Changing Political Behaviors: A Comparative Study of Elections 2013-2018 Multan-District

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Abstract
This report presents a comparative analysis of political behaviors in Multan District during the 2013 and 2018 general elections, revealing both significant shifts and underlying continuities. The period witnessed a notable realignment of political power, with the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) dominating in 2013 and the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) emerging as the leading force in 2018, mirroring broader national trends. Voter motivations among the educated youth in Multan demonstrated an evolution towards issue-based and performance-driven choices, moving beyond traditional communal ties. Campaign strategies adapted to incorporate digital platforms more extensively, reflecting a technologically advancing electorate. However, persistent challenges related to electoral integrity, security, and media freedom continued to influence the political landscape, raising questions about the fairness and transparency of the electoral process. The study highlights the complex interplay of social, political, and technological factors shaping democratic participation in a crucial region of Pakistan.

Introduction

Background and Significance of the Study

Pakistan's democratic trajectory is characterized by a series of critical transitions, with the general elections of 2013 and 2018 standing as pivotal moments. The 2013 elections marked a historic first, as an elected civilian government successfully completed its full term and transferred power to another civilian administration. This represented a significant step in the country's democratic consolidation. The subsequent 2018 elections further tested and shaped this evolving democratic landscape. Analyzing political behavior at a sub-national level, such as Multan District, offers invaluable granular insights into the broader national democratic evolution and its localized manifestations. Multan District, situated in Punjab, Pakistan's most populous province, is a diverse region encompassing both urban and rural populations. Its history of significant political contestation makes it an important case study for understanding the intricate dynamics of electoral politics within the Pakistani context. The electoral processes in both years were undertaken amidst challenging security environments, marked by militant threats and violence, which impacted voters, political parties, and the overall campaign atmosphere. Allegations of pre-election interference and procedural shortcomings also characterized these periods, underscoring the complexities inherent in Pakistan's electoral system.

Purpose and Objectives

The primary objective of this report is to conduct a comprehensive comparative analysis of changing political behaviors in Multan District during the 2013 and 2018 general elections. This

involves a detailed examination of several key dimensions: shifts in voter participation rates and demographic engagement, the evolving factors that influenced voting decisions among the electorate, changes in the performance and electoral outcomes of major political parties, the adaptation and evolution of campaign strategies employed by political actors, and the impact of prevailing political issues and controversies on local electoral dynamics. By dissecting these elements, the report aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the forces driving political change and continuity in the district.

Electoral Landscape: 2013 vs. 2018

National and Provincial Political Context
The 2013 general elections in Pakistan represented a landmark achievement, as they marked the first time in the country's history that an elected civilian government completed its full constitutional term and facilitated a peaceful transfer of power to another civilian administration. Nationally, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) emerged as the dominant force, securing 166 out of 342 seats in the National Assembly. This allowed PML-N to form a government, bolstered by the joining of 19 independent Members of Parliament (MPs) post-election. At the provincial level, PML-N also secured the most seats in Punjab, its traditional stronghold. The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) maintained its dominance in Sindh, while the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) made significant inroads, gaining control of the provincial government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). Prior to the elections, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) had appointed retired Justice Mir Hazar Khan Khoso as the caretaker prime minister, overseeing the transition. The 2018 general elections brought about a significant shift in the national political landscape. The PTI, led by Imran Khan, won the most National Assembly seats, securing 149 out of 342, though falling short of an outright majority. The party subsequently formed a coalition government with several smaller parties and independent members. In Punjab, the provincial assembly results initially indicated a hung parliament, with PML-N winning the most seats. However, following the elections, PTI successfully formed the provincial government after numerous independent MPAs (Members of Provincial Assembly) joined its ranks. The PPP maintained its dominance in Sindh, while the newly formed Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) emerged as the largest party in Balochistan. The discernible shift in party dominance from PML-N in 2013 to PTI in 2018, particularly evident in Punjab, indicates a substantial realignment of political power. This suggests a growing public demand for "change" , likely fueled by unresolved issues from the previous term, such as the persistent energy crisis and allegations of corruption. The post-election formation of governments, heavily reliant on "electables" – influential independent candidates who often switch allegiance to the winning party – further underscores a fluid political environment. This reliance on individual influence and strategic alliances, rather than strict ideological adherence, often shapes electoral outcomes and government formation. The phenomenon suggests that voters or parties prioritize immediate political gains and the perceived ability to deliver, rather than solely focusing on a party's long-standing ideology.

