

Electoral Trends in Himachal Pradesh: A Study of 14th Vidhan Sabha Election (2022)

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ABSTRACT

India is known for its electoral system all over the globe. A country with so much varieties in language, religion, culture, ethnicity etc., caught the attention of scholars since its first elections held in 1952. The electoral trends in India vary due to the vast geographical area and large population. Each state reflects a new phenomenon leaving the political pundits spellbound. Same is The heterogeneous nature of state politics reflects the impact of the state of socio-cultural, economic variations on the political institutions and process. Himachal Pradesh, one of the small states of the Indian union having demographic, cultural, social, political and economic variations. Elections and electoral politics of the state have its distinct features which is famous for its bi-bolar party system, different from its neighboring states. The elections in Himachal shown a different picture which have a direct impact on its relations with the government in Centre. The present study is comparative, evaluative to understand the present nature of state politics. Hypothesis of the study is that state politics in India is heterogenous and its nature is determined by its ecology. The study is based on the primary and secondary sources.

Himachal Pradesh

Himachal Pradesh is a small hilly state in the lapse of Himalayas. The state is rich in culture, language, ethnicity, cuisines, etc. It is a beautiful northern state with different ranges of Himalayas. It is predominantly a mountainous region with ranges such as Zaskar, Dhauladhar and Shivalik. Himachal has immense potential for hydro power as it is naturally blessed with abundant streams and rivers such as Yamuna, Beas, Sutlej, Chenab and Ravi and their tributaries. 89.9% of the population resides in rural areas and main occupation of the people is agriculture and horticulture. Agriculture contributes nearly

about 45% to the state gross domestic product. Himachal ranks second after Kerala with literacy rate of 82.8% as most of the people are educated. The life expectancy in Himachal is 71 years which is much better than national average. A very small proportion of people live below the poverty line and the per capita income is 1.83 lakhs per annum which is also much better than national average income. Apart from agriculture, the state has various industries such as tourism, textile, pharmaceutical, food processing and procurement, hydropower, cement etc. tourism sector contributes about 7% to the state gross domestic product. The high level of per capita income as well as expenditure, greater women's participation in labour work force and strong network of local institutions makes Himachal distinct from other hilly states.

Political Background of Himachal Pradesh

Although its majority of population is dependent on agriculture, still the people of Himachal show a great interest in politics of the State. The State being politically divided into Lower and Upper Himachal. Upper Himachal includes the districts Shimla, Sirmour, Kinnaur, Solan, Lahaul Spiti, Kullu, Chamba and parts of Mandi. Lower Himachal comprises of districts Hamirpur, Una, Kangra, Bilaspur and lower parts of Mandi. Lower Himachal had been the base of BJP while Upper Himachal had always been the support system of Congress. The Chief Minister from Congress party had always been from the upper Himachal. Kangra and Mandi districts have 15 and 10 seats respectively but it the Kangra district which acts as the game changer in every election. Still, it is the lower Himachal especially Kangra district which is the main player in deciding the fate of the winning party. Elections in Himachal are known for the unpredictable results and the bi-polar system prevailing here. Since 1985, there is a continuing pattern that the incumbent party loses the reelection in Himachal Pradesh which was seen in the 14th Assembly election too.

Vidhan Sabha Elections 2022

After every five years the people of Himachal Pradesh choose a government for themselves. Vidhan Sabha is the Legislative body of the State which is responsible for framing rules and policies for the State during its tenure. The election of 2022 was seen with a great hope as an election between “Raj and Riwaaj” i.e., the change of the ruling party in Himachal or change of the trend in Himachal where the incumbent party loses in reelection.

The Election Commission of India announced the schedule for elections in Himachal Pradesh on 14 October 2022.

Schedule for 14th Himachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly Elections is as follows:

S No.	Poll event	Date
1.	Notification Date	17 October 2022
2.	Last date for filling Nomination	25 October 2022
3.	Date for scrutiny of Nominations	27 October 2022
4.	Last date for withdrawal of candidatures	29 October 2022
5.	Date of Poll	12 November 2022
6.	Date of Counting and Declaration of Results	8 December 2022

Source: Election Commission of India

The total process from issuance of notification to declaration of results took almost two months.

Every election is distinct from the others for a variety of reasons such as extent of participation of political parties, candidates as well as voters.

