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Uncivil Language of Political Leaders and Voting Patterns: Measuring the Impact on Youth Voters During Pakistan General Elections 2018

Abstract

The issue of use of uncivilized language by political leaders has increased in Pakistan during last few years. Before general elections, this problem multiplies further. The current study focuses on the foul language of political leaders and its effect on the young voters and their vote choices. For this quantitative research, the data was collected through survey conducted during General Elections 2018 on youth voters of Lahore representing all nine towns of the provincial metropolis. The study results revealed that uncivilized language did not affect the vote decision of youth significantly in General Elections. However, the survey of voters with strong party affiliation showed that there was a significant relationship between importance of political leaders' language and feelings of voters.

Keywords: Democracy, Pakistan General Elections 2018, foul language, party leaders, party candidates, youth voters

Introduction and Background

Politicians have a vital role in the general public life as they are the voices of the public who elect them and have the ambition to serve the public. The most important feature of a good political leader is trustworthiness and caring nature. A reliable politician is a well-disciplined human being with reward less services to enhance the lifestyle of voters. Discipline is compulsory for a civilized society and political life. Without discipline societal life becomes worst. This is an immoral politician who will see that all the best and positive deeds are in his own side and that all the worst and negative deeds are on his opponent. Good politician shows respect to others.[1]

The positive thinking and positive narrative keep the national moral up and pride which ultimately can be transformed into national progress. Leadership and the national narrative given by the top leaders of any country plays a very pivotal role

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in the individual and societal build up as well as international standing of a nation.[2]

Pakistan General Election 2018 held on July 25. The language used during General Elections (GE) 2018 is very embarrassing, which in reality, is a question mark on any civilized, mature and tolerant society. Character damaging comments become a tradition in our political scenario. The worst thing is that those involved in abusive talk are actually the senior most politicians of Pakistan.[3]

The language of many politicians is very weird and agitating in the campaigns. The leaders who are the representatives of public and ideal of the nation used such an abusive, negative and foul language wrecking the standards of morality. The parliament is the sacred place where law making processes and policy making strategic issues are to be discussed but our political leaders engaged in blaming each other by using abusive language.[4]

Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan used the terminology *Gadha* (donkey) for the rival Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) supporters. In Karachi PTI followers, in reality, beat up a donkey with pebbles and wrote "Nawaz" on its body. This happened when Imran used the word *Gadha* for PML-N followers in GE 2018 campaigning. Some people termed this evil and sickening act of viciousness and brutality. Negative content and cruelty may get some fake appreciation on the spot, but they actually damage and pollute the mature political atmosphere. All politicians should respect all voters irrespective of the followers of any opponent political parties.[5]

Literature Review

Being a political candidate is just the starter of political process. Successful candidates must convince their electorates that they deserve their individual vote. Persuading their voters is the crux of their political campaign. Publicity, theme songs, end speeches, and more realistically, damaging and harmful campaigning have always been the part of election process.[6]

During election campaigns, communication skills gauge the capability of politicians. Spoken communication skills, media skills, and headship communication skills are the major categories of proficiencies of communication of politicians. Political leaders always required communication skills, specially the art of speaking in public meetings.[7]

The wrong choice of words can shipwreck a political career. Political leaders now can communicate to their vote bank directly through campaigns and political speeches. So, the use of language should be appropriate in speech discourse. Many political leaders become renowned and famous politicians by applying the protocols and standards of communication on twitter sphere. The point where politician can take edge is the use of language.[8]

Due to the objectionable phrases and defaming the opponents in the campaigns, in the whole world, language is an essential political and cultural phenomenon to be examined. Many socialists, educationist and political leaders know the importance of language.[9]

The causes of weakness of democracy in Pakistan lies in legal and electoral requirements of the institutions which damaged the political governments. The other important factor which is really responsible for the destruction of democracy in Pakistan, is the quality of Pakistan's leadership which the history has proved, always let down the country by the misuse of their linguistic skills. Fiscal influences are also responsible for the difficulties of the country to maintain democratic institutions. In general, local culture and civil society in Pakistan strengthened more in the period during which democratic practices prevailed in the society. The frequent sacking of democratically elected governments have no pleasant memory and very less chance for the institutions to adapt the supportive values to strengthen their origin.[10]

Theoretical Framework

The research work's theoretical framework is based on The Speech Act Theory and Psycho Linguistic theory" designed by Austin (1962)[11] and Wundt (1879)[12] respectively.