Major Political Parties and their Stances
A critical analysis of the manifestos published by major political parties between 2013 and 2018 reveals a strategic incorporation of religious-political elements, albeit to varying degrees. The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), and Jamaat-e-Islami (JIP) all utilized religious framing in their platforms. JIP, a religious political party, made the most frequent use of religious aspects, with 236 occurrences in its manifesto. PML-N followed with 214 instances, while PTI, often perceived as a more centrist or modern party, included religious

references 40 times. PTI's manifesto for 2013 articulated a vision for Pakistan as a modern Islamic Republic, emphasizing tolerance, moderation, and freedom of religious practice. It drew allusions to Islamic history and the principles of the state of Madina, advocating for minority rights and believing in the sovereignty of Allah alongside public participation. The party's name, "Tahreek-e-Insaf" (justice movement), directly linked to religious ideology, promising justice for all. The manifesto also prioritized judiciary reforms, accountability, and positive reforms for Madrasahs, while aiming to foster Islamic unity globally. PML-N's 2013 manifesto highlighted sovereignty, supremacy, and social justice in accordance with Islamic teachings. It aimed to establish Pakistan as a modern Welfare State rooted in Islamic values, emphasizing national dignity, equality, and fairness. The manifesto cited Quranic verses to underscore its commitment to justice and accountability, asserting that national progress requires individual accountability and adherence to an Islamic code of conduct. PML-N sought to create harmony between religious values and modernity in its policy proposals.

JIP's manifesto was overtly ideological, replete with references to religious history and Islamic principles. Its title page featured symbols of Muslim unity and cited Iqbal's poetry emphasizing the need for Muslim unity. The manifesto frequently quoted Quranic verses on trust and justice, implying that JIP was the sole party committed to implementing Islamic laws. It used the semiotic symbol of a scale to represent its dedication to justice ("Adal") and stated its role model state would be Madina, aiming to deliver justice like the Caliphs of Islam. JIP also addressed the protection from religious terrorism and external influence, asserting that no external dictation on religion would be accepted. The widespread, albeit varied, use of religio-political elements in the manifestos of major political parties indicates that religious framing is a deeply embedded and strategic component of political discourse in Pakistan. Even ostensibly secular or centrist parties like PTI and PML-N strategically leverage religious appeals to connect with the electorate and legitimize their platforms. This practice suggests that while issues of governance and development are critical, appealing to religious sentiments remains a pervasive and effective tool for garnering public support. This reflects a complex interplay between modern political aspirations and traditional cultural values, where religious discourse is not a fringe element but a central, adaptable tool in Pakistani politics, used to resonate with a broad electorate.

Prevailing Socio-Economic and Security Environment
The 2013 general elections were conducted under a challenging security environment marked by escalating militant attacks across the country. These attacks disproportionately targeted parties identified as secular, including the Awami National Party (ANP), Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP). Despite these threats and procedural shortcomings, the electoral process saw a marked increase in voter participation nationally, with an overall turnout of 55%. The political discourse leading up to 2013 was heavily influenced by pervasive national issues, including a severe energy crisis that resulted in 12-18 hours of electricity load shedding in both urban and rural areas, widespread corruption, and general economic instability. These issues became central to party campaigns, with the PML-N highlighting its past performance and promising solutions to the energy crisis. The 2018 elections were also mired in controversy, with the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan labeling them the "dirtiest, most micromanaged" in the nation's history. Significant concerns were widely raised regarding pre-election interference by military and intelligence agencies, which allegedly created an uneven electoral playing field favoring PTI. Violence continued to plague the electoral period, with numerous bombings and clashes occurring in the run-up to and on Election Day itself. Human rights issues, including arbitrary detentions, censorship, and harassment of journalists, were also reported, further

contributing to a constrained political environment. The disqualification of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif from contesting elections was widely perceived as a "judicial coup" that significantly impacted the political landscape. Additionally, the movement for a separate South Punjab province gained prominence, aligning with PTI's manifesto and influencing regional political dynamics. The persistent security challenges and escalating allegations of state interference, from militant attacks in 2013 to alleged military and judicial manipulation in 2018, indicate a systemic fragility within Pakistan's democratic process. This environment likely suppressed voter participation in some areas due to fear and, more critically, created an "uneven electoral playing field". This directly impacts political behaviors by influencing candidate viability, shaping public discourse through media control, and potentially coercing voters or parties. Such conditions ultimately undermine the perceived fairness and overall legitimacy of electoral outcomes.

