

Political Participation in Border Parliamentary Constituencies of Punjab

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ABSTRACT

The present paper attempts to study political participation of people living at the cutting edge. The border between India and Pakistan is among the most hostile borders in the world, as both countries have fought many wars and have faced war like situations since 1947. The focus of ruling parties both at Centre and State, is the defence, and people living there remain neglected on all counts. The present study attempts to explore the political behaviour, attitude and orientations of the border people towards their state and national level politics. For this study, the post-poll survey data of 2014 general elections (Punjab) has been taken from the Centre for Studies of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi which is an autonomous research institution. Four border parliamentary constituencies of Punjab namely Gurdaspur, Amritsar, Khadoor Sahib and Ferozepur have been selected. This paper is divided into two parts: part I gives the information of the socio-economic profile of the respondents; part II analyses the political participation and political awareness level of border people. At the end, the study shows that SAD-BJP alliance has a dominating trend in the electoral politics of border area.

1. Introduction

The Indo-Pak border is a hostile border, where the unending conflicts combined with harsh geographic terrain has resulted in giving a sense of insecurity and exclusion among its inhabitants. Though Punjab has made considerable economic progress after Green Revolution, but the border area has remained deprived of this transformation. Geographically, the border belt of Punjab consists of an area that falls in the range of sixteen kms. from zero line with a length of 553 kms. It covers approximately 17 per cent of total area of Punjab and includes six districts namely Gurdaspur, Pathankot, Amritsar, Tarn Taran, Ferozepur, and Fazilka with 1838 villages. Initially the border belt in Punjab consisted of three districts namely Amritsar, Gurdaspur and Ferozepur but with carving of Tarn Taran in 2006 and Pathankot (2011) and Fazilka (2011), the border belt is now made up of six districts. Until 1998 the border belt considered of the villages following within nine kilometres from the border but post -1998 it was extended up to sixteen kilometres, which resulted in certain developed villages also being included in the border belt, creating borders within borders (Sekhon, 2013). In political terms, there are four Parliamentary Constituencies (PCs) namely Gurdaspur, Amritsar, Khadoor Sahib and Ferozepur which cover the border area of Punjab. Each PC consists of nine assembly constituencies.

2. Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to examine political participation of the people living in the border region of Punjab. Whether they satisfied from the performance of their state and national governments? Have the border people hope from the governments to deliver their prosperity? Political participation means voters choose their representatives either directly or indirectly. It not only include voting but other political activities like contesting elections, seeking an information, discussion and debate, attending meetings, canvassing, contributing

financially to candidate and party, holding public and party office communication with representatives and other political leaders etc. all form part of Political participation. (Shankar, 2015: 258-259). Voting is the most significant part of the democratic political system in general and elections in particular. Elections play an important role in the development of a democratic political system. Representative democracy revolves around the citizen's participation in voting and other political activities (Negi, 2005: 95). Elections bring out the opinions and feedback of voters regarding political system in front of society. Voting process helps us to understand the satisfaction level of people with the performance of government.

3. Results of 2014 Parliamentary Elections in Border Parliamentary Constituencies of Punjab

The Congress and Shiromani Akali Dal- Bharatiya Janata Party (SAD-BJP) alliance are two traditional and major political parties of Punjab. In 2014 parliamentary elections, Amritsar and Gurdaspur seats were contested by SAD's alliance partner BJP whereas the Khadoor Sahib and Ferozepur were contested by the SAD itself. On the other side, the Congress contested from all the four seats by itself. In 2014 elections, SAD-BJP alliance won three border seats namely Gurdaspur, Khadoor Sahib and Ferozepur. On the other side, the BJP suffered a humiliating defeat from Amritsar where its candidate Arun Jaitely lost to Congress candidate Capt. Amarinder Singh with a huge margin of more than one lakh votes (www.eci.nic.in). Thus it would be interesting to find out the pattern of voting in border area where three seats out of the four seats won by SAD-BJP alliance although there was strong anti-incumbency against them in the state.

