
**ELECTORAL POLITICS AND VOTING BEHAVIOR IN
GILGIT-BALTISTAN: AN ANALYSIS OF SKARDU (2009-
2020)**



By

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I also understand that if evidence of plagiarism is found in my thesis/dissertation at any stage, even after the award of a degree, the work may be cancelled, and the degree revoked.

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ABSTRACT

Electoral politics is the backbone of any democratic state. As defined by Abraham Lincoln, democracy is rule by people, for people and of people. No democratic state can function in its earnest without a proper system of elections. It is only through elections and free and fair elections that the people and their aspirations can be represented in the upper echelons of the power in the state. Like other parts of Pakistan, elections have been holding in Gilgit-Baltistan since 1970 though it is a disputed area and the region has no representation both in the Senate and the National assembly of Pakistan. Under GB empowerment and Self-Government Order 2009, Gilgit-Baltistan has been given a semi provincial set up with its own legislative assembly, a Chief Minister and its Cabinet. The tenure of the Assembly is five years and after every five years elections are held in GB. In the elections, the people of GB follow a unique voting behavior influenced by many factors. The status of GB also plays a very important role in determining the voting behavior and electoral politics in Baltistan from 2009 to 2020. This research is an attempt to explore and analyze the electoral politics and voting behavior of District Skardu under the lenses of three voting behavior models i.e. Colombian Model, Michigan Model and Rational-Choice model.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THESIS AND DEFENCE APPROVAL FORM.....	ii
AUTHOR’S DECLARATION.....	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....	viii
DEDICATION.....	ix
ABBREVIATIONS	x
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	12
1.1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES.....	13
1.2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	13
1.3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.....	14
1.4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY.....	15
1.5. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	15
1.6. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:.....	22
1.6.1 Colombia Model	22
1.6.2. Michigan Model	23
1. 6. 3. Rational Choice Model.....	23
1.7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:.....	24
1.7.1. Interviews:.....	24
1.7.2. Questionnaire	24
1.7.3. Secondary Sources	25
1.8. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY.....	25
CHAPTER TWO: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND, GEOGRAPHY, PEOPLE AND LANGUAGES IN GILGIT-BALTISTAN.....	26
2.1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND.....	26
2.2. THE MAQPOON FAMILY	28
2.3. ZORAWAR SINGH’S CONQUEST OF BALTISTAN	31
2.4. GILGIT BALTISTAN UNDER THE DOGRA RULE.....	31
2.5. AMRITSAR TREATY 1846.....	32
2.6. SIGNING OF INSTRUMENT OF ACCESSION AND THE REVOLT OF GB SCOUT	32
2.7. THE KARACHI AGREEMENT 1949	33
2.8. 1949 ONWARDS	33

2.9. THE ETHNIC AND LINGUISTIC DIVISION OF THE LAND AND PEOPLE.....	34
2.10. CONSTITUENCIES IN GILGIT BALTISTAN.....	36
CHAPTER THREE: HISTORY OF ELECTIONS IN GILGIT-BALTISTAN.....	39
3.1. ELECTIONS 1970.....	39
3.2. ELECTIONS 1975.....	39
3.3. ELECTIONS 1979.....	40
3.4. ELECTIONS 1983.....	40
3.5. ELECTIONS 1987.....	41
3.6. ELECTIONS 1991.....	41
3.7. ELECTIONS 1994.....	42
3.8. ELECTIONS 1999.....	42
3.9. ELECTIONS 2004.....	43
3.10. THE GILGIT-BALTISTAN EMPOWERMENT AND SELF GOVERNANCE ORDER 2009 AND ELECTIONS.....	44
3.11. ELECTIONS 2015.....	46
3.12. ELECTIONS 2020.....	48
CHAPTER FOUR: ELECTORAL POLITICS AND VOTING BEHAVIOR IN DISTRICT SKARDU.....	51
4.1. INTRODUCTION.....	51
4.2. ELECTIONS RESULTS OF SKD-I/GBLA-7 AND SKD-II/GBLA-8 2009 TO 2020.....	52
4.2.1. Elections 2009.....	52
4.2.2. 2015 Elections.....	53
4.2.3. Results of the Election 2020.....	54
CHAPTER FIVE: SOCIAL FACTORS AND THE VOTING BEHAVIOR AND ELECTORAL POLITICS IN DISTRICT SKARDU.....	56
5.1. INTRODUCTION.....	56
5.2. RELIGION.....	56
5.2.1. 1988 Tension and the beginning of All Sectarianism.....	57
5.2.2. Baltistan Prospective.....	58
5.2.3. 2012 Bus Incidents.....	60
5.2.4. Influence of Religion on the voting Behavior of Skardu:.....	61
5.3. RELATIONSHIPS.....	65
5.4. THE FAMILY.....	66
5.5. LANGUAGE.....	69
5.6. THE “SALAM DUA” FACTOR.....	69
5.7. LOCALITY.....	70
5.8. EDUCATION.....	72

5.9. CANDIDATES' PERSONALITY	74
5.10. ROLE OF WOMEN	75
CHAPTER SIX: POLITICAL PARTIES AND VOTING BEHAVIOR IN SKARDU	77
6.1. INTRODUCTION	77
6.2. POLITICAL IDEOLOGY/IDEOLOGICAL FOLLOWERS OF A PARTICULAR PARTIES	78
6.3. RULING PARTY AT THE CENTER/FEDERAL	80
CHAPTER SEVEN: PERSONAL INTERESTS AND THE VOTING BEHAVIOR	85
7.1. INTRODUCTION	85
7.2. PROMISES OF JOBS	85
7.3. THE CONSTRUCTORS	86
CHAPTER EIGHT: THE STATUS OF GILGIT-BALTISTAN AND CHANGE IN VOTING BEHAVIOR.....	88
8.1. INTRODUCTION	88
8.2. ELECTIONS ON DIFFERENT DATES AND ITS IMPACT ON VOTING BEHAVIOR	88
8.3. GB STATUS AND CHANGE IN VOTING BEHAVIOR	90
8.4. DISAPPOINTMENT WITH THE MAINSTREAM POLITICAL PARTIES OF PAKISTAN.....	92
CHAPTER NINE: FINDINGS, SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION	94
9.1. INTRODUCTION	94
9.2. FINDINGS	94
9.3. SUGGESTIONS.....	96
9.5. CONCLUSION	97
BIBLIOGRAPHY	100
Primary Sources	100
Interviews.....	100
Websites	101
Secondary Sources.....	102
Books.....	102
Articles in Books	102
Journal Articles	103
Dissertations.....	104
Newspaper.....	104
Websites	104

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DEDICATION

Every challenging work need some personal efforts as well as the special guidance and supervision of elders. I dedicate my research work to my family members especially my parents and my beloved friends. The special guidance of my seniors throughout my BS program can never be neglected. Their affection, love, moral support and their precious prayers makes me able to get success. I also dedicate my research work to my respected supervisor and all faculty members. Special Dedication to the Peace Loving and Patriotic People of Skardu.

ABBREVIATIONS

GB	Gilgit-Baltistan
SKD	Skardu
MWM	Majlisul Wahdatul Muslimeen
TJP	Tehreek -I-Jafaria Pakistan
ITP	Islami Tehreek Pakistan
TTP	Tehreek-I-Taliban Pakistan
PPP	Pakistan Peoples’ Party
PML-N	Pakistan Muslim League – Nawaz
MQM	Mutahida Qaumi Movement
PTI	Pakistan Tehreek-I-Insaf
BNF	Blawaristan National Front

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The world, consists of different political unites called state or country. A state or a country can be defined as a territory which is governed by a single government and having sovereignty. It can also be called a nation, political state or a territory. Every country has its own system of governance. It can be Monarchy, democracy, autocracy, dictatorship or any other type that exists. Democracy is the most popular system of government in the world. Why democracy is so much preferred is because it gives people the right to participate in the government either directly or through their elected representatives. In the democratic states, the representatives are elected by voting i.e. through elections. Thus the essence of democracy lies in electoral politics. People elect their representatives from their constituencies, these elected people then represent the aspirations of the people who elected him in the government/parliament. Putting in simple words, people elect the members of the parliament who then do the legislating for the country. In electing the representatives, people follow a certain trait or behavior. This behavior may differ from one population to other. For example, the voting behavior of the people of UK is different from that of people of Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Even with in a same country, people from different areas may show a different voting behavior especially in a country like Pakistan where there is a population belonging to diverse ethnic groups and follow their own particular culture, not to mention, the religious identity, economic condition and interests and political ideologies.

Gilgit Baltistan which constitutes the Northern areas of Pakistan is a unique region politically. It is the part of disputed Jammu and Kashmir. It has a unique constitutional status. Neither it contains any representation in the federal parliament of Pakistan, nor it has an autonomous setup like that of Azad Kashmir. Before 2009, it was called the FANA (Federally

Administrated Northern Areas of Pakistan). In 2009, it was given a provincial status leading to the establishment of Gilgit Baltistan Legislative Assembly and a Government led by a Chief Minister but with limited power.

People of GB has been participating in the electoral politics for a long time. But after the GB Self-Government and empowerment Order 2009, a sharp change in the voting behavior was witnessed. This study is an attempt to investigate the voting behavior and electoral politics of District Skardu in Gilgit Baltistan region. Though the district contains four constituencies, but in this research, only constituencies GBLA-7/SKD-I and GBLA-8/SKD-II has been brought under investigation.

In this study, the researcher has attempted to find out the behavior and electoral politics of District Skardu. Also, which voting behavior model/theory is more suited to define the voting behavior of the people of District Skardu and also the researcher has attempted to predict what kind of change can be expected in the voting behavior and electoral politics of Skardu.

1.1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this research are as followings:

Primary Objective:

- To investigate the Voting Behavior of the people of District Skardu.

Secondary Objective:

- To find out the determinants and the extent of impact of these determinants of voting behavior of the people of district Skardu on the electoral politics.
- To investigate the influence of the unique status of GB on the electoral politics in District Skardu.
- To predict possible future change in the voting behavior and electoral politics in district Skardu.

1.2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Followings are the questions the researcher will try to answer in this thesis:

Primary Question:

- What is the voting behavior of people of District Skardu?

Secondary Questions:

- What are the determinants of voting behavior and the extent to which these determinants impact the electoral politics in district Skardu.
- How does the unique constitutional status of Gilgit-Baltistan impact the voting behavior in district Skardu?
- What kind of change can be predicted regarding voting behavior in the future in District Skardu?

1.3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The study of electoral politics and voting behavior is of the great importance in any democracy and has emerged to be a significant field of research for scholars. This study is an attempt to understand the electoral politics and voting behavior in Gilgit-Baltistan focusing on district Skardu. In this study, the researcher aims to uncover the voting trends in district Skardu from 2009 to 2020 and also will try to connect the relation between the electoral politics and voting behavior to the unique constitutional and political status of Gilgit-Baltistan and state of Pakistan while making a case study of district Skardu.

1.4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is of great importance due to the unique constitutional status of Gilgit-Baltistan in the state of Pakistan. Though, numerous research works have been conducted in the field of electoral politics and voting behavior in all over the world, but such research has not been conducted in district Skardu. Given its unique constitutional and political condition, not only this work will be a significant contribution to the overall study of electoral politics and voting behavior but also will unlock further study in the field of electoral politics and voting behavior and overall study of behavioral politics relating to Gilgit-Baltistan.

1.5. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the following paragraphs, the literature selected is summarized.

Sajjad Ali, while investigating the voting behavior in Ghanche district, Gilgit Baltistan, reached to the conclusion that the party affiliation did not played any significant role in the 2015 elections though the candidates participated in it representing a political party. Ali argued that the religious factor, or more precisely the sectarian factor (to which sect the candidate belongs to) plays the detrimental role in electoral decision making of the people of Ghanche. Few voted in accordance with their family elders' wishes especially females. He also argued that the voters were seemingly more rational in their political decision making. They either relied on other's judgments regarding the party and candidate or "on the pattern of personal associations" to understand and make decisions in the electoral/political process.¹

Muhammad Shakeel Ahmed in his PhD Dissertation has pointed out towards the importance and authority of the local strongmen in electoral politics. The political candidates instead of contacting the local population by going door to door they would court 'big man' who would

¹ Sajjad Ali, "Electoral Politics and Voting Behavior in Gilgit-Baltistan: A Case Study of District Ghanche," M.Phil. diss., (NIPS, 2019).

brought them five hundred or even a thousand votes. So he has argued that in Pakistani politics not the individual but the local leader or the community spokesman is the basic electoral unit. He also challenges the influence of political party as being minimal and people are more leader oriented and they would vote to acquire patronage rather than voting on the basis of issues pertaining the nation or any kind of manifesto. He also has emphasized the role of *biradari* and *khel* in determining the voting behavior of the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He also reached to the conclusion that the matters and issues relating to the local area has more significance as the determinant of voting behavior compared to the national matters and issues².

In his study he categorizes the voters in five groups, the civic voters voting on party basis with a partisan view over different issues; the client voter, belonging to feudal areas voting as they are instructed by their feudal lords as they are dependent on them; the maverick voter, who votes to acquire patronage and lastly the primary voter who voted on ethnic and sectarian identity line.³

Ahmad Sabat in his M.Phil. Dissertation has argued that people would vote for the person who most likely going to win the elections and the person who is going to solve their issues. The religious affairs of the candidates does not play any important role in the electoral politics and “the concept of vote for delivery or patron-client relation is governing the voting behavior in Vehari.” Sabat agrees with Shakeel Ahmed that the party does not play any major role because people are not ideologically attached to any party. The party who successfully secures strong personalities would win the election.⁴

In an article published in Pakistan Journal of Society, Education and Language, it has been concluded that the family background have the decisive influence on voting behavior in NA-

² Muhammad Shakeel Ahmed, “Electoral Politics in NWFP. 1988-1999,” PhD diss., (NIPS, 2010).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ahmed Sabat, “People's Choice in General Elections: Electoral Politics and Voting Behavior in Veheri District” M.Phil. diss., (NIPS, 2013).

