
Political Determinants of Voting Behaviour in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to find the political determinants of voting behaviour in the selected districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. It is a quantitative study and aims at knowing the political factors of voting behaviour in the earlier three general elections i.e., 2002, 2008 and 2013. Its major purpose is to see the changing trend of the voters in the above-mentioned elections. It has investigated 292 respondents who had cast vote in any of the target elections. The researchers asked questions through Likert scale designed questionnaire under the purposive sampling technique. The study finds a significant association of political factors such as candidate's affiliation, political party affiliation, party leadership affiliation and party ideology with the voting behaviour. The results of the data show changing scenario as the importance of numerous factors is replaced by others. The study recommends that local political leadership as well as the Election Commission of Pakistan should come forward to actively launch an awareness movement for women participation in elections. It should focus on the importance of vote towards increasing the ratio of participation in voting process, especially women's voting.

Keywords: Female Voters, Women Role in Politics, Party Affiliation, Elections, Democracy

1. Introduction

The electoral history of Pakistan is not too long. The first 23 years of Pakistan passed without national elections. Beside it, the delayed start of democratic process, the electoral system of Pakistan also experienced modifications. The frequent military takeovers did not allow the representative democracy in Pakistan to flourish and strengthen (Ahmad, 2004). Each passing election reflected encouraging the turnout and remained remarkable in elections 2013 which was 55.83%, the highest ever. Voting in national elections is the essence of democracy. A political system cannot be called democratic without public representation and participation. In representative democracies, people ensure their participation through vote casting which is considered an act that links polity with society. Elections ensure the right of the citizens to decide that who will govern them (Campbell & David, 2008). Elections afford an opportunity to the citizens to indicate their priorities, interests and reservations (Chinsenga, 2006). Why and how the electorates cast their vote in the elections is called the voting behaviour (Anderson & Stephenson, 2010).

The elections manifest the political behaviour of masses and help identify the factors as well

as considerations that shape their political disposition and voting preferences. Voting behaviour means how and why people vote the way they do. Voting behaviour of voters in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa always surprised the analysts. Political history of the province reveals that different political parties came into power in different elections with split mandate. No political party has been able to form its government for the second term. PPP, PML (N), MMA, ANP, and PTI got success in the previous elections of 1993, 1997, 2002, 2008 and 2013 respectively (Zubair, 2013). Understanding the voting behaviour in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has, thus, become a complex puzzle. This study focuses on the political factors that led the voters to change their voting choice each time. It is worth mentioning that an individual is the basic unit of democracy. Therefore, it is difficult to explore the voting behaviour of the province until factors behind casting of each vote are not found. That is why, an utmost effort is made to find the political factors behind the decision of each vote to solve the puzzle of the voting behaviour in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

2. Literature Review

Although the importance of elections is globally accepted, however, elections in Pakistani context have special significance. Elections not only resulted in the creation of Pakistan but also in its break-up. In elections (1945-46) which was the last held in India, Pakistan got its independence; the 1970 elections, the first national elections of Pakistan, contributed to its break-up. The results of elections (1977) were charged as rigged which led to overthrowing of elected government and paved way for military regime. General Zia ul Haq got himself elected as the President in referendum and continued to rule for eleven years (Khan et al., 2017). Though, the electoral history of Pakistan has been turbulent, yet, the next elections of 1985, 1988, 1990 and 1997 remained peaceful. In each case, a peaceful transition of powers was seen (Wilder, 1999). The elected government of 1997 could not complete its tenure as the Nawaz Sharif-led government was overthrown by General Pervez Musharraf, who clamped state of emergency and suspended the Constitution. The military rule continued for three years before general elections were held in October 2002. These elections put the country again on democratic path. Nevertheless, the successive elections of 2008 and 2013 further strengthened the democratic process (Asim, 2012).

The available literature depicts that political factors play a significant role in voting behaviour in Pakistan having party affiliation as the more significant. Ahmad (2010) challenges the common perception in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa that social determinants are more influential in effecting voting choices of the voters than political determinants in the province. He argues that social factors have lost its ground to the political factors like political party affiliation and party leadership affiliation. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the political determinants are getting stronger in comparison to social determinants of voting behaviour. This argument supports the findings of Wilder (1999) who studied the 1993 general elections of Pakistan. He concluded voting behaviour in Pakistan is mostly shaped by the political factors than social factors. Party affiliation and party leadership affiliation often comes simultaneously. These are the significant political determinants of voting behaviour. Those who consider themselves as party affiliated cast their vote according to the directions of the party and party leader. Their vote casting is a pre-thought decision that is why the party affiliates are seldom affected by the election campaigns (Farmanullah, 2014).

