



## **DALITS IN PUNJAB: ANALYSING SHIFTING SUPPORT BASE**

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**Abstract:** The present empirical study is an analysis of Dalits' shifting support base from the major political parties such as Congress, Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) to Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in 2022 Punjab Assembly election. With an established presence in the State, the AAP could present itself as a new alternative. The work is an effort to find out the causes behind this shifting Dalit support base to AAP. The AAP's success was a clear message from the people of Punjab that they were fed up with the power circle of traditional political parties that were in agreement with each other to rule the State by turns. Paper argues that Dalits are likely to vote for the parties that have a chance to come to power as in 2022 Punjab Assembly Election, Dalit support base has widely shifted to AAP. The study was qualitative and conducted in the three regions of Punjab Majha, Malwa and Doaba. It is an analysis of the interactions with 300 respondents of the targeted SCs population and 30 leaders from the major political parties in Punjab.

**Keywords:** Dalits, SC, AAP, Punjab, support base

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Dalit<sup>1</sup> is a term mainly confined to Scheduled Castes<sup>2</sup> (SCs). In current political discourses, the share of the population of India which comprises of SCs is nearly 16.6%. What distinguishes Punjab's SCs is the fact that they create strength in numbers, which is roughly around 31.9% according to the 2011 Census. Out of India's total SC population Punjab accounts for approximately 4.4%. Despite the fact that Dalits are in the highest concentration in the state, BSP, which is considered to be a Dalit party, has not been successful. At large,

Dalit support base was widespread among other major political parties. But in 2022, Punjab Assembly election, Dalits' support base widely shifted to AAP, which is a newcomer in Punjab political phenomenon, AAP had only four Parliamentary seats in 2014 Lok Sabha election. In 2022 Assembly election, it secured 92 seats out of 117 with 42% votes. There is a lack of investigation in the existing literature to provide an answer to the question as to why AAP has been able to mark among Dalits in Punjab as BSP claims SCs as its core ethnic category<sup>3</sup>.

### ***Dalits and Congress Party in Punjab***

The politics of the Congress party, which carefully avoided adopting any theoretical or ideological positions on the caste/class debate, saw a significant increase in the complexity of the caste politicization process. Congress adopts the policy of the aggregative party in its organizational structure, in contrast to the Akalis, who primarily pursue Sikh support, and uphold an inter-communal character in both the electoral and legislative spheres (Judge, 2022, pp. 63–64). On the other hand, there is a clear trend in the party preferences of SCs, who steadily distanced themselves from the Congress and chose substitutes wherever they could find them, like the AAP in the 2022 Assembly election. This shift in allegiance is driven more by the secular desire to express oneself in the power system in order to reap potential benefits than by narrow local concerns<sup>4</sup>. They are no longer willing to accept the position of passive voter-supporter in the larger context of enslavement and subjugation, which has prompted them to look for alternatives. Congress, the largest political party, only won 18 seats in the 2022 Assembly elections with a 23% vote share.

### ***Dalits, SAD and Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) in Punjab***

All major ideological doctrines of Akali Dal originate from the basic postulate of the inseparability of religion and politics. The Jat control of leadership in SAD since 1962 added to the fear and apprehension in the lower caste Sikhs (Puri, 2004, p. 215). But today, each and every Sikh organization like the Sikh *deras*<sup>5</sup>, SGPC and SAD are controlled by Jat Sikhs. It has been found that Jat Sikhs control 80% of its posts in the administrative capacity, other castes have control over 15% of such posts and Dalit Sikhs have only 5%, especially those belonging to Mazhabis and Ramdasias<sup>6</sup>. Because of this caste-wise discrimination and social exclusion, Dalits have started straying away from

the majority and conventional aspects of the Sikh religion and have started participating in different kinds of non-Sikh *deras* in Punjab (Ram, 2007, pp. 4066–4067). The main opposition party in Punjab, Akali Dal, did not provide brighter prospects. Since SC elites have a limited chance of advancing in SAD. The SAD's electoral tie-up with BSP did not lead to the acquisition of the Dalit vote bank, which supposedly forms the core group of voters for the BSP. In 2022 Assembly election SAD secured only four seats with 20.2% votes.

