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NORMAL AND DEVIATING VOTING PATTERNS IN ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS OF PUNJAB (1977-2002)

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Abstract

In some way each election is unique, therefore, spatial patterns of support for a party differ from one election to another. However, with all their idiosyncracies, electoral patterns do have common attributes which result in some correspondence between support patterns for a single party over time. This paper aims at identifying similarities and differences in spatial patterns of support for the Congress and Akali Dal parties in Assembly elections held during 1977 to 2002. For both the parties normal and deviating voting patterns have been identified. The data consist of assembly constituency wise vote percentages for the Congress and Akali Dal in 117 constituencies over six elections. The study uses the technique of factor analysis with oblique rotation. It has been observed that major political events cast their shadows on electoral politics of Punjab due to which the spatial patterns of support for both the parties undergo changes. The support patterns of the Congress Party are more volatile whereas the support patterns of the Akali Dal are more stable over time. The study predicts that the patterns of support for both the parties in ensuing 2007 election would show more correspondence with the 'normal vote' patterns of their parties.

Introduction

With its dominant religious majority of the Sikhs, with its regional party pre-eminence in the form of the Akali Dal having marked religious over-tones and committed to greater state autonomy, with its past history of vocal demand for a separate homeland for the Sikhs, with its two language problem and its location adjacent to the consistently hostile Pakistan, Punjab provides one of the most fascinating areal units for geographical study of elections in a federal state.

Politics in Punjab is not normally associated with an electoral process. Although elections have been held more or less regularly, interest in politics of Punjab has tended to focus on such events as the vigorous freedom movement before independence, wave of

communal killings during the partition, agitation for Punjabi Suba, the disowning of Punjabi language by a section of urban Hindu population in 1951 and 1981 census, Sikh-Nirankari clash, widespread alienation of the Sikh masses due to Operation Blue Star, Operation Woodrose, and the massacre of innocents in Delhi and elsewhere in 1984, Anandpur Sahib Resolution, and the politics of assassination and terrorism during 1980s and 1990s. These important political events and the electoral politics are intrinsically and intimately related and influence each other. For example, Punjab provides an excellent case where electoral politics acting as an instrument of integration brought back alienated Sikh masses back to the mainstream of the country due to Assembly, Municipal,

and Panchayat elections of 1992-93 and helped in restoring peace in strife-torn Punjab (Singh and Sharma, 1993). However, non-electoral political events listed above have also influenced the electoral politics under whose influence the spatial electoral patterns have changed over time. This paper aims at identifying the 'normal' and 'deviating' voting patterns of the Indian National Congress(henceforth referred to as Congress) and Shiromani Akali Dal (henceforth referred to as Akali Dal) in Assembly elections since 1977. Normal voting pattern is a dominant pattern, as such, its identification can be immensely helpful in planning electoral strategies in the ensuing Assembly elections which are scheduled to be held early next year.

Political Parties and Electoral Cleavages

The Punjab provides a classic example of 'Two-plus' party system which is less noticed though not entirely unknown in the literature on party systems (Yadav and Palshiker, 2003). It involves a multi-party competition with two principal actors and one secondary actor. In Punjab politics, the Congress and the Akali Dal are the two major parties and main contenders for power and the Bhartiya Janata Party (henceforth referred to as BJP) plays the secondary role. This is not quite a triangular contest, for the BJP can not offer competition in all parts of the state

or among all sections of society and has entered into an alliance with the Akali Dal since 1997 Assembly elections. In terms of per cent votes polled and seats won, the congress is a bigger party as compared to the Akali Dal. However, both the parties emerged victorious three times each out of six elections under study (Table 1).

In Punjab, after independence, the Congress organization was initially the weakest in India (Nijjar, 1977). The reason was that unlike elsewhere in India, it had not been the main political force during the pre-independence period (Brass, 1975A). However, the party quickly made up and has been off and on in power ever since. The Congress was not a popular party before reorganization of Punjab and was only the second preference of most of the voters (Nayar, 1966). As per the assessment of former Governor of Punjab, the party in the state "is mistrusted the most; even hated" (Mukarji, 1992). Although the party boasts of its secular credentials but during turbulent years of Punjab problem, the party "has been successful in organizing Punjabi Hindus along communal lines under its hegemony (Gill and Singhal, 1984).

The Akali Dal was formed on December 14, 1920 during the struggle for the control of Gurudwaras. During the

Table 1
Punjab: Per cent Votes polled and Seats won by Congress, Akali Dal and BJP in Assembly Elections (1977-2002).

Election Year	INC		SAD		BJP	
	% Votes	% Seats	% Votes	% Seats	% Votes	% Seats
1977	33.6	14.5	31.4	49.6	—	—
1980	45.2	53.8	26.9	31.6	6.5	0.9
1985	37.9	27.4	38.0	62.4	5.0	5.1
1992	43.7	74.4	—	—	16.6	5.1
1997	26.6	12.0	37.6	64.1	8.3	15.4
2002	36.5	53.0	30.5	35.0	5.7	2.6

struggle for independence, Akali Dal represented the Sikh community and pressed for a separate Sikh State. After 1947, the demand changed to one for a separate Punjabi Suba within the Indian federation. Ever since the Punjabi Suba demand was conceded in 1966, the party has stood for greater state autonomy almost bordering on a confederal relationship with the Centre. The Akali Dal has a theo-political ideology. "In its quest for political power, it was perhaps natural for the Akali Dal to project itself from its very inception, as the political arm of the Panth with the articulation, defence and consolidation of a separate Sikh identity, as distinct from a Punjabi identity, as its principal political objective" (Bombwall, 1986).