34, Lower Dir, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It also argues that religion is used to attract people and the communication skills of the candidates also play an important role in voting behavior of the people. Moreover, besides *Khanism* playing the decisive role in voting behavior, the khans does not give space to other candidates as well.⁵

Rahman, Said, Ahmad, Kashif and Hassan in their article titled Family as a Voting Determinant in 2013 General Elections has analyzed the influence of family on the voting behavior. According to their findings, decline in age causes the influence of family in voting behavior to diminish in district Buner. 32.2% of Voters between the ages of 18 to 30 years, decided not to vote on family lines according to this research paper. The research indicated that out of 306 respondents, only 80 (26.14%) favored voting on family lines while 119 (38.88%) did not do so.⁶

Analyzing the voting behavior in district Faisalabad, Shawar and Asim found that the political loyalty has much weak influence over peoples' choice in elections. Caste system plays much important role in the outcome of an election in Faisalabad. While also acknowledging the influence of campaigns, party slogans and various economic factors, the research concluded the major influence of *Biradarism* as more than fifty five percent of the respondents voted for the candidate belonging to their own *biradari* or cast.⁷

In a research conducted in Buner District of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Said, Rahman and Yousufi analyzed the impact of religion on the voting behavior where they found that the electors do consider the role of Ulema (religious Scholars) necessary in politics as majority (207 out of

⁵ Saeed Gul and Dr. Waseem Khan, "Voting Behavior in Elections 2013: A Case Study of Dir Lower (NA-34): Preferences and Priorities," *Pakistan Journal of Society, Education and Language* 3, no. 1 (2017): 70.

⁶ Dr. Aziz Ur Rahman et al., "Family as a Voting Determinant in 2013 General Elections," *Elementary Education Online* 20, no. 5 (2021): 2799, doi: 10.17051/ilkonline.2021.05.304.

⁷ Durre-E-Shawar and Muhammad Asim, "Voting Behavior of People towards Different Political Parties in District Faisalabad, Pakistan," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 3, no. 2 (2012): 90, doi: 10.5901/mjss.2012.v3n2.85.

306) agreed with the necessity of Ulema participating in politics. Also out of 306, 209 participants showed the desire for the establishment of Islamic system. But, according to this particular paper, the role of religion significantly diminished when it came to the 2013 elections as when the participants were asked about the extent they considered religion in their choice in election, only 114 (37.25%) voted on the religious line indicating the fact that people do not really bother to give any importance to the religious affairs of the candidate.⁸

M. Javaid Akhtar, Sajid Mahmood Awan and Shuja-ul-Haq has been critical of different social scientists who have worked on the voting behavior of Pakistan. These researchers have analyzed the response of social scientists to elections of Pakistan and found that neither of the scientists have applied quantitative method in analyzing the voting behavior and have relied only on narration and facts. The paper also claimed that not a single social scientist had tried to use any kind of model or approach nor succeeded in constructing any design to evaluate the voting behavior of people of Pakistan. The paper further argues that in the study of this particular field the social scientists have not used an approach to “determine the nature of correlation between different variables which are most important to understand the phenomenon except Andrew Wilder.” These researchers have pointed towards the need for “conscious thinking” by focusing on the methods like “political inquiry, case studies, comparative approach, grounded theory and other appendages of them to establish general empirical propositions.”⁹

Many scholars are of the view that partisanship plays the most significant role in voting behavior. While investigating voting behavior in Punjab, Wilder has discovered that partisanship plays a detrimental role only in the urban Punjab. He also has challenged the

⁸ Mian Gul Said, Aziz Ur Rahman and Musab Yousufi, “The Impact of Religion on Voting Behavior,” *Humanities and Social Sciences Reviews* 9, no. 2 (2021): 22, <https://doi.org/10.18510/hssr.2021.922>.

⁹ M. Javaid Akhtar, Sajid Mahmood Awan and Shuja-ul-Haq, “Elections of Pakistan and Response of Social Scientists: A Study of Theoretical Understandings,” *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences* 30, no. 2 (2010): 464.

notion of social factors being the determinant of voting behavior and argued that only the political determinants have influence over the voting behavior in Punjab.¹⁰

While discussing the voting behavior in Spain during 1970s and 1980s, Ignacio Lago has reached to the conclusion that voters' choice is based on heuristics (extrapolations from the previous election) rather than rational expectation.¹¹

Some scholars are of the view that the educated and uneducated act differently in elections. In an Article published in the "The News", Dr. Tariq Rehman while pointing towards the different voting behavior of educated and uneducated has argued that the educated class have no desire to stand in long queues to cast their votes. According to him, uneducated class cast their votes rationally while the educated do not do so. The educated class vote for the acquirement of jobs and education while the uneducated prefer to vote for their basic needs such as health centers, provision of electricity and gas and money.¹²

Muhammad Waseem in his book "Democratization in Pakistan: A study of 2002 elections has argued that Michigan, Columbian and Downsian theories are applicable to the electoral process and voting behavior in urban and rural areas of Pakistan because these approaches mostly cover all determinants and factors influencing the people of Pakistan in their participation in electoral politics.¹³

In a research conducted in Punjab province, it is argued that the connection of a candidate appearing in local government elections with the ruling provincial and national party plays the major role. According to this particular paper, majority of people opted to vote to the candidate

¹⁰ Andrew R. Wilder, *The Pakistani Voter: Electoral Politics and Voting Behavior in the Punjab* (Karachi: Oxford University Press. 1999).

¹¹ Ignacio Lago, "Rational Expectations or Heuristics? Strategic Voting in Proportional Representation Systems," *Party Politics* 14, no. 1 (2014): 44, doi: 10.1177/1354068807083822.

¹² Dr. Tariq Rehman, "Rational Voting," *The News*, October 10, 2002.

¹³ Muhammad Waseem, *Democratization in Pakistan: A study of 2002 elections* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2006).

who had more connections to the upper level government (i.e. to the provincial or national government) in the local elections because people strongly believed that candidates with solid connections to the upper level government members can ensure the delivery of services which does not particularly falls with in local government circle rather are provincial government's responsibility.¹⁴

Kishwar Munir in her PhD dissertation has analyzed the voting behavior in Lahore and its surroundings. Focusing on elections from 2008 to 2013, she found out that people's support for political parties has went through a change over time yet the support patterns remained consistent as in both elections PML-N remained the leading party indicating its strong roots in Lahore city while on the other hand, a surge in PTI's support has been witnessed amongst upper and middle class areas and PPP had lost its presence completely. She argues that neither *Biradari* (except in some of urban-rural periphery of Lahore city) nor candidate loyalty played any major role. According to her, the major determinant in both elections in Lahore was "the party or the party identification."¹⁵

While discussing the electoral politics in North West Frontier Province of India (now known as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) during the years 1946 and 1947, Dr. Fazl Rabbi, Amanullah Memon and Shakeel Ahmed has emphasized on the influence of religion in influencing the NWFP population. Before the referendum, congress and khudai Khidmatgars were too strong in the province under discussion and in both general elections held before 1947's referendum, congress performed extremely well even though it was a Muslim majority province. But, the affiliation of Khudai Khitmatgar with the congress (as khudai khitmatgars were blamed to be agents of Hindus and enemies of Islam) and the notion of Islam in Danger, was successfully

¹⁴ Asad Liaqat et al., "Political Connections and Vote Choice: Evidence from Pakistan," (September 13, 2019), 29.

¹⁵ Kishwar Munir, "Electoral politics of Lahore City: Voting Behavior Analysis of General Elections 2008-2013," PhD. Diss., (University of Punjab, 2019).

used in influencing the Pushtoons. Furthermore, the Hindu-Muslim riots during that time also played an important role in influencing the voting behavior in the region as Muslim League exploited all the religious factors which successfully effected the voting trend amongst the people as they considered defending Islam to be their secret duty and thus resulting in huge support for Muslim league's ideology and demand for Pakistan and also opting to join the dominion of Pakistan.¹⁶

In a research article, three scholars investigating the voting behavior of educated youth in Multan, has argued that while the influence of biradari has diminished amongst the educated youth, but the family bond remained strong as the youth were psychologically impressed by the partisanship of their parents and strongly believed that their vote can bring change for the betterment of the country as well. The research also indicates to the significance of party identification as there were few who voted on party lines. Also, there were a significant number of youth who did not voted to the same party as they considered their performance power when they were given the chance previously.¹⁷

In another article it is argued that the caste and biradari still exert significance influence in the electoral politics of rural areas but the same cannot be said regarding the urban areas as the situation has changed due to main stream media and social media playing a significant role in spreading awareness amongst the population resulting to the weakening of the influence of feudal lords. Political partisanship, has been concluded, to a very strong determinant in Pakistan as well.¹⁸

¹⁶ Muhammad Shakeel Ahmad, Amanullah Memon, Fazal Rabbi "Electoral Politics in the North West Frontier Province of Colonial India," *History and Sociology of South Asia* 8, no. 1 (2014): 19, doi: 10.1177/2230807513506625.

¹⁷ Lubna Kanwal, Abdul Razzaq Shahid and Mahwish Naeem, "Voting Behavior of Educated Youth In Pakistan: A Study Of Multan City," *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan* 53, no. 2 (2016): 101.

¹⁸ Fakhta Zeib, Muhammad Hassaan Zubair and Kashaf Abdul Razaq, "Determinants of Voting Behavior in Pakistan," *Psychology and Education* 59, no. 1 (2022): 186.

In a research paper published in Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences, it is revealed that a large portion of people (about 50%) with higher income (above 15000 per month) do not bother to participate in electoral process. Though people belonging to lower to middle income group (not more than 15000) participated highly in elections (73.50%).¹⁹

This research is a case study of district Skardu of Gilgit-Baltistan. No such research has been conducted in this region so it is very important to uncover the electoral politics and voting behavior of district Baltistan in order to increase the scope of the literature.

1.6. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

There are number of theories regarding the electoral politics and voting behavior like the retrospective theory of democracy, the party linkage model, the spatial model etc. In this research, the Michigan Model, Colombia Model and Rational Choice model has been applied.

1.6.1 Colombia Model

The Colombia Model was the first ever study made regarding the electoral politics and voting behavior. In this model, presented in the book *People's choice* later followed by another landmark work called *Voting*, argues that social factors play the most significant role in the molding of the voting behavior. "These social characteristics includes citizen's class status, citizen's racial or religious identification, the region of country a citizen lives in and whether they reside in urban or rural area."²⁰

¹⁹ Muhammad Azhar, Omer Farooq Zain and Muhammad Asif, "The Impact of Income over Voting Behavior in the South Punjab: An Empirical Study of Pakistan's General Election 2008," *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences* 30, no. 2 (2010): 352.

²⁰ Vincent L. Hutchings and Hakeem J. Jefferson, "The Sociological and Social-Psychological Approaches," in *The Routledge Handbook of Elections, Voting Behavior and Public Opinion* ed. J. Fisher et al. (Oxon: Routledge, 2018), 57.

1.6.2. Michigan Model

The Michigan model, also known as party identification model emphasizes on the role of political party as the decisive determinant in the electoral politics and voting behavior. This model was first presented in the book *American voter* where the researchers involved in the book argued that the attachment of a person to a political party is “the result of pre-adult socialization” rather than “issue preferences and ideological principles.” In other words, the source of party identification typically develops in mid-late childhood mostly due to “parental influence”.²¹

The argument presented in the *American voter* can be summed up into three points. “First, the Michigan scholars argued that people identify psychologically with political parties just as they do with religious, class, racial, and ethnic groups. Second, identification with a political party should be viewed as a long-term component of the political system and therefore this identification should persist even when people vote for a candidate representing the opposing party. Lastly, party identification is powerful not merely for its direct effects on vote choice, but also for its indirect influence on attitudes associated with the vote. These attitudes include evaluations of the major party candidates, the issues of the day, and the political parties.”²²

1. 6. 3. Rational Choice Model

The rational choice model or political economy models, states that the voters as well as the politicians act in pursuit of their economic interests. In other words, people vote for the

²¹ Angus Campbell et al., *The American voter* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980).

²² Hutchings and Jefferson, “The Sociological”, 62.

candidate or the party whose ideology falls closest to their own (as in spatial model), where their and their families' interests can be fulfilled at the best.²³

1.7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

This research is of both qualitative and quantitative in nature. The primary data has been collected through interviews and questionnaires while for secondary data books, research articles, news articles, government statistic data and other sources falling in this category has been used.

1.7.1. Interviews:

The researcher has interviewed more than twenty people belonging to different fields of life. All of the interviewees either belonged to the constituency GBLA-7/SKD-I or GBLA-8/SKD-II. The nature of the questions asked in the interview were Semi-Constructed. Though the discussion would start with few structured questions, but with the passage of time, the discussion would be more open where the interviewees would expressed freely their thoughts and what they feel about the electoral politics.

The researcher used, diary to note down the interviews and also used mobile phone to record the interview as well.

1.7.2. Questionnaire

In this research, questionnaire survey method was used. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. One part where the questions asked were to be answered in Yes or No and another part having options Strongly agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. The Questionnaire contained a comment box where the participants were asked to write their

²³ Keith Dowding, "Rational Choice Theory and Voting," in *The Routledge Handbook of Elections, Voting Behavior and Public Opinion* ed. J. Fisher et al. (Oxon: Routledge, 2018), 71.

opinion regarding the electoral politics. There were two comment boxes with the questions: Can You explain how the status of Gilgit-Baltistan played a role in your Voting behavior and Also about the answers you have given above or any other thing you want to tell regarding elections and voting behavior?" and the other comment box had the question "Can you write something that what you believe how the status of GB is impacting the voting behavior and also what kind of change you think will happen to the voting behavior of People of GB. Also tell us about your answer and why did you answer the questionnaire the way you have?"

In this survey 300 people had participated amongst which 60.4% belonged to GBLA-8/SKD-II and 39.6% belonged to GBLA-7/SKD-I. 69.3% of the participants were male while the remaining out of 100% were female. Amongst these 300, only 39 people attempted the comment boxes.

