

# Understanding the Voting Interests of Young Adults in Ludhiana

May 2023 to August 2023

## ABSTRACT

The paper gauges the electoral knowledge of educated youth (18- to 24-year-olds) and assess to what degree political parties and the public are on the same wavelength. The literature review assesses the psychosocial model, rational choice theory, and other external factors significant in influencing electoral participation and choices. 500 educated youth in Ludhiana from all 14 colleges/universities were surveyed with questions tailored to the objectives. Electoral participation in the 2022 Punjab Elections was low compared to previous years, and this trend, more accentuated even, was visible in the findings. Electoral awareness was relatively mediocre. Respondents were asked to rank policies, which were common objectives of most parties, on a Likert scale. The findings showed employment policies as being the utmost priority for youth. Following this, an MLA and his political advisor were interviewed regarding their party's political salience currently. The findings showed significant cleavage between the parties and the public regarding drug addiction policies.

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## Introduction

Elections are an elemental principle and a prerequisite to democracy. Individuals eligible under Universal Suffrage use the voting system as a mechanism to assert their voice, opinion, and, thus, choice. Enfranchised individuals who vote can choose leadership in their country and concurrently participate in its political system. This allows for the selection of representatives in a way that reflects the will of the voters. This method of choosing candidates is in accordance with the United Nation's explanation of an election as per the Human Rights Declaration (1948) – "The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections" (excerpt from Article 21. 3.). Periodic elections allow for the change of leadership, which introduces a self-correcting mechanism. The ruling party and its opposition(s) are continually made to assess the demands of the public and revise their policies resulting in an apparatus that suits the interest of the enfranchised.<sup>1</sup> Periodic elections stimulate parties and people to reconsider interests establishing an interrelation between social factors, individual thought, and political action.

Post-independence, India's federal structure had two tiers of government: the central/national level and the state level. Indian Federalism has evolved since independence through the interaction of political actors at the Centre and the state level; this transformation was also due to coinciding factors of political partisanship and the politics of resources and identities. Eventually, a third tier (at the level of local municipalities and panchayats) was introduced following amendments in 1992.<sup>2</sup> Two distinct political entities chosen by elections for their own respective house (the Lok Sabha for the central government and the Vidhan Sabha for the state government) allow for greater autonomy in governance.<sup>3</sup> For the Lok Sabha elections, if no party establishes a winning majority, the competing parties can ally with regional parties – bringing more constituencies in their hand – allowing the formation of a central government. This flexibility permits the apportioning of power leading to more respect for the autonomy of states. An independent court is responsible for ensuring check-and-balances within the federal framework.

Federalism accounts for regional diversity, which consequently promotes unity.<sup>4</sup> As per the provisions in the constitutions, the state government, which has greater comprehension of the identity of its peoples, can enact schemes/laws that would, perhaps, be too scrupulous a task for the central government. The state government, for example, can have a say on the reservation percentages

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.elections.in/importance-of-elections-in-india.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/indian-federalism-75-the-foundation-of-a-strong-democracy/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.elections.in/importance-of-elections-in-india.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.vedantu.com/question-answer/are-the-dual-objectives-of-the-federal-system-class-11-social-science-cbse-5fd838d0cd67a76506f1e1c5>

(quota) to promote "socially and educationally backward citizens". This is epitomised by the Bodoland Territorial Council in Assam – a body with legislative, financial, and executive powers that promotes the well-being of the Bodo people.<sup>5</sup> Policies percolated down from the central government can be tailored to local circumstances to foster inclusivity.

Decisions made by Indian voters at the ballots are monitored by the Election Commission, legitimised by the governor, ensured by the court, and guarded by the police; moreover, the final verdict on the apportioning of the share of seats is based on empirical evidence, which enhances confidence in the electoral procedure (excluding perhaps gerrymandered constituencies). Elections empower a democracy, provided there is significant voter turnout and voters express their will freely, because then the society is willing to involve in the actions of the state. Societal participation in elections allows the acquisition of knowledge about society, citizenship, and the political framework.<sup>6</sup> Democracy comprehensively expresses the will of the people if more individuals involve themselves in the state's actions. This generates the Red Queen Effect, a phenomena posited by Acemoglu and Robinson in their book *The Narrow Corridor: States, Societies, and the Fate of Liberty*, which curbs the formation of despotic institutions.<sup>7</sup> Having confidence in the political efficacy of the country, kindles the "feeling that political and social change is possible and that the individual citizen can play a part in bringing about this change" (Campbell, Gurin and Miller, 1954, p. 187).<sup>8</sup> Political participation expressed through electoral choices engenders the feeling of belonging. The social group one belongs to has a strong association with their voting behaviour.<sup>9</sup> Social groups inclined towards certain parties can foment violence due to disagreements. When a wide range of individuals from variegated backgrounds participate in elections there is a broader representation of society's interests: minorities and marginalized communities have a platform too. The faith established through check-and-balances in electoral processes to determine the ruling party result in greater communal cohesion and can quell fomentation.

The state of Punjab has 27.7 million voters. There are 117 constituencies in the state out of which 34 are reserved for scheduled casts. 14 constituencies fall under the largest district i.e., Ludhiana, 10 under Amritsar district, and 9 under Jalandhar district. Dera Bassi a constituency in Mohali district has had the highest electoral participation, and Gill constituency in Ludhiana district has placed second in

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<sup>5</sup> <https://bodoland.gov.in/departments.php>

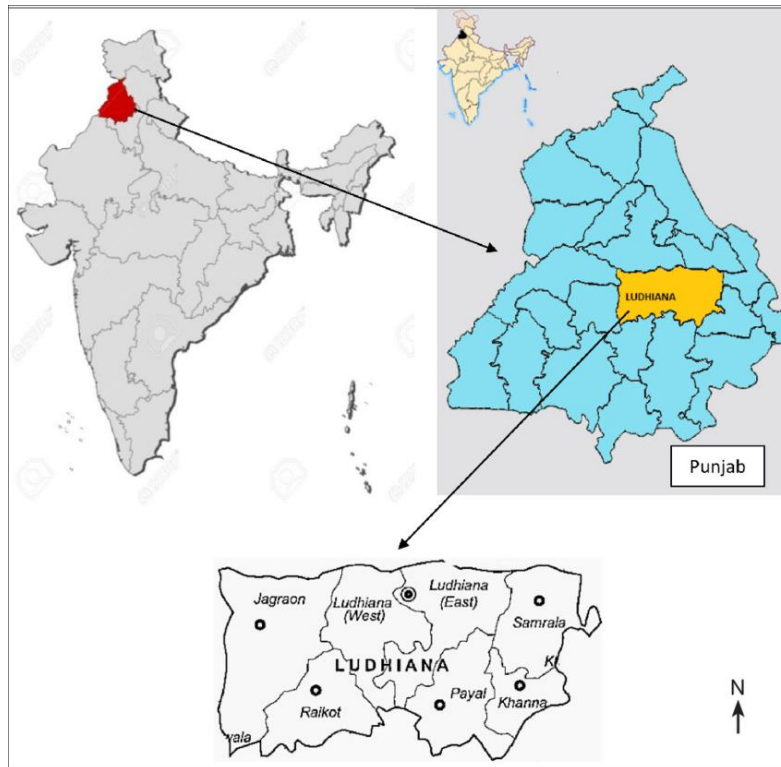
<sup>6</sup> (Schulz)

<sup>7</sup> (Acemoglu and Robinson)

<sup>8</sup> (Campbell, Gurin, et al.)