In Punjab, the Congress party and the Akali Dal have subscribed to contradictory and mutually exclusive strategies of conflict management in their inter-party and intra-party behaviour (Sharma, 1986). The Akali Dal is accommodative in inter-party relations, while defusionist in regard to intra-Akali relations. It implies that in intra-party relations the Akali Dal does not tolerate dissent and tries to defuse the rival factions instead of accommodating them. In inter-party relations, as far as possible, the party adopts the strategy of accommodating non-congress political parties (especially the Jana Sangh/ BJP) in the state. In sharp contrast to it the Congress is accommodative in intra-party relations and defusionist in inter-party relations. The Congress has always been a divided house but the party has successfully accommodated competing factional interests within the party. In inter-party relations, the Congress acts deliberately to erode and undermine the support bases of other political parties and does not accommodate them. Beside outlining the normal and deviating voting patterns of the Congress and the Akali Dal in

Punjab in Assembly elections since 1977, this paper is also concerned to show that different strategies of inter-party relations adopted by two parties are reflected in their voting patterns.

Religious cleavage is the most important in the electoral politics of Punjab (Brass, 1975B). This cleavage was further sharpened by the linguistic controversy when some Hindus of Punjab disowned the Punjabi language and got registered Hindi as their mother-tongue in 1951 and 1981 census. Disowning of Punjabi language by Hindus resulted in laying exclusive claim by the Sikhs on Punjabi language (Singh, 1984). "By disowning the Punjabi language they (Hindus) made it the language of the Sikhs and communalized the very issue of language. This was later used by the Sikh communalists to equate Punjabi culture to Sikh culture (Gill and Singhal, 1984, p.604). Bomwall (1986,) in an opening line of his article paints the true picture of communal tensions prevailing in Punjab during mid 1980s. He quotes an intellectual of Punjab that "There are no Punjabis in Punjab today; there are only Sikhs and Hindus."

However, the religious cleavage does not guide the electoral politics always. Dharni (1978) points out, that "the religious cleavage in Punjab was like the visible part of the iceberg", "a mere facade" for social and economic cleavages. The basic cleavages were "between the agriculturists and non-agriculturists, feudal landed interests and incipient capitalists, who further coincided with rural *verses* urban, urban caste Hindus *verses* rural dominant castes; and finally weak class conflict between the landlord and tenant, but a stronger conflict between the peasant and finance capitalist." The dominance of different cleavages at different times get reflected in the voting patterns of the Congress and the Akali Dal Parties.

The concept of the Normal Vote

The concept of the normal vote in electoral studies was introduced by Converse (1966). This concept suggests that the pattern of voting can be divided into two parts: (i) the normal or expected baseline segment, all other things being equal; and (2) deviations from that norm, reflecting the circumstance of a particular election. The normal vote thus constitutes the benchmark from which to compare changes in the voting behaviour of electoral cleavages in a geographical subdivision. Normal voting pattern is also the pattern which has maximum chances of its emergence in future elections. Thus, the normal voting patterns of different political parties can provide valuable clues to the leaders of parties to evolve suitable strategies for winning future elections.

Normal voting pattern is a measure of spatial stability of electoral patterns over time. By this is meant the extent to which the territorial support bases of the main parties are consistent over a number of elections. A low level of consistency would refer to a completely fluid or patternless situation where no party possesses a secure territorial base and the location of each party's successes are random. At the opposite extreme, a high level of consistency would be found if the territorial support bases of the parties are clearly and firmly delimited, so that no election produces large shifts of votes. Middle levels would include situations where parties while having certain relatively secure areas are in others either losing ground to rivals or gaining territory at others' expense.

Consistency here relates solely to spatial distributions of strength and not to overall strength. Thus a party might obtain a consistent percentage vote share in two successive elections, but its level of consistency would be described low if the spatial distribution of its support has

changed drastically between the two elections, losing badly in previously strong areas and gaining in places where it has been weak. Similarly, it would be a situation of high consistency if a party suffered a drastic fall in overall percentage vote-share so long as the spatial distribution of votes in constituencies was little altered. In other words, we are not measuring a party's general success or failure: a party which is growing rapidly in overall support may be doing so by merely consolidating old areas, by keeping old ones and adding some others or by losing old areas but gaining more new ones; the forms of these variations are relevant to the consistency level which could be, respectively, high, middle and low.

The present exercise examines how far the distribution of votes of a party in one election follows the distribution in the preceding election. The parties with well-defined socio-economic bases show up well in terms of spatial support consistency. In Punjab, the Akali Dal is likely to have high consistency whereas the Congress Party whose strongholds are poorly determined by socio-economic indicators is unlikely to show great consistency.

Data and Methodology

The data consist of constituency-wise percentage vote for the Congress and the Akali Dal parties for 117 constituencies (Fig. 1) since 1977 election. The matrix of vote percentages is subjected to a common factor analysis and the factors are rotated obliquely. Number of factors are chosen to ensure that all possible patterns that relate to at least one election are identified. Each factor represents a geographical pattern of voting across constituencies that is to be found in one or more elections.

