

## ETHNICITY AND VOTING BEHAVIOR IN PAKISTAN: A REVIEW OF ELECTION DATA

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### Abstract

*This article outlines how ethnicity influences voting behavior in Pakistan. The study uses election data (2008, 2013, and 2018) as empirical evidence to highlight how ethnicity shapes voting behavior across the provinces in Pakistan. Two political parties, Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) and Awami National Party (ANP), are considered for this review. MQM is an ethnic-based party in Karachi dominated by Muhajir. However, ANP is affiliated with Pakhtuns having presence in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Balochistan, and Karachi. Data come for this study from three general elections, i.e., 2008, 2013 and 2018, showing how many votes have been secured by MQM and ANP as ethnic-based political parties. The analysis revealed that ethnicity is among Pakistan's most substantial factors influencing voting behavior.*

**Keywords:** Ethnicity, voting behavior, MQM, ANP.

### INTRODUCTION

Ethnicity is one of the significant indicators of human identity that influences social and political relationships (Ford and Kelly, 2005). Voting behavior is no exception in the political process affected by ethnic connections. Ethnicity as a sociocultural identity has been deeply rooted in the political and democratic arenas (Sekulic, 2008). Ethnic identities shape an individual's voting behavior (Smedley & Smedley, 2005). How ethnicity influences voting behavior across the countries and Pakistan is debated below.

#### Ethnicity in Voting Behavior Across the Countries

Ethnicity as a sociocultural identity intersects with voting behavior across the countries (Ford and Harawa, 2010). Many Western democracies, such as the United States of America (USA), the United Kingdom (UK), Canada, France, Germany, and Australia, have witnessed ethnic presence in politics and voting behavior (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). In the USA, Esses *et al.*, (2001) concluded that voting behavior reflected ethnicity in the elections. They argued that white people preferred white candidates in the voting process. The connection between ethnicity and voting behavior in the USA is not only found in the current political scenario. Brass (1991) also reported the influence of ethnicity on voting behavior in the USA. The case of the UK is not different in this context. For instance, Phinney *et al.*, (2001) confided that ethnicity had been reflected in state policies and voting behavior, especially where particular ethnic groups have been marginalized. This study further revealed that ethnic identity matters in candidate selection during the election. Political mobilization in the UK is associated with ethnic and racial identities influencing voting behavior across political parties (Piombo, 2009). Modood (2005) also reported the presence of ethnic identities in voting behavior. This study claimed that ethnicity is one of the significant factors associated with voting behavior in the UK.

Similarly, in Canada, ethnic identity intersects with voting behavior. Besco and Tolley (2022) asserted that ethnicity is reflected in voting behavior and donations to electoral candidates. They argued that ethnic minorities face barriers to their electoral process, influencing their voting behavior. Chandra (2005) has presented the case of Germany in a similar context. This study reported the presence of ethnic-based political parties. These ethnic-based parties have successfully mobilized and molded voters' behavior. Dill (2012) revealed that ethnicity influences voting behavior. Voters prefer candidates voting affiliated with their ethnic identity. Jones (2019)

has presented an indifferent situation in France. This study has found a connection between voters' behavior and ethnic affiliation. Voters prefer candidates of their ethnic groups. The existence of ethnic identities in voting behavior cannot be denied. In the context of France, Wantchekon (2003) has reported the intersection of ethnicity with voting behavior. This study claimed that voters' preferences had been influenced by their ethnic identities. Norris (2004) has similarly reported the case of Australia. She argued that ethnic identities affect voters' choice of candidates affiliated with their ethnic groups.

