

SOCIAL ECOLOGY OF THE CONGRESS PARTY VOTE IN HIMACHAL PRADESH : ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS (1982-1990).

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ABSTRACT: The paper presents an ecological analysis of areal support of the Congress party in elections to the state assembly of 1982, 1985 and 1990 in Himachal Pradesh. Assembly constituency wise spatial patterns of electoral support for the party have been mapped. To facilitate the analysis of social-ecology, a set of nineteen variables, - factor analyzed into six contexts, - have been selected. Attempt has also been made to measure the degree to which the factor contexts explain the vote variance of the Congress party by the method of regression analysis.

CONGRESS PARTY IN HIMACHAL PRADESH

The Congress party holds the centrestage of Himachal Pradesh politics. In the initial stages, when Himachal Pradesh was a part of the Greater Punjab, organizational growth of the Congress remained slow. However, with the conversion of Praja Mandals into Congress Committees, the sphere of party's activity widened. In fact, during the course of party building in the state "....the Praja Mandals gradually came to be woven into the fabric of one organization, namely, the Himalayan Hill State's Regional Council. This organization became the basis for raising the superstructure of the party system of Himachal Pradesh. The transformation of the organization into Himachal Pradesh Congress Committee came about in May-June 1948..." (Sharma, 1977, p. 247).

PRAJA MANDALS AND THE CONGRESS

Praja Mandals in the hill state of Himachal Pradesh were designed with an object of organizing the people with a single political organization. Under the auspices of these organizations the residents of different erstwhile princely areal units were welded together.

In Himachal Pradesh, Prior to the Praja Mandal movements, there were many socio-cultural organizations which undertook to launch campaigns to eradicate social evils like untouchability, child marriage, problem of widow re-marriage, and *begar* system (a system of rendering services without any material benefit) which partially succeeded in their objectives. But more encouraging work in the field of mass awareness and social upliftment was undertaken by the Praja Mandals, the first of which the " Himalaya

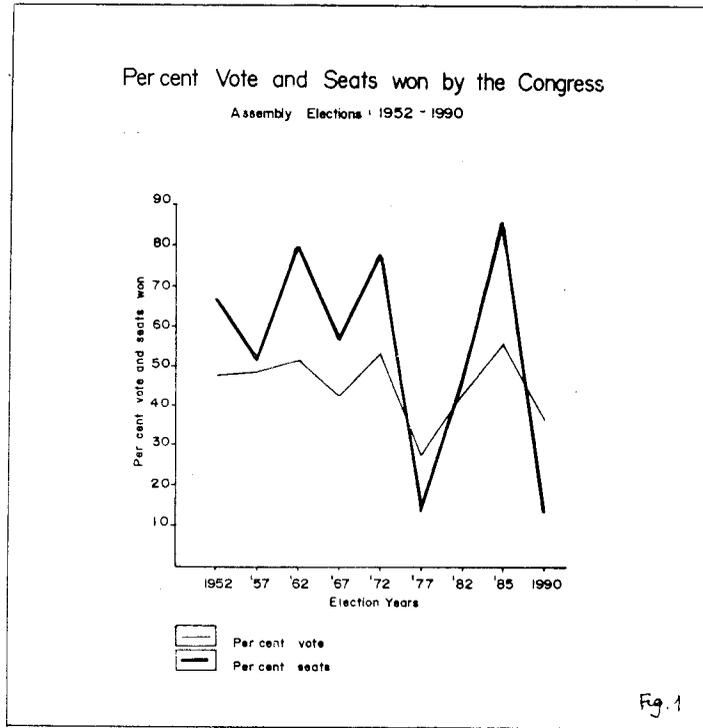


Fig. No. 1 - Per cent Vote and Seat won by the Congress

Riasti Praja Mandal" was organized in late 1930's. It helped the people become aware about the injustices which they had been meted out for centuries. By organizing public meetings at different places in the state, this organization directed the activities of the political and social workers. It encouraged people not to pay unjust taxes nor to do *begar*. Simultaneously, praja mandals were organized in Chamba, Sirmaur, Mandi, Bushahr and other small hill states.