**Table 1: 2022 Punjab Assembly Election**

2022 Punjab Assembly Election	
AAP	92(42.00%)
Congress	18(23.00%)
SAD+	4(20.2%)
BJP+	2(7.7%)
Others	1(-)
<i>Source:</i> Election Commission of India, November 2022.	

After SAD quit the BJP-led NDA in September 2020 because of its non-agreement on the much debated farm legislations, there was an immediate need for the BJP to draw its own path in a State where its usual and preferred notion of Hindutva in addition to election-time freebies was not wanted by majority of the population. There was little success in the alliance of the BJP with the Punjab Lok Congress (PLC) and SAD (Dhindsa) faction. On the contrary, the BJP has a strong base in the urban Hindu trading castes and some of the upper castes and SCs. In the beginning, the influence of the BJP was more pronounced among Hindu refugees like Khatri and Aroras. But because of the rising political power, its base has expanded. Despite this expansion, the maximum this party could achieve was 19 seats in 2007, which has only been declining. Both the SAD and the BJP represent different religious communities. In 2022, Assembly election BJP secured only two seats with 7.7% votes. However, the BJP, which had plateaued in the Delhi assembly elections between 1998 and 2015, was managing a relatively stable but stagnant vote share in these years, shifting between 32% and 36%, which the party managed to increase to 38.5% in the 2020 election, finally increasing it to 45.6% in the 2025 elections. The fall of AAP's vote share in Delhi was greater than the rise of BJP's vote share, which indicates that the city's vote was decisively against

AAP's leadership and style of governance rather than a indisputable support for the BJP.

### **Dalits and BSP in Punjab**

The vote share received by BSP from the Dalits (70%) is one of the highest ever recorded for any largest group in any State (Hasan, 2007). In the State of Punjab, it has highest numerical strength but it could have not been able to make a space in the State politics. Because of its breakup and the emergence of several parties that negated all of its benefits, the BSP's alliance structure turned out to be of marginal political use. BSP won the reserved seat for Phillaur in the 1989 Lok Sabha elections. It obtained six members from the Doaba area in the 1992 Assembly elections. In the 1996 general election, it managed to gain three Lok Sabha seats—Phillaur, Hoshiarpur and Ferozepur—and provided a winning position in nearly 17 Assembly districts; nevertheless, it was unable to maintain its partnership with SAD. In the 1997 Assembly elections, it severed ties with the leading Akali Dal and was unable to create a coalition with the Congress party. The BSP was successful in stealing Dalit votes from the Congress party in this election (Kumar, 2007, p. 2044). As a result, it was only able to win one seat in the elections. From 16.32% in 1992 to 1.5% in the 2017 Assembly election, there was a decrease in the vote share of the BSP. In the 2022 Punjab Assembly election, the BSP received 1.7% of the vote. It demonstrates that voters are not motivated by politics based only on caste or religion. More significant and appealing than dry terms like 'Ethnic Identity' and 'caste or Dalit identity' is the potential for progress.

While BCs have been least represented in the BSP organization, SCs are best represented by Ad-Dharmis, Chamars or Ramdasia, who consistently receive roughly half of the seats in Assembly elections throughout the 1985–2022 period. The Chamars and Ad-Dharmis controlled the early organizations in Punjab, such as BAMCEF (Backwards and Minority Communities Employees Federation). The information collected from Doaba region of Punjab with reference to less political representation indicates that Balmikis and Mazahabis<sup>7</sup> are still lack behind these Castes (Singh, 2014, p. 18). The biggest drawback for the BSP is the fact that it lacks any kind of organizational framework at the grassroots level and that it has no plan in place for the purpose of collecting the SC votes<sup>8</sup>. BSP has nil social as well political programming in the State.

