

Elections in Chandigarh Union Territory: A Longer View with Focus on the 2024 Elections

Prof. Ashutosh Kumar¹

ABSTRACT

Election studies in India have focussed on the constituent states as the units of analysis for the discussion on electoral trends and outcomes. There has not been attempt to undertake constituency specific analysis. The Union Territory of Chandigarh, the capital of Punjab and Haryana, has been a Lok Sabha constituency since the reorganisation of Punjab in 1966. However, there has hardly been much focus on the study of the electoral politics of this small but significant constituency. The article presents a longer view of the parliamentary elections held in Chandigarh Union Territory since the first such election was held in 1967. After profiling the making of this “wholly new city” of post-colonial India, it mentions the significant trends, which have been visible in these elections, and finds continuity in the 2024 general elections. The discussion in the article suggests that Chandigarh has had its own specificity in electoral terms, be it the electoral issues or electoral choices, which makes it an outlier, when compared with the way electoral politics unfolds in Haryana and Punjab.

Key Words: *Chandigarh Union Territory, Parliamentary Elections, 2024 Election, Electoral Trends*

India, being a federal parliamentary democracy, consists of as many as twenty-eight constituent states and eight union territories. Large or small, they all have their own political specificities, which qualify them as autonomous electoral units. This has been especially so after the decline of the Congress party and the rise of the regional parties. The emergence of coalition governments both at the federal and at the state levels made the state “the relevant unit at which politics was conducted and was intelligible as well” (Yadav & Palshikar, 2006). Sifting through the election studies, one finds that the academic focus has been mostly on the constituent states even in an “all-India” analysis. Cross-state comparisons have also been attempted (Palshikar, 2013). Union territories except Delhi, however, have received scant attention

1. Professor, Department of Political Science, Panjab University, Chandigarh
Email: ashutoshchd@gmail.com

in election studies.¹ Also, constituency level studies have been missing in the academic writings on elections. Chandigarh Union Territory (Chandigarh hereafter) is no exception to it. This article makes an attempt to fill in this gap by discussing the long-term electoral trends and outcomes in the elections held in the single parliamentary constituency of Chandigarh. It then moves to focus on the 2024 Lok Sabha election in Chandigarh to discuss whether this particular election showed the similar trends or not.

PROFILING THE PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY

The parliamentary constituency has a space of 114 square kilometres. It currently has 6.59 lakh registered voters. The union territory is divided into the city and the villages. The city of Chandigarh, inaugurated in 1953 by the then President of India, was designed by Le Corbusier, a French architect. The city has the distinction of being the first wholly planned city of an independent India.² It stands out for being among a “a very few towns constructed entirely as a unit on virgin soil.” As a result, it was thought “possible to construct the town with a minimum of attachment with the past.”³ This “totally new city”, created on “a clean slate”, was built to serve the purpose of rebuilding the “lost identity of Punjab which had lost its capital to Lahore, at the time of partition and (also) to resettle the refugees who were coming from across the border” (Kalia, 1987). The new capital city of post-colonial Punjab was to “display an Indian modernity distinct from and free of the colonial version” (Khilnani, 1999). The city as such was viewed as “an expression of the nation’s faith in the future.”⁴ The uniqueness of the city was also in the fact that it was not planned to act as a satellite to existing large cities (New Delhi) or to subserve the needs of a large industry (Bhilai, Durgapur) but as a fully autonomous city, complete in all respects to serve the needs of its residents (D’Souza, 1976).

However, the city was not visualized to be an industrial or commercial hub like nearby older cities like Ludhiana or Jalandhar in the state of Punjab. The

1 The two special issues of *Economic and Political Weekly* have essays on the 2024 general elections. They either focus on specific states (Vol LIX (38), September 21, 2024) as units of analysis or takes up all-India analysis (Vol LIX (48), November 30, 2024). <https://www.epw.in/journal/2024/38>; <https://www.epw.in/journal/2024/48> (both accessed on 10 December, 2024).

2 Bhuvneshwar and Gandhi Nagar, the capital cities of the states of Odisha and Gujarat followed.

3 Pierre D. Jenneret, another French architect associated with the making of the city, quoted in Chandigarh Architectural Museum.

