



Family As Determinant of the Gender and Age Based Voting in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: A Comparison of Voting Behavior Before 2013 And Pro-PTI Voting

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Abstract: Voting behavior is the inclination of a voter towards a particular political party or a candidate. There are different social, political and economic factors which influence the voting behavior of people. This research study aimed to explore the role of family as a determinant of gender based and age based voting behavior in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in elections before 2013 and pro- PTI voting behavior in the recent three elections. Both time lapses are then compared to see the change in voting behavior with respect to gender and age in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The mixed method research approach was used in this research. Tools for data collection are questionnaire and interview guide. The population of the study consists of all the registered and literate voters of district Malakand. A sample of 400 respondents for questionnaires survey is randomly chosen by using multi-stage cluster sampling technique. Interviews are conducted with the relevant stakeholders including political science experts, political workers and journalists. The quantitative data analysis is done through descriptive and inferential statistics while six-step model of thematic analysis is employed for qualitative data. By integrating the results of qualitative data and quantitative data, it is found that the gender based voting behavior has changed in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa since 2013. This research has further explained that before 2013, women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa would mostly vote on the basis of instructions of the family, elders or male members. However, in voting for Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) in the recent three elections, it is evident that, women have chosen to vote independently, instead of the family instructions. For the second objective, it is found that youth were more inclined to vote on the elders' instructions before 2013 however, in the pro-PTI voting behavior in last three elections in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, they have voted independently instead of the family instructions.

Introduction

Electoral politics has a long history and is an important area in Political Science research since 1940 (Schmitt-Beck, 2015). Voting behavior is generally influenced by family, ethnicity, religion, caste, literacy, age, political affiliation, patron-client relationship candidate's personality, political party's performance or voters' benefits (Negi, 2016). Studies show that voting behavior in a society depends

upon the power structure i.e., in developed world people are politically aware and mostly prefer issue based voting (Bhagoi, Mink, & Cash, 2007; Tsirbas, 2024), while family, kinship, religion, social differences, patron-client relationship, personality of the candidate and partisanship are the core values in developing countries (Seredina, 2022; Hazarika, 2015; Sadie, Patel, & Baldry, 2016). For example, in Nigeria, India, and other developing countries, sectarianism too decides the fate of voting (Alao, 2022), while in European democracies, electoral volatility is observed (Ondruška, 2022).

In societies where public participation is not facilitated through proper channels, people prefer organizing themselves on a kinship basis. This happened in colonies maintained by imperial powers. They would give jobs and pieces of land based on the Biradaries (Naz & Luqman, 2023). Research shows as a result of the lack of political platforms, people started organizing themselves according to clans, kinship, and family to reach powerful positions. This has further influenced the way party tickets are distributed as the party leader emphasizes the Biradari with the huge clan (Ahmed, 2008). Among the prominent voting behaviors in rural areas of Punjab, biradari, family influence, and peer suggestions are noticeable (Ahmad & Bhatti, 2020). Rural people prioritize voting based on caste as the leader possesses huge power and influence people of the tribe and is considered more legitimate than the rule of public institutions. Voting is the most important form of public participation. It can enable a party to come to power (Ahmad & Bhatti, 2020).

According to the Colombian School and the Michigan School of Thought, family influence is an important determinant of voting behavior even more than election campaigns. Wolfinger *et al.*, (2008) asserted that family structure is hugely important in predicting voter turnout. For instance, married people are more inclined to vote as compared to single people. In addition, those married with children have little yet a significant impact on voter turnout. Single parents also do vote but their number is often less, resultantly their say is not usually included in policy making. Furthermore, among married and educated couples, voter turnout is much higher as they discuss ideas, policies, elections, and party choices. Kudrnac and Lyons (2017) explained that voters who live with their parents are comparatively more motivated to vote than those who live alone. Similarly, they further assert that the youth whose parents are not active in political participation, consider voting as a bizarre activity. This trend is more common in first-time voters when they have not experienced the world so they prefer voting according to the footsteps of their parents. For instance, Kudrnac and Lyons (2017) explains the current generation in the Czech Republic is the first to grow up in a multi-party system, they are brought up by parents and grandparents who lived in Communism, so communist tendencies can still be examined in the opinion of the youth.

