Rising Electoral Support of PTI in Punjab: A Comparative Analysis of 2013 and 2018 General Elections

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Abstract

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has experienced a significant surge in electoral support within Punjab, the most populous and politically crucial province of Pakistan. This paper examines multifaceted factors contributing to PTI's ascendancy, including socio-political dynamics, campaign strategies, candidate selection, change effective political strategies, charismatic leadership under Imran Khan, a growing public desire for political change and voter perceptions to shed light on PTI's performance in 2013 and 2018 general elections. The analysis also explores demographic shifts, socio-economic influences, and the role of social media in mobilizing and engaging younger voters. The impact of PTI's governance in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, their anti-corruption stance, and successful public campaigns have further cemented their appeal in Punjab. This paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of PTI's electoral dynamics and the potential implications for Pakistan's political landscape. The debate investigating the causes and factors responsible for that noteworthy political change became inevitable. This paper is an attempt to answer the pertinent questions of why and how related to PTI rapid rise in the Punjab electoral politics. Furthermore, it analyzes the role of parties' manifestos in shaping support across different regions. The research seeks to enhance comprehension about dynamics of electoral politics in Pakistan.

Key Words: Elections, Electoral Politics, Dynamics, Punjab

Introduction

Political participation on a global scale often revolves around electoral politics and voting behavior. Despite various strategies employed by political agencies to support democracy, the focus consistently remains on free, fair, transparent, and competitive elections. The ballot box stands as the primary means for the public to systematically elect representatives, shaping governments' responses. Elections are fundamental to democracy, providing a platform for people to choose their representatives based on ideologies and voting assumptions (Al-Mujahid, 1965). Pakistan's electoral history dates back to the 19th century when the British colonial empire granted minor representation to the people of British India (Huq, 1966). The 20th century saw the adoption of an adult franchise system in the legislative assembly of British India. Following independence, Pakistan conducted its first elections in 1945-56 under the Government of India Act 1935. Subsequent developments included the introduction of the Basic Democracy (BD) system in 1959, local government elections in 1962 and 1965, and the landmark national general election in 1970. Elections have played a central role in shaping Pakistan's political landscape, contributing to the creation of the country and influencing its political trajectory (Sheikh, Bukhari, & Naseer, 2012). Despite periods of dictatorship and democratic governance, elections have remained pivotal in Pakistan's political development. The country's political system is influenced by factors such as feudalism, religion, caste, ethnicity, and race, which contribute to divisions in rural and urban area.

The research article focuses on the electoral system and voting behavior in Punjab, Pakistan's most populous province, during the 2013 and 2018 general elections. The study considers various factors, including education levels, traditional political influences, socio-economic conditions, party manifestos, and regional affiliations, in analyzing voting behavior. The theoretical framework incorporates psychological and sociological models of voting behavior to categorize voters and obtain

scientifically grounded results. Punjab's significance in Pakistan's electoral process and power dynamics cannot be overstated. Despite its importance, there has been a lack of scholarly attention to the voting behavior and electoral politics in Punjab. The research aims to bridge this gap by analyzing the 2013 and 2018 general elections in Punjab, emphasizing the province's undeniable impact on national politics (Zaidi, 2018). The study examines factors contributing to major political changes in Punjab, exploring the role of socioeconomic conditions, education levels, political personalities, urban-rural political understanding, and party manifestos in the rise and decline of political parties like PTI and PMLN in both election cycles. The focus is on understanding why the majority of Punjab's population supports specific political parties and what factors drive significant political changes in specific areas of the province.

Literature Review

As per Wilder (1995), research on electoral politics and voting behavior in Punjab has been instrumental, particularly in analyzing the dynamics of the general elections of 2013 and 2018. Prior to Wilder's work, this area of research was largely neglected, and socio-economic factors influencing voter decisions were not systematically examined. Wilder's book, *"The Pakistan Voter, Electoral Politics and Voting Behavior in the Punjab,"* focuses on Punjab, a key player in Pakistani politics, and sheds light on both rural and urban areas (Wilder, 1999). Wilder's findings highlight the impact of socio-economic factors on voter behavior, emphasizing the significance of voters' perceptions of which candidate and party would best address their needs. The book contributes to the understanding of the history of provincial Punjab elections, bridging the gap between current and past elections (Waseem, 1994). Further developed the electoral theory framework by focusing on the 1993 and 2002 elections. Waseem's book delves into the national elections, providing valuable insights into the evolving landscape of Pakistani politics at the theoretical level. Additionally, Waseem discusses the legitimacy of President Musharraf's military government and explores the concept of "psephology" in understanding voting behavior.