<sup>9</sup> (Campbell, Converse, et al.)

the past 2 elections.<sup>10</sup> Electoral involvement has been most significant in Ludhiana and Mohali in both 2017 and 2022 State Elections.<sup>11</sup>



*Location of Ludhiana District*

As of the 2022 Vidhan Sabha elections in Punjab, 53.6% of registered voters in Punjab are male, 46.4% female, and less than 0.01% are of another gender. The voter-turnout ratio has dwindled since a record-breaking 78.3% in 2012. The percentage declined in 2017 to 77.4%. The voter turnout for the 2022 Vidhan Sabha elections stands at 72.15%, and only 56.7% of newly registered voters exercised their franchise.<sup>12</sup> In Ludhiana, the largest district of Punjab, the voter turnout was just 63.5%. Comparing the Punjab Legislative Assembly elections of 2022 to the elections of other states, Punjab holds an ordinary position. In 2017, Andhra Pradesh had a 79.65% voter turnout. Further south, Tamil Nadu in 2021 had a 73.63% voter turnout. Assam boasts one of the highest voter turnouts consistently in the country, and in 2021 this proportion stood at 82.42%. Contrarily, Maharashtra had a voter turnout of just 60.56%. Relative to its neighbours, Punjab's turnout is considerable. Uttar Pradesh had a turnout of 61.01% in 2022 and 67.74% for Haryana in 2019. Himachal Pradesh, though, received greater electoral participation in proportion: 75.78% in 2022.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.ceopunjab.gov.in/index>

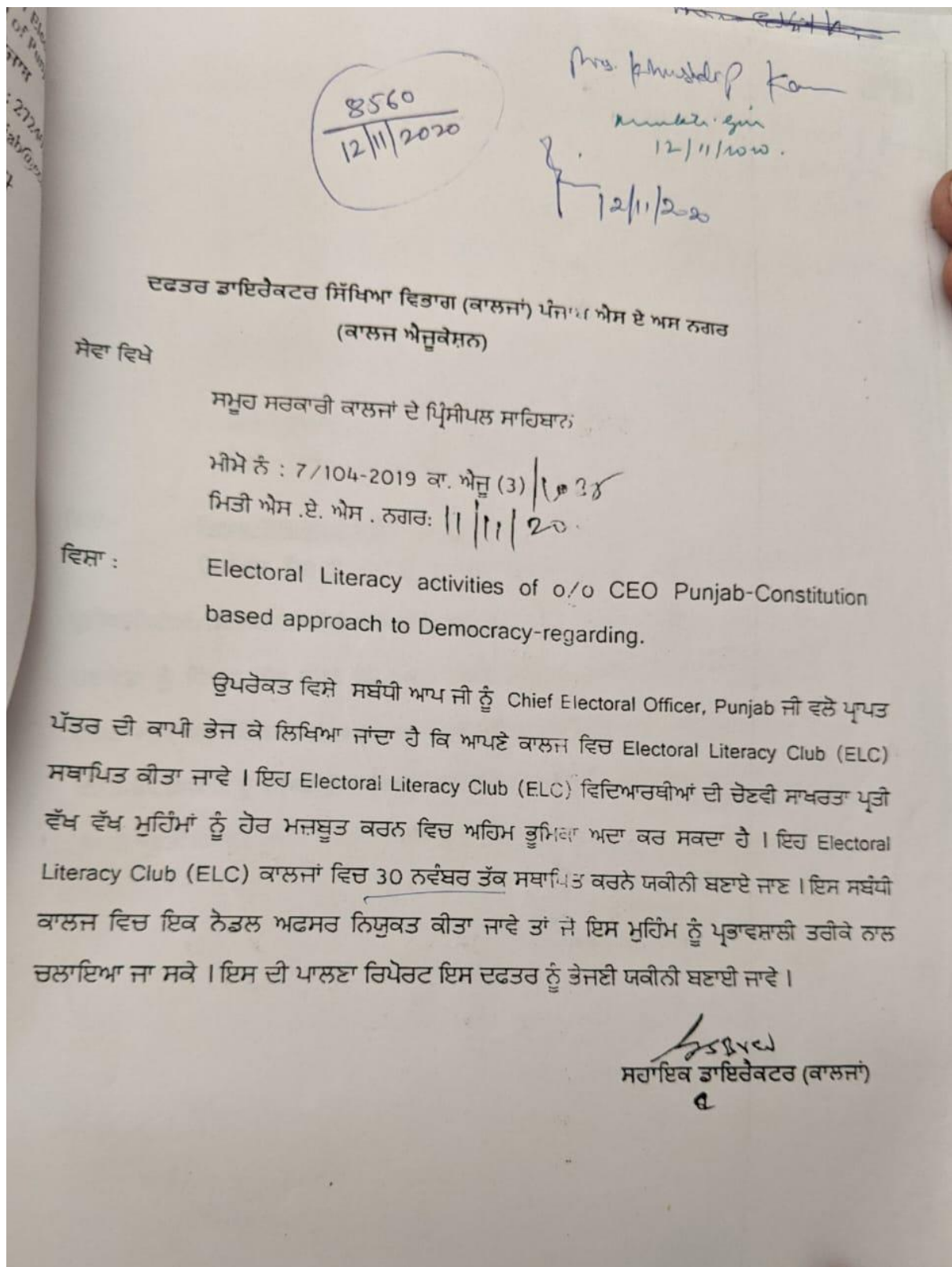
<sup>11</sup> <https://www.ceopunjab.gov.in/index>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.hindustantimes.com/elections/punjab-assembly-election/punjab-polls-just-57-young-first-time-voters-got-inked-101646510314363.html>

From the 2017 election, there was an increase in the number of contestants for all genders and also a growth in the proportion of women elected to the Vidhan Sabha in 2022. For the 2022 elections, despite constituting nearly half of the voting body, only 7.13% of women contested for the assembly. Precisely 93 out of 1304 candidates were women. But compared to men, a larger percentage of the contesting women were elected. 14% of competing women were elected, while just 8.6% of competing men. Out of the two candidates from other genders, neither was elected.

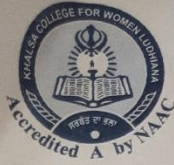
To disseminate knowledge regarding the voting process, a flagship program known as Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) has been introduced by the Election Commission of India. Their goal is "to enlighten, enable and empower every citizen to register as a voter and cast his/her vote at every election in an informed and ethical manner." SVEEP supports Election Clubs in educational institutes and has a nodal officer in each academic setting. Merit-based recognition is awarded to galvanise participation in the clubs, and hence electorates, from first-time voters. The nodal officer, who registers most voters in the district and/or state receives a letter of recognition from the Deputy Commissioner of their corresponding district. Exceptional administrative officers who facilitate smooth and secure elections receive distinction at the annual National Awards. Periodic programs in electoral literacy are tailored according to the educational institute – high school or college/university. The system does not preclude those who may not be in an educational institute; the ECI organises programs to propagate electoral awareness, especially amongst Scheduled Castes or minorities. The Commission has introduced an online portal called Form 6, which provides a concise application form in multiple languages allowing one to become a registered voter. With most electoral information obtainable online, the undercurrent of electoral literacy is digital awareness simultaneously.

The following documents were scanned under the supervision of Dr Khushdip Kaur, a nodal officer for the Election Club at Khalsa College for Women Ludhiana.



Document 1: A letter from the ECI Officer Ludhiana to the Principals of colleges/universities in Ludhiana requesting them to set up election literacy club by November 2019 and allot a nodal officer to oversee the same. The colleges need to notify the ECI commissioner on its progress.





## KHALSA COLLEGE FOR WOMEN

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Ref. No. 5016/KCW/2023

Dated: 24-01-2023

To

Deputy Commissioner-cum-District Election Officer

Mini Secretariat, Ferozepur Road

Ludhiana

Sub: Regarding National Voters' Day 2023

Sir,

With reference to your letter no.2023/SVEEP-137 dated 20<sup>th</sup> January 2023, this is for your information that college has organized various activities under SVEEP programme. An extension lecture(online) was organized on 30<sup>th</sup> December,2022 wherein an expert Prof. Rohit Sharma deliberated on "The Great Democratic Experiment: Universal Adult Franchise". Lecture was followed by interactive session wherein, students actively participated and queries were well answered by an expert. Poster Making and Slogan Writing Competition was also organized on the theme "Indian Constitution", result of which will be announced on 25<sup>th</sup> January,2023 on Voters' Day. Pledge will also be taken by the students in the morning assembly to mark National Voters' Day(25<sup>th</sup> January).