**Table 2: AAP in 2009 and 2014 Punjab Elections**

Party Name	2009			2014			Seats	%
	Contested	Won	%	Contested	Won	%		
AAP	–	–	–	13	4	30.40	+4	+30.40
SAD	10	4	33.85	10	4	20.30	0	–13.55
BJP	3	1	10.06	3	2	08.70	+1	–1.36
INC	13	8	45.23	13	2	33.10	–5	–12.13
BSP	13	0	5.75	13	0	05.23	–3	–0.52
CPI	2	0	00.33	5	0	00.51	0	+0.18
CPI(M)	1	0	00.14	1	0	00.13	0	–0.1
SAD(M)	3	0	00.36	9	0	00.38	0	+0.2
IN Dandothers	173	0	04.28	184	0	01.25	0	–3.03

Source: Results of the General Elections in Punjab in the year 2009 and 2014, retrieved from the office of Chief Electoral Officer, Chandigarh, Punjab.

### ***Breaking Hegemony of Traditional Political Parties and the rise of AAP***

AAP defeated the two established parties, Congress and SAD, who had been in power for the previous 70 years in the Punjab Assembly election of 2022. In 2014 Punjab Parliamentary election, AAP won four seats with 30.4% popular votes. In the 2014 Lok Sabha election in Punjab, the BJP won 2 seats with 8.7% of the valid votes, the Congress party won 3 seats with 33.19% of the votes, the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) won 4 seats with 26.37% of the votes and the AAP also won 4 seats with 24% vote share. The case of AAP and Punjab is interesting because Punjab was the first state that provided the party a Lok Sabha debut. Also, it was the first state other than Delhi, where the party won 20 of the 117 seats in the Punjab Legislative Assembly elections of 2017. 9 of these were reserved for the Scheduled Castes (SCs), equalling 45% of the total seats won by the party. This indicated that the Dalit voter had played a crucial role in sustaining the party's fortunes in the state.

It did well in the 2017 Assembly elections when it became the biggest opposition party. But the significance of its success in 2022 is far greater. A story has to be told about how a party that was largely unknown on the national political landscape only a few months prior, was underfunded and had almost no organizational infrastructure was able to win 42% of the vote share and 92 seats in Punjab. The Lokniti-CSDS post poll survey in Punjab revealed that in the 2017 elections, the AAP received maximum support amongst the Jat Sikhs followed by the Khatri Sikh and then the Hindu SC. The Dalit Sikh and

the Hindu SC overwhelmingly supported the Congress. In the 2022 assembly elections, Congress saw major decline in support of Hindu and Dalit Sikh voters. Amongst various castes, 56% of OBC Sikh voters supported AAP, making them the largest group to do so. This was followed by 46% support amongst Dalit and Jat Sikhs for AAP. The vote share of the SAD-Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) amongst the Dalit Sikhs declined by 17% (Kaur and Mishra 2022). Further, in the state assembly elections held in 2022, the party won 29 of the 34 reserved constituencies. This equaled 85.29% of the seats reserved for SC candidates. This was the highest ever for any party. It is suggestive of the fact that while the party performed well across the state, it was particularly successful in the constituencies reserved for the SCs. The key problems brought up by the AAP included VIP culture, corruption, the Swaminathan report's implementation, farmer suicides, the elimination of unemployment, improving the learning environment for students, women's security and crime control. Prior to these elections, AAP's landslide victory in Delhi established a favourable situation in Punjab.

**Table 2: 2017 Punjab Assembly Election Result**

<i>Region</i>	<i>Seats</i>	<i>INC</i>	<i>AAP</i>	<i>SAD</i>	<i>BJP</i>	<i>LIP</i>
Majha	69	40	18	08	01	02
Malwa	25	22	00	02	01	00
Doaba	23	15	02	05	01	00
Sum	117	77	20	15	03	02

Source: Election Commission of India, November 2022.

