



Religion as a Determinant of Voting Choice in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: A Case Study of District Bannu (NA-35) in 2013 General Election

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Abstract- The paper tests the research question “what is the importance of the religious factor in determining the voting behaviour of the people during general election 2013” under the assumption of Religious Voting Theory through the given hypothesis “People from the religious background were more influenced by religious elements in determining their voting behaviour than those living in the secular environment”. The empirical data collected during this study supports the arguments that District Bannu lies in the periphery of the province has less exposure to heterogeneous socio-cultural backgrounds. Meanwhile, its proximity with the two highly Talibanized North Waziristan District and South Waziristan District shaped its static religious voting behaviour. It further contends that the religious voting in District Bannu (NA-35) was greater than any district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as 51.48% of the total respondents voted in favour of religious voting in District Bannu (NA-35).

Keywords: District Bannu, Religious Voting, Socio-cultural, Talibanized, Voting Behaviour

I. INTRODUCTION

Electoral politics is generally based upon free and fair election at regular intervals of time in any democratic country. At the heart of electoral politics lies voting behaviour, a human action, determined by several factors. It is the source of a vibrant democracy, through which people elect their representative (Rauf & Shah, 2015). It is the principal method of participation in the political system of a state; the method of approval or disapproval of the policies and decisions of the incumbent elected government (Rosema, 2007). It also works to link citizen’s preferences with the policy decisions of a government. Thus voting behaviour is a collective behaviour of a society or a group that indicates the choice of a group or preferences of a society (Antunes, 2010).

There are several social, political, economic, and psychological reasons that shape the voting behaviour of the people in favour of a party or candidate. These factors include beliefs and values, kinship, education, religion, appealing agendas of a party or a candidate, ethnic affiliations, gender, age, charisma of a candidate, party loyalty, public opinion, and mass media that influencing the voting behaviour of the people. All these determinants shape the voting behaviour or a voter’s decision during elections. They help voters to cast their votes in favour of a party or a candidate most appropriate to their choice. This human action of voting choice is the basic decision-making process in a democratic setup referred to by political scientists as voting behaviour.

In Pakistan, general elections were carried out from time to time. The first general election was held in 1970 followed by the general election in 1977 the results of which were challenged by the Pakistan National Alliance (PNA) which led to the third Marshal law of General Zia ul Haq (Ahmad, 1976), the non-party based general election conducted under the umbrella of the military brought a puppet cabinet of Prime Minister Muhammad Khan Junejo but was dismissed in 1988. The fourth general election was soon held in 1988. It was the party-based election of 1985. It resulted in bringing back the PPP as Benazir Bhutto was sworn in as the first lady Prime Minister of Pakistan. Unfortunately, she was dismissed by Ghulam Ishaq Khan within a short period: December 1988- August 1990 by holding the fifth general election in 1990 (Akhtar, Awan, & Haq, 2010). The 1990s general election gave a chance to Nawaz Sharif for installing his government but he also failed in completing the tenure. His dismissal in 1993 gave another chance to Benazir Bhutto who succeeded in making government through the sixth general election. However, her tussle with Farooq Ahmed Laghari left her empty-handed. The next general election of 1997 once again turned the board in favour of Nawaz Sharif. His venture with the then military Chief Pervez Musharraf dragged the country into the 4th Marshal Law. Musharraf soon held the 8th general election in 2002 that shifted power from PML-N

and PPP to Pakistan Muslim League- Quaid-e-Azam (PML-Q) PML-Q installed its pro-military government at the centre with the support of Mutahida Majlis-e- Amal (MMA) (Pande, 2003).

The ninth general election was held in 2008 brought the coalition government of PPP was other minor parties at the centre while PML-N became the opposition party. Unlike in the past, 2008 elections were declared more fair and transparent with 44.23% voter turnout. The most recent was the tenth general election, conducted in due course for the first time in the history of Pakistan's electoral politics where one elected government transferred powers to the next elected government. PML-N replaced PPP in the centre while ANP was replaced by Pakistan Tahreek-i-Insaf (PTI) in KP. All mainstream and regional political parties contested the general election of 2013 (Botterman & Hooge, 2009). PPP and MQM in Sindh, while PML-N and PMAP established their government in Balochistan.