1.7.3. Secondary Sources

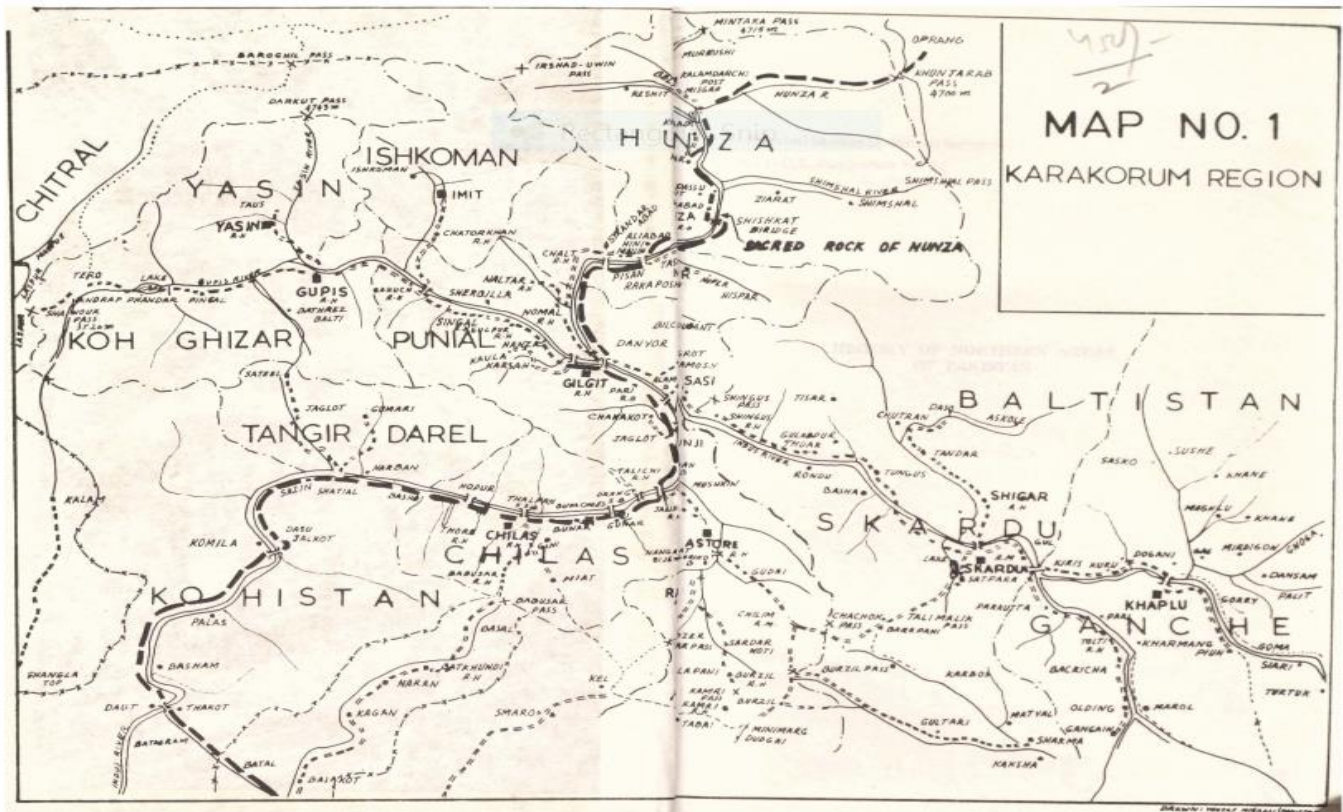
For secondary sources, books, articles in books, journal articles, Newspapers and websites has been used having information related to the research undertaken.

1.8. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

District Skardu consists four constituencies but this research will only include two constituencies i.e. Skardu-I/GBLA-7 and Skardu-II/GBLA-8. The reason behind only targeting the two constituencies is because of lack of resources and transport issues to collect both primary data and secondary data from the other two constituencies. Secondly, as this research heavily depends upon primary data collected through questionnaires and interviews, the results depends upon the willingness of the people to participate in the interviews and to what extend they would share their "true" opinion and feelings regarding voting behavior and electoral politics.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND, GEOGRAPHY, PEOPLE AND LANGUAGES IN GILGIT-BALTISTAN

2.1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND



(Map copied from the book History of Northern Areas of Pakistan)²⁴

Here it is “where the three Empires meet.” That is how E.F. Knight said about the land of Gilgit-Baltistan.²⁵ Surrounded by gigantic mountainous ranges, this region, for most of history remained cut off from the outside world. But it does not makes it any less interesting subject to study. This region homes to great dynasties, cultures, languages and traditions which intrigues researchers. Though the story of this small region is not much known but it is an extremely interesting journey as it is related to the region of utmost significance.²⁶

²⁴ Dr. Ahmed Hasan Dani, *History of Northern Areas of Pakistan* (Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, 1991).

²⁵ Ibid., 1.

²⁶ Ibid., 2.

As E.F. Knight said, this is where three empires meet. As the region providing a buffer zone for the British Empire and Russian Empire and at the North of it lied the Chinese Empire. Today it is surrounded by the Peoples' republic of China, Afghanistan, India and is under the administrative control of Pakistan (As the region is a disputed area between India and Pakistan).

According to the available literature, in Baltistan and adjacent region, there was a kingdom called "Palulo"²⁷ from the beginning of fifth century. It is not known when this kingdom was established, but it was indeed a powerful kingdom where its bordered Darel towards west.²⁸ In letter researches, it is stated that Palulo was divided into two parts. One is called Larger or Greater Palulo which was the name of now known as Baltistan, and the other part as smaller or lesser Baltistan consisting of Gilgit, Hunza and Nagar. While according to the documents of Tang Dynasty (618 to 907), Greater Palulo was Baltistan and Lesser Palulo included Gilgit and Yaseen.²⁹ According to Hussainabadi, both Palulos were under the rule of Chinese Empire. The ruler of Greater Palulo was bestowed the title of "Wang" by the Chinese Emperor.

Both the Palulos remained under Chinese Empire till 720 because during this time, the area went under the Tibetan kingdom.³⁰ In 721, The Tibetan Kingdom's army successfully conquered the Grater Palulo and the King of Palulo fled to lesser Palulo.³¹ In 722, Tibetan Army attacked Lesser Palulo as well. The Palulo king asked the Chinese Empire for help who sent an army of four thousand strength to help the Palulo king. Not only the Tibetan army was defeated but the newly conquered land by Tibetan kingdom was recaptured as well. After that, for years, Tibetan kingdom did not dear to attack the region.³²

²⁷ Chamman Lal Datta, *General Zorawar Singh; His Life and Achievements in Ladakh, Baltistan and Tibet* (New Delhi: Deep and Depp Publications, 1984), 46.

²⁸ Muhammad Yusuf Hussainabadi, *Tareekh-I-Baltistan* (Skardu: Baltistan Book Deput and Publications, 2019), 55.

²⁹ Ibid., 56

³⁰ Dani, *History of Northern Areas*, 161.

³¹ Hussainabadi, *Tareekh-I-Baltistan*, 60.

³² Ibid., 60

Later in 737, The Tibetan King Kri-Lde-Gsug-Srtsan attacked the Lesser Palulo. Even though the Chinese empire again aided the Lesser Palulo, but they were defeated. After that, the Tibetan called the Lesser Palulo Brushaal. In the records of Tibetans, the name Palulo was never used. They called Greater Palulo as *Balti* and Lesser Palulo as *Brushaal* which was the regional name of the areas.³³ Though the Tibetans conquered the Palulo, but instead of sending their own rulers or disposing the local rulers, they kept the local rulers in power. Thus, though under the Tibetan kingdom, the region was ruled by the local rulers of Palulo.

According to the historian, the area came under different rulers. Sometimes under Chinese who attacked and took it from Tibetan Empire, and the Tibetan Empire took it back. And for sometime remained under the Kings of Kashmir. But whenever, the Empires which were ruling over Baltistan were weakened, Baltistan would separate herself from the rule of outsiders. This also indicates that Palulo was not militarily a strong Kingdom.

It was during these times the name of the region went under change. For instance, the Muslims called it Balor, though it is not confirmed that by Balor did they meant Greater Palulo or Lesser Palulo. Because, the local people never used that word for themselves. In Kashmiri records, it was called *Balti yul* means name of Baltees. It is evident that the people living in this area called themselves Balti and the language they spoke was also Balti. Later, the area came to be known as *Tibet-I-khurd* meaning the small Tibet while Ladakh was called *Tibet-I-Kabeer* means the Big Tibet. After that, the area derived its Persian name as “Baltistan” which means the land of Baltees.

2.2. THE MAQPOON FAMILY

According to Hussainabadi, one of the Generals of Genghis Khan remained in Skardu. He became the ruler but did not had any son but only one daughter. His daughter married a person

³³ Ibid., 61

called Ibrahim, who came to Skardu (he was not a local Balti). Much has been discussed about the origin of Ibrahim in Hussainabadi's *Tareekh-I-Baltistan*. The word Maqpoon is derived from the word *Maqpa* which means son-in-law. The reason behind the ruling family of Tibet-I-Khurd being called Maqpoon was because of this event of Ibrahim, who himself and his decedents became Rajas, was because of this marriage.³⁴

As we discussed earlier, Baltistan was not militarily strong but things changed during Maqpoon dynasty especially Shair Ali Khan Anchan. Shair Ali Khan Anchan not only brought the whole Baltistan under his control (it is stated in the history books that whenever the Rajas of Skardu would weaken, the Amacha (ruling dynasty of Shiger), Yabgo (ruling dynasty of Khaplu) and other Rajas would separate their area from the rule of Skardu Raja and whenever the Skardu Rajas became strong, they would submit to him)³⁵ but also brought Ladakh (Tibat-I-Kabeer) under his rule. After some time he also conquered Chitral and Chilas as well.³⁶ When his land reached to the borders of Kashmir, which was then under the Mughals, it highly displeased the Mughals. The Mughals during the Akbar era did sent envoys to Anchan and one of Anchan's daughters was married to Prince Saleem, but the relation deteriorated in the year 1012.³⁷ Especially during Jahangir Era, number of times the Mughal tried to dethrone Anchan but Anchan successfully held the Mughal army back not even letting them to enter the borders of Baltistan.³⁸³⁹

The last Maqpoon Raja was Ahmed Shah. He assumed the throne on 1800 till 1840.⁴⁰ In 1799, Ranjit Singh established his rule in Punjab. After defeating Afghans, he conquered Kashmir

³⁴ Ibid., 74-75.

³⁵ Ibid., 89.

³⁶ Maulvi Hashmatullah Lucknowi, *Mukhtasar Tareekh-I-Jammu wa Kashmir* (Jammu: J K book House, 1992), 294-295.

³⁷ Hussainabadi, *Tareekh-I-Baltistan*, 92-93

³⁸ Ibid., 93-94.

³⁹ Lucknowi, *Tareekh-I-Jammu*, 296-297.

⁴⁰ Hussainabadi, *Tareekh-I-Baltistan*, 134.

and thus the borders of Sikh Empire had now met with Baltistan.⁴¹ Ahmad Shah had sense danger from Sikh Empire. So, he tried to establish relations with British East India Company to deter any danger from the Sikh Empire.⁴² But, EIC never gave any attention to Ahmad Shah's requests. Many times, he tried to show his fealty towards British. However, he failed to attract British attention to protect his territory from any kind of Sikh possible invasion.

The invasion of Sikh empire to Baltistan started as early as in 1831-33 but was repelled by Balti army.⁴³ The reason behind the attack is said to be because of Ahmed Shah's activities to engage the British.⁴⁴ This angered Ranjit Singh and his son Sher Singh, who was the Governor of Kashmir and made the first attempt.

On the other hand, Ahmed shah's relation with the Raja of Kharmang, Sher Ali Khan, was deteriorating. Since, Kharmang was under influence of Raja of Skardu (Ahmad Shah – though different areas had their own Raja but they all obeyed The Raja of Skardu – Ahmed's rule consisted of Skardu, Kharmang, Shiger, Khaplu, Rondu, Shingo Shiger and Astore), Ahmed Shah was angry over Sher Ali Khan due to his arrogant behavior. Ahmed Shah's daughter, Shah Jahan Begum was also married to Sher Ali Khan but they had no child. So, the Raja of kharmang married Sayyid Hussain Kharmang's Daughter Fizza Begum. Much angered by this developments, Ahmed Shah send his oldest son Murad Shah to conquer Kharmang. Sher Ali Khan fled and took refuge in Ladakh.⁴⁵ While returning from Kharmang, Shah Murad, a very bright and intelligent man, died due to fever. Later, by the request of Shah Jahan begum, Sher Ali Khan was allowed to returned to Kharmang which proved to be a costly decision as Sher Ali Khan helped Zorawar Singh to conquer Baltistan later.

⁴¹ Ibid., 138.

⁴² Datta, *General Zorawar Singh*, 48.

⁴³ Ibid., 49.

⁴⁴ Hussainabadi, *Tareekh-I-Baltistan*, 138.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 140.

2.3. ZORAWAR SINGH'S CONQUEST OF BALTISTAN

Later, Ranjit Singh impressed by Gulab Singh appointed him as the ruler of Kashmir (the Dogra Rule in Jammu & Kashmir).⁴⁶ During this time, instead of his elder son Muhammad Shah, Ahmed Shah appointed Muhammad Shah's step brother Muhammad Ali Khan as the successor to the throne.⁴⁷ Angered by this development Muhammad Shah ran and took refuge in the care of Wazir Zorawar Singh. Zorawar sent him in the care of Glafo Tandof Namgel.⁴⁸ Later, Ahmed Shah captured Muhammad Shah which was equal to declaring war of Dogras. And thus Zorawar Singh, wrote a letter to Ahmed Shah and when Ahmed Shah did not reply he started the invasion of Baltistan. Though they had marched but it was difficult for Zorawar Singh to cross the Indus river because the bridge was destroyed by the Balti army (this all took place in areas of Kharmang, since the research is not related to the history thus it has been highly shortened). But with the Help of Raja of Kharmang, the invading army successfully made an ice bridge and crossed the Indus river. Later, after some chains of clashes with the Balti army, Ahmed shah was surrounded in his Karpocho fort.⁴⁹⁵⁰⁵¹⁵² After some deceitful acts of Raja of Kharmang, Ahmed Shah was captured and the independent rule of Baltistan came to an end.⁵³⁵⁴

2.4. GILGIT BALTISTAN UNDER THE DOGRA RULE

The Dogras after capturing Gilgit-Baltistan, did not ruled here directly. Instead, left the local rulers but established a Wazir-E-Wizarat who was the representative of The Dogras in GB. Zorawar, after the annexing Baltistan, installed Muhammad shah as the ruler of Baltistan. From this point, though Baltistan (as well as Gilgit) were ruled by the local rulers, but all the local

⁴⁶ Ibid., 141.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 140-141.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 183.

