

Discourse of People's Choice in Pakistan's Politics and the Rise of ANP in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2008-2013

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Abstract

This study examines the rise of nationalist politics by analyzing the electoral victory of ANP in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) 2008-2013. It explores the political transformation in the 2008 general elections that witnessed a shift in people's political preferences from the religious alliance MMA to the liberal-nationalist platform of ANP. Using a qualitative and historical approach, the study analyzes party manifestos, ECP electoral results, official reports, and secondary sources to explain the changing electoral behaviors of the people of KP. The findings suggest that anti-incumbency, growing militancy, insecurity, and socio-economic challenges fortified electorates to support ANP's program of peace, Pashtun identity, provincial autonomy, democratic governance, and development. It further argues that electoral fragmentation, the First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral system, and issue-based campaign strengthened the ANP's electoral position in the province. Although the ANP-PPPP coalition government achieved significant constitutional and social reforms such as support for the 18th amendment and renaming the NWFP province as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, its performance was constrained by militancy, limited resources, and political instability. The study concludes that the 2008 electoral shift in KP was characterized by rational choice and issue-based voting.

Keywords: democratic approach, nationalist politics, people's choice, Pashtun identity, rational choice theory

Introduction

Electoral Politics in Pakistan reflects a dynamic connection of public will, social-political developments, and institutional challenges. In a democratic system, the people's choices are a reflection of societal aspirations as well as serving as a mechanism for political leadership accountability. The main agencies that strongly influence the people's political choices in the elections are the political elites and political parties. The people's choice is being determined by some factors which may vary from region to region, but more or less this choice is taking the shape of rational based informed decisions. In Pakistan, the people's choice has been broadly examined by different political scientists through independent variables such as issue-based voting, ideological alignment, party affiliation, candidate affiliation, charismatic appeal, and manifestoes of the political parties, as well as by the collective community life. These factors, shaped by rational- decision making and socio-psychological influences, contribute significantly to the formation of the political culture of a country. Moreover, the electoral results in Pakistan also determine the engagement of voters in the political process to reflect their preferences for both semi- religious and liberal political entities. According to Keith Callard (1968), "People's choice is primarily shaped by the middle segments of urban classes, landlords & influential religious leaders. This societal structure is an insufficient and unstable foundation for establishing an effective and durable state (68-69). However, the contribution of the young generation, mainly through social media, not only reshaped the political narratives but also changed the traditional power structure of Pakistan, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The General Elections of 2008 marked a return to civilian politics with the PPPP emerging as the largest party after a decade of military-led governance by General Pervez Musharraf. His struggle to sideline the national political parties like the PML-

N and the PPPP, as the emergence of the PML-Q and PPP (Patriot) in the 2002 election and after proved ineffective, was efficiently countered as they established their popular support in the 2008 elections. Their return to Pakistan increased the competitiveness of the polls. However, the tragic death of the country's most democratic political leader, Benazir Bhutto, in 2007 decreased the popularity graph of Musharraf and its political allies. Public opinion was fluctuating back and forth because they were trying to choose between what they liked (preferences) and what would actually benefit them (their needs and desires). Therefore, the PPPP left no stone unturned to project the assassination of Benazir Bhutto in the political campaign to gain the sympathy vote. However, the people exercised the right to vote to elect or reject based on performance, promises, and emerging political narratives. The political rise of MMA (alliance of six parties) in the 2002 elections ended in 2008 as priorities of the people shifted, or it might be the poor performance of MMA in delivery. Besides this, the 2008 elections were important for fostering a peaceful transfer of authority as they were held in a very critical time when Pakistan was facing severe security concerns in the backdrop of American intervention in neighboring Afghanistan. The 2008 election highlights a significant transition in the voting behavior of the NWFP (KP). People opted for political parties that articulated localized grievances (socio-economic demands), customary requirements, and ethnic aspirations (local issues), and aligned with those political factions that were formed on these axes. This study aims to grasp the nature of political fluctuations as happened around the political parties being reflected in the appeal of their manifesto. It will also try to understand the shifting political behavior of the people and the growing landscape of political competition in KP. This study seeks to examine the emerging narratives that influenced people's choice and supported the rise of nationalists (ANP) as a significant

political force in the province through a focused investigation into party politics from 2008-2013.

Research Question

The following research question is essential to understand the people's choice and appeal of nationalists in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa:

- i. Debate about people's choice of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in terms of their political preferences and how does it calibrate the level of political culture in the region of KP.

Theoretical Exposition

Theoretical exposition offers a structured lens to understand complex political preferences with insight and precision. Different models such as the Psycho-Social Model/Michigan Approach, the Sociological model/Columbian Approach, Rational Choice Theory, and Retrospective theory will grasp the epistemic relevance of these approaches to comprehend the people's choice and how they are caused to expose their attitudinal shift in making decisions.

Psycho-Social Model (Party Identification Theory)

It is also known as the Michigan school approach/partisanship. The theory of Party Identification originated from the first-ever electoral studies research conducted at the University of Michigan in the US, originating from the recognized study "The American Voter" in 1960 by Angus Campbell, Philip Converse, Warren Miller and Donald Stokes. According to these authors, the central point for political behavior is partisanship on the basis of social identification (strong and emotional political allegiance) (Campbell et al., 1960: 121). But, Steven Greene(1999) writes in his article "Understanding Party Identification: A Social Identity Approach" that party identification is not just an emotional attachment but a form of social identity, where individuals see themselves as part of political party and tend to favor their own party while viewing other parties less positively (394).

Anderson and Stephenson (2010) have had view that voters inherit deep-rooted emotional attachments, political loyalty and strong psychological tie to a party from parental and societal influences in their early life to be more partisan in their preferences. Gidengil et al. (2001) gave the analysis of electoral study that party identification is a key factor of the countries, having two party systems such as USA, Britain and Canada.

