents interviewed. Its performance was particularly noteworthy among some social categories like the hitherto neglected Other Backward Castes (OBC) voters. Also in

a state where the youth constitute a significant percentage of voters, 40 percent young voters interviewed during the survey said that they had voted for the new party.

The survey findings support our argument that one of the reasons for the AAP's success was that the party was ahead of other parties in raising the issues and problems which people considered important in these elections. Almost one fifth (19 percent) of the respondents were of the opinion that AAP had raised the issues and problems they consider the most important, followed by 18 percent respondents who named the Congress. Only 13 percent of the respondents stated that the SAD-BJP has raised these issues in the elections. The NES survey confirmed that price rise (27 percent) and corruption (18 per cent) were the most important electoral issues identified by the electorate in the state. Other issues were lack of development, farmer suicides and poverty. Other factors like soaring price of sand and gravel, monopoly over transport and liquor trade, recently levied property tax in the cities, controversial role of *Halqua*-in-charges dominating police along with '*goondagardi*' of ground level cadres of ruling alliance, increasing lawlessness and deteriorating women security could have also influenced voters. AAP led anti-corruption campaign did have its resonance among the masses as more than four fifth (82 percent) of the respondents considered UPA government to be corrupt. 29 percent were of the view that the UPA regime was responsible for price rise. Ironically, the SAD-BJP which was vociferous about the issue also faced people's flak as almost four fifth (79 percent) of the voters considered the state government to be corrupt.

Summing Up

The post-poll data suggests that the AAP gained electorally by presenting itself as a viable alternative to the Congress and the SAD. This marked an important change in a state that had a stable bi-polar party system since the 1997. Earlier voters who were disillusioned with both parties due to lacklustre performance had no political alternative. The electorate's dissatisfaction with the performance of both the Congress-led UPA government at the centre as well as the SAD-BJP government helped the AAP. The party