Although party affiliation is a significant factor effecting voting behaviour across the globe and in Pakistan as well. However, in sharp contrast to Wilder (1999), Ahmad (2010), and

Farmanullah (2014) found that party affiliation was not a significant determinant effecting voting behaviour of the voters of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in elections 2013. Majority of the respondents (53.3%) did not vote on party affiliation basis in election 2013. It signifies that the theory of party affiliation could not be applied to elections in the province. Similarly, a preliminary analysis of the Gallup Pakistan Exit Poll Survey (2008) shows that in elections of 2008, 24% voters voted based on party affiliation. However, this percentage dropped to 19% in the 2013 General Elections of Pakistan (Gallup Pakistan, 2013).

Ahmad (2010) analysed the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provincial Assembly elections from 1988 to 1997. He found that partisanship is the prime factor which determines voting behaviours in urban and central Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Urban and central Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is mostly inhabited by Pashtun population where the vote bank of Awami National Party (ANP) is significant. ANP consistently got majority of seats in these areas as compared to other parties. But ANP never got majority in the northern districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and lost this area to Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) due to its semi and non-Pashtun inhabitants. However, in rural areas of northern and southern parts of the province, the party affiliation did not play any significant role.

According to Wilder (1999), party affiliation significantly influences voting behaviours in urban Punjab. PML-N has replaced PPP as the party of urban Punjab. In 1970, PPP won all the urban seats in the province while in 1993, PML-N won every urban seat in Punjab. PML-N consistently maintained its lead over PPP everywhere in Punjab. The consistent success of PML-N in urban constituencies indicates that votes were cast due to political factors. Voters cast their vote either in favour of PML-N or its leader, or against PPP that again helped PML-N. Moreover, some unpopular and unknown candidates had been fielded by the PML-N who were elected with the same number of votes as the popular candidates, which further indicates that there was strictly party based voting. However, party affiliation is weak in rural Punjab as compared to urban Punjab, especially in western Punjab, where traditional social structure still has a strong influence over voting behaviour.

The Gallup Pakistan's Exit Poll Surveys (1990 & 1993) indicate that party affiliation was an important determinant of voting behaviour in both the elections. Although, voting based on party affiliation kept on shifting in favour of PPP and PML-N (or Islami Jamhoori Ittehad-IJI) but stood as an important determinant. In election 1990, 32% of the respondents voted for PPP which was purely based on party affiliation. However, its percentage for PML-N/IJI was 23. It means that 55% respondents cast votes to these two major political parties, purely based on party affiliation. In election 1993, party affiliation-based voting percentage shifted in favour of PML-N. 25% respondents cast votes to PML-N based on party affiliation as compared 23% in 1990. For the PPP, this percentage dropped from 32 in election of 1990 to 28 percent in the general election of 1993.

Candidate's affiliation is as an important determinant of voting behaviour. That's why the charismatic personalities are often elected to the assemblies. In response to a question that which type of candidate would you like to vote for, 20% respondents in the city of Wah Cantonment and Taxila responded that they would like to cast to a candidate which has a sound personality, is charismatic and dynamic. The respondents considered such qualities very important for a leader (Sheikh et al., 2015). Faisal et al. (2014) in their research on elections of 2013 at district Layyah found that majority of the respondents (55%) cast vote in favour of candidates instead of the party which the candidates represented.

The election results of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa reveal that a considerable number of independent candidates are elected in each election both to the national and provincial assembly. Majority of these independent candidates belong to the northern districts of the province. The reason is the prevalence of prominent personalities, tribal leaders, powerful elites, and feudalists in the region. They have an area of influence and can get enough votes to win their seats independently. Such personalities do not need tickets of the political parties. Even if contesting on a party ticket, majority of the votes are polled to the candidate on personal relations instead of the party affiliation. That is why major political parties often award tickets to feudalists and prominent personalities as their success is guaranteed and are considered as electable. Thus, majority of the votes obtained by the political parties in this region are the votes cast in favour of the candidates based on their personal influence and relationships. This situation persists over decades and has undergone minor change since 1970 (Ahmad, 2010).