The relative size of the first eigenvalue is a measure of consistency of electoral patterns. If there is one

dominant pattern to the voting, then there will be one dominant eigenvalue incorporating all the common variations in the election data. The importance of each pattern (factor) at each election is given by its factor loading which is a correlation coefficient between the factor pattern across constituencies and votes for that particular election across constituencies. The square of the loading indicates the degree to which the factor subsumes or replaces an original variable. The importance of patterns over time can be shown as factor profiles. These profiles are the main results of this methodology and they are shown for the 1977-2002 analysis of both the Congress performance and the Akali Dal performance in Punjab Assembly elections in Figs.2 and 3. This methodology has been widely used by western electoral geographers to discern epochs of voting and electoral regions (Archer, J.C. et al. 1985, 1988; Webster, 1996). However in India, only limited use of this technique has been made by geographers (Sharma and Chand, 2004).

The factor scores for the constituency level analysis were generated for the normal and deviating voting patterns. These scores were divided into quartiles and mapped. The reason for using quartiles for mapping is based on the fact that this study is concerned with outlining the changes in the electoral patterns over time and is not concerned with the overall strengths of the parties.

Patterns of the Congress Party Support

The two oblique factors of the Congress Party account for slightly over 60 per cent of the total geographical variance generated by the voting for the Congress sponsored candidates at Assembly constituency scale from 1977 to 2002. The first factor which has been named normal voting pattern explains over 41 per cent of the variance and the remaining over 19 per cent is explained by the

second factor which has been named deviating pattern. The proportions of variance explained are not high, indicating volatile nature of Congress support in Punjab Assembly Elections (Table 2)

Table 2
Punjab: Factor Matrix of the Congress Voting (1977-2002)

Election	Factor I (Normal Vote)	Factor II (Deviating Vote)
1977	0.72871	0.04654
1980	0.72015	-0.06175
1985	0.75635	-0.08216
1992	-0.16789	0.85733
1997	0.17644	0.74817
2002	0.60649	0.43582
Eigenvalue	2.46930	1.16148
Per cent	41.2	19.4
Variance		

The normal voting pattern is closely associated with first three elections for which the factor loadings are consistently high. This pattern explains more than 50 per cent of the total spatial variation in each case for these three elections. Assembly constituencies of Hoshiarpur, Ludhiana, Ferozepur and Gurdaspur districts recorded high support for the party during these three elections. On the other hand constituencies of Faridkot, Bhatinda, Moga and Mansa districts opposed the Congress Party (Fig. 4).

The normal voting pattern comes to an abrupt end in 1992 which has a weak negative loading on this factor. This election was held in unusual circumstances. Seven factions of the Akali Dal boycotted the Assembly election. As such, the real contest in Punjab was not among the various parties in the electoral fray, but between them and the groups which were boycotting the elections. The voting pattern of 1992 Assembly election registered major change with reverse in pattern; the constituencies of Hoshiarpur and

Ferozepur districts which used to give overwhelming support to the Congress recorded the lowest proportions of votes for the party. Amritsar, Faridkot and Fatehgarh Sahib districts, which usually are opponents of the Congress Party recorded the highest proportions of votes for the party. The reverse in voting pattern in 1992 does not imply that the number of votes for the Congress Party declined in Hoshiarpur and Ferozepur districts and the number of votes increased for the party in Amritsar and Faridkot districts. Contrary to it, the number of votes for the Congress were still higher in Hoshiarpur and Ferozepur districts, but since these districts had registered higher turn-out with higher number of contestants as compared to Amritsar and Faridkot districts, the proportions of votes for the Congress were lower.

The 1997 electoral pattern also does not conform with the normal vote pattern, however, the loading on normal vote pattern has become weak positive. This election was held in Punjab when peace had returned and the state as a whole recorded 68.7 per cent turn out which is the highest for any election out of the six elections included in this study. The normal circumstances and high turn-out could not reinstate the normal pattern of voting for the Congress Party. Following Key's famous theory of critical election, an eminent political scientist of Punjab proclaimed that 1997 election was "critical election" (Verma, 2002). Key (1955) has defined critical election as the one which results in "a more or less durable realignment of party loyalties". Key has further clarified that every election has the effect of creating lasting party loyalties in some individual voters, but it is "not often that the number so affected is so great as to create a sharp realignment." The electoral data of Punjab does not support the thesis of 1997

election as critical election. In fact, the data support persistence of deviating trend with some signs of drift towards normal vote pattern. The 2002 Assembly elections can be safely termed as reinstating election with higher loading on normal voting pattern. The constituencies of Ferozepur and Ludhiana districts which have given high support to the party in first three elections and discontinued the support in next two elections, reappeared as major supporters of the party. On the other hand the constituencies of Faridkot, Bhatinda, and Fatehgarh Sahib districts which recorded high support for the party in 1992 and 1997 elections again became areas of low support for the party.

The Assembly elections of 1977, 1980, and 1985 have extremely low loadings on Factor II (Fig. 2) showing no signs of correspondence between deviating vote pattern for the party and support patterns for the party in these three elections. However, the patterns of supports for the party in 1992 and 1997 elections closely correspond with deviating pattern with high loadings on this factor. The deviating pattern exhibits high support for the party in areas which normally do not support this party and vice versa (Fig.5). However the strengths of loadings are consistently decreasing over elections and the 2002 election has higher loading on normal vote factor than the deviating vote factor (Table 2). It can be predicted with confidence that in the ensuing election the normal vote pattern would be further strengthened and that the deviating pattern would get weakened.

Patterns of the Akali Dal Support

The two oblique factors explain over eighty two per cent of the total variance of the support for Akali Dal party in five elections. The first factor alone explains as high as over two third of the total variance (Table 3). The high eigenvalue of the first factor is indicative of high

consistency in the spatial patterns of support for the Akali Dal over different elections.