The Speech Act Theory focusses on the speech with reference to the speakers' act or conduct and the receiver/ listener in communication. It involves the speakers' skills and intent to drive the conversation as every spoken word has some unique communicative drive as per the unique manner of speaking and discussion (Austin, 1962).[13] In this paper, the researchers analyzed the political leaders' uncivil language and its impact on the listeners, especially voters.

In the Psycho-Linguistic Theory, according to Wundt (1879), language is a product of reasoning and therefore accessible to general, rational analysis, i.e. in analogy to other cognitive functions. Cognitive linguistics can be seen as the modern instantiation of this view, regarding language-bound functionality of the brain as incorporated and inextricably linked with other functions of the brain and being a learned ability, biologically / genetically based only on general-purpose "reasoning-mechanisms" of the brain.[14] Applied in communication science this theory means that a particular use of language in messages has more or less persuasive power depending on the value system, the effort and the motivation of receivers. The theory focuses that within a value system, the determination and the motivation of the receiver with more or less influential power to have a specific use of the language.

Study Objectives

The study objectives were:

- To explore the relationship between uncivil language of political leaders and voters turn out in GE 2018.

- To measure the impacts of objectionable language during the political campaign on voters' decision in GE 2018.

- To explore whether the vote bank of the political leaders was affected due to objectionable language usage in political campaigns.

- The outcome of this research may help in improving the usage of civilized language by the politicians in public processions and TV programs.

- To gauge the effect of politicians' objectionable language on party affiliation of their voters.

Research Questions

RQ1. What was the impact of objectionable language of political leaders on their voters in GE 2018?

RQ2. Whether the impact of objectionable language of political leaders on their voters was negative?

RQ3. Did the number of followers of such leaders who used uncivil language for their opponents' increase or decrease in GE 2018?

RQ4. Whether the objectionable language of political leaders affected their opponents' vote bank positively?

RQ5. Did the party affiliation of voters weaken due to uncivil language of their party leaders?

Hypothesis:

H1: Political leaders' objectionable language affected voters negatively in Pakistan General Elections 2018.

H2: There is strong relationship between the damaging effect of objectionable language of political leaders and their opponents' supportive voter decision.

Research Method

This is a quantitative survey [15] research study employing the instrument of questionnaire comprising 19 items with 5-point Likert scale. The research population was the youth voters of Lahore, the provincial metropolis of Punjab, which is an all-time active place of political activity, especially during general elections. In this research, the concern is mainly on the socio-political behavior of the youth voters' decision in the uncivil/objectionable/negative language culture of Pakistani politicians. Purposive sampling technique was used with sample size of 258. Spreading the sample among Urban and rural population 28-30 respondents were taken from all nine towns of the city. Also data was collected from 49.2 percent male and 50.8 female voters for this survey.

Independent variable in this study were language of political leaders, objectionable/uncivil/negative language of political leaders, objectionable language of party candidates and leaders broadcast on news television channels.

The dependent variables in this study were vote decision of the voters, party affiliation, defending the political leaders and effect on voters' feelings. That data

was analyzed using SPSS software through chi-square analysis. The chi-square statistical distribution develops in tests of hypotheses about the independence of two random variables and as regards whether a discrete random variable follows a specified distribution.[16]

Results and Analysis

The survey data was analysed using the SPSS software by applying simple Chi-square tests to test the hypotheses.

Table 1: Chi-Square Tests: Political Affiliation * Due to uncivil or objectionable language of your party-chief, you changed your vote decision

	Value	Df.	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	7.793[a]	4	.099
Likelihood Ratio	7.822	4	.098
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.837	1	.050
N of Valid Cases	258		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 11.09.

This table shows there was insignificant relation between party affiliation and effect on change of voters' decision in case of objectionable language as $\chi2(4)$ =7.793, p > .05.

Table 2: Chi Square Test: Political Affiliation * You had bad feeling when your opponent political party leaders used negative language about your party leader/s?

	Value	Df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	61.072[a]	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	62.664	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	44.972	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	258		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 16.12.