Sociological Model / Columbian Approach

The Sociological Model or Columbian Approach was developed by Paul Lazarsfeld and his colleagues Bernard Berelson, Hazel Gaudet at Columbia University from an innovative study "The People's Choice" conducted in 1944. The authors gave more weight-age to the social context such as division (class), gender both male & female, ethnicity, belief (religion), region, family background as well as the social and economic conditions that influence more on the political preferences and electoral choices. They believe that interpersonal communication significantly shapes people's choices (Lazarsfeld et al. 1944: 16).

Rational Choice Theory

The electorates make political choices through rational and well-informed decisions based upon profound influence on the

functionality of a political culture of a country. Rational Choice Theory and Retrospective Voting Theory offer useful ways to shed light on electoral behavior.

Rational Choice Theory (RCT) theory also recognized as the School of Rochester, is applied to democracy by Anthony Down in 1957 in his book "An Economic Theory of Democracy". The theory presents the electorate as logical thinkers who make political decisions by considering costs and benefits to capitalize on personal advantage. The framework of this theory is used across social sciences, mainly in the field of economics and political science. Down claimed that political actors (both political parties and electorates) behave rationally in chase of their self-interests. Political parties craft platforms that will maximize their political appeal to attract most votes, while electorates support those candidates or political parties whose policies give the impression of serving their personal benefits (295-296). Nevertheless, voters' motivation can extend beyond personal interests to ideological alignment, desire for social justice, and national interest. Political parties, candidates or voters are expected to think carefully before making a choice or planning a policy. They must know what they will get from their decision. What will it cost them? Which option is best to articulate their interests more effectively?

Retrospective Theory of Voting Behavior

How significantly do electorates support or oppose the incumbents in the light of past policy choices? This question structures the central element of the retrospective theory of voting behavior. It suggests that the voters use past performance as a standard for future gains. According to this theory, the politicians as well as political parties pursues to shape their actions with the inclinations of the dominant electors. The chances of an incumbent candidate as being re-elected, is mostly dependent on the priorities of voter. The author Key's (1966) provides strong support to the above argument in his book "The Responsible Electorate: Rationality in Presidential Voting 1936-1960" that electors never vote based on emotions, but they are capable, responsible and rational decision-makers. They assess competing political alternatives based on the information about incumbent's previous performance (7). This illustrates that people's choice represent their sensibility and accountability in choosing the political actors grounded in retrospective assessments of past actions, events and performance. Moreover, new supporters are drawn who actively participate in the election. Some empirical studies reveal that not all political parties or candidates follow the average voters approach (centrist policies to win) rather they prioritize their ideological boundaries more than just winning or losing dominant voters (Wayne L. Francis, 1994: 1000). So, this shows the limitation of the convergence and the non-convergent model in political attitudes, particularly in the diverse, multiethnic and politically sensitive societies.

Analysis

Rise of ANP in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2008-2013 Narrative Summary of the Geographical and Demographic Overview of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa possesses distinct geographical and demographic characteristics that significantly influence its socio-political and electoral dynamics. Therefore, a brief overview of

these characteristics is necessary for understanding electoral politics in the province.

From 2008 to 2025, KP has seen significant demographic expansions and administrative transformations. Initially, in 2008, it consisted of 24 settled districts with approximately 17.74 million of population (Census Report of Pakistan, 1998: 101). However, for effective management, multiple bifurcation occurred and new districts were added to KP administration, such as Kala Dhaka (Torgher) separated from district Mansehra in 2011 pursuant to article 246 of the 1973 constitution of Pakistan (2011, January 28th, *The Express Tribune*), Upper and Lower Kohistan district parted from larger Kohistan district in 2014 (2014, January 16th, *DAWN*) and Kolai-Palas carved as a new district out of the existing district Lower Kohistan in 2017 (2017, August 26th, *The News*). The year 2018 marked a major administrative reform when FATA was merged into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa following the Pakistan's 25th amendment to the Constitution, resultantly added seven tribal agencies namely Bajaur, Mohmand, Khyber, Orakzai, Kurram, North Waziristan and South Waziristan as new settled districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's administration (Khan, 2018, May 28, *The News*). The districts count expanded to 38 in total following the subsequent bifurcations between 2022 and 2023, following the subdivisions of South Waziristan as South Waziristan Upper (Mehsud tribe-dominated) and South Waziristan Lower (Ahmedzai Wazir tribe-dominated) in April 2022 (April 13, 2022, *DAWN*, October 14, 2022, *DAWN*) and with the addition of Central Dir separated from Upper Dir district on 23rd January 2022 (2023, 18th January, *Roznama Aaj*), Allai from Batagram (2023, 22 Jan, *DAWN*). The official figures of Pakistan Digital Census 2023 reveals that the population of KP has risen from 21 million in 2008 to over 35.5 million in 2017 and is presently calculated around 40.8 million in 2023. It recorded a growth of 5.3 million reflecting the annual growing rate of 2.3% since 2017 Census (Ali, Manzoor, 2023, August 13, *DAWN*). The expansion of districts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa reflects an ongoing governance decentralization and regional demand for representation. Moreover, it seems not only a bureaucratic or technical transformation but it reveals a policy trend.

Linguistically, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is dominated by Pashto-speaking population with 81% of the total populace, while Hindko and Urdu projecting minority languages of the province with 9.39% and 0.64 % respectively. Whereas, 8.97 % represents the others non-dominant languages spoken by a small proportion of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's population like Kohistani, Saraiki, Chitrali, Gojri, Kashmiri etc. (Pakistan Bureau Statistics, Islamabad, 2023: 2).