4. Methodology

The post-poll survey data of National Election Study 2014 (NES 2014) (Punjab) has been taken from the Centre for

Studies of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi. The data for 2014 general elections in the context of state of Punjab was collected by the CSDS-Lokniti in association with Department of Political Science, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar. "The Survey was conducted in 26 states of India. The survey was not conducted in Goa, Nagaland and Sikkim due to logistical constraints. Out of the total 543 Lok Sabha constituencies, 306 were sampled for the survey. Within these parliamentary constituencies, 347 Assembly segments were sampled. Within these Assembly constituencies, 1388 individual polling station areas were selected. The constituencies were sampled using the Probability Proportionate to Size Method (PPS). Four polling stations within each of the sampled assembly constituencies were selected using the Systematic Random Sampling (SRS) technique. The respondents were also sampled using the SRS method from the most updated electoral rolls. From each of the rural polling station 25 respondents were sampled from the electoral rolls and from each of the urban polling station 30 respondents were drawn. Around 37,000 respondents randomly selected from the most updated electoral rolls were approached for the interview, of which 22,295 voters could be successfully interviewed (www.lokniti.org/)."

From four border parliamentary constituencies of Punjab, total 381 respondents were surveyed for 2014 general elections.

Part I

In India, voting behaviour is influenced by various factors such as religion, caste, community, language, personal charisma of the leaders, the personal characteristics of the candidates, evaluations of the performance of the government, party identification, and ideology and many others (Kumar & Rai, 2013:6-9). This part covers demographic and social characteristics of the sampled respondents with reference to gender, age, religion, caste, sub-caste, education and occupation.

Table 1
Gender of the Respondents (In %)

	Gurdaspur	Amritsar	Khadoor Sahib	Ferozepur
Male	55.4	55.1	51.6	60.5
Female	44.6	44.9	48.4	39.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 1 gives a reflection on the gender of the sampled households. It is observed that majority of respondents in all the four border parliamentary constituencies of Punjab were males which shows low interest as well as low participation of women in the political activities of the country. Women do not play an active role in politics due to socio-economic and cultural barriers.

Table 2
Age (In %)

years	Gurdaspur	Amritsar	Khadoor Sahib	Ferozepur
18-30	24.5	34.7	27.0	28.7
31-45	27.3	25.4	34.0	32.0
46-60	32.2	32.1	17.0	23.6
Above 60	16	7.8	22.0	15.7
Total	100	100.0	100	100

Age is an important factor in a society which differentiates people on the basis of different categories such as young, middle aged and old aged people. As regards the age of the respondents, it is observed that majority of people in Gurdaspur constituency were come under 46-60 category while Amritsar has more young people in comparison to all other constituencies. It is interesting to see that Khadoor Sahib is the only constituency where good proportion people are in the age group of above 60.

Table 3
Education (In %)

	Gurdaspur	Amritsar	Khadoor Sahib	Ferozepur
Below Primary	--	5.1	3.9	--
Primary pass/Middle fail	4.1	7.7	9.2	13.2
Middle pass/Matric fail	13.5	11.5	7.8	9.2
Matric	21.6	30.8	20.3	11.8
College no-degree	20.3	15.4	19.0	15.8
Graduate	12.2	6.4	2.6	7.9
Post Graduate	9.5	1.3	1.3	1.3
Professional degrees	6.8	--	--	--
Non literate	10.8	21.8	35.3	40.8
NA	1.2	--	0.6	--
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table3 illustrates the education qualification of the respondents. Backwardness of border belt is clearly seen in the education qualification of the respondents as there are 40.8 per cent respondents in Ferozepur, 35.3 per cent in Khadoor Sahib, 21.8 per cent in Amritsar who were found non-literates. It is observed that those who were educated, majority of them were up to matric as 34.2 per cent in Ferozepur, 41.2 per cent in Khadoor Sahib, 55.1 per cent in Amritsar and 39.2 per cent in Gurdaspur are educated upto matric. There were only 6.8 per cent having professional degrees in Gurdaspur.

Table 4
Occupation (In %)

	Gurdaspur	Amritsar	Khadoor Sahib	Ferozepur
Govt job	9.5	1.3	5.3	1.3
Skilled Labourer	4.1	20.7	8.5	2.6
Cultivator	5.4	1.3	17.0	31.7
Labourer	16.3	23.0	12.5	19.7
House wife	27.2	24.4	37.3	30.3
Student	10.8	7.7	5.2	9.2
Other occupation	--	19.0	11.6	2.6
Employee seekers	1.4	2.6	--	2.6
NA	25.3	--	2.6	--
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 4 shows occupation wise pattern of the constituencies. It was found that majority of households i.e. 31.7 per cent in Ferozepur were directly involved in agricultural activities. It is observed that the proportion of govt jobs in all

the four constituencies was marginal as only 1.3 per cent in Amritsar and Ferozepur each, 5.3 per cent in Khadoor Sahib and 9.5 per cent in Ferozepur had engaged in these services. The ratio of skilled labour was also low particularly in Ferozepur constituency.