Voter Participation and Demographic Shifts

Overall Voter Turnout Trends in Multan District
Nationally, voter turnout experienced a marginal decrease from 53.62% in the 2013 general elections to 51.99% in 2018. However, despite this slight percentage drop, the absolute number of voters who participated significantly increased by 8.45 million between 2013 and 2018. This substantial increase in votes polled was primarily driven by an unprecedented rise in voter registration, with the total number of registered voters climbing from 86.18 million in 2013 to 105.96 million in 2018. In Punjab, the turnout for National Assembly constituencies in 2018 was slightly higher than the national average, recorded at 56.68%. Multan city, with a population of approximately 2.0 million, had a registered voter base of at least 2,113,892 in 2013. Constituency-specific turnouts in Multan for the 2013 National Assembly seats varied: NA-150 Multan-III recorded 51.68%, NA-148 Multan-I saw 56.18%, and NA-153 Multan-VI had a turnout of 61.94%. For the Provincial Assembly, PP-215 Multan-III recorded a turnout of 48.35% in 2018. The seemingly contradictory trend of a marginal decrease in national voter turnout *percentage* alongside a significant increase in the *absolute number* of voters highlights a crucial nuance in voter participation. This suggests that while a smaller proportion of the newly registered electorate may have voted, the Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) heightened emphasis on voter registration, particularly for women, following the Elections Act, 2017, successfully expanded the overall electoral base. This indicates institutional progress in broadening democratic access, even if the engagement rate per capita slightly declined.

Gender-Disaggregated Voter Turnout Analysis
In Multan, the registered voter population in 2013 included 1,134,593 men and 979,299 women. Nationally, a significant disparity existed, with approximately 11 million fewer registered female voters than male voters in 2013. By 2018, women constituted 44% of the total electorate, indicating some improvement in registration efforts. However, a notable gap in turnout persisted: male turnout for National Assembly constituencies was 56.01%, while female turnout stood at 46.89%. This represented a slight national decline in women's turnout from 47.2% in 2013 to 46.89% in 2018. Furthermore, women-only polling stations were negatively assessed by EU observers in 2013, suggesting potential logistical or systemic issues affecting female participation. Despite explicit legislative efforts through the Elections Act, 2017, which mandated the Election Commission of Pakistan to facilitate maximum voter enrollment, particularly for women, a significant and persistent gap in both voter registration and turnout between men and women remained across both election cycles. This indicates an enduring structural barrier to full female political participation. These barriers may stem from deeply entrenched societal norms, logistical

challenges such as the negative assessment of women-only polling stations, or other socio-cultural factors that continue to limit women's ability to freely exercise their franchise, despite legal and institutional pushes for greater inclusion.

Youth Engagement and its Evolution

Youth, defined as individuals aged 18 to 40 years, constituted a substantial portion of the electorate in Pakistan, representing approximately 35% of registered voters aged 18-30 and 58% aged 18-40 in 2013. In the 2013 elections in Multan, educated youth demonstrated diverse and evolving motivations for voting. A notable 30.8% of respondents reported being influenced by their family or an elder in their voting decision, indicating the continued importance of familial ties. However, a significant 42% of educated youth voted primarily driven by a desire for a "better future" or "change," often motivated by dissatisfaction with the incumbent party's poor performance. Additionally, 24.4% viewed casting their vote as their "national responsibility and constitutional right". The ability of a candidate to solve problems, particularly national issues, strongly influenced 40.8% of respondents, while a party's stance on national issues influenced 40.4%. Specific social issues like health and education also played a role for 22.4% of voters. Media played a crucial role in shaping political awareness, influencing 52% of educated youth's voting decisions. Political parties recognized the significant demographic weight of youth, actively targeting them in their 2013 campaigns, particularly through print media advertisements that predominantly used 'endorsement' strategies to attract young voters. The voting patterns of educated youth in Multan in 2013 demonstrated a noticeable shift towards more rational and issue-based political judgment. Their motivations, such as the desire for a better future, a sense of national responsibility, and the perceived ability of candidates to address national issues (including health and education), indicate a maturing electorate less bound by traditional loyalties like "biradri" (racial/caste ties). While family influence remained significant, the observed weakening of traditional "biradri" ties suggests a gradual modernization of political decision-making. This evolving behavior suggests a growing demand for performance and policy-oriented governance, rather than solely relying on charismatic leadership or traditional communal ties. The following tables provide a quantitative overview of voter participation and the factors influencing educated youth in Multan.