In the 2022 elections, the party increased its footprint across all the three major regions of the state in the reserved constituencies. However, while it won 9 out of the 14 reserved constituencies in the Doaba and Majha region, it won 19 out of the 20 reserved seats in the Malwa region. The paper, therefore, also explores the question of regional variation in the appeal of AAP amongst Dalit voters.

The AAP's triumph is more of an indictment than it is a sign that the party did well in the election. The AAP was able to establish itself as the only discernible political option, and as a result, the people of the State have given it their support. Which is worse—AAP's triumph or the collapse of the entire political system—is the actual question. People voted for the AAP because they believed that at least this party would be superior to all others. Punjab wants

transformation and a fresh civic story. With an established presence in the State, the AAP has shown itself a new alternative before the people. Without realising the conflict by the Congress, the Dalit population in general, had joined hands with the AAP.

Caste demographics in the State are that of the officially designated SCs. Perhaps the most significant features about them are the numbers. The Khatris, the Jats, and the upper caste Sikhs have controlled the Akali Dal. However, Dalits, who make up between 25% and 30% of the entire population of the Sikhs, have stayed on the periphery of local matters. The core dividing of the SCs residing in the State is much larger in the context in comparison to the examples of rigorous vote bank politics (Jodhka & Kumar, 2007, pp. 20–23). Islam and Sikhism both decry the practice of caste and discrimination. Even the Punjabi Hindus do not show reverence to the Brahminical model of religious life (Jodhka, 2004, p. 1813).

Both the Congress and the SAD-BJP alliances lost out to AAP as a result of the anti-incumbency issue. Among each and every age range, class, caste, community and region/locality, the AAP fared significantly better than anticipated. The electorate of the State, which has cycled between nonperforming Congress and Akali administrations since 1992 with the exception of 2012, was desperate, and this contributed to AAP's victory. The AAP also benefited from the candidates' and volunteers' immaculate reputations in the party (Kumar, 2014, p. 169). All of the AAP candidates for the 2022 Assembly elections had a good public reputation; the majority of them were 'amateur' politicians, that is, they were new to electoral politics, but as professionals or artists, they enjoyed the support of the electorate because of their stellar records of social service<sup>9</sup>.

The party attacked the Akali Dal and the Congress for the depressing state of affairs and highlighted topics like unemployment, price increases, migration, corruption, the agricultural crisis, farmer suicides, and the marginalization of small and impoverished peasantry in a credible manner. The party also placed a special emphasis on the pervasive threat posed by drugs, and it accused the State's leadership of straying from party policy as well as the succeeding administrations of engaging in illegal collusion with the drug mafia and purposefully destroying and expelling the State's youth. The AAP had the chance to directly criticise the Congress and the SAD-BJP coalition for the threat in the State and win electoral support, while the Congress also made feeble attempts to take advantage of the situation.<sup>10</sup>

In 2022, Punjab Assembly election, the AAP was successful in managing a gain in the Doaba Region, which forms the focal point of Dalit politics, by winning 10 of the total 23 seats in the region which comprises of a total of four districts. In Doaba, an area that lies between the Beas and the Satluj rivers, there are four districts—Jalandhar (nine seats), Hoshiarpur (seven seats), Kapurthala (four) and Nawanshahr (three seats). The Congress was victorious in nine seats in the Doaba region. Half of the seats it has gained throughout the State have come from the Doaba Region. Nearly all of the States that had elections saw a gain in the vote for the BJP, including a little increase in Punjab, where it narrowly won two seats. In all, the BJP won two seats in the State, including one in the Doaba Region. The Nawanshahr seat in SBS Nagar was won by the BSP, opening its account. In the Hoshiarpur district of the Doaba Region, where it was victorious in five of the seven seats, the AAP displayed its strongest result. In Jalandhar district, it won four seats of the total nine, whereas five were won by the Congress. The only district where AAP was not able to get a single victory was Kapurthala, where Congress won over three of the four seats. In Nawanshahr, BSP candidate Nachttar Pal beat the candidate from AAP, Lalit Mohan Pathak, and SAD kept its Banga seat. Congress found success in winning four of the eight seats reserved in the Doaba area, while the AAP took home three.

