

## **Second-order Election Model: Revisited in Context of Punjab**

**Kulvir Singh**

*Assistant Professor in Political Science,  
Punjabi University TPD Malwa College Rampura Phul,  
Dist. Bathinda, Punjab.*

### **Abstract**

It is established truth that contemporary democracies work in a multi-level governing system that may be cross-border, national, regional and local. It is further said that these levels of democratic governance have specific electoral arrangements. The different election process in different electoral arenas influences each other. To understand these phenomena, scholars of multi-level electoral politics studied the second-order election model for their insightful investigation. The constitution of India establishes federal polity and divides power between the union and state governments. Periodical elections ensure competitive politics in both levels. The present study is a humble attempt to understand the electoral politics of Punjab in parliamentary as well as state assembly elections by the second order election model.

**Keywords:** Coalition Government, Electoral Politics, Regional Parties, Shiromani Akali Dal

### **Introduction: Second-order election model**

This model emerged when the first direct elections of the European Parliament were held in 1979; at that time Karlheinz Reif and Hermann Schmitt presented the Second-order election model. According to them “Second-order elections are, of course, neither new nor unfamiliar either in the European Community or in western democracies as a whole. In each of these systems one can discern with relative ease which are the decisive elections: the “first order” elections in parliamentary systems are the national parliamentary elections, and in a presidential system, the national presidential election. In addition to these, however, there is a plethora of “Second-order” elections: by-elections, municipal elections, various sorts of regional elections those to a “second

chamber” and the like”<sup>1</sup>. The essence of their second-order election model is based on the proposition that second-order elections are less important than first-order elections that are for national offices. They further argue that “the strategy and tactics of political parties in second-order election campaigns are often influenced by political calculations concerning the main arena”<sup>2</sup>. To ensure electoral success, political parties mobilize the voters and allocate and invest their money, energy, source etc. In different kinds of elections, there is a huge flexibility of allocations by political parties. It is further argued that the election level effect parties’ strategies as well. Based on Karlheinz Reif and Hermann Schmitt’s hypothesis i.e. “the less-at-stake dimension,”<sup>3</sup> this model offers three broad predictions about second-order election outcomes. Firstly the turnout is lower than in national elections because voters receive that these elections are less important than first-order elections. Secondly, the smaller and regional parties perform better and finally the parties in national government i.e. incumbent are punished by voters in second-order elections<sup>4</sup>.

### **First-order and second-order election in Punjab: An analysis**

There is a multi-level government in India. The founding fathers of the Indian constitution adopted a parliamentary form of government in both the national and state level governments. Do electoral preferences in Indian democracy differ when voters cast their votes in different electoral arenas? It should be studied with reference to the behaviour of political actors by the second-order election model, particularly in the context of Punjab. Whether the application of this model is universal, will be analysed scientifically. For this purpose, firstly we study the electoral outcomes of union parliamentary (*Lok Sabha*) elections and state legislative assembly (*Vidhan Sabha*) elections since 1997.

---

<sup>1</sup>Karlheinz Reif and Hermann Schmitt, ‘*Nine Second order national elections: A Conceptual Framework for the Analysis of European Election Results*’, *European Journal of Political Research*, 1980, no 8, 3-44.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Their final argument is borrowed from Hirschman’s concept “Exit, Voice and Loyalty” in which he described that some, who generally support the government, vote for opposition in secondary elections in order to apply pressure on the government although not fundamentally changing their party allegiance. A.O. Hirschmann, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty*, 1970, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

**Table: 1.1:** Parliamentary elections of thirteen constituencies in Punjab since 1998

Party	1998 (60.07%)		1999 (56.11%)		2004 (61.59%)		2009 (70.04%)		2014 (70.64%)	
	Won	Vote (%)	Won	Vote (%)	Won	Vote (%)	Won	Vote (%)	Won	Vote (%)
INC	00	25.85	08	38.44	02	34.17	08	45.23	03	33.10
BJP	03	11.67	01	09.16	03	10.48	01	10.6	02	08.70
BSP	00	12.65	00	03.84	00	07.67	00	05.75	00	01.90
SAD	08	32.93	02	28.59	08	34.28	04	33.85	04	26.30
CPI	00	03.40	01	03.74	00	02.55	00	0.33	00	0.40
CPM	00	01.06	00	02.18	00	01.81	00	0.14	00	0.10
SAD (M)	00	02.73	01	03.41	00	03.79	00	0.36	00	0.30
AAP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	04	24.40
Ind./Others	02	9.53	00	10.64	00	05.29	00	03.74	00	04.80
	13		13		13		13		13	