Registration drive was organized in the campus from 1<sup>st</sup> December to 15<sup>th</sup> January to register all the young voters who have attained 18 years of age. Nodal Officer, Dr. Khushdip Kaur organized a digital campaign with the help of student council and Senior Buddies of the college, wherein online meets were organized with all the classes to register the students for their voter cards. As far as post graduate students, final year and second year students of under graduate classes are concerned almost, all the students were registered during the drive organized by Electoral Literacy Club last year with successful 1021 registrations. This year's campaign was successfully concluded on 15<sup>th</sup> January with more than 300 voter card registrations.

Thanking you

Yours Sincerely

Principal  
Khalsa College For Women  
Civil Lines, Ludhiana

Khushdip  
NODAL OFFICER

Dr. Khushdip Kaur  
Associate Professor

ENCL: 1. list of students with reference ids

2. Few entries of poster making competition

Document 2: A progress update from Dr Khushdip Kaur regarding an activity organised by the club on electoral literacy to the ECI commissioner.



## CHAPTER - 4

### CONTINUOUS ELECTORAL LITERACY

**4.1. Campus Ambassadors:** CEOs shall appoint Campus Ambassadors from among neutral, non-political students in recognised Colleges and Universities to bridge the gap in youth electoral participation. Each Campus Ambassador shall be in position for one Academic year and appointment may be renewed on a yearly basis. In co-educational college two Campus Ambassadors (one male and one Female) can be selected.

#### 4.1.1. Role of Campus Ambassador

- a. Identification of students, teachers and non-teaching staff and their family members who are not registered in the electoral roll and those without EPIC or with wrong EPICs;
- b. Facilitating their registration in the electoral roll by providing forms and guiding how to fill the forms and co-ordinating with the electoral machinery for approval of the new applications, correction and distribution of EPICs to the Campus electorate;
- c. Organising with the help of CEO/DEO office, special drive for registration and also online registration;
- d. Educating campus electorates about the electoral process i.e. registration, correction of errors, transposition of names, voting process and ethical voting;
- e. Facilitating inclusion of Voter Education in various co-curricular activities/festivals of the Campus through different activities such as Slogan writing, Poster making, quiz, debate, essay writing, song, street plays etc;
- f. Creating core team of students to work as Volunteers for the SVEEP activities in the campus;
- g. Coordinating with campus related organizations like Scout and Guide, NCC, NSS for enrolment
- h. Organizing talks/workshop etc for capacity building in Voter Education among student community;
- i. Organizing National Voters' Day programmes in their campus;

*Document 3: A picture of the handbook provided to the nodal officer which prescribes the curriculum to be covered in the Election Club.*

## Literature Review

Plano and Riggs described, "Voting Behaviours is a field of study concerned with the ways in which people tend to vote in public election and the reason why they vote as they do."<sup>13</sup> The field is subsumed within the broader designation of political behaviour. Examination of 'voting behaviour' entails the scrutiny of voting statistics and records, whose computation allows for the comprehension of electoral shifts and swings. It requires an assessment of factors influencing individual psychological processes, i.e., determinants affecting perception, emotion, and motivation, and how they impact political action and, consequently, voting action.<sup>14</sup> With this, alternate theoretical models concerning voting behaviour are predicated: the rational choice theory, the sociological model of voting behaviour, and the psychosocial model of voting behaviour. Theoreticians assert the overlapping nature and continuity of these frameworks with each other.<sup>15</sup> The study of public electoral participation allows for the cognition of individual thought processes reflecting their comprehension and activism within democratic processes and how they associate with social groups. This is advantageous for political parties, who can identify demographic tendencies informing them to formulate policy accordingly and target particular social/communal groups in their campaigns. An assessment of the potency of factors like media, identification with social groups, 'vote buying', literacy etc. in impacting electoral choices is possible with the study of voting behaviour.

In the philosophical sense, humans are rational beings who aggregate rational calculations to make rational choices. In electoral behaviour, this is the alignment of interests by weighing costs and benefits, permitting people and parties to accord. This theory draws an analogy from the market economy, where companies work to maximise profits and consumers to utility. Parallely, voters act to maximise the utility of their vote as parties seek to augment electoral gains from political proposals. The application of economic parameters to find a model was theorized by Anthony Downes (1957) in the work "An Economic Theory of Democracy."<sup>16</sup> This theory is called the rational choice theory. Downs explained that fundamentally what matters to voters is not the doctrine propagated by a party, but the concrete actions that governments take. Voters and parties act in their interests. Along these lines is a study conducted in Punjab by Singhania et al., "Perceptions of Governance and Youth Voting Behaviour in Punjab" (2016). The study explored the attitudes of young adults towards political leadership, policies, and government performance in Punjab, providing insights into the role of governance perceptions in voting decisions.

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<sup>13</sup> (Antunes)

<sup>14</sup> (Hazarika)

<sup>15</sup> (Antunes)

<sup>16</sup> (Downs)

In the study "Social interactions in voting behaviour: Evidence from India", Khalil et al. explain, "All voters measure social welfare as the social utility of a policy minus the total costs required to achieve that policy... Not all voters agree on the social utility of various policies, but they share a common belief about the distribution of voting costs in society."<sup>17</sup>

Concerning voter turnout, individuals quantify the election cost (to be differentiated from voting costs in society). Enfranchised citizens vote depending on the perceived costs and benefits. Significant literature suggests that public policies like voter registration, imposition of identification laws, long wait times, and greater distance to polling stations reduce voter turnout. Moreover, the cost of voting is acknowledged by scholars as being low.<sup>18</sup> Lower election costs bring more uninformed/illiterate individuals to the ballots, abandoning the phenomena termed Duverger's Law as they are more likely to vote for non-competitive candidates. "Political Awareness and Voting Intentions among Youth in Punjab" (2018) by Verma et al. assessed the level of political literacy and its correlation with voting intentions. The study accentuated the importance of political education and civic engagement programs in improving political awareness and promoting active participation in electoral processes. Resnick et al. explained in their study that the level of political information available to youth is proportional to their interest, hence, participation in political matters.<sup>19</sup> This model of rationality regarding voter turnout is an irrational idea, because an individual may have a misplaced belief about the effectiveness of voting. The probability an individual votes is higher if their expectations regarding the critical importance of their vote and the anticipated benefits from voting outweigh the costs, vice-versa. The substructure for political education is literacy itself. As per the 2011 Population Census, the literacy level in Punjab is 75.84% - a medial proportion for Indian states. The literacy rate in Ludhiana district is 85.77%. Educational attainment is a determinant of voting behaviour. The weakness of low mass literacy undermines India's democratic framework as political parties, communal groups, and militant outfits can prey on the sentiments of the people in the name of caste, religion, language etc.<sup>20</sup> Malhotra et al. substantiated this correlation of literacy and engagement in political processes in their work "The Role of Education in Youth Voting Behaviour in Punjab" (2017). They highlighted the impact of educational background, knowledge, and civic values in shaping the preferences and choices of young adults. Despite receiving education, some may still express diminutive interest in political affairs, while others plenty. Lazarsfeld et al. argued that this phenomenon makes democratic regimes

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<sup>17</sup> (Khalil et al.)

<sup>18</sup> (Blais)

<sup>19</sup> (Resnick and Casale)

<sup>20</sup> (Hazarika)

stronger.<sup>21</sup> If every voter had a high level of political interest and motivation, this would be reflected in greater political cleavage and antipathy among voters, which may endanger the system.