3. Methods and Materials

The study is conducted in seven districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (one district from each division). The sampled districts were selected due to their major chunk of votes and relative awareness of voters about the role and importance of vote. Registered voters (18-year age above) who had cast vote in any of the sampled elections constitute the universe of this study. Multistage sampling is used for data collection. At first instance, districts with major populace in all divisions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are selected by stratified sampling. Then data is collected from sampled respondents under the purposive sampling technique. Proportional allocation strategy is applied for breakup of total sample size into target districts and respondents. It is noteworthy that sample size of 300 is chosen as per analogy of Roscoe (1975). However, during data collection, it has been found that no woman voted in the sampled elections in district Dir Upper. That is the reason, 8 female voters distributed as per formula are not interviewed. Therefore, total sample size of the study stands 292.

Table-1: Sample Composition and Selection Procedure

No.	Sampled Districts	Population Size (Registered Voters)			Sample Size		
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1	Peshawar	819869	596646	1416515	50	36	86
2	Mardan	577325	409797	987122	35	25	60
3	Abbottabad	381617	293571	675188	23	18	41
4	Dir (Upper)	205121	125883	331004	12	0	12
5	Kohat	262303	188139	450442	16	11	27
6	D.I. Khan	348697	280531	629228	21	17	38
7	Bannu	270858	182683	453541	17	11	28
Total		2865790	2077250	4943040	174	118	292

Source: ECP, 2013.

4. Results and Discussion

Data is collected through the Likert Scale designed questionnaire. Univariate and bivariate analysis of the data has been conducted. Chi-square test is also used for bivariate analysis. This section gives complete detail about the data, its analysis, interpretation and explanation.

Table-2: Demographic Information of the Respondents

Age Group (in years)	Frequency	Percentage	Education Status	Frequency	Percentage
18-30	29	10	Primary	6	2
31-40	37	12.5	Middle	9	3
41-50	90	31	Matric	30	10
51-60	78	26.5	Intermediate	24	8
61-70	47	16	Graduation	55	19
Above 70	11	4	MA/MSc	57	20
Total	292	100	LLB	17	06
Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage	Medical Doctors	14	05
Married	254	87	Uneducated	80	27
Single	38	13	Total	292	100
Total	292	100	Area of Residence	Frequency	Percentage
Occupation	Frequency	Percent	Urban	95	33
Farming	17	6	Rural	197	67
Manual Labour	20	7	Total	292	100
Business	38	13	Monthly Family Income (in PKR)	Frequency	Percentage
Government Service	58	20	5000-20,000	7	2
Private Service	49	16.5	20,001-35,000	34	12
Religious Teachers	7	2.5	35,001-50,000	49	17
Lawyers	17	6	50,001-65,000	66	23
Journalists	6	2	65,001-80,000	61	21
Politicians	13	4	Above 80,000	75	26
Students	22	7.5	Total	292	100
Housewives	45	15.5	Mother Tongue	Frequency	Percentage
Total	292	100	Pashto	202	69
Family Pattern	Frequency	Percentage	Urdu	5	1.5
Nuclear Family	69	24	Hindko	61	21
Joint Family	194	66	Saraiki	23	8
Extended Family	29	10	Punjabi	1	0.5
Total	292	100	Total	292	100

Source: Field Survey, (2016).

Minimum age of the respondents of the study is 18 years, because it is the least age limit for adult franchise in Pakistan. Age group of 10% respondents is 18-30 years. Majority of them voted for the first time being underage in the elections of 2008 and 2002. However, their inclusion in the study is essential to highlight the voting behaviour of youth and maiden voters. Age of the remaining 90% respondents range from 31 years to 70 years. Educated respondents constitute 73%, while uneducated respondents constitute 27% of the sample size. Majority of the sampled districts have major cities and urban centres, where the trend of education is good and access to education is available. That is why, majority of the respondents are educated. Rural residents constituted 67%, while urban constituted 33% of the respondents. As peripheries constitute major portion of the constituencies, that is why the number of rural

respondents is more than the urban respondents. Moreover, 87% of the respondents are married while 13% are unmarried. The occupations of the respondents include both government and private services (20% and 16.5% respectively), house wives (15%), businessmen (13%), students (7.5%), hard labour (7%), farming (6%), lawyers (6%), politicians (4%), journalists (2%) and religious teachers (2.5%). It shows that the nature of the population is diverse from professional aspects.