Table 1: Year-wise overview of districts and population in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (2008-2025)

Year	No. of Districts	Population	Administrative Change	Details
2008	24	17.74 million	-	Based on 1998 Census

2011	25		+1 district	Torghar separated from Mansehra
2014	26		+ 1 district	Upper & Lower Kohistan notified from Kohistan
2017	27	35.5 Million (2017 Census)	+ 1 district	Kolai-Palas created from Kohistan
2018	34		Erstwhile FATA-KP merger) + 7 district	Mohmand, Bajur, Khyber, Orakzai, Kurram, North and South Waziristan; 6FRs merged into nearby districts
2022	36		+ 2 districts	Upper South Waziristan, Lower South Waziristan carved from South Waziristan
2023	38	40.856 million (PBS-2023)	+ 2 districts	Allai from Batagram, Central Dir from Lower Dir
2025	---	---	---	----

Electoral dynamics in 2002 elections in NWFP

The essence of the democratic process is "the people" who serves as sovereign entity to determine the direction of representative governance. The 2002, 2008, 2013 and 2018 polls portrays remarkable democratic transformations in the political preferences of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Political parties played a central role in channeling people's participation into formal political framework. In 2002 elections, significant electoral reforms were introduced by the military government under the 2002 electoral order for restructuring the political field. NA seats were increased from 207 to 272, 17% representation to women as reserved seats and 10 seats were allocated to minorities. Moreover, NWFP Provincial Assembly was also expanded from 87 seats to 124 seats. The key legislation was the imposition of graduation degree for political candidate's eligibility. Though the graduation degree restriction was criticized by many politician. However, the religious political candidates were unaffected by the restrictions as their degree was equivalent to university degree since military General Zia-ul-Haq regime. Therefore, the electoral changes in 2002 presents the strategic move of military general Pervez Musharraf for the purpose to legitimize its rule and reshaping people participation under dictatorial influence. Through all the elections, the political parties of Pakistan campaigned tirelessly to win the support of voters in order to claim their share in representative democracy (democratic process). However, the religion seems more dominant in determining the people's choice especially in the conservative and conventional part of the society of NWFP. The impact of this political dynamic has been simmered out in 2002 general elections when religious parties worked in an association under the banner of Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) achieved a

significant electoral share across NWFP. Whereas, the religious political parties had only managed to secure not more than 5 to 8% vote in previous elections. Therefore, this democratic shift in the people's choice of NWFP is to be evaluated in this paper.

The electoral strategy of MMA in the 2002 Elections

The MMA implemented a populist approach in their 2002's election manifesto aiming at liberating the people from the atmosphere of fear that had aroused after 9/11 incident. The NWFP due to its vicinity to Afghanistan suffered the backlash of American policy towards it. The socio-political and economic structures had been severely upset by the US-led War on Terror. This upheaval turned into anti-US vibes and capitalized on by the MMA in the 2002 polls in NWFP.

MMA's successfully provoked the religious sentiments of the people of NWFP by holding the enforcement of Sharia (Farmanullah, 2017: 3) as leading objective in their manifesto with an addition of using "book" as electoral symbol to pronounce as symbol of Quran (Hussain, 2018, June 27, *DAWN*). Moreover, the incumbency factor worked against ANP and PPPP in NWFP especially their inability to deliver on their key promises like provincial autonomy, inflation control and hydel project, created disappointments in electorates, consequently shifted the preferences of voters in favor of MMA. This reflect not only the rational approach but also demonstrate the political maturity of the people of NWFP by making the ruling elite accountable for poor governance.

Although some scholars and journalists interpreted the military's establishment facilitation as a strategic tool due to their notably support to religious parties in their electoral efforts including campaigns, demonstrations and meetings (Shah, 2017, March 27, *DAWN*) as well as the equivalent status of Madaris degrees with University degree (Arqam, 2018, July 16th, *DAWN*). While, Shah, (2021), argue that the MMA's rise in NWFP was engineered by the Musharraf Government to capitalize it as a strategic tool in political dealings with USA (144). Such interpretation made by Shah lacks sound grounding by connecting the electoral success of MMA in Pakistan particularly in NWFP with State patronage aimed to secure external support. This perspective is inconsistent with Pakistan's official position of what they have put on table of UN Security Council resolution like decreasing extremism and encouraging democratic standards. Similarly, the White (2008) aligned the establishment and promotion of MMA with the calculated move of Pakistan's government by amplifying conservative religious feelings among the people of NWFP bordering Afghanistan. This narrative strengthened the impression that military establishment conveyed a double message to American stakeholders. The foremost consideration was the significant growing of religious militancy in NWFP, in addition, it proposed that only a centralized military establishment in Islamabad was supposed to suppress this emerging threat (52).

However, the White's viewpoint has also resonated Shah's stance and raise the question here that how the state could undermine its authority by supporting such kind of ideologues and the groups that frequently opposed the state ideology both in its foundational perspectives as well as its alignment with modern values of democracy. The only factor which worked in the triumph of MMA in 2002 election was the result of American

narrative. The electoral outcomes of 2002 and the corresponding political parties' position in the NA and PA of NWFP is summarized in the following tables;

Table No 2: Party position in NWFP's National Assembly in 2002 Elections

S.No	Political party/Alliance	Number of contenders	NWFP/Seats won/General FATA	Women Reserved Seats	Minorities Reserved Seats	Votes Shared	%
1	PML-QA	20	4	1	0	430,009	14.3
2	PPPP	21	0	0	0	300,683	10.0
3	MMA	33	29	7	1	1,409,344	46.7
4	PML-N	14	0	0	0	-	-
5	MQM	1	0	0	0	-	-
6	Others	66	2	0	0	635,176	21
7	Independents	37	-	12	0	240,411	8.0
8	ANP		0				
9	Total	192	35	12	1	3,015,623	100

Table No: 3. Party position in NWFP's Provincial Assembly in 2002 Elections

S.No	Political Party/ Alliance	Party position in PA/NWFP	Reserved seats for Women	Reserved seats for Minorities	Total Seats	Votes polled	Party wise share %	Over all Turn out
1	MMA	48	13	2	63	792,949	26.4	35%
2	PPPP	9	2	0	11	270,468	9.2	-
3	ANP	8	2	0	10	334,504	11.1	-
4	PPP-S	9	2	1	12			-
5	PML-QA	6	2	0	8	435,444	14.5	-
6	PML-N	5	1	0	6	277,683	9.2	-
7	PTI	1	0	0	1			-
8	Others	-	-	-	-	-	14.6	-
9	Independents	14	0	0	14	439,365	15.1	-
10	Total	99	22	3	124	3,099,683	100	35