The general election of 2013 gave a stunning entry to the Pakistan Tehreek-i- Insaf (PTI) in the electoral politics in Pakistan generally and particularly in the KP. It was largely dominated by PTI triumph with 34 seats in the National Assembly, while establishing their government in the KP, Pervez Khattak was appointed as the KP Chief Minister. The present research work focused on various religious aspects of voting preferences in KP in general and in particular, presents an analytical study of NA-35 Bannu (Old NA-26) in the context of the religious voting theory of voting behaviour. This study focuses on the applicability of religious voting theory to the District Bannu in the 2013 General Elections. This study also uses religious voting theory as a theoretical and conceptual framework to understand religion as a determinant in voting behaviour in the above-mentioned constituency of KP.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Many researchers have taken up work on electoral politics and elections in Pakistan which are published in many research journals. Most of these works either study regional politics or national politics while the provincial domain is almost untouched. Despite some private based and a very minimal number of government departments that worked so far on the electoral politics of Pakistan still, there is a need for plenty research work to be made on this specific realm. The existing research work on elections is generally related to electoral politics, the nature of the campaign and other macro-level electoral events. A few electoral studies specifically related to the provincial elections. Lack of institutional funding, absence of academic interest in the field of electoral research on the micro-level and the lack of a tradition of teamwork are some of the factors responsible for the dearth of scholarly research on elections at the provincial level. Farman Ullah in his doctoral dissertation has a very fascinating and detailed sketch of the 2008 general election in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The dissertation based on empirical data on several levels from urban to rural. He has awesomely discussed various determinants of voting behaviour in KP. His dissertation also derives a comparative analysis of the past three elections including 2002, 2008 and 2013 general elections in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In his study, there is also significant literature on the religious determinants of voting behaviour in Pakistan generally and specifically in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. To him, the 2008 and 2013 general elections were comparatively less influenced by the religious elements as compared to the 2002 general election (Farmanullah, 2014). Muhammad Shakeel Ahmad in his doctoral dissertation has discussed electoral politics in NWFP 1988-1999. This dissertation covers several determinants of voting behaviour including social, religious, and political determinants. It also comprised rich electoral geography of the four regions including the central, southern, northern, and east northern region of the province. The study has also a rich segment of the religious determinant of voting behaviour along with other sociological factors. The author has concluded his thesis with the argument that the voting behaviour of the people in KP is not static and it varies from area to area, from tribe to tribe and from family to family (Ahmad, 2010). Anwar has mentioned the strategies and policies of government during the 1990 election (Sayed, 1991). He further elaborated the PPP and IJI political tussle in detail. Henry observed the poor reporting and investigation of the 1990 election by foreigners in detail (Carey, 1988). The 1993 election was relatively free of controversy. Ziring points out the opposition and the government behaviour to the opposition (Ziring, 1997).

The electoral theories of party identification, religious voting and ethnic-based perception of the voters have been prevalent in the electoral history of Pakistan. No single factor has been involved in moulding voter's choices in the past general elections. The literature further directs that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has remained the most turbulent area during general election results. It further studies the other parts of the country like Punjab and Sindh where Pirs and Sajjada Nashin has remained a significant influential factor in determining the voting behaviour of the people.

I. Research Question

1. What is the importance of religious factors in shaping the voting decision of the people of District Bannu in the 2013 general elections?

II. Aims and Objectives of the Study

Following are the basic objectives of this study;

- a) To investigate the religious determinants of voting behaviour during general elections 2013 in NA-35 Bannu in the context of religious voting theory.
- b) To provide a detailed primary data-based analysis of District Bannu during the 2013 general election in KP.

III. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Religion is one of the influential factors in determining the voting choice of the voters both at the individual and community level. In most cases, it affects the choices of people with a conservative background. Meanwhile, it also happens in societies despite the most secular like the USA. The election and re-election of President Bush in 2000 and 2004 was because of his religious conservatism as showing himself the champion of guarding the Christian faith against Islamic fundamentalist (Wald & Calhoun-Brown, 2007). Seymour Martin Lipset argues that the voting behaviour of the most secular Western European countries is determined by religion. To him, it's the religious and social cleavages that influence the voter's choice in Western European countries (Lipset, 1995). The Religious Cleavages in society results in the formation of political parties (Raymond, 2011). Laymen pointed out the importance of religious voting in comparison to secular voting concerning Great Britain, Germany, and the USA (Raymond, 2011). He concluded that religious people support religious parties while secular voters favour secular parties. In a study on European electoral politics from 1989 to 2004, Wouter Von Dar Brug and his colleagues stated that religion as a voting choice is more viable in current. They further argued that in the segmented societies religion play a significant role in determining the voters' decision during the election (Brug, Hobolt & Vreese, 2009). Generally, in South Asia and in particular, in Pakistan religion has played a significant role in determining the voting behaviour of the people. Religion has shown a common platform for the Muslims of the sub-continent to pursue the idea of a separate Muslim state. Controversy over the nature of the state gave rise to the religious elements in influencing the state affairs by the clergies. Alongside, it further proved helpful information of religious political parties. The electoral history of Pakistan indicates that these religious-political groups did not achieve success in obtaining considerable attention from the voters during general elections till 2002. It was the catastrophic incident of 9/11 and US intervention in Afghanistan that gave rise to the sentiments against the USA in the Muslim world generally while particularly in Pakistan. Meanwhile, the six-piece religious parties' alliance, the MMA considerably influenced the voting behaviour by using Anti-American sentiments and the slogan Sharia as a manifesto for the 2002 General election that led to its success (Rauf & Ayaz, 2011). The MMA established its government in KP, a coalition government in Balochistan, and made opposition leader in the National Assembly. This study focuses on comparative analysis and applicability of religious voting theory to the Southern and Central region of KP in the 2013 General Elections. This study also uses religious voting theory as a theoretical and conceptual framework to understand religion as a determinant in voting behaviour in the above-mentioned regions of KP.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Both qualitative and quantitative instruments of data collection are used to determine different dimensions and depths of religious factors and voting behaviour in the two regions of KP. Both descriptive and historical method is used in this study. Furthermore, the research relies both on primary and secondary sources of data collection to investigate the facts and figures in detail. Secondary sources of data collection are; books, research reports, district census reports, journal and periodical articles, district election commission results, gazetteers, newspaper articles, and official district and provincial websites.

