

An Analysis of Women Voters as a Factor in JIP's Electoral Performance in Upper Dir & Lower Dir in General Elections 2018

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Abstract

Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan (JIP) is one of the leading Islamist political parties trying since late 1950s to acquire political power in Pakistan through electoral politics. Yet its electoral performance has remained lackluster. The 2018 elections were particularly significant as JIP lost in all constituencies, except one provincial constituency in Upper Dir. Some party elites observed that the party's candidates lost in these two districts mainly due to women voters. Using both primary and secondary data sources, this qualitative comparative study examines whether female voters did actually impact, and if so, to what extent, the performance of JIP in general election 2018 in Upper Dir and Lower Dir. The study finds that while the candidates of JIP lost to rival candidates, their defeat was neither exclusively nor mainly due to women voters and that JIP secured relatively more votes among female voters than among male voters. It suggests that JIP make efforts to access women voters on a wider scale for better electoral performance in future.

Keywords: Islamism, electoral politics, women empowerment, political parties, Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan

Introduction

As one of the leading Islamist political parties of contemporary Muslim world, Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan (JIP) had jumped into the politics in the late 1950s as a means of peaceful struggle for acquiring political power within the newly created state of Pakistan with the ultimate objective of establishing an Islamic system (Moten, 2003; Balaggan, 2019). After its disappointing performance in the general elections 1970 which “dealt a severe blow to the morale and confidence of the rank and file of the Jamaat” (Moten, 2003; Nasr, 1994), and the non-party elections of 1985, JIP tried politics of alliance under IJI but abandoned it after a sour experience (Muhammad, 2015; Rahman, 2000). Under the dynamic leadership of Qazi Husain Ahmed, the party tried to open up and become a mass party under the Pakistan Islamic Front in 1993 (Moten 2003; Nadeem, 2018), even though Maudoodi (Jan, 2017) had ruled out further opening up, but again faced a disappointing election result, partly due to internal differences over to decision to form PIF (Rahman, 2000; Moten,

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2003) and chiefly due to the Front's poor electoral performance in the 1993 general elections. With such a sordid electoral trajectory and boycotting of the 1997 general elections the party again went into alliance under Mutahidda Majlas-e-Amal (MMA) in 2002, coming into power in KP, but parted ways with MMA and boycotted the 2008 general elections (Basit, 2013; Afridi, Ullah, & Gul, 2016; Yusaf, 2020), a wrong decision that seriously harmed the party (Chishti, 2013; Ansari, 2014). But as the general elections 2013 came closer, JIP faced the tricky question of whether to ally once again or contest alone. Exhausted in efforts yet unable to forge alliance with any major party (Yusaf, 2020), JIP finally contested elections alone in 2013 for the first time after 1970. Once again, the party failed to impress the masses due to reasons highlighted by many (Yusaf, 2020; 2018; Amin, 2020); Ansari, 2013; Hamid, 2013), but was at least able to win most of the constituencies it had been winning in Upper Dir and Lower Dir, and thus entered into coalition government with Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). The 2018 general elections, however, turned out to be a nightmare for JIP as it lost all but one provincial constituency in KP. Despite the perception about JIP as the most democratic political party in the context of Pakistan (Lieven, 2012; Rais, 2017), disciplined and organized (Amin, 2016; Lieven, 2012), having a robust public welfare wing (Banu, 2009), and untainted by corruption (Husain, 2018) the party's electoral performance in 2018 is quite an intriguing phenomenon, casting doubts over its future in these districts.

Research Questions

- i. What is the perception of JIP party elites about the contribution of women voters in the defeat of party candidates in general elections 2018?
- ii. Whether in the light of ECP data, the loss of JIP's candidates in Upper Dir and Lower in 2018 is attributable to women voters?
- iii. How in terms of votes secured have the candidates of JIP scored comparatively among male and female voters in these two districts in general elections 2018?