Table No: 4. District-wise seats analysis of NWFP's political parties in 2002 Provincial elections

District Names	Total number	MMA	PPPP	ANP	PML-QA	PML-N	PPP-S	PTI	Ind.
Chitral,Dir,Swat,Malakand, Buner, Shangla	23	20	2	0	0	0	1	0	0
Peshawar,Nowshera, Charsadda, Mardan,Swabi	36	18	5	5	1	0	5	0	2
Abbottabad,Mansehra, Haripur,Batagram,Kohistan	20	4	0	0	5	2	1	0	8

Kohat, Karak, Bannu, Lakki Marwat, Dera Ismail Khan, Tank	20	6	1	3	0	3	2	1	4
Total	99	48	8	8	6	5	9	1	14

Source: General Elections 2002, Report Volume-11, Election Commission of Pakistan: 301-337

Analysis of Party Politics of NWFP Election 2002

The analysis of electoral results of 2002 reflects that the people's preferences were influenced by several prominent factors such as anti-US sentiments, poor governance, and the desire for a secure environment for personal growth and development. The people's choice did not reflect deep-rooted religious attachments rather the religion was strategically framed as an electoral issue and used as a political narrative (Farmanullah & Shahbaz Khan, 2017: 6). It was also observed that MMA presented the US-WOT as anti-Pashtun movement and successfully garnered the support of Pashtun belt in their favor. Due to the legal restriction on political party activities in FATA, the 12 independent candidates could not affiliate with any formal party structure. Nevertheless, they were allowed to align themselves with government only (Khan, 25th October, 2002, DAWN). This reflects a controlled political environment with limited party competition and alignment shaped by state patronage.

Aftab Ahmed Khan Sherpao, a shrewd politician of PPP-S, truly assessed the political inclination of the people in his hometown Charsadda. Therefore, strategically associated its party with MMA, ultimately successful in receiving 12 seats in Provincial Assembly while 2 seats in National Assembly. In 2002, he became the Federal Interior Minister of Pakistan. In his hometown, his personal influence and political appeal were more significant factors in attracting support than his party's ideological platform. The PPP-S also weakened the political stature of ANP in the province by focusing mainly on ethnic and regional politics. But, in 2018, the chief of PPP-S lost his home-constituency seat to a PTI candidate in his stronghold area. The decline can be attributed to the emergence of a more competitive political environment in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa shaped by the strong leadership of PTI, its appealing manifesto, message of Change, outsider image and emphasis on youth participation in politics. Consequently, the dominance of traditional political forces in the province gradually diminished.

Although, the ANP failed to secure a single NA seat from NWFP even from all over Pakistan in the 2002 elections. Even though, it received 273,757 votes across 16 constituencies in NWFP and mostly candidates finished as runner up and were able to get considerable popular support in the region (ECP report 2002, Volume 2: 15-27). The MMA, nevertheless, challenged traditional political parties like PML-N, PPPP and ANP in NWFP. The ANP's Pashtun image was dented for supporting the military operations in erstwhile FATA and Malakand. Moreover, its association with American's policy against Afghanistan after 9/11, despite its verbal opposition, consequently alienated the frontier voters and created distrust for the party. The ANP's anti-terrorism efforts was politicized as anti-Taliban actions (Khan, 2013, August 3: 26). Ultimately, later the party was exposed to violent counterattacks. Which not only

undermined their electoral support and organizational structure in subsequent elections. Moreover, the shift from nationalist stature to pro-establishment position viewed them as opportunistic (Khan, 2013, March 31st, *The Express Tribune*). However, the role of internal rifts in the party and formation of new factions by the establishment like NAPP by Ajmal Khattak also contributed in weakening its support base in the region (2002, January 7th DAWN). Additionally, it, was observed that the political vacuum created by ANP was filled with the formation of PPP-S as nationalists' party and its alliance with MMA weakened the ANP's position in the province. In addition, the party's weak electoral strategies with clarity of political ideology and manifesto's overlooking the main public concerns like inflation, civil-military imbalances, Kashmir issues, accountability, and media's freedom eroded public trust (2002, October 2, DAWN). Creating a smaller parties within established political parties such as NAPP, PPP-S, National Alliance, and PML-Q highlights the role of military establishment not only in dividing political landscape and keep control over the political forces but also undermine the voting strength of established political parties especially like ANP, PPPP and PML-N in NWFP.

While evaluating the MMA's governance, Waseem and Mufti's (2009) study "Religion, Politics and Governance in Pakistan" traces the MMA's organizational ineffectiveness, inability to challenge bureaucratic norms and its structural reliance on donor-agencies (NGO's). Though, it gained significant electoral success on the basis of strong ideological agenda including the promulgation of Islamic principles grounded in morality and justice. Yet, the authors disclose that government's real outcome was shaped mainly by organizational rigidity to accept any change and patronage politics than religious framework. The ruling period of the religious alliance (2002-2007) in NWFP was marked by symbolic (rhetorical) Islamization, internal inconsistencies and limited reforms. Its unwillingness to collaborate with non-state actors (NGOs), but on the other side dependent on them for administrative performance, demonstrates the conflict between principles versus practicality in their institutional structure. They also exposed their contradictory gender stand, in which, it openly challenged women's participation in the public sphere such as work and politics. However, at the same time, focused on female's access to education, sports and health. This situation reveal that how difficult it is to translate religious belief into justified public interest. Therefore, it raises questions that how political Islam when unaccompanied by functional institutional reforms, organizational competence and comprehensive policy making can be transformed into societal welfare? (44-67). Therefore, it is concluded that the religious populism (Islamic establishment) in developing democracies like Pakistan does not necessarily guarantee administrative efficacy. It depicts that MMA's electoral success was rooted in its religious appeal, but its governance was constrained by organizational weaknesses, bureaucratic resistance and political patronage. The experience highlights the gap between ideological promises and effective policy implementation in the government.

