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Shah Nawaz Mangi,
Government College University, Faisalabad,
Pakistan

*CORRESPONDENCE

Mujeeba Ashraf
✉ mujeebaashraf009@gmail.com

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Voters' perceptions of the policy making and performance of the elected government after 2018 general election in Pakistan

Mujeeba Ashraf* and Muzamal Tahir

Institute of Applied Psychology, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan

In this study, the phenomenological approach was used to explore the perceptions of Pakistan Tahreek Insaf (PTI) voters regarding PTI policy making and performance six months after the Pakistani general election of 2018 (GE-2018). The sample comprised 20 PTI voters, and data was collected through one-to-one interview. The thematic analysis led to the following broad and sub themes: The first broad theme, pre-election party ideology, was described by the following sub-themes: vision of change, fight against corruption, and developing Pakistan along the lines of the State of Medina. The second broad theme, the performance of the elected government, was understood through the following sub-themes: accountability, political stability, poor policy making, and false election pledges. And the last broad theme, the public's perceptions of the future performance of the elected government can be explained by its single sub-theme, i.e., giving the elected government a chance to complete its tenure of five years. It can be concluded that most of the participants were optimistic that the elected government of Pakistan would fulfill its pre-election promises.

KEYWORDS

Pakistan election 2018, voters' perceptions, performance of elected government, policy making, Pakistani voters

Introduction

In the democratic system of any country, politics plays a crucial part in significant decision making, along with policies, for the nation to settle different problems, concerns and issues in society (Beetham, 2006). Political parties usually rule on the basis of their ideologies, which are considered to be a natural product of the mobilization of millions of voters in a democratic state (Adams et al., 2011).

In Pakistan, before fall of Dhaka, 1971, various political parties contest the election for seats in the National and Provincial assemblies (Aziz, 2009). Later, two-party system was originated between Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) (Haqqani, 2005). A third party-Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, (PTI) has witnessed in Pakistan's party politics which held strong political ground in the electoral mechanics of the country. It stepped into an orderly two-party rotation since 2008 (Wu and Ali, 2020).

After the resignation of President Pervez Musharraf in 2008, general election of Pakistan was held and PPP, has formed the government. Within two years PPP Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani would be forced to resign amid a corruption case (Lieven, 2011). In general election of 2013, or PML-N has formed the government. PML-N prime Minister Nawaz sharif would

also be forced to resign in 2017 due to corruption case (Mansoor, 2019). The public demonstrate their frustration over inflation, corruption, and governance failures of the country's major parties (Wu and Ali, 2020). In the midst of this instability, the PTI, or Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, led by former cricketer Imran Khan, came into power, in Pakistan GE-2018, due to party's manifesto to fight against corruption and to bring change for the better to Pakistan (Niaz, 2018).

This government was considered to be ruled by amateur party in comparison to the other two political parties Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) and Pakistan People Party (PPP). As a consequence, when PTI started its policy making it was widely criticized by the public and other politicians because PTI politicians were novices. The rapid failure of policy making, for example failure to control the electricity shortage and the fact that the party leader, Imran Khan, kept changing the cabinet ministers, indicated that they did not have a strong enough team to implement the changes that they had promised people in their manifesto. The party's working plan was a 100-day plan and it was not completed successfully; therefore, people started to evaluate and criticize the government's performance.

In this reference, a theory of reputation depreciation can be considered to understand the electoral accountability dynamics. This theory advocated that voter's perception between competent and incompetent government would change over time, and it's depended upon their review of retrospective economic contribution of the government (Krause and Melusky, 2014). Thus, this research was established in order to study voters' perceptions about PTI's policy making and its performance against its party manifesto, six months after the general election of 2018 in Pakistan.

In this paper, voter's perception can be understood in the light of non-Bayesian models of communication learning (French, 1956) where people start to form their opinions based on their experiences in similar situations in the past and by averaging the opinion of their neighbors, colleagues or peers (see DeGroot, 1974; Friedkin and Johnsen, 1990).

PTI's public policy is based on its public-oriented manifesto. Public policy making is usually explained as a set of actions taken by the government to resolve the problems faced by the public in the country (Chand, 2010). In general, the public evaluate the government on the basis of their policy making and its application. This phenomenon is explained by the expectation confirmation theory (ECT), proposed by Oliver in 1980, which posits that an individual's perceptions are changed by a lack of congruence between an individual's prior performance expectations, and the actual performance experienced. Specifically, if an individual has low performance expectations, and experiences a good performance, that individual will form a more positive evaluation. On the contrary, if an individual has high expectations and experiences poor performance, that individual will form a more negative evaluation. The theory has proven useful for explaining how citizens evaluate the services provided to them by their administrations. However, it is largely absent from political and psychological research. Few studies have underlined the importance of voters' expectations for the way in which they evaluate their government's performance (Malhotra and Margalit, 2014).