Aims and objectives

This study seeks to serve three main objectives. Firstly, it seeks to ascertain the perception of JIP elites, both current and former, about women voters as a factor in the party's electoral results in general election 2018. Secondly, it tries to see whether and how far the perception of party elites regarding women voters is supported by data of ECP. Thirdly, the

study aims at highlighting the impact of women voters on the electoral performance of JIP in the two districts where women were previously barred from voting under local agreements but came out in large numbers in general elections 2018 to cast their vote. In doing so, the study compares the relative performance of the candidates of JIP among male and female voters to see whether the loss of JIP candidates is mainly attributable to the former or the latter.

Methodology

This is a qualitative case study explaining a phenomenon, viz. impact of women voters on electoral performance of JIP. It is territorially confined to the districts of Upper Dir and Lower Dir KP Pakistan, and temporally restricted to general election 2018. In qualitative research tradition, meaning is generated from the data collected in the field which are lent further support from secondary data sources (Creswell, 2009). An in-depth qualitative research strategy suits examination of a complex and intriguing social phenomenon, like the electoral performance of JIP, that cannot be fully understood merely with external research devices common in quantitative research (Shkedi, 2019). Using both primary data generated through interview schedule, and secondary data sources, including published data of Forms 45 of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), the study seeks to answer the research questions. Selection of District Upper Dir and Lower Dir is based on the consideration that in these districts JIP had previously won most of the elections but lost all except one constituency in 2018, hence question mark over the party's future in its stronghold districts. Face-to-face interviews were taken from a purposively selected sample of eleven local leaders, comprising nine men and two women, including party candidates and important office bearers of JIP. In-depth personal interviews with elite members are a widely used method (Semenova, 2018, p. 75).

The selection of party elites was based on the consideration that being insiders they knew "all there is to know in order to accurately describe and analyze what happened and why" (LaPorte, 1975, p.185). Being strategically located, the party elites illuminate the forces and processes under study (Gerson & Horowitz, 2002). The interviews were personally transcribed and thematically analyzed using features of MS Excel. The data of Form 45 of ECP, pertaining to polling stations where only men polled votes and polling stations where only women polled votes, was also fed into MS Excel for analysis to see trends of votes secured among men and women by JIP's losing candidates vis-à-vis the winning candidates.

Literature Review

There is considerable literature on JIP touching on various aspects of the party, including its ideology, founder, organization, role and electoral performance. Nasr (1994) points out how JIP politicized Islam but failed to benefit from it and transform into a mass party. Although Moten (2003) finds that JIP has transformed from a cadre party into a mass revolutionary movement after the failed experience of Pakistan Islamic Front. In their study on the electoral politics of JIP from 1987 to 2009 Afridi, Ullah, & Gul (2016) have found that the party has shifted from traditional Islamic politics towards social-justice based politics and secured electoral success under MMA. However, others (Balaggan, 2019; Ansari, 2020; Khan, 2014; Rais, 2017) believe that the party has largely failed in electoral politics. Several scholars (Khan, 2014; Yusaf, 2020; Ansari, 2014; Chishti, 2013) have highlighted the various reasons responsible for JIP's continuing failure to impress the electorate on a vast scale.

After the 2013 general elections, Chishti (2013) had predicted even worse electoral outcome in 2018. A number of writers on JIP (Hamid, 2013; Nasr, 2013; Khan, 2014; Butt, 2013; Amin, 2020) have suggested how the party can reform to improve its performance in elections. In her detailed work on women segment of JIP, Jamal (2013) finds that despite its failure in elections so far, JIP can expand its appeal among women by liberalising its position towards women instead of continuing its exclusionary politics. These works are valuable in their own right but there is dearth of adequate research on the reasons why the party failed in general elections 2018 even in its stronghold districts Upper Dir and Lower Dir. This study is an attempt to fill up this gap.