In order to form a Pradesh Congress Committee, the Praja Mandals were converted into Congress Committees. Having thus amassed the strength, the Himalyan Hill State's Regional Council announced its decision to fight

for the establishment of a separate hill state with common historical traditions, cultural homogeneity, linguistic unity and geographical continuity. It was thought that Himachal Pradesh, "should have its separate identity and the Provincial Congress Committee for this new Province....so that side by side with the inauguration of the new Province on 15th of April, 1948, the Himachal Pradesh Congress Committee also started functioning. The A.I.C.C. (All India Congress Committee) was requested to treat Praja Mandals as Congress Committee and to take over Praja Mandal workers as Congress members on signing the Congress pledge" (Sharma, 1977, pp. 71-72).

1. Electoral bias is defined and measured as the difference between the percentage of seats that a party wins and the percentage of vote polled in favour of the same party. In the cases of positive electoral bias, a party wins more percentage of seats than vote.

(i) Electoral History of the Congress Party

Though with the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party in Himachal Pradesh, the Congress has not remained the "dominant" party, but still has an edge in the process of government making over its main competitor (B.J.P.) in state's power politics. However, the party has continuously been experiencing many ups and downs in its electoral performance since the 1952 assembly elections.

The graphic display of the Congress party's vote and seats won from 1952 to 1990 assembly elections (Fig. 1) clearly exhibits that excepting 1977 and 1990 assembly elections, the party always gets benefit from the huge positive electoral bias¹. Likewise the seats won by the party, its vote percentage share has also shown many ups and downs since the 1952 assembly elections. In the 1952 assembly elections, the party polled 47.3 per cent vote, however, it was able to win 24 (69.29 per cent) seats out of the total 36. In the 1957 assembly elections, the party registered 21 victories (out of the total 41 seats) by polling 48.26 per cent vote. In the 1962 assembly elections, by polling 51.5 per cent vote and acquiring 79.63 per cent seats the party further strengthened its stronghold. However, in 1967 elections, the strength of the Congress party dwindled. Its per cent vote share decreased from 51.5 cent in 1962 to 42.19 per cent and the party could win only 34 (56.67%) seats. In fact, " The continu (ed) rising prices, the recurring shortage essential commodities, the near-famine conditions in the

Pradesh and uneasy outlook for the future bred, resentment and hostility among the various sections of the society (the producers, the consumers and the house-wives)" (Gupta, 1976; p. 120), led to an erosion of Congress image and prestige. In the 1977 elections, the party with a vote share of 27.7 per cent could win only nine out of the total 68 seats. This had happened due to the anti-Congress and pro-Janata party wave at that time. In the next two assembly elections of 1982 and 1985, the party increased its tally in terms of both vote gained and seats won. The party, however, had to face a humaliting defeat in the 1990 assembly elections, when by polling 36.94 per cent vote it won only nine (out of the total 68) seats.

(ii) Changing Electoral Patterns of the Congress

1982 Elections : In the 1982 elections, held for the assembly house in Himachal Pradesh, the Congress party fielded its condidates on all but one (Solan) seats. Out of the total 67 contested seats, party's candidates were declared elected on 31 seats, of which 23 seats alone fell in the old Himachal region.² On an average, the party's vote share was 42.91 per cent, whereas, the standard deviation was 11.32 per cent. The co-efficient of variation was 26.38 per cent. Out of the total 67 seats on which the candidates were in the electoral fray, in three constituencies, the party had polled more than 60 per cent vote and in fifteen

2. The area of erstwhile Punjab, which was integrated in Himachal Pradesh in 1966, now-a-days is known as new Himachal region. however, it is noted that " ... ever since the state of Himachal Pradesh was created, the upper hills (old Himachal) leadership of the ruling (Congress) party had been domination the political scene. Except for a brief interlude from 1977 to 1979, when Mr. Shanta Kumar, who hails from the lower area, headed the Janata government, the state government, the state government has been led by man from the upper hill or " old " Himachal region". For this old and new Himachal political leadership rivalry and factionalism in the state, see, Najim-Ul-Hasan (April 22, 1990, p.3).