4 Nehru quoted in Khilnani, p.131.

city planned by Corbusier for a half a million people was originally intended to be “solely a seat of government”, to be inhabited by serving and retired civil servants, professionals, and a large class of their service providers, also mostly from the government sector (Sharma et al, 1999). It was only in the subsequent years that industrial areas catering to the ancillaries were added in the then remote eastern periphery of the city adjoining the villages. Apart from the secluded capitol complex, arrayed around a central square, which was to have the secretariat, assembly, high court, and the governor house, the city was to have a residential area originally divided in to thirty sectors. The hierarchy that pervades seemingly homogenous middle class in India was starkly reflected in the way the sectors were situated and the plots were numbered in the planned city. The low numbered northern sectors had the larger plots, to be inhabited by high-ranking bureaucrats, politicians and top professionals (mostly lawyers), whereas the high numbered southern sectors were for the middle-middle and lower middle class. The same pattern was visible within each sector also, the lower the number, the larger the plot. The original master plan of the city while obliterating the possibility of aggregation of a particular caste or religious group in one particular locality as happens in the old cities of India, did create a class division by making the income/status level as the criteria for distributing the housing plots (D’Souza, 1976). The city has expanded now to fifty-six sectors, but barring the new sectors, which have mostly three storied flats, this pattern remains visible in all the sectors. As Khilnani succinctly put it, “every Chandigarh address thus echoed fairly precise information about its owner’s standing in the bureaucratic and economic hierarchy” (Khilnani, 1999).

The left-over villages nestled within the city parameters form the colonies. These villages have remained intact as in the second and third phase of the making of the city, only agricultural lands were acquired due to villagers’ protest. There are still a few slums left in the UT, mostly on the periphery now. Many former slum dwellers have been allotted low-income flats by the administration on rent. The sectors have come up in phases as the city has grown. Sectors are inhabited by the middle classes, though in each sector there is a particular block having a segment that houses economically weaker people. The sectors and the plot size are markers of a resident’s status in this class-conscious city, as the older sectors having larger plots are populated by upper middle class/original settlers, whereas the new sectors are inhabited by the middle-middle class. The lower middle class live in the villages and urban slums nestled within the perimeter of the union territory, which are called colonies. Slums are inhabited by poor, mostly migrant labourers. The twenty-five colonies also have a sizeable number of migrants, many descendants of

the workers who came to build the city from different parts of India in the 1950s and did not return. Ironically, in the planned city, there was no space earmarked for the actual builders of the city; hence the slums came up in the then vacant spaces. There are still urban villages on the periphery of the city, but farmers have left farming, though they do rear milch cattle. Over the last six decades, there has been a continuous influx of migrant labour from economically poorer states. As a result, more than half of the electorates of the union territory now live in the colonies, villages, and slums.

CHANDIGARH ADMINISTRATION

Chandigarh, the first planned city of an Independent India, was originally built as the capital of post-partition Punjab, as mentioned above. It became the joint capital of Punjab and Haryana after the linguistic reorganisation of Punjab in 1966 and was also accorded the status of a union territory. An assembly constituency till then, it was upgraded as a parliamentary constituency. Chandigarh union territory does not have a legislative assembly. Since there is no legislative assembly, there is no representation of Chandigarh in Rajya Sabha. It has a municipal council, which has 35 elected members from as many wards. Nine members are nominated by the Chandigarh administration. Elections to the council are contested on party lines. The member of parliament (MP) from Chandigarh is the ex-officio member of the council. The mayor is elected every new year, voted by all the council members as well as the MP. The Chandigarh administration is headed by the chief administrator, who happens to be the ex-officio Governor of Punjab. The union territory, in the absence of an elected government, is administered by the chief administrator who is assisted by an advisor, invariably a senior civil servant from the AGMUT cadre, appointed by the centre on deputation for a fixed tenure. The administration is in effect run by the bureaucrats, coming on deputation to the city from the state cadres of Haryana and Punjab in a fixed ratio and also the ones belonging to AGMUT. Municipal Council has limited authority and is rendered ineffective due to factionalism even within the same party members.