⁴⁹ Dani, *History of Northern Areas*, 248-251.

⁵⁰ Datta, *General Zorawar Singh*, 53-55.

⁵¹ Hussainabadi, *Tareekh-I-Baltistan*, 183-189.

⁵² Lucknowi, *Tareekh-I-Jammu*, 298-300.

⁵³ Datta, *General Zorawar Singh*, 55.

⁵⁴ Hussainabadi, *Tareekh-I-Baltistan*, 193.

rulers was obedient to the Sikh Dogra Raja at Srinagar.⁵⁵⁵⁶ After the death of Ranjit Singh, 1839 a war broke out between Sikh and British in 1845 and by March 1846, Sikh empire was defeated. Gulab Singh switched his loyalty and structured a deal with the British.⁵⁷

2.5. AMRITSAR TREATY 1846

On 16 March 1846, a treaty was signed between Hari Singh and the British Government of India comprising of 10 Articles. In this treaty, the First article states that, “The Government of British moved to Gulab Singh and acquires whole alpine state in the view of treaty of Lahore” and Article IV which expressed that the restrictions of the region “shall not at any time be changed without the concurrence of the British Government.”⁵⁸ In general, British government recognized GB being a part of Jammu & Kashmir Princely state and sold the area to Hari Singh for 7500000 Rupees⁵⁹. It is also important to mention that the Gilgit Wizarat was leased to British government in 1935.

2.6. SIGNING OF INSTRUMENT OF ACCESSION AND THE REVOLT OF GB SCOUT

After the events that disclosed in the wake of partition, Kashmir became the first flash point between Pakistan and India. By 24th of August 1947 communal riots had spread to Kashmir. To help their Muslim brothermen and liberate Kashmir, a Lashkar of tribesmen had entered Kashmir on 24th of October. Indian Chief was informed by Pakistani GHQ that 5000 Tribesmen has entered Kashmir.⁶⁰ Threatened by advancing Lashkar, Hari Singh, the Maharaja of

⁵⁵ Dani, *History of Northern Areas*, 249.

⁵⁶ Hussainabadi, *Tareekh-I-Baltistan*, 231.

⁵⁷ Martin Sokefeld, “Anthropology of Gilgit-Baltistan: Introduction.” *EthnoScripts* 16, no. 1, (2014): 10.

⁵⁸ Mohmad Ashraf Khaja. “Treaty Of Amritsar In Retrospect: The Validity, Legitimization And Its Subsequent Repercussions On The People Of Kashmir.” *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 77 (2016): 338–347. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26552659>.

⁵⁹ Sokefeld, “Anthropology,” 13.

⁶⁰ Ishtiaq Ahmed, *The Pakistan Garrison State: Origins, Evolution, Consequences 1947-2011* (Stockholm: Oxford University Press, 2013), 82.

Kashmir, asked help from India and eventually, according to India, signed the Instrument of accession in 27th of October. Indian army was flown in Kashmir and they started to push back the Lashkar. Later in May 1948, Pak army also entered to fight alongside the Lashkar.⁶¹ Meanwhile, the GB scout had revolted against the Dogra rule. Though many take credit for liberating GB from Dogra Rule, but according to Dani, it was solely done by the people of Gilgit Baltistan and GB scouts.⁶², first gaining independence in Gilgit and in 1949 Baltistan was also freed. Later GB also acceded to Pakistan.

2.7. THE KARACHI AGREEMENT 1949

After 15 days of independence, the GB leaders asked Jinnah for the accession of GB to Pakistan.⁶³ Thus a political agent, named Sardar Alam, was sent to GB who imposed FCR in GB.⁶⁴ Later in 1949, President of Azad Jammu & Kashmir signed an agreement to transfer the administrative control of GB to Pakistan. This agreement is known as Karachi agreement. In this agreement, there was no representation from GB.⁶⁵

2.8. 1949 ONWARDS

GB remained under FCR till 1972. During this time, due to strengthening of relations between Pakistan and China, the areas of Shamsal and Raskam was given to China under Sino-Pakistan border agreement 1962.⁶⁶ It is very interesting that if GB is really a disputed territory, why such agreement was made with China.

⁶¹ Ibid., 86.

⁶² Dani, *History of Northern Areas*, 338.

⁶³ Syed Muhammad Abbas Mosavi, "Gilgit-Baltistan and the Ongoing Politics of Ambiguity." In *Society and politics of Jammu and Kashmir*, ed. Serena Hussain, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 100.

⁶⁴ Syeda Naila, "Gilgit Baltistan and Kashmir Two separate units or one unit: An Analysis of the Position of Different Stakeholders" M.Phil. diss., (NIPS, 2020), 38.

⁶⁵ Mosavi, "Gilgit-Baltistan and the Ongoing" 101.

⁶⁶ Ibid.,

The Northern areas known as FANA (Federally Administrated Northern Areas) remain under a bureaucratic rule. In 2009, the Gilgit Baltistan Empowerment and self-rule order came giving GB a nominal provincial setup. Later, the order was passed in eighteenth amendment.

Till today, GB has not yet become a full fledged province of Pakistan. Even though it has been given its own provincial setup, still the bureaucratic dominance in the region remains. GB has no representation in National Assembly and the senate of Pakistan alienating it from the mainstream politics of Pakistan. Lack of self-rule and no participation of GB in the mainstream politics of the country has raised a sense of hatred and despair towards the state of Pakistan amongst the people of GB which needs to be addressed immediately.

2.9. THE ETHNIC AND LINGUISTIC DIVISION OF THE LAND AND PEOPLE

The population of Gilgit-Baltistan contains number of ethnic groups who lived in harmony and fought together for independence against the Dogras. There were inter-marriages among different religious-ethnic groups and they lived in peace and harmony. The people are extremely peace loving by nature and their loyalty were to their ethnic and tribal identity rather than religious identity⁶⁷. However, from 1980s, due to the rise in sectarian violence, this harmony is no more that strong as it used to be and people are now denoted by their religious identity rather than ethnic or tribal identity.

The main languages spoken in Gilgit Baltistan are Balti, Shina in many local varieties, Burushaski, Wakhi and Khowar.⁶⁸ Additionally, Punjabi Hindko, Gujri, and Pashto is also spoken in the area by the people who migrated to Gilgit Baltistan.⁶⁹ Urdu, the national language

⁶⁷ Muhammad Feyyaz, "Sectarian Conflict in Gilgit-Baltistan." *Discussion Paper*, (Islamabad: PILDAT, 2011), 13.

⁶⁸ Sokefeld, "Anthropology," 10.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

of Pakistan serves as the lingua franca among the people of Gilgit-Baltistan and English is the language of its education similar to Pakistan.⁷⁰

Burushaski: this language is spoken primarily by the people of Hunza, Nagar and Yasin.⁷¹

Balti: Balti language is the native language of ethnic Balti people. It is highly spoken in Baltistan Division of Pakistan (though it is the language of ethnic Balti people so it is also spoken by the Tibet people including Ladakh, Baltistan and even in Xinjiang province of China). In Baltistan division, it is majorly spoken in Skardu, Kharmang, Shigar, Kahplu, Gultari and Mashabrum.⁷² Also it is spoken in Roundu as well but Shina is also spoken in many areas of Roundu but the majority of the people of Roundu can understand and speak both Shina and Balti.

Shina: “Shina is spoken in Gilgit, Diamer, Chilas, Astore, Roundu, Punial, Gahkuch, Tangir and Darel.”⁷³

Khowar: “Khowar is spoken in Gupis and Ishkoman mainly. However, it is also so spoken in some parts of Yasin and Puniyal as well.”⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Ibid., 10.

⁷¹ Britannica. “Brushiski Language” Accessed December 6, 2022.
<https://www.Britannica.com/topic/Burushiski-Language> (wikipedia n.d.)

⁷² Wikipedia, “Gilgit-Baltistan” Accessed December 6, 2022.
<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilgit-Baltistan>

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

Wakhi: “This language is highly used in tehsil Gojal of Hunza. However, is also spoken in Ishkoman and Yasin as well.”⁷⁵

2.10. CONSTITUENCIES IN GILGIT BALTISTAN



The legislative assembly of Gilgit-Baltistan established in 2010, under Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-governance order 2009 passed during Zardari era, is a thirty three-member assembly known as Gilgit-Baltistan Assembly (GBA). Among these members, twenty-four are general members, while nine reserved seats; six for women and three for technocrats respectively. The constituencies of Gilgit-Baltistan are given in the below table:

Division	District	Constituency
Gilgit	Gilgit	1. GBA-1/Gilgit-I
		2. GBA-2/Gilgit-II
		3. GBA-3/Gilgit-III
Gilgit	Nagar	1. GBA-4/Nagar-I

⁷⁵ Ibid.

		2. GBA-5/Nagar-II
Gilgit	Hunza	1. GBA-6/Hunza-II
Baltistan	Skardu	1. GBA-7/Skardu-I 2. GBA-8/Skardu-II 3. GBA-9/Skardu-III 4. GBA-10/Skardu-IV
Baltistan	Kharmang	GBA-11/Kharmang-I
Baltistan	Shigar	GBA-12/Shigar-I
Diamer	Astore	1. GBA-13/Astore-I 2. GBA-14/Astore-II
Diamer	Diamer	1. GBA-15/Diamer-I 2. GBA-16/Diamer-II 3. GBA-17/Diamer-III 4. GBA-18/Diamer-IV
Gilgit	Ghizer	1. GBA-19/Ghizer-I 2. GBA-20/Ghizer-II 3. GBA-21/Ghizer-III
Baltistan	Ghanche	1. GBA-22/Ghanche-I 2. GBA-23/Ghanche-II

		3. GBA-24/Ghanche-III
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(This table is produced according to the list of candidates who won the 2020 elections on Gilgit Baltistan Assembly website)⁷⁶

The four newly formed districts in 2019, Yasin-Gupis, Rondu, Tangir and Darel forms the constituencies GBA-20/Ghizer-II, GBA-10/Skardu-IV, GBA-17/Diamer-III and GBA-18/Diamer-IV respectively, and in the member list and their constituencies in the Gilgit-Baltistan Assembly website, these newly formed districts are counted in the district Ghizer, Skardu and Diamer respectively.⁷⁷ However, In Wikipedia, the name of constituencies of Yasin-Gupis, Tangir and Darel is given as GBA20/Yasin-Gupis-I, GBA-17/Tangir-I and GBA-18/Darel-I respectively.⁷⁸

The focus of this research will be the district Skardu, constituencies GBA-7/Skardu-I and GBA-8/Skardu II.

⁷⁶ Gilgit-Baltistan Assembly, "Members" Accessed December 6, 2022.

<https://gba.gov.pk/members/>

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Wikipedia, "List of Constituencies of Pakistan" Accessed December 6, 2022.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_constituencies_of_Pakistan

HISTORY OF ELECTIONS IN GILGIT-BALTISTAN

3.1. ELECTIONS 1970

For the first time in the history of Gilgit Baltistan, elections were held in 1970 for the membership of the “Advisory Council.”⁷⁹ Though an Advisory Council was established in the region where the membership was based on popular adult franchise electoral politics, but the advisory council, as it names goes, was simply an advisory one. It could only give suggestions. Had no power to amend any law. The real power still rested in the hands of the Federal Center. This council was the first step towards political recognition and introduction of electoral politics in this region. The Council consisted of twenty-one members; eight from Gilgit Agency while six from Baltistan region and other remaining ones were non-elected official members; five elected by the Resident and two elected from Government Departments of both Gilgit and Baltistan.⁸⁰ The main constituencies of Gilgit Agency were Darel, Punial, Astore, Yasin, Chilas and Gilgit while those of Baltistan were Parkuta, Skardu, Kharmang, Shigar, Roundu and Khaplu. The elections were held on December 30, 1970.

3.2. ELECTIONS 1975

For the first time in the history of GB, reforms were introduced by the then Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Other than Subsidies on different items, the Northern Areas Legal Framework Order 1975 was introduced, for the first time, political, administrative and judicial reforms in GB. Moreover, the FCR was also abolished.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Gohar Ali Iftikhar, “Gilgit Baltistan: History, Constitutional Status and Genesis of Electoral Politics 1947-2015.” *Journal of Languages, Culture and Civilization* 2, no. 1 (2020): 27.

⁸⁰ Ali, “Electoral Politics” M.Phil. diss., (NIPS, 2019): 30.

⁸¹ Iftikhar, “Gilgit Baltistan,” 27.

Under this order, the advisory council was replaced by the Northern Areas Council having the strength of Sixteen members in total. Under this system, five elections were held in Gilgit Baltistan in the years 1975, 1979, 1983, 1987 and 1991.

3.3. ELECTIONS 1979

As mentioned earlier, five elections were held under the system introduced by Z. A. Bhutto. Since the target of this researched is Skardu, which is part of Baltistan Division, only the elections result of Baltistan Divisions will be mention in the following paragraph.

The result of the under discussion election is:

Name of Candidate	Constituency
Wazir Muhammad Sadiq	Skardu-I (Rondu) (No.1)
Haji Juma Khan	Skardu-II(Skardu) (No.2)
Haji Muhammad Hussain	Shiger (No.3)
Syed Muhammad Ali Shah	Kharmang (No.4)
Syed Muhammad Shah	Khaplu-I (No. 5)
Ghulam Ali Hiadari	Khaplu-II (No.6)

Source: Election Commission GB

3.4. ELECTIONS 1983

The results of 1983 elections are:

Name of Candidate	Constituencies
Agha Ahmad Ali Shah	Skardu-I
Haji Ahmed Cho	Skardu-II

Haji Muhammad Hussain	Skardu-III(Shigar)
Muhammad Jaffar	Skardu-IV (Khaplu-1)
Muhammad Ismail	Skardu-V (Khaplu-2)
Agha Muhammad Ali Shah	Skardu-VI (Kharmang)

Source: Election Commission GB

3.5. ELECTIONS 1987

Followings are the name of the candidates successfully elected from Skardu Division:

Name of Candidate	Constituency
Agha Ahmed Ali Shah	Skardu-I
Wazir Faiz Muhammad	Skardu-II
Syed Tahir Ali Shah	Khaplu-I (Constituency No. 3)
Muhammad Jaffar	Khaplu-II (Constituency No. 4)
Syed Asad Zaidi	Kharmang (Constituency No. 5)
Raja Muhammad Azam Khan	Shiger (Constituency No. 6)

Source: Election Commission GB

3.6. ELECTIONS 1991

The elections was boycotted by the Shia Community leading towards a low turnout in elections.