From winning just two out of 23 seats in Doaba in 2017. It increased its tally to 10 in 2022 Punjab Assembly election. The SC categories have been quite supportive of the AAP, which did not get much traction in this area until a few months before the election. People put caste and religious politics to rest during the 2022 Assembly election. It displays the voters' dissatisfaction with Congress and the SAD-BSP. With the slogan '*Ik mauka Bhagwant Mann te Kejriwal nu*', AAP pleaded for a chance. The AAP, which sprang from the anti-corruption movement, capitalized on this emotion to overthrow the State's duopoly. The chief thrust factor in the election was the dislike for the Akalis and Congress, who people sought to teach a lesson to. The success of AAP in Punjab was notable because it spread throughout all three of Punjab's electoral regions—Malwa, Doaba and Majha—making it similar in comparison to the Congress and the SAD-BJP coalition in this sense for the purposes of this specific election, in contrast to the prevalence of parties carrying a Leftist ideology, which were restricted to Malwa, or the BSP, which was restricted to Doaba.

Caste-based politics have not been well-known in Punjab. It's interesting to note that Punjab was the home of BSP founder Kanshi Ram. But his party only seldom had political triumph in the State. Punjab is not a Brahminical Hindu state either (Singh, 2019, p. 46). There are caste distinctions in the area, and they continue to exist and survive. Political parties have frequently been attracted by this intriguing regional demography of caste in Punjab, but it is vital to note that the greatest fraction of the SC population in the nation, which is over twice the national average, has never appeared in the shape of a unified Dalit political identity<sup>11</sup>.

In 2020 Delhi Assembly election AAP won 62 seats out of 70 to claim an absolute majority in the elections. AAP wrested power from BJP, and won 134 seats of 250 wards in December 2022 Delhi Municipal Corporation. The positive feedback about the 'Delhi model of governance' especially its focus on school education and health, Kejriwal's announcement of freebies, helped the party get traction. The Kejriwal-Mann team's organized, well-coordinated campaign stood in stark contrast to the fractious leadership of Congress and debunked prior rumours that the AAP was divided.

Young people and female voters who wished to provide a new party and the '*aam aadmi*' a chance overwhelmingly supported AAP. The pledge of Kejriwal to eradicate the State's pervasive corruption struck a chord with young people eager to usher in a new administration that would boost opportunities for work and education. Similarly, even while many acknowledged that such populist promises are typically intended to be violated, AAP's pledge to deposit a thousand rupees into the bank accounts of women in Punjab each month did win over this group. But in the extremely patriarchal State, the fact that he courted females in the form of a distinct voting pool rather than merely as an extension of their dads or husbands attracted them. AAP provided a glimmer of hope to the underprivileged by exhibiting its Delhi model of health and education, promising better public service delivery, and portraying itself as a moral party amid a corrupt and crony political environment<sup>12</sup>.

Farmers and Sikhs both sympathized with and backed the SAD. The accusations of sacrilege had damaged the Sikhs' party and their religious identity. It made a severe error by initially backing and supporting the contentious farm laws. The Congress, a party with bitter internal strife, was unable to benefit from the social engineering of the appointment of a SC Chief Minister, which was perceived as a ruse to counteract the anti-incumbency

factor. However, the party utterly misjudged the blowback from other parts in its arrogance of appointment. When a few senior party officials objected to a Hindu CM, Hindus in Punjab felt belittled. No government office, according to Mann, will showcase images of the Chief Minister. Instead, government offices will hang pictures of Bhagat Singh and Dr B.R. Ambedkar on the walls<sup>13</sup>.

