

Voting behaviour in rural and urban areas of Punjab

Dr. Mughees Ahmed¹

Abstract

The study of voting behavior of the rural and urban voters is the main objective of this paper. Ideological and *biradari* (clan, tribe) based considerations of voters are discussed in this case. *Biradarism* (casteism, tribalism) is the main component of this behavior. It has a very deep impact on political alignments of the people of Punjab. This factor gained more importance in the era of non-political governments. Non-party elections at the national and local level and weak political ideology further strengthened it. Elections of local bodies played their role to increase this trend also. The over all effects of these factors on the output of political process in the Punjab province have been analyzed. A historical, analytical and behavioral approach has been adopted. Another object of this paper is to analyze the power of cultural elements in politics for the reason that it takes one beyond the traditional range of political theory and practice in its past and present appearance. Such a study can provide a preliminary base to extend the boundaries of comparative politics and political behavior and some detail on the role of tradition in politics. This paper is divided into three parts. The first part is related to the meaning and role of *biradari*, the second is the division of the urban and rural areas and the last one is connected to political parties and religious groups playing a role in electoral behavior.

Contextual Analysis

The people of Pakistan do not have a lot of experience in elections. The first general elections in Pakistan were held in 1970, twenty three years after independence. The election system has been changing since independence. Hence the political system of Pakistan is still in its experimental stage. Political systems and networks of relationships through which, government generates policies in response to demands or support from the general public.¹ All political systems share certain characteristics and differ in functions. Political scientist David Easton in 1965, writes that all political systems function within the context of political culture, which consists of traditions, values, and common knowledge.² Political behaviour is a central part of politics of any political system. Politics is an activity related to political system. It is not only a part of political life but social life too. Andrew Hay Wood examines politics as an activity. He writes that "Politics is the activity by which differing interests with a given unit of rule are conciliated by giving them a share in power, proportion to their importance to the welfare and the

¹ Author is Associate Professor of Political Science at Govt. College University, Faisalabad, Pakistan

survival of the whole community".³ On the other hand, the Indian scholar Johri observes politics as universal activity. He says that "Politics is a continuous, timeless, ever-changing and universal activity having its key manifestation in the making of decisions to face and solve a 'predicament'".⁴ Politics is a process of decision making and settling issues within a society. Thomas M. Magstadt and Peter M. Schotten explain politics as, "Politics is the process by which a community selects rulers and empowers them to make decisions, takes action to attain common goals, and reconciles conflicts within the community."⁵ A vote is the right to express one's choice or opinion, especially by officially marking a paper or by raising one's hand. Voting behaviour is a set of attitudes and beliefs towards election at the national as well as at the local level. The voting behaviour of Punjab is influenced by its local culture. Culture is a set of attitudes, beliefs and sentiments which give order and meaning to a political process and which provide the underlying assumptions and rules that govern behavior in a political system. It encompasses both the political ideals and operating norms of a polity. Political culture is thus the manifestation in an aggregate form of the psychological and subjective dimensions of politics and is the product of both the collective history of a political system and the life histories of the members of the system and thus it is rooted equally in public events and private experience.⁶ *Biradarism* is the main component of local culture and voting behaviour of the district. There are all sorts of *biradaris* in the province including locals, settlers, immigrants, traders, professionals are settled here. *Biradari* is a collection of castes while a caste is the name of the collection of some families.⁷ Castes are further divided into sub-castes, which are more important in terms of their impact on the daily lives of people. Those who belong to *Zats* form a *Biradri*, which is the specific socio cultural unit within which caste rules are performed. *Biradari* can be defined as a rigid social system in which a social hierarchy is maintained generation after generation.

Historical Background:

Punjab is the second largest province in area but the largest in population. It has a total population of 73.6 million with 68.7% rural and 31.3% urban population. It accounts for 55.6% of the total population of Pakistan. (Rural Urban population, 1998 census) Rural population is that which is related to agriculture and living in villages with cultural traditions while urban areas have more facilities with mixed culture population. Such a large area cannot be discussed in this brief discourse. Therefore, Faisalabad district of the Punjab is being discussed as a case study.