The electorates were disappointed by the religious alliance's administrative incompetency during 2002-2007 in NWFP, additionally its failure to fulfill the promise of

enforcement of Sharia, eventually moved towards the nationalist party's message of provincial autonomy, anti-terrorism efforts, Pashtun's identity politics (ethnic sentiments) and democratic progress. This reveals the growing dominance of retrospective approach and rationality in explaining people's choice. The MMA party was fragmented internally by the 2008 elections. The rise of nationalists in NWFP in 2008 elections does not reflect only a political change but a refusal of ideological rigidity and prioritized issue-based voting. Although, Waseem and Mufti mainly highlighted the administrative inefficiencies and institutional imbalances of MMA in their study but overlooked the political consequences of why voter's shifted loyalties towards nationalists in 2008? Remained silent on the internal rifts between JUI-F, JUI-S and JI that led to division of 6-parties alliance. In the underlying section, some of the policy steps taken by the MMA during its tenure which contradicts the real world situation.

Weiss, Anita (2007), "Questioning Women's Rights in Pakistan: Finding Common Ground", portraying the religious alliance's strategies towards women and public institution as representative and ideologically motivated rather than honestly reformative. The MMA's initiatives like segregated female education institutions, separate sports directorates and the promotion of legal ban on "SWARA" and honor killing was considered as "Window dressing". She exposes it as MMA's strategic move to retain people's choice without organizational transformation. The segregated women policies met with material deaths of in healthcare centers due to shortage of female doctors. She criticized the MMA's reinforcement of patriarchal restrictions in the form of security that limited their access to fundamental services. The failed attempt of Hasba bill was considered unconstitutional by the Supreme Court and exposed the broader agenda of MMA's to establish a parallel Islamic Judicial System. Weiss investigation suggests that MMA used Islam as an instrument to legalize its political power and disrupted civic institutions. Her analysis discloses that even though framed as pro-women, the MMA's administration, however, in reality they were weakening it. The main purpose of governance was to prioritize the ideological control over real prosperity. So, this led to a weakening reliability and public trust in 2008 elections due to its rigid and unpractical policies and focusing mainly on controlling social behavior and overlooking real issues (109-115). Anita Weiss analysis reflects the elite centric and presents urban-educated narratives. She ignored the rural, lower-class representatives and illiterate women.

From Religious populism to Liberal Nationalism: The Political Transition and Opportunity in NWFP- 2008-2013

In 2008 elections, the clear example of the voters of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's retrospective decision can be well interpreted by the rejection of the MMA's government and support for the ANP. Where national level parties like PPPP stood second in KP while PML-Q experienced a huge decline and remained behind its competitors. Therefore, the subsequent section revolves around the theme of political transformation in NWFP in 2008-2013. This transformation reveals voter's alignment as moving from Islamic populism (MMA) to a liberal-nationalist agenda (ANP) based on its appeal to ethnicity, peace, identity and development. The manifestos, electoral results and detailed analysis focusing how

the political realignments in people's choice indicated a shift away from conservatism to liberalism in NWFP in 2008 elections is examined. Moreover, this change is assessed through different theories reflecting voting trends particularly, retrospective theory, rational-choice theory and party identification theory. The governance of ANP from 2008-2013 is critically evaluated. It is further investigated that the nationalists actually represented the aspiration of the voters.

Manifesto's assessment of ANP, PPPP, PML-N, MMA (JUI-F), PML-Q in 2008 elections

Manifestos plays a leading role in democratic competition and shaping people's choice. Therefore, it is also essential to review how diverse political manifestos played its role in making people's choice and influenced the NWFP's electoral outcomes in 2008. For 2008 elections, the PILDAT (2007) assessed the electoral manifestos of different parties like PPPP, ANP, MMA (JUI-F) & PML-Q issued in early December 2007. The report highlights that mostly political parties' manifestoes revolve around patronage politics or client-voter centric approach. While PPPP focused on "5 Es' Agenda" such as Education, Employment, Energy, Equity and Environment. Whereas, the PML-N focused on comprehensive national agenda like restoration of constitution, civil-military relations, judicial independence and condemnation of Musharraf government. However, the party ignored to address the local issues related to NWFP, except, some religious voters of the northern region were motivated to its stance against Lal Masjid operation. Due to its pro-establishment stance and unclear position on military actions and emergency rule, the political party of PML-Q became disconnected from regional grievances of the NWFP. Ultimately the directly war affected people who distanced themselves from the party (2007, December 27, PILDAT). JUI-F decided to contest elections under the umbrella of MMA separately and adopted the same manifesto as of 2002 elections such as anti-American sentiments, sharia's imposition and support for Afghan Taliban (April 5, 2013, DAWN).

ANP's manifesto truly demonstrated the people's choice in 2008 election in NWFP by expressing a strong, ideological based and identity motivated agenda. In contrast to national parties like PPPP and PML-N who mainly ignored region-specific issues in their manifestoes, the ANP took advantage of the socio-political situation in the region after years of war and promoted a narrative on the anti-extremism (people were desiring peace and stability), used ethnic-consciousness (Pashtun Nationalism) as sentiment to get support from people and promoted the need for provincial autonomy (decentralization) to articulate people's wish to have control over their resources. Moreover focused on agricultural development and kept a firm stance against construction of Kala Bagh Dam (ANP manifesto 2008, 2007, Bacha Khan Markaz). Wilder (1995) argue that electorates, mainly in rural areas prefer material and tangible benefits over legal issues (393). Therefore, the ethnic identity and provincial autonomy were presented as tangible political goods in 2008 elections in NWFP that resonated the regional populace.

