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Elections and Mass Media in Pakistan

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ELECTION AND THE MASS MEDIA IN PAKISTAN:

**A Study of Pakistan's
National Elections 1990**

Volume 1

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INTRODUCTION

The Study was conducted in the major urban areas of the country. The sample was representative of the voters in those cities and comprised a cross-section of all socio economic groups. In that respect the study presents a good analysis of the attitudes and behaviour of urban voters in the country. The sample was appropriate for most of the questions included in this survey. However for some questions which were specific to constituencies or on issues where responses were determined by a local issue, the sample would not be an accurate reflection of the national situation. This is particularly true for issues influenced by affiliation with certain regional tendencies as in two of the top cities in the country, Karachi and Peshawar. Two regional parties, MQM and ANP received a majority of votes in these cities. Since the sample included both cities, the findings of the survey are disproportionately coloured by the views of these two tendencies on certain issues. This qualification may be considered by those who read this Report.

Part I

**ROLE OF
MASS MEDIA**

ROLE OF NEWSPAPERS

A majority of newspaper readers took special interest in election reporting. Four fifths (79%) of them had recently read a report about the elections and half (51%) of all newspaper readers identified political news as a subject that attracted them the most in newspapers. Interestingly, their interests focussed more on national (56%) rather than on provincial (15%) or constituency level (14%) news.

Newspaper readers were divided on whether the papers were doing their job of reporting on the elections with fairness and without bias. Views were somewhat tilted against the performance of newspapers: 28% rated their performance favourably while 35% rated their performance negatively. The remaining 37% were unable to make a particular judgement.

ROLE OF RADIO

Radio was not a major source of information on the election campaign. In a survey conducted shortly before the elections, only 23 percent of the sample said they had recently heard a broad-cast related to elections. When asked to identify the election related broadcast which they had heard on the radio, the respondents came up with a variety of response comprising all the special broadcasts on elections, such as an interview programme with political party leaders titled Qaumi Siyasat (1%), polling procedures (5%), a special election programme titled Election 90 (6%), (Siyasi Guftagoo) Political talk (4%). Interestingly, Radio news broadcasts were not perceived as an important broadcast related to elections.

While Radio was not a major source of information on the elections, it was nevertheless viewed as fair in its reporting. Among those who gave a view on this subject, more than 80 percent believed radio reporting to have been fair. Among those who viewed radio reporting to have been biased, more than 70% believed the bias was in favour of IJI or the ruling party at that time. But, interestingly 20 percent of the sample believed that radio reporting favoured Ms. Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party.

ROLE OF TELEVISION

Sixty percent of television viewers had watched an election related telecast according to a survey conducted on the election eve. But, the election related viewing was mostly restricted to only one programme, series of interviews with political party heads. This programme titled Qaumi Siyasat (National Politics), was mentioned by nearly 70% of those who claimed to have watched an election related programme on the TV. The second, most often quoted, programme related to polling procedures explained on the TV. It is worth noting that television news did not figure out at prominently as an election related programme.

It is interesting that television reporting on elections was generally viewed as 'fair' and without partisan bias. Apparently, television's credibility in this regard was considerably higher than both print media and radio.

Among those who believed television reporting to have been biased, it was mostly (62%) considered to favour the IJI or the party ruling at the time. But, a sizeable group (27%) believed the bias was in favour of Ms. Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party.

INTERVIEWS OF POLITICAL LEADERS ON TELEVISION AND RADIO

Nearly half of the sample in a representative survey conducted in major urban areas of the country claimed to have watched a series of interviews with heads of major political parties. The series was aired on both Television and Radio. Nearly 80 per cent of those who watched this series, said it had helped them to understand the election issues.

Part II

**ROLE OF
ELECTION CAMPAIGN**

Role of
ELECTION CAMPAIGN

LEVEL OF INTEREST

More than half of the respondents in a representative sample of major urban areas in the country said they took interest in national elections. But only one fifth of the sample (21%) said they took moderate to deep interest. Another 39 per cent took slight interest, while the remaining 40 per cent said they did not take any significant interest in elections.

SOURCES AND LEVEL OF INFORMATION

Level of Knowledge

Whatever their level of interest, nearly 90 per cent of all respondents were able to correctly recall the dates on which National and Provincial Assembly elections were to be held. The survey was conducted during the week preceding the elections.