ELECTIONS IN CHANDIGARH: TRENDS

A closer look at the electoral verdicts reveals several common trends. (Kumar, 2024) First, in fifteen Lok Sabha elections held so far in the union territory, the Congress has won eight times, whereas the Jana Sangh/BJP have won five times (**Table 1**). The Janata Party (Jana Sangh being a constituent) and Janata Dal candidates won in the 1980 and 1989 elections. All the winning

candidates have been from national parties. The only state party candidate to win ever was from the Lok Dal, which was then in alliance with the Janata Party, in the 1977 election. Only once, in the 1980 election, an independent candidate came second (**Table 2**). The electorates' preference for the national parties can be attributed to the non-provincial character of Chandigarh union territory (Chandigarh hereafter), which has people not only from the neighbouring states but also from faraway states. Also, Chandigarh sectors have an overwhelming presence of white-collar upper-caste-middle-class citizens, who invariably prefer a national party, as per poll surveys.

Second, Chandigarh, a small city but with a cosmopolitan character, invariably gets impacted by national issues and events. Despite being the capital city of Punjab and Haryana since 1966, the regional issues and party politics related to the two states have hardly had any visible impact. It is only the 'national' leaders and not the regional leaders who campaign, despite the fact that most of these state-level leaders reside in the city, many having their own houses. Also, being a modern city of the Nehruvian era, Chandigarh sectors have never witnessed elections being fought openly over divisive primordial issues like caste, religion or region. Even the colonies and slum politics, having large migrant population from Hindi speaking states, remain largely immune from caste politics. For them, it is more the effectiveness of the delivery of public goods and services by a particular party regime and also the connect with the party candidate that matters.

Third, scanning the electoral verdicts shows that the party, whose candidate has won in the union territory in a particular election, succeeded in forming the government on its own or in coalition at the federal level. The exceptions so far have been the 1967, 1999 and 2024 elections. Proclivity to vote for the party expected to form the government at the centre is largely due to the 'satellite' character of the politics and economy of Chandigarh. Being a central government-funded city, inhabited by numerous central government officials/professionals, centrally funded institutions, and administered by the centre, the middle-class voters tend to make a rational/pragmatic choice, to be on the right side of the winnable party at the centre.

Fourth, the candidates being set up by parties have invariably been connected with the city, either as its residents or having studied in the city's educational institutions or worked as a professional. Every successful contestant has had a connection with the city in some or other form. Even those who have lived in the city, then moved away to pursue their professional/political career, carry the burden of being labelled as an outsider.

Fifth, despite being the capital city of the two states whose governments are in perpetual contention over the status of the city or even about claiming more official spaces or key administrative positions in the Chandigarh administration for their state cadre officers, electorates in this city state appear to be living in secluded political space, and oblivious to the politics of Punjab and Haryana. Besides the national campaign issues, there are only local issues like the regularisation of the violation of building bylaws, the property tax rates, conversion of leasehold properties, drinking water supply, maintenance of parks, drainage systems, development in the colonies etc. that received much attention during the election. This may be partly due to the absence of a legislative assembly in Chandigarh like Puducherry, a long-term local demand.

THE 2024 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION

Dissecting the verdict in the 2024 elections showed that it confirmed the above trends, except the electoral outcome. This time also the main contest was also between the candidates put up by two national parties, namely the Congress and the BJP, though like in the past, the BSP did put up its own candidate also. The AAP, which had an impressive run in the 2014 elections, this time was backing up the Congress. Manish Tewari and Sanjay Tandon, the two candidates, respectively from the Congress and the BJP, had city connections, having houses in the city's older sectors. Both studied in the city schools and the university, and have been active in the city's student politics. Also, both candidates belong to families, which have been active in Chandigarh politics. Since Tewari had later moved to Delhi as a practising Supreme Court lawyer, he was dubbed as an outsider by his opponents, despite him repeatedly reminding everyone that he was born in the city unlike other winning candidates in the past. Same was true for his opponent. This tag of being an 'outsider' was one of the factors that was held against him earlier also when he wanted the party ticket in the last two elections from Chandigarh. He had refused to contest for any other seat in the 2014 election, citing his bad health. Pawan Bansal, a resident of the city and three times MP, got tickets both times. Tandon, who resides in the city and has been the BJP city head for ten years, had the advantage of being a 'city boy', an 'insider', claiming during his interviews to know thousands of city dwellers by name. Ironically, Tandon was also thwarted in his last two attempts to get the party ticket, as other faction leaders within his party opposed him. The factional dispute allowed Kirron Kher, an 'outsider', to get the party ticket though she also had the city connect, having studied in Panjab university.