Political Culture of NWFP and Party Politics in 2008 Elections

Sareen Shushant (2018), explains in "Observer Research Foundation" that the dramatic entry of MMA in 2002 as a 3rd largest party and becoming the people's choice of NWFP with

overwhelming majority, ultimately met with disintegration due to many contributing factors, such as strategic unintelligibility, symbolic legislations, internal ideological rifts, incumbency disadvantage, its compromise on supporting Musharraf Government's decision for 17th amendment, failure to address insurgency particularly in Swat and Malakand during (2002-2007) including economic hardships, factional tensions between JUI-F and JI, the separation of JUI-S and other minor parties led to the division among alliance at the time when it required union (78). Despite the disintegration of the MMA and calls to boycott the elections by all its constituent parties, JUI-F's decision to contest elections helped to retain its political stature without scoring good tally in 2008 election. Though, the party was successful in getting seats from some selected districts of southern area including tribal areas. However, the overall results show decline of MMA due to the internal rifts and incumbency factor that led to a shift in political preferences of the people of NWFP in 2008 elections.

The MMA's fall created political vacuum that provided political space to ANP and PPPP in NWFP in 2008. The period expose a transformative change in NWFP's political culture. The people moved towards development-oriented agenda and peace which shows their democratic maturity and rationality in prioritizing issues over rhetoric orientation. The decision of JI, PTI and PMAP to boycott the elections shows their strategic mistake because their decision not only marginalized them from institutional politics but also dented the religious vote and benefitted ANP in the region (February 13, 2008, DAWN). But, the boycott preserved the outsider (untainted) image of PTI which later contributed to its success and political emergence in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2013 elections. Though, the decision of PPPP to participate in the elections at that critical time when it lost its central leadership supported their democratic stature. Furthermore, Birsal, February 11, 2008 focuses heavily on sympathy vote and makes clear connection of it with the winning of PPPP in 2008 elections (Reuters). Moreover, their social justice stance also contributed effectively to garner the marginalized group support in the elections.

The PML-N maintained its national standing and remained dominant in Punjab. Although, its presence in NWFP was generally limited, but, it enjoyed considerable support in the north of the NWFP (Haripur, Abbottabad, Mansehra, Batagram, Kohistan). Mehdi (2012) argues that the party adopted a pragmatic and strategically flexible approach before 2008 elections. Initially, it joined "APDM" and supported to boycott the elections. But, reversed its decision after the PPPP, ANP, JUI-F and PPP-S announced their participation in the election. Following the Benazir Bhutto's assassination, the party again considered boycotting elections but retreated when PPPP confirmed its participation in the election (75). These shifts suggest that the party prioritized electoral participation over opposition unity. Its withdrawal from the APDM also weakened the alliance and highlighted the lack of cohesion among anti-regime alliances.

Women Political Participation in NWFP

The 2008 elections marked an important milestone in the development of democratic governance in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. However, the women's political participation continued to face

significant barriers. Women play an important role in mobilizing voters and supporting political campaigns despite facing some challenges in the traditional pockets of NWFP. But, their representation as voters as well as candidates remained limited due to socio-cultural restrictions, patriarchal attitudes and security concerns. Consequently, many women were unable to exercise their political right independently or to participate fully in the electoral process in 2008 election in NWFP.

The report of EU Election Observation Mission, Pakistan (2008) indicated that despite progress in representative democracy many organizational deficiencies such as insecurity and the patriarchal dominancy suppressed the women's political participation with zero turnout in hundreds female polling stations particularly in NWFP. Although, the Pakistan's constitution is fully committed to allow women's franchise according to the international conventions like CEDAW and CPRW (44). However, the zero female political participation is visible in almost 478 polling station in NWFP in which 23% were in the FATA reflects the deliberate systematic segregation of women from electoral practices (Jamil, 2014:6). This pattern highlights persistent gender and regional disparities in electoral participation. Though, the issue was subsequently addressed by the ECP through reforms introduced under the Election Act 2017, which required a minimum of 10% female voter turnout in a constituency. The ECP may declared the elections null and void if the turnout of women participation falls below 10% in a constituency. The Act also instructed political parties to award at least 5% tickets on general seats to women candidates for the encouragement of gender equality (Government of Pakistan, Election Act 2017: 109).

Jamil, Asim (2014) connects the women's political underrepresentation with cultural constraints, strong tribal influences and patriarchal structures including lack of access to polling stations, voter's bans and political inaction by local authorities and Election Commission of Pakistan that inhibited women's participatory politics in NWFP (4). While National Commission on the status of women (2010) reported that customary practices, male dominated society, the repercussions of 9/11, military interventions in tribal areas, recurring security challenges, IDPs issue, the frustration from governance structure reduced the women political participation.

However, the patriarchal and cultural constraints are not solely attribute to the low turnout of female participation in NWFP, the structural, house-hold and individual level negligence factors such as difficulties in getting CNICs, lack of awareness, poor civic education, challenges in voters' registration especially in remote and conflict areas, unavailability of transportation and long distance from polling stations also contribute from preventing a significant portion of female population from their rightful share in the electoral representation.

Electoral results and political Transformation: Evaluating the 2008 Election in NWFP

The subsequent section's analysis presents the detailed electoral performance of significant political parties in 2008 elections in NWFP, revealing people's choice, identifying the leading party's emergence (ANP) and highlighting how electorates supported different competing political parties. Moreover, the analysis is constructed on party identification

theory, rational choice theory or retrospective theory to understand which of these theories best explains the political transformation in the political landscape of NWFP in 2008 elections.