People were clamouring for change due to decades of bad government, easy access to narcotics, widespread corruption, illicit sand mining, liquor lobby payments, and a lack of work possibilities. If the cynicism was started by the Akali Dal, then the Congress bears most of the culpability for allowing the wounds to scab over. The Congress confronts a deeper crisis of purpose aside from the evident leadership problem. AAP did not need to be intellectual; it just needed to be perceived differently. The AAP triumphed easily since it was not hindered by its history or heritage to bring it down.

Much before anyone else, in November 2022, if elected to power, AAP Chief Minister Kejriwal promised that his party will nominate a Dalit deputy chief minister in Punjab. Following suit, the Akalis announced their partnership with the BSP. The in power Congress took things a step further and appointed SC Charanjit Singh Channi in the form of the new chief minister of the State, later projecting him as a candidate for the position. They believed that a victorious election strategy would be one that combined the conventional Congress voting base with SC consolidation. The second specific condition of Punjabi's electoral politics is the engagement of various religious *deras*. There are more than 9,000 *deras* in Punjab of which four are believed to be important with regards to their effect on Punjab, namely Dera Sacha Sauda, Radha Soami, Dera Sachkhand Ballan and Bhaniarawala Dera. While the former two *deras* have followers from various castes and religions, the latter two are caste-based. Dera Sachkhand Ballan is associated with the Ravidasia community. The Bhaniarawala Dera is of recent origin with an exclusive following among the Mazhabis (Judge, 2022, p. 65).

The Congress high command's hesitation in responding to Captain Amrinder's intransigence and the ensuing tendency to split its support between Charanjit Singh Channi and Navjot Singh Sidhu backfired tragically. Due to what was believed to be a lack of earnestness on religious and panthic matters, the Akalis even lost their main constituency to the AAP. The AAP started out with a lot on its plate, including deplorable state finances and growing unemployment.

The recent farmers' protest against three now-repealed central legislation set in motion the process of political churn in the State. In addition to advocating for Kisan-mazdoor ekta (unity between cultivators and agricultural labourers), it weakened caste and class distinctions and schisms at the local level. In the process, it undermined the formerly uncontested power of the local political elites. By upending the '*dharra*' system (faction) that previously influenced poll results, the agricultural agitation which continued for more than a year compelled the federal government to abolish the three unpopular farmer legislations laid the groundwork for changes in the administration. A doubting voter began putting up questions before the leaders as to why they could not look beyond roads, rivers, dams and drains even more than 70 years have passed since the time the country gained independence, according to Joginder Singh Ugrahan, president of BKU (Ugrahan), which is the largest union in Punjab with a significant following in the Malwa area and 69 Assembly seats. These queries seemed to get an answer from AAP.

Due to its soft-peddalling on allegations against the Badals, the Former Chief Minister Amarinder Singh-led administration was marred with accusations that it was hand in glove with the Akalis, giving rise to the on-ground view that the Congress and SAD formed two sides of the same coin. The general population in Punjab voted this time for a better alternative. The message that rippled across the State was that despite the two major parties having ruled for 70 years, the citizens have not seen any progress. So it is time to give someone else an opportunity. People in the State were tired of the status quo and declining income levels, which led to the AAP slogan '*Is baar na khaarwaange dhokha, Bhagwant Maan te Kejriwal nu dewaange mauka*' (We will not be fooled this time, will give a chance to Bhagwant Mann and Kejriwal). The party was able to shed the outsider label that its competitors had given it thanks to the emergence of Bhagwant Mann as the chief ministerial candidate. With his political and social humour, Mann, a well-known comedian, won the hearts of many Punjabis. He is unlike any traditional politician with a spotless reputation as a son of the soil.