Zaidi (2002), readings on "Naya Pakistan" explore the challenges of creating a new political landscape, emphasizing the complexity of introducing change in the political culture and parties. Fisher et al., (2018), in *"The Rutledge Handbook of Elections, Voting Behavior and Public Opinion,"* offers a comprehensive guide to key developments in theoretical and methodological terms related to elections, voting behavior, and public opinion. As per Sayeed (1968), *"Pakistan: New challenges to Political System"* provides a detailed account of Pakistani politics, covering early partition and the subsequent political processes. In a discusses about the culture of power and domination in Pakistan, addressing historical issues of sovereignty and the ethical threats posed by the decline in the morals of the ruling elite (Niaz, 2014).

Waseem (2011), in a book detail discuss how the military dictator used Islamization to gain support, interfering with the democratic process through political maneuvering and emphasizes the importance of social classes in understanding voting behavior, considering economic dependency and traditional values. Moreover, Ahmed & Hussain (2016), analysis of the 2008 national elections discusses the various political changes in Pakistan, including events during the Musharraf regime and the subsequent restoration of democracy through the 18th constitutional Amendment. PILDAT (2008), research paper before the 2008 general election provides a comprehensive examination of polling conduct, highlighting uncertain outcomes and diverse voting patterns. Various researchers, including Gallup team and others have contributed to the understanding of pre-election events, party campaigns, and voting processes. Their studies incorporate data from print media, exploring the impact of seat adjustments, negative campaigns, and organizational commitments on election outcomes. The collective research paints a rich picture of the electoral politics and voting behavior in Punjab, offering valuable insights into the political landscape of Pakistan.

Material and Methods

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to analyze the rising electoral support for PTI in Punjab. The methodology includes both quantitative and qualitative components to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to PTI's increased popularity. Examine the official election results in Punjab perspective from ECP for the 2013 and 2018 general elections. This includes vote share and number of seats won by PTI. Use of statistical tools to calculating the increase in PTI's vote share and seats won. Conducting interviews with political analysts, PTI party members, and voters from various constituencies to gain insights into the reasons behind the shift in support. Reviewing media coverage, campaign materials, and social media activity to understand the narrative and messaging strategies employed by PTI. This includes advertisements, and social media posts for evaluating the impact of PTI's anti-corruption and governance promises on voter perceptions. Assessing the performance and public perception of incumbents from other parties in these constituencies to understand the shift towards PTI. Using census data to correlate changes in voter demographics with PTI's rising support. This includes age, gender, education level, and urban-rural distribution. Examining economic conditions, employment rates, and public services in Punjab between 2013 and 2018 to understand their impact on voter preferences. Tracking PTI's social media presence and its effectiveness in engaging and mobilizing voters. By integrating these methodologies, the study aims to provide a detailed and nuanced understanding of the rise in PTI's electoral support in Punjab between the 2013 and 2018 general elections, shedding light on the broader implications for Pakistan's political dynamics.

Table 1
Electoral Dynamics: PML-N and PTI Seat Disparity in 2013 & 2018

Divisions Name	Seats secured by Parties in 2013 Election in Punjab	Seats secured by Parties in 2018 Election in Punjab
Lahore Division	PML-N = 24 PTI = 01	PML-N = 16 PTI = 07
Gujranwala Division	PML-N = 20 PML-Q = 02 Independent = 01 PTI = 00	PML-N = 14 PTI = 03 PML-Q = 01 Independent = 02
Sargodha Division	PML-N = 08 PTI = 02 Independent = 01	PML-N = 05 PTI = 05 Independent = 01
Sahiwal Division	PML-N = 11 PTI= 01	PML-N = 08 PTI = 01
Faisalabad Division	PML-N = 18 PTI = 00 Independent = 02	PML-N = 06 PTI = 11 Independent = 01
Multan Division	PML-N = 10 PTI = 02 Independent = 04	PML-N = 05 PTI = 10 Independent = 01
Rawalpindi Division	PML-N = 10 PTI = 02 PML-Other = 01 Independent = 01	PML-N = 00 PTI = 10 PPP = 01 AML = 01 PML- Q = 01
Bahawalpur Division	PML-N = 09 PTI = 00 PML-Q = 01 PPP = 02 PML- other = 01 Independent = 01	PML-N = 06 PTI = 03 PML-Q = 02 PPP = 02 Independent = 01
Dera Ghazi khan Division	PML-N = 08	PML-N = 00