Faisalabad is situated in central Punjab. It has an area of 1.44 millions acres with a population of 54, 29,547 (1998 census) souls. Urban population is 23, 18,433 and 31,

11,114 people are living in rural areas which is 58% of the total. This district consists of six sub-divisions. Faisalabad district was formed in 1906. Before 1892, it was a vast tropical forest called Sandal Bar. The people of Sandal Bar (locals) are Arab, "Baddu" in origin and *biradaris* of this area have a mixed culture⁸. In the process of the settlement of bar, the British behavior towards *biradaris* and their arrangements for colonists to settle them in Patti system (*biradari* groups) became the cause of *biradarism* later on.⁹ A specific piece of land was exclusively allotted to one *biradri*. Through Punjab Alienation of Land Act 1901, the non-cultivator *biradries* were prohibited from buying a cultivated land. In this way, the local community was divided into cultivators and non – cultivators (Kammi). The agriculturist clans had been given more government jobs. In this way, the foundation of a rural community's specification became *biradri* instead of religion.¹⁰ In the English era the rural politics were based on *biradri* fidelity. In the years before 1947, the role of *biradaris* in politics grew out of the colonial politics of representation and rural political control more generally. In order to define a structure linking the colonial state to indigenous society, the British deliberately drew administrative and local constituency boundaries that encouraged representation based on indigenous kinship ties. *Biradaris* have continued to play important roles in electoral politics since 1947.¹¹ The English reserved separate seats for urban and rural areas in 1919. Only landlords were given permission to contest election on rural seats. In this way, after cultivator and non- cultivator, now rural and urban division system was brought into existence through an organized method (1901,1919)¹² Before 1947, there was a rift between local and settlers but they came closer after the migration of Hindus and Sikhs from here. A huge number of people from East Punjab and other cities from Punjab shifted here during 1947 to 1960 and this trend are still continuing. The *biradarism* has always played a pivotal role in the district's political scenario. The important biradaris of Faisalabad district are Kharals, Vatus, Fityanas, Syeds and Balochs who are the politically stimulated while Jutt, Arrain, Rajput and Gujar are prominent in the settlers and migrants in rural areas as Ansaris, Maliks and Kashmiris are in urban areas.

Rural behavior

More than 3.5 million people are living in rural area of district Faisalabad which is about 64% of the total population. People related to agriculture are included in the rural population. Eight constituencies out of eleven in total exist in rural area. After independence a huge rural population migrated from East Punjab and settled here. Only a society like the one which developed in the colony area successfully faced the challenge of the arrival of a large number of the refugees from the East Punjab after independence and their rehabilitation on the land abandoned by the non-Muslims

owners. In this connection the example of the former district of Lyallpur (Faisalabad) can be quoted which absorbed the highest number of agriculturist refugees on the lands abandoned by the non-Muslim owners.¹³

Political scientists opine that voting behavior is influenced by social class plus one or more other factors, such as regions, ethnic group, religion and urban-rural differences.¹⁴ People in the countryside think in terms of *Biradaries* (tribes and clans); those in urban areas stick to sectarian and ethnic identities. There are also people who view the world divided on religious lines. The problem arises when the state fails to strike a balance and plays a role in imposing the value system of the one on the other.¹⁵ As mentioned earlier that British reserved separate seats for urban and rural areas in 1919. Only landowners were allowed to contest on rural seats. In this way, after cultivators and non-cultivators, now a rural and urban division system was brought into existence in an organized method. This restriction does not exist now but the victory ratio of candidates belonging to landless castes in rural area is still zero percent. (see table 1)

Table 1: Winner party and *biradari* in rural area (selected constituencies)

NA	1977	1985	1988	1990	1993	1997	2002
74/62/75	Jatt *	Jatt	Jatt **	Rajput **	Jatt *	Rajput **	Jatt **
73/57/77	Rajput *	Arain	Arain	Jatt **	Rajput **	Rajput **	Arain **
72/58/76	Arain *	Kharal	Kharal *	Kharal *	Kharal *	Kharal **	Rajput **
75- 7/59/78	Baloch *	Baloch	Baloch *	Baloch **	Baloch *	Baloch **	Baloch **
76/60/79	Gujar *	Jatt	Jatt *	Jatt **	Arain *	Jatt **	Jatt **
71/61/81	Rajput *	Arain	Arain **	Arain **	Jatt *	Arain **	Jatt *

SOURCE: Election Commission of Pakistan. & Ahmed, Mughees, Dr.(2004) *Faisalabad Division ke Siasat per Biradarism kay Asraat*, Ph.D Thesis, Department of Political Science, B Z University, Multan,

* Pakistan People's Party & Alliance

** Pakistan Muslim League (N, Q.) & Alliance

1985 elections were held on a non-party basis.