The constituencies were divided in districts. Two seats were reserved for women in Northern Area Council.

Name of Candidate	District	Constituencies
Haji Ghulam Haider	Skardu	Skardu-I
Syed Asad Zaidi	Skardu	Kharmang No. 2

Raja Muhammad Azam Khan	Skardu	Shiger No. 3
Mr. Fida Hussain Zaidi	Ghanche	Khaplu-I
Mr. Muhammad Jafar	Ghanche	Khaplu-II

Source: Election Commission GB

3.7. ELECTIONS 1994

Benazir Bhutto's government brought some reforms in Northern Areas through Legal Framework Order (LFO) 1994. The number of NAC was increased to twenty six among which twenty four was to be elected through election via adult franchise.

Name of Candidate	District	Constituencies
Mr Ghulam Hussain Slaeem	Skardu	Skardu-I
Syed Muhammad Abbas	Skardu	Skardu-II
Haji Fida Nashad	Skardu	Skardu-III
Mr. Sadiq Ali	Skardu	Rondu
Syed Asad Zaidi	Skardu	Kharmang
Haji Muhammad Hussain	Skardu	Shiger
Fida Hussain Zaidi	Ghanche	Khaplu-I
Muhammad Iqbal	Ghanche	Khaplu-II
Muhammad Ismail	Ghanche	Mashabrum

Source: Election Commission GB

3.8. ELECTIONS 1999

The Northern Areas Council was replaced by Northern Areas Legislative Council (NALC) with the authority to initiate and legislate on more than 49 subjects.

Results of the elections are as followings;

Name of the Candidate	District	Constituencies
Syed Mehdi Shah	Skardu	Skardu-I
Syed Muhammad Abbas Rizvi	Skardu	Skardu-I
Haji Fida Muhammad Nashad	Skardu	Skardu-III
Wazir Hassan	Skardu	Skardu-IV
Syed Muhammad Ali Shah	Skardu	Skardu-V
Imran Nadeem	Skardu	Skardu-VI (shiger)
Muhammad Jaffar	Ghanche	Ghanche-I
Ghulam Ali Haideri	Ghanche	Ghanche-II
Muhammad Ismail	Ghanche	Ghanche-III

Source: Election Commission GB

3.9. ELECTIONS 2004

The most important aspect of this elections was that, the 2004 elections were contested on party basis. The number of seats in the NALC was 36 where six were reserved for women and six were for technocrats.

The positions of the parties are as follows:

Party Name	Number of seats won
Pakistan People Party (PPP)	07

Pakistan Muslim league (PML-Q)	06
Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N)	02
Independents	09

With the help of independent candidates, PML-Q was successful in forming the government.

Source: Election Commission GB

3.10. THE GILGIT-BALTISTAN EMPOWERMENT AND SELF GOVERNANCE ORDER 2009 AND ELECTIONS

It was a landmark reform (The Gilgit Baltistan Empowerment and Self Governance Order) giving GB a legislative council with the authority to legislate on 61 items. The name of NALC was replaced by Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly (GBLA). GB was, for the first time, to have a Chief Minister and his cabinet as the Governance body of the region. In other words, it was given a nominal provincial status. The GBLA had the strength of thirty-three with twenty-four to be elected through Adult franchise.

The results of the elections are as under:

S.No	Name of Candidate	Party Name	District	Constituency
01	Syed Raziuddin Rizvi	Independent (Later Joint PPP)	Gilgit	LA-1/Gilgit-I
02	Deedar Ali	Independent	Gilgit	LA-2/Gilgit-II
03	Aftab Haider	PPP	Gilgit	LA-3/Gilgit-III
04	Muhammad Ali Akhtar	PPP	Hunza-Nagar	LA-4/H-N-I

05	Mirza Hussain	PML-Q	Hunza-Nagar	LA-5/H-N-II
06	Wazir Baig	PPP	Hunza-Nagar	LA-6/H-N-III
07	Syed Mehdi Shah	PPP	Skardu	LA-7/Skardu-I
08	Sheikh Nisar	PPP	Skardu	LA-8/Skardu-II
09	Wazir Shakeel Ahmed	PPP	Skardu	LA-9/Skardu-III
10	Wazir Hassan	PPP	Skardu	LA-10/Skardu-IV
11	Syed Muhammad Ali Shah	PPP	Skardu	LA-11/Skardu-V
12	Raja Azam Khan	MQM	Skardu	LA12/Skardu-VI
13	Abdul Hameed	PPP	Astore	LA-13/Astore-I
14	Muhammad Naseer Khan	PPP	Astore	LA-14/Astore-II
15	Basheer Ahmed Khan	PML-Q	Diamer	LA-15/Diamer-I
16	Janbaz Khan	PML-N	Diamer	LA-16/Diamer-II
17	Rehmat Khaliq	JUI	Diamer	LA-17/Diamer-III
18	Gulbar Khan	JUI	Diamer	LA-18/Diamer-IV
19	Nawaz Khan Naji	BNF(Balaw aristan National Front)	Ghizer	LA-19/Ghizer-I
20	Ali Muhammad Sher	PPP	Ghizer	LA-20/Ghizer-II
21	Muhammad Ayub	Independent	Ghizer	LA-21/Ghizer-III
22	Muhammad Jafar	PPP	Ghanche	LA-22/Ghanche-I
23	Muhammad Abdullah	PML-N	Ghanche	LA-23/Ghanche-II

24	Muhammad Ismail	PPP	Ghanche	LA-24/Ghanche-III
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(Source: <https://ecgb.gov.pk/elec09.htm>)

Party positions were:

Name of Party	Number of Seats Won +Reserved women seats and Technocrats
PPP	14(elected) + 6 women reserved and Technocrats = 20
PML-Q	2(elected) +1 Women Reserved = 3
PML-N	2 (elected) = 2
JUI	2 (elected) + 2 Women reserved and Technocrat = 4
MQM	1 (elected) =1
BNF	1 (elected) = 1
IND	2 (elected) = 2

3.11. ELECTIONS 2015

The elections were held on 8th June 2015. The results are as under.

S.No	Name of Candidate	Party Name	District	Constituency
01	Jaffar Ullah	PML-N	Gilgit	GBLA-1/Gilgit-1
02	Hafiz Hafiz-Ur-Rahman	PML-N	Gilgit	GBLA-2/Gilgit-II
03	Muhammad Iqbal	PML-N	Gilgit	GBLA-3/Gilgit-III
04	Muhammad Ali	ITP	Hunza-Nagar	GBLA-4/HNR-I
05	Rizwan Ali	MWM	Hunza-Nagar	GBLA-5/HNR-II

06	Mir Ghazanfar Ali Khan	PML-N	Hunza-Nagar	GBLA-6/HNR-III
07	Muhammad Akbar Taban	PML-N	Skardu	GBLA-7/Skardu-I
08	Kacho Imtiaz Haider	MWM	Skardu	GBLA-8/Skardu-II
09	Fida Nashad	PML-N	Skardu	GBLA-9/Skardu-III
10	Muhammad Sikandar	ITP	Skardu	GBLA-10/Skardu-IV
11	Iqbal Hassan	PML-N	Skardu	GBLA-11/Skardu-V
12	Imran Nadeem	PPP	Skardu	GBLA-12/Skardu-VI
13	Farman Ali	PML-N	Astore	GBLA-13/Astore-I
14	Barkat Jamil	IND	Astore	GBLA-14/Astore-II
15	Haji Shah Baig	JUI	Diamer	GBLA-15/Diamer-I
16	Janbaz Khan	PML-N	Diamer	GBLA-16/Diamer-II
17	Haider Khan	PML-N	Diamer	GBLA-17/Diamer-III
18	Muhammad Wakeel	PML-N	Diamer	GBLA-18/Diamer-IV
19	Nawaz Khan Naji	BNF	Ghizer	GBLA-19/Ghizer-I
20	Fida Khan	IND(Later joint PML- N)	Ghizer	GBLA-20/Ghizer-II
21	Jahanzaib	PTI	Ghizer	GBLA-21/Ghizer-III
22	Muhammad Ibrahim Sanai	PML-N	Ghanche	GBLA-22/Ghanche-I
23	Ghulam Hussain	PML-N	Ghanche	GBLA-23/Ghanche-II
24	Muhammad Shafique	PML-N	Ghanche	GBLA-24/Ghanche-III

(Source: Website Election Commission Gilgit-Baltistan: <https://ecgb.gov.pk/election15.htm>)

Party Positions:

Name of Party	Elected Members + Women reserved and Technocrats
PML-N	15 Elected + 4 Women + 2 Technocrats =21
ITP (Islami Tehreek Pakistan)	2 Elected + 1 Woman + 1 Technocrat =4
MWM (Majlis Wahdat-Ul-Muslimeen)	2 Elected + 1 Woman = 3
PPP	1 Elected = 1
PTI	1 Elected = 1
JUI	1 Elected = 1
BNF	1 Elected = 1
IND	1 Elected = 1

3.12. ELECTIONS 2020

2020 elections were held in November 2020. It is also important to mention that some new districts were formed in GB. The results are:

S.No	Name of Candidate	Party Name	District	Constituency
01	Amjad Hussain Advocate	PPP	Gilgit	GBLA-1/Gilgit-I
02	Fateh Ullah Khan	PTI	Gilgit	GBLA-2/Gilgit-II
03	Syed Sohail Abbas Shah	PTI	Gilgit	GBLA-3/Gilgit-III
04	Amjad Hussain Advocate (later when Amjad Resigned Ayub Waziri of ITP won in by Elections)	PPP/ITP	Nagar	GBLA-4/Nagar-I

05	Javaid Ali Manwa	IND(Later Joint PTI)	Nagar	GBLA-5/Nagar-II
06	Ubaid Ullah Baig	PTI	Hunza	GBLA-6/Hunza
07	Raja Muhammad Zakariya Khan Maqpoon	PTI	Skardu	GBLA-7/Skardu-I
08	Muhammad Maisam Kazim	MWM	Skardu	GBLA-8/Skardu-II
09	Wazir Muhammad Saleem	IND(Later Joint PTI)	Skardu	GBLA-9/Skardu-III
10	Raja Nasir Ali Khan	IND (later Joint PTI)	Skardu	GBLA-10/Skardu-IV
11	Syed Amjad Ali Zaidi	PTI	Kharmang	GBLA-11/Kharmang
12	Raja Muhammad Azam Khan	PTI	Shiger	GBLA-12/Shiger
13	Muhammad khalid Khursheed Khan	PTI	Astore	GBLA-13/Astore-I
14	Shams Ul Haq Lone	PTI	Astore	GBLA-14/Astore-II
15	Haji Shah Baig	IND(Later Joint PTI)	Diamer	GBLA-15/Diamer-I
16	Muhammad Anwar	PML-N	Diamer	GBLA-16/Diamer-II
17	Rehmat Khaliq	JUI	Diamer	GBLA-17/Diamer-III
18	Gul Bar Khan	PTI	Diamer	GBLA-18/Diamer-IV
19	Nawaz Khan Naji	BNF	Ghizer	GBLA-19/Ghizer-I
20	Nazir Ahmed	PTI	Ghizer	GBLA-20/Ghizer-II

21	Ghulam Muhammad	PML-N	Ghizer	GBLA-21/Ghizer-III
22	Mushtaq Hussain	IND(Later Joint PTI)	Ghanche	GBLA-22/Ghanche-I
23	Abdul Hameed	IND(Later Joint PTI)	Ghanche	GBLA-23/Ghanche-II
24	Muhammad Ismail	PPP	Ghanche	GBLA-24/Ghanche-III

Source: <https://www.electionpakistani.com/gilgit-baltistan-2020/result.html>

Party Positions:

Name of Party	Number of Elected Seats + Women Reserved and Technocrats
PTI	16 elected + 4 Women and 2 Technocrats =22
PPP	3 Elected (later became 2) +1 Woman and 1 Technocrat = 5 later 4
PML-N	2 Elected + 1 Woman = 3
ITP	0 at first Later 1 Elected =1
JUI	1 elected =1
MWM	1 Elected =1
BNF	1 elected =1

It is important to mention that MWM and PTI fought the elections as a joint party so the women and technocrats of PTI contain some MWM members as well.

CHAPTER TWO: ELECTORAL POLITICS AND VOTING BEHAVIOR IN DISTRICT SKARDU



MAP 1.1 The city of Gilgit and the village of Shimshal, in relation to Gilgit-Baltistan

Source: Map by Moacir P. de Sa Pereira. Made with Natural Earth. Free vector and raster map data@naturalearthdata.com.

Note: Map not drawn to scale and may not represent authentic international boundaries.

4.1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, different factors influencing voting behavior will be discussed regarding voting behavior.

Before starting the chapter, it is important to mention that the political awareness amongst the people regarding politics is not much impressive (revealed from interviews conducted). As Mr. Sakhawat a resident of Skardu who currently lives in Islamabad revealed that “there is no politics in Skardu.”⁸² It is a very interesting claim. For majority of people politics means participating in elections. While interviewing Mr. Sohail Zahidi a student of BBA from Sundus

⁸² Sakhawat Hussain, “Politics in Skardu” interviewed by Syed Zulqarnain Hussaini, July 8, 2022.

(GBLA-8/SKD-II), he pointed out towards the constitutional status of the GB. For him, politics only meant elections. Other than that, politics does not make any sort of sense to the people. He said that given the limited power of the GB government and its assembly, not only few people are well aware of politics but majority of politicians do not exactly know what politics is. He pointed out towards number of politicians who has occupied the Gilgit Baltistan legislative Assembly and who had never even saw the gates of any university.⁸³

Mr. Hussain Ali, an advocate by profession also agreed with Mr. Sohail Zahidi in this regard. In his point of view, the political awareness comes when there is a proper self local government system. But it is been ages since the “Baltiati elections” was held. So, for the majority of people, politics just means participating in elections.⁸⁴ Therefore, as far as the question that why people even participate in this process? The answer is that this is the only political process they know which give them the feeling of inclusion in the political situation and process of their region to some extent. And also, in the further chapters, different factors regarding voting behavior will be discussed. Those factors also become a reason for people to participate in the electoral politics. So, therefore, it is important that this fact must be kept in mind regarding people’s opinion and what elections mean to them before discussing the factors influencing the voting behavior of people of GB.