Table 3
Punjab: Factor Matrix of the Akali Dal Voting (1977-2002)

Election	Factor I (Normal Vote)	Factor II (Deviating Vote)
1977	0.04509	0.87652
1980	-0.02611	0.93554
1985	0.57271	0.36385
1997	0.94344	-0.12861
2002	0.85807	0.11391
Eigenvalue	3.36555	0.75630
Per cent	67.3	15.1
Variance		

The 1977 and 1980 elections have weak loadings on the normal vote factor and are thus not represented by this factor. However, the next three factors have high loadings on this factor and the 1997 and 2002 elections have strong correlation with this factor. These are the two elections in which the Akali Dal contested election in alliance with the BJP. In fact, in terms of number of seats won the 1997 election registered the biggest victory for the Akali Dal and the party secured near two-third seats on it's own in the Assembly. However, the Akali Dal- BJP victory in this election is interesting principally not for its scale but for its content. The fundamental premise, albeit an unstated one, of the Akali Dal-BJP platform is the notion that Punjab consists of two vertically divided religious communities. These communities see the Akali Dal- BJP alliance as Sikh-Hindu partnership. In 1997 and subsequent election, both the parties mellowed down their approaches towards communal issues. In Akali Dal the more fundamentalist elements are marginalised and isolated. The BJP made number of strategic concessions including disowning its traditional opposition to the primacy of the Punjabi language in the state and

remaining quite on its opposition to the Anandpur Sahib Resolution.

The constituencies of Amritsar, Moga, Faridkot, Mukatsar, Bhatinda, and Mansa by and large supported the Akali Dal candidates, and the constituencies with low support were scattered over the districts of Hoshiarpur, Firozepur, Jallander and Gurdaspur districts (Fig. 6).

The second factor in the matrix shows deviant pattern which represents the Akali support in 1977 and 1980 elections (Fig.3). In both these elections constituencies of Kapurthala and Fatehgarh Sahib districts had also recorded high support for the party. The support for the party declined in these areas in subsequent elections. However, the biggest gain for the party in the recent elections was in Amritsar district from where the party was getting overwhelming support (Fig. 7). The deviant pattern of the Akali Dal is not important statistically because it explains only 15 per cent of the variance in five patterns. The Akali Dal is again planning to contest next election in alliance with the BJP, therefore, no hazard is involved in predicting the emergence of voting pattern which is likely to have very close correspondence with normal vote pattern for the party.

Conclusion

The study period of this paper has seen intense non-electoral political events with far reaching consequences. Support patterns of the Congress Party and Akali Dal have responded to these political events and have registered perceptible changes in the spatial patterns of support.

The patterns of support of the Congress Party in Punjab are more volatile. The normal vote pattern of the party explains 41 per cent of the total variance in the patterns of support for the party in six elections. The first three elections from 1977 to 1985 and the 2002 election have high loadings on this factor. The support

patterns of the Congress Party in these four elections show close correspondence with normal vote pattern. The 1992 Assembly election marks the abrupt end of the normal pattern and thus gives birth to new pattern which has been named deviant pattern of support for the Congress Party. The support patterns of the party during 1992 and 1997 elections show correspondence with the deviant pattern. However, the deviant pattern of support for the Congress has weakened and the normal pattern is gaining strength over time.

The patterns of support of the Akali Dal exhibit more territorial consistency. The first factor which has been named normal vote of the Akali Dal alone explains as high as over two-third of the total variance in voting patterns in five elections. High level of spatial consistency of the party is indicative of well defined socio-economic base of the party. The 1997 and 2002 elections have very strong loadings on this factor implying strong correspondence between normal pattern of support for the party and support patterns during these two elections. The 1977 and 1980 elections are represented by the deviant vote pattern. Both these elections show appreciable similarities between the support patterns of the Akali Dal and the deviant pattern.

It can be safely predicted that normal vote patterns of both the parties would emerge stronger in the ensuing Assembly elections. This prediction is based on the trend in strengths of factor loadings on normal and deviating patterns of both the parties.