PTI = 00	PTI = 09
PPP = 00	PPP = 03
PML-Q = 00	Independent = 03
Independent = 04	

The Major Factors that Enabled PTI for Popular Support and Electoral Success in Punjab
The Political Canvas: Understanding the Electoral Background of 2018

Between 2013 and 2018, Pakistan experienced significant political changes. Historically dominated by the PML-N and PPPP, with occasional governance by PML-Q, the 2013 elections saw Nawaz Sharif of PML-N become Prime Minister, forming a coalition with 19 Independent MNAs. Imran Khan's PTI, as the opposition, raised concerns about electoral manipulation but judicial inaction followed. Khan led a major protest, the Azadi (Freedom) March, demanding Sharif's resignation and investigations into alleged irregularities (Hadi, 2016). The protest ended after the Peshawar school massacre, and a judicial commission later confirmed the 2013 elections' fairness. The Panama Papers leak implicated Nawaz Sharif in corruption, leading to his disqualification and a prison sentence for the Al-Aziz Steel Mill case, though he was released on bail for medical reasons. This scandal eroded trust in PML-N, resulting in defections to PTI, which won the 2018 elections as PML-N faced setbacks (Naseer, 2018).

From Cricket Pitch to Political Arena: Imran Khan's Journey and the 2018 Election

The 2018 elections were a pivotal moment in Imran Khan's political journey, which began over two decades earlier and marked a new chapter in his career. Unlike traditional political elites, Khan first gained fame as a cricketer, leading Pakistan to victory in the 1992 World Cup. He later founded the Shaukat Khanum Cancer Hospital in Lahore in 1994, driven by philanthropy and personal challenges. His fundraising efforts and humanitarian work, including the Imran Khan Foundation, endeared him to the public and facilitated his political entry (Adeela, 2002). In 1996, he founded the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, but initial electoral attempts were unsuccessful, securing only one seat in the 2002 elections and boycotting the 2008 elections in protest against General Musharraf's regime. PTI gained significant traction in the 2013 elections, winning 28 seats and becoming the second-largest party by vote share. Khan's political momentum surged with a major rally in Lahore in 2011, marking a shift in public sentiment. Following the 2013 elections, Khan accused the ruling party of electoral malpractice, leading protests that culminated in the Azadi March (Ullah, Ahmad & Azim, 2020). The Panama Papers leak strengthened his anti-corruption platform, resulting in legal actions against Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his eventual ousting from office.

The Khan Train: Beginning Its Journey down the Tracks

Imran Khan's recent rally in Lahore has garnered political attention, with significant figures like Shah Mahmood Qureshi joining his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). Qureshi, a former Foreign Minister with ties to the PPP and the Zardari administration, resigned in 2011 due to disagreements over the Raymond Davis incident. His new role as PTI's Vice Chairman, along with the addition of experienced politicians such as Khurshid Kasuri, Jehangir Tareen, Ishaq Khaqwani, and Owais Leghari, marks a pivotal moment for PTI. Additionally, Javed Hashmi, a prominent figure from South Punjab previously aligned with Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League, has joined PTI, strengthening its influence, particularly in Punjab, where Hashmi's advocacy for the division of the province into smaller units contrasts with PML(N)'s stance. PTI's strategic rally in Karachi, drawing 200,000 attendees, highlighted corruption issues and called for Pakistan's independence from external influences (Dawn, 2011). Imran Khan's focus on internal issues and his alignment with ideals like democracy and economic development have drawn the attention of U.S. officials, reflecting PTI's growing political clout.

Khan's Political Path: Navigating Religious and Populist Currents in the 2018 Election

Imran Khan has strategically leveraged religious sentiments, termed "Islamist civilisationism," to distinguish himself as a populist leader. Pakistan's political history includes populist movements, such as the democracy advocacy by Fatima Ali Jinnah, the leftist populism of Z. A. Bhutto's PPP, and General Zia-ul-Haq's Islamic reforms (Askari,2002). Imran Khan entered politics in 1994, focusing on anti-corruption and aligning with Islamic principles. His PTI party's anti-establishment stance gained traction, especially during the "war on terror," opposing US drone strikes and advocating for human rights. Khan's Islamist populism, likened to Turkey's Erdogan, capitalized on anti-Western sentiments, portraying conflicts as a clash between civilizations. As Prime Minister, he endorsed the Afghan Taliban and promoted Islamic values in education, often collaborating with conservative Islamist groups. PTI's populist strategy, including the "Naya Pakistan" campaign, emphasized Islamic governance and anti-corruption, aiming to create an Islamic welfare state inspired by early Islamic history. Despite lacking detailed strategies, PTI's narrative resonated with those disillusioned by traditional elites, consolidating power through a blend of populism and Islamism, often marginalizing liberal and secular critics.