4.2. ELECTIONS RESULTS OF SKD-I/GBLA-7 AND SKD-II/GBLA-8 2009 TO 2020

4.2.1. Elections 2009

SKD-I/GBLA-7:

Candidate Name	Party	Votes Obtained
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⁸³ Sohail Zahidi, “Electoral Politics in Skardu” interview by the Author, July 15, 2022.

⁸⁴ Hussain Ali, “Electoral Politics and Voting Behavior” interview by the Author, October 17, 2022.

1st, 2nd and 3rd		
Syed Mehdi Shah	PPP	6697
Wazir Wilayat Ali	PML-Q	1990
Raja Zakaria Maqpoon	MQM	1190

Source: <https://ecgb.gov.pk/elec09.htm>

SKD-II/GBLA-8:

Candidate Name	Party	Votes Obtained
1st, 2nd and 3rd		
Sheikh Nisar	PPP	8077
Syed Muhammad Ali Shah	IND	4690
Ghulam Nabi	IND	4893

Source: <https://ecgb.gov.pk/elec09.htm>

4.2.2. 2015 Elections

SKD-I/GBLA-7

Candidate Name	Party	Votes Obtained
Muhammad Akbar Taban	PML-N	3331
Raja Jalal Hussain Maqpoon	PTI	3330
Syed Mehdi Shah	PPP	2709
Ghulam Shehzad Agha	ITP	925
Syed Muzaffar Hussain	IND	264
Kamal Hussain	APML	179
	Total Votes Cast	11452

	Total Number of Votes	16484
	Turn Out	69.47%

Source: <https://ecgb.gov.pk/election15.htm>

SKD-II/GBLA-8

Candidate Name	Party	Votes Obtained
Kacho Imtiaz Haider	MWM	10411
Syed M. Ali Shah	PML-N	4841
Syed M. Abbas Rizvi	ITP	2945
Nisar Hussain	PPP	2485
Muhammad Zakir	PTI	445
Furman Ali	381	Qaumi Watan Party
	Total Votes Casted	21508
	Total Number of Votes	34281
	Turn Out	62.74%

Source: <https://ecgb.gov.pk/election15.htm>

4.2.3. Results of the Election 2020

SKD-I/GBLA-7

Candidate Name	Party	Votes Obtained
Raja Zakaria Maqpoon	PTI	5288

Syed Mehdi Shah	PPP	4140
Haji Akbar Taban	PML-N	1712
	Total Votes Casted	10857
	Total Number of Votes	17127
	Turn Out	63%

Source: <https://dunyanews.tv/gbla2020/>

SKD-II/GBLA-8

Candidate Name	Party	Votes Obtained
Muhammad Kazim	MWM	7988
S. M. Ali Shah	PPP	7012
Kacho Imtiaz Haider	IND	3107
Muhammad Saeed	PML-N	1854
Muhammad Shabbir	ITP	1841
	Total Votes Casted	22560
	Total Number of Votes	39567
	Turn Out	57%

CHAPTER THREE: SOCIAL FACTORS AND THE VOTING BEHAVIOR AND ELECTORAL POLITICS IN DISTRICT SKARDU

5.1. INTRODUCTION

In the voting behavior, social factor plays an important role. In this chapter, the social factor influencing the voting behavior and electoral politics of District Skardu has been discussed in detail. According to the Colombian Model, social factors play the most significant role in the molding of the voting behavior. “These social characteristics includes citizen’s class status, citizen’s racial or religious identification, the region of country a citizen lives in and whether they reside in urban or rural area.⁸⁵” In this chapter, not only the factors highly influencing voting behavior has been discussed but also to what extend these social factors play a key role in electoral politics of District Skardu.

5.2. RELIGION

Religion has always played a part in determining the path of the polity of any nation or area. Even in the most secular countries, though the government dismiss the religion factor and envision the state free from the religion, but it is not practically true. This influence of religion on the polity especially to a region like Baltistan is because of the religious identity. The religious identity can be defined as a common belief held by a group of people.⁸⁶ Every religion has a set of belief, which makes then distinct from one another- it would not be wrong to call religion a set of belief that people accept. People who have the common set of belief can be referred as religious identity. For example, Muslims all have a common identity because they have a common set of beliefs. In majority of religions, there are religious institutions who

⁸⁵ Hutchings and Jefferson, “The Sociological,” 57.

⁸⁶ Jonathan Fox, *An Introduction to Religion and Politics*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2018), 33.

perform number of services and among those services; the preservation of religious identity is one of them.⁸⁷ One religion may be divided into number of sub identity groups like those that Muslims are separated in Sunni and Shia both having a different religious identity. As mentioned in the theory of *Primordialism* “religious issues are ancient, and are embedded culturally in the identity groups.”⁸⁸ According to Primordialism “Conflicts based on primordial grievances are generally ones that have been continuing for generations where hatred between the groups is based on perceived injustices and a spiral of violence and retribution that can go for back for centuries.”⁸⁹ This factor is its greatest manifest on the electoral politics. Because this region is the only Shia majority area in Sunni dominated Pakistan.

The Shia identity has played a very important role in determining the voting behavior in Skardu. Especially in SKD-II/GBLA-8. Both in elections of 2015 and 2020 Religio-Political Party, MWM, has dominated the elections. Some historical events which lead to sectarianism and its impact on political landscape is discussed below.

5.2.1. 1988 Tension and the beginning of All Sectarianism

We have already discussed that that the sectarian violence in the region was very minimal and would happen only on Muharram processions which would be kept under control by the local people and elders. Ethnic loyalty was much important than the religious identity. Inter-faith marriages were common in the region. However, all of this changed in the events known as *Athasi Tension*. Today, the history of 1988 tension is in the mind of everyone in Gilgit-Baltistan. Not every child of Gilgit-Baltistan, may know clearly what happened during that time, but all of them know that the Sunnis from KPK attacked and killed Shias and Burnt the villages of Gilgit-Baltistan.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 33.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 34.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 35.

In 1988, Mujahidin's Army known as Lashkar, invaded Gilgit. The Lashkar was estimated to be eighty thousand in strength. The Lashkar massacred more than four hundred Shias and burnt down entire Shia villages.⁹⁰ According to Hunzai, "This attack was triggered by a rumor alleging a Sunni massacre in Gilgit by Shias, which some say was deliberately spread to provide an excuse for Sunni militants to conduct the attacks."⁹¹ However, many other researchers believe that it was the signing of the moon marking the end of Ramadan. According to Mishra, "On May 17, 1988, Shias celebrated Eid-ul-Fitr, the festival marking the end of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, a day earlier than the Sunni population. The Sunni started clash with the Shia community, as a result of which a Shia student leader was seriously wounded. The news of the clash was spread to different parts of the region and beyond; Sunni ulemas in North-West Frontier Province (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) declared a jihad against Shias. Sunni supporters—assisted by local Sunnis from Chilas, Darel, and Tangir—attacked several Shia villages on the outskirts of Gilgit."⁹² Among these villages Jalalabad tragedy, a 100 percent Shia population, is the most important. It is alleged that the Mujahidins were transported by helicopters to the area in a deliberate attempt to change the demography of the Shia dominated area. This massacre marked the beginning of armed sectarian conflict sponsored by external actors and the political lining on the basis of religious identity in GB.

5.2.2. Baltistan Prospective

The Baltistan prospective is not well documented by the researchers. However, stories by local people has a lot to say about it. The Lashkar did not only march to Gilgit but also towards Baltistan as well. But the people of Baltistan defended at a place in Haramosh known as *Maqpooni Shagharan*. At *Maqpooni Shagharan* the Baltees fought to stop the marching

⁹⁰ Izhar Hunzai, "Conflict Dynamics in Gilgit Baltistan," *United States Institute of Peace*, 2013: 5.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹² Vivek Kumar Mishra, "Sectarian Violence in Gilgit Baltistan," *Jadavpur Journal of International Relations* 23, no. 1 (2019): 10.

Lashkar from entering Baltistan which was dominantly inhabited by Shia religious identity. Syed Akhtar Hussain, a resident of Baltistan narrates that once or twice a week Ration was collected where from every home something would be given for the people fighting on the front line.⁹³ According to Syed Muhammad Baqir, the Baltees were extremely ill equipped while the Sunnis brought with themselves modern weapons like machine gun and our people defending Baltistan had to fall back at one point.⁹⁴ It is said that three bridges connecting the areas were blown to stop the marching Lashkar from entering Baltistan. In this war many lost their lives defending their land among which Haider Shaheed is the most notable one. It is said that there were number of martyrs whose bodies were not even found because their bodies were overrun by trucks and vehicles by Lashkar.

For the people of Gilgit-Baltistan, this was totally a state sponsored attack on the basis of religious identity. It is impossible for an army of eight thousand to simply enter GB without passing the check posts. Not to mention the people of Baltistan had to defend themselves - where was Pakistan Army? Were not they supposed to protect the people from such aggression?

After the 1988 tension the political dimension of Baltistan changed. No wonder that TJP got strong support from the Shias of Baltistan in 1990s given the history of 1988 tension. After this incident, the Shia population of GB lost the trust they had in Pakistan. Not only that, since the local Sunnis cooperated with the Lashkar, they were distrustful of the Sunni population in the region even though they had good relation with them in the past. After 1988 tension the socio-political aspect of GB was lined on the sectarian bases. Till today, even if the Baltistan region have not seen any kind of major sectarian violence, but the politics and the impact of religious

⁹³ Syed Akhtar Hussain, "Electoral Politics and Voting Behavior in Skardu" interview by the Author, July 2, 2022.

⁹⁴ Syed Muhammad Baqir Hussaini, "1988 Tension, Religion and elections" interview by the Author, March 2, 2023.

identity or more precisely the impact of *Primordialism* on the voting behavior of the people of Baltistan is vividly clear. Moreover, the role of Ulema, who generally get their education from Iran and Iraq was highly increased. They started to directly participate in elections and other socio-political events in the region. This event led to the dominance of TJP in 1990s elections. Both in SKD-I/GBLA-7 and SKD-II/GBLA-8 (Though at that time the constituencies weren't like this) the TJP's candidate represented the region for ten years; Molvi Saleem and Agha Abbas Rizvi respectively.

5.2.3. 2012 Bus Incidents

In 2012, two incidents of sectarian violence happened in Kohistan and Babusar. Terrorist in army uniforms stopped the buses caring passengers from Rawalpindi to GB and attacked.⁹⁵⁹⁶ On 18 February 2012, 18 people were dragged off from buses and killed after been identified as Shias in Kohistan.⁹⁷ Later on, at least 20 Shias from GB were killed in the same manner at Babusar on August 16, 2012. In both incidents, people from both Gilgit division and Baltistan Division were martyred by the terrorists. The bodies were received in a very bad condition in Skardu (for the martyrs belonging to Baltistan- more precisely Skardu city). The prayers for them (*Nimaz E Mayyat*) was led by Allama Sheikh Muhammad Hassan Jafari, The Imam-I-Jumua of Markazi Imamia Jame Masjid Skardu who is also called the *Quaid-I-Baltistan* (leader of Baltistan). In these days, families received dead bodies of their loved ones in a bad condition (among which my own grandfather, Syed Hussain Shah Hussaini, resident of Sukamaidan Skardu). Skardu was rocked with protests and sit-ins with massive people participating in them. The non-local people from Punjab and KPK, who belonged to the Sunni sect, had to flee from Skardu city so they would not be targeted by the angry people of Skardu. All the protests were

⁹⁵ Ahmed Turabi, "Sectarianism, elections and religion" interview by the Author, August 13, 2022.

⁹⁷ Ajit Kumar Singh, "Massacre after Massacre," *Outlook India*, August 21, 2012.

led by the Ulemas. During these events Majlis Wahdatul Muslimeen (MWM) came into prominence with its Secretary General of Baltistan division, Allama Syed Ali Rizvi, residence of Snurangah Skardu (which comes in the jurisdiction of constituency Skardu-2) acting as one of the most influential Ulema during these protests.

This event is of extreme importance as it gave rise to the political influence of religious identity and rise to another Shia religio-political party, MWM. After the events, Allama Syed Sajid Ali Naqavi also visited Baltistan and he was greeted and welcomed by huge number of people in 2013. He was not only greeted by local people but people and politicians belonging to all parties active in Baltistan.

After 2012 Bus incidents, MWM and ITP both appeared in elections held in 2015. ITP was successful in securing two general seats, one seat reserved for women and a technocrat in Gilgit Baltistan Legislative Assembly (GBLA), while MWM secured 2 general seats. These events, and the failure of Islamabad to punish a single perpetrator, increased the distrust in the hearts of people towards the Sunni dominated Pakistani institutions and distrust towards the Sunni community overall in Pakistan.

The bus incidents, both played a pivotal role in reviving the Religio-Political Parties in the electoral politics of Skardu. In both the elections both the Shia parties, The ITP (Formerly known as TJP) and MWM has appeared in the elections afterwards with MWM dominating the SKD-II constituency in both 2015 and 2020 elections.

5.2.4. Influence of Religion on the voting Behavior of Skardu:

Apart from the historical events, religion has been in the heart of the electoral politics. The district Skardu is dominated by the Shia sect of Islam. Among all the other provinces and areas, GB is the only province with Shia Majority. Given its demography, Islam and Shi'ism has a great impact on the voting behavior of the population of the Skardu.

Among all interviews and questionnaires, it was evident that the people of Skardu would never vote for a Sunni. In other words, people tend to vote for the person of their own sect instead of someone who belongs to another one. Syed Ali Rizvi, a resident of Skardu belonging to the constituency Skardu-II made it extremely clear that the people of Skardu-II are highly religious. In his opinion religion plays a very important role. For the last two elections candidate of MWM, which is a religio-political party, has won the elections. Even before him, the winners of elections had some sort of religious background or a backing of a religious person/Scholar.⁹⁸

Arif Sahab⁹⁹, A poet and journalist, in his interview explained that people of Skardu always vote on the religious lines. It is the most important factor in the electoral politics of Baltistan. While talking about the Skardu-I, he said that the main reason that why religio-political parties like that of MWM and ITP has not been very successful in these elections is because of the neutrality of Skardu Markaz – The social organization led by the Islamic Scholars of Skardu which plays a very important role in the social activities of Skardu. Giving the example of Agha Baqir Al-hussaini the Naib Imam Juma of Markazi Imamia Jame Masjid Skardu and the president of the Anjman-E-Imamiya (Which is the main religio-Social Organization At Markaz), he said no politician can mobilize such huge crowd in Skardu¹⁰⁰.