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Fig. 1

NORMAL AND DEVIATING VOTING PATTERN OF CONGRESS PARTY IN PUNJAB: 1977-2002

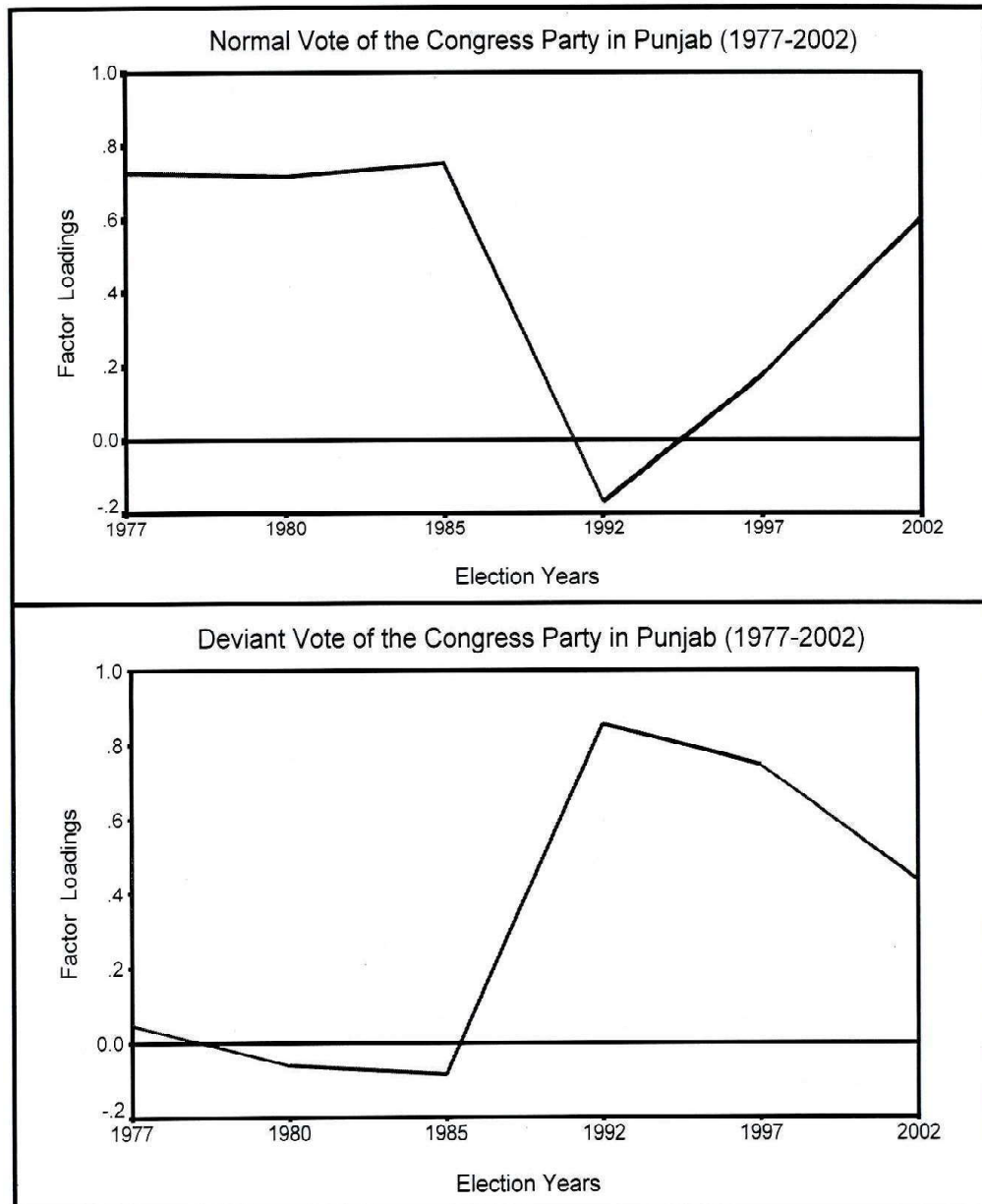


Fig. 2

**NORMAL AND DEVIATING VOTING PATTERN OF AKALI DAL
PARTY IN PUNJAB: 1977-2002**

