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Promises, Slogans, and Power: Political Campaigns in South Punjab's 2018 Elections

Abstract

The South Punjab general elections of 2018 turned into a fine synthesis of promises, rhetoric, and clashes for power that modified the entire political complexion of this region. Major parties campaigned among the economically deprived voters with populism and a regional narrative. They were all rejoicing in themes of development, provincial autonomy, and inclusion, but most of the time, these were empty promises incapable of seeing the light of demonstrable results. The flip-flops of the politicized arena from one faction to another represent new types of loyalties spawned by clientelism, not ideology. This study deals with how electoral messaging, identity politics, and bargaining for power acted to such an extent as to bind voters into reinforcing mechanisms for existing power structures in the disguise of change and regional empowerment.

Keywords: South Punjab, 2018 Elections, Political Campaigns, Promises, Slogans, Power, Pti, Pml-N, Provincial Autonomy, Patron-Client Politics

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Abstract

The South Punjab general elections of 2018 turned into a fine synthesis of promises, rhetoric, and clashes for power that modified the entire political complexion of this region. Major parties campaigned among the economically deprived voters with populism and a regional narrative. They were all rejoicing in themes of development, provincial autonomy, and inclusion, but most of the time, these were empty promises incapable of seeing the light of demonstrable results. The flip-flops of the politicized arena from one faction to another represent new types of loyalties spawned by clientelism, not ideology. This study deals with how electoral messaging, identity politics, and bargaining for power acted to such an extent as to bind voters into reinforcing mechanisms for existing power structures in the disguise of change and regional empowerment.

Keywords:

[South Punjab](#), [2018 Elections](#), [Political Campaigns](#), [Promises](#), [Slogans](#), [Power](#), [Pti](#), [Pml-N](#), [Provincial Autonomy](#), [Patron-Client Politics](#)

Introduction

The year 2018 was witness to the general election tales in South Punjab's politics: tales so marvellous that promises, sloganeering, and power were intangibly tied into the most complicated negotiation addressed to many identities under severe unevenness in development down to patronage competition. On the political front, this southern belt drawn across Multan, Bahawalpur, and Dera Ghazi Khan has, from time to time, borne parallel popularity to the very heart of Punjab, where national political parties nursed with "electables," conjuring Seraiki cultural pride with promises of

accelerated development. The campaigns were not just promises; they were the political economy for candidates, big clans and biradaries, local bureaucratic intermediaries, and agriculturists dependent on irrigation and public services. In this contest, therefore, slogans would condense into depraved whispers that would travel swiftly across rural and peri-urban constituencies high aspirations for recognition, redistribution, and representation (Cheema et al., 2006).

During the contestation sharpening, personality-driven politics or issue-based contestations came more into focus during the 2018



election. Parties carried the national narratives of accountability, change, service delivery, and stability; candidates localized these in village meetings, dera gatherings, and union councils. Development became their common language almost; roads, schools, health units, and canal lining were promised, together with fast access to the office and officials. Equally salient were identity politics. Seraiki rights and the perennial demand for administrative reconfiguration, the so-called development discourse of a separate South Punjab province-became both policy signals and mobilization frames (Jaffrelot & Tillin, [2017](#)).

Power here was not a static thing but a flexible capability that was negotiated to deliver services. Those candidates who had political clout (that is, in such work as for jobs, transfers, or public expenditures) were capable of translating an abstract party platform into tangible material benefits. The logic of competing for the electables had the parties wanting those who could grab an otherwise very narrow and very tight race into a victory. This, however, happened side by side with increased demand for programmatic entitlements, particularly by young and first-time voters, with the exposure from social media. Campaign caravans, corner meetings, and WhatsApp consensus on short-and-sweet, sticky slogans of change, justice, or continuity blurred any distinction between message and momentum (Javid & Mufti, [2022](#)).

Do political campaigns in South Punjab during general elections offer a revealing window to see how promises, slogans, and power become assembled in a context marked by layered identities, uneven development, and competitive patronage? For long seen as a peripheral frontier to the political heartlands of Punjab, the southern belt, stretched across the districts of Multan, Bahawalpur, and Dera Ghazi Khan-became a decisive arena where the national parties courted "electables," evoked Seraiki cultural pride, and promised accelerated development. There, such campaigns did not only carry messages; they brokered relations among candidates, influential clans and biradaries, local bureaucratic intermediaries, and voters whose livelihoods hinge on agriculture, irrigation, and public services (Ghani et al., [2020](#)).