The Question of Women Vote Prior to 2018

Maudoodi's ideology has influenced JIP's position on women (Jamal, 2013). Maudoodi, the party's founder, had initially ruled out women participation in business of the parliament as something wrong, western and against Islamic spirit (Jan, 2018; Maudoodi, 2010) and so had other JIP leaders (Rahman, 2000), but subsequently this conservative position was softened and JIP sent its women to the elected assemblies (Nadeem, 2018). The general elections 2002 were historic since several JIP women formally entered the electoral arena, even though on the whole JIP's traditional shyness towards full scale women participation in electoral politics continued (Jamal, 2013). In remote rural areas of Pakistan like Upper Dir and Lower Dir, this attitude was further augmented by the local cultural milieu as different political parties would

come to an agreement not to bring out women for voting (ABKT, 2014; ICG, 2015). Women in rural areas with little education, restricted social mobility and limited resources continue to stay deprived of their rights and opportunities (Oxfam, 2013). The population of Upper Dir is 946,421 and that of Lower Dir is 1,435,917 (PBS, 2017). The number of registered voters in Upper Dir is 447,414, of which 268,134 are male and 179,280 females, while in Lower Dir the total registered voters are 681,841 including 403,755 male voters and 278,086 female voters (ECP, 2018). Yet the total turnout of women voters in general elections (NA and PA constituencies combined) 2018 was 40.19% and 40.72% respectively in these districts (ECP, 2018). Amid lingering poverty and deprivation, one female candidate Ms. Hameeda Shahid of PTI contested election from PK-10 Upper Dir, and even though she could not win the election, she still secured 11118 votes in one of the remotest rural parts of Pakistan (ECP, 2018). This was a huge improvement compared to the situation in 2013 when for the first time a woman namely Ms. Nasrat Begum, a PTI District Vice President, contested from Lower Dir as independent candidate and secured less than 187 votes (ICG, 2015; ECP, 2013). This was indeed a momentous development, given the predominantly conservative socio-cultural context of Upper Dir and Lower Dir.

Despite hurdles in the way of women voting in the two districts, voices for women emancipation and participation in voting process kept coming, especially from women rights activists like Ms. Shad Begum and organizations (Aziz & Abdullah, 2012; ICG, 2015) and finally through the Election Act 2017, a major policy shift came to the rescue of women voters. Section 9(1) of the Act empowered ECP to declare election in a constituency void if the women vote count was less than 10% of the total polled votes (GOP, 2018). However, the party elites observed during their interviews that the party workers were still hesitant to bring out their female relatives for voting on the election day, even when they were conscious of the importance of the women voters. No wonder then that most of party elites, while not ruling out other factors, attributed the defeat of JIP candidates in the 2018 general elections mainly to women voters.

Analysis

The responses of party elites offered varied explanations for the failure of JIP candidates in general elections 2018 in Upper Dir and Lower Dir. However, most of them considered that the party lost elections mainly due to women voters who voted against JIP candidates. They also observed that JIP workers did not bring out their women to cast their vote as the activists of other parties did. A District General Secretary of JIP

claimed that his party has lost election due to women; that in Lower Dir JIP has won among men but lost among women. He observed that “Our women are so veiled and modest, that you can bring them to vote only through a lot of swearing and persuasion; while the women of other parties were fully active on elections day, thinking that this is the opportunity”. Similarly, a District President of the party opined, “This women factor is our weakness, a very big one. We are very week on these wickets,” and a JIP losing candidate referring to the foul play in the election, claimed, “All the game has been played in the female votes.” A former Provincial Minister of JIP who was also a candidate in 2018 observed thus, “In 2018 women vote has played out as a factor... The studies conducted so far show that in Upper Dir and Lower Dir, we have won election in the male polling stations while we have lost in the female stations”. A District President of JIP shared his views that, “Even in Dir (Upper and Lower) the reason for the bad electoral performance was that women vote was very low there. Now JIP has realized this very much and now for the last four five months it is being emphasized that at every Village Council level, you have to establish women organization”. To quote the words of an MPA of JIP:

“In Upper Dir, neither PPP was allowing women to vote, nor ANP, nor any other party. Here there was a tradition, a procedure. Under an understanding, they would not let women cast vote.... But this time in 2018, no such thing took place. It was left open in 2018. And then in 2018, JIP also did convincing among the females, PPP has also done, this (party) has done, that (party) has done. But overall, JIP may not have benefitted here”.