Imran Khan frequently incorporates religious themes into his speeches, particularly the significance of 'Medina,' to blend his image of Islamic simplicity with legitimacy for his modernizing agenda. Medina, the first Islamic state, symbolizes an ideal society characterized by justice, equality, and education, which Khan uses to infuse Islamic utopian ideals into Pakistani politics. By referencing Medina, Khan appeals to religious sentiments crucial for political acceptance in Pakistan. He advocates for a welfare state inspired by Medina's principles, focusing on justice, meritocracy, and support for the marginalized (Khan, 2016). Khan's vision for "Naya Pakistan" reflects these values, aiming for a society based on justice, equality, and meritocracy. His rhetoric, especially concerning women's rights and education, underscores his commitment to a culturally relevant yet progressive agenda. By invoking Islamic history and values, Khan's political strategy resonates with the public, blending patriotism, religious beliefs, and populist ideology to support his modernization efforts.

Reasons of Major Setback to PML-N in Faisalabad and Rawalpindi Regions in 2018 Election

PML-N has traditionally enjoyed strong electoral success in Punjab, making it a formidable force that other parties struggled to contend with, owing to its track record of governance. However, the 2018 election marked a significant turning point as PTI managed to disrupt PML-N's dominance, causing an unexpected shift in the political landscape. Several factors contributed to PML-N's decline despite its past achievements. Tensions with the military, the emergence of TPL, sudden withdrawals of PML-N candidates from the election, and internal rifts within the party played pivotal roles in its electoral setback (Khan, 2018). Moreover, influential political figures from various parties, particularly in Faisalabad, Rawalpindi, and South Punjab, switched their allegiance to PTI, further weakening PML-N's position. This amalgamation of factors culminated in the surprising outcome of the 2018 elections.

In the 2013 elections, PML-N dominated Faisalabad division, winning 18 out of 20 seats, with two independent candidates also aligning with them. However, the 2018 elections marked a significant shift as PTI triumphed over PML-N. Key factors included Muhammad Asim Nazeer's switch from PML-N to an independent candidate and then to PTI, Raza Nasrullah's move from PPP to PTI, and Farrukh Habib's victory over PML-N's Abid Sher Ali. In Chiniot and Jhang districts, notable figures like Ghulam Muhammad Laali and Sahibzada Muhammad Ameer Sultan defected from PML-N to PTI, while PML-N managed to retain some seats in Toba Tek Singh (Dawn, 2018).

In the Rawalpindi division, known for its political significance, PML-N faced a drastic decline in the 2018 elections, failing to secure any seats after winning 10 out of 14 in 2013. PTI increased its seats from two in 2013 to 10 in 2018, with additional victories by PPP, AML, and PML-Q. PTI's success was highlighted by Sadaqat Ali Abbasi's win over former Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, and Imran Khan's victory against Hanif Abbasi. Key alliances with PML-Q and AML bolstered PTI's performance, leading to significant wins in Chakwal and Rawalpindi, further consolidating their influence in the region.

Leader with Integrity: Meeting the Hunger for Genuine Commitment

In 2011, Pakistan faced numerous challenges, including a struggling economy, energy shortages, poor political responses, strained US relations, rampant northern terrorism, increasing urban lawlessness, and widespread corruption, prompting calls for leadership change. Amid this discontent, Imran Khan, celebrated for leading Pakistan to victory in the 1992 cricket World Cup, gained national attention as a potential leader. On October 30, 2011, Khan delivered a significant speech near Lahore's Minar-e-Pakistan monument, drawing an unprecedented crowd, similar to the fervor during Benazir Bhutto's 1986 return from exile. He replicated this success in Karachi, despite its ethnic tensions, particularly during the tumultuous summer of 2011, highlighting his rising popularity despite challenges related to his background (James, 2011).