Analysis of rural voting behavior in the light of the results of Table 1:

The results confirm that only land owner *biradaries* have succeeded. In the rural area of Faisalabad district the word "Kummi" is commonly used for landless families and it is so difficult for this class to win in rural areas. Ameer Abdullah Rokarri writes in this context that "the word "kammi" is often used in central Punjab because Hindu traditions are

more effective here than other areas. After independence we (parliamentarians) passed a bill to replace the world kammi with Moeen or Shaikh.”¹⁶ This trend shows the importance of local culture in politics. The main conclusions of rural voting behavior are as under:

- (i) Only *biradaris* in numerical majority are successful. It means that people cast their votes to *biradari* supported candidate. The ratio of support to *biradari* supported candidates in Faisalabad district is 74%.¹⁷
- (ii) Major political parties or alliances award tickets to *biradaris* in majority. Every political party wants to win so the party ticket is given to major *biradaris* because *biradari* politics is deep rooted in Faisalabad’s electoral politics. Political parties carefully weigh the relative strengths and weaknesses of candidates seeking tickets, including the strength of their *biradaris*.¹⁸
- (iii) A major part of voters have no political fidelity. They cast their votes to survive as a group or *biradri*. In case of candidates belonging to the same *biradari*, voters use their preferences. There is no party identification, that is, the psychological attachment of a voter to a particular political party.¹⁹ If group A is in Pakistan People’s Party and B is in Pakistan Muslim League, next time if A joins PML then B will automatically quit PML. The reason is that voters do not have any ideological attachment to political parties but *biradari* fidelity is against opponent groups.

Kinds of voters in rural area

There are many types of voters in rural areas. Detail is given in table 2.

Table 2

Kinds of voter	Commitment	Party loyalty	<i>Biradari</i> fidelity	Neutrality	Vote casting	Support	Position
Dead Supporters	Maximum	Normal	Maximum	Nil	Maximum	Maximum	Particular status
Supporters	Maximum	Normal	Maximum	Nil	Maximum	Maximum	Important status
Ideological	Maximum	Maximum	Minimum	Nil	Maximum	Maximum	Contestant
General	Minimum	Minimum	Normal	Minimum	Normal	Normal	Participant
Neutral	Minimum	Minimum	Minimum	Maximum	Normal	Nil	Contributor
Ignored	Nil	Minimum	Minimum	Maximum	Normal	Nil	Decisive
Dependant	Nil	Minimum	Normal	Normal	Maximum	Nil	Contributor

Source; Survey report, Ahmed, Mughees, Dr.(2004) *Faisalabad Division ke Siasat per Biradarism kay Asraat*, Ph.D Thesis, Department of Political Science, B Z University, Multan,

- (i) Dead Supporters play a vital role in an election campaign. These voters are not just supporter but consultants. These sincere voters take part in decisions and share in everyday expenditure. They arranged public meetings. Individual and collective role of these voters is a critical part of election campaign.
- (ii) Supporters are those who strengthen the election campaign. The candidates utilizing it properly can attract the voters but can not achieve victory. These voters put the candidates in an imaginary world and ensure them that success is not far away. Some times cheaters surround the candidate in the shape of supporters.
- (iii) Ideological voters are a windfall for contesters and strengthen the political ideology. These voters are faithful to their party and cast their votes without any provision. This vote bank still exists in Faisalabad city.
- (iv) General voters are in majority but they are just participant. They cast votes some times on a *biradari* basis or political loyalty and on personality attraction in exceptional cases. These voters change the atmosphere of the election and some times erroneous expectations appear. These voters maintain a balance between candidates up to the last part and draw a line between contest and a one sided victory.
- (v) Neutral voters usually belong to upper and high middle classes. They prefer to stay at home on the Election Day. They deceive the candidates and assure more than one can do of casting their vote in their favor.
- (vi) Ignored voters exist in every constituency. These voters are a decisive factor. Although these are not in numerical fighting but play crucial role in the result. It concludes that *biradari* and ideology make a balance and ignore the fact that voters are important to decide the contest.
- (vii) Dependant voters are those who depend on landowners. They can not differ openly. The same is the behavior of females in villages. These voters have the same opinion as their male relatives. Both cast their vote on the wish of their landlords or family heads. The fear element also exists.
- (viii) Voters weak in wealth or man power cast their votes to a strong group in the hope to get help from them in crises like financial and Thana- courts problems. Some sort of fear and revulsion are also a factor in point.