Arif Sahab, when was asked why the difference in the impact of religion between Skardu-I and Skardu-II constituencies as in Skardu-II, for the last two elections MWM has won the elections. He answered that even though it can be claimed that in Skardu-I though both the major religio-political parties had little success in the elections, but given their poor organizational condition

⁹⁸ Syed Ali Razavi, "Electoral Politics and Voting Behavior" interview by the Author, April 12, 2023.

⁹⁹ Dr. Arif Sahab, "Electoral Politics and Voting Behavior in Skardu" interview by the Author, May 15, 2024.

¹⁰⁰ In 2024 a religious issue happened due to which an FIR was filled by the Chilas against Agha Baqir Al-Hussaini. In the result the whole population of Skardu came to roads and protested against the FIR. By far, it was the biggest gathering that took place in Skardu. No such great crowd was seen in Skardu united behind a single person.

and resources, for them to even appear in elections and their ability to actually gain some vote by itself shows that religion plays a very important role.

Furthermore, He said that even the politicians during the elections try to be on the good side of the religious scholars of different muhallas because if any one of the Islamic Scholars turns against him, he would not get much vote from that muhalla. So, for the formation of the vote bank Islamic scholars play a very important role. He also added that the main reason that in constituency Skardu-II the religio-political parties are performing much better is because of the reason that the Ulema of Skardu-II are not that neutral and are actively participating in elections. For MWM to find any kind of success in elections is because of Agha Ali Rizvi, one of the leading Ulema of Skardu-II, while on the other hand the Ulema of Skardu-I has shunned politics and stayed neutral in elections.¹⁰¹ This point is evident that when in 2015 elections, Agha Baqir Hussaini, one of the leading ulema of Skardu and the President of Anjuman-E-Imamiya once gave an interview and said he was thinking about appearing in elections, the whole political landscape changed. Syed Akhtar who told me that when he visited Raja Jalal, the candidate of PTI in 2015 elections, his younger brother Raja Jafar Khan was highly relieved that Agha Baqir Hussaini has decided not to take part in elections.¹⁰² Similarly, Afzal Raza, resident of Kachura who is currently working as Bureau Chief Islamabad of IRNA (Islamic Republic News Agency) said that not only district Skardu but all the districts of GB, religions plays a decisive role in the elections.¹⁰³

During this research and the survey conducted it was highly evident that religion played a very important role in the electoral politics. Even the most secular persons would try to keep the religious factor in their mind in the elections because one way or the other, people would

¹⁰¹ Sahab, interview.

¹⁰² Hussain, interview.

¹⁰³ Afzal Raza, "Electoral Politics and Voting Behavior in Skardu" interview by the Author, January 23, 2023.

always keep in mind the religion while choosing to whom they should vote. While from the survey it is evident that no one would vote for a person who does not belong to their sect.

Wazir Ali, a resident of SKD-II said that people tend to follow the Clerics compared to the politicians. For them, politics is a deceptive business and the politicians are all deceptive. They would rather trust an Islamic Scholar. Moreover, he said that only those politicians can perform in the elections who have any sort of support from Clerics. In his constituency for the last two elections, MWM has won because of a Cleric Agha Ali Rizvi.¹⁰⁴ He also pointed towards another important thing that both Dr. Nazir also pointed out regarding their constituency (SKD-II) that even in 2009 elections the candidate of PPP won because of his religious affiliation. His name was Nisar and highly known as Sheikh Nisar (Sheikh a title used for Islamic Scholars in Baltistan).¹⁰⁵ Though he himself is not a scholar, but it is said that he has for a little time spent his life in a Madrasa and his family was a religious one. His father was a prominent religious scholar.

However, the story of SKD-I is different. Syed Taqi Al-Hussaini, the Vice President of Anjuman-E-Tajiran, when asked about this difference in the voting behavior in the both neighbor constituencies, he attributed it to the lack of involvement of Skardu Scholars in politics.¹⁰⁶ Something mentioned by the number of interviewees. In the survey conducted 37.5% of the participants agreed while 31.3% strongly agreed while 14.6% decided to stay neutral with the remaining out 100% disagreed. For the records, all the interviewees constantly kept the position that a Sunni will not stand a chance in the elections in Skardu district.

¹⁰⁴ Wazir Ali, "Electoral Politics and Voting Behavior in Skardu," interview by the Author, April, 28, 2024.

¹⁰⁵ Dr. Muhammad Nazir "Electoral Politics and Voting Behavior in Skardu," interview by the Author, May 17, 2024.

¹⁰⁶ Syed Taqi Al-hussaini, "Electoral Politics and Voting Behavior in Skardu," interview by the Author, May 27, 2023.

It is evident from the election campaigning from 2015 to 2020, all the candidates from both constituencies under research has tried to not to anger the Islamic scholars. In SKD-II they even try to make allies of the Imam's of mosques of different areas to gather votes in their favor. Though this practice is more vivid in the elections in SKD-II but in SKD-I as well, all the politicians try to keep cordial relations especially with the "Markazi" Ulema. Mr. Mumtaz Ali pretty much cleared the point by saying that the only reason any politician has high hopes in the elections is because the Leader of Friday Prayers of the Markazi Imamia Jamia Masjid Skardu is totally neutral regarding the electoral politics and do not involve himself in it. If he decides to support a candidate or a party, almost it would be impossible for anyone else to win the elections given there is no rigging in the elections.¹⁰⁷

5.3. RELATIONSHIPS

Skardu is not a very big district. Almost all the people have some sort of relationships with each other because of marriages and other sorts of things which we share. In 2015 elections, when I was working for ITP, I asked many people from my own muhalla to vote for ITP. Majority of them excused me because of their relationships. In 2020 elections my whole family (Khandan) voted for Raja Zakaria Maqpoon not based on any other merit but because he was a relative. So, only those do not care about the relationships who has no one of their relatives fighting for a seat. Mr. Taqi Al-Hussaini when asked about his own personal voting behavior mentioned me that in all elections where Raja Zakaria appeared, he voted for him not because he was any good candidate but because he was simply a relative.¹⁰⁸ In the survey 56.3% of the participants agreed while 22.9% strongly agreed that people tend to vote for the candidate who is their relative if there is any candidate. A civil servant on the condition of anonymity said that the first vote bank of any candidate is his relatives. "I myself have worked extremely hard to

¹⁰⁷ Mumtaz Ali, "Electoral Politics and Voting Behavior in Skardu," interview by the Author, October 2, 2023.

¹⁰⁸ Al-Hussaini, interview.

gather vote for one candidate who was my close relative in 2020 elections. I asked my colleagues to vote for him. I always would invite my colleagues on tea parties. I would also promise them that if they had any issue, I would try to solve it once my relative wins the elections.”¹⁰⁹

The main election campaigning is done by the relatives. The relatives of the candidate would go door to door especially women to gather women vote. Another civil servant told me that he was against the idea of one of his relatives to appear in elections. He said that he would not give his own vote to him even. But, once he submitted election form, all the family including himself was busy gathering votes for him.¹¹⁰ While 10.4% remained neutral about the relationship factor in voting behavior only 10.3% of the participants were in disagreement regarding the relationship had any influence. This shows that relationship has a huge impact on the elections.

A resident of Naghulispang, Ahmed Ali who is a shopkeeper said that he voted for a certain candidate in both 2015 and 2020 elections even he knew that he would not win the elections. He voted just because he had family terms with him.¹¹¹

5.4. THE FAMILY

Not only that, the family the candidate belongs to also plays a very important role. According to Arif Sahab, candidates belonging to big families are more influential.¹¹² This point is vividly clear through the 2015 elections in SKD-I. Raja Jalal Maqpoon, who belongs to the former ruling family of Skardu lost with only one vote. Many attribute his small margin loss to the political engineering. The main reason for Raja Jalal to perform so well in the elections is

¹⁰⁹ Anonymous, “Electoral Politics and Voting behavior in Skardu,” interview by the Author, March 12, 2023.

¹¹⁰ Anonymous, “Voting Behavior and Electoral Politics in Skardu,” interview by the Author, January, 10, 2024.

¹¹¹ Ahmed Ali, “Voting Behavior and Electoral Politics in Skardu,” interview by the Author, March, 2, 2024.

¹¹² Sahab, interview.

because of his family even though it was the first time he has actually appeared in elections and did not have any experience in electoral politics. Maqpoon family is still kept in high esteem by the people of Skardu. Same goes for Raja Zakaria Maqpoon. He also belongs to the Maqpoon family giving him an extra edge in the elections. The Maqpoons are highly respected by the people and naturally they have a better standing and respect amongst the people.

Moreover, in majority of families, the elder of the family decide to whom the whole family members would vote for. Even if the family would vote for the different candidates, it is the elders of the family who would decide. Syed Akhtar Hussain while discussing the 2015 elections said that when he asked Mr. Shahid Rajpoot who is a staunch follower of PPP, if Allama Syed Baqir Hussaini would appear in elections would he vote for him. In response he said that we will not disappoint him, out of eight voters in our home, we will distribute it equally amongst PPP's syed Mehdi Shah and Agha Baqir.¹¹³ This shows that the voting behavior in the families is more a collective decision than an individual one. In the survey 43.8% agreed that it is the family elders which decides to whom the family should vote for while 6.3% strongly agreed. 35.4% remained neutral while almost 15% disagreed. In the short interviews conducted and the survey revealed that the family would vote collectively instead of individually.

Similarly, in the elections, the Wazir family has also been active (Wazir Wilayat has fought elections). The wazir family is a big family with many relationships with other families and by itself an influential family in the Skardu.

Both in SKD-I and SKD-II, the candidates who had fought elections belonged to a renowned family or had the backing of such families. In 2009, Syed Mehdi Shah won the elections with 6697 votes with the margin of 4707 votes to his runner up Wazir Wilayat. His family is a major

¹¹³ Hussain, interview.

influential family in the Sukameidan area. While on SKD-II Sheikh Nisar, by virtue that his family, because of their religiosity, is considered to be an influential family in SKD-II. The 2015 elections saw the same pattern. The close contest between Akbar Taban and Raja Jalal Maqpoon where Akbar Taban secured 3331 votes while Raja Jalal Maqpoon secured 3330 votes out of 1142 votes casted. While in the SKD-II Kacho Imtiaz of the party MWM, won with 10411 out of 21508 votes casted with the margin of 5570 votes to the runner up Syed Muhammad Ali Shah. Not only Kacho Imtiaz himself belonged to an influential family (the Kacho family – which is again a branch of Maqpoon or the former ruling families of Skardu) but also had the backing of MWM – the religious factor. In 2020 elections, Raja Zakaria Maqpoon won a comfortable victory in SKD-I and Mesam Kazim of SKD-II – Candidate of MWM won the elections. Mesam Kazim, who was the candidate of MWM won with lesser votes compared to the 2015 elections candidate of MWM. In 2015, when Kacho Imtiaz was the candidate of MWM he was able to secure 10411 votes out of 20013 votes casted out of 36417 total votes (54.95% turnout) while in 2020 the MWM candidate Mesam Kazim secured 7988 votes out of 21814 votes casted with total voters of 35840 (60% turnout), even though compared to the 2015 elections, he had majority of the supports of Islamic Scholar as many Islamic Scholars formally belonging to ITP had joint MWM. This can be attributed to the family factor as Mesam Kazim did not belonged to a renounced family compared to Kacho Imtiaz.

So from the interviews and survey conducted, the researcher dares to conclude that it is very rare for a family to vote individually according to their own choices but rather the whole family decides to vote. Even if the votes of a single family is distributed amongst different candidates, it is because the family has decided to do so.

5.5. LANGUAGE

Arif Sahab, in his interview pointed out towards this factor. During the interview he also said that people would not vote for a candidate who speak another language.¹¹⁴ Many Shina speaker communities are settled in Skardu. Not a single person has appeared in elections from 2015 to 2020 except Muhammad Abbas Safeer, the candidate of ITP who later gave up elections in favor of PTI's candidate Raja Zakariya Maqpoon. Mr. Musa, an MBA and worker of ITP revealed during the interview that the joining of Muhammad Abbas Safeer had played a very important role in bringing the Shina speakers and the huge Brasil community towards ITP.¹¹⁵

Dr. Nazir also said that every candidate who wants to win the support of other language, especially Shina speaking community, by including someone from that community in its elections campaign and of course promising him some sort of interest.¹¹⁶

Since the dominant population of district Skardu is Balti speakers, they tend to vote for people speaking Balti. According to the survey while 25% strongly agreed with this point of view, 53.6% agreed. 15.8% remained neutral while the remaining shows those who disagreed.

Mr. Esa, teacher by profession from SKD-II said that there is a kind of jealousy between the different language speakers in Skardu. People seldom marry into other language speakers let alone vote for a candidate of a community of different language.¹¹⁷

5.6. THE “SALAM DUA” FACTOR

While interviewing Mr. Sohail Zahidi, a resident of SKD-II, he said that *Yahan to salam dua chalta hay*¹¹⁸. What he said was extremely captivating. Syed Akhtar Hussain also mentioned

¹¹⁴ Sahab, interview.

¹¹⁵ Muhammad Musa, “Electoral Politics and Voting Behavior in Skardu,” June 27, 2022.

¹¹⁶ Nazir, interview.

¹¹⁷ Muhammad Esa, “Electoral Politics and Voting Behavior in Skardu,” November, 22, 2023.

¹¹⁸ Zahidi, interview.

this point while being interviewed. Giving the example of Imran Nadeem of PPP from Shiger (though he do not belong to SKD-I or SKD-II), that whenever something happens like a death, he would always send his son if he himself is not available to keep a presence in the society.¹¹⁹

This factor can be seen almost everywhere. For example, Raja Zakariya Maqpoon himself is the product of *Thana Politics*. As Mr. Taqi Hussaini mentioned, Raja Zakariya came to make many personal connections by resolving small disputes amongst the people.¹²⁰ So, every politician who wants to appear in elections, always keeps a social presence and will always join people in different occasions i.e. in the deaths, birth or even would visit different people on Eid days to congratulate them.