The axiom of self-interest founded on rational calculations applies to political parties equally. Although parties may profess altruistic intentions whilst implementing or proposing policies, the ulterior motive is rather to gain prestige and the profits inherent to being in power. Accordingly, Downs explained, "parties formulate policies in order to win elections, rather than win elections to formulate policies."<sup>22</sup> Since these profits are harnessed only through electoral gains, we can concur the main purpose of parties is to win elections by maximising the action's utility.

However, there are many irrational forces in play when determining electoral choices. The rational choice model, Blais pointed out, has minute explanatory power of voting behaviour. He observed that the majority are driven by the duty of voting rather than by making a cost-benefit analysis.<sup>23</sup>

As previously discussed, education is critical in political participation and a strong determinant in voting behaviour. Poor literacy rates stem from poor socio-economic status. The provision of patronage to disadvantages vulnerable groups in return for a vote for the patron is termed vote buying. This problem is being exploited in India today; an instrumental factor in winning political clientele (Chandra, 2007). These groups find patronage more advantageous than a vote, as they are more dependent on material benefits. Patronage in return for votes can result in bondage for perpetuity because theft of belongings, false FIRs, murder attempts etc. are common in India to keep people under patronage (Wilkinson, 2000). To a great magnitude, income, occupation, and social class, factors that shape economic interests and willingness for social mobility, impact voting patterns (Kumar et al., 2016, "Socioeconomic Factors and Youth Voting Patterns in Punjab"). Provision for patronage may sometimes only be for certain communal/social groups to concretise the sense of association for people between them, their social group, and, simultaneously, the party they identify with.

The emphasis a potential voter places on ethnic correspondence with a particular party is pertinent to the economic condition of the country. Kaul (Ethnic Politics and Urban Voting Behaviour in India: Explaining Variation in Electoral Support for the Bharatiya Janata Party, 1999-2000 (2013)) postulated the theory of Ethnically Mediated Retrospective Voting (ERV).<sup>24</sup> To analogise, it posited a linear spectrum, where the political salience is ethnic interests on one side and programmatic interests on

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<sup>21</sup> (Berelson et al.)

<sup>22</sup> (Downs)

<sup>23</sup> (Blais)

<sup>24</sup> (Kaul)

the other. Ethnic conflicts and economic growth determine where one finds themselves on the spectrum. Kaul explained, "Under conditions of high level of perceived ethnic conflict, ethnic interests increase in salience in voters' political choices. Second, under conditions of strong economic growth, programmatic demands increase in salience..." The study, at a microcosmic level, can be associated with the economic progress of a state. One of the determinants outlining the successes of candidates who found their campaign on an ethnic basis is explained by the social protection net they offer their voters. The role political ideologies play in shaping the voting preferences of young adults is very significant. The study by Joshi et al., "Political Ideology and Voting Choices among Young Adults in Punjab" (2018), demonstrated that young voters, although at a magnitude lower than elder age groups, significantly align with specific political parties according to the ideology the party propagates or stands for. Voters change their affiliation with political parties based on their assessment of economic conditions and the party leaders' responses to them during each election. Youth in Punjab give significant weightage to economic development, education, and governing conditions in the state, higher relative to elder age-groups. Sharma et al. expatiated in their work "Youth and Electoral Politics: A Study of Voting Behaviour in Punjab" that these factors influenced political participation, motivations, and factors, and, consequently, voting preferences.

As per the provisions of the Constitution, India is a secular state. But this status does not curb irrational elements like religion and sub-nationalism from being strong determinants of voting choices. Religious pluralism in India is a significant feature of the Indian political system; it significantly influenced the struggle for power among parties.<sup>25</sup> It is also common practice to use religious establishments for political purposes, particularly during election seasons. Candidates are influenced by the religion card. Voters very often vote on religious considerations. There is substantial evidence of the same in Punjab, where Akali Dal, a centre-right Sikh-centric state political party, receives a tremendous share of votes from Sikhs – the largest religion in the state. Aam Admi Party (AAP) has forged their policies with compensation for the families who were victims of the 1984 anti-Sikh communal violence in mind. Language is also employed as both a unifying and dividing factor because the outline of constituencies dictates the dialect/language spoken in that region. People have a strong emotional connection with their languages, which makes it an influential factor in voting behaviour. Secessionist movements in Punjab have their roots in the Khalistan movement. Remnants of the movement remain: Akali Dal, in the past, has often raised parochial slogans disturbing the emotional stability of people in the state due to the re-evocation of communalism. Such actions influence individuals to organize themselves along narrow, parochial lines.

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<sup>25</sup> (Hazarika)

Contesting the theory that voters vote not based on ideology but by considering concrete action is the sociological model. The aforementioned factors of religion and sub nationalism are critical. Lazarsfeld, in the study of electoral campaigns, found that the campaign's most significant effect is on voters who are already inclined to support the candidate endorsed by this party, activating and/or enhancing the prior predisposition. The impact of campaigns on converting or activating voters is minimal. The role of electoral campaigns seems more to solidify the cohesiveness of party supporters around their electoral proposals than to change their position. This result appears to be related to the previously mentioned phenomena of selective attention of voters; these voters have already determined their vote and, subsequently, paid greater attention to the campaign on television, radio, newspaper etc.<sup>26</sup> The findings of Khalil et al. concur that these targeted programs aimed at encouraging voter turnout had a lower impact on increasing the proportion than anticipated by policymakers. There is a significant social cleavage between urban and rural groups in India. These schisms translate to political cleavages when these groups develop perceptions of these differences, making them enshrined in political institutions.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, social groups to which the voter belongs enormously influence their preference. Those who are more politically active and informed act as opinion leaders in their groups. They percolate the party policies of their preferred party and the opposing one to other group members, who may not be as politically aware. For receivers, this is another cognitive shortcut of filtering policies, where the party in preference is usually illustrated in a hyperbolically favourable light. This is termed as two step-flow communication. Participation in civic organisations, like religious and community groups, is another mechanism of sharing political information. Lazarsfeld explained, "people vote, not only with their social group, but also for it." <sup>28</sup>

Despite tremendous legislation to uplift certain social groups, especially those bonded to inferior labour by caste, it is an instrumental factor in influencing electorates. Social ties and networking between voters and candidates based on common caste are nascent to desirable outcomes in elections. Scholars concur that the confines of social divisions are determined most powerfully by the caste system than any other irrational factor. Patronage is sometimes provided particularly to individuals of the same caste too. Caste binds people into groups enhancing homogeneity; individuals, thus, support candidates of the same caste. Those ranked lower in the caste system suffer from poor socio-economic conditions and are, resultantly, unable to contest elections because they are unable to provide social protection net (patronage) to their voters. They require patronage and protection themselves. The caste system dictates not only who to elect, but also who can be elected.<sup>29</sup> These

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<sup>26</sup> (Lazarsfeld et al.)

<sup>27</sup> (Brooks and Manza)

<sup>28</sup> (Lazarsfeld et al.)

<sup>29</sup> (Usman et al.)



peer networks in conjunction with social interactions influenced voting behaviour as per Gupta et al. ("influence of Peer Networks on Youth Voting Behaviour in Punjab", 2019). The study revealed that group dynamics, peer influence, and political decisions strongly shape voting choices.

Party identification works as a cognitive shortcut. It allows the filtration of vast information disseminated by multiple parties in their campaigns, speeches, flyers manifestos etc. Without reviewing all potential proposals, association with parties permits them to cope with the extra information establishing an emotional link; individuals may fail to review similar policies of other parties and may sometimes insist that the reason for voting for a party was because similar policies were not proposed by an alternative party.