Empirical evidence from many South Asian countries also revealed the association between ethnicity and voting behavior. For instance, Kisaka and Nyadera (2019) indicated that ethnicity affects voting behavior in Kenya. Voters prefer candidates affiliated with their ethnic groups. Ethnicity shapes political experiences, including voting behavior. In Kenya, in the 2007 election, ethnic hatred affected the whole election process. Orwenjo (2014) confided that ethnic violence led to a fraudulent election, and many people were killed and displaced during the elections because of ethnic violence. The case of India is not different in this case. Vaishnav (2019) reported that political parties use ethnicity as one of the essential tools during the election campaign. Voting preferences are linked to the voter's ethnic identity. How does ethnicity influence voter behavior in India? Muvungi (2008) revealed that political parties give tickets to candidates with strong ethnic ties in the community. Indonesian political landscape also revealed the relationship between ethnicity and voting behavior. Mendelson and O' Loughlin (2014) found that political parties convince voters through ethnic networking. Voters also prefer to vote for those affiliated with their ethnic groups. Brass (2012) revealed an indifferent situation in Bangladesh that ethnic identity influenced voting behavior. Voters prefer candidates associated with their ethnic identities. Ethnic presence in voting behavior is also prevalent in Bangladesh. Huber (2012) indicated that ethnic identity is used in the election campaign and influences voting behavior. From the above discussion, it is concluded that ethnicity affects voting behavior across the global North, such as the USA, UK, Canada, France, Germany, and Australia. The discussion also revealed some South Asian countries, such as Kenya, India, Indonesia, and Bangladesh, where ethnicity affected voting behavior. The forthcoming sections turn into a discussion on how ethnicity influences voting behavior in Pakistan.

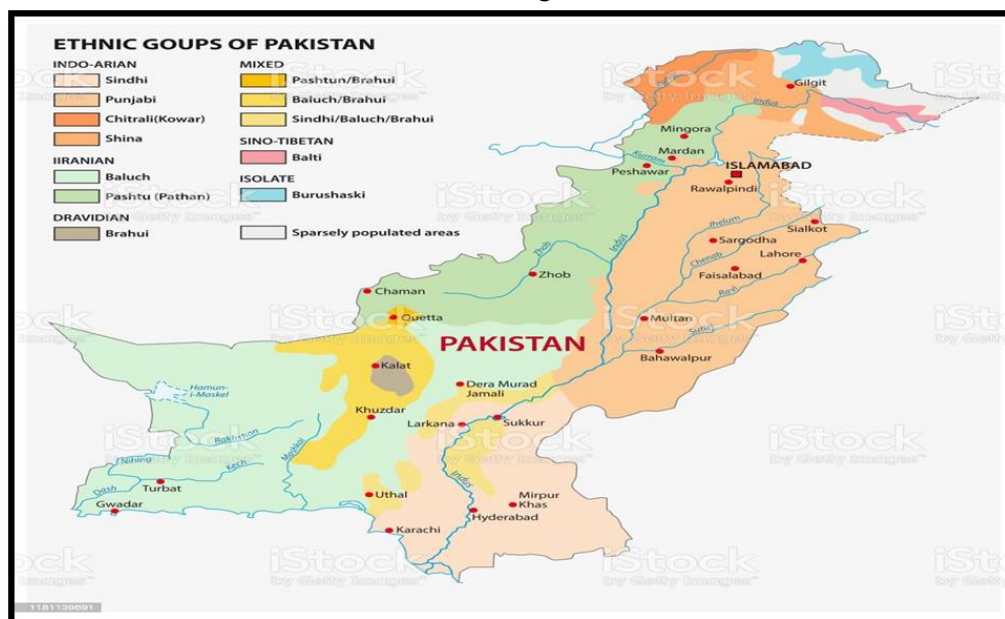
## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This article critically analyzes how the two ethnic-based political parties in Pakistan, Muttahidda Qaumi Movement (MQM) and Awami National Party (ANP), use ethnicity as a political tool and influence voting behavior. The article uses empirical and theoretical reviews on ethnicity in voting behavior to explore how voting behavior was affected in the 2008, 2013, and 2018 general elections by *Muhajir* and *Pakhtun* ethnic groups dominating MQM and ANP, respectively. A comparative analysis of MQM and ANP was necessary to explore how ethnicity (*Muhajir* and *Pakhtun*) influenced voter behavior during the 2008, 2013, and 2018 general elections. This study would be helpful for all those researchers working on the intersection of ethnicity and voting behavior. The conclusion is based on empirical evidence that will add new avenues to the debate on ethnicity and voting behavior in the Pakistani context.

### Discussion and Findings

Multiple ethnicities are prevalent in Pakistan's electoral politics. Akhtar (2009) has reported the major ethnic groups as *Punjabi*, *Sindhi*, *Baluchi*, *Pakhtuns*, and *Chitrali*. These ethnic groups have located in different provinces. *Punjabi* live in Punjab, *Sindhi* in Sind province, *Baluchi* in Balochistan, and *Pakhtuns* in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. The following figure shows ethnic groups in Pakistan.