Source of Knowledge

Knowledge about the election data came mostly from Television (41%) followed by Newspapers (27%), Word of mouth (14%) and Radio (5%).

Information about Political Parties

A large majority of the respondents were able to name at least one political party contesting the elections. In this way, there was significant awareness about political parties.

The major source of information about political parties were newspapers (38%) followed by Television (18%), word of mouth (17%), Posters (6%) and Radio (5%).

Information about Candidates

Three in four (73%) respondents knew the names of candidates contesting in their constituency. The major sources of information about candidates were, as in the case of political parties, Newspapers (27%) followed by Word of mouth (23%), Posters (20%), Television 5%), and Radio (2%).

Summary

To recapitulate the findings of the survey on the means of information on the elections, one can say that the Television is most effective on broad information about the holding of elections, its dates and even in influencing voting decisions. But the Print media and Word of mouth are more effective on information about political parties and election candidates. Posters and Handbills emerge as a very significant source of information on individual candidates contesting the elections.

ELECTION RALLIES

Incidence of Participation

More than one quarter of the sample (27%) said they had participated in at least one election rally. In most cases (43%), their participation was limited to a rally or meeting in their immediate town or village. However, the remaining, apparently, attended a rally in a nearby town or village.

More than half (62%) of those attending rallies attended more than one election rally.

Participation in rallies reflected the general political distribution in the country. The highest participation was reported in the rallies of IJI/Muslim League followed by the Pakistan People's Party. The two were the ultimate winner and runner up in the elections.

A majority of the sample (42%) reported simple curiosity as the major reason for participating in election rallies. Others were persuaded by friends (9%) or political activists (5%).

A significant number of those who attended rallies were attracted to listen to a star speaker (18%) or to get information about elections (10%).

Content of Election Rallies

Four issues emerge as the dominant themes of election rallies. These include criticism of Government (26%), Economic Issues (20%), Corruption (15%), and Qualities of Leadership (15%).

It is interesting to note that Religious or Communal issues were not reported as significant themes in election rallies (2% only).

POSTERS

Viewerships:

Seventy five percent (75%) of a national urban sample claimed to have been exposed one or more election posters.

Place of Exhibition:

Streets, Bazars (Markets) and Home Walls were reported to be the major place of exhibition.

Content of Posters: Parties and Issue

More people recalled to have seen PPP posters (74%) as compared to other party posters: IJI (57%) and Muslim League (16%) were recalled by considerably fewer persons. It is conceivable that the PPP used posters more often than the IJI or that the recall and recognition of PPP posters was higher. It appears that the posters generally focused on the qualities of leadership (23%) than on socio-economic or even political issues.

WALL CHALKING (GRAFFITI)

Viewership:

One-third (35%) of the sample said they could recall having seen wall chalking or Graffiti related to the election campaign. Apparently, Graffiti is more popular in the small towns and rural areas and less in the major urban centres where the survey was conducted.

Content:

Among those who had seen Graffiti, 21% related it to the names and leadership qualities of election candidates. Otherwise, a common response was that wall Graffiti did not address any specific issue.

PERSONAL CANVASSING

Incidence:

Nearly a third (30%) of a national urban sample said that they had been approached through personal canvassing during the election campaign.

A majority of the respondents (62%) recalled personal canvassing by a PPP partisan. In comparison, 41% recalled personal canvassing on behalf of IJI, and 7% for IJI's major component, the Muslim League.

It must, however, be noted that the sample was not representative of the entire country. It was limited to the major urban centres which included Karachi and Peshawar. In both cities, IJI was not well-represented by its own candidates. Instead, the IJI allies MQM and ANP, were the dominant electoral candidates in those two cities.

Male/Female Participation in Canvassing:

A majority of canvassing teams were all male (58%), but females were also active, apparently among female voters: 24% of respondents said they were approached by all Female teams. In some cases (12%), the canvassing teams included both men and women.

Influence on Voting Decision:

Seventy percent of those approached by personal canvassing did not acknowledge its influence on their voting decision . As opposed to this, only 12% acknowledged a clear influence, while another 5% acknowledged a slight influence. The remaining 13% were not able to give a specific answer to this question.