The 2018 cycle really sharpened the long-standing contestations between issue-based and personality-driven politics. While parties projected

national narratives - accountability, change, service delivery, stability - candidates localized those in village meetings, dera gatherings, and union council networks. Virtual Will is the new subversion. For some time now, Surplus Population has moved cancel; not to say that they just learnt the art of administration, Führers and such. Likewise, this goes with a really remarkable recognition of identity politics. The claims to Seraiki rights and the ever-revolving claims for an administrative reconfiguration in tune with the dreams of a separate province in South Punjab evidence the signals sent by policies and mobilizing frames (Shafiq et al., [2024](#)).

Political campaigning thrived in South Punjab during the general elections of 2018, facilitating promises, slogans, power assembly within multi-layered identities and hierarchical forms of development, and the competing dimension of patronage that marks this region. Today opened a significant field for the national parties to "court" and "electables" across the southern stretch of Punjab, including the districts of Multan, Bahawalpur, and Dera Ghazi Khan, on the importance of Seraiki cultural pride and a demand for fast-track development. These campaigns were not only the conveyors of messages but also were successful in brokering relations between candidates and influential clans and biradaries, local bureaucratic intermediaries, and, finally, with those voters whose livelihood depends on agriculture, irrigation, and public services (Javid, [2019](#)).

The cycle of 2018 has heightened confrontations already existing between issue-based political contestations and personality-driven political contests. While parties projected their stories on a national level-accountability, change, service delivery, stability-candidates localized that in village meetings, dera gatherings, and through union councils. Development became the lingua franca of promises of roads, schools, health units, and canal lining; promises of more rapid access to offices and officials were combined with those. In the same vein, such politics could be distinguished. Seraiki rights as an issue and perennial calls for administrative reconfiguration, at least most conspicuously as the concept of a separate province of South Punjab, thus designating both as a policy signal and a mobilizing frame (Sahar et al., [2025](#)).

Literature Review

Political campaigns constitute the performative frontier between parties and voters in an election; in South Punjab, however, the maximum political interface was symbolic rather than policy debate in the Pakistan general elections of 2018, over promises of province-making, identity-laden slogans, and more appeals to patronage networks that found support in the local language.

Within this context, the Pakistani election rhetoric scholarship argues, slogans serve condensed frames because they shrink complex grievances into emotive slogans that move collective identities and embody promises of instituting tangible change. Specific studies focused on such 2018 slogans reveal that PTI, PML-N, and PPP used short and restated catchphrases about corruption, 'change', and provincial autonomy, which could easily be chanted, made banners writers use them, and circulated them in media; these slogans worked to signify membership in larger national narratives while being adapted to the local claims in South Punjab. Research on rhetorical practice in Pakistan shows that political slogans act simultaneously as persuasion devices and as markers of political legitimacy — i.e., to claim you represent 'the people', you must phrase your claim in language that resonates culturally and emotionally with target constituencies (Behera, [2018](#)).

The scholars who study nationalist/ethnolinguistic movements (Saraiki studies), therefore, provide a very important context for understanding how the province's demand resonated politically. The demands of the Saraiki movement have historical roots in a pattern of underinvestment, cultural invisibility, and centralization of power in the metropolis, Lahore. In the literature, two political logics are distinguished at work: on the one hand, provincial demand is corrective to material need and institutional neglect that characterizes grievance politics; on the other hand, symbolic politics of identity treat the demand as a claim to recognition and dignity. Political actors in the year 2018 married both logics: hence, even by the promise of a new province, redistribution could be done in terms of material share as well as cultural respect to make the slogan very attractive (Malik et al., [2025](#)).

Another axis looked for in the literature discusses the rise of electables and patronage

networks in South Punjab. The electoral studies of Pakistan accentuate that the rural south Punjab politics are still intact with the biraderi (kinship), landlordism, and clientelist exchange. The vast majority of constituencies are ruled by powerful local personalities (electables) who have the command of loyal vote blocs through the distribution of resources, mediation of disputes, or through their social status. The writers state that whether a catchy national-level vocal is in circulation, like 'change' or 'province for South Punjab', it has to be disaggregated into local power-brokers' endorsing and mobilizing it for translation in that constituency into votes. So campaign promises are filtered by this process: that is how the national party's catchphrase gets traction when local elites adopt it and promise to deliver concrete implementation, while in other areas the slogan remains rhetorical (Shabbir & Haider, [2023](#)).