Figure-1



Source: Federal Bureau of Statistics, Pakistan

These ethnic groups have their own political identities across the political parties. Majeed (2010) reported some major political parties in Pakistan, such as Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz PML-N, Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarians (PPPP), Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), Awami National Party (ANP), Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal Pakistan (MMAP), and Muttahidda Qaumi Movement (MQM). How different ethnic groups dominate some of these political parties is discussed in the following section.

### The Emergence of Ethnic Political Parties in Pakistan

Ethnic politics have been present in Pakistan since the country's independence. Each ethnic group, such as *Punjabis*, *Sindhis*, *Balochis*, and *Pakhtuns*, has political identities (Bhattacharya, 2015). However, the first ethnic political party emerged in 1949 with the name Awami League under the leadership of Hussain Shaheed Suharwardy. (Rashiduzzaman, 1970). Awami League was comprised of *Bengali* ethnic people of East Pakistan. Bengali ethnic people felt marginalized and neglected by the central government in West Pakistan. The establishment of the Awami League as an ethnic Party of Bengalis inspired other ethnic groups in Pakistan. National Awami Party came into existence in 1960, serving the interest of the *Pashtuns* ethnic group in Northwest Pakistan (Bhattacharya, 2015). Similarly, Balochistan National Party was founded in 1967, advocating the rights of the *Balochis* in southwestern Balochistan. Pakistan People's Party came into existence under the leadership of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto in West Pakistan, securing Punjabi and Sindhi's political interests (Baxter, 1971). Likewise, in Sindh, Mohajir Qaumi Movement (now Muttahidda Qaumi Movement) was formed to represent the interests of Urdu-speaking migrants from India (Haq, 1995). Awami National Party was established by Abdul Wali Khan in 1986, meeting the political interests of *Pakhtuns*, the North West Frontier of Pakistan, currently known as KP (Haq, 1995). Most importantly, Muttahidda Qaumi Movement and Awami National Party still represent the political interests of Muhajir dominantly in Sindh and *Pashtuns* in KP and Balochistan, respectively (Waseem, 2022). These political parties (MQM and ANP) are significant evidence of how ethnic identities intersect with voting behavior.

### Muhajir Ethnicity and Muttahidda Qaumi Movement Vote's Bank

Muttahidda Qaumi Movement (MQM) plays ethnic politics, and most of its voters belong to the *Muhajir* ethnicity (Akhtar, 2013). This reveals ethnicity as a core political element that influences voting behavior. MQM, like other political parties, especially ANP, has made its vote bank by addressing the issues of *Muhajir* ethnicity before the government (Majeed, 2010). MQM politically

mobilizes the *Muhajir* community in Karachi while addressing their social and political problems, such as job opportunities, housing, health, and education (Baloch, 2012). The connection between *Muhajir* ethnicity and MQM indicates how ethnicity influences voting behavior. For instance, MQM used ethnic cards during the voting campaign and successfully gained votes from *Muhajir* communities in Karachi (Akhtar *et. al.*, 2022). However, ethnic-based voter bases carry challenges for democratic stability.

How ethnicity affects voting behavior in Karachi, Sindh, can be seen from the association between *Muhajir* ethnicity and MQM voters. Verkaaik (2016) confided that MQM won the election and often mobilized voters through ethnic politics. MQM used the politics of *Mihajir* ethnicity to get the attention of voters. Levesque (2013) argued that when political parties use ethnic politics, this undermines democracy. The relationship between *Muhajir* ethnicity and MQM voter's bank proves Levesque's findings. Ethnic-based voter bank motivates political parties and starts doing ethnic politics. For instance, Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarians (PPPP) are also doing ethnic politics and trying to gain more votes using ethnicity when they see MQM's strategy of doing ethnic politics (Khan, 2002). Bilal and Ahmad (2012) gave significantly less importance to the effect of ethnicity on politics and voting behavior in political participation in Pakistan. However, the situation was different in Karachi, Sindh of, Pakistan. Gazdar (2011) found a strong association between *Muhajir* ethnicity and the voting behavior of MQM voters. This study revealed that MQM often wins elections in Karachi using the *Muhajir* ethnicity card.