Opinion leaders acquire knowledge of parties through media and then percolate this knowledge downwards. There is an intercorrelation between media and peer groups, as explained by Katz and Lazarsfeld in "Personal Influence: The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communication" (1955).<sup>30</sup> The authors postulated in the study that a voter's response to media messages is through interpersonal connections and the groups that subjects are a part of. Individuals acting as opinion leaders can construct or reconstruct the meaning behind the message disseminated by the media in their social circles. In a more comprehensive study later, Lazarsfeld wrote, "the act of voting is [not] an individual act. The relationship between social groups to which people belong, their political choice and the decisive role of personal contacts in the definition of electoral choices indicated that the decisions of voters are processes of group cohesion, rather than individual acts." (Lazarsfeld et al., 1968, p. 148).<sup>31</sup> Kapoor et al., 2015, in the study "Media Influence and Youth Voting Behaviour in Punjab", examined the effect of the dissemination of political knowledge through media, both traditional and digital platforms, on voting behaviour. Their study analysed media consumption patterns, political advertising, and media effects, underscoring the role of media in determining electoral choices.

## Objectives

- To gauge the electoral knowledge of educated youth (18- to 24-year-olds). With dwindling votes from the youth, understanding the factors that motivate them is critical for parties, so they can encourage first-time votes.

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<sup>30</sup> (Katz and Lazarsfeld)

<sup>31</sup> (Lazarsfeld et al.)

- To assess to what degree political parties and the public are on the same wavelength. Many parties have commonalities in their proposals. However, this research intends to see how close (or how far) in agreement the wants of educated youngsters are to parties, so that this cleavage can be narrowed.
- A lot of studies have been conducted on what motivates youngsters in Punjab to vote. But there is no study that specialises in the region of Ludhiana to trace influencing patterns on youth. This research intends to close the gap.

## Methodology

As per the Oxford Dictionary lexicon, a manifesto is "a written statement in which a group of people explain their beliefs and aims, especially one published by a political party to say what they will do if they win an election". Manifestoes act as signalling devices attempting to lucidly propagate the objectives of a party. In early 2022, Member of Parliament Varun Gandhi acknowledged that manifestoes are usually overlooked and go uninformed. Though they can be a critical instrument in political discourse, they "morph into mere intellectual exercises".<sup>32</sup> Preceding the 2022 Punjab State Elections, the four main parties contesting – Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Congress (INC), and Shiromani Akali Dal and Bahujan Samaj Party alliance (SAD-BSP) – all published their manifestoes. Most policies, in a large essence, overlap. Recurring proposals include tackling corruption, ridding Punjab of Mafia-raj, improvement in healthcare, government jobs etc.

The youth of Punjab, especially Ludhiana, had an underwhelming turnout in the 2022 State Elections. 18 to 24-year-old students from all 14 colleges and universities in Ludhiana were surveyed to interpret the low turnout and gauge their appeal to the proposals outlined by parties in their manifestoes. This study was a quantitative and exploratory study. 586 responses, all from residents of Ludhiana, were received. Dr Khushdip Kaur, Associate Professor, Nodal officer for ECI, and the mentor of the election club at Khalsa College for women, Ludhiana was approached to seek assistance in data collection. Numerous responses were received from students from the all-female college.<sup>33</sup> 500 responses were consolidated through random sampling. The raw data was projected onto graphs to graphs by first using basic Excel programming. The analysis tools offered by Excel allowed a more lucid comprehension of data. The first part of the questionnaire was focused on understanding the degree to which the youth engaged with political affairs followed by their awareness of such matters. The questions asked, thus, varied from whether they had a voter ID, had cognisance of Form 6, and if their

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<sup>32</sup> (Chimnani et al.)

<sup>33</sup> I am also indebted to Dr Khushdip Kaur for her help in formulating the appropriate questions for the survey.

family members were connected with political parties. The latter half gauged what proposals interested the youth. Common proposals of competing parties were arranged on a Likert scale and respondents were asked to rank from Most to Least Appealing. The charts accompanied by data analysis below present the results.

## Questionnaire

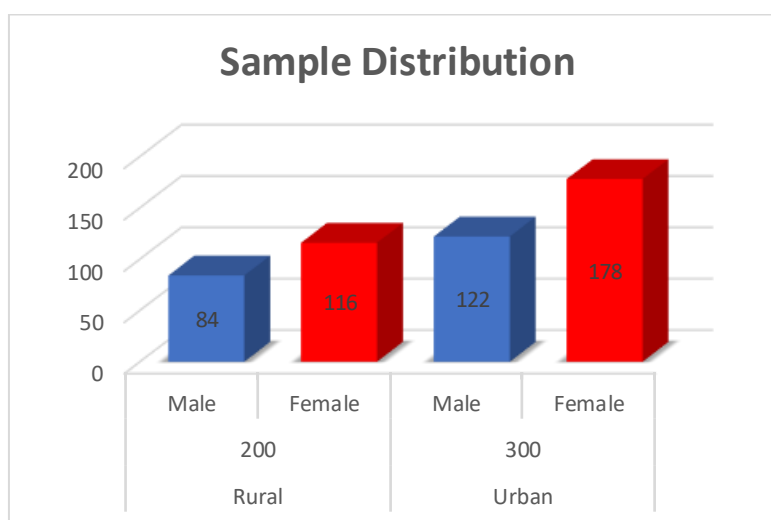
Below is the survey that respondents were asked to fill out. 576 responses were received.

1. Are you from urban or rural Punjab?
2. Age
3. Gender
4. Employment status
5. Do you have a Voter ID?
  - a. If you answered no, are you aware how to get a Voter ID?
    - i. If you answered yes to the previous question, then why do you not have a Voter ID. *Choose an option: cost/time/criminal record/form rejected by government authority/other.*
6. Are you aware of Form 6 – an online portal to register as a new voter?
7. Did you vote in the 2022 Punjab State Elections?
8. Are you aware of NOTA (none of the above system). *(When you do not like any candidate and wish to record this fact; hence, you cast a negative vote.)*
  - a. Did you or would you have exercised this right (NOTA) in the 2022 elections.
9. Are your parents actively connected with any political party?
10. Are you a part of any Student Union/Federation/Association in your institute?
  - a. If you answered yes to the previous question, have you participated in any election for your union/federation/association?
11. Are you aware that political parties have manifestoes?
  - a. If you answered yes to the previous questions, did you check their manifestoes?
12. These policies are proposed in the manifestoes of some prominent parties in Punjab. Which one's appeal to you the most. (Rank the policies from Least to Most Appealing on the 5-point Likert scale.)
  - a. Provision of de-addiction and rehabilitation centres
  - b. Provide one lakh (100,000) government jobs
  - c. Free health services in government hospitals

- d. Entrepreneurship and Skilling Centres (ESC)
- e. Advising and training youth for foreign jobs
- f. Increased micro-financing of innovators
- g. Free bus travel facility for students
- h. Free career counselling session for students
- i. Increased sports budget
- j. Cleaning the Buddha Nullah River

## Data Analysis

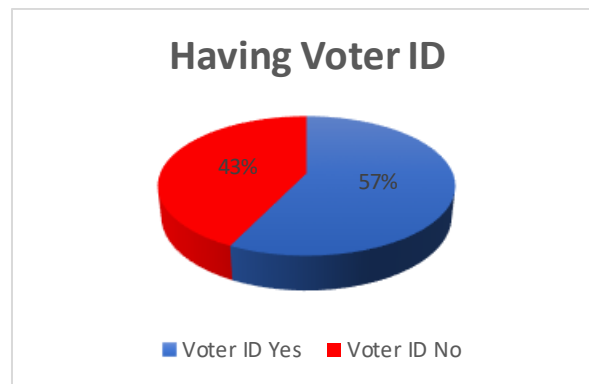
The data was stratified into two groups: urban and rural residents of Ludhiana. Fig. 1 shows the number of female respondents in both groups was higher, perhaps, due to the number of responses from Khalsa College for Women. A larger proportion of the respondents were residents of urban Ludhiana – comprehensible for most students receiving higher education and for a majorly urban district.