Media reports and post-election assessments help to establish a rift between the rhetoric of promise and its fulfillment. Current reportage during the 2018 campaign depicted an electoral period in which slogans frequently outran organizational capacity — banners and chants promised a new province, clean governance, and social services, but observers noted relative deprivation in policy particulars and low grassroots campaign infrastructure in many rural precincts. Observers mentioned a campaign climate that was, in some pockets, muted, where slogans filled a void left behind by weak party machinery or constrained civic discourse. Post-election reviews revealed that where parties had made clear promises of province creation, the ploy improved vote share but did not translate into any automatic conversion of political follow-through; after the election, the process of provincial reorganization began to stall due to constitutional intricacies and association with competing interests (Kaleem et al., [2022](#)).

A critical stream of literature examines the performativity of promises: they create expectations and political capital but become tools of temporality and deferral. Political theorists and empirical political scientists have established that promising to carry out major institutional reforms (e.g., creation of a province) achieves three short-term advantages for parties: it signals their responsiveness; it mollifies aggrieved constituencies; and finally, it postpones tough,

politically costly work into an indefinite future. The South Punjab cycle of promise and postpone, though, has engendered not only disillusionments but some renewed electoral leverage: voters will recall the prior failure to deliver on promises but will still vote for whichever party is able to rearticulate that demand most convincingly (Saud, 2020).

Methodologically, the literature of 2018 enhances the prospects of combining slogan discourse analysis with voting behavior fieldwork. Discourse analysts trace how slogans are constructed (lexical choices, imagery, invocation of historical grievances), while survey and constituency-level studies provide insights into how different socioeconomic groups might interpret those slogans. For example, urban middle-class voters might construe "change" as anti-corruption governance; rural constituencies hear it through the prism of local redistribution and promise delivery. Similarly, those calls in the Saraiki language improved the identification amongst ethnic Saraiki speakers, but they had to carry the endorsement of local brokers to create turnout effects (Shah & Majeed, 2022).

Campaign Strategies in the 2018 Elections

The 2018 General Elections in Pakistan drew new dimensions in national politics, but none was as glaring as South Punjab in terms of promises, sloganeering, and power plays. South Punjab has been historically known as one of the most marginalized areas in the whole country, and now it has become an arena for the national political parties to contest with their discourses on local grievances. The major parties—the PTI, the PML-N, and the PPP—were aware that winning over the voters in this area depended on the mobilization of a layered structure of undying complaints against one another: neglect, lack of development, and administrative exclusion (Ali & Mufti, 2022).

Campaign strategies thus leaned towards promises of short-term material returns and slogans for what amounted to deeper, symbolic aspirations of the Seraikis. At the center of campaign messaging in South Punjab was the demand for a separate province. The issue, historical in itself, attained special salience in 2018, given PTI's promise at large to grant an independent South Punjab province upon winning state power. The slogan South Punjab Suba resonated deeply within the local community

because it stood for actualization of their grievance against histories of disparity, the absence of representation in provincial decision-making, and unequal resource allocation from Lahore-centered politics of Punjab. For the PML-N, which had ruled Punjab for more than a decade under Shahbaz Sharif, the counter-strategy was not to make hurt that would shake this stronghold in central Punjab (Zafar, 2019).

Critics, however, denied that any of these developments reached the masses in South Punjab, whereby PML-N's grant of promises seemed insufficient while PTI's slogan of provincial acknowledgement evoked greater emotional appeal. The PPP, which was used to dominate political affairs in South Punjab, always took the opportunity to revive its past fortunes inside the region by choosing to speak within the narrative it has created for itself during the years in power. The slogans surrounding, "Roti, Kapra, aur Makan" came back under promises of social welfare and provision of job opportunities. However, the existing decay in the organization of the PPP in Punjab, coupled with diminishing returns from its traditional base among feudal lords, determined that its campaign fell on hard times as it struggled for oxygen. The PPP did try to distance itself through the argument that it had been supportive of and attached to federalism as a concept whenever and wherever claimed by the Seraiki identity. (Sadaf, 2020)

These promises were very specific to the agrarian people, long aggrieved about the inequitable canal water supply and insufficient government subsidies. On the contrary, development through building infrastructure was what PML-N had promised—taxation would then be used to induce advances in educational and health services. Although the party claimed to build hospitals, schools, and roads, voters often wondered whether these benefits reached the southern districts equitably (Arshad et al., 2025).