Political Parties

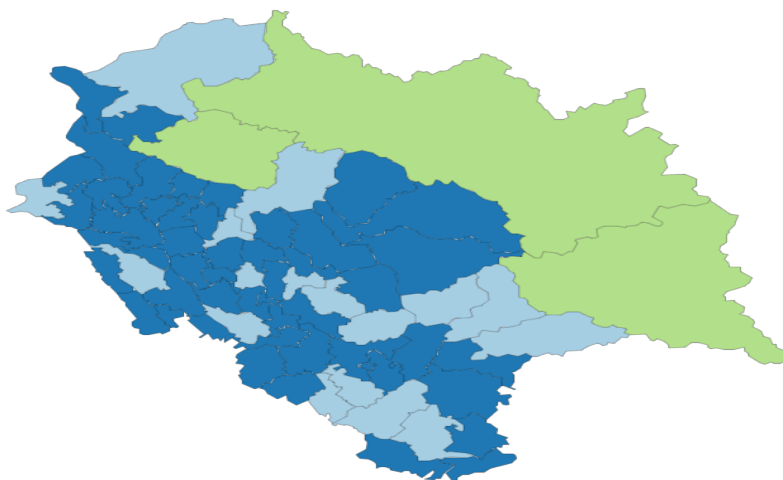
S No.	Political party	Status of Political Party	Seats Contested
1.	Bhartiya Janta Party	National party	68
2.	Indian National Congress	National party	68
3.	Aam Aadmi Party	State based Party	67
4.	Communist Party of India	National party	01
5.	Communist Party of India (Marxist)	National Party	11
6.	Rashtriya Dev Bhumi Party	Local Party	29
7.	Himachal Jan Kranti	Local party	06
8.	Bahujan samaj Party (BSP)	State based Party	53
9.	Independent	-	99
10.	Himachal Janta Party	Local party	01

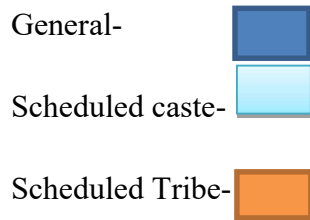
11.	Bhartiya Veer Dal	Local party	01
12.	Hindu Samaj Party	Local party	03
13.	Others	-	05
14.	Total		412

Source: Statistical data on HP Vidhan Sabha Election 2022

Political parties are an important part of the electoral system. Parties are present in every country whether democratic or not. Political parties play a crucial role in the election procedure. In fact, the role of political parties is so important that people even vote in the name of the political parties in India. These political parties have rooted themselves so deep that people remember these parties by their symbols. In Himachal, BJP and the Congress are the two main parties and their supporters are even identified from the color of their caps (himachali topis) i.e., Red cap is considered to be the insignia of BJP and green cap belongs to the Congress. In the 14th Assembly Elections 2022, about one dozen parties contested for 68 seats. Among these parties, there were 4 national parties, 2 state level parties as well as some local parties. Total candidates who contested in this election were 421. In 13th Assembly elections 2017, 19 political parties participated but in 2022 elections the number of parties contesting decreased to 14 which shows the bipolar character of Himachal state politics where there is least scope for a third alternative apart from independents who manage to grab one or two seats.

Number of Constituencies and Distribution of seats





General	Scheduled Caste	Scheduled Tribe	Total
48	17	3	68

Article 332 of Indian Constitution provides for reservation of seats for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes in the Legislative Assemblies of the states. The map shown distribution of Legislative Assembly seats in Himachal Pradesh. Light green color represents the seats reserved for the Scheduled Tribes in the State which includes one seat from Kinnaur and Lahaul Spiti district each and one for Bharmour constituency of Chamba district. Light blue color represents the seats reserved for the Scheduled Castes of Himachal Pradesh in 17 constituencies and rest 48 seats are open seats which are represented by dark blue color in the map. The purpose of this distribution is that all categories have some sort of representation in the Assembly.

CANDIDATES

Candidates’ participation and performance

Nomination Filed	Nomination accepted	Nominations Rejected	Nominations Withdrawn	Contesting Candidates
786	589	84	113	412

Source: Election Commission of India

In the 14th Legislative assembly elections, total 786 candidates filed their nominations for contesting on 68 seats with the Election Commission but only 589 nominations were accepted. Then nominations of 84 candidates were rejected while 113 candidates withdrew their nomination on 29 October and hence total 412 candidates set their belts to contest for the Assembly elections of the State.