Table No 5: Summary of statistics for Elections 2008 to the National Assembly of NWFP

Province	Registered voters	Votes polled	Valid votes	Rejected votes	% of total votes polled	% of valid polled votes	% of reject polled votes
NWFP	10661212	3576523	3480103	96420	33.54	32.64	0.90
FATA	1410326	397593	393065	4528	31.05	30.69	0.35

Table No-6: Detailed position of political parties in 2008 Elections in NWFP's National Assembly

S. No	Party Name	FATA	NWFP Assembly			
		General Seats	General seats	Independents	Women	Total
	Total seats	12	35		8	43
1	PPPP	-	9	1	3	13
2	PML-N	-	4	0	1	5
3	PML	-	5	0	1	6
4	MQM	-	0	0	0	0
5	ANP	-	10	0	3	13
6	MMA	-	4	0	0	4
7	PML-F	-	0	0	0	0
8	BNP-A	-	0	0	0	0
9	PPP-S	-	1	0	0	1
10	NPP	-	0	0	0	0
11	Ind.	11	1	0	0	1
12	Total	11	34	1	8	43

Note: NA-42 elections postponed in FATA. Source: ECP, GE- 2008 Report, December 18, 2012, Volume-11 (vi)

Table No-7: Party shares in Votes in NWFP in National Assembly in 2008 elections

Party Name	Votes Shared	Percentage
PPPP	677,111	19.5
ANP	612,239	17.6
MMA	479,712	13.8
IND	535,254	15.4
Others	1,174,552	33.8
All	3,478,868	100

Source: Mehdi, Tahir, (2012), The Pakistan Election Compendium

Table No-8: Turnout province-wise in 2008 compared with 2002 elections

	2002	2008
Pakistan	42	45
Islamabad	51	50
Punjab	46	49
Sindh	38	45
Baluchistan	30	31
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	36	34
Erstwhile FATA	25	27

Source: The Herald, March 2008: 45

Table No-9: Summary of statistics for Elections 2008 to the Provincial Assembly of NWFP

Province	Total Seats	Registered. Voters	Votes polled	Valid votes	Rej. Votes	Turn Out	% of valid votes	% of rejected
NWFP	99	10500430	3559276	3469088	104344	33.46	97.47	2.93

Table No-10: Detailed position of political parties in 2008 Elections in NWFP Provincial Assembly

Province		NWFP Assembly					
Total seats		99		22	3	124	
S. No	Party name	G. seats	Ind	Women	Non-Muslims	Total	
1	PPPP	18	5	6	1	30	
2	PML-N	5	2	2	0	9	
3	PML	5	0	1	0	6	
4	MQM	0	0	0	0	0	
5	ANP	33	5	9	1	48	
6	MMA	10	0	3	1	14	
7	PML-F	0	0	0	0	0	
8	BNP-A	0	0	0	0	0	
9	PPP-S	5	0	1	0	6	
10	NPP	0	0	0	0	0	
11	MJUF	0	0	0	0	0	
12	JUI-S	1	0	0	0	1	
13	NP	0	0	0	0	0	
14	PMLZ	0	0	0	0	0	
15	Ind.	10	0	0	0	10	
Total		87	12	22	3	124	

Source: ECP, General Elections 2008 Report, Volume-11, December 18, 2012

Table No-11: District-wise seat analysis of NWFP's political parties in Provincial Assembly in 2008 elections

District Names	Total seats	ANP	PPPP	MMA	PPP-S	PML-N	PML	Ind.
Chitral, Dir, Swat, Malakand, Buner, Shangla	23	10	7	0	0	0	2	2
Peshawar, Nowshahra, Charsadda, Mardan, Swabi	36	20	8	1	4	0	0	2
Abbottabad, Mansehra, Haripur, Batagram, Kohistan	20	1	1	3	0	5	2	7
Kohat, Karak, Bannu, Lakki Marwat, Dera Ismail Khan, Tank	20	0	1	6	2	0	1	10
Total	99	31	17	10	6	5	5	21

Source: Mehdi, Tahir, (2012). The Pakistan Election Compendium: 45

Table No-12: Distribution of party vote in NWFP's PA during 2008 elections

Party Name	Votes Shared	Percentage
PPPP	563,057	16.5%
ANP	578,405	16.9%
MMA	500,479	14.7%
IND	828,317	24.3%
PML	440,518	12.9%
PPP-S	215,474	6.6%
PML-N	277,559	8.1%
Other parties	9,955	-
Total	3,413,764	100%

Source: Mehdi, Tahir, (2012), The Pakistan Election Compendium: 45

Table No-13: Turnout rates, ethnic segments

Ethnic Groups	2002	2008
Punjabi	46	49
Sindhi	39	43
Pushto	32	31
Saraiki	47	47
Balochi	33	37
Urdu	38	59
Others	39	41
Mixed	41	45

Source: The Herald, March 2008: 45

Analysis: Trends and Electoral Dynamics in 2008 elections in NWFP

The outcomes of the 2008 elections show that moderate democratic parties emerged as a dominant political force in the

political culture of NWFP. It also reflects the impact of First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) system which helped ANP in transforming its regionally concentrated voter bases into a large number of seats. Though the party did not achieve an absolute majority. Vote fragmentation played an important role in this election. Votes were divided among multiple smaller parties or factions like MMA, PML and considerable number of independents. This division benefitted the ANP. The party secured 48 seats including women reserved seats and minorities in its traditional power base. At the same time, the PPPP could not fully convert its vote bank into seats due to this fragmentation. Both ANP and PPPP maintained a strong position in the National and Provincial Assemblies. Their strength came from a combination of general and reserved seats. Moreover, this is concluded that elections data presents a divided share to each party reflect a political competitiveness among parties.

The electoral trends demonstrate the MMA's weak incumbency from 2002-2007. Public disillusionment with the religious factions created space for the nationalist and liberal parties. Although, the PPPP's resilience in the province shows the post-assassination wave of sympathy of Benazir Bhutto in 2007. But, it still faced strong competition from ANP in their concentrated stronghold districts. While the PML-N's comeback with 9 provincial and 6 national seats including women reserved and minority's seats reflect a partial repair of its pre-1999 vote bank instead of sweeping the province overwhelmingly. Though, the party showed its strong presence in Hazara division but did not dominate the entire province. Moreover, the 2008 elections positioned the MMA as a declined party which reflects largely an outcome of internal rifts and strategic boycott of JI and other smaller parties. But, the JUI-F within this wider decline, established significant resilience and its decision of contesting elections under the umbrella of MMA added a meaningful political share in parliamentary democracy.