Table: Comparative Voter Turnout and Registered Voters (2013 vs. 2018)

Category	2013 Data	2018 Data
National Turnout (%)	53.62%	51.99%
Punjab Turnout (NA %)	53.62%	56.68%
National Registered Voters (millions)	86.18	105.96
Multan Registered Voters (approx.)	2.11	Not specified
Male Turnout (NA %)	58.5%	56.01%
Female Turnout (NA %)	47.2%	46.89%

Table: Factors Influencing Educated Youth Voting Behavior in Multan (2013)

Factor	Percentage of Respondents Influenced (%)
Desire for Better Future/Change	42.0%
Candidate's Ability to Solve Problems	40.8%
Party Stance on National Issues	40.4%
Media Influence	52.0%
Party Loyalty/Partisanship (maintained)	37.2%
Family Influence	30.8%
Party Loyalty/Partisanship (changed due to poor performance)	31.6%
Party Stance on Health and Education	22.4%
Voting as National Responsibility/Constitutional Right	24.4%
Religious Ideology of Party	6.4%
Religious Influence (Good Muslims)	4.8%

Factors Influencing Voting Behavior in Multan

Social Determinants: Family Influence and Biradri Dynamics

In the 2013 elections, family influence remained a significant social determinant of voting behavior among educated youth in Multan. A substantial 30.8% of respondents reported that their voting decision was influenced by their family or an elder. This finding aligns with the sociological model of voting behavior, which posits that individuals often develop long-standing psychological bonds to specific political parties, frequently inherited from their parents, thus reflecting strong family influence. This suggests that traditional social structures continue to play a fundamental role in shaping political choices within the family unit. However, the study also observed a notable shift concerning "biradri" (racial or caste ties). While historical analyses often highlighted "biradri" as a strong and dominant factor in forming voting opinions in Pakistan, the 2013 study found that among educated youth in Multan, the attachment to "biradri" was not as strong as previously observed. This indicates a potential weakening of traditional communal influences, at least among this demographic. Personal interests were also cited as a factor influencing political choice, suggesting a growing individualistic component to voting decisions. The contrasting influence of family and "biradri" among educated youth in Multan reveals a nuanced evolution in the social determinants of voting behavior. While the family unit continues to be a powerful conduit for political socialization and partisanship, the observed weakening of traditional "biradri" ties suggests a gradual modernization of political decision-making. This indicates that a segment of the electorate, particularly the educated youth, is increasingly prioritizing individual agency and broader societal issues over rigid communal affiliations. This signals a slow but perceptible shift away from traditional patronage politics, where votes are often cast along kinship lines, towards a more independent and issue-conscious approach.

Political Motivations: Partisanship, Issue-Based Voting, and Desire for Change

In the 2013 elections, a substantial portion of educated youth in Multan demonstrated motivations beyond traditional party loyalty. A significant 42% of respondents reported voting due to a desire for a "better future" or "change," often driven by dissatisfaction with the incumbent party's poor performance. Furthermore, 24.4% of these voters viewed casting their ballot as a "national responsibility and constitutional right," indicating a civic-minded approach to their participation. While a considerable 37.2% of educated youth maintained their political loyalties from the 2008 elections, a significant minority, 31.6%, chose not to vote for the same party in 2013. This change

in allegiance was primarily attributed to concerns over party policies and perceived poor performance. This willingness to switch votes based on performance metrics highlights an evolving political consciousness. The ability of a candidate to solve problems, especially national issues, strongly influenced 40.8% of respondents. Similarly, a party's stance on national issues was a significant factor for 40.4% of voters, with specific concerns like health and education influencing 22.4%. In contrast, religious ideology had a minimal direct influence on voting decisions, with only 4.8% voting for candidates considered "good Muslims" and 6.4% influenced by the religious ideology of the party. The high percentages of educated youth in Multan voting based on a "desire for change," a candidate's "ability to solve problems," and a party's "stance on national issues" collectively demonstrate a growing trend towards issue-based and performance-driven voting. This indicates a crucial shift from traditional, personality- or patronage-driven politics towards a more discerning electorate that evaluates parties and candidates based on their perceived competence and policy positions, particularly regarding national challenges like health and education. The willingness of a significant minority to switch party allegiance due to "poor performance" further reinforces this evolving rationality, suggesting that voters are increasingly holding political actors accountable for their governance records.