There is a considerable body of literature on the subject of whether or not an elected government has fulfilled its election promises. Most American and European literature has reported that political parties make favorable promises in order to attract voters, but they easily put them aside when they are elected into government (ISSP Research

Group, 2021; see also Naurin, 2011; Thomson, 2011). For example, the perceptions of Irish citizens of the fulfillment of a pledge were more positive than their perceptions of the actual performance of the government (Thomson, 2011). In contrast, evidence also exists which emphasizes that political parties fulfill most of their promises (Thomson et al., 2017). The first systematic study of pledge fulfillment examined the United States and found that 79% of the pledges made by the party that won the presidential elections in the years 1944–66 was fulfilled at least partly (Pomper, 1968). Subsequent research from other countries, including the United States (Royed, 1996), the United Kingdom (Rose, 1984; Rallings, 1987), Greece (Kalogeropoulou, 1989), the Netherlands (Thomson, 2001), Ireland (Mansergh, 2005), Spain (Artés and Antonio, 2007) and Sweden (Naurin, 2011) also reported that between 50 and 80% of governing parties' pledges had been fulfilled at least partly. Similarly, Naurin (2014) reported that on average more than 80% of the promises made by the four Swedish governments during their election campaigns from 1994 to 2010 had been fulfilled.

Furthermore, Powell and Whitten (1993) explained that if a single party comes into government, then it feels a greater sense of responsibility and has more control over policy making than governments built on a coalition. For example, Thomson et al. (2017) suggested that in countries where single parties govern, such as the United Kingdom, Sweden, Portugal, Spain and Canada, the government's fulfillment of election promises is higher than in countries where the parties govern in coalition, such as Germany, Austria, Bulgaria, Ireland and Italy.

With reference to Pakistan's general election of 2018, though PTI won the most seats (149); however, to form a government they fell short of 23 seats. Therefore, PTI formed a coalition government with members of several other parties including Muttahida Qaumi Movement and Pakistan Muslim League (Q), Balochistan Awami Party, Grand Democratic Alliance, Awami Muslim League and independent candidates. According to models of coalition formation and policymaking in coalitions, the Prime minister has greater influence over policy than does its junior coalition partner(s). And have an advantage in terms of pledge fulfillment (Austen-Smith and Banks, 1988; Baron, 1991; Diermeier and Feddersen, 1998). For example, Laver and Shepsle's (1996) model of coalition policymaking advocated coalition parties have only say in policy making where they have ministerial control. Therefore, before coalition they keenly checked the distribution of ministries. However, Crombez's (1996) model of government formation indicated that minority status in forming a government should be considered as a sign of strength rather than weakness. On the other hand, the saliency theory of party competition (Robertson, 1976; Budge et al., 1987) states that when government formed on the basis of diverse coalition it increases the possibility to focus on diverse issues and fulfill pledges which different parties tend to focus on.

No existing research in Pakistan examines the policy making and performance of the coalited government in result of GE-2018. Hence this study set out to answer the following question: How do PTI voters evaluate the promised manifesto, policy making and performance of the elected government, six months after the general election of 2018?

Method

The purpose of this study is to understand the perceptions of PTI voter's regarding the current government's policy making and performance six months after it was elected in 2018.

Therefore, a qualitative research method was used. It has been argued that qualitative research can facilitate to understand young adult and politics (Collin, 2008; Winchester et al., 2014; Kaya et al., 2020).

Sample

In qualitative research, there has always been a debate that “how many “participants are considered enough which mostly rely on various factors relating to epistemological, methodological and practical issues (Baker et al., 2012). However, few researchers introduced numerical recommendations, for example, Thorogood and Green (2018) suggested purposefully interviewing 20 people can be considered enough to generate information related to phenomenon understudy.

The present study provides an understanding of PTI voters’ opinions of the performance of the elected government after the 2018 general election in Pakistan. A purposeful sampling technique was used to collect the data from 20 PTI voters, 10 men and 10 women, within the age range of 18–35. And other parties’ voters were excluded.