Gender wise distribution of seats

S No.	Gender	General	SC	ST	Total contestation
1	Male	288	88	12	388
2	Female	16	07	01	24
3	Third Gender	0	0	0	0
4.	Total seats	48	17	3	68
5.	Total Candidates contesting	304	95	13	412

Source: Statistical Data on HP Vidhan Sabha Election 2022

In Himachal Pradesh Legislative Elections 2022, in total 412 candidates from about one dozen parties contested on 68 seats. If we see vertically, total 48 constituencies were open for all candidates and about 304 candidates contested on these seats in the State. On 17 seats reserved for Scheduled castes, the contesting candidates were 95 while on 3 tribal seats, 13 candidates filed contested. This number reflects the level of political participation of the people of the state. But the gender wise distribution of seats depicts a different picture. Out of the total candidates there were only 24 females and 388 males. There was no third gender candidate. Out of 24 females contesting in 14th Assembly Election, 16 candidates were from General category, 7 belonged to Scheduled Caste while only one candidate was given seat from Scheduled Tribe constituency. Majority of candidates were males while female constituted a small percentage of contesting candidates. This uneven distribution of seats shows the urgent need for reservation of a specific percentage for women in Assembly and Parliamentary elections. To ensure the representation of women, the Bill pending in the parliament should be passed with immediate effect.

Age wise contestation

S No.	Candidate	Below 50	Between 50-65	Above 65
1.	Male	191	155	42
2.	Female	18	05	01
3.	Total	209	160	43

Source: Statistical Data on HP Vidhan Sabha Elections 2022

The youth of Himachal Pradesh showed an active participation in the 14th Assembly Election. This participation can be very well seen in the form of contestation by the youth candidates who were below the age of 50 years, accounting almost 50% of total candidates. Out of 209 young candidates, 18 were females which was quite impressive in a total of 24 female candidates. The lone winning female candidate Reena Kashyap from BJP also fall in this age group. 160 candidates fall in second category of age group between 50 and 65. Most of the senior leaders made the space in this category. 5 women candidates were also aged between 50 to 65. The last category of age group above 65 include the most experienced and senior most leaders which numbered 43 including one women candidate Asha Kumari(67years) from Dalhousie and the senior most candidate Dhani Ram Shandil who made his way to Legislative Assembly from Solan constituency is aged 82 years. They both were from Congress party. The average age of contestants in 14th Assembly elections was recorded as 50.31 years.

No. of Candidates contesting per Constituency



- Constituencies with less than 5 candidates
- Constituencies with more than 5 candidates

Chart: Trivedi Centre for Political data Source: LokDhaba

This map represents number of candidates contesting for a single seat. In Lahaul Spiti district, Churah constituency of Chamba district and Darang constituency of Kullu district there were less than 5 candidates contesting while rest of the constituencies had more than 5 candidates contesting. The

Joginder Nagar constituency of Mandi district had 11 candidates contesting for a single seat, it was the maximum number of candidates on a single seat. Lahaul Spiti tribal seat, Churah Constituency of Chamba district and Darang constituency of Kullu district had 3 candidates each contesting for the respective seat. The other constituencies had more than 5 candidates per seat.

Forfeiture of deposits by the Candidates

Chart: Trivedi Centre for Political data Source: LokDhaba

S No.	Gender	No. of candidates who lost their deposits
1.	Male	247
2.	Female	14
3.	Third Gender	00
4.	Total	261

Source: Statistical data on HP Vidhan Sabha Election 2022

According to the mandatory provisions of the Representation of People Act, 1951, every candidate contesting in an Assembly or Parliamentary election need to deposit a certain amount as a security deposit with the Election Commission. As per Section 34(1)(a) of the Representation of People Act, 1951, the amount fixed for general candidates is Rs. 10,000 to fight the election in Assembly constituency and half of this amount has to be deposited with the Election Commission by SC and ST candidates. This amount is called as Security Deposit. This provision is made so that only serious candidates file nomination for contesting the election. A total 412 candidates contested for 68 Legislative Assembly seats in Assembly elections of 2022. Of these 261 candidates lost their deposits as they failed to get 1/6th valid votes which are mandatory to secure the deposits. This number also reflects the bi-polar nature of politics of Himachal Pradesh where almost 14 political parties contested but two parties represented through their candidates in the Assembly.

First time winners in 14th Assembly Elections

Chart: Trivedi Centre for Political Data Source: LokDhaba

In the 14th Vidhan Sabha elections, 23 MLAs out of the total 68 are first time winners which accounts about 33.82%. This shows that the voters of Himachal Pradesh have shown faith in the first-time contestants and have voted in their favour making their path to Legislative Assembly easier. This 33.82% also shows the political behavior of the people of the hilly state that they are interested in changing their representatives if they don't fulfil their demands.

Number of Contestation by Candidates

Chart: Trivedi Centre for Political Data Source: LokDhaba

S No.	Contestants	Number	Percentage
1.	First time	263	63.83
2.	Second time	54	13.35
3.	Multiple contests	94	22.82

Source: Statistical Data on HP Vidhan Sabha Election 2022

In 14th Assembly elections, the candidates who were contesting for the very first time number almost half of the total candidates. 263 (63.83%) candidates in the present elections were the first time candidates while only 13.35% i.e., 54 candidates were those contesting for the second time. 94 candidates were such who were contesting for more than two times. But the huge number of first time contestants show that many new comers or we can say many interested voters became interested in contesting elections this time. Whatever be the winning rate but the contestation in such large number shows the interest of people in contesting elections.