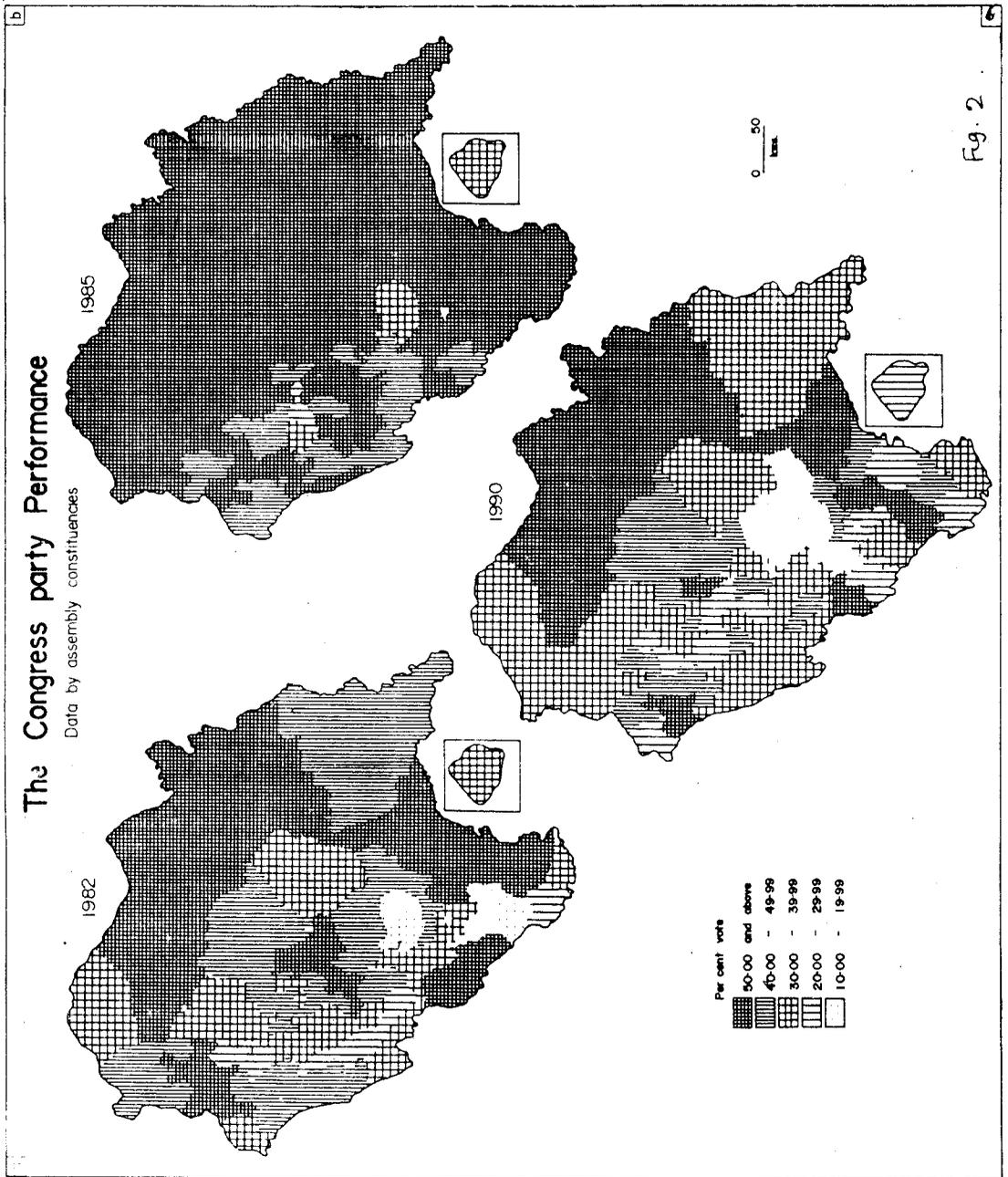


Fig. No. 2 - The Congress Party Performance

between 50 to 60 per cent . There were two constituencies where the party's candidates had polled less than 20 per cent vote. Frequency distribution was positively skewed (428) with 47.76 constituencies polling higher than the party's average percentage vote figure. The range was 71.14 per cent, which indicates that the vote variation between the constituencies was much more pronounced. The kurtosis was 1.563.