Khan's Opposition Saga: Confrontations with the Mainstream (2013-2018)

In 2013, Imran Khan announced internal by-elections within his party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), to break away from traditional political structures dominated by feudal and hereditary power dynamics, enhancing his populist image. However, this move also drew criticism for PTI's embrace of "electable" lawmakers from other parties. Khan defended this strategy as necessary for electoral victory, emphasizing practical politics over maintaining an impeccable reputation, and portraying himself as the sole leader capable of rescuing Pakistan from its crises (Dawn, 2018). PTI achieved significant milestones in 2013, notably forming a provincial government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and launching progressive reforms in welfare, public institutions, and technology. Despite these initiatives, the technocratic reforms did not translate into substantial development for the general population due to persistent governance challenges. Khan's tenure saw two military operations against militants and a shift towards Islamic studies in schools, which he overlooked to maintain political support. Ironically, Khan initiated a metro bus project in Peshawar, similar to a criticized project in Lahore, which faced delays and budget issues, along with his "tree tsunami" initiative embroiled in corruption scandals. Khan's political acumen was evident during the 2014 "Azadi March," where he led nationwide rallies against corruption, garnering support from both middle and working-class citizens. He pledged to eradicate corruption and terrorism quickly and launched a 100-day program to recover stolen assets. The Panama Papers leak bolstered Khan's anti-corruption crusade, leading to Nawaz Sharif's disqualification from public office. This victory, celebrated by Khan and his supporters, set the stage for his 2018 campaign, where he promised to establish a Muslim welfare state and hold corrupt individuals accountable aiming to enhance Pakistan's independence from foreign aid.

Political Renaissance: The Novel Transformation of Pakistan's Party Politics

In recent years, Pakistan's political landscape has seen a notable transformation marked by the emergence of a third political force, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). Prior to 2008, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) dominated the country's politics, with strongholds in Sindh and Punjab provinces, respectively. However, PTI managed to cultivate a significant support base in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa despite challenges like terrorism and governance issues. This shift was underscored by PTI's substantial victory in the 2018 general elections, securing a prominent position in the National Assembly. The changes in Pakistan's political dynamics have had far-reaching implications nationally and regionally, reflecting shifts in the political landscape and social structures away from traditional democratic norms. Key aspects of this transformation include PTI's rise to power, driven by changing political environments and evolving social dynamics, deviating from established democratic patterns (Ahmad & Skoric, 2014).

From Bloodlines to Ballots: The Transformation of Dynastic Political Culture

In Pakistan, entrenched dynastic politics have historically shaped major political parties, notably the Bhutto family's influence within the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the Sharif family's control over the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). Despite the inheritance of political

institutions from British India, traditional social structures still wield significant influence, where family connections, social status, and religious affiliations continue to shape political dynamics, often overshadowing institutional frameworks (Amin, 1994). However, Imran Khan's rise to power with the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) in 2018 marked a departure from this trend, offering an alternative to the traditional leadership succession seen in parties like the PPP and PML-N. PTI's success in carving out a unique niche within Pakistan's political landscape can be attributed to several factors, including ideological resonance, organizational enhancements, and a shift in civil-military relations. PTI strategically tapped into mounting dissatisfaction with established parties, targeting young voters through innovative means like social media while championing issues of transparency, accountability, and nationalism. This shift has led to increased civic participation, particularly among youth and women, and broadened the party's leadership base to include the middle class, influencing foreign policy objectives and reshaping voter preferences.

Ideologically, PTI sets itself apart by prioritizing clean governance, opposing religious extremism, and advocating for a progressive and inclusive worldview. Unlike previous administrations, PTI pledges to actively pursue corruption cases and promote self-reliance in the economy. Organizationally, PTI adopts a horizontal structure, emphasizing institutionalization and democratic practices, in contrast to the hierarchical setups of other parties. This commitment to internal democracy was exemplified through innovative nomination processes and intra-party elections, fostering consensus-building and mobilization efforts (Zaidi, 2018). Amidst Pakistan's political history characterized by military interventions and conflicts between civilian governments and the military, PTI's emergence and subsequent success have contributed to stability in civil-military relations (Raiz, 2017). Despite debates regarding alleged military backing in recent elections, PTI maintains its commitment to effective governance and stable civil-military relations, highlighting progress in Pakistan's political evolution.