Table 5
Caste Group (In %)

	Gurdaspur	Amritsar	Khadoor Sahib	Ferozepur
Scheduled Caste (SC)	21.6	55.1	34.0	30.3
Scheduled Tribe (ST)	1.4	--	.7	--
Other Backward Caste(OBCs)	18.9	24.4	12.4	15.8
4General	58.1	20.5	52.9	53.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

As regards the Caste of the surveyed respondents, the data shows that Gurdaspur (58.1 percent) had maximum households in general category (majority of them were Rajput) followed by Ferozepur 53.9 per cent(majority of them were Jat Sikh), Khadoor Sahib 52.9 per cent(majority of them were Jat Sikh), and Amritsar 20.5 percent(majority of them were Brahmins). In case of Scheduled Castes (SCs), majority of the people i.e. 55.1 per cent from Amritsar constituency come under this category followed by Khadoor Sahib, Ferozepur and Gurdaspur. In the category of OBCs, large numbers of OBC Sikh were found in Amritsar.

Table 6
Religion (In %)

	Gurdaspur	Amritsar	Khadoor Sahib	Ferozepur
Hindu	91.9	15.4	3.9	14.5
Christian	1.4	9.0	.7	2.6
Sikh	6.8	75.6	94.8	81.6
Others	--		.7	1.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

According to Census 2011 Sikhism is the dominant religion in Punjab following by Hindus. The present study also reflects this with Sikh households being 94.8 per cent in Khadoor Sahib (it is also considered as a Sikh dominated constituency), 81.6 per cent in Ferozepur and 75.6 per cent in Amritsar. Maximum Hindu household were found in the villages of Gurdaspur (91.9 percent) because it is Hindu majority constituency.

PART II

Part II focuses on the political participation and voting behaviour of the border people. Many factors such as voting, participation in discussion and debate, satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the performance of the government, whose opinion matters while voting and other issues have been discussed in this section.

Table 7
Did You Vote In 2014 General Elections? (In %)

	Gurdaspur	Amritsar	Khadoor Sahib	Ferozepur
Yes	75.7	100.0	96.7	92.1
No	24.3	--	1.3	2.6
Did not	--	--	2.0	5.3

answer				
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 7 explains all the respondents in Amritsar and the majority of the respondents in all the other constituencies cast their vote in the last elections which indicates the respondents' enthusiasm for voting. Only 1.3 per cent respondents in Khadoor Sahib and 2.6 per cent respondents in Ferozepur did not cast their vote.

Table 8
Did You Participate in various Activities Related to Election Like Processions? (In %)

	Gurdaspur	Amritsar	Khadoor Sahib	Ferozepur
Yes	2.7	1.3	16.3	1.3
No	97.3	98.7	83.7	98.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 8 shows that an overwhelming majority of respondents participated only by voting in election, whereas they were not interested in other political activities like participating in election campaigns.

Table 9
Did you participate in door to door canvassing? (In %)

	Gurdaspur	Amritsar	Khadoor Sahib	Ferozepur
Yes	5.4	--	6.5	9.2
No	94.6	100.0	93.5	90.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 9 indicates that in case of door to door canvassing, again people are not actively participate as 100 per cent in Amritsar, 94.6 per cent in Gurdaspur, 93.5 per cent in Khadoor and 90.8 per cent in Ferozepur were not participated in it.

Table 10
Did you attend election meetings? (in %)

	Gurdaspur	Amritsar	Khadoor Sahib	Ferozepur
Yes	6.8	2.6	35.3	26.3
No	93.2	97.4	64.7	73.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

In attending election meetings, 35.3 per cent respondents in Khadoor Sahib and 26.3 per cent in Ferozepur admitted for that.

Table 11
Did you distribute election leaflets or put up posters? (in %)

	Gurdaspur	Amritsar	Khadoor Sahib	Ferozepur
Yes	2.7	--	2.6	2.6
No	97.3	100.0	97.4	97.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

The table shows that less than 3 per cent of the respondents in three constituencies were reportedly involved in this election activity while from Amritsar, not even a single person involved in it.

Table 12
Did you contribute or collect money? (in %)

	Gurdaspur	Amritsar	Khadoor Sahib	Ferozepur
Yes	1.4	--	0.7	--
No	98.6	100.0	00.3	100.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 12 shows that majority of them did not contribute financially. Not even a single respondent from Amritsar and Ferozepur admitted that they contributing funds for parties or candidates while a negligible percentage from other two constituencies participated in this activity. It can be said that the generally ordinary people are not involved in these kind of activities.

