Sikh Disinformation Lab

MISLEADING

Yes Punjab report on "ISI-backed Khalistan" election plot rests on unnamed officials

A November 25, 2026 Yes Punjab article asserts that Indian intelligence agencies have warned of ISI-backed Khalistan groups planning targeted killings, extortion and voter intimidation before the Punjab Assembly elections. The Lab assesses the report as Misleading: its central allegations rest almost entirely on unnamed officials, with no publicly verifiable evidence.

PUBLISHED
27 November 2026

SOURCE POSTED
25 November 2026

NARRATIVES
Claiming Pakistan Controls Sikh Political Activism · Portraying Advocacy for Khalistan as Terrorism

OUR ASSESSMENT

Yes Punjab's November 25, 2026 report presents an alleged ISI-backed campaign of targeted killings, extortion and voter intimidation as a developing threat ahead of the Punjab Assembly elections. However, its central allegations depend almost entirely on unnamed intelligence officials, without accompanying operational evidence, identified perpetrators, intercepted communications or publicly verifiable investigative findings establishing the claimed election-disruption strategy.

The article also weaponizes Punjab's 1992 electoral history to support its present-day security narrative. More broadly, the report minimizes the mainstream Akali Dal boycotts, disputed electoral legitimacy and widespread state repression that formed part of the historical circumstances surrounding the 1992 election.

The Shahzad Bhatti Network is a documented criminal organization designated under India's UAPA, and Bengaluru police registered a case concerning a threat to Diljit Dosanjh's upcoming concert. These developments warrant serious investigation. They do not, however, independently establish that an organized Khalistan movement is directing a coordinated campaign to suppress Punjab's electoral participation. Police were still investigating the origin of the concert threat, while the article supplies no publicly verifiable evidence connecting the various alleged activities to a common electoral strategy.

The report repeatedly shifts between Pakistan-based criminal networks, unidentified threat senders, alleged ISI instructions and the broader Khalistan movement without establishing the relationships among them. It also treats assertions about the movement's public support, political intentions and funding as authoritative intelligence conclusions without presenting supporting data. The resulting framing risks conflating Sikh self-determination advocacy with organized criminal activity and foreign-directed violence, while obscuring the complexity of Punjab's electoral history.

THE CLAIM

Intelligence Agencies Warn of ISI-Backed Khalistan Groups' Plans for Targeted Killings, Extortion Ahead of Punjab Polls

THE ANALYSIS

What was published

On November 25, 2026, the Indian outlet Yes Punjab published an article headlined "Intelligence Agencies Warn of ISI-Backed Khalistan Groups' Plans for Targeted Killings, Extortion Ahead of Punjab Polls." The report, citing unnamed intelligence officials, presents an alleged campaign of targeted killings, extortion and voter intimidation as a developing threat ahead of the Punjab Assembly elections.

The Lab's assessment is **Misleading**, with a severity rating of **4 out of 5**.

What the review found

The report's central allegations depend almost entirely on unnamed intelligence officials. The article supplies no operational evidence, no identified perpetrators, no intercepted communications and no publicly verifiable investigative findings establishing the claimed election-disruption strategy. Despite these evidentiary gaps, allegations of foreign direction, organized criminal activity and political intimidation are presented as elements of a single coordinated operation.

Two underlying matters referenced in this context are documented. The Shahzad Bhatti Network is a criminal organization designated under India's Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, and Bengaluru police registered a case concerning a threat to an upcoming Diljit Dosanjh concert. Those developments warrant serious investigation. They do not independently establish that an organized Khalistan movement is directing a coordinated campaign to suppress Punjab's electoral participation. Police were still investigating the origin of the concert threat.

The report shifts repeatedly between Pakistan-based criminal networks, unidentified threat senders, alleged ISI instructions and the broader Khalistan movement without establishing the relationships among them. It also treats assertions about the movement's public support, political intentions and funding as authoritative intelligence conclusions without presenting supporting data.

The absence of meaningful political context is particularly significant. In the 2024 Lok Sabha election, Amritpal Singh won the Khadoor Sahib constituency as an independent candidate with **404,430 votes and a victory margin of 197,120 votes**. While this result cannot be treated as a referendum on Khalistan or used to determine why every voter supported him, it is an important electoral development that complicates sweeping claims about the political marginality of Sikh nationalist figures.

Internationally, Sikhs for Justice (SFJ) has organized unofficial referendums advocating an independent Khalistan. During the September 2023 Surrey vote, organizers claimed participation exceeding 100,000, while independent reporting described tens of thousands attending. Organizers also reported more than 53,000 participants at the November 2025 Ottawa vote. Nevertheless, the documented events and participation challenge any attempt to characterize the movement's political mobilization as negligible without offering a clear measure or supporting research.