These excerpts from the interviews of party elites show that the local leadership of JIP consider women voters as the key factor in the defeat of party’s candidates in general elections 2018 in Upper Dir and Lower Dir. The observations of party leaders also reveal the growing realization within the party for access to the women voters on a much wider scale yet for reasons success is evasive.

With these observations in the hindsight, the pattern of male and female voting in Upper Dir and Lower Dir in general elections 2018 needs to be seen in the light of the data of ECP. There were a total of three National Assembly (NA) constituencies in the two districts and eight Provincial Assembly (PA) constituencies against which JIP candidates

contested in 2018. All of these except one PA constituency were won by JIP in the 2013 general elections (ECP 2013), and all of them except one PA constituency were lost by JIP in the general elections 2018 (ECP, 2018), hence a complete reversal of fortunes for JIP in the latter elections. Since women were voting in these two districts for the first time without being restrained through agreement among local party leaders, hence the perception among some party elites that actually women vote cost them the 2018 general elections. To cross check this perception, the data of Form-45 of all polling stations of two NA constituencies was obtained from ECP and analyzed. Form-45 is a detailed statement of the count, introduced for the first time in general elections 2018, showing data of votes secured by each candidate. Scrutiny of the data revealed that there were three types of polling stations: those where only male voters polled votes, those where only women voters casted vote, and joint polling stations where both male and female voters voted. Form-45 of the joint polling stations does not contain gender-disaggregated data. The only option available is to examine the Forms 45 of the remaining two types of polling stations (hereinafter, the gender-segregated polling stations) and see the trends of male and female voters between the winning and the runner up candidates in these constituencies. Accordingly, the data of Forms 45 of male and female polling stations of NA-5 Upper Dir, NA-7 Lower Dir, PK-10 Upper Dir, PK-17 Lower Dir, PK-13 Lower Dir, and PK-14 Lower Dir was taken from ECP and analyzed.

In NA-5 the winning candidate Sahibzada Sibghatullah of PTI secured 66654 votes while the runner up candidate Sahibzada Tariq Ullah of JIP got 58307 votes, the latter lost by a margin of 8347 votes. Table-I below shows the position of votes secured by JIP's Sahibzada Tariq Ullah and PTI's Sahibzada Sibghatullah among male and female voters in the gender-segregated polling stations in NA-5 Upper Dir in general elections 2018.

Table I

Candidate	Total Votes Among men & Women	Votes Among Women		Votes Among Men	
		Number of Votes	%	Number of Votes	%
Tariq Ullah	14780	4729	46.51	10,051	36.68
Sibghatullah	22782	5437	53.48	17,345	63.31
Totals	37,562	10166	100	27,396	100

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Difference between the Candidate's Votes	8002	708		7294	
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Calculations are based on ECP data.

The table reveals that firstly JIP candidate lost to PTI's candidate both among male voters and female voters. Secondly, the margin of difference between Sahibzada Sibghatullah and Sahibzada Tariq Ullah is merely 708 votes among women voters against 7294 votes difference between the two candidates among male voters. This means the margin of loss for JIP candidate was ten times greater in male voters than the loss margin in female voters. Thirdly, in percentage terms, of the total women voters, JIP's candidate got 46.51% and PTI's candidate got 53.48%, while among male voters, JIP could barely get 36.68% against PTI's 63.31%.

The trends highlighted in NA-5 Upper Dir have continued in NA-7 Lower Dir also. The ECP data shows that overall Bahir Khan got 63,071 votes against 46,927 votes of Siraj-ul-Haq (ECP, 2018). Table-II summarizes the position of votes secured by the two candidates in the gender-segregated polling stations.

Table II

Candidate Name	Total Votes Among men & Women	Female Voters		Male Voters	
		Count	%	Count	%
Siraj-ul-Haq	13305	3170	43.11	10135	38.97
Bashir Khan	20055	4183	56.88	15872	61.02
Total	33360	7353	100	26007	100
Difference between the Candidate's Votes	6750	1013		5737	

Calculations are based on ECP data.