*Fig. 1: Data was stratified into 500 respondents: 200 from a rural background and 300 from an urban background. There were more female respondents due to the aid for Khalsa College for Woman.*

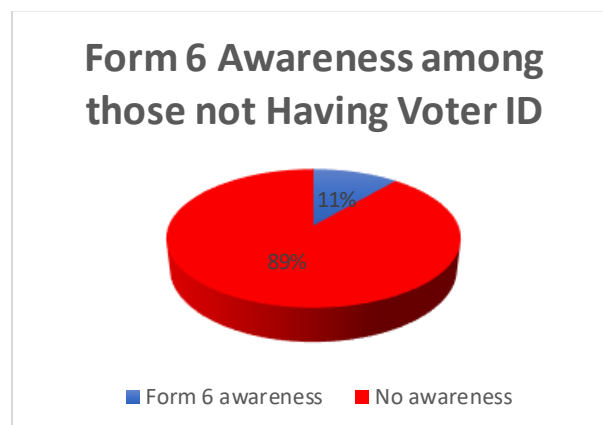
Respondents were asked whether they have a voter ID. 286 (Fig. 2) said they did. The proportion is relatively higher than in previous state and national election years, suggesting the ECI's efforts through its club and Form 6 are enabling greater enfranchisement. Of the 214 (Fig. 2) who did not have a Voter ID, a reason was asked. More than three-quarters of respondents complained that the process was too time-consuming, while the second most common reason was cost. A higher proportion of rural

respondents for this section attributed cost to be a factor for not getting a Voter ID compared to urban residents. This phenomenon is testament to the theory that higher election costs discourage voters from a lower socio-economic background. Some respondents expressed that they took little interest in political affairs by citing their reason as "negligence". This was the third major factor. Few also listed the reason as being the cost of getting a physical Voter ID card.



*Fig. 2: Majority of the respondents had a Voter ID.*

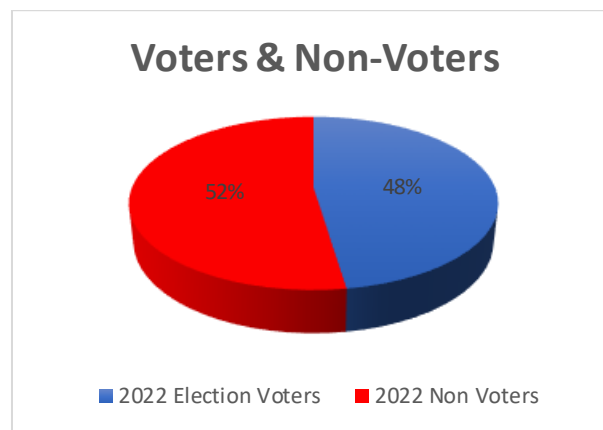
The 214 (Fig. 3) respondents, who did not have a Voter ID, were then asked whether they were aware they could register as a voter for free online by filling out Form 6 on ECI's website. 190 individuals said they were unaware, while only 24 said they knew but still found the procedure either time-consuming or they were not interested in voting.



*Fig. 3: Only 11% of the respondents knew they could apply for a Voter ID online.*

238 students voted in the Punjab State 2022 Election, while 262 did not (Fig. 4). The turnout amongst literate youth is a mere 48%. Ludhiana's turnout was 63.5%, lower than the state average. Young voters seem to take lesser interest in politics than elders in the district. But it is also necessary to take into consideration two limitations. First, respondents, although less than a fifth, were 18 years old,

suggesting they were not eligible to vote then. Second, most of the educational institutes where the survey was conducted offer undergraduate programs, wherein students graduate by the age of 23. There were very few respondents who were aged 24 and, perhaps, more likely to vote because most were employed qualifying the assumption that they were relatively more independent.



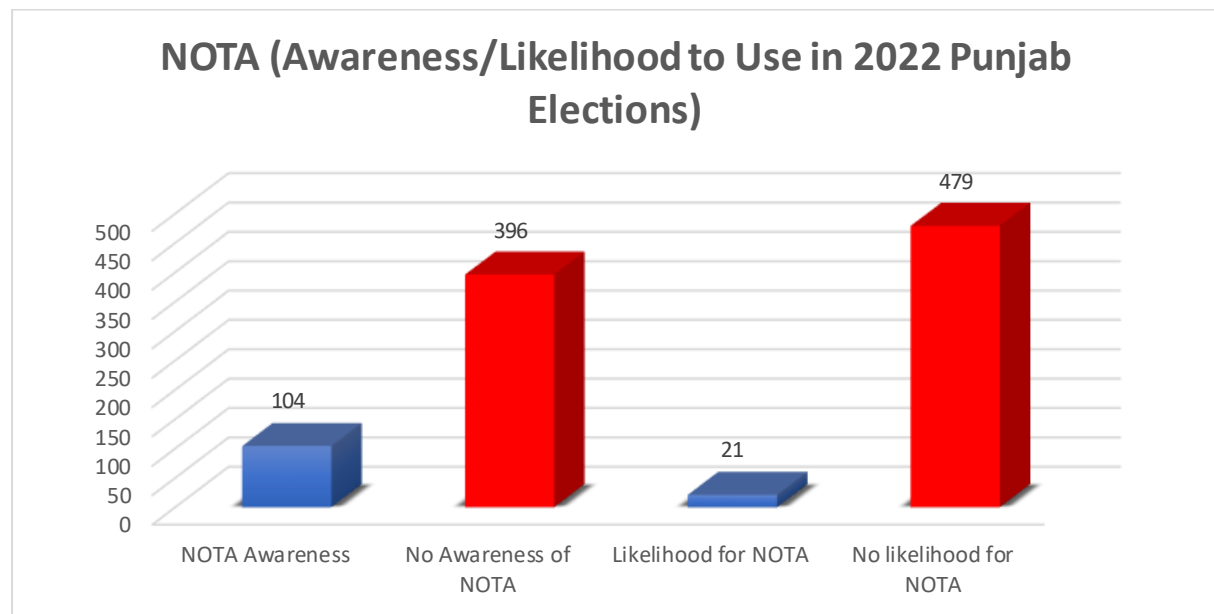
*Fig. 4: Less than half the respondents voted in the 2022 State Elections.*

Next, all students were asked whether they are aware of the NOTA (None Of The Above) system. This option allows voters to express their displeasure with the candidates running for office. It enables citizens to cast a negative ballot, expressing dissatisfaction with the options while still maintaining their right to participate in the democratic process. NOTA constituted 1.1% of the votes in the Lok Sabha Elections in 2014. Most of these votes were registered by young adults. In the 2022 Punjab Elections, the constituency of Ludhiana West received the highest percentage of NOTA votes (1.01%), but the exercise of this option was limited in the range between 0.50% to 0.74% in other Ludhiana constituencies.

Only 104 of the respondents knew about NOTA – 79% were not aware of this option (Fig. 5). To gauge whether the youth approved of candidates in their constituencies and/or approved of the parties contesting the assembly in general, they were asked whether they would have exercised or did exercise this option. Those who were not aware were informed about NOTA: “When you do not like any candidate and wish to record this fact; hence, you cast a negative vote.” Only 21 out of 500 respondents replied that they did or would have used NOTA. This suggests that 96% of respondents associated with a candidate or, nonetheless, did not feel the need to use NOTA because they believed it was a waste of a vote and/or there were viable contestants regardless of whether they endorsed them.



Many opt against the application of NOTA, because it has no effect on the result of an election. For instance, if majority votes are registered as NOTA, the actual candidate with the highest votes forms the government. Hence, it is more a symbolic gesture than a practical one.