Map showing constituency-wise distribution of the Congress party's per cent vote clearly reveals that the party has wide areal support base (Fig. 2a). Due to this reason the coefficient of variation was only 26.38 per cent. Lahaul & Spiti district, eastern parts of Shimla district, south-western parts of Solan district and central parts of Mandi district were the areas of very high support (50 per cent and above) for the Congress party in this elections. High support (40 to 50 per cent) was recorded in the Kinnaur district, western parts of Kangra district, northern parts of the districts of Kullu and Chamba. Low (20 to 30 per cent) to very low (10 to 20 per cent) support was found in Karsog constituency (Mandi district), Pachhad and Nahan constituency (Sirmaur district), Geharwin constituency (Bilaspur district), Kutlehar constituency (Una district) and in some scattered constituencies of Kangra district (Fig. 2a).

1985 ELECTIONS

In the 1985 Assembly elections, a drastic change in the electoral map of the state in respect of the Congress party had been registered. The party fielded its candidates on all the 68 assembly seats. Party's main success again came from the old Himachal region as 38, out of the total 58, victories came from this region. On an average, the party had polled 55.87 per cent vote, i.e. an increase of 12.96 per cent., than the preceding assembly elections of 1982.

The standard deviation for the party was 12.83 per cent. The co-efficient of variation in respect of the party wiened from 27.9 per cent in 1982 assembly elections to 22.95 per cent in 1985 -- exhibiting a further increase in the uniformity of the party's electoral support base. Out of the total 68 assembly constituencies, in as many as 17, the party had polled more than 60 per cent vote, whereas, their number in the same vote category in the previous assembly elections was only three. In 27 constituencies, the party's candidates had polled between 50 to 60 per cent. There were only four constituencies where the party's candidates secured less than 40 per cent vote. The frequency distribution of the percentages of vote polled for the party was positively skewed (0.786) with 55.88 per cent of the constituencies receiving vote below the mean. The intraconstituency vote percentages ranged from 25.82 in Thural to 96.31 in Lahaul & Spiti. The kurtosis was 1.057.

Map showing the constituency-wise distribution of the Congress party's vote in Himachal Pradesh clearly indicates that the support base for the party in the 1985 assembly elections was wide spread. Districts of Kinnaur, Lahaul & Spiti, Shimla, Sirmaur and majority of the constituencies falling in the district of Chamba Mandi recorded very high support for the Congress in 1985 elections. In fact, there were 46 constituencies, out of the total 68, where the party had polled 50 per cent and above. The areas of high support included majority of the constituencies falling in Bilaspur and Una district. The only constituency recording below 30 per cent vote was Thural in Kangra district (Fig. 2b).

1990 ELECTIONS :

As the Pro-Congress (sympathy) wave of 1985 had put the Congress in the saddle of power, the anti-congress wave of 1990, had

taken off the Congress from the power. In this assembly elections of 1990, the Congress party fielded its candidates on all but one (Ani-Sc) seats. However, the party could bag only nine seats, of which seven came from the old Himachal region. The average vote share of the party declined from 55.87 per cent in 1985 to 36.94 per cent in 1990. The standard deviation of the party was 12.21 per cent. The coefficient of variation for the party increased from 22.95 per cent in 1985 to 33.05 per cent in 1990, indicating the areal concentration of the party's support base. Out of the total 67 contested seats, in two constituencies the party

has polled above 60 per cent, whereas, there were 17 constituencies in the same vote group in the preceding assembly elections of 1985. In contrast to 1985 assembly elections, when 27 candidates had polled between 50 to 60 per cent, in 1990 elections only six candidates could do so. In addition to this, in 1990 elections, there were 45 constituencies where the party's candidates had polled less than 40 per cent, whereas, there were only four candidates in this vote category in 1985 elections. The frequency distribution of the percentages of vote polled for the party was highly positively skewed (1.14) with 55.22 per cent of the

Table 1 : Rotated Factor Matrix of 19 Socio-Economic Variables.