Role of Media in 2018 Election Political Campaigns in Pakistan

During the 2018 general elections in Pakistan, social media emerged as a crucial tool for major political parties like the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) to connect with voters and promote their agendas. Platforms like Facebook and Twitter played a central role, allowing politicians to disseminate campaign messages directly to the public and engage with supporters (Saud, 2018). However, concerns arose regarding the credibility of social media companies and the proliferation of fake advertisements, potentially swaying public opinion and eroding trust in the electoral process (Ahmed, Alvi & Ittefaq, 2019). Despite challenges, social media provided a platform for political parties to mobilize supporters, coordinate campaigns, and influence public discourse, impacting the dynamics of electoral politics in Pakistan. Leading up to the elections, both PTI and PML-N utilized social media effectively to energize their voter base and garner attention. PTI's robust social media presence, including the launch of a voter database mobile app, enabled them to engage with followers, coordinate campaign efforts, and enhance their credibility (Emruli & Baca, 2011). In contrast, PML-N faced challenges, particularly with disruptions in their online presence due to the absence of key figures like Maryam Nawaz. Additionally, the proliferation of misleading content and fake accounts raised concerns about the manipulation of public opinion. Despite these challenges, the widespread use of social media platforms democratized political participation, empowering individuals across diverse backgrounds to engage actively and shaping the communication dynamics between politicians and the public (Bilal et al., 2018).

Civil-Military Relation in Nawaz Era and Its Repercussion in 2018 Election

The transition within Pakistan's democratic process was marred by allegations of intimidation and election tampering, casting doubt on the fairness of the elections. Reports from independent sources like the Human Rights Commission and EU election monitors highlighted issues such as unequal opportunities for certain parties, notably the PML(N), and alleged incidents of manipulation on voting day. Despite PTI party denials, other political factions lodged substantial complaints, citing interference hindering their officials from overseeing vote tallying. Delays in vote counting and reluctance of the

electoral commission to provide results on official forms added to skepticism, leading to demands for a clear re-election from a post-election coalition of parties. These events not only raised doubts about election integrity but also revealed broader political dynamics. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's disqualification, biased court convictions, orchestrated defections, and alleged military-backed strategies to hinder his return to power highlighted tensions between civilian and military authorities. Episodes like the Dawn leaks in 2016 exacerbated these tensions, underscoring complex power dynamics within Pakistan's political sphere (Almedia, 2016). Nawaz Sharif's strained relationship with the military stemmed from his disclosures of sensitive information, efforts to assert civilian authority over security matters, and commentary on extremist activities, escalating legal troubles culminating in his disqualification from holding public office and subsequent convictions in corruption cases, further sidelining him from active political participation and weakening his political party, the PML(N).

Jeep in Race

In the current election, an unexpected symbol, the jeep, has emerged as a potent emblem for garnering votes, departing from conventional choices like the lion, axe, or arrow. Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan in Chakri, Rawalpindi, who contested independently after leaving the PML-N party, initiated this trend. Senior PML-N politician Zaeem Qadri also adopted the jeep as his emblem for his election campaign in Lahore, along with 11 PML-N candidates from South Punjab who switched to independent candidacy, all opting for the jeep emblem (Abbasi, 2018). The PML-N responded strongly, alleging hidden motives behind the surge in independent candidates selecting the jeep symbol, linking it to possible pre-election interference and involvement of key figures like General Faiz Hameed from the ISI, as suggested by Nawaz Sharif and his daughter Maryam Nawaz (Dawn, 2018). This sudden prominence of the jeep as a political symbol has sparked extensive speculation and debate, with various interpretations regarding its selection and meaning. According to reports from the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) and the Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN), 143 independent candidates from Punjab are vying for National Assembly seats, with many opting for the jeep emblem, particularly in Punjab, posing challenges for parties like the PML-N, PTI, and PPP in constituencies across the country. Despite the intrigue surrounding these independent candidates, it's essential to note that not every candidate using the jeep symbol is guaranteed victory, as emphasized by analysts like Karamat Ali. The involvement of prominent figures like Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan adds further complexity to the electoral landscape, raising questions and speculation among political observers (Birmani, Faheem, & Ali, 2018).

TLP Political Move

In 2018 elections, there has been a noticeable surge in support for extreme political parties, presenting a significant challenge to the Sharif political faction. This trend was particularly evident in the NA-120 Lahore by-election held in September 2017. During this by-election, the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) and the Milli Muslim League (MML) gained attention as their candidates collectively garnered nearly 11% of the total votes, amounting to roughly 13,000 votes. The by-election was prompted by Nawaz Sharif's disqualification, resulting in his wife, Kulsoom Nawaz, contesting and securing the seat. In the subsequent 2018 general election, these parties continued to exert influence, amassing approximately 2.2 million votes nationwide (Dawn, 2018).