Slogans in South Punjab were not just linguistic vehicles but popular mobilizers. PTI's slogan "Tabdeeli Ayegi" (Change Will Come) was modified through a locally adopted slogan "South Punjab Suba," thus bringing the need for local change into the national populist fold. It is a cognitive space so constructed for the voter to spend less time on very complex matters that include policy debates in an area where literacy levels are lower, hence less access to detailed manifestos. Considerable public

awareness of the slogans was achieved through repetition in rallies and through their presence in posters and across social media platforms, so much so that they could evoke massive responses rather than being that which would go into a lengthy manifesto (Mir et al., [2023](#)).

Despite the supremacy of digital campaigning and social media, South Punjab remained a place where so many of its developments were being driven by landlords, kinship leaders of biradari, and local powerbrokers. Therefore, the constituency mattered most in terms of endorsement because most of such endorsements are based on candidate preference rather than manifesto approval. This dynamic further means that promise-making is confined to the constituency level: a local leader might demand assurances of development funds or positions in exchange for delivering votes. This equilibrium between large crowds, lured by slogans and promises, ensured elite involvement through their promises as reflected in the campaign strategy.

It has proven to be as necessary that the slogans and power interplay meant that electoral promises were tracked very well within defined limits. The feudal elites configured the electoral promises so well that they could not cause damage to the interests of the same elect, these would be the ones controlling the huge territories with the kinship network. During the electoral period, therefore, there would not be so much as the proposition of land reform or resource reallocation. The focus would be on slogans like "Naya Pakistan" or "South Punjab Province," which were quite simply appealing to the general masses, but probably, hopefully, would not antagonize the sitting elite.

Voter Behavior in South Punjab

Elections held in 2018 in South Punjab saw voter behavior influenced by the layered interplay of three factors, with material incentives, discursive framing (promises and slogans), and deepening local power patterns all impacting what voters listened to and how they interpreted it. The simple patron-client relationship functioned as a very strong explanatory frame at the ground level. Strongly feudal landlords, biradari chieftains, and political brokers firmly entrenched in local politics exercised significant influence over the choice of votes by social pressures created through resources they were able to provide

and promises of access to state goods (Yilmaz & Batool, [2025](#)).

Derive them slogans complicated programmatic pledges, distill them into uncomplicated emotional cues by which conflicted voters navigate wide information spaces, and often transform the discussion from the candidate's personality to that of systemic reform narratives. To evoke dignity, development, or put a stop to elite capture was to tap into grievances about continuing poverty, poorly delivered public services, and perceptions that elites enjoy impunity. Joined to this, while short-term, concrete momentary short-term enticements were used, discourses can be such that realignment in the electoral scene happened with surprises (Bashir & Khalid, [2020](#)).

Generally, South Punjab constituents turned out to vote because they were purely energized by the party or demobilized because of clientelistic closure. And where the elites were so sure of their hold, they could deter opposition mobilization by means of social sanctions or logistical hindrance. People would probably engage in exciting ground campaigning with clear promises in competitive races, mobilizing the public to vote. Gendered dimensions of voter behavior also surfaced. In some areas, official female turnout rose, but the cultural barriers, mobility constraints, and gendered distribution of patronage meant that women's electoral choices were often mediated by male kin or local power structures, thus muting the independent effect of campaign slogans targeting women (Niaz, [2021](#)).

Ethno-linguistic and sectarian identities also affected how messages would be received. Thus, local appeals in sub-regional Punjabi identity or, more frequently, implied neglect by central elites had much stronger resonance and generated localized variation in slogan framing and oral emphasis. Another notable factor is switching parties and the movement of candidates from one party to another. Political elites in South Punjab often migrate across party lines in elections; for voters, a candidate's identity might carry much more weight than the name of a party in deciding where to vote. That is why promises linked to familiar local personalities are normally considered more credible, compared to the same promises from alien national ticket-bearers (Kreuzer, [2020](#)).