USE OF AUDIO CASSETTES

Incidence of Use:

One quarter of the sample (25%) recalled having listened to election publicity on audio-cassettes.

Place of Listening:

The most likely place to listen to election publicity on audio cassettes were political party offices (45%) and party rallies (15%). Cassettes were also listened in the neighbourhood in friends' houses (15%), homes of party activists (4%), Relatives' homes (3%), and Place of work (1%).

USE OF VIDEO CASSETTES

Incidence of Use:

Only 4% of the respondents said they had watched election publicity on the video.

Place of Watching:

The viewing of publicity material on video was generally done at Party meetings, Party offices or at homes of friends and relatives.

USE OF FOLK THEATRE

Incidence of Use:

Only 2% of the sample recalled having watched election publicity through folk theatre.

Place of Viewing:

Election publicity through folk-theatre was generally viewed at Party offices, political meetings and in private homes of friends and relatives.

USE OF ADVERTISING

Incidence of Use:

Nearly half of the sample (47%) recalled some form of election advertising.

Vehicle of Electoral Advertising:

A majority recalled that their exposure to electoral advertising was through newspapers (39%) and magazines (3%). The second most recalled source of electoral advertising was wall posters (27%) followed by sign-boards or hoardings (6%).

Part III

**VOTING DECISION AND
SOURCE WHICH INFLUENCE
THIS DECISION**

VOTING DECISION

Timing of Decision

Seventy per cent of the respondents claimed to have made up their mind about whom to vote for by the last week preceding the elections. The remaining 30% said they were undecided until that time.

Source of Influence

When asked to identify the source which had most influenced their decision to choose one from many candidates, a majority identified the mass media.

While mass media was identified by 50% of the respondents, only 20% identified face to face personal contacts as a significant influence on their voting decision. The remaining 30% were unable to identify a clear source of influence.

Of the various mass media, the newspapers were identified as the most influential (23%) followed by Television (19%), Posters/Hand bills (3%), Radio (2%) and Magazines (1%).

TIMING OF FIRING UP VOTING DECISION

Interestingly enough, only half of the sample said they made up their mind about who to vote for during the election campaign. The other half had made up their mind even prior to the announcement of elections.

Among the fifty per cent of the sample who made their decision during the campaign, 29% said they made their decision soon after the nominations were announced, 11% decided midway through the campaign, 5% just before the end of polling and the remaining 5% did not give a definite answer.

One-half of the sample refused to acknowledge that their voting decision was influenced by the election campaign.

Among the remaining half which believed that its decision was influenced by the election campaign, the most acknowledged source of influence was personal relationship of friends, relatives neighbours (15%), and Party workers (5%), Newspapers (16%), Television (10%), Radio (2%), and Posters/handbills (1%).

A majority of more than 80% believed that their decision had been firmed up in their mind even before the election campaign began. Only 8% believed that their views on who to vote for were CHANGED during the election campaign, that is, after the formal announcement of candidature by various hopefuls.

Those who changed their views during the election campaign did so through the influence of Media, that is, Newspapers (9%), Television (6%), Radio (1%), and **Personal contact**, that is, Friends, Relatives and Neighbours (5%), Party Activists (4%).

One can infer from this that while Personal relationships play a greater role than the mass media in forming pre-dispositions about voting decisions, the Mass Media begins to play a more dominant role during Personal Relationships once the election campaign begins.

Factors in Voting Decision

When it comes to identifying the basis for voting decisions, views are roughly equally divided between those who give more weight to the characteristics of Political Parties and others who emphasize the personal qualities of men who lead the party.

One group of the sample believes that an evaluation of Party manifesto, (23%), and its past performance (19%), should be the basis for voting decisions.

An equally strong group believes that the Personal qualities of Party leaders (19%), and the candidates at the constituency level (24%) should be the decisive factor.

The remaining 15% do not give an opinion.

The respondents hold this view not only in abstract, but also regard it valid for their own personal decision as well. 42% of

the respondents said their personal voting decision was motivated by their view about the Programme and past performance of political parties, while 43% were motivated by their evaluation of party and electoral leadership.