Table2
National Assembly results of TLP

Election	Leader	Votes	Percentage	Seats
2018	Khadim Hussain Razvi	2,234,316	4.83%	0/342

Table 3
Punjab Assembly results of TLP

Election	Leader	Votes	Percentage	Seats
2018	Khadim Hussain Rizvi	1,888,240	5.7%	0/371

The robust campaigning efforts of emerging political factions, coupled with the utilization of religious venues and mosques for aggressive political mobilization, present a formidable challenge to established parties. These new political entities are distancing themselves from traditional affiliations and are striving to carve out distinct voter blocs based on Deobandi, Brelvi, and Ahle Hadis sects. The recent surge in public demonstrations by extremist groups spanning the ideological spectrum, as well as their active participation in electoral processes, has the potential to significantly reshape conventional voter demographics. It is imperative to closely monitor and evaluate the impact of political groups such as the TLP, Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat's Rah-e-Haq Party, MML's Allah-o-Akbar Tehreek, Majlis-e-Wahadat-Ul-Muslimeen, and Sunni Tehreek on the political landscape.

Allah-O-Akber Tahreek

Established by Hafiz Saeed in August 2017, the MML faced registration challenges from ECP but sidestepped them by affiliating with the dormant Allah-o-Akbar Tehreek. This maneuver aimed to contest 265 out of 300 seats allocated for Allah-o-Akbar Tehreek in national and provincial assembly elections (Ali, 2017). Initially aligned with the PML-N, Saeed's support dwindled due to criticism of the Sharif government's policies towards India and legal actions against his associates involved in the Pathankot incident. Further discontent arose when the Punjab government placed him under house arrest, expecting treatment akin to Masood Azhar. The MML's success hinged on converting support from the Falah-I-Insaniet Foundation into votes, alongside garnering backing from Ahle Hadis adherents, constituting 5 to 10% of Pakistan's population. The Foundation, with a robust philanthropic network targeting minority group, bolstered MML's appeal. Financially well-endowed, MML rivaled established parties like PML-N and PPP in campaign expenditures. Despite being one of seven prominent Ahle Hadis groups, the extent of MML's influence on its supporters remained uncertain.

South Punjab Defection

The Sharif family and the PML-N have historically held sway in Punjab, particularly in its southern regions like Bahawalpur, Multan, and Rahim Yar Khan, which boast a significant population and political influence. However, there's a noticeable shift happening due to the rising Seraiki sentiment, especially apparent during elections. The PPP has been able to capitalize on this sentiment, gaining traction in Punjab, while Imran Khan eyes the opportunity to expand his influence, leveraging the PPP's internal issues. The formation of the Janoobi Punjab Suba Mahaz (JPSM) by defectors from the PML-N, led by Makhdoom Khusro Bakhtiar, further complicates the political landscape, signaling challenges for the PML-N in the upcoming general elections. Bakhtiar's move underscores the growing importance of the southern Punjab region, akin to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), adding pressure on the PML-N's stronghold in the area (Ibid, 2018).

Supreme Court/ Judicial Decisions against Leaders of PLM-N; Paved the Way of PTI Success

Emerging as a formidable opposition to the PML-N administration post their 2013 defeat, Imran Khan initiated the "Azadi March" fueled by electoral fraud allegations, leading to a judicial commission confirming fair elections. Khan, along with others, filed a petition on the Panama Papers leak, seeking Nawaz Sharif's disqualification under Articles 62 and 63 of the Constitution, starting hearings in November 2016. Despite the court's ruling insufficient evidence to disqualify Sharif on April 20, 2017, a JIT was formed to investigate corruption allegations against PML-N leaders. Upon the JIT's report submission on July 10, 2017, the Supreme Court on July 28, 2017, declared Sharif unfit for office, directing NAB to initiate corruption proceedings (Iqbal, 2017). The subsequent Aven-field case saw Sharif, Maryam Nawaz, and Captain Safdar sentenced, later suspended due to insufficient evidence. Sharif was sentenced to 7 years in prison in December 2018, initially denied bail for medical treatment, placed on the ECL, but later granted bail on humanitarian grounds to travel abroad for medical care, eventually leaving the country via air ambulance with return agreements.