Sr. No.	Variables	Factors				
		I	II	III	IV	V
1.	Density of population	.3829	-	-	-	-
2.	Per cent Urban population	.8842	-	-	-	-
3.	Sex Ratio	-.5068	-.5936	-	-.3720	-
4.	Per cent Scheduled Caste population	-	-.6501	-	-	-
5.	Per cent Scheduled Tribe population	-	.7643	-	-	-
6.	Per cent Literate population	.4567	-	.7287	-	-
7.	Per cent Female Literate population	.4393	-	.7678	-	-
8.	Per cent Workers	-	-	-.8846	-	-
9.	Per cent Agricultural Workers	-.3401	-	-.8424	-	-
10.	Per cent Agricultural Labourers	-	-	-	.8934	-
11.	Per cent Workers engaged in Manufacturing Activities	-	-	-	.8784	-
12.	Per cent Workers engaged in other Activities	.8217	.4032	-	-	-
13.	Net Area Sown as percentage of total area	-	-	-	-	-
14.	Irrigated Area as percentage of Net Area Sown	-	.7023	-	-	-
15.	Per cent Hindu population	-	-.8467	-	-	-
16.	Per cent Muslim population	-	-	-	-	.8350
17.	Per cent Sikh population	-	-	-	-	.4951
18.	Per cent Christian population	.7749	-	-	-	-
19.	Per cent Buddhist population	-	.8924	-	-	-
Eigen Value		4.4677	3.9421	2.3385	1.6210	1.4
Cumulative Percentage of Trace		23.5	44.3	56.6	65.1	72.5
Per cent Variance Explained		23.5	20.7	12.3	8.5	7.4

constituencies falling below the mean. In terms of vote share, the party performance ranged from 10.24 in Nachan-SC to 89.06 per cent in Rohur. The kurtosis was 4.01.

Map showing constituency-wise distribution of the Congress party's vote clearly indicates the areal concentration of the party's vote in this assembly elections. It was due to this reason that co-efficient of variation (33.05 per cent) in this elections was higher than the preceding assembly elections.

The area of very high support for the Congress in 1990 included the districts of Lahaul & Spiti, central Shimla and Sirmaur. The northern parts of Kulu district, southern parts of Mandi district, eastern parts of Kangra district recorded high support for the party. Low to very low support was recorded in Chopal and Shimla constituency (Shimla district), Nahan constituency (Sirmaur district), Doon constituency (Solan district), Karsog and Chachiot constituencies (Mandi district) and Gangath constituency (Kangra district) (Fig. 2c).

(B) Socio-Economic Variables and Explanation of Congress party performance

(i) Socio-Economic variables and extraction of contexts

As the electoral patterns of an area is greatly shaped by the area's cultural, socio-economic variables, describing the dimensions of similarity and difference in the Congress vote, are used. (Table 1) 1981 Census data have been converted to the level of assembly constituency in the manner as explained is Dikshit and Sharma (1981).

As explained a 19 x 19 variables correlation matrix would be a cumbersome exercise, the method of principal axis factoring, in order to compress these 19 variables into fewer and

more manageable contextual dimensions, has been used. Factors with eigen value more than unity have been given Kaiser's normal varimax rotation. Six factors have been elicited which together account for 78.3 per cent of the total variance. Out of these six extracted factors, the first three alone explain 56.6 per cent variance, whereas other three explain 21.7 per cent only.

Factor loading greater than the value of 0.3, of these six rotated factors, have been given in Table 1. Out of the six extracted factors, the first factor alone accounts for 23.5 per cent of the total variance. The important variables (above .80) loaded on this factor are : urban population (.884), Density of population (.882), and Workers involved in other Activities (0.821). The other important variables loaded positively on this factor are : Per cent Christian population (.774), Literate population (.439). Since all these factors are related to urban-development this factor may be considered as "Urban-Development context". The inversely related variables on this factor are : Sex Ratio (.506), and Cultivators (.340).