## Conclusion

Due to Dalits' fluctuating votes and their preference for political parties throughout election season, the voting behaviour of SCs has become extremely complicated. Different political organizations serve as a means of salvation for

certain Dalits and their local elites. Voters are likely to prefer that party which will give them access to the benefits. In 2022 Punjab Assembly elections, caste alone did not determine electoral outcomes. The AAP's campaign slogan has been a transparent, accountable government that listens to the concerns of its constituents, but there always has been an aspiration in its appeal in the state of Punjab. Voters responded well to the party's *Ik mauka Kejriwal nu* (One Chance to Kejriwal) campaign, which capitalized on the personal appeal of the Delhi chief minister. It led to a lopsided triumph. With the success and performance demonstrated by the AAP in Delhi after 2015, the party was formed in Punjab too. It has received wholehearted support from the people of Punjab. It turned out to be the second major party.

The Dalit support for AAP in Malwa in the 2017 assembly elections was a reflection in part of Dalit political assertiveness in voting for a new party; albeit a choice which has been shaped by the continued socioeconomic deprivation that they face on account of landlessness, limited livelihood options and rampant drug addiction. AAP's success as a new party hinged on its 'newness' rather than on any distinct ideology or issue. It's 'newness' also meant that it was not weighed down by the "historical baggage" of "corruption, disrepute and extraction of rent" that other parties in Punjab carried with them (Chandhoke 2017). That this 'newness' formed part of its electoral appeal is reflected in electoral surveys such as the CSDS post poll survey 2022. In the survey 83% respondents said that they voted for AAP because they really wanted to and not because they disliked or wanted to defeat the other candidates or parties.

With respect to the Dalit voters, AAP's electoral strategy comprised of organizing *Samman Sabhas* (felicitations programs), issuing special guarantees for provision of healthcare, education facilities and various welfare measures including scholarships and putting in place various 'outreach teams' to convey this message to the voters. As one respondent said, "*kanak band kar do, rozgar de do*" (stop the (distribution of) wheat, give us employment). Religion and caste do make their appearance in the electoral campaign of political parties such as the sacrilege issue.<sup>14</sup>

### Notes

1. The term 'dalit' refers to large groups of people who are poor, marginalized and oppressed; it is a manufactured identity distinct from caste, which cannot be refuted (Bharati, 2002, p. 4339). Dalits are a collective word for SCs, STs and BCs.

2. In the current political climate, the word 'Dalit' primarily refers to SCs and only includes Dalits who identify as Hindus, Sikhs or Buddhists (Ram, 2007, p. 4073).
3. An ethnic group champions itself at the expense of other groups. If a party manages to win over at least the majority of the target ethnic group, it is considered successful (Chandra, 2004, pp. 3–5).
4. Interview with leaders, Jalandhar, 10 November 2024.
5. Dera is a place of refuge without established religious institutions. It contains a distinctive philosophy, rituals, and symbols that get their meaning from a single teacher's teachings (Ram, 2016, p. 193). There are 176 Ad Dharmis deras in Punjab, all of which have Guru Ravidas ji as their god (Singh, 2018, p. 161).
6. The Mazhabis are Valmikis who converted from Hinduism, whereas the Ramdaisas are Chamars from Hinduism to Sikhism.
7. Dalits who converted to Islam are called Mussalis; who converted to Sikhism are called Mazhabis and who converted to Christianity are called Masih. They converted to other religions to get rid of discrimination, exploitation and Humiliation in the Hindu religion (Judge, 2010, p. 124).
8. Interviews with the key functionaries, Leaders of BSP and its various factions, 13 April 2025.
9. Interviews with leaders, Hoshiarpur, 15 Feb, 2025.
10. An analysis of the interviews/interactions with Dalit masses and leaders, conducted in Doaba region of Punjab, July–December 2024.
11. Please see Note 10.
12. Please see Note 10.
13. An analysis of the interviews/interactions with Dalit mass, organization, and leaders, conducted at Hoshiarpur, July–December 2024.
14. See Lokniti-CSDS 'Punjab Postpoll 2022 Survey

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