The Sampling Size and Procedure

The process of selecting a portion of the population to represent the entire population is known as sampling (LoBiondo-Wood & Haber, 1998). Several registered voters who participated in the 2013 general election from the mentioned District were selected. In this study, a purposive sample of 500 respondents from mentioned constituency has been obtained from registered voters who participated in the election. Those who were available at the times when the researcher conducted to fill the questionnaire and were keen were included in the sample.

Instrument

The researcher uses to collect the data by making a questionnaire with the help of indicators and variables derived from the research questions. A self-structured questionnaire was formulated to identify the several religious factors that influence the voting behaviour of the people during the general election 2013. The questionnaire composed of the following parts: ·

Part 1. Questions related to demographic information of the registered voters who participated in the 2013 general election.

Part 2. Questions related to indicators that influence the voting behaviour of the people during the general election 2013.

Operational Definitions of Variables

The dependent variable is the voting behaviour of the respondents. Voting behaviour is related to religious factors which help in making the mindset of the voters during elections. The religious factor is the independent variable of the study.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Religion and religious parties have remained as one of the key determinants in influencing the choices of the people during the general election. According to religious voting theory, it is the conservative societies that most welcome the religious phenomena in determining their choices of voting. Meanwhile, it will be out of place to ignore the rule of religious voters in the electoral processes in developed societies even.

Electoral politics in Pakistan also witnessed the rule of religious determinant in influencing this political venture. The influence of religious parties remained negligible in the past during general elections. It was reached its peak in the 2002 general election where the six-piece religious parties' alliance (MMA) got an overwhelming majority in the two provinces; Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan specifically and generally all over the country. It was then followed by the 2008 and 2013 general election where religious parties presented no such impressive results except in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan province.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, out of the many electoral determinants, religion has continued to be a very significant aspect in determining the voting behaviour of the people during general elections in comparison to other provinces. Specifically, in the southern region, it is considered to be the most influencing factors in comparison to the central parts of KP.

This section evaluates the applicability of religious voting theory based on the empirical data collected in the NA-35 constituency of Bannu. It further provides and a comparative sketch of the mentioned constituencies respectively. Religious voting has been studied and assessed based on various indicators through various questions. The questionnaire consists of general question asked for knowing the general awareness of the voters regarding the voting behaviour and applicability of religious voting in elections. Some specific questions have been asked related to the 2013 general election which vividly reveals the relevancy of the theory of religious voters in the general election. Each question has been calculated based on frequencies and percentage. All the questions have been investigated based on certain variables including urban/rural, Age, Gender, and literacy.

Rural/Urban Assessment

The majority of the rural respondent favoured the importance of religious factors in shaping the voting decision followed by the urban respondent.

Table 1: Opinions of the Respondents based on Urban/Rural

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Partially Agree	Disagree	Total
Urban	110 (40.4%)	56 (20.5%)	34 (12.4%)	72 (26.7%)	272 (100%)
Rural	119 (52.3%)	43 (18.9%)	17 (7.3%)	49 (21.5%)	228 (100%)
Total	229 (45.8%)	99 (19.8%)	51 (10.2%)	121 (24.2%)	500 (100%)

The above illustration in the table indicates that a high number of rural respondents (52.3%) agreed to the influence of the stated indicator in influencing their voting choice. Similarly, urban respondents (40.4%) also agreed to the above-mentioned indicator but it is less than the rural. It directs that rural voters were more inclined towards religious voting than urban voters in the 2013 general election.

Age-Based Assessment

The majority of the older respondent favoured the importance of religious factors in shaping the voting decision followed by the younger respondent.