Rerunning candidates and incumbents in 14th Vidhan Sabha

S no.	Candidates	Number	%age
1.	No. of rerunning candidates	127	30.83
2.	No. of contesting incumbents	61	89.71
3.	No. of rerunning incumbents	33	48.53
4.	First time winners	24	35.29

Source: Statistical data on HP Legislative Assembly Election 2022

In the 14th Legislative Assembly elections, 127 candidates were those who were contesting again after winning for one or more times. These candidates account for 30.83% of the total 412. About 61 incumbents i.e., the ones who were elected in 13th Vidhan Sabha contested in this election too but only 33 managed to make their way for the next tenure. This shows that they failed to regain the support of the voters from their constituency. The allocation of tickets to new faces and coming of 24 first time MLAs to the Assembly shows that voters of Himachal are smart and do not have any loyal binding. They tried new candidates in this election which shows their educational character. The political parties also experimented with new candidates which proved to be a successful one.

POLITICAL PARTIES

Performance of parties in vote share

S No.	Political party	No. of Seat contested	Vote share	Winning candidates	Position
1.	BJP	68	43	25	2
2.	INC	68	43.9	40	1
3.	Independent	99	9.7	03	3

Source: Statistical data on HP Vidhan Sabha Election 2022

The political parties tried their luck in the 14th Assembly election where they picked up some new faces and moved with some older ones too. BJP and Congress contested on 68 seats each while there were 99 independent contestants including 20 BJP rebels and 7 Congress rebels. Indian National Congress became victorious with 40 seats followed by Bhartiya Janta Party securing 25 seats and independent candidates winning one three seats. The vote share between BJP and Congress was not much but the seats share of Congress helped it in forming the government in the State. The voting pattern showed that there was a negligible swing as Congress won without a CM face and despite its weak Centre. Aam Admi Party came out loud with a promise of becoming a third alternate in the state but the Himachal polls show that people of the state have clarity of two parties and there is no space for a third party.

Performance of Political Parties

Source: results.eci.gov.in/

S No.	Political Party	Seats Contested	No. of Seats Won	% of seat share	% of vote share
1.	BJP	68	25	36.76	42.88
2.	Congress	68	40	58.82	43.96
3.	Independent	99	3	4.42	10.43
4.	AAAP	67	0	0	1.11
5.	CPI(M)	11	0	0	0.67
6.	BSP	53	0	0	0.35
7.	Others	239	0	0	0.60

Source: Statistical data on HP Vidhan Sabha Election 2022

In the 14th Assembly Election, 14 political parties participated but only the main National Parties Bhartiya Janta Party and Indian National Congress represented in the Assembly. Congress got victory by grabbing 40 seats while BJP had to settle for 25 seats only. This affirmed the bi-polar nature of Himachal politics. The Vote share BJP and Congress was close as majority of the chase was with very little margin whereas in some constituencies the winner was decided by large margin. Independent candidates secured 3 seats which accounted for 10.43% of vote share. National parties like CPI and CPI(M) failed to win even a single seat whereas CPI(M) lost its only seat from Theog constituency and even their vote share was also less than 1%. The State level parties such as Aam Admi Party and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) neither won any seat nor managed to get a good share of votes in the state. All the candidate of BSP, AAP and other parties lost their deposits too. The results of the election and vote share make it clear that BJP and Congress are the major parties who come into power for every consecutive term and any other party can manage to get one or two seat but can never be a third alternative in the State.

Region wise performance of Political parties

S No.	Region	Total seats	Congress	% of seats won	BJP	% of seats won	Independent	% of seats won	Others
1	Beas	39	19	48.72%	19	48.72%	01	2.56	00

	River Basin								
2	Greater Himalayas	02	02	100%	00	-	00	-	00
3	Shimla Region	08	07	87.5	01	12.50	00	-	00
4	Shivalik Region	19	12	63.16	05	26.32	02	10.52	00
5.	Total	68	40	58.82	25	36.76	03	4.42	00

Source: Statistical Data on HP Vidhan Sabha Election 2022

The constituencies of the State can be divided into four regions for better understanding the poll results and electoral trends in 14th assembly election. The Beas River basin contains about 50% of the seats. In this region, both BJP and Congress showed same results as both parties managed to get equal number of seats with one independent candidate winning from this region. The Greater Himalayan region consists just 2 seats, one seat each from Kinnaur and Lahaul Spiti districts. In the Shimla region, Congress grabbed 7 out of total 8 seats in the region. In the Shivalik belt, again the Congress was in lead as it managed to secure 12 seats out of total 19 as compared to only 5 seats in BJP's court. 2 seats were won by candidates contesting independently. Overall results show that Congress got 40 seats and BJP with 25 seats. From the region wise data, we analyse that it was the Beas River basin where both parties won same number of seats but Congress got a good lead from other three regions especially the Shimla region and the Greater Himalayan Region. In the Shivalik region too, the Congress party performed well.