According to social learning theory, children learn from their parents (Nabavi & Bijandi, 2011). Research shows that party choice is often made based on social class, profession, and family influence. Party identification is a political determinant but it is often influenced by family. Some students even get inspiration from a certain teacher regarding their political attitude or due to peer discussion or a particular political event (Kristensen & Solhaug, 2017; Siegel-Stechler, 2019). Siegel-Stechler (2019) elaborated the causal relationship between young adults' voting behavior and the parents' instruction regarding it. He says that parents' verbal instruction and encouragement regarding involvement in the political process have considerable affect. It further depicts how youth cast vote is immensely important for understanding the present and future trends in voting behavior which in turn shape the policies in different fields.

This study aims to answer the question: How the gender based voting behavior has changed over time in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa since 2013 by comparing the common voting behavior before 2013 and the pro-

PTI voting behavior in the recent three elections of 2013, 2018 and 2024. Secondly, this study aims to explain how the age based voting behavior has changed over time in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa by comparing the common voting behavior before 2013 and the pro-PTI voting behavior in the last three elections. The research objective of the study is to explore the change in gender based and age based voting behavior by comparing the common voting behavior before 2013 and the pro-PTI voting behavior in the recent three elections.

Methodology

This study is conducted by using the mixed method research approach. The rationale for using mixed method is that it has helped in better understanding of the gender based and age based voting behavior of people in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The population of the study consists of the registered voters (n=461985) of district Malakand (Election Commission of Pakistan, 2023). For quantitative data collection, literate and registered voters were included. Similarly, the population for qualitative data collection included experts from political science and journalism, political workers and journalists in field in district Malakand. According to Raosoft Online Sample Size Calculator and Kreji and Morgan sample size table (Gay, 1996), the Sample Size for quantitative data collection was four hundred (400). The multi-stage cluster sampling technique was used for choosing the sample for data collection through questionnaire. This study has used two data collection tools i.e. interview and questionnaire. For the quantitative data analysis, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 was used while qualitative data analysis was done by using six-step Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2008). The results from both the methods were then integrated and findings were drawn through discussion.

Results

1. Influence of Family over Gender and Age Based Voting Behavior in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa before 2013

This research aimed to explore the role of family over gender based and age based voting behavior in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa before 2013 through mixed method (both qualitative and quantitative). The results from qualitative and quantitative data analysis are almost aligned showing that role of family was a prominent factor responsible for women's and youth voting on the instructions of elders and male members before 2013. To elaborate it further, women's voting on the directives of family remained more significant as compare to the family influence over youth's voting in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa before 2013.

The role of elders is seen as dominant in developing countries where family structure is strong and decisions are taken by the family head including Pakistan. Wolfinger *et al.*, (2008) asserted that family structure is hugely important in predicting voter turnout. Kudrnac and Lyons (2017) explained that voters who live with their parents are comparatively more motivated to vote than those who live alone. The youth whose parents are not active in political participation, consider voting as a bizarre activity. The following table shows the same trend in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa before 2013.

Table 1

Elders' Influence on common voting behavior before 2013

(n=400)

S.No	Elders' influence	N F (%)	R F (%)	ST F (%)	O F (%)	A F (%)	Mean
1.	On people's voting behavior	25 6.3%	42 10.5%	86 21.5%	166 41.5%	81 20.3%	3.43
2.	On women's voting behavior	19	30	40	125	186	4.07

		4.8%	7.5%	10%	31.3%	46.5%	
3.	On youth's voting behavior	32	60	110	118	80	3.39
		8%	15%	27.5%	29.5%	20%	