Like in the past, the BJP tried to whip up support amongst the residents, like in other parts of the country, over national issues like corruption, dynastic parties, national security, India being the fifth-largest economy, abrogation of Article 370, Ram Mandir, uniform civil code, Vikshit Bharat, and about 'Modi guarantees' for the colonies and slums. Its national leaders like Yogi Aditya Nath and Amit Shah held the election meetings. Tandon also invoked the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, though unlike the last two elections he did not campaign in Chandigarh. Tandon in his campaign which was mostly in the form of small meetings, questioned Tewari's sincerity as a representative for frequently shifting his constituencies (Ludhiana and Anand Sahib), his lack of accessibility and perceived arrogance. Tewari, a more articulate and seasoned orator, being a former national spokesperson of the Congress, harped upon both the national and local issues. Holding a copy of the Indian constitution like Rahul Gandhi during his campaign meetings and city walks, again small ones, like in the past, he raised concern about the future of democracy and the need to safeguard the diversity of the country. He repeatedly raised the alleged tampering of votes in the recent election for Mayor. He also flagged his experience of being a two-time active member of the parliament and a union minister, contrasting it to the administrative and legislative inexperience of Tandon.

Tewari by winning the election created an upset, as there was a clear perception, whipped up by the media and the party itself, about Tandon winning parliamentary elections with an overwhelming majority. The urban aspirational middle classes/upper castes living in the sectors were expected to vote for the winning party, as had happened in the past. However, this did not happen. Tewari got significant votes from all the sectors, including the posh sectors to which he belongs having a house, and in many other middle and lower-middle class sectors, he had a lead over Tandon. In colonies and villages, Tewari was always expected to have an edge due to the rising prices, lack of employment opportunity, farmers' antipathy towards the BJP. The alliance with the AAP also helped, as in the 2014 elections, the party candidate Gul Panag had done exceedingly well though in the 2019 election, the party did not do well. More recently, in the local elections for the municipal council held in 2022, AAP emerged as the largest party. As for the deep factional politics that has always prevailed in the Chandigarh units of both the BJP and Congress, both contestants hardly received much support from other faction leaders of their own parties.

Finally, the most important factor that caused the defeat of Tandon was the lack of performance of the former BJP MP and councillors from his party. Chandigarh's electors living in sectors were certainly very unhappy about the overall decline of the city, once considered the cleanest and most liveable city in the country. The decline has been in terms of the failure to develop IT and tourism sectors, to attract corporate investment. Civic facilities also went down, reflected in traffic woes, erratic drinking water supply, drainage system breaking down. Bureaucratic inertia in execution of the smart city project and implementing the city master plan was also highlighted. He also supported the AAP agenda of making Chandigarh a city-state like Delhi, so that Chandigarh can have a legislative assembly. He also promised to provide free electricity for low-income groups. Tandon, being identified with the ruling dispensation, found it hard to defend the past ten years' dismal performance of the Chandigarh administration or his party's MP and councillors. Though to his credit, he lost only by a slender margin of 2504 votes. It would be interesting if Tewari, his party not being in power at the centre, would receive the centre's help. As an able parliamentarian, he is, however, expected to raise the issues related to Chandigarh in the Parliament and in other forums. In the 2024 sessions of the Parliament, for instance, he asked questions pertaining to the Panjab University, its long impending metro project, and also the concern about the rapid urbanisation in the Union Territory and its suburb township causing adverse impact on the ecological balance, biodiversity and level of water table in the "city beautiful" (MP Manish Tewari questions rapid urbanisation happening around Chandigarh in House, 2024).

CONCLUSION

The discussion in the article refers to the trends in the electoral politics of the Union Territory with focus on the 2024 elections. It shows that after becoming a separate administrative entity, Chandigarh has transformed into a distinct electoral entity, having its own specificities in terms of electoral issues and choices. Chandigarh stands as an outlier when compared with the nature and determinants of politics of Punjab and Haryana.