WOMEN

Women Participation and Performance

Women account for half of the population and are seen as important vote bank by the political parties. Himachal Pradesh is a small state with maximum of its population as literate. We cannot measure the political participation of the people of the State by ignoring the political participation and performance of this half section.

S No.	Assembly Election	Election year	Total Candidates	No. of women Contesting	In percent	No. of women winning	In percent
1.	13 th	2017	338	19	5.62	4	5.88
2.	14 th	2022	412	24	5.83	1	1.47

Source: Statistical data on HP Vidhan Sabha Election, 2022

In the 14th Legislative Assembly elections, out of the total 412 candidates there were only 24 women candidates who contested under the banner of various political parties as well as independent candidates. Though it is little more than contesting percentage in 2017 Assembly Election. The results were more shocking because only one candidate managed to bag a seat in the whole Legislative Assembly of 68 seats as compared to 4 women MLAs in 13th Assembly election. The sole candidate was Reena Kashyap from Bhartiya Janta Party who contested from Pacchad seat (SC) of district Sirmaur. This reflects that women in the state are not seen as good representative even after contesting from two key parties of the State. The preference of male candidates over the female ones shows that women are not considered as an alternate for their male counterparts.

Distribution of seats for female candidates by different political parties

S No.	Gender	BJP	Congress	AAP	Others	Total
1.	Female	6	3	5	10	24
2.	General	03	02	02	09	16
3.	SC female	03	01	03	00	07
4.	ST female	0	0	00	01	01

Source: Statistical data on HP Vidhan Sabha elections 2022

BJP nominated total six female candidates out of which three were from general category while rest three were from Scheduled caste. There were only 3 candidates out of 68 from Congress side who contested in this election and out of them two belonged to schedule caste category. AAP nominated five female candidates with three candidates from Scheduled Caste and two from general category. Among the three major parties in this election, none nominated a woman as the Scheduled Tribe candidate. Only one candidate named Puja from Himachal Jan Kranti Party was nominated as sole female candidate from the Tribal area. Firstly, the nomination data shown the poor position of women as leaders in the

state. Secondly, out of the 24 candidates contesting, only one female candidate managed to get a seat in the Assembly with 67 males. This distribution of seats for women candidates show that women are considered only as vote bank. The study of one of the research scholar have shown that movement of Self Help Group and Mahila Mandals have contributed in increased participation of women in the society. They have become economically sound and have been politically active. It was seen in the Panchayati Raj elections of the state held in 2020 that apart from 50% reservation of women, they contested and won from non-reserved seats. But the Assembly results show that they are still confined only to local sphere and main politics is still controlled by males.

VOTERS

Voters' participation

Voters are the most important part of the whole electoral process. The class, gender and religion are considered as the most important factors to influence voters. The voters are the one who decide the faith of the candidates contesting in the election. It is one vote which can make a candidate winner as well as loser. Political parties and Candidates try to educate voters through their election manifesto and election campaign. Thus, voter education is important to achieve universal coverage of the electorate.

Registered Voters

S No.	Gender	No. of voters
1.	Male	28,54,945
2.	Female	27,37,845
3.	Third Gender	38
4.	Total	55,92,828
5.	Service Voters	67,559
6.	First time voters	1.93 lakh
7.	Voters above 80 years	12,140
8.	Voters aged above 100 years	1,181
9.	Persons with disabilities	56,501

Source: Statistical data on HP Vidhan Sabha Election 2022

In total, there were 55,92,828 registered voters in the 14th Vidhan Sabha election. The male voters were about 28,54,945 whereas there were 27,37,845 female voters. In these elections 38 voters registered

them as third gender. About 1.93 lakh voters were those who were to cast their vote for the very first time. There were 12,140 voters above 80 years of age while 1,181 voters were aged above 100 years. For the voters above 80 years and disabled people, the Election Commission made the provision of postal ballot.

The maximum voters that were registered were 1.05 lakh in Sullah constituency of Kangra district while the least number of voters were in Lahaul-Spiti i.e., 24,808 voters. The faith of the 412 candidates was dependent on these registered voters of the State.