Language of majority of the respondents (69%) is Pashto, followed by Hindko (21%) Saraiki (8%) and Urdu (2%). The Saraiki and Urdu speakers belong to district Dera Ismail Khan (D. I. Khan), Hindko speakers belong to district Abbottabad, Peshawar and Kohat while Pashto speakers exist in all the sampled districts. However, all the respondents from district Dir Upper, Bannu and Mardan are Pashto speakers. As Pashtuns are the major inhabitants of the province, they are in majority in the sampled districts. That is the reason that major language of the respondents is Pashto. The inclusion of district Abbottabad, Kohat and Peshawar as area of the study justifies Hindko as the second major language of the respondents. Moreover, Saraiki is the third major language being spoken in district D.I. Khan. Majority of the respondents (66%) belong to joint family system, (24%) have nuclear families, while (10%) respondents have extended family system. Extended family units being major family pattern predicts the influence of family on the voting behaviour. Monthly family income of majority of the respondents (69%) is Rs. 50,001/- to Rs. 65,000/-, while that of 31% is Rs. 5000/- to Rs. 50,000/- as per detail in the table-2.

Table-3: Respondents' Voting Ratio in the Sampled General Elections

Voting in General Elections	Voted		Not Voted		Total	
	Frequency	%age	Frequency	%age	Frequency	%age
Elections 2013	289	99	3	1	292	100
Elections 2008	254	87	38	13	292	100
Elections 2002	258	88.4	34	11.6	292	100
Reasons for not Voting	A	B	C	D	E	F
Elections 2013	0	0	0	0	2(0.7%)	1(0.3%)
Elections 2008	23 (8%)	10(3%)	1(0.4%)	1(0.4%)	1(0.4%)	2(0.8%)
Elections 2002	32 (11%)	0	0	1(0.3%)	0	1(0.3%)

Source: (Field Survey, 2016).

Denotations:

A. Under-age B. Party Boycotted C. Didn't like any party to vote for
F. Couldn't spare time to vote E. Family didn't allow to vote F. On election duty

Majority of the respondents 289 (99%) cast vote in general elections 2013, while 03 (1%) respondents did not cast vote. 02 respondents (female) are not allowed by their family to cast vote and 01 respondent could not spare time for voting being on election duty. In elections 2008, 87% respondents cast vote while 13% respondents did not cast vote. Reasons for not casting vote are either being under-age (8%), party boycott (3%), could not spare time for casting vote either due to personal engagements or being on election duty (1.2%), not allowed by family to cast vote (0.4%), or dislike for the existing candidates or political parties (0.4%) and abstained from casting vote. In general elections of 2002, 88.4% respondents cast their vote, while (11.6%) did not cast their vote to any candidate. Reasons for voting apathy are the same as in election of 2008.

Table-5: Association between Political Social Factors and Voting Behaviour

Statement	Election	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure	Total	Chi-Square
The candidate was more important to you while polling the vote	2013	93 (32%)	188 (65%)	8 (3%)	289 (100%)	16.033 (0.003)
	2008	91 (36%)	151 (59.5%)	12 (4.5%)	254 (100%)	22.027 (0.000)
	2002	106 (41%)	138 (53.5%)	14 (5.5%)	258 (100%)	43.003 (0.000)
Political party of the candidate was more important to you while polling the vote	2013	162 (56%)	69 (24%)	58 (20%)	289 (100%)	37.965 (0.000)
	2008	116 (45.5%)	90 (35.5%)	48 (19%)	254 (100%)	40.347 (0.000)
	2002	112 (43.5%)	99 (38.5%)	47 (18%)	258 (100%)	66.594 (0.000)
Leader of the political party was more important to you while polling the vote	2013	112 (39%)	115 (40%)	62 (21%)	289 (100%)	10.465 (0.033)
	2008	29 (11.5%)	136 (53.5%)	89 (35%)	254 (100%)	8.754 (0.068)
	2002	29 (11%)	146 (56.5%)	83 (32.5%)	258 (100%)	9.140 (0.058)
Ideology of the party influenced your voting choice	2013	98 (34%)	99 (34%)	92 (32%)	289 (100%)	52.288 (0.000)
	2008	68 (27%)	116 (45.5%)	70 (27.5%)	254 (100%)	39.738 (0.000)
	2002	70 (27%)	111 (43%)	77 (30%)	258 (100%)	63.963 (0.000)

Source: (Field Survey, 2016).

Ahmad (2010) challenges the common perception in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa that social determinants are more influential in effecting voting behaviour of the voters than political determinants. His arguments are also supported by Wilder, (1999) who studied the 1993 general elections of Pakistan and concluded that voting behaviour in Pakistan is mostly shaped by the political factors than social factors. Starting from affiliation of candidate, the results show a highly significant association between candidate affiliation and voting behaviour in the sampled elections i.e. ($p=0.003$) in election 2013; ($p=0.000$) in 2008 and ($p=0.000$) in election 2002. These results are in consonance with the study findings of Sheikh et al. (2015) and Aziz et al. (2014). The success of significant number of independent candidates from north-eastern KP is a good example of importance of candidates in elections.