The 2018 elections became crucial in revealing a conditional parity among voters to policy-based appeals. In constituencies where service delivery visibly improved or past promises were being honored, the voters exhibited much more programmatic behavior, assessing candidates against track records against defendable policy platforms; otherwise, in an environment characterized by perennial governance outlays and clientelistic redistribution, the voters shunned any talks on abstract policy objectives in favor of immediate material advantages and socially embedded approbations.

Case Studies of Political Campaigns

For the 2018 general elections, political campaigning in southern Punjab must be read as the outcome of layered, at times conflicted, logics: national-level narratives that sought to reframe the politics of Pakistan; clamor for institutional recognition of regional identity claims; and local power structures that stubbornly dictate voter behavior. The overwhelming 2018 national narrative was 'change' promised by PTI — the shorthand slogan Naya Pakistan and its related Urdu/English catchphrases of *tabdeeli*, that merged anti-status-quo rhetoric with performative promises of institutional reform, anti-corruption drives, and economic revival.

PTI molded these national slogans as a moral and programmatic rupture with dynastic politics associated with the PML-N and PPP; they were brief, repeatable, and media-friendly, thus lending themselves well to national broadcasts and urban rallies. However, upon arrival in the political market of South Punjab, these generalized slogans were almost instantaneously retraced, interpreted, and domesticated by regional actors who reframed them according to local grievances and historical cleavages, in particular, the age-old demand for a separate South Punjab (Saraiki) province. PTI's promise to construct a South Punjab province within 100 days of assuming government became one major localized promise to blend national branding with alertness to regional identity politics (Hussain, 2022).

These electables performed several political tasks simultaneously: they lent PTI local credibility, mobilized turnout through clientelist exchange networks, and anchored campaign messages in concrete patronage promises. Research and also

field work in the 2018 research will emphasize this point PTI's gains in South Punjab were not merely a simple win in national messaging; they were painstakingly won by the careful co-optation of regional electables and were able to flexibly adopt the Saraiki card where it was useful. In many constituencies, PTI did not replace local power; it absorbed it (Khan & Malik, 2023).

Promises and slogans, therefore, worked on two temporal registers. On one register, short-form slogans like *tabdeeli* crystallized a forward-looking temporal imaginary that validated voting for change as a moral act. On the other hand, regionally specific promises such as the formation of a South Punjab province, resource redistribution to southern districts, and development projects tied to Multan, Dera Ghazi Khan, Bahawalpur, and surrounding areas were meant to effect immediate spatially targeted improvements. Crucially, the latter category was phrased in terms resonating with longstanding perceptions of marginalization: South Punjab's share of provincial resources and political influence was limited, and the creation of a new province was presented as a structural corrective to decades of center-periphery neglect (Malik et al., 2025)

Yet 2018 saw campaign rhetoric that would show the gender and social limitations. Distant polling stations and social norms that sidetracked mobilization attempts were declared to be structural barriers to women's turnout in different constituencies. In some constituencies, issues of religion and appeals to traditional authority surfaced, as, at times, religious leaders did indeed accelerate or hamper some campaigns, where the parties risked neglecting major segments of voters if they failed to contextually translate their slogans into gender-sensitive local outreach. Such asymmetrical ways of incorporating women and marginalized social groups into campaign strategies not only were to defined the texture of electoral competition in South Punjab, but also further consolidated the hierarchical nature of local politics and the limitations of the universality of national slogans to engender consciousness (Clary & Siddiqui, 2021).

Analysis

The contest became the national turning point for the 2018 general elections in Pakistan and then the

canvas for local dynamics like South Punjab. The new political reality forged by competition on the national level was the amazing emergence of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) as the largest political party: the breaking of the PML-N/PPP equilibrium. But the story of South Punjab was much more of how localized appeals (in promises and slogans) and regional claims of power shaped voter behaviours and formed campaigns, rather than whether one party came into power. In simple terms, the national narratives mattered but were refracted through old loyalties, new grievances, and specific regional demands, particularly a long-standing demand for a separate province of South Punjab.

There were two prospective roles of promises: first, that a manifesto or formal commitments could be treated as a symbolic contract among the parties as to how they would claim competency in exhibiting how promises of the national economy or governance could be translated later on into local benefits. Second, especially in South Punjab, campaign promises served as instruments of distributive signaling — a way of promising roads, schools, development projects, jobs, or bureaucratic change that voters could imagine as tangibly coming to their tehsils and union councils. Scholars examined a tangible cross-Punjab scepticism about how tightly manifestos influenced votes; many analysts went so far as to argue that patronage networks, candidate reputation, and identity politics dispense with manifestos as an important caution when considering promises as direct obligations rather than campaign rhetoric (Transparency International Pakistan, [2019](#)).