Voting percentage in 2022 Elections

Election	Year	Male Voting %	Female Voting %
14 th Assembly	2022	72.4	76.8

Although women constitute about 49% of total votes in the state which means that every second voter is a woman still the hilly state managed to have a lone female MLA in this election as compared to 4 in the 13th Legislative Assembly election held in 2017. Interesting fact is that women participating as voters is always above the men since 1998 elections. According to **The Statesman**, “38 women were elected as MLAs in the past 75 years of independence in Himachal Pradesh...”

Gender wise voting percentage since 1998

S No.	Assembly	Year	Male voting %	Female Voting %
1	9 th	1998	71.23	72.2
2	10 th	2003	73.14	75.92
3	11 th	2007	68.36	74.10
4	12 th	2012	69.39	76.20
5	13 th	2017	70.58	77.98

Source: Statistical data on HP Vidhan Sabha election 2022

The above chart shows that since 1998 or the 9th Legislative Assembly Elections, the percentage of female voters have consistently remained greater than voting percentage of the male voters. This is the proof that the women of the hilly state are more aware of the value of their vote. Women being the half population and a major vote bank of political parties are not seen as powerful leader which can be presented as the candidate from the party. It is an important question to ask that even after being a major

vote bank, why women of the state are not seen as better alternative for their male counterparts. Being an active voter since 1998 reflects the level of political awareness of the women regarding casting their vote in the elections but winning on only one seat out of 68 also shows that poor political participation of women as candidates in Himachal Pradesh.

Polling Stations

S No.	Total Polling Station	7881
1.	Rural	7235
2.	Urban	646
3.	Managed by Women Staff	127

Source: Statistical Data on HP Vidhan Sabha Election, 2022

For conducting elections for 68 Legislative Assembly seats in 12 districts of the small hilly state of Himachal Pradesh, in total 7881 polling stations were set up. Because 90% of the population of Himachal resides in rural areas thus 7235 polling stations were established in rural areas while 646 stations were in urban areas. The purpose of setting up so many polling stations was to ensure that maximum voters reach the station to cast their vote. In this election, 127 polling stations were managed solely by the women staff. Tash gang in Lahaul-Spiti was the highest polling station at 15,256 ft height.

Factors affecting Voting Behavior in the Assembly Election

In every election, various factors are responsible for influencing the voters and helpful in determining the voting behavior of voters in the election. The most important factor which influenced Himachali voters and contributed in the victory of Congress in the hill state was restoration of Old Pension Scheme (OPS). Other factors were Agnipath Scheme, Farmers dissatisfaction due to rise in GST on apple cartons, ST status to Hatti community etc. Role of women voters, votes from different regions and castes and communities, Vikas factor and most important economic issue were the indicators taken in post-poll survey conducted by Lokniti in November 2022 by interviewing 2,844 voters across 110 polling stations in 28 Constituencies selected randomly.

Factor	Fully satisfied (support)	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Fully dissatisfied (oppose)
Restoration of OPS	50%	20%	6%	17

Agnipath Scheme	19%		14%		8%		42%	
Satisfaction with the sitting MLA	BJP	Cong.	BJP	Cong.	BJP	Cong.	BJP	Cong.
	30%	37%	25	26	9	13	34%	21%
Satisfaction with BJP government in State	32%		32%		12%		21%	

Source: CSDS-Lokniti Post-poll survey, 2022

The restoration of Old Pension Scheme (OPS) for government employees was the major promise by Congress in their manifesto. The demand for restoration of OPS became a big movement in the State. Congress had already restored OPS in Congress ruled states like Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Rajasthan. Congress came with the same promise in the Hill state. According to a data, about 1.5 lakh employees are covered under New Pension Scheme (NPS). OPS saw a huge support as 70% voters favored its restoration and voted for Congress in this election. Agnipath Scheme too led to a setback for BJP in Assembly election as a large number of Himachali youth joins Army and many serve the nation in military. Due to introduction Agnipath scheme, most of the youth got disappointed and their anger was reflected in the Assembly Elections. 42% of voters reported dissatisfaction with the Agnipath scheme.

Through the survey, it is clear that people were satisfied with the sitting MLAs as well as the BJP government in the State. It can be concluded that voters of Himachal wanted to continue the pattern of electing a new government after 5 years.