Sources: Election Commission of India

Table:1.1<sup>5</sup> depicts the competitive politics between the regional and national parties. In five hundred forty-three members' lower house of the Indian Parliament (*Lok Sabha*), the share of Punjab is just thirteen seats. *Shiromani Akali Dal*, a regional political party of Punjab constantly secures a larger share in seats as well as vote share. Their long-time ally<sup>6</sup>, *Bhartiya Janta Party* plays the role of her junior partner. The constantly rising voter turnout since 1999 shows that the people of post violence society<sup>7</sup> like Punjab are keenly participating in the democratic process. The main rival of *Shiromani Akali Dal* in Punjab is a national party i.e. Indian National Congress, found struggling against a regional player. It is further analysed that a major portion of swing voters periodically changed the electoral outcomes. Other national and regional parties have a marginal and constant vote share in every parliamentary election, but it is not enough to convert it into winning seats. The combination of swings and small parties' voters was the foremost cause of the emergence of AAP in the 2014 election.

<sup>5</sup>Abbreviations: INC- Indian National Congress, BJP- Bhartiya Janta Party, BSP- Bahujan Samaj Party, SAD- Shiromani Akali Dal, CPI- Communist Party of India, CPM- Communist Party of India (Marxist), SAD- Shiromani Akali Dal (Simranjit Singh Mann), AAP- Aam Aadmi Party, Ind- Independent and other smaller parties.

<sup>6</sup>SAD and BJP have electoral alliance since 1996

<sup>7</sup>Due to militancy from 1980 to 1995, there was great setback to the development of Punjab. Thousands of people lost their lives. During this period, long term presidential rule ruin political process in the region.

**Table: 1.2:** State Legislative Assembly Elections Since 1997

Party	1997 (68.73%)		2002 (65.14%)		2007 (75.45%)		2012 (78.20%)		2017 (76.83%)	
	Won	Vote (%)	Won	Vote (%)	Won	Vote (%)	Won	Vote (%)	Won	Vote (%)
INC	14	26.59	62	35.81	44	40.90	46	40.09	77	38.50
BJP	18	8.33	03	5.67	19	8.28	12	7.18	3	5.39
BSP	01	7.48	00	5.69	00	4.13	00	4.30	00	1.52
SAD	75	37.64	41	31.08	49	37.09	56	34.73	15	25.24
CPI	02	2.98	02	2.15	00	0.76	00	0.82	00	0.22
CPM	00	1.79	00	0.36	00	0.28	00	0.16	00	0.07
SAD(M)	01	3.10	00	4.65	00	0.52	00	0.28	00	0.32
AAP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	20	23.72
Ind./Other	06	12.09	09	14.59	05	8.04	03	12.44	02	5.02
	117		117		117		117		117	

Source: Election Commission of India

Table 1.2 indicates the growing turnout of voters from 2002 to 2012 and mildly dip in the 2017 state legislative assembly election. Competitive politics between political players prevailed high in this period. A major portion of the period of study is dominated by the regional political party. A big national player like the Bhartiya Janta Party, the coalition partner of Shiromani Akali Dal, remains junior and dependent on this regional power.

### Comparative analysis of first and second-order elections

Originally Karlheinz Reif and Hermann Schmitt in their second-order election model predict that here the turnout is lower than national or first-order elections because voters have an opinion that these second-order elections are less important. But data illustrated in the tables explore that the turnout in Punjab is high in second-order elections. The second prediction that smaller and regional parties perform better is partially true because results of consecutive elections show that regional party is performing better and worse in both arenas. The third prediction that the parties in national government i.e. incumbents are punished by voters in second-order elections is also questionable. From 1997 to 2017 there is not any drastic change in vote share between competitive groups. But a small change in vote share can widen or narrow the tally of victorious seats. Analysis shows that the second-order election model is not depicting the dynamics of electoral politics in Punjab. Here a question arises how we can understand the correlation and differentiate between first-order and second-order elections in Punjab?