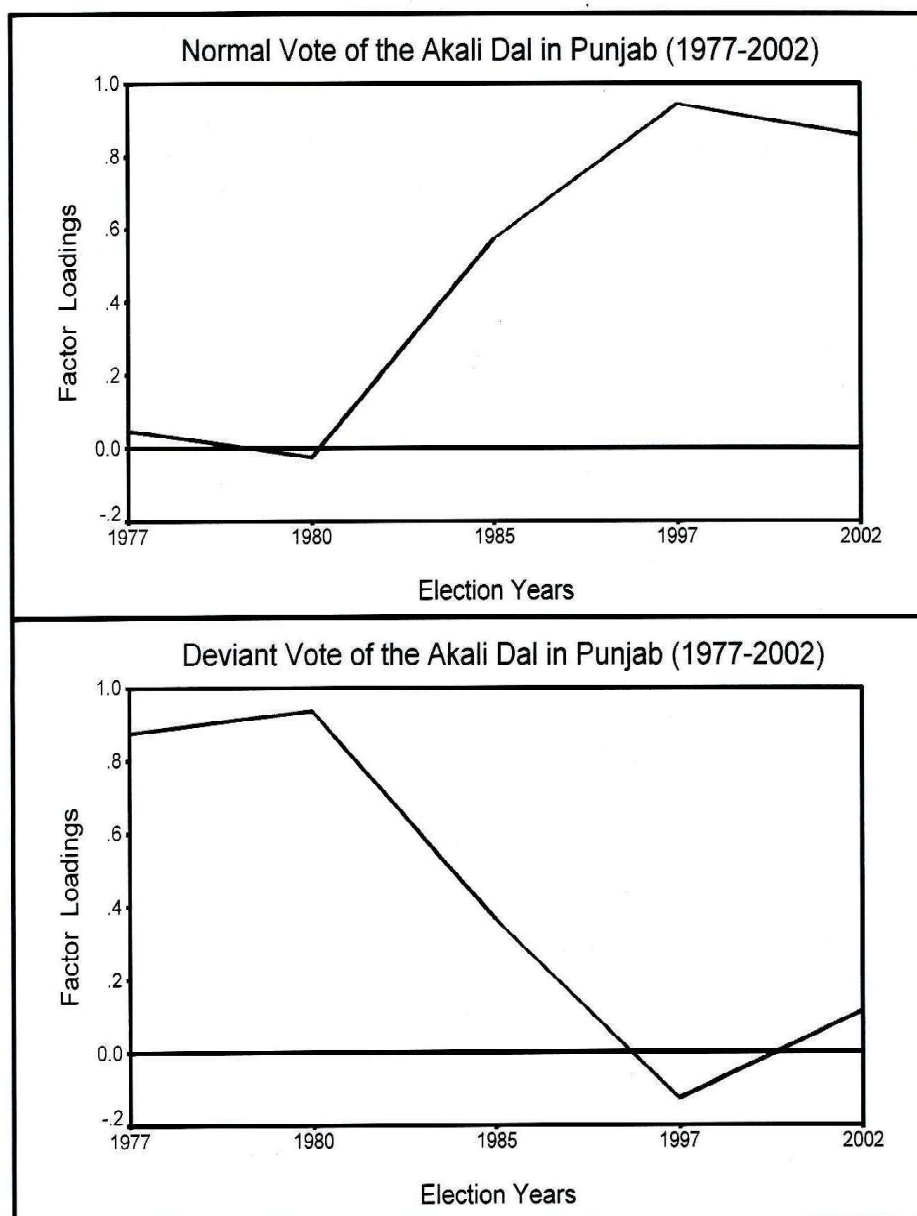


Fig. 3

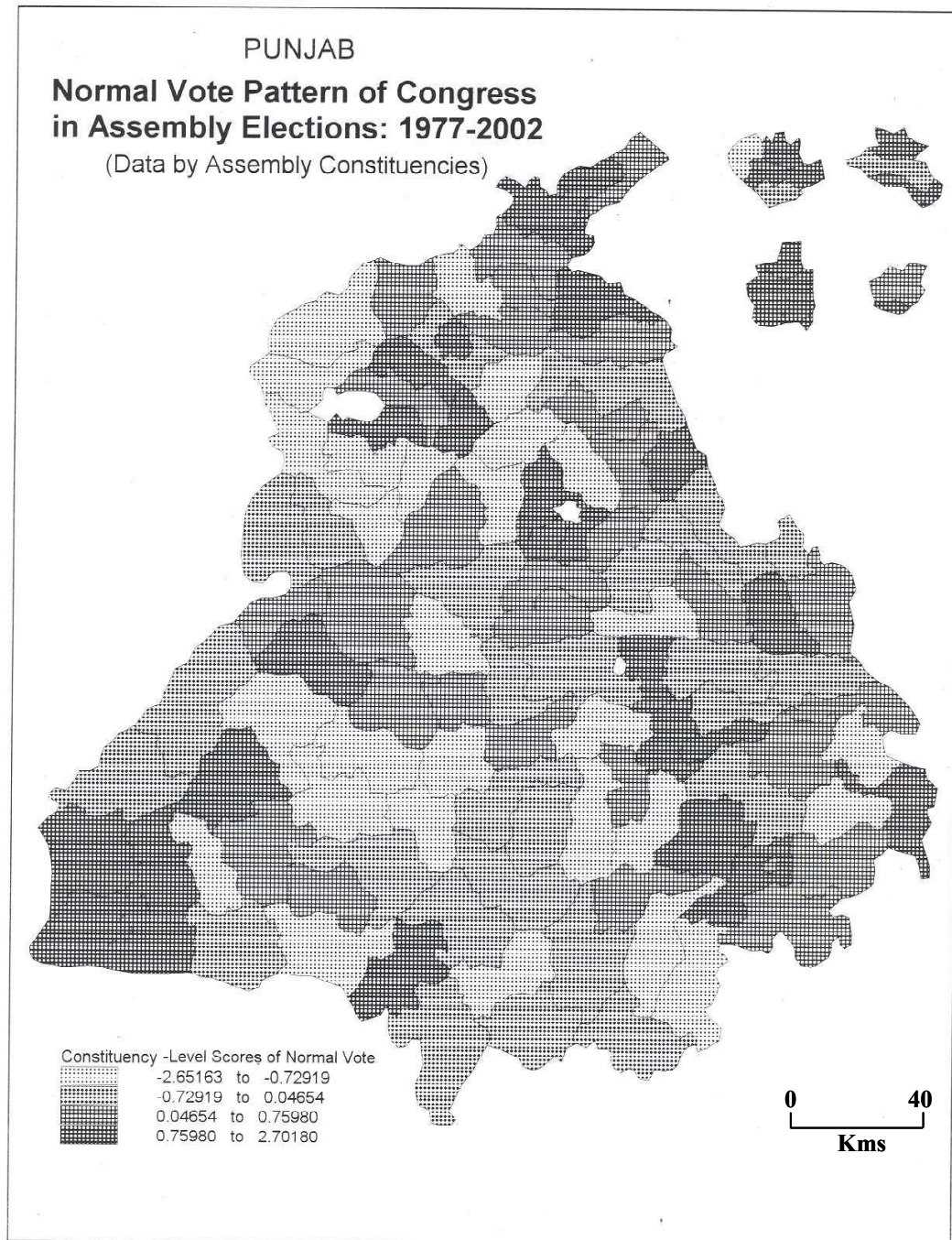


Fig. 4

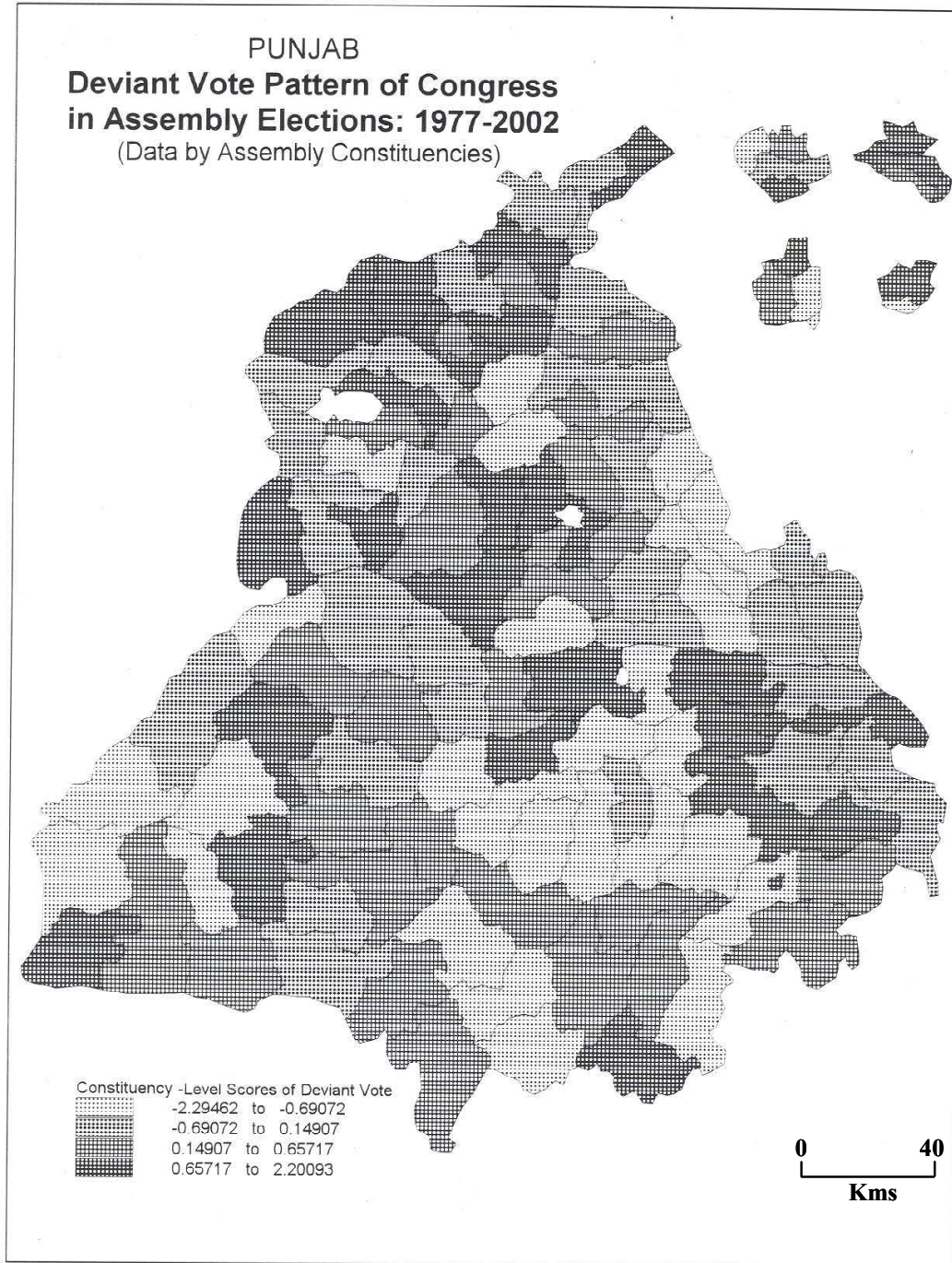