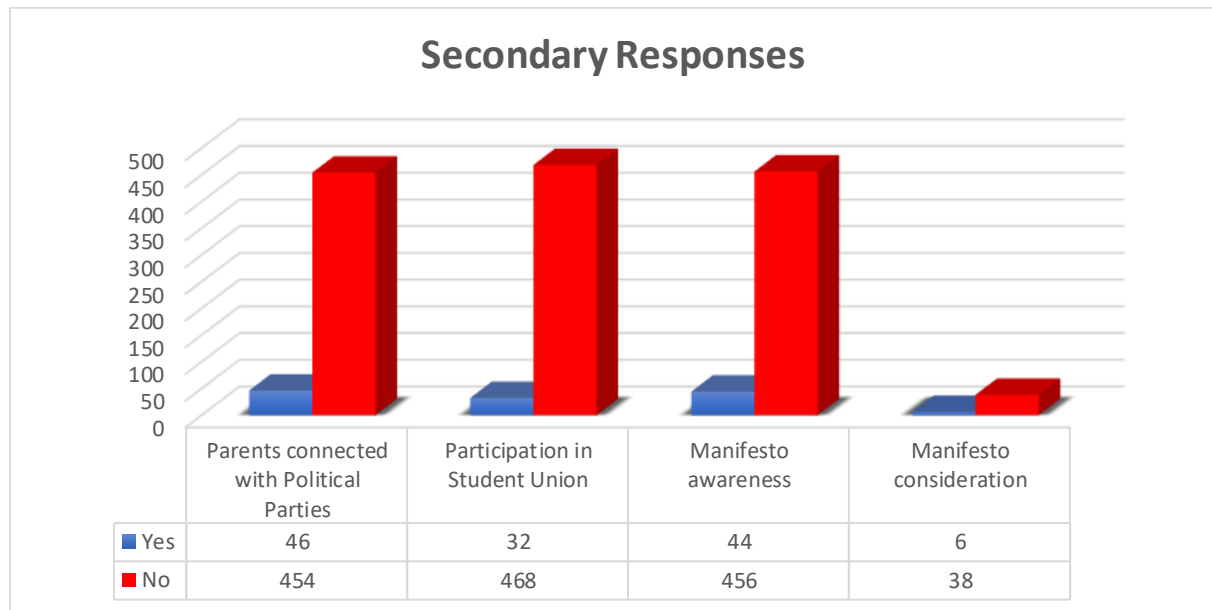


*Fig. 5: 79% of respondents were not aware of the NOTA system. After being made aware of the system only 4% said that they used/would have used it in the recent State Elections.*

Familial connections with political parties or participation in student unions, where voting for representatives also occurs, usually translate into higher political interests. Respondents were asked whether their parents had connections with political parties. The majority, 91%, said no. A similar percentage, 94% precisely, also said they were not part of any student unions or clubs (Fig. 6). There were only 46 individuals whose parents had connections with political parties, and 32 individuals were part of student unions. 25 students were part of both indicating a strong correlation that political activism/participation was higher among those whose parents were politically involved too. The findings reflected the aforementioned assumption that respondents who replied "Yes" to either category were more likely to vote. 35 students whose parents had connections voted (76%). 27 students who were part of student unions voted (77%). These proportions are considerably higher than the turnout of Ludhiana and Punjab.

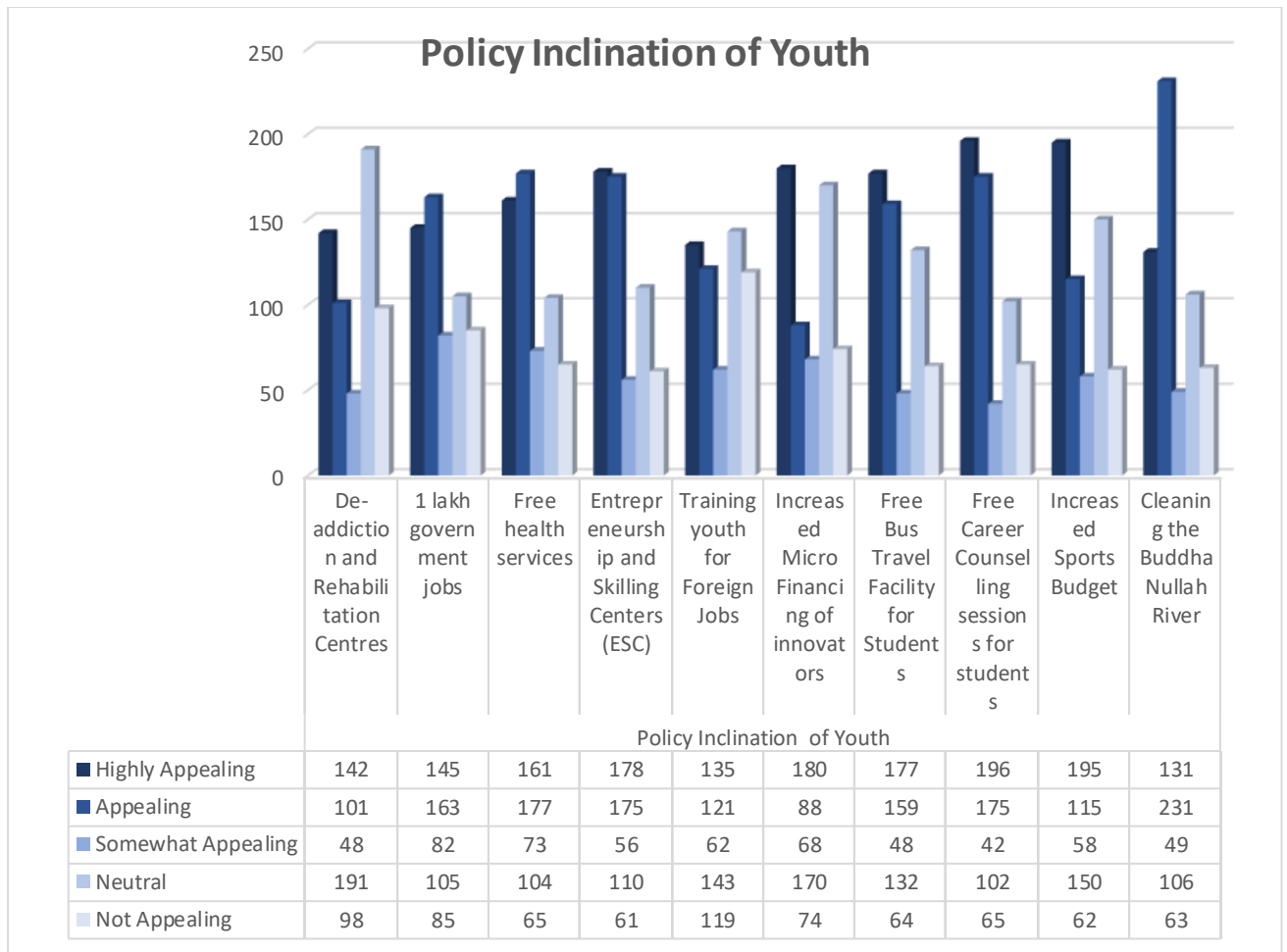
The 500 students were then asked whether they are aware political parties publish manifestoes a few months before elections to outline their prospective undertakings once in power (Fig. 6). 91% of respondents were not aware of the same. Only 44 students knew that political parties have manifestoes, while only 6 out of those respondents reviewed manifestoes of political parties. 99% of respondents did not take manifestoes into consideration whilst voting for political parties. This

supports Varun Gandhi's statement in Lok Sabha in 2022 that manifestoes are overlooked, despite having tremendous potential to convey objectives limpidly.



*Fig. 6: More than 90% of students were not part of a student union nor were their parents connected with political parties. A moderately strong correlation was found between those with connection to political parties or those part of unions with likelihood of voting. Only 44 respondents were aware parties had manifestoes, out of which only 6 read them.*

On a 5-Point Likert Scale, ten policies, which majorly overlapped between these political parties, were listed (Fig. 7). A psychometric scale was chosen to collect respondents' attitudes towards these proposed policies. Respondents were asked to categorize each policy as "Highly Appealing", "Appealing", "Somewhat Appealing", "Neutral", and "Not Appealing". To quantify this data in a structured and standardized manner, calculations were performed: i) Each of the five categories was attributed a value - (5) Highly Appealing; (4) Appealing; (3) Somewhat Appealing; (2) Neutral; and (1) Not Appealing. ii) A total score is calculated for each policy by multiplying the number of selections for each category by its respective value. For example, the calculations for the proposal for De-addiction and Rehabilitation Centres are  $142(5) + 101(4) + 48(3) + 191(2) + 98(1) = 1738$ . iii) The total scores were divided by the number of respondents. By dividing each total score by 500, the scaled values range between 1 and 5. The obtained policy scores are the average level of preference for each policy, where 1 represents the lowest preference, and 5 represents the highest preference.