The resulting framing risks conflating Sikh self-determination advocacy with organized criminal activity and foreign-directed violence, while reducing Punjab's complex political history to a security narrative. **Political support, electoral participation, diaspora activism and involvement in criminal violence are distinct matters that require separate evidence.**

The claims, one by one

The Lab assessed **eleven claims. Ten are Unsupported and one is Misleading.**

1. Intelligence agencies have warned of an impending increase in extortion and threatening communications before the Punjab elections: Unsupported. The article says warnings were issued but provides no advisory, assessment number, official briefing or named spokesperson. Readers cannot independently establish the warning's contents or institutional authority. An anonymous intelligence attribution does not provide sufficient grounds to treat a future criminal campaign as an established fact.

2. Pro-Khalistan elements are responsible for the anticipated extortion rackets, threatening emails and calls: Unsupported. No specific individuals or organizations are identified in relation to the alleged campaign. Criminal conduct by identified persons cannot automatically be attributed to a wider political movement. The report uses the broad designation "pro-Khalistan elements" without establishing whether the alleged perpetrators belong

to particular organizations, hold identifiable political positions or have any demonstrated connection to peaceful Sikh self-determination advocacy.

3. These groups have planned major strikes in Punjab: Unsupported. No targets, dates, operational evidence, intercepted instructions or named investigative sources are disclosed. A prediction based on confidential intelligence may warrant security attention, but it is not confirmation that an operation has been established. The article presents the possibility of future violence without giving readers the evidence needed to distinguish a substantiated threat assessment from an unverified allegation.

4. The objective is to create public fear ahead of the Assembly elections: Unsupported. The article asserts an intended political effect without presenting communications from the alleged perpetrators or other evidence of their objectives. The possibility that violence could frighten voters does not establish that specific individuals planned it for that purpose.

5. The alleged groups intend to suppress voter turnout: Unsupported. The report moves from anticipated violence to a specific electoral strategy without demonstrating that the same actors devised both. An anticipated effect on turnout is not evidence of an operational intention to manipulate turnout. The claim becomes particularly consequential because it portrays Sikh separatist politics as inherently opposed to democratic participation without identifying the organizations supposedly advancing that strategy.

6. Pakistan's ISI is backing several pro-Khalistan groups preparing an electoral disruption campaign: Unsupported. The article supplies no publicly reviewable evidence connecting the particular groups it describes to a coordinated 2027 election-disruption plan. Allegations concerning Pakistan-based criminal networks must be distinguished from evidence demonstrating that identifiable Sikh political organizations are participating in the same operation. The existence of past ISI-linked investigations does not independently establish the specific future campaign described here.

7. Low turnout in 1992 resulted from political boycotts, threats and violence: Misleading. Those factors were present, but major Akali Dal factions also boycotted the election amid disputes about its legitimacy, and Punjab experienced extensive state repression and human-rights abuses. The article does not adequately examine those additional factors, instead using the historically low turnout to support a contemporary narrative of Khalistan-linked voter intimidation.

The historical presentation contains another important factual problem. The article describes the Tarn Taran Assembly constituency as having recorded zero per cent polling in 1992. Electoral records show that Congress candidate Dilbag Singh was elected unopposed, meaning no contested poll took place. The absence of recorded votes in an uncontested election cannot be used as evidence that an entire constituency abstained because of militant intimidation. This distinction materially weakens the article's use of the 1992 election as a model for an alleged contemporary strategy.

8. The Khalistan movement has failed to secure significant public support in Punjab: Unsupported. No current polling, representative research or other defined measure is supplied. Participation in Indian elections cannot by itself establish the level of support for a separate political objective.

The article also overlooks relevant electoral evidence. In 2024, Amritpal Singh secured **404,430 votes in Khadoor Sahib**, defeating the runner-up by **197,120 votes** while contesting as an independent candidate. The result demonstrates substantial electoral support for that candidate, although it does not establish how many voters supported Khalistan or which issues motivated their choices. A credible assessment of public support must

distinguish support for individual candidates, religious and political grievances, Sikh nationalist positions and an independent-state proposal rather than treating them as interchangeable.

9. Repeated efforts to revive the movement have received an almost negligible response: Unsupported. No specific campaigns, time periods, membership figures or public-opinion measures are given; the assertion is attributed to an unnamed official.

The claim also fails to engage with documented diaspora political mobilization. SFJ-organized, unofficial Khalistan referendum events have attracted substantial participation in Canada. Organizers claimed more than 100,000 participants at the September 2023 Surrey event, while Global News reported attendance in the tens of thousands. More than 53,000 participants were reported by organizers for the November 2025 Ottawa referendum. These are organizer-reported figures. However, the existence of repeated, publicly documented political mobilization makes an unqualified assertion of negligible response difficult to sustain without defining the population being assessed and presenting evidence.

10. The alleged extortion campaign is intended to raise funds for Khalistan-related activities: Unsupported. Criminal extortion can fund many activities. No financial records, verified transfers, identified recipients or documentary evidence are offered to establish that the alleged proceeds would support particular Sikh separatist organizations. The report moves from suspected organized crime to a broader political funding allegation without demonstrating the financial connection.

11. ISI-directed gangster networks are increasing extortion and threats to finance the Khalistan movement and suppress electoral participation: Unsupported. This overarching claim combines foreign direction, organized crime, political funding and electoral intimidation into a single explanation without public evidence demonstrating the complete chain. The article does not establish which networks allegedly received instructions, who issued them, which political organizations would benefit, or how the reported activities were intended to influence voter participation.