The independents played a role of power broker in 2008 elections in NWFP by inclusion in provincial politics and influencing national alliances. They are often concentrated in provinces where politics is driven more by personalities than by party structures. The report of Election Commission of Pakistan presents 22 winning Independent candidates in the Provincial Assembly of NWFP in 2008. Among them, 12 joined established political parties like (ANP, PPPP and PML- N) to get access to resources and have greater legislative influence, while among remaining 10, 8 decided to join opposition party, thus, improved the opposition's influence in NWFP's provincial Assembly (Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, April-2011:3). In National Assembly 12 members remained successful from FATA (ECP, 2012: 294-326). The fact that independent candidates secured a larger vote share (24.3%) than ANP (16.9%) which reflects the persistence of primordial loyalties in KP politics. Where kinship, tribal and local affiliations continued to exert a stronger influence on people's choice than partisan identification. Whereas, the issue based mobilization by the ANP translated into their significant electoral success, reflecting the importance of identity politics in the province.

According to "The Congressional Research Services" (2008), in 2008, the formation of a stable parliamentary government in Pakistan was supported by 11 independent members elected

from FATA to get their affiliation with the political parties (7-PPPP and 4 PML-N). Together with the extended support of JUI-F and ANP, this strengthened the PPPP-PML-N coalition at the federal level (8). This trend supports the growing influence of regional power in national politics. Moreover, this broader parliamentary support compelled the Federal government to shift its approach towards FATA from a security-centric perspective to one that also prioritized progressive development and institutional reforms. This policy shift was reflected in a series of reforms initiated by the PPPP government, including the extension of the Political Parties Order-2002 to FATA in 2011 (Ali, May 2013: *DAWN*). Subsequently, the merger of FATA with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa through the 25th constitutional amendment in 2018 marked the most significant transformation in the region's governance and constitutional status (Waseem, May 31, 2018: *DAWN*). After this constitutional development, the FATA candidates joined the KP Provincial Assembly, expanding its structure to 145 seats comprising general seats increased to 115 due to population rise, 26 women reserved seats, and 4 for non-Muslims.

Besides this, the Herald electoral magazine (2008) records the turnout and ethnic composition of NWFP and FATA. The data reveal stability in the people's participation. However, it shows comparatively a modest decline from 36% in the 2002 elections to 34% in the 2008 elections in NWFP (45). The reasons behind a slightly low turnout were the security apprehensions, political disappointments, and logistical challenges, etc. The most important electoral transformation was not the electorate's participation in the elections but revealing their preferences (how, whom, and why they voted). In contrast, the FATA's turnout recorded an increase from 25% to 27%. Therefore, the increased participation in FATA challenges the assumption mentioned by the Herald that security concerns automatically suppressed the political participation of people in NWFP. Because FATA was the most security-affected region. So, it highlights the influence of grassroots political mobilization and institutional factors that contributed to determining its participation rate. Moreover, a tiny decline in Pashto-ethnic group from 32% in 2002 to 31% in 2008 in NWFP suggests participatory fatigue rather than full political withdrawal.

Conclusion

The rise and growth of nationalist politics in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, from Khudai Khidmatgar Movement to ANP, reflects the party's continued efforts to promote social reforms, provincial autonomy and Pashtun identity. Despite frequent political setbacks, security challenges, allegations of non-patriotism and intimidation, the ANP political base has survived. Since its rise, it emphasized promoting socio-economic and cultural reforms and drew strength from concentrated regional dynamics. Besides this, low turnout due to security threats, especially in urban areas of Mardan, Swat and Peshawar in NWFP, also benefited the political parties of ANP, PPPP and MMA (March 2008, *The Herald*). This reflects how fear-driven disconnection in some areas changes competitive dynamics and winning margin. The analysis of the electoral data of 2008 presents a complex relationship between people's choice, parties' approaches (manifesto, issue-focused campaigning), opposition fragmentation and concentrated regional dynamics. It also highlights the tactical role of independents as post-power

brokers, along with the impact of reserved seats for women and minorities and electoral rules in bringing political transformation. Furthermore, political mobilization around military projection and calls for political integration of FATA influenced the broader political environment, and the incumbency factor also influenced the people's preferences. These factors reflected the political sense of the people, which contextually aligned the voters with the political parties and ultimately contributed to the support base of the parties such as ANP, PPPP and PML (N) in the region.

The NWFP's politics also demonstrates how party politics adapted to regional demands. The effect of personalized politics in FATA was observed due to the ban on political parties in the region. It seems that the NWFP's voters followed the rational, retrospective, and issue-based voting approach (punishing MMA and rewarding ANP for peace, identity, and governance). But at the same time, in tribal areas, the psycho-social dynamics (loyalty, partisanship, and identity) dominated by prioritizing established tribal leaders. Overall, the voters restructured the path of party politics in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa by restoring progressive and nationalist powers as significant representatives of the people's choice. The governance experience of ANP-PPPP in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa during 2008-2013 shows both achievements in provincial autonomy through the 18th amendments and social reforms like prioritizing the education sector, health, and legislation to protect children and women; moreover, renaming of NWFP as "Khyber Pakhtunkhwa" gave the ethnic and cultural identity to the majority Pashtuns. Nevertheless, it was not secured from the constraints imposed by militancy, inter-provincial resentment, and limited resources. Zahab (2008) theorizes that "establishment" played a role in bringing the nationalists to power, although with a split mandate to power in the 2008 elections. The fragmented mandate's purpose was to prevent the party from absolute control of the region. She further explains that even the leaders of ANP were surprised by their overwhelming majority (10). But her claim seems weak because she provides no empirical proof to confirm the establishment's connection to electoral results. Therefore, her speculative assertion limits the credibility of her interpretation as a scholarly source. However, the people of Swat, Malakand, and tribal areas showed disenchantment with MMA over unchecked militancy and appealed to ANP anti-militancy's stance in the 2008 elections (Ali, Sep 26, 2012, *The Express Tribune*).

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Credit authorship contribution statement

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