Source: Field Data

This table shows the elders' influence upon the voters, specifically women and youth was strong in KP before 2013. Out of 400 respondents, 186 (46.5%) responded "Always" while 125 (31.3%) responded "Often" to the statement "women had voted on the directives of men/elders of their families before 2013". Similarly, 118 respondents (29.5%) responded "often" while 110 (27.5%) responded "Sometimes" to the statement that youth were dependent upon their elders' directives in voting before 2013. Overall family's influence on the people in voting behavior can be interpreted as dominant because 166 respondents (41.5%) expressed that before 2013 people would often vote according to the directives of their elders/family men. By comparing the mean of the above three statements, women, were more dependent upon the family elders' directives in case of voting. Shah *et al.*, (2021) said that in KP, due to the patriarchal structure of the Pashtun society, women are mostly dependent on men in every aspect of life. Under this observation, the female voting decision is influenced by the men of their family.

Furthermore, the data collected while interviewing the relevant stakeholders also showed that the role of youth in politics was negligible, specifically before 2013 and thus they were mostly dependent upon their elders' directives in voting. In response to the question "what was the common voting behavior in KP before 2013?" most of respondents explained the reasons of inactive role of youth in electoral politics before 2013. They said that political parties' direct targets were not youth back then. The party manifestos of political parties did not address the issues of youth hence this age group was reluctant to vote and had little interest in politics. Preference was given to the decision of old age people instead to that of youth. Participants also added that the young generation was ignored to some extent in the decision-making, both at the family level as well as at state level policy making. Respondents agreed to the stance that youth before 2013 used to consider their elders' opinions and would follow the party affiliation announced by the family chief. This behavior of voting was to a greater extent influenced by the traditions of Pashtuns according to which agreeing to elders' decisions is part of the social norms. This tradition was practiced in all sectors of life and thus voting behavior was no different. One sample of the above explanation by the respondent is given below.

young people used to consider their elders' opinions and directions mandatory for them to follow and thus had to vote accordingly (Interview, Malakand, 19th January, 2025).

The analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data thus indicates that role of elders in voting behavior in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa before 2013 was prominent specifically on women. In addition, it is found that youth's role in politics was inactive and hence they were dependent on their elders' directives in case of voting.

2. Influence of Family over Gender and Age Based Voting Behavior in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in the Pro-PTI Voting in 2013, 2018 and 2024 Elections

This trend explains that the social factors are not very dominant in the pro-PTI voting behavior, the role of family is seen is less prominent determinant of voting behavior in gender based and age based voting. It explains that women and youth had voted the PTI on their own choice instead of following the direction of elders. This is an enormous change which is observed in KP in the last three general elections.

This table explains the role of family over women and youth in the pro-PTI voting in Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa in the last three general elections (2013, 2018 and 2024).

Table 2

Role of Family in pro-PTI Voting Behavior

(n=400)

S. No	Elders' Influence	N F (%)	R F (%)	ST F (%)	O F (%)	A F (%)	Mean
1.	on people in pro-PTI voting	225 56.3%	103 25.8%	45 11.3%	9 2.3%	18 4.5%	1.73
2.	on women in pro-PTI voting	134 33.5%	89 22.3%	81 20.3%	52 13%	40 10%	2.43
3.	on youth in pro-PTI voting	213 53.3%	96 24%	50 12.5%	24 6%	13 3.3%	1.81

Source: Field Data

The lower values of mean and the tendency of respondents towards the options “Never and rarely” shows that the role of family as a determinant of voting behavior was almost negligible in the pro-PTI voting. In response to the statement “women voted to PTI on the directives of men/elders of the family” 134 respondents (33.5%) chose “Never” while 89 (22.3%) chose “Rarely”. In the similar way, the statement “youth voted to PTI on the directives of their elders” also shows the same trend as 213 respondents (53.3%) responded “Never” while 96 (24%) responded “Rarely”. Furthermore, generally the role of elders in determining the voting behavior of people of KP is rejected as 225 respondents (56.3%) opted “Never”. Thus the role of family has tremendously decreased in the pro-PTI voting behavior in the last three general elections in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as compared to its role in elections before 2013.

