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Pakistan's Elections Debates: An Analysis of Electoral Knowledge Production

Abstract

The political debates are the major indicators to open a dialogue and to set the tone of politics in society. The elections' debates in Pakistan are directly linked with the nature of the state and its ideological and elite composition. The post-colonial state structure and its reflection in electoral politics is a dominant determining factor which led to induce order through objectifying in existing electoral status quo. The dominant forces on the electoral scene have the power to interpret the existing knowledge production and debate for their own interest. Both objectivities and subjectivities in which electoral debates operate are in control of the post-colonial state structure. This paper is an attempt to explore the articulation of electoral debates in academic knowledge production. Further, how does existing academic debate explain the nature of electoral politics? Why? The purposively selected academic debates on elections revolved around functionalist and interpretivist paradigms influenced by the existing debate between subjectivity and objectivity. The descriptive method has been applied in exploring a research question under study.

Key Words: Elections, Knowledge Production, Pakistan, Political Debate, Post-Colonialism

Introduction

In electoral studies, knowledge production is a political project and is influenced by the political system and state structure. In post-colonial societies, neoliberal knowledge production is at the forefront of the protection of the market economy. After the 1980s, the global structural adjustment programs have transformed the nature of electoral politics. Neoliberal rhetorics have been used rapidly in elections, the language of elections became more market-oriented, and similarly, research centers and universities in Pakistan kept aside themselves from the political discourses reflected in electoral politics. The funding and research productivity is dominated by neoliberal norms instead of the intellectual development of society (D. Fasenfest, 2010) as it seems dangerous to the post-colonial exploitative forces. However, few academic studies have elaborated the debate in electoral politics, but the major focus was to keep the society in 'order' in the Weberian context and to focus on the rule of law being a significant spirit of democracy. The debate of dialectics of electoral change is largely missing from the academic debate from neoliberal electoral studies in Pakistan.

Discussion

The major academic debates which revolved around the interpretivism paradigm were carried out in Pakistan's were from Saghir Ahmed (1977), [Hamza Alavi \(1972\)](#), [Nicholas Martin \(2010\)](#), [Shahnaz Rouse \(2004\)](#), and [Hassan Javed \(2012\)](#). Hamza Alavi is an influential scholar who linked political debate with the material conditions of society. Hamza Alavi has also emphasized class in different articles related to politics and voting behavior in rural Punjab. (Alavi, H.1977). He conducted his research work in various villages of Sahiwal District. The analysis argues, voting behavior is determined by voters' economic position. The economic factor is one of the major factors of choice formulation and manufacturing a consent to decide a vote—usually, the economically dependent class votes in favour of those who have control over resources. Economically dependent on others, they will vote

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under the dictates of those upon whom they depend. [Kathleen Gough \(1967\)](#) has pointed out the influence of landlordism over voting choices. She further refre Hamza Alavi's point regarding the voters-landlords relationship where voters try to link upwards power structure instead of horizontal connections. This behavior of representation has already been explained by post-colonial scholars like Gayatri Spivak, Ranjit Gua, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Partha Chatterjee, etc. In subaltern, approach representation provides lower to upper linkage connection which ultimately delink representatives horizontally. The horizontal voters alignment is also dependent of the electoral system that constructs an horizontal solidarity, but this is also political in nature.

[Alavi \(1971\)](#) maintains that the voter's choice is dependent on those who feed the voters. Here leaders are the feeders, and people are compelled to vote for them; otherwise, they cannot be fed by these leaders. The trends of voter subjugation are embedded in "sub-structures" of a village that are "inherent sources of political power and influence, and the capacity to mobilize voters". The definition of such sub-structures as customs or "traditional social institutions" of caste-based and kinship ties, the production relations within the base structure, and the "superstructure as government and administration, particularly the police and magistracy...which is an important source of considerable power for anyone who can establish effective links." ([Alavi, H.1971](#)). Saghir Ahmed carried out his research in the 1960s in a landlord-dominated village – in district Sargodha in canal irrigated Punjab. ([Ahmad, Saghir, and Kathleen Gough, 1977](#)). According to the research, the land was a marker of all relations of production and livelihood in the village. The ownership not only provided the resources but also control of villagers' life by the landowner. The scholar utilizes the Marxian concept and focuses on the economic structure of society with its linkage with the judicial and political superstructure, which further correspond to definite forms of social consciousness.