Data was collected from the Punjab province because it holds the majority of the national assembly seats. All of the participants were literate and employed, and most of them ($n = 13$, 65%) were first-time voters; 12 (60%) lived in a nuclear family system. According to the election commission of Pakistan total turnout in GE-2018 was 51.7% among which 37% were young adults which was the highest turnout for voting for this age group. One probable explanation of this high turnout is that they appeared to be fascinated by the manifesto of the PTI which focused on policies and attitude to bring change in Pakistan’s education and health system. As young adults were frustrated by the corruption of the other political parties, the increased cost of living, unemployment, poor health and education system (Mehboob, 2022).

Data collection technique

In phenomenological research, the interview is used to understand the phenomenon as the synthesis of reality enabled, revealing the facts as lived by the experience of the participants, from their perspective (Maxwell, 2013). Semi-structured interviews are the primary instrument for data collection. There is consensus that two or three main questions followed by sub questions are considered enough for collecting data because if too many questions were asked then it would be difficult to manage data (Brown, 2010).

Therefore, in this research, initial questions were asked regarding demographics, then the following questions were posed:

- Did you know about the manifesto of the PTI before casting your vote?
- As you know, PTI formed its government six months back, what do you say about the policy making and performance of PTI?
- Do you think that their performance and policy making is in accordance with their election manifesto?

The questions applied to the participants were primarily open ended, although prompts and more specific follow-up questions were

sometimes used to ensure breadth and depth in the responses obtained. Follow-up questions were also asked by the researcher to delve further into particular areas. For example, the researcher asked ‘Can you explain it more?’ or ‘You said that people were more aware this time, what do you mean by that?’

In this study, semi-structured interviews were scheduled with the participants at their houses. Interviews were scheduled in advance by telephone, performed at the participants’ houses and recorded with their written consent. The average length of the interviews was 30 min. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study and that they could withdraw their participation at any time, and they were assured of their anonymity and the confidentiality of the data.

Data analysis

The data were analyzed in line with Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-step framework. According to the first step, the researchers familiarized themselves with all the interviews by listening and transcribing them all. In the second step, the data were organized into meaningful codes on the basis of their similarities and differences. It helped us to gain the perspectives of the interviewees. Then, in the third step, we arranged the codes into broader themes which seemed to say something specific about the research question. In the fourth step, we reviewed the emerged themes and worked on data reduction based on relevance to the research question. In the fifth step, we arranged the themes into broad themes and sub-themes as most of them were interrelated. In the sixth and final step, all of the themes were written in an effective way in accordance with the research question, i.e., How do PTI voters evaluate the promised manifesto and performance of the elected government, six months after the election?

Results

From the data analysis, we could divide the perceptions of PTI voter’s regarding the current government’s performance and policy making six months after the general election into three broad themes: the party’s pre-election ideology, the performance of the elected government, and perceptions of the future performance of the elected government. The first broad theme, pre-election party ideology, can be further explained by its three constituents: vision of change, the fight against corruption and developing Pakistan along the lines of the State of Medina. The second broad theme, the performance of the elected government, can be understood further by its four components: accountability, political stability, poor policy making and false election pledges. The final broad theme, the future performance of the elected government, can be described by its single sub-theme: giving the government a chance to complete its five-year democratic tenure.

Party’s pre-election ideology

The participants were of the opinion that PTI introduced their ideology of change and fighting corruption, along with a slogan to build a new Pakistan similar to the State of Medina. This made people aware of their rights, which inspired people to vote for PTI.

For example, Mr. Muhammad Obaid said:

Youth was in favour of PTI, because they wanted change in the country ... their major manifesto was that they wanted to do something different for the country. They said that they would eradicate corruption and the status quo. And then they would create jobs and opportunities for youth. And they would work for the poor people, and solve the issues of health.

About their manifesto to build a new Pakistan, Mr. Farooq said:

We became impressed by their talk that a new Pakistan is going to be established. People will live with harmony or love. And their economic condition will be better. And we were satisfied with the vision or ideology which was the reason for our vote casting or the idea in which we are entangled after giving our vote to this party.

Another interviewee, Maryam, explains about their manifesto related to the State of Medina as follows: *They [PTI party] said that we will rule according to Islamic principles and rules like Riasat -e-Madina.*

Overall this theme explains that the participants in this study voted for PTI because of their ideology and they believed that the party would act according to this ideology. The participants stated that the PTI leader, Imran Khan, talked about the party's political ideology during the election campaigns, which attracted the voters. This is in line with previous literature which advocated that the manifesto of a political party is an important ingredient in the representation of their ideology and policies (Askari, 2002; Hillygus and Jackman, 2003; Trent and Friedenber, 2008; Lilleker, 2014). The basic ideology of the current government was to bring change to the country. The literature suggests that people essentially select a candidate who they think will bring change and reform to society (Askari, 2002; Lilleker, 2014). This reflects the fact that the participants hoped that the current government would fulfill their pledges and bring change to the country.