The second factor emerging from the factor-matrix accounts for 20.7 per cent of the variance. The prominent variables loaded positively on this factor are : Buddhist population (.892), Schedule Tribe population (.764), Per cent Net Area Irrigated (.702) and Workers involved in Other Activities (.403). The reason why Buddhist population, Scheduled Tribe population and Net Area Irrigated load highly on this factor is that in the State of Himachal Pradesh, Most of the Scheduled tribes belong to the Buddhist religion and the areas inhabited by them are well-irrigated also. For example, in the Lahaul & Spiti assembly constituency, 58.62 per cent population belongs to Buddhist religion, 74.04 per cent population is dominated by different scheduled tribes, and the area is hundred per cent irrigated. Due to this

Regression Analysis of Congress Vote and Urban Developmental Context

1982 elections	Y =	.0475	-	.0408	XI	R ²	=	.0019
1985 elections	Y =	.0000	-	.0986	XI	R ²	=	.0097
1990 elections	Y =	.0000	-	.0687	XI	R ²	=	.0047

fact, the correlation coefficient between Buddhist population and Scheduled Tribe population was +.685, and between the Buddhist population and Net area irrigated +.566. On the basis of the nature of this factor, it may be labelled as Buddhist-ST Population Context". The variables loaded negatively on this factor are : Per cent Hindu population (.846), and Schedule Caste population (.650).

The third factor emerging from the factor matrix accounts for 12.3 per cent of the variance. The notable variables loaded positively on this factor are : Female literate population (.767), Literate population (.728), Sex Ratio (.593). this factor may be denoted as "Literate Population Context". The variables having negative loading on this factor are per cent Workers population (.884), and Agriculture workers (.842).

The fourth factor is named as "Agricultural Labourers-Household Context". It explains 8.5 per cent of the variance. The important variables making positive loadings on this factor are : Agriculture labourers(.893), and Workers engaged in Other Activities (.878). However, no significant variable, on this factor, has inverse loading.

The fifth factor accounts for 7.4 per cent of the variance. The variables which dominate this factor are all concerned with main Indian religious minorities, by virtue of which this context is christened as "Religious Minorities Context". The per cent Muslim population and per cent Sikh population have .835 and .495 factor loadings respectively. The only factor

with negative loading was sex-ratio (372). The sixth factor registers only 5.8 per cent variance. The only variable which has notable positive loadings on this factor is net area sown, by virtue of which this context is termed as "Net Area Sown Context". The reason behind such a prominence of this variable is the lack of suitable land for agriculture in a hilly state like Himachal Pradesh. The single most variable with negative loading on this factor is Christian population, - which has high positive loading on "Urban Developmental Context."

(ii) Explanation of the Congress Party Performance

By virtue of its ability to receive vote across the rigid Indian social system, the Congress party has generally been regarded as an umbrella under which different ideologies and groups assemble. Three explanations regarding the catch-all or aggregative nature of the Congress can be put forward :

First, the Congress, which not only dominated the post-independence politics and political parties, but to a large extent also shaped it, - has often been regarded as the only party in the Indian party system, which provided freedom to Indian people from the colonial yoke. Second, ideological eclecticism in the Congress always favoured for the centrist policies and programmes of socio-economic changes, so that, often the programmes and policies of other political parties are absorbed by it (see Manor 1991, pp. 63-66). Third, the failure of opposition parties, in forming the government, at the national level (as the cases of 1977 and

1989 show) made the Indian electorate rather suspicious on the account that none of these parties, if voted to power, could go for the full quota of five years. In many instances, it has also been noted that the Indian electorate vote for the Congress only in the absence of any strong national alternative.

As an aggregative party, the Congress derives electoral support from all sections of society. For this reason, one cannot expect strong relationship between electoral performance of the congress party and different socio-economic contexts.

(i) Congress Vote and Urban Developmental Context

By taking Z-score values in respect of the Congress party, and the factor scores of the Urban-Developmental Context, the following regression equations have been obtained : The above given equations suggest that urban developmental context is not an influential context for explaining electoral performance of the Congress party. The explanatory power of this context ranged from .19 per cent in 1982 to .97 per cent in 1985 assembly elections. It is also important to note that in all the three elections, the relationship was found to be negative.