Deep esoteric currents flowed in and behind the promises that mattered and the slogans that adhered; power, both as control over resources and as shaping the political rule and image, was that current. Established powerholders (local landlords, political families, and influential biradari networks) retained the structural capacity to influence outcomes through clientelist exchange: delivery (or the credible promise of delivery) of state resources, and influence over local bureaucrats, or social pressure on voters. This newly emerging power affected control in certain constituencies: media visibility, urban youth mobilization through social media, and national narratives about corruption and merit. The combination of old and new sources of

power yielded mixed outcomes in South Punjab: constituencies where feudalism or patronage were strongly entrenched maintained loyalty to the traditional parties or elite candidates, regardless of any national swing; while, on the other hand, the constituencies with more fluid social structures were amenable to the PTI's message of change.

The South Punjab province was the same as demanded in 2018. This administrative and identity claim did not cross party lines: it altered the rhetoric of campaigning. Candidates who could credibly promise advancement on devolution or fresh provincial status could exert leverage. Even parties whose national brand was on shaky ground would capture votes for the demand. An example of such a regional structural grievance reconstituting national promises would be the demand for a province, whereby voters from South Punjab rated national promises on their ability to increase local autonomy, resources, and recognition.

The campaign in South Punjab, during the period after 2018, was marked by such constraints and opportunities. In some urban localities, for reasons such as media saturation, security fears, and the perceived preordained fate of certain constituencies, excitement for the traditional mass campaign was somewhat damped. The rural and peri-urban mobilization was still vibrant, allowing for some localized networking to happen as well as door-to-door campaigning. In these urban pockets, PTI was running an active ground campaign accompanied by visible high-octane rallies, while older parties were heavily relying on retail politics, intervening at the candidate level in certain rural constituencies. This enabled the sociolinguistics of national promises packaged as some policy template (macro-economic stability or national health initiative) to be converted into believable micro-level storytelling applicable to the villages and small towns of South Punjab, thus gaining actual substance.

This is because media and social media did fill complementary roles: traditional print and video debates set the national frame, but WhatsApp clubs, Facebook pages, and local cable TV talk shows localized and personalized messages. South Punjab was less evenly distributed in the literacy-internet picture: South media had amplified national slogans and targeted narratives for urban youth, and the spearheads on face-to-face networks, mosque

announcements, and candidate visits were still central for more remote communities. The uneven technological diffusion meant that campaigns had to deploy slogans and promises multi-modally: a TV-level slogan on anti-corruption had to be reworked into a door-to-door promise about a new school or a gas connection to be persuasive in many rural hamlets (Ahmed, 2021).

Credibility gap-the distance between promises and belief in the keeping of those promises by voters-is the fundamental analytical pivot. By this metric, incumbents with a project delivery or visible patronage history discounted their promises or measured them on a tighter performance scale. In the opposite vein, if incumbents are viewed as corrupt or negligent, even the most audacious, ambitious promises would be convincing when framed as diversions. Candidates who could point to specific, short-term deliverables (e.g., repairing a school, facilitating hospital access) converted skepticism into votes more effectively than those who offered sweeping, abstract reforms.

According to the 2018 voting behaviour analysis, turnout and choice were determined by identity, material interests, and perceptions of power; tools of age, gender, and geodiversity of the population were used to mobilize voters through ethnic and biradari ties, class-position, and land-holding patterns. Hence, turnout of women remained an issue in some areas of rural Punjab; several constituencies faced restraints on female political participation due to local cultural constraints and logistical issues, which in turn affected the design of campaigning in terms of targeting and mobilization strategies.

The actual distinction between the campaigning rhetoric and governance gets very close based on the post-2018 scenario. On the other hand, gold-coated words about corruption and economic transformation sometimes met with a structural barrier and contradicting realities; inertia of institutions and bureaucratic quagmires, cheered on by rival political priorities. When it comes to South Punjab, the antique clamoring for a province and the lethargy in bringing about administrative change prove that if sloganeering and promises win elections, the absence of strong institutional commitment maintained well beyond the campaign turns those electoral victories into a farce when considered in terms of structural change.