RTS Failure and Blame of Rigging

The final election results in Pakistan faced delays attributed to technical glitches with the Results Transmission System (RTS), causing concerns over potential vote rigging. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) addressed these issues, particularly regarding handwritten receipts known as "katchi receipts," and assured active investigation into valid complaints, emphasizing the compilation of data received through Form 45. Despite challenges with the RTS, manual vote counting at polling stations ensured transparency, enabling verification of results. However, the RTS failure during the recent general elections sparked post-election chaos, raising doubts about the polls' integrity. Despite prior warnings from returning officers regarding the RTS's limitations, the ECP proceeded with its implementation, leading to widespread issues and concerns. The failure of the RTS, combined with delayed census results and recurring problems of staff mismanagement at polling booths, highlights systemic challenges in Pakistan's electoral processes that require comprehensive reforms. In the aftermath of the elections, dissatisfaction persists, with concerns over rejected votes and arbitrary decisions by Returning Officers exacerbating electoral disputes. The need for electoral reforms to ensure fairness and transparency remains paramount, especially with regards to the adequacy of election materials and procedures. Additionally, the intricate political landscape of Pakistan, characterized by power struggles between major political forces and the role of provincial governments, adds complexity to the pursuit of effective governance and electoral integrity.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis of the 2013 and 2018 general elections reveals a substantial increase in electoral support for the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) in Punjab, driven by multiple interrelated factors. The data conclude significant gains in vote share and the number of seats won by PTI, underscoring a broad-based shift in voter preferences. The findings of qualitative analyses suggest that PTI's strategic focus on anti-corruption, effective use of social media, and the charismatic leadership of Imran Khan resonated strongly with a diverse electorate, particularly the younger and urban demographics. The party's successful governance in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa also played a crucial role in bolstering its credibility and appeal in Punjab. The Demographic and socio-economic analyses further highlight that changing voter demographics, such as increased political engagement among youth and urban dwellers, were pivotal in PTI's success. Economic challenges and dissatisfaction with incumbent parties also contributed to the electorate's desire for political change. In conclusion, PTI's rising electoral support in Punjab between 2013 and 2018 reflects a complex interplay of effective political strategy, leadership, and evolving voter dynamics. This shift not only transformed Punjab's political landscape but also indicated broader trends within Pakistan's electoral politics, emphasizing the growing importance of addressing corruption, leveraging digital platforms, and engaging a youthful electorate. The insights from this study provide valuable lessons for political parties aiming to adapt and thrive in Pakistan's changing political environment.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from the comparative analysis of the 2013 and 2018 general elections, several recommendations can be made for PTI and other political stakeholders to sustain and build on the rising electoral support in Punjab:

- Enhance engagement with local communities through regular meetings and grassroots mobilization to address local issues and build trust.
- Actively involve youth and women in the political process through targeted campaigns, leadership training programs, and creating platforms for their voices to be heard.
- Continue to innovate and expand social media strategies to engage and mobilize voters, particularly focusing on interactive and issue-based content.
- Implement digital literacy programs to ensure broader segments of the population can access and engage with online political content.

- Maintain a strong focus on transparent and accountable governance to sustain public trust and address voter concerns about corruption and inefficiency.
- Develop and publicize clear performance metrics for evaluating government initiatives and public services, ensuring accountability and continuous improvement.
- Formulate and implement economic policies that address unemployment, inflation, and economic disparities, which are critical concerns for voters.
- Focus on improving public services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure, demonstrating tangible benefits of PTI's governance to the electorate.
- Form strategic alliances with like-minded political parties and groups to consolidate support and strengthen political influence in Punjab.
- Foster intra-party unity and coherence, ensuring that internal conflicts do not undermine the party's public image and electoral performance.
- Implement continuous voter education programs to inform the electorate about their rights, the importance of their vote, and the electoral process.
- Clearly communicate policy positions and legislative achievements to the public, making complex political issues accessible and understandable.
- Establish robust mechanisms for obtaining and responding to voter feedback, ensuring that policy making is responsive to the evolving needs and preferences of the electorate.
- Focus on issue-based campaigns that address specific local and national concerns, demonstrating PTI's commitment to solving real-world problems.

By implementing these recommendations, PTI and other parties consolidate its electoral gains in Punjab but also set a benchmark for effective political strategy and governance in Pakistan's evolving political landscape. These strategies can help sustain voter confidence and ensure long-term political success.

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