In his analyses of people's views on the authority of the landlord in rural areas, he reveals that the landlords "*are the maaliks* [owners/lords] and *reiaya* (subject) or *Ghulam* (slave)." ([Ahmad, S. 1977](#)). The descriptions on *quoms* and *birders* are not static but fluid. This change depends upon wealth, income, and social status, which direct people to alter their social formations like baradari, etc. A Punjabi proverb says: "Last year I was *Jullah* [weaver], this year I am a *Sheikh* [disciple of the Prophet Mohammad]". So, social stratification is a function of economic class, and moreover, caste or kinship group influence on political behavior is mostly motivated by economic sensitivities. The conclusion of the study is that landlords' attempts to diffuse collective action are directed against the poor and not against small landowners. To him, "the class relations of south Asian villagers are more fundamental for most of their life experiences – including religious belief and practice than is their membership in *quoms* and caste-like status groups." ([Ahmad, S. 1977](#))

Shahnaz Rouse, an anthropologist, in her research on a landlord-dominated Sahiwal village of District Sargodha. Her argument on the outcome of 1970 elections stated that "In 1970 a new era dawned both nationally and at the village level. Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and his Pakistan People's Party (PPP) came into power. Unlike the traditional voting patterns when votes were cast on the basis of *patti* affiliations, this time, votes were cast on an ideological basis. While the landlord supported a candidate of their liking, a broad coalition of landless laborers, poor peasants, and like-minded villages joined to cast their votes for the PPP candidates." ([Rouse, S. 1983](#)).

[Nicolas Martin \(2009\)](#), a British anthropologist and ethnographer, focused his research qualitatively in a landlord-dominated village in District Sargodha, central Punjab. He mentioned that economic dependency through different ways, the landlords control rural poor. His explanation refers that after the end of colonial rule, despite of political and socio-economic changes, the domination of the landed elite persisted over the rural poor mainly because of authoritarian military regimes policies. He cites that "Members of the landed elite still wield considerable power over much of the rural population through tenancy relations, patronage, and coercion. It enables them to obtain votes in the election and command *curvee* labor to enforce debt bondage" ([Martin, 2009](#)). According to Martin, the landlords no longer just rely upon land resources. The resources are diversified by preparing their next generation through necessary skills for jobs in civil services, police and judiciary, and especially corporate professional jobs abroad. The argument is that mechanization created landed elite in the form of village

bourgeoisie and converted the tenants into field laborers. The electoral representation of the poor under the suppression of the mussel powder. Wealth and political domination of politicians. (Martin, N. 2009). On political accountability through elections in Punjab, he is of the view that "severe political and economic inequalities and the absence of political parties that genuinely represented popular interests meant that election in the rural Pakistani Punjab could hardly be described as competitive and as occasions when poor voters could hold politicians to account and press their demands" (Martin, N. 2009).