The allegation is especially consequential because it presents criminal operations as part of a unified political strategy associated with Khalistan. Without independently established organizational and financial connections, the report risks attributing the activities of alleged criminal networks to a wider movement for Sikh self-determination.

SDL Review

The Lab's assessment identifies a recurring problem in the article's treatment of Sikh political advocacy: allegations concerning criminal networks and foreign intelligence are extended into broader claims about the Khalistan movement without sufficient evidence connecting the individuals, organizations and political objectives involved.

The article also relies on a selective interpretation of Punjab's 1992 elections while overlooking the political boycotts, contested legitimacy and human-rights conditions that shaped participation. Its incorrect portrayal of Tarn Taran as a constituency where voters recorded zero turnout further demonstrates the danger of using incomplete electoral statistics to support a contemporary security narrative.

The claims about public support are similarly unsupported by defined measurements. Amritpal Singh's documented 2024 electoral result and the reported participation in SFJ's unofficial diaspora referendums do not establish a single level of support for Khalistan, but they provide relevant political context that the article fails

to engage with. Assertions about public opinion require evidence rather than conclusions attributed to unnamed intelligence officials.

The central concern is the construction of an overarching Khalistan–ISI electoral-security narrative through anonymous allegations, selective historical comparisons and unsupported political attributions. Genuine criminal threats must be investigated, but their existence does not justify treating Sikh self-determination advocacy as synonymous with foreign-directed violence.

The Lab assesses the report as **Misleading**, with a severity rating of **4 out of 5**.

Sources and Supporting Evidence

https://yespunjab.com/intelligence-agencies-warn-of-isi-backed-khalistan-groups-plans-for-targeted-killings-extortion-ahead

CLAIMS ASSESSED

01	ndian intelligence agencies have warned about an impending increase in extortion and threatening communications before the Punjab elections.	UNSUPPORTED
02	Pro-Khalistan elements are responsible for the anticipated extortion rackets, threatening emails and calls.	UNSUPPORTED
03	These groups have planned major strikes in Punjab.	UNSUPPORTED
04	The objective of the alleged operations is to create public fear ahead of the Assembly elections.	UNSUPPORTED
05	The alleged groups intend to suppress voter turnout.	UNSUPPORTED
06	Pakistan's ISI is backing several pro-Khalistan groups preparing an electoral disruption campaign.	UNSUPPORTED
07	The low turnout resulted from political boycotts, threats and violence.	MISLEADING
08	The Khalistan movement has failed to secure significant public support in Punjab.	UNSUPPORTED
09	Repeated efforts to revive the movement have received an almost negligible response.	UNSUPPORTED
10	The alleged extortion campaign is intended to raise funds for Khalistan-related activities.	UNSUPPORTED
11	ISI-directed gangster networks are increasing extortion and threats to finance the Khalistan movement and suppress electoral participation.	UNSUPPORTED

SOURCES

01 https://yespunjab.com/intelligence-agencies-warn-of-isi-backed-khalistan-groups-plans-for-targeted-killings-extortion-ahead-of-punj

02 https://pollmedia.org/india/constituencies/pc/punjab/khadoor-sahib

03 https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/in-khadoor-sahib-amritpal-springs-a-surprise-627840

04 https://globalnews.ca/news/9951463/thousands-khalistan-vote-surrey/

05 https://www.geo.tv/latest/635132-53000-sikhs-vote-in-ottawa-khalistan-referendum-amid-carney-modi-trade-talks-scrutiny

06 https://pollmedia.org/india/constituencies/ac/punjab/tarn-taran-30856ad7fc56?code=23&edition=b9bae5d3aef4239776cec441

07 https://www.refworld.org/reference/countryrep/irbc/1994/en/38594

08 https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/JCS/article/download/4293/4888?inline=1

09 https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2311078&lang=1&reg=3

10 https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/bangalore/diljit-dosanjh-bengaluru-concert-bomb-threat-ied-blast-police-file-fir-10976779/

Sikh Disinformation Lab

About Sikh Disinformation Lab

Sikh Disinformation Lab is an independent, evidence-based programme founded and hosted by the World Sikh Organization of Canada. It monitors, analyses and publicly documents disinformation affecting Sikhs.

The Lab examines claims against evidence, publishes assessments with that evidence attached, and tracks coordinated campaigns over time. Every published assessment names what was claimed, where it appeared, what the review found, and what that assessment rests on. Where an item makes several distinct claims, each is assessed separately.

Assessments are made against the methodology framework in force at the time of publication. That framework is public, versioned, and reviewed at each phase gate; a material change produces a new version rather than a silent edit. The full method is published at sikhdisinfolab.ca/method.

Corrections are dated entries, never silent edits. Where a published assessment is found to be wrong or incomplete, the correction is recorded against it and listed at sikhdisinfolab.ca/corrections. If you believe something published here is inaccurate, write to the programme and it will be reviewed.

Assessments are the responsibility of Sikh Disinformation Lab.

This project has been made possible with support from the Government of Canada.

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