Table 2: Opinions of the Respondents based on Age

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Partially Agree	Disagree	Total
18-40	143 (45.4%)	52 (16.7%)	37 (11.8%)	82 (26.1%)	314 (100%)
Above 40	96 (51.6%)	42 (22.5%)	10 (5.6%)	38 (20.2%)	186 (100%)
Total	239 (47.8%)	94 (18.8%)	47 (9.4%)	120 (24.0%)	500 (100%)

The above illustration shows that a large number of the older respondents (51.6%) agreed to the influence of the stated indicator in influencing their voting choice. Similarly, younger respondents (45.4%) also agreed to the above-mentioned indicator but it is less than the older. It indicates that older voters were more inclined towards religious voting than younger voters in the 2013 general election.

Gender-Based Assessment

The majority of the male respondent favoured the importance of religious factors in shaping the voting decision followed by the female respondent.

Table 3: Opinions of the Respondents based on Gender

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Partially Agree	Disagree	Total
Male	151 (50.9%)	49 (16.4%)	22 (7.4%)	75 (25.3%)	297 (100.0%)
Female	99 (48.5%)	40 (19.5%)	19 (9.6%)	45 (22.4%)	203 (100.0%)
Total	250 (50.0%)	89 (17.8%)	41 (8.2%)	120 (24.0%)	500 (100.0%)

The above illustration in the table indicates that a high number of male respondents (50.9%) agreed to the influence of the stated indicator in influencing their voting choice. Similarly, female respondents (48.5%) also agreed to the above-mentioned indicator but it is less than the male. It indicates that male voters were more inclined towards religious voting than female voters in the 2013 general election.

Literacy Assessment

The majority of the literate respondent opt for the importance of religious factors in shaping the voting decision followed by the illiterate respondent.

Table 4: Opinions of the Respondents based on Literacy

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Partially Agree	Disagree	Total
Literate	153 (50.4%)	48 (15.7%)	23 (7.6%)	80 (26.2%)	304 (100%)
Illiterate	89 (45.4%)	45 (23.2%)	22 (11.3%)	40 (20.1%)	196 (100%)
Total	242 (48.4%)	93 (18.6%)	45 (9.0%)	120 (24.0%)	500 (100%)

The above illustration in the table indicates that a high number of literate respondents (50.4%) agreed to the influence of the stated indicator in influencing their voting choice. Similarly, illiterate respondents

(45.4%) also agreed to the above-mentioned indicator but it is less than literate. It indicates that literate voters were more inclined towards religious voting than illiterate voters in the 2013 general election.

Religious voting has a very significant role in influencing the electoral scenario of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Ullah & Islam, 2014). The empirical tabulated data shows that religion has still its importance for moulding people's choices in elections generally in KP and specifically in the southern region. The collected empirical data verify the hypothesis that religious voting is more obvious in the region where religious elements and actors are more prominent as compare to the secular region. Meanwhile, the data results show that the religious voting in NA-35 Bannu was much significant as 51.48% of the total respondents voted in favour of religious voting in constituency NA-35 Bannu.

The application of the religious voting theory was further observed concerning several variables including age, gender, literacy, and urban/rural division. Finding based on the collected data shows that most of the rural respondent (52.64%) voted in favour of religious voting than the urban (47.64) respondent in NA-35 Bannu in the 2013 general election. In gender, most of the female (52.4%) respondent favoured religious voting as compared to the male (50.78%) respondent. Similar most of the older (52.86%) respondent supported religious voting in comparison to the 50.1% younger respondent in the 2013 general election. Based on literacy, the finding shows that most of the illiterate (53.66%) respondent favoured religious voting over the literate (51.82%) respondents.

V. CONCLUSION

The history of general elections in Pakistan appears to be variant and changeable from time to time and from area to area. While all the provinces observed their style of electoral politics, the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has observed its version of electoral politics. The voting preferences of the Pashtuns remained unstable for the past few general elections in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Especially motivations toward religious parties and religious voting have been changed from time to time and from the area. The current study has been undertaken to understand this peculiar phenomenon of religious voters in the Southern Region (NA-35 Bannu) of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Being centre for the religious activities and home ground of the famous JUI leaders including Ex. chief minister KP Akram Khan Durrani and late MNA Maulana Nasib Ali Shah, NA-35 Bannu experiencing religious voting since 2002 general election both on National and Provincial Assembly seats. Not only here but the same practice has been observed in the other districts of Southern region like in Lakki Marwat, Dera Ismail Khan, Kohat, Karak, Hangu, and Tank district is a clear manifestation of the robust hold of religious parties in this region. This study further concludes that while the Southern region experiencing a stable voting behaviour because of its religious attachment compared to the rest of KP. Except those people living in the rural areas where the literacy rate is low, experiencing a slow pace in shifting their priorities of voting choice. Similarly, the behaviour of the voters in the constituency of District Bannu varies based on education, rural-urban division, age, and gender which indicate that shortly more political and voting trends are expected. The finding further provides an innovative and progressive attitude of the electoral politics in the Bannu regions specifically and generally in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for further research in this field.

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