Hassan Javed (2012) applied the theoretical framework of critical juncture and path dependence. About the continuation of landowners in the politics of Punjab despite significant societal changes in post-independence, Javed argues that despite the socio-economic change, the colonial political framework of power and patronage is still intact. He states that "out of the initial bargain between the colonizers and the landowners, emerging administrative framework gave birth to the path-dependence process of institutional development in Punjab. As a consequence, landowners increasingly entrench themselves within the order of power during the colonial and post-colonial periods. In effect, the landed elite became able to reinforce such arrangement with the colonizers and, post-independence, the Pakistani military bureaucracy, consolidating a relationship that supported the interests of the actors involved." (Hassan Javed (2012)). The bureaucracy landowner nexus does not demonstrate the politics in the small landholding northern Punjab, *Pothohar* region. The patronage politics in *Pothohar* region manifested in politics of common sense premised upon particular electoral habitus of this region. Shandana Khan Mohmand (2011) used mixed research methods in six villages of District Sargodha of Punjab. The research on village-level political organization and voting behavior of rural masses, her focus was on vote blocs in electoral politics of Punjab. Mohmand's evaluation refers to political change through economic development. Her case is that with the advancement in mechanization results, the change in social structure. Rapid improvement in the infrastructure connecting the towns with villages and consistent population growth leading to rapid urbanization has been causing political mobilization in rural Punjab. The voters' autonomy increased, but it happened so only in upwards or vertical relationships with local landed patrons that led the political system towards patron-clientele. (Mohmand, S. K. 2011). The middleman voters used to organize more horizontally, but they adapted with it not because of voluntary affinity but rather on ascriptive kinship affinity towards a political system defined by *biraderi-ism*. Shandana argues that historical land inequality, socio-economic structure, caste-based identity cult, and mobility are the factors that shape voting behavior in Punjab. She describes voters as benefit-seeking political actors in rural Punjab. They strategically enter into *biraderi* factions and for seeking the support of candidates or broker patron for accessing state services and public goods. In her finding dialectics of *biraderi* and patronage are instruments of the dominant classes to continue their political domination over the poor. The possible elevation of rural poor as an equal citizen in achieving constitutional rights of representation when socio-economic arrangement would be replaced by class and universal services delivery.

In the second string of scholars, who build on the evolutionary paradigm of functionalist paradigm. They focused on primordial identities in a social and cultural milieu that determine the shaping of voting behavior. The structural-functional paradigm contends that voting behavior could be understood through institutions, relations, roles, norms that constitute a society to perform a certain purpose as a determinant of voting choices. Prominent work includes the major research by Ian Talbot (2011), David Gilmartin (1988), Inayat-Ullah (1958), Philip Jones (1977), Mohammad Waseem (2002), Andrew Wilder (1996), Muhammad Shakeel Ahmad (2010), Stephen Lyon (2004) and Mathew Nelson (2011).

David Gilmartin (1988) wrote a book titled *Empire and Islam; Punjab and the Making of Pakistan*. The book highlights the roots of communal rhetoric acquired wide acceptance as the broad ideal expression of the Muslim community in the Muslim League's electoral campaign of 1946 elections. The elections did not result into the transformation of the structure of local politics. The post-partition period witnessed the strong influence of local power structure on the politics of new state Pakistan. Nothing more could better explain the tensions clearly than specific democratic practice of Punjab alone. The popular election of 1946 exhibited the Muslim community, but the electoral system was the colonial

product. Here the structure showed the primacy of local intermediaries in the order of power in the colonial state. The triumph of League's success described the new symbolic political basis for the new state and confirmed the mediation structure on which colonial power was rested. All symbols of cultural base underwent the transformation in a new form, but the mediatory structure of political power that was set up on "Representation" hardly departed from the colonial structure of power in Punjab. For many political trappings in Pakistani "nationalism," the League's power mostly rested on the same base as Unionists had before.

It was the mediatory character of electoral politics in Punjab that continued in the post-colonial period of the new state that demonstrates the hegemonic structure of power at grass-root level political exchange. [Ian Talbot \(2011\)](#) states in his work on Punjab under colonialism that order is gradually consolidated through electoral transformations. Thus, mediated state access is institutionalized in a way that voting choices go in line with it. The seminal work of [Inayatullah \(1997\)](#) in his early work on 'Perspective in Rural power structure in West Pakistan' has reinforced the oft-cited dominant role of social factors showing that primordial group identity of *biraderi* is main determinant of voting behavior.