**Table: 1 Election Result for Lok Sabha Elections: Chandigarh Constituency
1967-2024**

| Year of Lok Sabha Election (Total Seat-01) | Voter Turn Out | Party Name | | | | | | | | | |
|--|----------------|-------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------|----------------|---------------------|----------------|-----------------------------|---------------|--|--|
| | | INC | | ABJS (1967-71)/ BJP (1984-2019) | | IND | | Others | | | |
| | | Seats contested/ won | Votes polled % | Seats contested/ won | Votes polled % | contestants/ won | Votes polled % | Seats contested/ won | Votes polled | | |
| 1967 | 65.36 | 1/0 | 23.04 | 1/1 | 48.70 | 6/0 | 2.56 | 1/0(SWA) | 20.87 | | |
| 1971 | 62.92 | 1/1 | 66.85 | 1/0 | 23.31 | 08/00 | 9.63 | - | - | | |
| 1977 | 67.40 | 1/0 | 28.37 | - | - | 7/0 | 3.18 | 1/1 (BLD) | 66.13 | | |
| 1980 | 63.93 | 1/1 | 49.65 | - | - | 35/00 | 33.02 | 1/1(JNP) 1/0 (INC(U)) | 9.30 7.22 | | |
| 1984 | 68.93 | 1/1 | 66.02 | 1/0 | 5.60 | 30/0 | 4.82 | 1/0 | 23.56 | | |
| 1989 | 65.67 | 1/0 | 40.22 | 1/0 | 12.26 | 19/0 | 3.26 | 01/01(JD) | 42.05 | | |
| 1991 | 57.84 | 1/1 | 35.86 | 1/0 | 28.80 | 46/0 | 4.12 | 1/0(JNP), 01/01 (BSP) | 23.48 4.71 | | |
| 1996 | 58.41 | 1/0 | 29.79 | 1/1 | 39.05 | 35/0 | 3.14 | 1/0 (BSP) 1/0 (SAP) | 4.10 17.59 | | |
| 1998 | 53.69 | 1/0 | 38.70 | 1/1 | 42.36 | 1/0 | 1.57 | 1/0 (SJP(R)) | 14.57 | | |
| 1999 | 48.35 | 1/1 | 47.00 | 1/0 | 45.07 | 10/0 | 3.15 | 01/01(BSP) | 2.75 | | |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|------|-------|-----|-------|-----|-------|------|------|--------------------------|---------------|
| 2004 | 51.14 | 1/1 | 52.06 | 1/0 | 35.22 | 10/0 | 3.42 | 1/0 (BSP), 1/0 (INLD) | 2.31, 6.61 |
| 2009 | 65.51 | 1/1 | 46.87 | 1/0 | 29.71 | 8/0 | 1.87 | 1/0 (BSP) | 17.88 |
| 2014 | 73.71 | 1/0 | 26.84 | 1/1 | 42.20 | 8/0 | 1.87 | 1/0 (AAP) 1/0 (BSP) | 23.97 3.51 |
| 2019 | 70.61 | 1/0 | 40.35 | 1/1 | 50.64 | 13/0 | 1.03 | 1/0(AAP) 1/0 (BSP) | 3.02 1.6 |
| 2024 | 67.98 | 1/1 | 48.22 | 1/0 | 47.67 | 16/0 | 2.62 | 1/0 (BSP) | 1.49 |

Source: Election Commission of India

Table 2: List of Winning and Runner Up candidates in Chandigarh (1967-2024)

| Year of the Election | Winning Candidate/Party | Runner up Candidate/ party |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1967 | Shrichand Goyal (Jana Sangh) | Amarnath Vidyalankar (Congress) |
| 1971 | Amarnath Vidyalankar (Congress) | Shrichand Goyal (Jana Sangh) |
| 1977 | Krishna Kant (Lok Dal) | Sat Pal (Congress) |
| 1980 | Jagan Nath Kaushal (Congress) | Ram Swarup (Independent) |
| 1984 | Jagan Nath Kaushal (Congress) | Harmohan Dhawan (Janata Party) |
| 1989 | Harmohan Dhawan (Janata Dal) | Jagan Nath Kaushal (Congress) |
| 1991 | Pawan Kumar Bansal (Congress) | Satyapal Jain (BJP) |
| 1996 | Satyapal Jain (BJP) | Pawan Kumar Bansal (Congress) |
| 1998 | Satyapal Jain (BJP) | Pawan Kumar Bansal (Congress) |
| 1999 | Pawan Kumar Bansal (Congress) | Krishan Lal Sharma (BJP) |
| 2004 | Pawan Kumar Bansal (Congress) | Satyapal Jain (BJP) |
| 2014 | Kirron Kher (BJP) | Pawan Kumar Bansal (Congress) |
| 2019 | Kirron Kher (BJP) | Pawan Kumar Bansal (Congress) |
| 2024 | Manish Tewari (Congress) | Sanjay Tandon (BJP) |

Source: Election Commission of India

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