Fig. 5

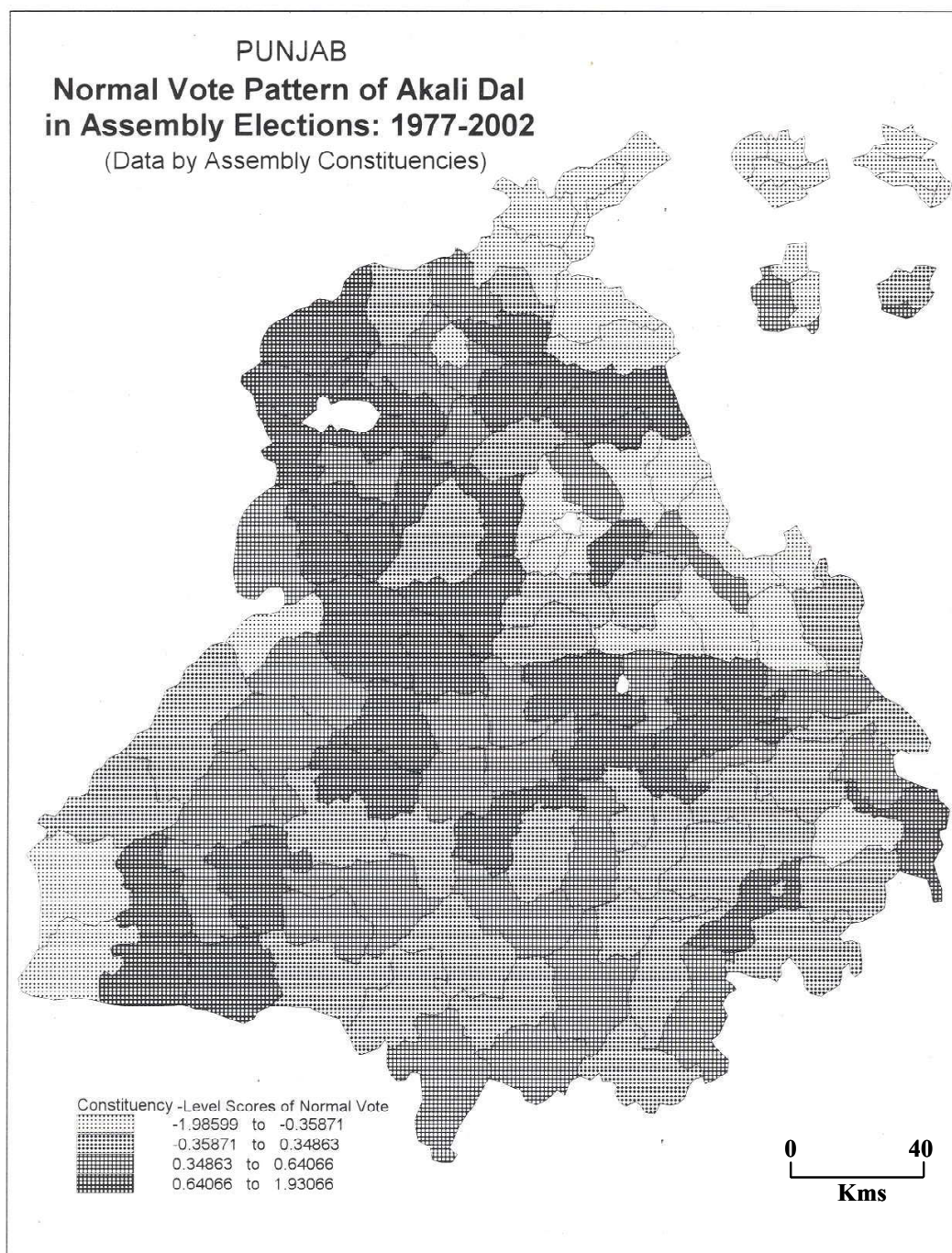
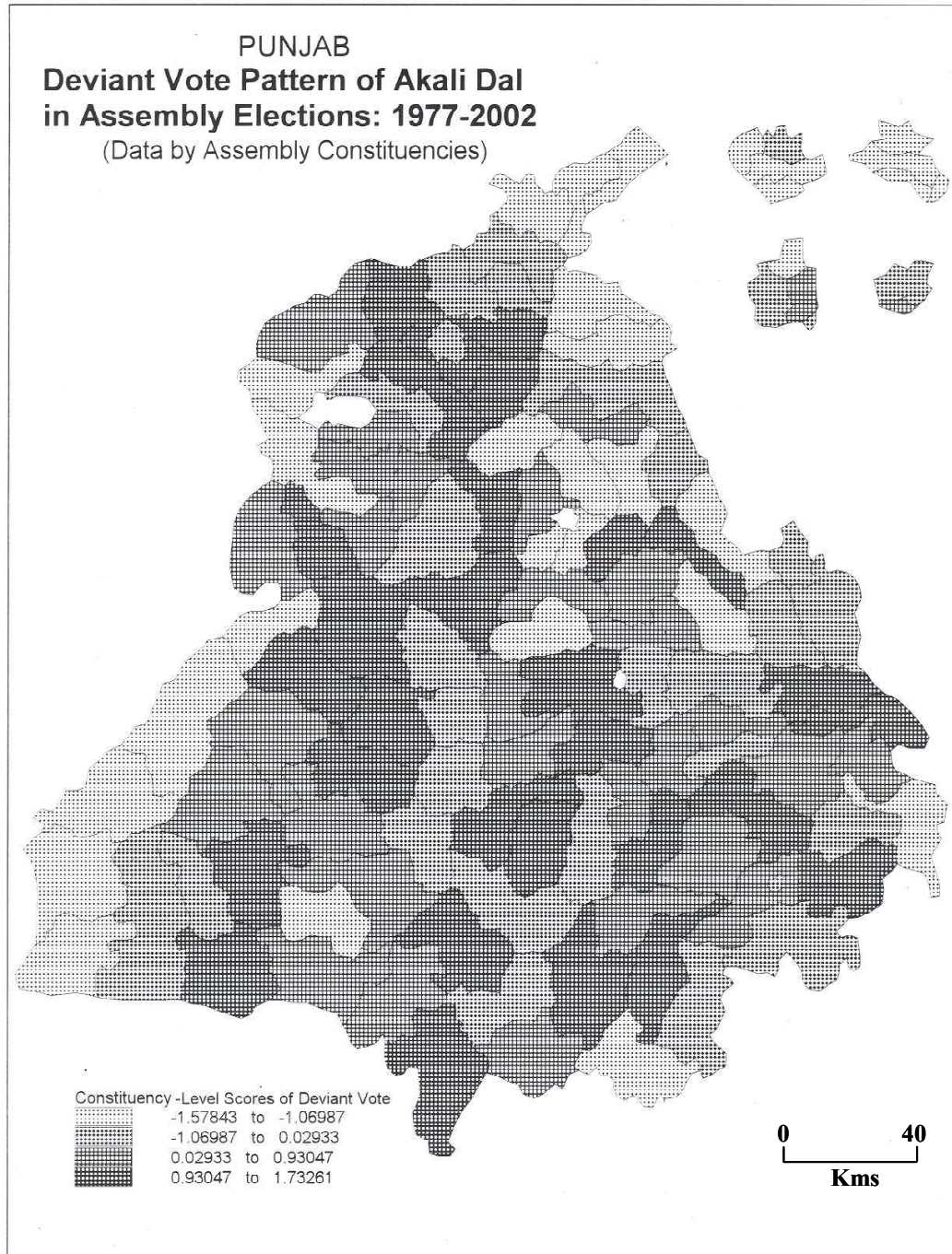


Fig. 6

**Fig. 7**