Voters are divided on whether independent candidates are better or worse than those affiliated with political parties. On the whole popular views, as reflected in the survey, is tilted against independent candidates.

PERCEPTIONS ABOUT ELECTION OUTCOME

Perceived Outcome:

A majority believed that the IJI would win the elections. Thus, while more people recalled the electioneering by PPP, they did not necessarily believe that it was also winning.

Perceived Basis for Victory

The popular perception seems to be that incumbency (16%) and ability (25%) were the major factors in a possible victory. Association with ruling party (5%), or with opposition (5%), and a prominent or majority caste (5%) did not figure very prominently in perceived causes for winning the elections.

So far as their personal decisions were concerned, one quarter of the respondents identified reason of Traditional affiliation, such as Always voted for it (12%), Party supported by community (7%), Party traditionally supported by the family (6%).

One quarter of the respondents identified superior leadership qualities as the reason for their choice.

Appendices

- * MEDIA PROFILE
OF THE SAMPLE**
- * SAMPLING PROCEDURES**

MEDIA PROFILE OF THE SAMPLE

Newspaper Readership

Two-thirds of the sample (65%) were newspaper readers.

Nearly half of the readers (54%) purchased their own paper whereas the remaining borrowed or read at a public place. But not all buyers would buy their paper every day: Only 61% claimed to be daily buyers.

The daily 'Jang' was identified as their favourite paper (61%) by more than half of the sample. Two other Urdu papers and a Sindhi paper made the list. But, interestingly, none of the English papers could achieve a rating of more than 1 % of the sample.

Radio Listenership

Only one-third (36%) of the sample, restricted mainly to major urban centres, turned out to be radio's listeners. Even among the listeners nearly half listened to the radio for no more than an average of one hour a day.

Surprisingly more than half the sample said they did not even own a radio set. This is not quite plausible and apparently the response is handicapped by a bias in wording (the respondents might exclude a tape-recorder which includes a transistor from the definition of a radio) or unwillingness to disclose this

information for fear of keeping an unlicensed radio. There is a small radio licence fee which is generally defaulted.

Approximately 15 per cent of radio listeners listen to radio outside home at a public place or at neighbours.

The national language (Urdu) programmes account for the major share of listening, but there is a sizeable listenership of regional language programmes in Punjabi, Sindhi and Pushto.

News programmes account for higher listenership (71%) closely followed by music programmes (66%). Other popular programme types are Religious programmes (39%) and Sports (30%)

Television

Two-thirds of the Sample households (68%) owned a television set. Most of the viewers are regular viewers. But apparently they watch it for only a couple of hours a day. The language of viewing is mostly the national language Urdu.

News tops the list of most often watched programmes (84%). Other frequently watched programme types include Music (41%), Sports 34%), and Religious programmes. The programme category titled 'Interviews' also appeared prominently (35%) likely as a result of a series of interviews with political leaders screened shortly before this survey was conducted on the election eve.

Cinema

Only one in five persons in the sample were movie-goers. A little over half of them can be called as frequent movie-goers because they claimed to watch an average of one or more movie in a month. The remaining watch movie in a cinema less often.

Movies in the National language, Urdu, account for more than half of all cinema viewing. Other languages in movie-viewing are Punjabi, Pushto and English in that order.

A very small percentage of movie-goers said they had watched an election advertisements. Apparently cinema movies were not used as a significant vehicle for election campaigning or advertisement.

Technical Appendix

SAMPLING PROCEDURE

1. The survey was designed to be conducted in primarily urban areas, but with some participation of rural areas. A geographic spread to ensure the coverage of various languages/provinces of the country was another consideration. In this light, ten points were selected on the basis of geographic/linguistic distribution of the country.
2. Secondly, rural locations were identified in the adjoining areas of selected points.
3. Following this process a total of 50 geographic locations; 42 urban and 8 rural were identified.
4. Within each identified location, a method of random selection of household was followed. A listing of all households in the location was obtained. A random number was used to choose the first respondent household. Therefore, typically, another 9 households were selected for interview.

Through field instructions it was ensured that at last one thirds of the locations would be interviewed by female interviewers, who interviewed female respondents. In the remaining two thirds of the sample was intended to be male respondents, interviewed by male interviewers.