(ii) Congress Vote and Buddhist -ST Population Context

When we regress the Congress vote percentages on the scores of the Buddhist-ST Population Context, the following equations result :

Regression Anysis of Congress Vote and Buddhist - ST Population Context

$$1980 \text{ election } Y = .0482 + .403 XI \quad R2 = .0019$$

$$1985 \text{ election } Y = 0.000 + .1955 XI \quad R2 = .0382$$

$$1990 \text{ elections } Y = .0000 + .0951 XI \quad R2 = .0090$$

The R2 values of above equations are quite low, however, the weak relationship between the Congress vote and the Buddhist-ST Population Context has remained consistent.

(iii) Congress Vote and Literate Population Context

The following equations show the relationship between the Congress vote and the Literate Population Context :

Regression Analysis of Congrsss Vote and Literate Population Context

$$1980 \text{ election } Y = .0482 + .2327 XI \quad R2 = .0644$$

$$1985 \text{ election } Y = .0000 + .4824 XI \quad R2 = .2327$$

$$1990 \text{ elections } Y = .0000 + .1712 XI \quad R2 = .0293$$

It is evident from the above given R2 values that the Literate Population Context is quite important in explaining the areal vote variance of the Congress vote. The explanatory power of this context ranged from 2.93 per cent in 1990 assembly elections to 23.27 per cent in 1985 assembly elections. The relationship was found negative in all the three assembly elections.

(iv) Congress Vote and Agriculture and Household Labourers Context

After regressing the per cent vote polled by the Congress on the factors scores of Agriculture and Household Labourers Context for each election, following equations are obtained :

Regression Analysis And Agriculture and Household Labourers Context

$$1980 \text{ election } Y = .0483 + .0012 XI \quad R2 = .0000$$

$$1985 \text{ election } Y = .0000 + .0756 XI \quad R2 = .0057$$

$$1990 \text{ elections } Y = .0000 + .0192 XI \quad R2 = .0004$$

The R2 values of the above equations are quite low, indicating that this context has only a small influence on Congress electoral performance. In 1980 elections, there was positive correlation between the Congress vote and the Agriculture and Household Labourers Context. Whereas, in the 1985 and 1990 elections, the relationship was negative.

(v) Congress Vote and Net Area Sown Context

The following equations show the relationship between the Congress vote and Net Area Sown Context :

Regression Analysis of Congress Vote and Net Area Sown Context

$$1980 \text{ election } Y = .0483 + .267 \text{ XI} \quad R2 = .0008$$

$$1985 \text{ election } Y = .0000 + .0607 \text{ XI} \quad R2 = .0037$$

$$1990 \text{ elections } Y = .0000 + .286 \text{ XI} \quad R2 = .0008$$

The influence of Net Area Sown Context on Congress vote was only marginal, as the R2 values of the above equations are quite low. The relationship between the two components was positive in 1980 elections, whereas it was negative in 1985 and 1990 elections.

(vi) Congress Vote and Religious Minorities Context

Religious Minorities Context has not influenced the electoral performance of the Congress much. However, the explanatory power of this context was higher than all the contexts, but Literate Population Context.

Regression Analysis of Congress Vote and Religious Minorities Context

$$1980 \text{ election } Y = .0484 + .0061 \text{ XI} \quad R2 = .0000$$

$$1985 \text{ election } Y = .0000 + .1762 \text{ XI} \quad R2 = .0310$$

$$1990 \text{ elections } Y = .0018 + .2712 \text{ XI} \quad R2 = .0737$$

Except for the 1980 assembly elections, the Congress party tended to perform better in areas of religious minorities. The co-efficient of determination (R2) which was zero in 1980 elections, increased to 7.36 per cent in 1990 elections. This increase in the R2 value of this context in 1990 elections, might be due to the fact that due to the BJP wave, minorities voted more positively to the Congress in this election than they did before.

CONCLUSIONS

The foregoing analysis of the Congress party in Himachal Pradesh has underlined the following conclusions :

- i) the Congress is by far the dominant political party in the state;
- ii) most of the Congress party MLAS come from the old Himachal region.
- iii) owing to the aggregative nature, the influence of socio-economic factors in spatial variation in the intensity of electoral support for the Congress was very low;
- iv) the relationship between the Congress party vote and the Urban-Developmental Context, Buddhist-ST Population Context and Literate Population Context remained consistent in the three assembly elections under study.

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