Although major political parties also get handsome votes from the region, but the votes collected by these parties are cast in favour of the candidates and not for the political parties. Political parties often award tickets to such candidates in north-eastern KP who have clear chances of winning the election even without party ticket (Ahmad, 2010). Its reasons could be multiple. Sometimes, the personalities are so charismatic, respectable, and impressive that voters are driven to vote for them. Some candidates are very active and have hands on experience in resolving local demands of the constituents and get elected. Yet others are influential elites with wide circle of influence and can accumulate enough votes to get elected without party ticket. The presence of independent candidates in assemblies is a clear manifestation of evaluation of candidates by the voters instead of their partisanship. However,

the importance of candidates as influencing factor of voting behaviour diminished with each passing election. As majority of the contesting candidates form the platform of MMA in election 2002 are renowned religious scholars and pious persons, they are more important for majority of the voters than Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) to vote for. The dissolution of MMA, replacement of candidates and non-fulfilment of promises done during the election campaign replaced the importance of the candidates by importance of the political parties in the next elections.

The importance of political parties in determining the voting behaviour of the respondents is more clear than other political factors. Voting based on party orientation has increased with each passing election. The analysis shows a highly significant association ($p=0.000$) between political parties and voting behaviour in the sampled elections. These results are in line with the study findings of Wilder (1999) and Ahmad (2010). Party affiliation is the liking of a person for a political party. This liking is considered constant and longstanding. But this attachment needs not to be formal, official and strict enough to interrupt with the activities of the party. It is also called partisanship. The party affiliation and party leadership affiliation often come simultaneously. These are the significant political determinants of voting behaviour. Those voters who consider themselves affiliated to a political party, cast vote by the directions of the party leadership. Their vote casting is a pre-decided that is why party affiliates are seldom affected by the election campaigns of other political parties (Farmanullah, 2014). The increasing importance of political parties as determinant of voting behaviour over non-partisan candidates is because of increasing political awareness amongst the masses, and effective election campaigns of the political parties.

Party leadership's orientation is another important determinant of voting behaviour. A significant association was found between party leadership's orientation and voting behaviour i.e. ($p=0.033$) in elections of 2013, while association between party leadership and voting behaviour was non-significant in elections of 2008 and 2002 as ($p=0.068$) and ($p=0.058$) respectively. The jumping ratio of vote casting based on party leadership's orientation in elections of 2013 could be attributed to the vigorous entry of the cricket star and youth favourite Chief of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), Imran Khan. His vigorous critical campaign against the political opponents and attractive slogans of change during election campaign like Naya Pakistan (New Pakistan) have the potential to attract considerable number of voters, especially the youth. In fact, the number of votes PTI gained in national elections 2013 owes to the personality of Imran Khan.

Ideological attachment with political parties is also an important determinant of voting behaviour. Association between ideology of political parties and voting behaviour in the sampled elections has been found highly significant ($p=0.000$). Leftist and rightest, religious and nationalist political parties do exist in Pakistan with ideological supporters. Ideological voters get unaffected by other factors and usually cast their vote consistently to political parties to whom they are ideologically attached. The number of ideological votes has increased in elections of 2013 due to the participation of all political parties in general elections. The advent of PTI as a third major political party with a considerable number of ideological voters also contributed in this rise.

5. Conclusion

Among the political determinants of the voting behaviour, party affiliation stands with greater

significance. The importance of candidates was replaced by the political parties successively. Similarly, the importance of political factors like party leadership affiliation and ideological attachment with party as determinants of voting behaviour also increased successively. This is a significant shift from a narrow approach of voting for candidates to a much broader approach of voting for political parties. Voting behaviour doesn't depend on any sole political factor rather each vote decision is a composite of several factors that explains how and why a person votes the way that he or she chooses. The collective influence of all political factors leads the voters to set their political preferences and make voting choices. Political factors are, thus, important determinants of voting behaviour in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Based on findings of the study, it is recommended that voters' education and political awareness is essential to discourage group prejudices and empower individual voters to make voting choices independently. The election commission of Pakistan should take strict measures to ensure that no one who is eligible and willing to cast vote is barred from casting vote. Any political party restricting female voters with access to polling station must be banned to take part in any election for at least 05 years. All parties may be bound to have women wings in their offices orbit. The parties should mobilize the women to cast vote in favour of any contesting candidate based on their free will. All political parties should publicly explain their party manifestos so that voters could make informed decision in choosing a party to vote for.

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