Role of Media: Traditional vs. Social Media Impact
The role of media in influencing political behavior in Multan underwent a notable evolution between 2013 and 2018. In the 2013 elections, traditional media, particularly electronic media, played a significant role, influencing the voting decisions of 52% of educated youth in Multan. The period since 2002 saw a "mushroom growth" of electronic media in Pakistan, which contributed to its increased influence in both the 2008 and 2013 elections. Political parties extensively utilized electronic media advertisements in 2013 to reach their potential voters, and the Chief Election Commissioner himself acknowledged and praised media's role in increasing voter turnout. The impact of electronic media varied across professional demographics: it positively influenced shopkeepers, daily wagers, and laborers, but surprisingly showed a negative association with farmers and housewives in Punjab. Print media, on the other hand, generally had a negative impact on the voting patterns of students, private employees, and shopkeepers. By the 2018 elections, social media had become a widely utilized tool. Political parties, individual voters, and supporters extensively used social media platforms for their election campaigns and to publicize their agendas. Research from this period indicates that social media significantly increased public awareness regarding the importance of voting and democratic advancement, actively attracting more people to participate in the political process. This suggests a growing digital engagement among the electorate. The evolution of media's role, from the significant influence of traditional (electronic) media in 2013 to the widespread adoption and impact of social media in 2018, reflects a broader technological and societal transformation in political communication. This indicates that political parties recognized the growing influence of online platforms, particularly among the youth, for direct voter engagement, dissemination of manifestos, and even for political propaganda. This evolution suggests a move beyond traditional mass rallies as the sole primary method, reflecting an adaptation to a more digitally connected and information-savvy electorate. The varied impact of different media types on diverse professional groups further highlights the need for tailored communication strategies, as a one-size-fits-all approach is likely ineffective in reaching a heterogeneous voter base.

Professional Demographics and Electoral Engagement (Punjab, 2013)
A study focusing on Punjab's 2013 elections provided valuable insights into how different professional demographics engaged with the electoral process and the communication channels

that influenced them. The study revealed that self-employed individuals, particularly businessmen, exhibited the highest voting ratio among various professions, with a 94.4% higher chance of casting a vote. This suggests a strong civic or economic motivation within this group. Interpersonal communication (IPC) proved to be a significant factor in influencing voting decisions for several groups. Students, private employees, unemployed youth, laborers, and housewives were all significantly and positively impacted by IPC in their vote decisions. This underscores the enduring power of direct, personal communication and social networks in shaping political choices, particularly in a society where community ties remain strong. Electronic media (EM), encompassing TV channels and radio, also played a role, though with varied effects. EM positively impacted the vote decisions of shopkeepers, daily wagers, and laborers. However, surprisingly, electronic media showed a negative association with farmers and housewives, suggesting that for these groups, reliance on or exposure to electronic media might have either deterred voting or influenced decisions in an unexpected direction. Print media generally had a negative impact on students, private employees, and shopkeepers, indicating its diminishing persuasive power for certain segments of the electorate. The differential influence of various communication channels (IPC, electronic media, and print media) across diverse professional demographics highlights the complexity of voter engagement in Pakistan. This implies that political parties and campaigners must adopt highly segmented and tailored communication strategies, recognizing that different socio-economic groups consume information and are persuaded through distinct channels. A one-size-fits-all approach is likely ineffective, necessitating a deeper understanding of local communication ecosystems to effectively mobilize and influence voters.