### **Decoding puzzle of second-order elections**

Works of contemporary second-order election theorists show that multi-level voting can be dissimilar in institutionally centralised countries with severe regional diversity. Scholars like Jeffery and Hough<sup>8</sup> think that the second-order election theory is still the most influential in studies of regional elections. Research on regional election finds that “party vote share deviate from the logic of second-order elections theory in regions with (a) strong decision-making power (b) distinct territorial identities when these identities are politicized by regional parties”<sup>9</sup>. The period under the current study of multi-level electoral politics in Punjab is dominated by strong regional leaders. It is further said that after one and a half decade of violence, Punjab started a new journey towards peace and development. In this environment the sentiments of the distinct political identity of its people were supreme. Dominating leaders of the region successfully politicize these identity issues. Henderson and McEwen also endorse these views when they said that “voter turnout at regional elections depends on the strength of regional identities and on the extent of regional distinctiveness that can be associated with regional languages or regional parties”<sup>10</sup>. Scholars criticized the original work of Reif and Schmitt from a different perspective. “Reif and Schmitt do not offer a theory of a European voter. Their work is essentially an aggregate-level theory. Yet, while the original article by Reif and Schmitt(1980) may not have set out to develop a complete individual-level model of vote choice, they do nonetheless build their aggregate-level predictions on statements about individual-level behaviour in second-order elections”<sup>11</sup>. These new supplements in second-order election model theory can be useful to understand multi-level electoral politics in Indian states, particularly in Punjab.

### **Distinct nature of politics of Indian states**

Describing the distinct nature of politics of Indian states Adam Ziegfeld said that “keeping up with politics in different parts of India often feels like following politics in different countries. The main political parties, important leaders, influential social groups, and relevant political ideologies can differ starkly across a surprisingly small

---

<sup>8</sup>Charlie Jeffery and Dan Hough, *Understanding Post Devolution Elections in Scotland and Wales in Comparative Perspective*, Party Politics, 2009, 15, No.02, pp 219-240.

<sup>9</sup>Valentyna Romanova, *The principle of Cyclicity of the Second-Order Election Theory for Simultaneous Multi-Level Elections*, Politics, 2014, Vol. 34, No. 02, pp 161-179.

<sup>10</sup>Ailsa Henderson and Nicola McEwen, *A Comparative Analysis of Voter Turnout in Regional Elections*, Electoral Studies, 2010, No.29 pp 405-416.

<sup>11</sup>Sara Binzer Hobilt and Jill Wittroc, *The second-order election model revisited: An experimental test of vote choices in European Parliament Elections*, Electoral Studies, 2011, No. 30, pp 29-40.

distance”<sup>12</sup>. Presently growing field of state-level politics in India needs new method and approach to study the new phenomena accurately. “the upsurge in identity politics has reconfigured the democratic politics of India in last three decades in a significant way, as the diverse social groups in India have increasingly been politicized and mobilized based on social and political cleavages’ rather than based on their common economic interests, ideologies or policies”<sup>13</sup>. The parties win votes through clientelism rather than through programmatic appeals. Identity groups are being sought to be collectively recognised and mobilized under the changed mode of electoral politics.

### **Conclusion**

Data from previous Parliamentary (*Lok Sabha*) elections and state assembly elections shows that the original second-order election model is not sufficient to analyse the multi-level electoral politics in Punjab. Presently, this model is enriched by new scholars through their research publications. These new citations are significant for scientifically decoding the puzzles of correlation and differentiation of multi-level electoral politics in Punjab as well as other parts of India.

---

<sup>12</sup>Adam Ziegfeld, *Why Regional Parties? Clientelism, Elites, and the Indian Party System*, 2016, New York: Cambridge University Press, pp 1

<sup>13</sup>Ashutosh Kumar, *Moving Beyond Nation-State: Framing State level Politics in India*, *India Review*, 2017, Vol. 16, No. 3, pp 277-303.