The Table 2 shows there was a significant relation between party affiliation and bad feelings of respondents when opponent political leaders used negative language about their party leaders as $\chi2(4)$ =61.072, p < .05. Table reflects 58.5% respondents agreed that they have strong political affiliation and they felt bad

when opponent political leaders used negative language for their party leaders in electoral campaigns.

Table 3: Chi-Square Test: Political Affiliation * When your party leaders used objectionable language against their opponents in their election campaign, you felt bad

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	43.173ᵃ	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	44.212	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	36.944	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	258		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 14.36.

Table 3 reflects there was significant relationship between party affiliation and bad feeling of voters when their party leader used objectionable language during election campaigns against their opponents as $\chi2$ (4) = 43.173, p < .05.

Table 4: Chi-Square Test: Strong Party Affiliation * Due to the objectionable language of your party leaders, your party affiliation was weekend?

	Value	Df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	24.657ᵃ	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	24.645	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	21.993	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	258		

a.   0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 20.66

The Table 4 depicts there was a significant relationship between strong party affiliation initially and weakening party affiliation after political leaders' objectionable language against their opponents in electoral campaigns as $\chi2$ (4) = 24.657, p < .05.

Table 5: Chi-Square Test: Strong Party Affiliation * In case if your area (constituency) candidate/s' uncivil or objectionable language, you feel good?

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.115[a]	2	.347
Likelihood Ratio	2.119	2	.347
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.632	1	.201
N of Valid Cases	258		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 31.49.

This Table number 5 reflects there was insignificant relationship between party affiliation and good feeling of voters on the objectionable language of constituency candidate as $\chi2$ (2) = 2.115, p > .05.

Table 6: Chi-Square Test: In your opinion language of political leaders is very important for their victory in Elections. * In case if your opponent party candidate's language was good and your party candidate's language was objectionable, you feel bad?

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	13.738[a]	2	.001
Likelihood Ratio	14.063	2	.001
Linear-by-Linear Association	11.726	1	.001
N of Valid Cases	258		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 6.00.

The Table 6 shows a significant relationship between importance of political leader's language and feeling of voters when their own area candidate has uncivil language in comparison to good language of their opponent party candidate. $\chi2(2)$ = 13.738, p < .05.

Conclusion

The study results showed there was insignificant relation between the uncivil language of party leader and effect on voters' decision in Lahore in General Elections 2018 as $\chi2(4)$ =7.793, p > .05, the voters did not change their decision just because of uncivil or objectionable language of party leaders. When opponent political leaders used negative language about their party leaders, study revealed, there was a significant relation between party affiliation and bad feelings of respondents as $\chi2(4)$ =61.072, p < .05. However, the study finds a significant relationship between party affiliation and uncivil or abusive language of party leaders in the electoral campaigns as $\chi2$ (4) =24.657, p < .05 as it was difficult for

the voters to defend their leaders. From the 1st result of this study, it can be ascertained that voters did not change decision on the parameter of uncivil/abusive language but immoral communication of party leader affected their feelings resulting in the shape of weakening of party affiliation. Party affiliation and bad feeling of voters on party leader's uncivil language have significant association as $\chi2(4) =43.173$, $p < .05$.

Also, interestingly, there was a significant relationship between importance of political leaders' language and feeling of voters when their own area candidate has uncivil language in comparison to good language of their opponent party's candidate as $\chi2(2) = 13.738$, $p < .05$. The study results confirmed the findings of (Fridkin and Kenney 2008, 2011; Brooks and Geer 2007; Mutz and Reeves 2005).[17]

Recommendations

Based on the research findings, it is recommended that the policy makers in general and the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), in particular, should take measures to ensure use of civilized language during the election campaigns for promoting positivity in line with the principles of the teachings of Islam. The political parties should also abide by the ECP and Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) code of conduct during their election campaigns. The ECP in collaboration with media may launch awareness campaigns to educate the party leaders and candidates that their uncivil language affects their voters' feelings negatively, hence they must use decent and civilized language. The PEMRA Code of Conduct 2015 (2) should be implemented as its states that TV channels shall ensure that hate speech by any guest shall not be broadcast. Further, it's section (f) reads that TV content which contains abusive comment that incites hatred and contempt against any individual or group of persons, on the basis of race, caste, nationality, ethnic or linguistic origin, colour, religion, sect, gender, age, mental or physical disability, shall not be broadcast.[18]

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