Waseem's (1994) scholarly research on 1993 elections presented three main theories of the voting behavior. He changed the general lens that focused on various determinants of voting behavior, he brought out the sociological theory of voting behavior. The study focuses on political parties and categorizes them into three types: mainstream, ethnic, and religious parties. The analysis focused on their ideological and organizational profiles. The investigation explored pockets of support basis in different constituencies. The voter typology is explained in four types. They are primary voters, client voters, civic voters, and maverick voters. The conclusive argument says that the colonial legacy of patronage rule provided the basis for the continuation of civil-military coalescing to continue the position of power. This is practiced either by direct military rule or by curtailing political activism of any sort. They always checked the emergence of independent political organizations. The significant point of electoral politics is patronage-seeking behaviour. When voters perceive that they cannot influence policy and have no share in decision-making, they engage in patronage politics. In this process, voters only use elections for resolving their everyday issues like electricity, domestic gas meters, posting and transfer, etc. The 1993 study shows that voter is primarily parochial, not national. Voters is local, and by deciding to caste vote, they consider their *biradaris* a major driving force towards voting choice. *Baradaris* received pride and prestige to counter other competing *biradaris* at the local level through these elections. Elections at local level are nothing but a source of pride for dominants. These *biradaris* having linkage with state apparatus construct the overall nature of Pakistani voters. Such a type of debate is based on the following model, where the main determinant of Voting is social networks (*Baradaris*).

Social Network Site Usage Determinants

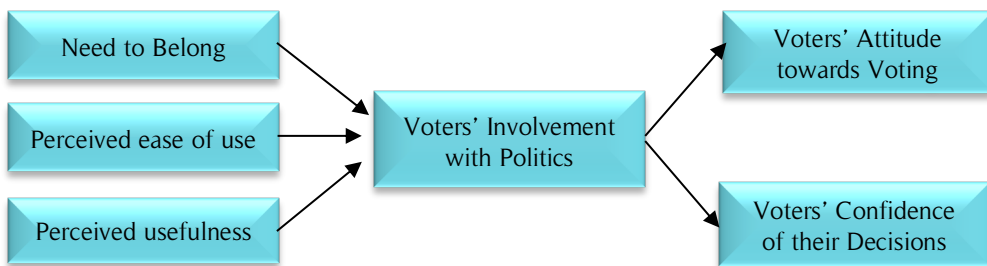


Figure 1

In a similar analysis Jones (2003) analytical findings on the 1970 election that for the first time in the history of the country, people voted along class lines defeated primordial identities like caste and kinship in voting behavior. Jones highlighted that "In the 1970 elections, Bhutto had led his Pakistan

People's Party to victory in the country's key province, Punjab, by galvanizing the common man behind his program of Islamic Socialism and promise of *roti, kapra, makan* ('bread, clothing, housing'). Never before the rural peasant or urban worker had gotten so broken with this customary leadership, the rural landlord and the urban union godfather, to assert his independent political right as he did in 1970" (Jones, 2003). It was the ambition of poor voters hoping that the PPP would liberate them against "the forces and institutions that had weighed upon him for so long and heavily – the *zemindar*, the police, bureaucracy and the judiciary. Jones (as quoted in Wilder) made a reference on socio-economic conditions and its effect on specific results, the political set up in different regions of Punjab, mentioned that "In the political geography of the province, the line separating the pre-Mutiny settlement districts from the post-Mutiny ones represents a major political cleavage that is distinctly visible on the map of 1970 elections. In these elections, as in those of 1946, the post-Mutiny settlement districts were a bastion of conservative chiefly control, quite impervious to the PPP flood (Muslim League in 1946) which was swept virtually every other part of Punjab". (Andrew Wilder, 1999). Wilder in his extensive study on Voting and elections in Punjab, have drawn few conclusions. The electoral decisions in Punjab exhibited less effect of social determinants like caste/*biraderi* or kinship, factional alliance. The main influence that shaped voting in Punjab are political determinants. In urban places, it is party loyalty, loyalty with the party leader, patronage orientation, and issue awareness. In villages, it takes the form of patronage and development that are significant. Andrew Wilder explained that "Voting is increasingly being influenced by voter concerns over local issues such as assistance in police and lower judiciary affairs; or the need for road, school, or basic health unit in their village or for electricity, telephone, or natural gas connections for house; promotions or transfers in the workplace. A growing number of votes are therefore being cast for candidates with strong records of addressing these local concerns by delivering patronage to their constituents and introducing development schemes in the constituencies". (Andrew Wilder, 1999)