As the table shows, the total votes secured by both candidates is 33360, of which JIP got 13305 (or 39.88%) and PTI got 20055 votes (or 60.11%). Of these, JIP's share in women voters was 43.11% against PTI's share of 56.88%, but among men JIP secured 38.97% against PTI's 61.02% votes. The margin of difference between the two candidates among male votes is 5737, among female voters it is barely 1013. This clearly reflects that JIP candidate scored relatively better among women voters compared to male voters, although in both categories of voters JIP lost to PTI. JIP's margin of loss among male voters is more than five times higher than among women voters.

In PK-10 Upper Dir, JIP's candidate Muhammad Ali lost to Malik Badshah Salih of Pakistan People's Party Parliamentarians (PPPP). The following table summarizes the votes secured by the two candidates in gender-segregated polling stations.

Table-III

Candidate Name	Total Votes Among Men & Women	Female Voters		Male Voters	
		Votes	% of the total female voters	Votes	% of the total male voters
Badshah Salih	3826	1252	58.50	2574	56.10
Muhammad Ali	2902	888	41.49	2014	43.89
Total Votes among Men & Women	6728	2140	100	4588	100
Difference between Votes of Candidates	924	364		560	

Calculations are based on ECP data.

The table reveals that the total votes secured by both candidates in the gender-segregated polling stations is 6728, of which JIP got 2902 (43.13%) and PPPP got 3826 (56.87%). Secondly, JIP has lost to PPPP both among male and female voters. Thirdly, women's contribution (viz. 364 votes) to JIP's margin of loss (viz. 924 votes) is much smaller (viz. 39.39%) than the contribution of male voters (viz. 560 votes) which is 60.61% of the margin of loss. However, JIP's Muhammad Ali scored (41.49%) relatively worse among women voters compared to his score (43.89%) among male voters vis-à-vis the score of PPPP's Malik Badshah Salih viz. 58.51% among females and 56.10% among male voters respectively.

In PK-17 Lower Dir JIP's Saeed Gul got 18850 votes and lost to PTI's Malik Liaquat Ali who got 22886 votes, hence the loss margin of 4036 votes (ECP, 2018). Table-IV shows the details.

Table-IV

Candidate Name	Total Votes Among Men & Women	Female Voters		Male Voters	
		Votes	% of the total female voters	Votes	% of the total male voters
Liaquat Ali	7297	1964	54.54	5333	56.27

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Saeed Gul	5781	1637	45.45	4144	43.73
Total	13078	3601	100	9477	100
Difference between the Votes of Candidates	1516	327		1189	

Calculations are based on ECP data.

This table also reveals similar pattern as was observed in NA-5, NA-7 and PK-10. Firstly, JIP's candidate lost to PTI's candidate both among male voters and female voters. Secondly, JIP's Saeed Gul has secured a higher percentage of votes (viz. 45.45%) among women voters than among male voters (viz. 43.73%) when compared to the percentage share of votes secured by the winning candidate Malik Liaquat Ali among male voters (viz. 54.54%) and female voters (viz. 56.27%). Thirdly, the contribution of male voters (viz. 1189 votes or 78.43%) in the margin of vote difference between the two candidates is at least three times greater than the contribution of female voters (viz. 327 votes or 21.56%).

In PK-14 Lower Dir, Dr. Zakirullah Khan of JIP secured 14846 against Humayun Khan's 19619 votes, and thus lost by a margin of 4773 votes (ECP, 2018). Table V summarizes their position.

Table-V

Candidate Name	Votes Obtained	Female Voters		Male Voters	
		Votes	% of the total female voters	Votes	% of the total male voters
Humayun	5459	1810	63.86	3649	66.99
Zakirullah	2822	1024	36.13	1798	33.01
Total	8281	2834	100	5447	100
Difference between the Votes of Candidates	2637	786		1851	

Calculations are based on ECP data

Here again JIP has lost among both male and female voters. Major contribution (viz. 1851 votes or 70.19%) to the margin of defeat came from male voters. Female voters contributed only 786 votes or 29.80%. In percentage terms, Zakirullah Khan scored better among female voters by securing 36.13%, while among male voters he secured 33.01%, against Humayun Khan's 63.86% and 66.99% among female and male voters respectively.