The data collected through interviews also shows that in the last three general elections in KP, family influence in voting behavior has decreased. In these three elections, women and youth specifically had not voted on the directives of their elders. With the emergence of PTI as a popular party, the role of young generation increased in politics and specifically in electoral politics. Unlike the past instances, the PTI made youth its primary focus by addressing them as agents of change in the society. Riaz, Abbasi and Shah, (2020) asserts that the PTI did 41% of youth-targeted advertisements in 2013 elections which is greater than any other political party. The importance given to the young generation led to unprecedented mobilization of masses. The power of decision making at family level transferred to the young generation unlike the traditional setup of the society when the elders would decide the party affiliation and the whole family would follow them. The population of youth received so much importance and hence this age group supported the PTI. The bond of the young generation and women with the party reached to the level of sympathy for the party leadership. One respondent explained this scenario as below.

The PTI took the youth onboard specifically generation of 18 to 30 and below 18 years of age. Imran Khan emerged a leader of the young generation through discussing their issues and social mobilization, emotional trainings as well as emotional attachment strategy used by PTI, changed the behavior of voters in KP and made them cast vote for PTI (Interview, Malakand, 15th Jan, 2025).

The analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data show that role of family/elders in pro-PTI voting behavior has tremendously decreased in the last three general elections in KP. The women and youth have casted vote independent of the influence of the elders.

Discussion

The role of family, according to the Columbian School of thought, is very important in deciding the choice of the party in voting (Kudrnac & Lyons, 2017). The results from this study show that voting behavior of the people of KP before 2013 was also largely influenced by family. Shah *et al.*, (2021) opine that the role of women in politics and other walks of life are subject to the patriarchal structure of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Due to this fact, this study shows that before 2013, women were more dependent upon the family decision in casting vote as compared to men. However, in pro-PTI voting in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in the last three elections, it is evident that, women have voted independently instead of voting according to the family instructions. This exhibits that in last three elections, the women in KP have become more politically aware and mobilized as compared to the past. The participation of youth in politics was negligible before 2013 and thus their role in decision making was neglected in the field of politics. They would follow the traditions set by their elders. However, after 2013 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the youth have become the trend setters in politics. They have educated their families about the parties' manifesto due to which the voter turnout has increased in the recent elections.

But the issue based voting becomes a less priority when other factors dominate voting behavior. For instance, before 2013, the most prevalent factor which influenced people of KP in elections was family, kinship and voting according to the directives of elders. However, in the last three general elections in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the role of family upon the gender and age based voting behavior was less prominent in KP.

The 2018 elections the youth in Pakistan utilized the platform of social media for party campaigns. And the PTI was the party which used it in a more organized way by attracting youth towards itself (Mubashir, 2022). The similar results were found in this study explaining that the reason of the PTI success in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was mainly due to the role of social media and the support of youth which made it victorious in 2018 as well as 2024 general elections. However, the study also depicts that as before 2013, the social media was almost non-existent, the role of youth was almost ignored in the political activities. Society was mostly aligned with the status quo. As a result, people were less mobilized and the voter turnout was low. In the present, social media works as a tool for political mobilization and hence enhanced political awareness.

Findings

1. It was found that the gender based voting behavior has changed in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa since 2013.
2. Before 2013, women would mostly vote on the basis of their family instructions as the factors of family and kinship were strong.
3. In the pro-PTI voting behavior in the recent three elections of 2013, 2018 and 2024 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa women have largely chosen to vote independently instead of the family instructions.
4. In the age based voting, youth were more inclined to voting according to the instructions of the elders in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
5. In pro-PTI voting in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in the last three general elections of 2013, 2018 and 2024, the youth voted PTI independently of the family instructions.

Conclusion

By integrating the findings from the qualitative and quantitative methods, it is evident that the gender based and age based voting behavior has changed in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa over time. Before 2013,

women and youth would mostly prefer to vote according to their family suggestions, however, the voting patterns in the pro-PTI voting in the recent three elections of 2013, 2018 and 2024 shows that women and youngsters have voted independently instead of their family instructions. Thus, it depicts that the role of family has decreased in the recent elections due to the independent decision making of women and youth while voting the PTI.

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