Performance of the elected government

This theme explained the participants' perceptions about the performance of the PTI government. Research shows that voters evaluate the performance of the government on the basis of their promises. The participants of the present study reported that the PTI leader, Imran Khan, promised to pursue corrupt government officers and make them accountable for their misdeeds.

A female interviewee, Saima, said that Imran Khan promised to make policies about corruption. Now, he is focusing on the issue of corruption and taking action over it. Similarly, a male interviewee, Ali, explained that *on Asif Zardari and Nawaz Shrief cases had been opened, and they are in jail. So, this is a big step to eradicate corruption.*

With regard to the sub-theme of political stability, the participants said that the foreign policy; of Pakistan was in a better shape and that Pakistan's international relationships with different countries had improved.

For example, a male interviewee, Obaid said:

The foreign policy is very good now-a-days in Pakistan because they [PTI government] know how to deal. Before this, other nations have not trusted Pakistan as compared to now. Ambassadors of other countries have visited Pakistan and they are making long-term development agreements with Pakistan.

Interestingly, the participants also shared their perceptions about government and army relationships. As female interviewee, Nageen, said:

Government and army are standing in line. It is happening the first time in the history of Pakistan, that they are discussing with each other every type of matter. Recently when there was a serious situation with India, the Pakistani government and army worked together and all of their statements were the same.

In contrast, some participants discussed the incompetence of the government, and pointed out that this government has failed to develop better economic policies. For instance, female participant, Mubbashira, said: with reference to economic policies their promises and claims were bogus because the Finance Minister has resigned, and they did not announce any employment policy for youth.

The participants also reported that due to ineffective economic policy, inflation had occurred in the prices of daily goods, which was affecting the daily living expenses of the general public. A female interviewee, Sidra, said: They [government ministers] said that there will be no inflation, *but petrol prices are increased.* With regard to education policy, the participants reflected upon the ineffective education policy of the government. As male interviewee, Danial, said:

Instead of increasing the education budget he is reducing it up to 50 %, we are expecting from him that he should fulfil his promise about education for all, and increase the number of scholarships but he passed the policy to ban international scholarship for higher education.

In short, the participants' opinions were divided as a few of them were of the opinion that the government's performance was adequate as they had devised an effective foreign policy and worked in close coordination with the legal and army sector. This is supported by the literature, as scholars have reported that foreign affairs and national security are main dimensions upon which voters evaluate the performance of the elected government (Nincic and Hinckley, 1991; Anand and Krosnick, 2003).

On the other hand, researchers have also argued that by electing a government, voters authorize the party to implement their planned policy projects, hence linking voter preferences to governmental action. Based on a party's performance while in power, citizens have the opportunity to express their approval or disapproval (Corazzini et al., 2014; Dupont et al., 2019).

In accordance with this, some participants in this study thought that the government's policy making was not in line with their election promises. Previous literature suggests that policy making involves developing policies to address the problems being faced by a society, but if the economy weakens, the public may feel that the head of the government is performing badly (Roderick Kiewiet, 1983; Thomson et al., 2017). Similarly, the education framework is

an instrument considered to be a politically impacted procedure (Markwat, 2021).

Perceptions of the future performance of the elected government

As the participants were being asked to evaluate the performance of the government after being in power for just six months, they said that this was a very short period of time to judge PTI's performance. This was particularly true in this case as they had no prior experience of the government but they were hopeful that the government would work hard to fulfill their promises in the coming years. Therefore, they believed that the government should be given a chance to complete its government tenure.

For example, a male participant, Obaid said:

It is not correct to analyse and judge them on the basis of six months. They need to study things properly so we should give them time. We should give them time to complete their tenure and then we should analyse their performance.

Other female participant, Saima expressed the following view:

Earlier, we tried both parties [PPP & PML-N] and both of them cheated the public. So this time public chose a new party. And we will give the government the rest of the time that they will try to develop the country.

In sum, this theme describes the fact that the participants were of the opinion that the current government should be given its full tenure to work and the public should evaluate their performance when this tenure was over. This can be supported by the literature as governments often fulfill their election pledges in order to remain in power (Naurin et al., 2019).

However, Werner (2019) point out that whether party fulfill their promise or not voters party affiliation and party support was not affected.

