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Delhi elections 2015: Arvind Kejriwal-led AAP breaks rules of identity politics, dents core vote bases of BJP & Congress

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Traditionally, the upper castes of Delhi had voted for the BJP in sizeable numbers, particularly the Punjabi Khatri and the Bania communities.

By Sanjay Kumar, Shreyas Sardesai & Pranav Gupta

NEW DELHI: The arrival of the Aam Aadmi Party on Delhi's electoral scene in 2013 upset the traditional support base of various parties across various castes and communities.

The usual pattern of upper castes voting mainly for the BJP and the OBCs and Dalits voting largely for the Congress stood disrupted.

The AAP broke the rules of identity politics and made a dent in the core vote bases of both the established political players.

Findings from surveys conducted by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) in Delhi estimate an average of 40% of the voters in Delhi belong to the upper castes. About 12% are Brahmins, 7% are Punjabi Khatris, 7% are Rajputs, 6% belong to the Vaishya (Bania) and Jain communities and 8% are from other upper castes (See Table 1).

Traditionally, the upper castes of Delhi had voted for the BJP in sizeable numbers, particularly the Punjabi Khatri and the Bania communities.

Support for the BJP among these two communities was consistently above the 50% mark in the 1998, 2003 and 2008 Vidhan Sabha elections.

However in 2013, the AAP succeeded in taking away a big chunk of the BJP's Punjabi Khatri and Bania votes. Among the Punjabi Khatris, it garnered 39% of the votes compared with the BJP's 36%, while among the Jains and Banias (the community to which Arvind Kejriwal of the AAP belongs), the party ended up with 29% of the vote and gave the BJP a decent fight.

An analysis of the 2013 assembly election results confirms the damage done by the AAP to the BJP's core Punjabi-Bania base. Out of the 16 assembly seats that are Punjabi-dominated, the AAP won as many as nine and the BJP six (See Table 2).

During the 2014 Lok Sabha election, the AAP lost a substantial chunk of its Punjabi vote to the BJP and if the party wants to do well again, winning back this vote is absolutely critical. With Kiran Bedi (who is a Punjabi) being made the chief ministerial candidate of the BJP, the task has been made more difficult for the AAP.

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Congress more or less equally.

The AAP Effect

AAP's entry has disrupted the old caste patterns of upper and middle castes voting for BJP and OBCs, Dalits voting Cong

Vote by Caste and Community — All figures are in percentage

Community	Share in population	2008 Vidhan Sabha			2013 Vidhan Sabha			2014 Lok Sabha		
		Cong	BJP	AAP	Cong	BJP	AAP	Cong	BJP	AAP
Brahmins	12	36	41	NA	24	46	23	11	65	22
Punjabi Khatri	7	29	59	NA	22	36	39	8	62	15
Rajput	7	40	46	NA	24	37	32	8	56	28
Vaishya/Jains	6	29	52	NA	18	43	29	12	64	18
Other Upper Castes	8	31	51	NA	23	33	31	12	62	22
Jats	5	39	51	NA	15	49	24	*	*	*
Gujjar/Yadav	6	40	24	NA	17	36	35	*	*	*
Other OBC	12	36	39	NA	18	32	38	13	44	41
Dalits	17	37	26	NA	23	29	36	19	33	41
Muslims	12	64	14	NA	53	12	12	39	2	56
Sikhs	4	41	46	NA	23	43	26	10	68	16

Source: CSDS Post Poll Surveys in Delhi during 2008, 2013 Vidhan Sabha and 2014 Lok Sabha elections. The rest of the respondents voted for others. NA stands for not applicable. AAP didn't exist in 2008 *denotes no estimate due to very low sample size. Share in population of communities arrived at by calculating average share of each community in the achieved samples of last three election surveys in Delhi.

Assembly polls 2013 - Community wise Analysis

Community concentration	Total Seats	Cong		BJP+SAD		AAP	
		Won	Vote %	Won	Vote %	Won	Vote %
UP-Bihar Migrants	16	1	21.9	9	32.1	6	28.6
Punjabi	16	1	26.3	6	35.8	9	32.2
Peasants	11	0	20.1	8	37.7	2	26.2
Rest	27	6	27.7	9	32.1	11	30.4

Source: ECI data analysed by CSDS Data Unit

Assembly polls 2013 - How Dalits Voted

	Cong	BJP	AAP
Jatav	17	32	35
Balmiki	17	29	37
Other SC	25	26	36

Source: CSDS Post Poll Survey in Delhi during 2013 Vidhan Sabha election

The BJP was, however, more successful in retaining support among the Jat community, roughly 5% of Delhi's population and located mostly in the rural parts of outer Delhi. Whatever Jat votes the AAP secured in 2013 came not from the BJP but from the Jats who voted for the Congress in 2008.

The Jats of Delhi, many of whom had shifted allegiance to the Congress in 2003, returned to the BJP in 2008 and continued to be with the party in 2013. In 2013, the party made special efforts to enthuse the community by giving tickets to Parvesh Verma and Azad Singh, son and brother of Jat leader and former CM late Sahib Singh Verma.

The polarisation that took place following the Jat-Muslim riots in Muzaffarnagar in September 2013 would have also led to this. The Jats stuck with the BJP and the Muslims with the Congress. In 2015, both the Congress and the AAP are actively trying to woo the Jat vote by aggressively pitching the Modi government's ordinance to amend the Land Acquisition Act as anti-farmer.

In this context, it would be interesting to see if the BJP is able to hold on to its Jat vote in the coming election. There are at least 11 seats where Jats hold sway and of these, the BJP had won eight in the 2013 assembly election.

OBC communities such as the Gujjars, Yadavs and the lower OBCs together form about 18% of Delhi's population. Traditionally the backbone of the Congress's base (along with Muslims and Dalits) in Delhi, they switched over to the AAP in 2013 in large numbers. Even in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, these were the only communities, apart from the Dalits and Muslims, among whom the AAP continued to do well despite the so called "Modi wave."

The Dalit communities (17% of Delhi's population), in fact, have been instrumental in AAP's spectacular rise in the city. Having mainly been with the Congress and the Bahujan Samaj Party in the past, they shifted in massive numbers towards the AAP in 2013, especially the Balmiki community, (See Table 3), so much so that the AAP emerged as the leading choice of Dalits.

About 36% of the Dalits voted for the AAP in the 2013 election as opposed to 29% for the BJP and 23% for the Congress. This sizeable support among Dalits for the AAP resulted in the party winning as many as nine of the 12 seats reserved for Scheduled Castes in the 2013 Assembly elections (See Table 4).

Retaining this Dalit support in the face of the BJP's aggressive efforts to woo the community will be a major challenge for the AAP. The induction of Krishna Tirath and Buta

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The fault lines of class may eventually prove to be a bigger factor in determining voter preferences in Delhi's elections than the divisions of caste and community.

The fact that only a Jat is fielded as a candidate from a predominantly Jat area, that Kejriwal chose to describe himself as a Bania at a traders' gathering, that multiple Dalit meetings have been organised by BJP President Amit Shah and party MP Udit Raj, and that Narendra Modi's first rally in Delhi was attended by BJP chief ministers from Haryana, Jharkhand and Maharashtra, indicate that political parties continue to see caste and regional identities as important factors in Delhi's electoral politics.

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