Table 13

Did any candidate, party worker or canvasser come to your house during the campaign to ask for your vote? (in %)

	Gurdaspur	Amritsar	Khadoor Sahib	Ferozepur
Yes	16.2	24.4	61.4	61.8
No	78.4	75.6	32.0	27.6
Don't remember	5.4	--	6.5	10.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

This table illustrates that in the rural constituencies of Khadoor Sahib and Ferozepur, almost 62 per cent respondents admitted that political leaders or party workers come to them for asking their votes whereas in the semi-rural constituencies of Gurdaspur and Amritsar, this trend was very low.

Table 14

In deciding whom to vote for, whose opinion mattered to you most? (in %)

	Gurdaspur	Amritsar	Khadoor Sahib	Ferozepur
Local political leader	10.8	1.3	5.9	36.8
Husband/wife	2.7	6.4	5.9	10.5
Other family members	6.8	10.3	16.3	9.2
Caste/community leaders	--	--	4.6	--
Co-workers/colleagues	2.7		1.3	--
Friends/neighbours	--	1.3	2.6	--
No one, I voted on my own	59.5	76.9	48.4	14.5
Others	4.1	--	2.0	1.3
Can't say	13.5	3.8	13.1	27.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 14 indicates that majority of the respondents in Gurdaspur, Amritsar and Khadoor Sahib admitted that they voted as per their wishes while 36.8 per cent of Ferozepur respondent reportedly cast their vote according to their local political leaders' wish.

Table 15

Whom to vote for in the election - party or candidate? (in %)

	Gurdaspur	Amritsar	Khadoor Sahib	Ferozepur
Party	51.4	78.2	79.7	23.7
Candidate	24.3	16.7	11.8	40.8
Can't say	16.2	5.1	5.9	34.2
NA	8.1	--	2.6	1.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

In order to know what the voter has in mind while casting the vote, the data clears that majority of the respondents in Gurdaspur, Amritsar and Khadoor Sahib had the party in mind while voting. On the other side, in Ferozepur, the large majority of the respondents admitted that they had the candidate in mind while voting. According to Kaur (2014) Candidate also is an important factor for the voters in Punjab but it is the Party that holds more sway in Punjab politics in the assembly and parliamentary elections.

Table 16

Are you a member of any political party? (in %)

	Gurdaspur	Amritsar	Khadoor Sahib	Ferozepur
Yes	8.1	--	5.9	6.6
No	91.9	100.0	94.1	93.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

This table show how people are apolitical in Punjab as only 8.1 per cent respondents in Gurdaspur, 5.9 per cent respondents in Khadoor Sahib and 6.6 per cent respondents in Ferozepur were found to be having political membership, whereas the all of the respondents in Amritsar did not have membership of any political party.

5. Conclusion

In summing up, it can be said that the dominating trend of SAD-BJP in the electoral politics of border area shows a challenging time ahead for the Congress party. There are various reasons for that such as except of Gurdaspur constituency, all the other three constituencies have majority of Sikh population which usually support for the SAD-BJP alliance. Moreover, the popular schemes initiated by the SAD like providing free electricity and canal water to the farmers, free electricity to the dalits, distribution of Atta-Dal at very low price to the people living below poverty line, old-age pension, shagun schemes etc. were considered to be beneficial for the alliance (Sekhon and Kaur, 2016: 45-46). In the case of Amritsar constituency where the Congress got lead in 2014 elections, there were many reasons such as the people were very annoyed from the ruling government on many issues like drug racketing, high prices of sand and gravel, issue of property tax, lack of infrastructural development etc. Moreover

candidate factor also played its important role as more popularity of Capt. Amarinder Singh in rural as well as urban areas fetched him a significant chunk of votes (Kaur, 2015:152). Thus in the present paper an effort has been made to understand the level of political participation of border people of Punjab who are living at the cutting edge and feel marginalised on all counts of development. Education plays an important role for the development of any person and ultimately for a nation but large numbers of people of border region were found uneducated. The data reveals that people are largely apolitical. Only participation in voting is not enough, people should have actively participate in all political activities. The data also shows that the majority of the respondents preferred party over the candidate which shows their traditional support to certain parties. It is important to point out that generally they do not understand the ideology of the party but they follow it from generation to generation.

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