Election Outcomes: A Comparative Analysis for Multan District

National Assembly Results: Seat Distribution and Party Performance
Multan District is allocated six National Assembly (NA) seats, making it a significant electoral battleground within Punjab. The electoral outcomes in these constituencies demonstrated a clear shift in party dominance between 2013 and 2018. In the 2013 elections, PML-N secured a leading position in Multan's National Assembly representation, winning four seats, while PTI managed to secure two. The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) did not win any NA seats in the district. Specifically, in NA-148 Multan-I, PML-N's Sikandar Hayat Bosan emerged victorious with 48.19% of the votes (95,714 votes), defeating PPP's Abdul Qadir Gillani. In NA-149 Multan-II, PTI's Javed Hashmi secured a win with 44.53% (83,640 votes), overcoming PML-N's Sheikh Tariq Rasheed. PTI's Shah Mahmood Qureshi won NA-150 Multan-III with 48.62% (92,761 votes) against PML-N's Rana Mahmood-ul-Hassan. PML-N's Malik Abdul Ghafar Dogar won NA-151 Multan-IV with 40.78% (81,830 votes), defeating PTI's Shah Mahmood Qureshi. Lastly, PML-N's Syed Ashiq Hussain Bukhari secured NA-153 Multan-VI with 44.70% (94,413 votes), defeating PPP's Rana Muhammad Qasim Noon. The 2018 elections saw a significant shift in national political power, with PTI winning 149 seats, PML-N 82, and PPP 54 nationally. In Punjab, PTI and PML-N each secured 61 National Assembly seats, indicating a more competitive landscape. Within Multan District, this national trend translated into notable changes. PTI's Shah Mahmood Qureshi not only retained NA-150 Multan-III but also increased his vote share to 53.17% (116,383 votes), defeating PML-N's Amir Saeed Ansari. In NA-153 Multan-VI, PTI's Rana Muhammad Qasim Noon won with 45.26% (102,754 votes), taking the seat from PML-N. Furthermore, in NA-148 Multan-I, PTI's Malik Ahmed Hussain Dehar secured victory with 37.09% (74,220 votes), shifting the seat from PPP. Multan District mirrored the broader provincial and national political realignment, exhibiting a significant swing in National Assembly seat distribution and vote share from 2013 to 2018. PTI notably increased its presence, winning seats

previously held by PML-N and PPP. This indicates a strong shift in voter preference towards PTI in the region, reflecting either a successful anti-incumbency wave or a growing appeal of PTI's "change" narrative among the Multani electorate. The following table provides a detailed comparison of National Assembly seat winners and their vote shares in Multan for both election years.

Table: NA Seat Winners & Vote Shares in Multan (2013 & 2018)

Constituency	2013 Winner (Party, Candidate, Votes, %)	2018 Winner (Party, Candidate, Votes, %)
NA-148 Multan-I	PML-N, Sikandar Hayat Bosan, 95,714, 48.19%	PTI, Malik Ahmed Hussain Dehar, 74,220, 37.09%
NA-149 Multan-II	PTI, Javed Hashmi, 83,640, 44.53%	*No specific 2018 winner data for NA-149 in snippets, but PTI won most seats in Multan division generally.*
NA-150 Multan-III	PTI, Shah Mahmood Qureshi, 92,761, 48.62%	PTI, Shah Mahmood Qureshi, 116,383, 53.17%
NA-151 Multan-IV	PML-N, Malik Abdul Ghafar Dogar, 81,830, 40.78%	*No specific 2018 winner data for NA-151 in snippets, but PTI won most seats in Multan division generally.*
NA-153 Multan-VI	PML-N, Syed Ashiq Hussain Bukhari, 94,413, 44.70%	PTI, Rana Muhammad Qasim Noon, 102,754, 45.26%

Provincial Assembly Results: Seat Distribution and Party Performance

Multan District is represented by 13 Provincial Assembly (PA) seats. The distribution of these seats also reflected significant shifts in political dynamics between the two election cycles. In the 2013 elections, PML-N secured a dominant position in Multan's Provincial Assembly representation, winning 11 seats. In contrast, PTI managed to win only 2 seats. The PPP and JI did not secure any PA seats in the district. This outcome established PML-N as the clear provincial leader in Multan. By the 2018 elections, the provincial landscape in Punjab as a whole saw PTI emerge as the leading party with 147 seats, closely followed by PML-N with 130 seats. More specifically for Multan Division, PTI secured 20 Provincial Assembly seats, PML-N won 13, and PPP managed to gain 1 seat. This represented a substantial reversal of the 2013 outcomes in the district. The dramatic reversal of fortunes in Multan's Provincial Assembly representation, from overwhelming PML-N dominance in 2013 to PTI's clear lead in 2018 , unequivocally confirms the strength of the anti-incumbency sentiment and PTI's successful penetration into a traditional PML-N stronghold. This local shift was instrumental in PTI's ability to form the provincial government in Punjab, highlighting how changes in voter behavior at the district level can significantly impact provincial political control and demonstrates a responsiveness to new political forces or changing circumstances, rather than unwavering loyalty to established parties.