Wilder references Northern Punjab political dynamics; "It is the smallest of province four regions and agriculturally the poorest as its hilly terrain makes canal irrigation impossible. As a result, it has the lowest of its labor force employed in agricultural sector and highest percentage employed in civil and military branches of government. *Pothohar* is the most literate of the Punjab's regions and in terms of urbanization is second only to more industrialized central Punjab". (Andrew Wilder, 1999)

On the economy of northern Punjab, Wilder states that it is a rain-dependent area and has a least agricultural production here. The terrain is also terrible for massive scale agriculture. So it is agriculturally poor and industrially underdeveloped region, the only employment opportunity left is in services particularly government service...One third of the labor force of the *Pothohar* urban population employed in government service...The military provides a high percentage of jobs to its people...In world war I, 40 percent of all males of military age were in British Indian army...Working abroad as the migrant worker is another important source of employment for the region's surplus labor force. The districts with a high percentage of migrant workers from the whole country are two of its districts Rawalpindi and Jhelum. Remittances helped fuel boom in 80's building houses and joining ranks of middle class.

On the politics of *Pothohar* Wilder states; "Voter turn-out in this region of province has been consistently five-six percent higher than other three regions of Punjab...The rise of Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) PMLN especially performed well in more urbanized, literate and economically developed sub Himalayan districts Rawalpindi and Jhelum...The basic explanation seems to lie in high urbanization and literacy rates, and a large percentage of its work force employed by the government...A related explanation is that *Pothohar's* economy is least dependent on agriculture therefore its rural voters were not affected by any perception against PMLN...Winning vote in *Pothohar* through selection of suitable candidates is proven strategy of mainstream parties". (Andrew Wilder, 1999)

Stephen Lyon 2004 carried out research in a village of *Pothohar* district *Attock*. The basic inquiry was on patron client relationship. The scholar comments that everybody is patron at one time and client at the other. He maintains that, "Asymmetrical power relations form the cornerstone of Pakistani

society. The fundamental cultural relation a Pakistani seeks with other people is asymmetrical. Close relations of equality are problematic...seem to occur in very limited conditions". (Stephen Lyon, 2004). The importance of patronage in local power relations is explained in these words, "The alliances created for party politics emerge out of a patron-based distribution of resources and contacts. Populist discourses do not allow an individual the latitude necessary to win elections, though they may be necessary to gain votes in the wider arena. Before a man or women effectively mount a campaign for office, they must have the support of networks. Gaining the support of networks in Pakistan entails into relations of Patronage" (S. Lyon, 2004).

Mathew Nelson 2011 worked in three districts of central region of Punjab. The focus of research was on land related factional politics of province Punjab analyzed the mechanisms that influence the processes of local structure of power. The scholar's findings show that it is not state legal process that deprives subordinate classes of their right, but the fact is systematic patronage in voter representation relationship that undermines it. How without formal strict implementation of rules, laws and bureaucratic procedures can consolidate dominant power. Representative ability to bend circumstances, laws and bureaucratic procedures are major reasons behind exploitation of subordinate clauses. The scholar's findings further argue that politics is despotic rather than democratic at political arena. There are multiple channels that landowner could utilize to secure power. These are political networks that offer access to power by just being owner of land, rural informal social institutions and kinship ties. These channels become access points to state institutions in matters of conflict resolution and property inheritance.

Muhammad Shakeel Ahmad (2011) argues about the determinants of Voting in Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP which is Khyber Pakhtunkhwa/KP now). The study mapped out the detailed analysis of sociological factors and political factors determination on the voting decision of voters of province. The empirical data analysis showed that political factors are significant determinant of Voting in NWFP during successive elections of 90's. The debate around political system and party identification is primarily based on the following model.