Challenges and Criticisms

The Pakistan political landscape was further enhanced by the 2018 general elections through an awareness of the promises, slogans, and powers that addressed South Punjab, making it even more interesting as a case study- Combating demographic change. Therefore, the entire rhetoric in the campaigns promised a lot of everything: the heaviest assaults on social justice, very attractive offers to settle questions, and emotional and passionate pleas to allure the imagination of this mixed electorate. However, soon, these very actors attracted much criticism since it became evident that there was a large gulf between rhetoric and reality. The challenges to the political campaigns in South Punjab exposed systemic weaknesses in the democratic fabric of Pakistan, agency of entrenched local elites, and limitations of erstwhile supposedly democratic electoral accountabilities (Rafiq, 2022).

Touted by some to be one of the greatest acts of criticism of the South Punjab 2018 campaigns was their unfortunate dependence on sloganeering as a substitute for a substantive discourse on governance. Agendas were offered to the public merely in simplified formulations by political leaders seeking to garner votes without necessarily putting public policy trade-offs in focus. They may have wanted to discuss evidence-based solutions to water shortages, literacy, and poverty, but instead, they have dealt with despair-causing words that would somehow breed public frustration, with little discussion on plans or implementation.

Related quite closely to this question is indeed the issue of excessive or vague promises. Campaign speeches in South Punjab pledged sweeping reforms-instant betterment in healthcare, education for all, and speedy infrastructure development; however, they were extremely thin on the ground when it came to credible implementation strategies, fiscal calculations, and timelines. These promises left the financing or execution of these promises hanging or shrugged off into rhetoric more than anything else. The voters were, thus, left with hugely inflated expectations that frequently turned into outright disappointment when the governments failed to deliver.

Into someone's life-all the way to the general elections in South Punjab, with promises as catchy as instant health service reform or frictionless admission to educational institutions or meteoric

infrastructure development-nearly all of the campaign promises were vague enough to probably not be expected to be taken seriously. The terribly few that had any credibility were themselves marred in ambiguity regarding a possible financial mechanism and a way through which the proposals would be implemented. Everything about implementation and financing that could not be credibly discussed remains hanging like some shell in a rhetorical context. With that, voters have unrealistically inflated expectations that, barring a few exceptions, were clearly intended to fall into abject disappointment whenever respective governments failed to deliver.

Such pledges were all tied to playing the number game to the extent of getting exaggerated or vague promises. Most of the campaign speeches from South Punjab reflected huge promises against very general promises, such as instant improvement in healthcare, a big increase because of universal admission into education facilities, and overall infrastructural whirlwind development on one hand; on the other, they were very seldom matched with credible implementation strategies, fiscal calculations, or timelines. Their void in how they were to be financed or executed left hanging in the air or shrugged off into rhetoric more than anything else. That left voters with unrealistically exaggerated expectations that would almost always fall flat on the ground into outright disappointment when governments did not deliver (Abassi, 2020).

Clientelism and patronage networks deeply rooted in politics have created major challenges. Communication modalities have become modernized, whether through digital campaigning, yet the repositories of local power structures were proven, and dictating quite evidently. These support networks are still divided among biradari affiliations, feudal loyalties, and those patron-client relations; hence, most of the candidates will have them. In such apparent contexts, campaign promises could somehow exhort less programmatic reforms; more importantly, such exorcisms would least allow selective benefits for loyal supporters. Mostly, the realization of developmental projects in government jobs and subsidies was dependent upon political loyalties rather than circumscribing the expectations of the public.

Most of the problems associated with 2018 campaigning were that clientelism and patronage

networks were very much alive in South Punjab polity right up to the present day. Communication modalities became modernized, and digital campaigning came into being, yet repositories of local power structures were ever so determinedly proven and dictating. Such support networks are still in place based on biradari affiliations, feudal loyalties, and those patron-client relations; hence, most of the candidates would tend to have such support. In such obvious contexts, the promise for the campaign seems to have been less exhortation for programmatic reforms; more importantly, this exorcism would least allow selective benefits for loyal supporters. Realization of developmental projects in government jobs and subsidies was mostly contingent on political loyalties instead of being circumscribed by expectations from the public.