Response of farmers on various issues

S. No.	Factor	Voted for Congress	Voted for BJP	Voted for others
1.	GST on apple cartons	52%	34%	14%
2.	Removal of subsidies	52%	33%	14%
3.	Other Agriculture Related welfare scheme	41%	47%	11%

4.	Beneficiaries of Kisan Samman Nidhi	43%	43%	14%
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Source: CSDS-Lokniti Post-poll Survey 2022

In Himachal Pradesh, 90% of the population resides in villages and agriculture is the main occupation of the people here. Horticulture is the main source of income for people in the upper belt of the state. The Central Government’s decision to hike GST on apple packaging from 12% to 18% not only led to widespread protests in the apple belt but also became a reason of BJP’s defeat in the Shimla region. Among voters engaged in agriculture, 52% voters discontented by this decision, voted in favour of Congress. Removal of subsidies on agricultural essentials like fertilizers, seeds etc., also compelled nearly half of the agriculturalist voters to put an end to BJP’s rule in the State. The beneficiaries of Kisan Samman Nidhi scheme voted equally in favour of BJP and Congress but BJP got support from nearly 50% voters for implementing various agriculture related welfare scheme.

Caste based voting

Caste	Voted for Congress	Voted for BJP	Voted for Others
Brahmin	33	48	19
Rajput	40	49	11
Other Upper Caste	34	54	11
OBC	58	36	6
Dalit	53	34	14
Adivasi (all communities)	33	60	7
Others	38	32	30

Source: CSDS-Lokniti post-poll survey

Different castes vote differently in the elections. BJP is known as the party of Upper castes, generally Brahmins and Rajput but since 2014 BJP had turned its focus towards other Castes also. The support base of BJP had increased in recent time. In Himachal Pradesh too, almost 50% of Brahmin, Rajput and other upper Caste voters voted in favour of BJP. Tribal community (including the Hatti community which recently got ST status) also supported BJP in the election as 60% of the tribal Voters voted for BJP. The main support for Congress in this election came from Other Backward Castes (OBC) and

Dalits. More than half of the OBC and Dalit voters voted in favour of Congress. From this data, it could be stated that support from the OBC and Dalit voters helped the Congress to come to power even though BJP was backed with upper caste votes. This also proves that BJP and Congress are the two accepted parties in the State as voters don't run for third alternate.

Scheduled Tribe Status to Hatti community

	Voted Congress	Voted BJP	Voted others
Fully Support	35	54	11
Fully Oppose	57	32	12

Source: CSDS-Lokniti Post-poll Survey

The BJP government in order to influence the Hatti voters, demanded for Scheduled Tribe status for the trans-Giri area of district Sirmour. The Modi Government at Centre agreed to give the status and such notification was made by the Central government. It was seen as a bog political move because the Hatti community was demanding ST status from a long time. But this decision was not acceptable to non-Hattis as they voted against BJP in the election and about 50% votes went into Congress's court. The people in favour of ST status to Hatti community voted in favour of BJP but this move could not help the BJP to come back to power.

Preferred attributes of the candidates

	A lot	Little bit	Very less	Not at all
Work Done	90	7	1	1
Education	89	7	2	1
Young Candidate	54	28	7	8
Candidate's party	49	19	9	19
Local candidate	41	16	6	31
Female candidate	23	24	16	30
Religion	9	9	11	65
Candidate's caste	5	6	10	72

Source: CSDS-Lokniti post-poll Survey

The respondents were asked their preference while casting their vote, 90% people reported that they voted on the basis of work done by the candidate in that area. The survey showed that work done and education of the candidate were major factors in influencing the voters. People gave more preference to a young candidate in comparison to the party to which the candidate was affiliated. The gender of the candidate was seen as negative because only 23% people marked female candidate as their preference for MLA. The region and caste of the candidate tend to influence voters because people generally lack information about the politicians so they vote on caste. But in Himachal, voters had other preferences so their voting behavior was not affected by the factors like caste and religion of the candidate. Hence, more than 50% of the respondents stated that they have nothing to do with the caste and region of the candidate.

Important Consideration while Voting in the Assembly election

S No.	Issues	Response in percentage
1.	Development	45
2.	Inflation/ Rising price of essential commodities	12
3.	Unemployment	9
4.	Functioning of Government	5
5.	Change/removal of Government	5
6.	Bringing back the government	3
7.	Vote for a particular leader/party/candidate	2

Source: CSDS-Lokniti Post-poll Survey 2022

Every election is contested on various agendas, similarly, voters also cast their vote on considering certain factors. In Himachal Pradesh, 45% reported that development is main issue of consideration for them while casting their vote. Second most important issue was inflation followed by unemployment. Functioning of government was also reported by few as a point to be considered while voting. Only 2% people considered that preferences such as a particular candidate or a political party or even a leader could play an important role in influencing them while casting the vote in the assembly election. Development still remained the top consideration among voters.