*Fig. 7: A Likert scale of common proposals by parties ranked by respondents.*

The calculated policy scores are ranked in descending order in Table 1. This summarization allows cognition of which policies are regarded higher.

Rank	Proposed Policy	Policy Score
1	Free Career Counselling sessions for Students	4.150
2	Entrepreneurship and Skilling Centres	4.078
3	Free health services	4.010
4	Cleaning the Buddha Nullah River	4.002
5	Free Bus Travel Facility for Students	3.986
6	Increased Sports Budget	3.942
7	Increased microfinancing of innovators	3.740
8	1 lakh government jobs	3.836
9	Training youth for Foreign Jobs	3.500
10	Deaddiction and Rehabilitation Centres	3.476

*Table 1: Likert scale scores calculated.*

The results provide insights into the preferences of the educated youth in Ludhiana. With an average score of 4.150, Free Career Counselling sessions for Students emerged as the most appealing policy to

the respondents, closely followed by Entrepreneurship and Skilling Centres with an average score of 4.078, and then Free health services with an average score of 4.010. Environmental conservation by Cleaning the Buddha Nullah River received the fourth highest average score of 4.010. These results suggest that the youth in Ludhiana highly value policies that focus on job prospects and maintaining good health.

However, there was an unexpectedly low appeal to the policy of Deaddiction and Rehabilitation Centres, which obtained an average score of 3.476; given the well-documented problem of drug addiction, particularly among Punjab's youth, one may have predicted that this strategy would receive a lot of support. The minimal interest in this policy raises concerns about the lack of acknowledgment or reluctance to address the issue openly.

### **Post-data Collection Discussion with Other Stakeholders**

In this phase of understanding accumulation, an MLA from one of the constituencies and his political advisor were approached. With reference to the understanding built based on the collected data, the interview was conducted. The purpose of the interview was to determine to what degree the incumbent political party and youth are on the same wavelength regarding policies, and whether the results of the survey match the approach employed by the party to attract young voters. The interview was conducted on 23rd July 2023.



*MLA Kulwant Singh Sindhu from Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) from Ludhiana West (064) Constituency*

The MLA outlined his main objectives for aiding youth in Ludhiana and, consequently, his strategy to win their trust. Two prominent issues, he mentioned required utmost attention – drug addiction and youth unemployment – work hand-in-hand. He explained that mafia racket leaders lure unemployed youngsters by creating an impression that the job is easy and guarantees a good sum of money. He postulated that youngsters fell victim to this easy-going aura the mafia manufactured surrounding the job because of the lack of job opportunities and their desperation to earn a living. Consequently, he explained, they can get addicted to narcotics.

Currently, civil hospitals and NGOs offer counselling for addicts. Upon the inquiry why a need so indispensable has not been extended, for example, implemented in Aam Aadmi Clinics that provide "essential healthcare", the response from both was underwhelming: the suggestion was appreciated and followed by the advice that such ideas should be shared with to the State Health Minister.

When the political advisor was acquainted with the survey results regarding Ludhiana's youngsters' attitude towards this policy, he agreed on the need for greater acknowledgement. He also agreed that this is the biggest issue in Punjab.

The sports budget requires re-evaluation in Punjab. Kheda Wattan Punjabi Diyan, a regional sports competition has been launched for youth. Winners are awarded cash prizes on the same day, the political advisor said. Regarding infrastructure improvements, there is little to suggest concrete undertakings - only awards and job opportunities to winners to encourage them further; there was a suggestion the Punjab Sports Minister is attempting to resolve this. Much remains to be addressed to improve the quality of the competition by upgrading facilities and trainers.

Considering the development aspect, both concurred that improving quality and access to education was the most important. In accordance with the manifesto, IELTS and UPSC coaching centres on merit-based 100% scholarships were in the process of opening. A contradiction was found – offering training for foreign jobs meant losing valuable labour trained in Punjab at tax-payer expenses, whilst the manifesto listed policies aimed to strengthen Punjab's labour market. On this, the MLA pleaded with the youth not to reconsider moving abroad. Instead of spending the life earning of one's parents, he said, it was more advisable to stay abroad – and when the funds are not sufficient upon one's relocation abroad, they can resort to illicit means to meet ends spoiling the name of our country. He extrapolated that after they are in jail, they might suicide.

Both interviewees were informed of the survey results suggesting a lack of manifesto awareness and of the more diminutive portion that read through them. Both implored the public to go through manifestoes and keep updated with his political party's social media continuously. The MLA explained

that we must appreciate parties who deliver on the promises listed in their manifesto and condemn them when they are negligent or fail to deliver. The MLA said he found social media the most apt disseminator of information, an instrument to increase political awareness and reach out to voters. He remarked that digital media is the most effective way to attract voters. Most youth of Punjab have access to social media, yet the turnout among youth was relatively low: only 48% as per Fig. 4. The impact of digital media, perhaps, might not be that strong on youth, but on a different age-group. There was no implication of higher social media activity for the next elections to attract more youngsters.

Ludhiana has numerous requirements. The MLA and his advisor were asked how they draw up policy proposals. They outlined that the assistance of political experts being critical to the formulation and implementation of their policies. In fact, to obtain a broad understanding of the public's wants, hoardings have been set where individuals can WhatsApp problems – and potential solutions too. Lawyers finally review policies and may provide suggestions.

Finally, the MLA was asked to comment on the practicality of NOTA. He labelled it “dangerous” and emphasised the need to consider “ten times” before genuinely casting the vote. He clarified that he did not wish to condemn NOTA; his argument was not to “waste” your vote because it is incredibly important – think it through.

## **Conclusion**

The findings from the survey are notable. The prominence of female participants, likely attributed to the contribution from Khalsa College for Women, underscored a notable gender representation within the survey. The higher proportion of urban respondents correlated well with Ludhiana's predominantly urban landscape and its prevalence of institutions of higher education.

The possession of voter IDs by a substantial proportion of respondents underscored the effective endeavours undertaken by the Election Commission of India (ECI). However, obstacles like perceived time consumption and financial implications acted as deterrents, particularly affecting rural respondents. These findings highlighted the necessity for simplifying registration procedures and addressing financial concerns.

Awareness about online voter registration through Form 6 remained relatively limited, and youth voter turnout in the recent state election depicted a decrease, indicating the challenge in mobilizing young voters effectively.



The "None Of The Above" (NOTA) system garnered minimal attention, indicative of its symbolic rather than utilitarian role within the electoral process.

Intriguingly, policies associated with career counselling, skill enhancement, and healthcare emerged as particularly appealing to the respondents, mirroring their priorities and concerns. Nonetheless, the poor response towards policies addressing drug addiction raised questions about the acknowledgment and resolution of this pressing issue.

Future research can be conducted on a broader scope. A wider range of respondents can be surveyed and to have greater demographic representation LGBTQI communities can also be surveyed. The survey can be extended from educated youth to other young adults – the impact and view of illiterate youth and young migrants can be incorporated too. An alternate method of stratification of respondents can be applied i.e., by income groups. In future studies, more districts can be incorporated not only in the Malwa region but in the entirety of Punjab. Comparative district studies can also be conducted.

An assessment of the implementation and effectiveness of policies that received higher appeal among Ludhiana's educated youth can be conducted. The impact of these policies, whether they have produced the desired outcomes, and if they have influenced the voting behaviours and perceptions of young voters in the region can be evaluated. This analysis allows for the comprehension of the impact of parties on delivering promises and allows them to streamline their policies too.

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