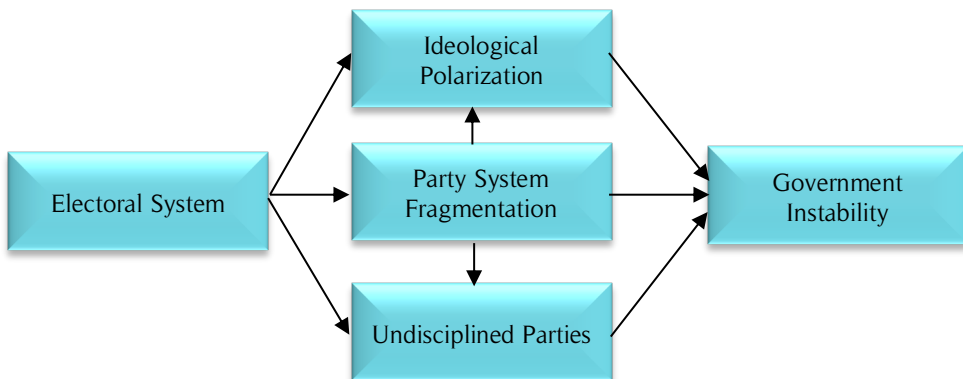


Figure 2

Source: Buben, R. & Kouba, K. (2017). *Proportional Representation, Large District Magnitude and Closed Lists*. *World Political Science*, 13(2), 151-191. <https://doi.org/10.1515/wps-2017-0007>

The existing literature on primarily focuses on the nature of knowledge production, which is mostly explained in the context of social order dominated by socio-political determinants of electoral politics. However, dialectics of voter representation relationship receives scant attention in knowledge production on elections. The dialectics of coercion and consent in voter representation relationship has been grossly missing in the available scholarly work. Dialectics is a method of argument that systematically weighs contradictory ideas to reach resolution of contradiction. Voter and representation

are two contradictory ideas that reach resolution of contradiction through episodes of elections. It explains about coercion and consent, force and persuasion, and domination and Hegemony exhibited in voter representation relationship. It explains how voter consent manufacturing process takes place in the prevailing power structure of region

Thus, these features demand scholarly undertaking to explore inner forces and factors explaining politics of election and voting behavior manifested in voter representation relationship. Therefore, it is voter agency's unconscious transformation of consciousness which have been a cornerstone of paradox of voter representation relationship.

Since long, scholars have addressed the issue of the influence of socio-economic conditions on voting behavior. Despite disagreement over some specifics of the relationship, the preponderance of evidence clearly suggests that short-term macroeconomic fluctuations affect electoral outcomes. While this literature is voluminous, it has focused almost entirely on Western industrial democracies. This is hardly surprising, given that little attention has been paid to any aspect of knowledge production over competitive elections in developing countries.

Conclusion

The literature produced on electoral studies can be divided into two main categories, the first is conflict paradigm and the second is structural-functional paradigm. The academic work on electoral politics has largely been limited to analysis of macro level election results, which focuses on superficial party loyalties as driving factor in deciding specific elections. These studies, however, lack long term perspectives on political choices because these ignore politics and engagement of political parties in terms of kinship/class/sectarian loyalties and socio-economic and cultural processes. The structural transformation underway in the form of urbanization, rural urbanization, commercialization, rise of religious ideologies, and global market forces need to be analyzed for better understanding voter representation relationship. Published literature in Punjab, however, lacks focus on possibilities of paradigm shifts. Specifically, when a certain paradigm reaches to a transition point and then a new paradigm takes it over. Such processes define paradigm shift, which explains that how voter representation relationship perpetuates *electocratic* cycles in successive elections. Micro level analysis of voter-representation relationship may enhance understanding of electoral politics within cycles of *electocracy*. The missing link is in exploration of superstructure of electoral representation grows out of the base (voters) and provides electoral legitimacy to ruling class interests. The knowledge production on electoral politics in Pakistan has discussed two major factors, sociological factors and political factors. While recent literature particularly [David Washbrook \(1997\)](#), [Ayesha Jalal \(1999\)](#), [Philip Jones \(1973\)](#), [Craig Baxter \(1973\)](#) suggest that political factors are taking precedence over social factors. In this way, the major thrust of rich literature has emphasized on benign process of representation facilitating socio-economic development resulting in democratization. ([Lal Deepak, 2004](#)) However, knowledge production on electoral politics ignores fundamental question about electoral representation, why and how inherited colonial design of resilient power structure creates uneven voter representation relationship even in rapidly urbanizing society.

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