Infrastructure Assessment in Himachal Pradesh in last five years or the VIKAS factor

S No.	Indicators	Improved	Deteriorated	As good	As bad as	No
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				as before	before	Response
1.	Condition of Roads	48	28	12	11	1
2.	Supply of electricity	74	8	14	4	1
3.	Supply of drinking water	70	10	13	6	1
4.	Condition of Government schools	46	19	18	12	5
5.	Condition of Government hospitals	35	27	18	17	3

Source: CSDS-Lokniti post-poll Survey

The Vikas factor played an important role in bringing BJP to power at Centre for the second term in 2019 elections. BJP government in the state also worked on infrastructural development in the state. In the post-poll survey, most people agreed that there had been a lot improvement in certain government facilities. Almost half of the people reported that condition of the roads had improved in last five years. There were positive responses over availability of electricity as well as supply of drinking water in the State. About the condition of government schools 46% people reported that the condition had improved. There were mixed responses by the respondents over condition of government schools in the state i.e., neither much improved nor much deteriorated.

Political Analysis of Elections to 14th Legislative Assembly in Himachal Pradesh

The State of Himachal Pradesh is infamous for the electoral trend. Since 1991, the state has never seen the incumbent party running back to power, however better it had performed during its five years tenure. In 2014, BJP came up as a majority party at the Centre and formed the government. At that time, the State of Himachal Pradesh was ruled by the Congress party under the leadership of Late Virbhadra Singh. This period from June 2014 to November 2017 saw two distinct governments at Central as well as State level. Then, in 13th Legislative Assembly elections held in 2017, BJP attained power in the State with same governments at both levels. This period was seen with great hope by the people of the State as

they expected a lot from the BJP government at the Centre which came with great majority in 2019 Lok Sabha elections. With a lot of grants and aids from the Central government along with frequent visits by PM Modi, it was believed that the convention of incumbent party losing the next election will break but nobody could guess the mood of Himachali voters. The first highlight was during the by-polls when Congress won the Mandi Lok Sabha seat and three Assembly seats. It was seen as the sympathy wave for the Congress party after the death of ex-CM Virbhadra Singh.

But the picture got clear after the results of 14th Assembly Election. The Indian National Congress won 40 seats while Bhartiya Janta Party fell down to 25 seats where 8 out of 10 cabinet ministers in BJP government lost their seats. 3 seats were begged by independent candidates. The only sitting MLA from CPI(M) also lost his seat in this election whereas AAP, failing to gain the trust of the voters, couldn't open its account in the hilly state. The vote difference between two key parties was less than 1%. On about 15 seats won by Congress, the victory margin was even less than 2,000 votes.

There were many uncertainties before the elections because the BJP government was confident with its “Mission Repeat” in the scenario of weaking Congress in the country and the work done by it in last five years. Congress had twin rivals one was BJP and other was AAP which was trying its faith in the hilly state. Congress was facing the challenge from the insiders too which remained even after winning majority of the seats. Just before the elections, Congress had a setback when Pawan Kumar Kajal, the head of congress Working committee and Lakhvinder Singh Rana, another senior Congress leader joined BJP. Another shock came for Congress in the form of Harsh Mahajan, former cabinet minister who also joined BJP in September 2022. The coming of Congress to the power was shocking too. The Legislative Assembly Elections were important for all parties. For BJP, it was to come back to power by ending the convention prevailing in the state. For Congress, it was a hope in the time of its roller coaster journey in the country where it is the oldest party. For AAP, it was a chance to penetrate in the bipolar politics of Himachal after coming to power in the adjoining state of Punjab, for Left front it was to save their sailing boat but lost even their only seat in the State. Despite BJPs COVID management and community development with the aid of strong central funding, uneven distribution of seats by BJP, promise of restoration of OPS and chances of re-elected government were main factors which contributed in the victory of Congress in the State.

Conclusion

The State of Himachal Pradesh is known not only for its distinct identity among the other Northern states but also for its political manoeuvres. The results were surprising too as the difference between votes of the two key parties of the state i.e., BJP and Congress was less than 1% even though seat percentage had a great margin. The victory of Congress continued the pattern of incumbent party losing re-election in Himachal Pradesh. BJP's "Mission Repeat" failed as party could not go beyond the mark of 25. The results of 14th Assembly election also affirmed that there is no room for a third party in the state, maintaining the Bi-polar nature of Himachal Pradesh politics. The Assembly Election can also be looked up into the light of the upcoming Lok Sabha Election of 2024 that what will influence the people of Himachal. The unexpected results of this election have shocked the political pundits when the exit polls indicated that BJP will make a comeback that too with a great majority. Now it is to be seen that how the Congress will manage to run the government despite double pressure one from insiders and other from the BJP government at the Centre when the State is already burdened with huge loans.

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