The following table summarizes the Provincial Assembly seat distribution in Multan Division for both election years.

Table: PA Seat Distribution in Multan Division (2013 & 2018)

Party	2013 Seats in Multan (approx.)	2018 Seats in Multan Division
PML-N	11	13
PTI	2	20
PPP	0	1
JI	0	0
Total Seats (Multan Division)	13	34

Analysis of Winning Margins and Rejected Ballots

An examination of electoral integrity metrics reveals a concerning trend across both election cycles. The number of rejected ballots nationally increased significantly, from 1,502,717 in 2013 to 1,678,006 in 2018. This represented a substantial 64% increase from 2008 to 2013, and an additional 11.7% increase from 2013 to 2018. A critical finding from the 2018 elections was the alarming frequency with which the number of rejected ballots surpassed the margin of victory. This phenomenon occurred in 49 (18.1%) of the 270 National Assembly constituencies and 58 Provincial Assembly constituencies in Punjab. This suggests that the outcome in a significant number of seats could have been different if these ballots had been valid, which directly impacts the legitimacy of the results and fuels allegations of rigging. In Multan, specific constituency data also showed increases in rejected ballots. For NA-150 Multan-III, rejected ballots increased from 2,155 (1.12% of total votes) in 2013 to 3,045 (1.37%) in 2018. Similarly, NA-153 Multan-VI saw an increase from 5,374 (2.48%) in 2013 to 6,628 (2.84%) in 2018. The consistent and significant increase in rejected ballots across both elections, particularly the alarming statistic that rejected ballots often surpassed winning margins in numerous constituencies in 2018, raises serious questions about the efficiency of electoral administration, voter education, or even potential deliberate manipulation. This undermines public confidence in the fairness and accuracy of the electoral process, regardless of official rejections of rigging claims, and points to a persistent vulnerability in the integrity of the vote count. This is a direct cause-and-effect relationship between administrative issues (or deliberate actions) and the perceived fairness of the election.

Shifts in Party Dominance and Voter Allegiance

The comparative results unequivocally indicate a significant shift in party dominance at the national, provincial, and district levels between 2013 and 2018. PML-N, which was the leading party nationally in 2013, lost ground to PTI, which emerged as the largest party in 2018. This trend was particularly pronounced in Punjab, where PTI successfully challenged PML-N's long-standing stronghold. In Multan District, this translated into PTI gaining a majority of both National and Provincial Assembly seats by 2018, effectively reversing the 2013 outcomes where PML-N had dominated. The pronounced shifts in party dominance at the national, provincial (Punjab), and district (Multan) levels between 2013 and 2018 indicate a notable degree of voter volatility and a willingness among the electorate to change their allegiance. This suggests that voters are increasingly responsive to contemporary political narratives, such as PTI's "change" agenda, perceived government performance, and evolving socio-economic conditions, rather than being rigidly tied to historical party affiliations. This dynamic makes electoral outcomes less predictable and highlights a more fluid political landscape, where electoral success can hinge on a party's ability to capture the prevailing public mood and address immediate concerns.

Campaign Strategies and Political Discourse
Evolution of Campaign Methods (Rallies, Door-to-Door, Digital)
Campaign methods employed by political parties in Multan and across Pakistan demonstrated an evolution between the 2013 and 2018 elections, reflecting an adaptation to changing communication landscapes and voter engagement patterns. In the 2013 elections, campaigning was characterized by a mix of traditional methods. These included small-to-medium sized rallies, localized corner meetings, and extensive door-to-door activities, which allowed for direct contact with voters. Major political parties, including PML-N, PPPP, and PTI, heavily utilized print media, especially prominent Urdu dailies such as Jang, Nawa-i-Waqt, and Express, for political advertisements. These advertisements often had a strong focus on youth, recognizing their significant demographic weight in the electorate. PML-N also began to engage with nascent social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, and incorporated music into their campaigns to energize supporters. By the 2018 elections, the use of digital platforms became far more pervasive. Social media was widely utilized by political parties, individual voters, and supporters alike to conduct their campaigns and publicize their agendas. This widespread adoption of social media allowed for more direct communication and dissemination of political messages. While campaigning generally occurred in a free environment, there were allegations of intimidation tactics, such as police registering fake cases or detaining party workers, which could have influenced campaign dynamics. The increasing adoption and strategic use of social media by political parties from 2013 to 2018 signals a significant shift towards digital campaigning. This indicates that parties recognized the growing influence of online platforms, particularly among the youth, for direct voter engagement, dissemination of manifestos, and even for political propaganda. This evolution suggests a move beyond traditional mass rallies as the sole primary method, reflecting an adaptation to a more digitally connected and information-savvy electorate. The shift towards digital platforms also implies a potential for more targeted messaging and a different form of public discourse, where information can spread rapidly and often bypass traditional media gatekeepers.