Discussion

By understanding the perceptions of PTI voters regarding PTI's policy making and performance six months after the Pakistan general election in 2018, this study found that their views were expressed in multiple forms. The results showed that the essential structure of the studied phenomenon was characterized by the party's pre-election ideology, and it was observed through party performance after being elected in the general election, and voters' perceptions of the future performance of the elected government.

This study suggested that voters form their perceptions about a party and their policy making through the promises and pledges that the elected government shared during its election campaign. People vote for the elected members on the basis of their given ideology, which is expressed in the shape of their manifestos, pledges and promises (Thomson et al., 2017). The first major theme reflected that participants of this research voted PTI because of their manifesto: vision of change, fight against corruption, and developing Pakistan

along the lines of the State of Medina. Researchers also suggest that citizens vote for the parties which have policies that best represent the citizens' own interests, or which are likely to change policies in their preferred direction (Grofman et al., 1999). This can also be explained by the work of Kalogeropoulou (1989), who investigated the 'mandate theory' and advocated the idea that electors choose political parties on the basis of the alternative government programs they offer during an election campaign. Thus, the question of whether or not programs are fulfilled by governments is central to assessing the effectiveness of democratic processes.

In reference to this, second major theme, expressed the participants perceptions about the policy making of the government and its implementation of policies. It was clear that policy making and policy implementation were considered to be important features of a government by the public. Most of the participants expressed their satisfaction with the elected government's performance in terms of foreign and accountability policy. However, in terms of economic and education policies they were of the opinion that the government had thus far failed to fulfill many of the promises that it had made during the pre-election campaign. This can be explained through the ECT (Oliver, 1980), which explained that an individual's perceptions are changed by a lack of congruence between an individual's prior performance expectations, and the actual performance that the individual experiences. Researchers also argued that when specific election pledges are being evaluated, personal heuristics, such as attachments to parties, play a lesser role in judgments; rather, the specificity embedded in the evaluation encourages citizens to engage in a more knowledge-based evaluation of whether or not pledges have been fulfilled (Naurin and Henrik, 2017; Naurin et al., 2017).

Similarly, the third major theme related to the performance of the party reflected that the majority of the participants were also of the opinion that the performance of the government could not be judged on the basis of six months' performance as the elected government required time to fulfill its promises. The participants were hopeful that the elected government would not break its pre-election promises. The findings concern one of the central principles of democratic theory: that parties make promises to voters during election campaigns and then fulfill these promises if they enter government office after elections (Mansbridge, 2003). The evidence shows that parties act according to this principle to a considerable extent. Parties that hold executive office after elections generally fulfill a substantial percentage, sometimes a very high percentage, of their election pledges.

In short, the results showed not only similarities between the accounts of the participants but also variations and the data offered nuanced knowledge about the studied phenomenon. The research on voter's perception of the policy making and performance of the elected government, is still in infancy in Pakistan. Therefore, this research warrants that future research should narrow down on any one or two of the sub themes of this research to understand them more in depth.

Like any other research, this study also has certain strengths and limitations. For example, the strength of a qualitative study is the opportunity to enter deeply into a phenomenon rather than focusing on generalizability which is a guided principle of quantitative research (Korstjens and Moser, 2017). Therefore, generalizability of this study is limited and results should interpret with caution. It is also important to mention that the interviews comprised interactions between the participants and the researcher and both have their own world of perceptions.

The researcher tried to clarify the opinions of the participants but it is still possible that the explanations given here might be affected by the subjectivity of the researcher as a PTI voter. Therefore, another researcher who was not involved in the interviews re-coded the information in order to check the reliability of the initial coding. Moreover, the results of this qualitative study should be interpreted in relation to time and place; this does not mean that these findings will not make sense in other contexts, but that caution should be exercised when interpreting these results in a different context.

Conclusion

The participants described how they voted for PTI because of their ideology and they explained that they expected them to work on the manifesto and fulfill their pledges. They regarded the performance of the elected government to be below the standard expected during the first six months of governance but the participants also argued that as this government has no prior experience of governance, they should be given the full five-year democratic tenure before their performance is re-evaluated. The current political condition of Pakistan expressed public aggression and exhibited that they are not satisfied that PTI has been removed unjustifiably without giving them a chance to complete five-year tenure.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Ethics statement

The studies involving humans were approved by Departmental Doctoral Program Committee (DDPC) of the Institute of Applied

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Psychology, University of the Punjab, Lahore. The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study. Written informed consent was obtained from the individual(s) for the publication of any potentially identifiable images or data included in this article.

Author contributions

MA: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Methodology, Supervision, Writing – review & editing. MT: Data curation, Investigation, Methodology, Software, Writing – original draft.

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