In the elections of local bodies in rural areas, people cast their vote to their groups. So there is no loyalty for a candidate but for a group. The local bodies' elections are held only on *biradari* basis. First of all the *biradari* decides to cast vote in favor of *biradari* supported candidate and then the election campaign begins. Rival *Biradaries* or groups

in National and Provincial elections are allied in local bodies' elections. Group politics means Jatt-Arain, Arain-Rajput, Jatt-Rajput alliance. Nazim is from one group or *biradari* and Naib Nazim is from other. There are no other criteria for alliance but expected victory. These alliances vary from seat to seat. Jatt-Arain can be allies on one seat but rival on the next one.

Urban Behavior

There are four National Assembly seats in Faisalabad city (the number of seats before 2002 were three). The population of the city is about 2 millions. As far as the political parties are concerned, there is no doubt that the local *biradaries* are a power more real than the political parties; in a real sense the local *biradaries* have enslaved the political parties.²⁰

Table: 3

NA	1977	1985	1988	1990	1993	1997	2002
63/70/82	Rajput*	Ansari	Rajput*	Ansari**	Ansari**	Ansari**	Jatt**
64/69/84	Arain**	Rajput	Awan*	Arain**	Kashmiri**	Kashmiri**	Kashmiri**
65/68/83	Rajput*	Rajput	Arain*	Kashmiri**	Arain**	Rajput	Jatt**

Source: Survey report, Ahmed, Mughees, Dr.(2004) *Faisalabad Division ke Siasat per Biradarism kay Asraat*, Ph.D Thesis, Department of Political Science, B Z University, Multan,

* Pakistan People's Party & Alliance

** Pakistan Muslim League (N, Q.) & Alliance

In table 3 results of Faisalabad city are compiled. In Election 2002, the city had four seats of National Assembly including some rural area.

The NA 63/70/82 constituency exists in the North-Western area of the city. Some area of the previous one is in NA 85. Raja Nadir Pervaiz Rajput ** won from the NA 85 in 2002. Ghulam Muhammed Abad a populated colony of Faisalabad with winning majority of Ansari *biradari* is bigger than any other *biradari* in this constituency with some area in NA85. Results show that the *biradari* in majority is winning with better ratio than any other *biradari*. The second major *biradari* is the Maliks who are also non-agriculturist like Ansaris. Maliks also share political power with Ansaris at the local and provincial level. No one can win without the support of Ansaris and Maliks. Rajputs are a third *biradari* in numerical majority. They are also sharing victory with the help of ideological and other minor *biradaries*. Ansaris are divided into both constituencies and resultantly they lost their seat.

The NA 64/69/84 constituency is located in the central part of the city. It is a constituency of mixed *biradaris*. Ideological voters are in majority in the constituency as in NA83. In both constituencies candidates from major political parties have been winning. It can be concluded that urban areas have no influence of *biradarism* except the Ansaris area. Religious parties do not have any remarkable role in Faisalabad politics. The district politics often support ruling parties and religious parties never remain in government, resultantly they never get support from Faisalabad rural or urban area. It can be concluded that political parties carefully weigh the relative strengths and weaknesses of candidates seeking tickets, including the strength of their *biradaris* (clans)²¹

Conclusion

Biradari seems to be stronger than political fidelity as far as motivations for voting behavior are concerned. Two elements are required for the victory of a candidate; one is the ticket of a major political party and the other is the favor of a major *biradari*. *Biradari* determines voting behavior in the rural areas of Faisalabad like other areas of the Punjab. Individualism in voting behavior does not exist in the voting system in the politics of rural areas comparatively more than in the urban areas. The tendency of voter is limited to major political parties or to major *biradaris*. Political scientists believe that political parties and pressure groups are necessary for democracy. Generally in Pakistan and especially in Punjab *biradaris* are playing the role of pressure groups and providing a contesting atmosphere which is necessary for democracy. It also fills the leadership gap because of the weakness of the ideological connections of the political parties. Non-political powers use this trend in their favor to expand and prolong their sphere of authority and this trend became a challenge to the concept of genuine democracy in the country. The strong and national level political parties are expected to wipe out the influence of *biradarism*. The better level of education and political awareness will reduce the power of discouraging elements of *biradarism*. *Bradarism* as a racial or group prejudice should be discouraged. The negative impact of *biradarism* as is prevalent in the Punjab can be dangerous for national unity. By holding party-less local body elections, non-political powers and politics based on ethnicity and *biradarism* has been given a chance to get strong. As a result we are still living in a non-politicalised society. Political parties assure an individual citizen that his general interests will be safeguarded with minimum of personal involvement and if the need arises, the citizens would participate actively. However in Punjab the same is ensured by groups and *biradaris*.²² As a result voting behavior gives the impression of static conditions; and it will remain so as long as political parties are under the sheer influence of non-political powers. Speaking in a South Asian context, no doubt, societies are