In PK-13 Lower Dir JIP's Shad Nawaz secured 18832 votes but lost to PTI's Muhammad Azam Khan who got 21683 votes, hence a difference of 2851 votes (ECP, 2018). Table VI shows that JIP's candidate defeated the PTI candidate among women voters by a margin of 110 votes. But among male voters, JIP lost to PTI by 1651 votes, which is approximately fifteen times more than JIP's lead of 110 votes among female voters.

Table-VI

Candidate Name	Total Votes Among Men & Women	Female Voters		Male Voters	
		Votes	% of the total female voters	Votes	% of the total male voters
Azam Khan	8447	2051	48.69	6393	57.41
Shad Nawaz	6903	2161	51.30	4742	42.58
Total	15350	4212	100	11135	100
Difference between the Votes of Candidates	1544	110		1651	

Calculations are based on ECP data.

Keeping in view these voting patterns in various PA and NA constituencies in Upper Dir and Lower Dir in general elections 2018, the perception of JIP party elites is not substantiated. On the contrary, data shows that in percentage terms JIP candidates performed relatively better among female voters than among male voters vis-à-vis the winning candidates. One possible explanation hinges on the perception that traditionally women with limited exposure to political enfranchisement and empowerment, more so in the conservative rural settings, are more religious (PEW, 2016; Trzebiatowska & Bruce, 2012) and conservative (Inglehart & Norris, 2000; Wherry, 2015), hence their inclination towards parties that are perceived more religious. As admitted by several party elites, for its Islamist identity and narrative, JIP is obviously seen as more religious, hence the likelihood of women voters being more inclined to it. However, given that the media factored heavily in changing perceptions and political mobilization in general elections (Zafar, 2014; EU EOM, 2018) women voters were also likely to be influenced. But as party elites observed, women in rural areas usually follow their male family members in voting decisions. This partly explains why on the whole majority of women also voted candidates other than JIP candidates. Yet the fact that JIP performed relatively better among women voters' beacon towards a

certain degree of independent exercise of choice by the women voters irrespective of the choice of their male relatives. A full-fledged exploration of the behavior of women voters in Upper Dir and Lower Dir is one potential area for future research.

With the discontinuation of local agreements against women voting, the significance of women voters has increased for future elections in Upper Dir and Lower Dir. As such, JIP needs to reach out to women on a much wider scale than it has done so far, if it wants to regain its lost ground in these districts. Women constitute around 48.5% of the country's population (WB, 2019). There are 457,366 women voters in a total 1.13 million voters in Upper Dir and Lower Dir alone (ECP, 2018). A political party like JIP that seeks electoral success, has to fully engage women in its political activism. JIP's Long-term Strategy Paper 2020-33 and Action Plan 2020 (Jamaat-e-Islami, 2020a; Jamat-e-Islamic Pakistan, 2020) offer potential for hope but much would depend on the execution of the envisaged programs and initiatives.

Conclusion

This study analyzed the impact of women voters in the electoral performance of JIP in Upper Dir and Lower Dir in general elections 2018. Analysis of the observations of party elites revealed a perception that the party's candidates lost mainly due to women voters. However, the study finds that the perception is not supported by the data of ECP. On the contrary, the study finds that although JIP lost both among male and female voters, its candidates scored much better comparatively among female voters than among male voters in terms of percentage votes secured vis-à-vis the percentage votes secured by the winning candidates.

Recommendations

In view of the significance of women voters, the following recommendations are framed.

- i) JIP needs to reach out to women voters on a vast scale, while concurrently working among male sections of the society.
- ii) The party may motivate its activists to involve their women in political activities of the party.
- iii) Members of the party need to lead by example by helping their women to play a more dynamic role in elections rather than shy away even from polling their votes on elections day.

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