Doing ethnic politics is not a good practice for democratic development in a country. Birnir *et.*, al (2007) concluded that using ethnicity in voting campaigns and politics leads to a fragmented political landscape that creates difficulties for the political parties doing good governance. However, MQM in Sindh, Pakistan, understands ethnic support in voting campaigns and politics as one of the fundamental strengths of democracy. MQM takes help from the *Muhajir* ethnicity during the election campaign. Verkaaik (2004) found that most of the partisan voters of MQM are from the *Muhajir* ethnicity. Similarly, how *Muhajir's* ethnicity affected voting behavior in Sindh, Pakistan. The following table is empirical evidence showing *Muhajir* ethnicity's influence on voting behavior.

**Table-1** MQM and ANP Votes in the General Election of 2008, 2013, and 2018

Party name	General Elections	National Assembly	Punjab Assembly	Sindh Assembly	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly	Balochistan Assembly
MQM	2008	0.13	0%	32%	0%	0%
	2013	5%	0%	50%	0%	0%
	2018	1.38%	0%	7%	0%	0%
ANP	2008	16%	0%	0%	48%	6%
	2013	7%	0%	1%	4.2%	1.7%
	2018	1.54%	0%	1%	10%	1.8%

Source: Election Commission of Pakistan

The preceding table shows how *Muhajir* and *Pakhtun* ethnicities are reflected in MQM and ANP voters. The percentage of each political party is self-explanatory, which is empirical evidence strengthening the argument in this paper.

#### ***Pakhtun* Ethnicity and Awami National Party Vote's Bank**

Awami National Party represents *Pakhtuns* in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces. How does ANP get voters' support in the election? The above table is evidence of that. Awami National Party uses *Pakhtun* ethnic card and makes partisan voters. Akhtar (2013) indicated the association between ethnicity and voting behavior. Similarly, ANP uses *Pakhtun* ethnic cards to make its vote bank stronger. The three general elections in Pakistan, 2008, 2013, and 2018 prove the association between *Pakhtun* ethnicity and the vote bank of ANP. *Pakhtuns* in KP and some in Balochistan support ANP because of their ethnic affiliation. It is worth mentioning that ANP came

into government in the 2008 election, in which ethnic votes were one of the significant elements (Waseem, 2016).

Ethnic voting cannot be denied in Pakistan. Awami National Party mainly represents *Pakhtun* ethnicity which strengthens its vote bank. Khan (2018) argued that ethnic voting cannot be denied. This study revealed that most of the voters of ANP are *Pakhtuns*. Awami National Party is doing ethnic politics by addressing problems of the *Pakhtun* community, primarily in KP and Balochistan. In return, ANP strengthens its vote bank by getting the support of *Pakhtuns*. Subhan and Kasi (2018) concluded that ANP is a *Pashtun* nationalist party that constantly seeks to enhance its voters by addressing issues of *Pakhtuns*. Similarly, the data presented in Table 01 reveals the relationship between *Pakhtun* ethnicity and the ANP votes bank. The above discussion indicates that *Pakhtun* ethnicity influences voting behavior through which the Awami National Party plays politics while trying to address the problems of *Pakhtuns*.


### CONCLUSION

In this article, we outlined an association between ethnicity and voting behavior. The explanations conclude that *Muhajir* and *Pakhtun* ethnicities influence voting behavior in Pakistan. MQM and ANP are playing ethnic politics while getting the support of *Muhajir* and *Pakhtuns*, respectively. A brief account of the analysis found that in the three general elections, 2008, 2013, and 2018, both MQM and ANP tried to establish their vote bank by doing ethnic politics. MQM in Karachi has an ethnic vote bank dominated by *Muhajir* ethnicity. However, ANP has the most *Pakhtun* voters in KP, Karachi, and Balochistan. This situation reflects an undeniable association of *Muhajir* and *Pakhtun* ethnicities with voters of MQM and ANP. MQM and ANP always tried to strengthen their vote bank by getting support from *Muhajir* and *Pakhtuns* while addressing their problems. The crux of the discussion here is that *Muhajir* and *Pakhtun* ethnicities are strongly associated with voting behavior in KP (*Pakhtun* ethnicity), Karachi (*Muhajir* ethnicity), and in Balochistan (*Pakhtun* ethnicity).

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