multi-lingual and multi-cultural and pluralism has been a hallmark of India throughout the ages. However, pluralism must be neutral in essence: it should not be allowed to work as leverage for resource allocation. *Biradarism* is more acute in rural and less in urban areas. It has worked as a source of alignment and realignment in the electoral process and resource allocation on such considerations.

References

1. Andrew Heywood, *Politics*, (London: Macmillan Press Ltd.) 1997, p.24
2. Magstadt M. Thomas, M. and Peter, M. Schotten, *Understanding Politic: Ideas, Institutions, and Issues, Third Edition*, (New York: St. Martin's Press), 1993 p.16.
3. Andrew Heywood, *Politics*, (London: Macmillan Press Ltd) 1997, p.9.
4. J.C .Johari , *Comparative Politics*, (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Ltd.), 2001, p.4.
5. Magstadt M. Thomas and Peter M.Schotten *Understanding Politics*, 1993, p.584.
6. *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, 1968, p.218.
7. Dr Muhammed Ashraf, *Hindustani Muashara*, (Lahore: Fiction House), 1991, p.149.
8. Ahmed Ghazali, *Sandal Bar*, (Lahore: Feroze Sons) 1986, p.100.
9. Dr. Mughees Ahmed, *Faisalabad Division ke Siasat per Biradarism kay Asraat*, Ph.D Thesis, Department of Political Science and International Relations, (Multan, B. Z. University), 2004, p.46.
10. Dr. Mughees Ahmed, *Caste system in the Sub-Continent*; Al-Siyasa, A Journal of Politics, Society and Culture, Issue IX, summer, (Lahore: University of the Punjab), 2006, p.34.
11. Steven Holtzman, *Biradaris and Elections in the Punjab: Colonial Roots and Post-Colonial Implications*, Columbia University, (Lahore: The News), July 2-2005.
12. Ian Talbot, Translator *Punjab Ghulami say Azadi Tak*, (Lahore: Takhliqat), 199& Andrew R Wilder, *The Pakistani Voter: Electoral Politics and Voting Behavior in The Punjab*, (Karachi: Oxford University Press), 1999, p178.
13. Zaghama Pasha and Shahid Shoukat Ali, *History of Lyallpur Now Faisalabad*, (Lahore: Fine Book Printers), 1996, p.126.
14. Michael Roskin, *Countries and Concepts: an introduction to comparative politics*, 6th ed. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River), 1998, p.49.
15. Riaz Misen www.jang.com.pk/thenews/jan2006-daily/02-01-2006
16. Ameer Abdullah Rokari, *Maen aur mera Pakistan*, (Lahore: Jang Publications), p.38.
17. Dr. Mughees Ahmed, *Faisalabad Division ke Siasat per Biradarism kay Asraat*, (Ph.D Thesis, Department of Political Science and International Relations, (Multan: B Z University), 2004, p.235
18. Andrew R Wilder, *the Pakistani Voter: Electoral Politics and Voting Behavior in the Punjab*, (Karachi: Oxford University Press), 1999, P.190.
19. Michael Roskin, *Countries and Concepts: an introduction to comparative Politics*, 6th ed. (New jersey: Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River), 1998, p.494

20. Salmaan Abid, *Pakistan ka Nia Siasi Nazam aur Mqami Hakoomtoon ka Kirdar*, (Lahore: Jamhoori Publications), 2002, p.56.
21. Andrew R Wilder, *the Pakistani Voter: Electoral Politics and Voting Behavior in the Punjab*, (Karachi: Oxford University Press), 1999, p.190.
22. Samirenda N. Ray, *Modern Comparative Politics: Approaches, Methods and Issues*, (New Delhi: Prentice- Hall of India), 1999, p.187.