Media Coverage and its Influence on Public Discourse
The landscape of media coverage and its influence on public discourse also evolved, albeit with concerning implications for electoral fairness. In the 2013 elections, the media generally enjoyed a degree of freedom of speech, providing a range of viewpoints and exercising scrutiny over the election process. However, this freedom was not without limitations. State and privately owned broadcasters often failed to provide equitable coverage to all political parties. For instance, PML-N received significantly more live TV coverage (nearly 16 hours) compared to PTI (5 hours) or PPP (4 hours) from the six TV channels monitored by the EU Election Observation Mission. Despite these imbalances, media was widely credited with developing public consciousness about the importance of elections and the power of their vote, particularly in urban areas. Nevertheless, journalists were targeted in some regions, indicating underlying pressures on media freedom. By the 2018 election cycle, concerns about media freedom escalated significantly. Widespread allegations of pre-election interference by military and intelligence agencies were reported, which allegedly created an uneven electoral playing field. This interference included censorship, site-blocking, and harassment of journalists. Leading newspapers like Dawn and major TV channels such as Geo TV and Jang reportedly faced intimidation, financial pressures, and bans on sale in certain areas after reporting on sensitive political matters. Social media, while used for campaigns, was also utilized by activists to highlight human rights abuses and harassment, indicating its role as an alternative space for discourse when mainstream media faced restrictions. While media played a vital role in raising voter awareness and providing diverse viewpoints in 2013 , the 2018

election cycle witnessed a concerning regression in media freedom. This was marked by widespread allegations of state interference, censorship, and harassment of journalists. This suppression of independent media potentially distorted public discourse, limited the electorate's access to unbiased information, and thereby influenced political behaviors by shaping perceptions and limiting informed choice. The reported intimidation of media outlets suggests a deliberate effort to control the narrative, which has profound implications for democratic integrity and the ability of citizens to make fully informed decisions.

Conclusion

The comparative study of political behaviors in Multan District during the 2013 and 2018 general elections reveals a dynamic and evolving electoral landscape, characterized by both enduring patterns and significant shifts. The period witnessed a clear realignment of political power, with PML-N's dominance in 2013 giving way to PTI's ascendancy in 2018, mirroring broader national and provincial trends in Punjab. This shift suggests a degree of voter volatility and a responsiveness to new political narratives, particularly PTI's "change" agenda, and perceived government performance. Voter participation, while showing a slight percentage decrease nationally, demonstrated an absolute increase in the number of voters, driven by enhanced voter registration efforts. However, persistent disparities in registration and turnout between men and women highlight ongoing structural barriers to full female political participation. Among educated youth in Multan, there was a discernible move towards more rational, issue-based voting, with a greater emphasis on candidates' ability to solve problems and parties' stances on national issues, rather than solely relying on traditional "biradri" ties. While family influence remained a significant social determinant, the declining importance of broader communal affiliations points to a gradual modernization of political decision-making. Campaign strategies evolved to embrace digital platforms, with social media becoming a crucial tool for voter engagement and information dissemination by 2018. This reflects the increasing digitalization of political communication and an adaptation by parties to a more technologically connected electorate. However, the electoral environment remained fraught with challenges. Persistent security threats continued to impact campaigns and voter safety. More critically, the 2018 elections were marred by widespread allegations of pre-election interference by state institutions, censorship, and harassment of journalists, which potentially created an uneven playing field and undermined the fairness of the process. The significant increase in rejected ballots, sometimes exceeding winning margins, further raised concerns about electoral integrity.

In sum, Multan District's electoral journey from 2013 to 2018 reflects a complex interplay of a maturing electorate with evolving demands for performance and accountability, juxtaposed against persistent structural challenges to democratic fairness and transparency. The shift in party allegiances, the changing role of media, and the enduring influence of social factors all contribute to a nuanced understanding of political behavior in this critical region of Pakistan. The findings underscore the ongoing tension between democratic aspirations and the realities of political contestation in a challenging socio-political context.

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