Almost all problems of the 2018 campaigns had to do with clientelism and patronage networks still very much alive in South Punjab polity till today. Communication modalities became modernized; digital campaigning came into being; yet repositories of local power structures were ever so determinedly proven and dictating. With biradari affiliations, feudal loyalties, and patron-client relationships, candidates still got all their support. In the apparent context, campaign promises included fewer exhortations to programmatic reforms, and more importantly, these exorcisms were least capable of allowing selective benefits for loyal supporters. Mostly, realization of developmental projects, jobs in government establishments, or subsidies was dependent on political loyalties rather than circumscribed by public expectation (Iqra, 2019)

Criticism did not end at that; it also reached dynastic politics for shaping campaign narratives. Candidates in South Punjab relied more on lineage and on the fact that they belonged to some entrenched local hierarchical status rather than any first-hand governance experience or nurturing supporters among the people through a legitimized representation to create their own identity. Often, therefore, slogans and promises were more linked to the preservation of feudal dominance than to transformative change. Terms like honor, loyalty, or local pride were used to define the campaign and, therefore, serve to entrench hierarchies and not promote inclusivity.

One of the examples where identity politics poses a real problem in voting in 2018 is the case of South Punjab, where the identity of that place was actually politicized marketing-wise, but also brought to the fore some genuinely aware grievances about development and representation. South Punjab was promised either a separate province by all parties and candidates, or a development package that failed to excite any interest or enthusiasm (Shafqat, [2018](#)).

The media lives most turbulent atmosphere during elections- candidates really hold the most interesting campaign stunts in terms of loud sound bites, image-laden spectacles, and downright sensationalism above any depth of substance and policy consideration. Even zoomed-in candidates have built most of their campaign strategies around impressions that would capture public revival, dancing only around the razzmatazz-theatrical substance. Creates false promises and hyped claims that rip through social networks, plus much disinformation due to low levels of digital literacy among voters. There is no strong fact-checking mechanism or moral or political will or duty to hold themselves accountable for falsities, and so the political campaigns have proceeded along a comfortably obscured line of truth without any serious penalty.

The researcher confirms that, in this respect, the biggest scam would happen in South Punjab. Indeed, just as it was in other regions of the country during the 2018 elections, the indication was that money was not being evenly distributed. It was almost the difference between the rich and state resources; for organizing rallies, media coverage, and giving inducements to voters, the candidates were considered lucky. All this created an uneven playing field and an uproar against competition in the elections. The weak mechanisms in place for regulating scrutiny of campaign expenses almost certainly created room for money-intensive outcomes.

Equality and its discontents were therefore expected to articulate the criticism at least during the 2018 campaign. From a number standpoint, one could argue that there had been an absence of women's issues in the entire political discourse of South Punjab. Women were brought in only as an

image, a picture in campaign slogans or manifestos, instead of concrete commitments regarding the betterment of education, health, safety, or political participation. These structural restrictions could prevent women from showing independent actions in their electoral process: mobility restrictions, economic dependence, or patriarchal norms, whereby these instruments constrained women's participation in elections. Critics say that the political campaigns have not prepared themselves well for these challenges and instead continue to push male-centered narratives regarding leadership and power (Nazir et al., [2022](#)).

Conclusion

In general, elections held in South Punjab in 2018 showed how promises and slogans or even appeals to power would be effective tools for voter behavior. Rhetoric had marked the political campaigns with deprivation and underdevelopment, and calls for provincial autonomy; such calls resonated with the region's historical feeling of being marginalized. Indeed, the slogans of justice, change, and representation had such emotional flavoring that they could possibly convince disillusioned voters away from other political elites and failing governance, simply because these slogans themselves were too vague. Again, most of them seemed less like tying them to reality through actual mathematical policy frameworks and more in constructing a confidence- and identity-based allegiance around them.

Such strategies had been put through the test of elections, which left unfulfilled promises along truly instrumental questioning about securing political power. The year 2018 may once again see the rhetoric of inclusion and empowerment become a shaper of outcome, just as it may trigger a renewed cycle of reinvigoration that, in the name of short-term campaigning narratives, again casts long-term commitments to development into shadow. South Punjab encapsulates well how electoral politics, in Pakistan, tends to operate with populist slogans rather than structural changes, bringing forth the paradox wherein citizens continue to invest in promising changes only to find themselves caught up in an entanglement of unfulfilled hopes and shifting allegiances.

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