Mr. Arif Sahab and Dr. Nazir both pointed towards the behavior of politicians especially when elections were close by. They both agreed to the point that whenever elections are close by, the activity of political leaders and their family highly increases. They visit homes and try to persuade their neighbors to vote for them. Many people do vote for a politician just because they happen to know him. No other kind of merit is kept in mind. Even in the case of Raja Zakaria someone even told me that he voted for him in 2020 election saying that he is a very mannered person *wo bohot khush ikhlaq hai*. While discussing this factor, 10.4% strongly agreed and 39.6% agreed. 31.3% remained neutral while the remaining either disagreed or strongly disagreed.

5.7. LOCALITY

Mr. Muhammad Ali, Vice Principal of Public School and College Skardu and Pakistan Studies lecturer, in the time of the 2015 election, in one of his lecture (I used to be college student at that time) said about the vote bank. He said that no man can win the election if he does not

¹¹⁹ Hussain, interview.

¹²⁰ Hussaini, interview.

have a vote bank. For example, Akbar Taban was from Khargrong (SKD-I), so his vote bank was Khargrong. During 2015 and 2020 elections, Akbar Taban had the majority votes in Khargrong polling stations. Similarly, in Sukamaidan Syed Mehdi Shah has majority votes there. Because they belong to that Muhalla and their “Salam Dua” is in their own Muhalla.

Mr. Zakir who owns a Saloon Shop in Rawalpindi Peerwadai told me that for the first time a candidate from Chunda valley (His native place) has appeared in the elections – Muhammad Saeed from PML-N party in 2020 elections. So, the residents of Chunda are going to vote for him.¹²¹ Muhammad Saeed major vote portion was from Chunda and adjacent Muhallas/valley (He secured 1841 votes out of 22560 in 2020 elections SKD-II/GBLA-8). For Kacho Imtiaz as well. He was from Kwardu and in both elections of 2015 and 2020 won from the wards of Kwardu. Similarly in 2015 elections the 925 votes secured by ITP’s shehzad Agha in SKD-I was mainly from Olding Muhalla since he belonged to that Muhalla. However, in 2009 elections Raja Zakaria was not able to win in Gangupi Muhalla (SKD-I) Wards even though he belonged to that Muhallah. The main reason was that Raja Jalal who is the current head of Maqpoon family and also from Gangupi was a member of PPP and was fully supporting the PPP and its candidate Syed Mehdi Shah. The main reason for Syed Mehdi Shah to win in Gangupi Wards was Raja Jalal. Similarly, when Raja Jalal Hussain Maqpoon himself participated in elections of 2015 from PTI’s platform, he had a comfortable victory in Gangupi Wards. In 2020 elections Raja Zakaria secured the Gangupi Wards because this time he had the backing of Raja Jalal as both were at that time in PTI. In the survey conducted, 23.4% of the participants strongly agreed while a whole 53.4% agreed that locality plays a very important role. For common people, when a person from their own area or Muhalla is in the elections it

¹²¹ Zakir Hussain, “Elections in Skardu,” interview by the Author, 2020.

would be a proud moment if he wins the elections and also since the candidate belongs to their own Muhalla, they know him better compared to other candidates appearing in the elections.

Because of the importance of locality, politicians who want to appear in elections tend to bring “effective” people of different localities towards themselves. Wazir Wajahat, a resident of SKD-II revealed that one the important factors of victory for MWM in 2020 elections was Mr. Ismail. Mr. Ismail played a very important role in securing the vote of Astana Locality in the SKD-II.¹²² So if any politician wants to perform well in the elections, they need to be in good terms with the “effective” people of different localities. Therefore, it is a common practice for politicians to visit the major personalities of different localities so they could secure votes from different localities. In this point, it is very important to mention that even in Muhallas, especially in SKD-II the voting behavior is collective. Because these effective people have great influence in their locality which plays an important role in bringing vote for a particular candidate. These effective people are either elders of Muhalla which are majority Islamic Scholars. So, here we can see the importance of the social factors in the electoral politics and voting behavior. Not to mention that the political parties try to give tickets for election to people having some sort of influence in the area either because of their personality or because of their family.

5.8. EDUCATION

Education is the name of change in behavior, awareness and enlightenment. There is not a single person who would not say that we have to vote for educated people because they are educated and would be the most suited for the development of GB. Even the most uneducated people are of the opinion that the barometer of competence is education. In the survey, when the participants were asked if they voted for the candidate because of his education 76.6%

¹²² Wazir Wajahat, “Electoral Politics and Voting Behavior in Skardu,” interview by the Author, April 1, 2024.

marked Yes, while 23.4% said No. But when asked if the people give vote because of competence and education only 10.4% strongly agreed while 18.8% disagreed. While 31.3% stayed neutral 12.5% and 27.1% of the participants strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively. The irony in this may be because of what they think and what they themselves did. Or since only 300 participants were there.

When the researcher shared the data with two interviewees- Mr. Esa and Mr. Arif Sahab both of them almost gave an identical response saying that if that is really the case why the like of Syed Mehdi Shah and Raja Zakaria has won the election who are totally not educated. In 2009 elections Sheikh Nisar won in SKD-II who was uneducated. However, in 2015 and 2020 elections winners in SKD-II both Kacho Imtiaz and Muhammad Kazim were indeed educated (Muhaamad Kazim was a lecturer at Public School and College before entering the politics and my own teacher). But Mr. Esa was of the opinion that in the SKD-II elections in 2015 and 2020, education of the winning politicians did not played any sort of significant role in their victory. Though many people use the excuse that they were educated, but the reality is that the major factor was religion and Agha Ali Rizvi.¹²³ We should also mention that the people who have participated in survey are educated people. So, the main old majority may be of different opinion.

Mr. Esa while continuing said that if the education was really a decisive factor, in 2015 elections Shehzad Agha who only secured 925 votes out of 11452 votes casted, the candidate of ITP was the most educated and by far may be the most competent person (Shehzad Agha holds an MSc degree in political Science). Similarly, ITP's candidate in 2020 elections Abbas Safeer was an Advocate (he is an LLB who practices Law in Skardu) who did not contest the election since there was no chance of him winning the elections. But rather, the likes of Syed

¹²³ Esa, interview.

Mehdi Shah and Raja Zakariya has won the elections in SKD-I which shows that people seldom care about the education of the candidates.¹²⁴ Mr. Ahmed Ali, a shopkeeper used a rather more moderate words by saying that the main reason that education does not play any role in the voting behavior is because of the fact that not many educated people do participate in elections. But he also, while shaking his head said did not “disagreed” that education do not play a very significant role in the electoral politics. He himself admitted that while voting this factor did not even crossed his mind as he had participated in all the three elections under discussion.¹²⁵ Dr. Nazir sarcastically said that as far as people are concerned, if the candidate that they like is educated “it would be great” and they can always use that excuse that they have voted for the educated person. But, if the candidate is not educated, then they are not going to vote for a more educated person either. They are simply going to cast the vote to the same candidate they would vote. Dr. Nazir, when shared about the data collected by the survey, he simply said it is a lie. People really do not even exactly know about the complications of the electoral politics. They just vote because they have to vote or because of other factors which has nothing to do with the development of the area or any other thing. While mentioning his own family he said majority of his family voted to MWM in 2020 because they were convinced by the workers of the MWM to do so and also, they had promised to fix the water problem in their area as well.¹²⁶

5.9. CANDIDATES’ PERSONALITY

Candidates’ personality plays a very important role in voting behavior. Majority of the times the candidate’s personality is determined by his family or by his social connections (Salam Dua). Not only the candidate himself but also every candidate tries to win the support of such persons of high stature in different Muhallas.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ali, interview.

¹²⁶ Nazir, interview.

In determining the personality, again, religion plays a very important role. A person who is more religious is considered to be a better option. In 2020 elections, Muhammad Kazim from SKD-II, candidate of MWM, was a person who had worked in ISO (Imamia Student Organization) and many considered him to be the most suitable one because he had spent his life with Ulema etc. But there are some factors which tend to be more decisive than the personality. For example, Raja Zakaria is considered to be a *Charsi* (an allegation used when he appeared both in elections of 2005 and 2010) and Syed Mehdi Shah to be *Sharabi* (an allegation) and yet both of them have won elections in SKD-I.

5.10. ROLE OF WOMEN

Women play a major role in the electoral politics of District Skardu. Although the participation of women compared to men is less but the trend is changing with the passage of time. The women are more and more participating in the electoral politics. Because they form a major vote bank.

As far as women are concerned, women usually tend to vote to the candidate to whom the head of family (Father or Husband) would vote for. It is seldom that a woman would vote out of her own will. Arif Sahab and Syed Taqi Hussaini both pointed towards this factor. Syed Taqi Al-Hussaini mentioned that it is not that the women are forced to vote according to the will of the male (as the society is patriarchal in Skardu), they just follow the family naturally.¹²⁷

As we have discussed earlier, voting is more like a collective action rather than an individual in Skardu. The family as a whole votes for a candidate even if the vote is divided amongst different candidates (A result of Salam Dua Factor). But, sometimes, the male members of the family may go rogue and vote against the wishes of the family but this does not happen amongst the women. As pointed out by Dr. Nazir and Arif Sahab both agreed. According to the survey 31.3%

¹²⁷ Hussaini, interview.

strongly agreed to this point while 52.1% simply agreed showing the women voting behavior in district Skardu. Even if they would vote for a different candidate, it would be after taking permission from the male members of the family according to Mr. Ejaz a resident of Basho which falls under SKD-II.¹²⁸

However, Dr. Nazir also mentioned that sometimes the female does vote for other candidates going against the will of the family head. But this thing in SKD-II has happened due to religion. Sometimes, male members do not vote to a religious party or a religious person, so the situation in home gets a little bit challenging and disagreements and family fights does happen in the homes. Dr. Nazir also said in one of his relatives the situation even reached to the level of divorce.¹²⁹ But it does not happen that much. In SKD-II women hugely voted for MWM because of Allama Agha Ali Rizvi. This shows a lack of awareness amongst the women and also shows that the religion factor is much more dominant in the electoral politics in women compared to man. But in the end, majority of the women still vote according to the wishes of the whole family rather to think individually.

¹²⁸ Muhammad Ejaz, "Electoral Politics and Voting Behavior in Skardu," interview by the Author, December, 10, 2022.

¹²⁹ Nazir, interview.

POLITICAL PARTIES AND VOTING BEHAVIOR IN SKARDU

6.1. INTRODUCTION

In democratic states, especially in parliamentary form of government, political parties are of extreme importance. Especially when we talk about Pakistan, there are many political parties who fight in elections. Parties are of many ideology for instance, the PPP who is a left spectrum political party, the Religio-political parties like that of JI, JUI-F, JUI-S, ITP, MWM etc. who are right wing parties. And the likes of PML-N who fall in Centre right.

JI, JUI-F and other Sunni Political parties do not have any sort of presence in the Shia majority Skardu. This factor has been discussed in detail in the religion factor. The main political parties who appear in politics are PML-N, PPP and PTI who has a significant presence in Skardu. MWM has a major presence but it is limited to SKD-II while ITP does possess some presence but it is limited in Skardu. These political parties play a very significant role in the politics of Skardu especially the electoral politics. From 2009 to 2020 elections, only those have won the election who belonged to a particular party. During this time not a single independent candidate has emerged victorious in both constituencies SKD-I and SKD-II which is the target of this research.

According to the Michigan model, which is also known as party identification model, the political party plays the decisive role in the electoral politics and voting behavior. This model has been discussed in the theoretical framework in this research. In this chapter, the impact of the political parties will be discussed and also whether the model stays true for the voting behavior of people of Skardu or not.

6.2. POLITICAL IDEOLOGY/IDEOLOGICAL FOLLOWERS OF A PARTICULAR PARTIES

For a person to follow a political party means that they are well aware of the ideology of the party (e.g. if it is a right wing or left wing, what is the basis of these party etc.). But are the people of Skardu aware of these things? Answer would be much tricky. People of Skardu do discuss the political situation of Skardu which is common in any area but do they understand the complexities of politics? The answer to this question is “pretty much No.” Many political Scientists are of the view that even the educated people do not understand the complexities of politics (mentioned in the literature review). So, given the lack of awareness in Skardu, this factor is much more vividly clear.

During the interviews, except Mr. Akhond Ahmed¹³⁰, all the other interviewees agreed to this point that no party has any ideological followers. Arif Sahab mention this factor in much clearer terms that social factors play much more important role as compared to the party identity. According to him if any party has any sort of presence in Skardu, it is not because of the party and its ideology. People even do not know the basic principles of any party or what kind of party they are, what is their ideology or what is fundamental to a political party. Even the parties themselves are dependent on the support of influential people. Because of the presence of some influential people in the party, the party has some sort of presence. Giving the example of MWM, Arif Sahab said that the basic reason for MWM success in SKD-II is because of Allama Agha Ali Rizvi. People vote for Agha Ali not for MWM.¹³¹

Dr. Nazir, who himself is an ideological supporter of PPP also agreed with Arif Sahab. In his opinion, only PPP has some ideological followers which is a handful bunch of people. The main stream political parties have a huge presence in Skardu because majority of political

¹³⁰ Akhond Ahmed, “Electoral Politics and Voting Behavior in Skardu,” interview by the Author, May 5, 2024.

¹³¹ Sahib, interview.

figures having a high social stature tend to join these parties instead of smaller parties. Therefore, we can see the likes of PPP, PML-N and PTI having a huge presence in Skardu. And the reason behind such influential people to join these mainstream Pakistani political parties is not ideological rather based on benefits. After all, these mainstream parties possess huge resources compared to other parties.¹³²

Zahid Advocate, pointing towards this point said that MWM is not a very huge party yet in SKD-II it has a strong presence but in SKD-I and other constituencies, it has almost died. The reason behind this is Agha Ali Rizvi. So according to Zahid Advocate, the day Agha Ali Rizvi switches the party, MWM will also die in SKD-II as well.¹³³

Amjad Ali, police by profession also declared that his whole family had been voting for PPP in SKD-I from 2015 to 2020. When asked why, he answered that it had nothing to do political ideology. He was innocent enough to tell me that he knows nothing about politics (a truth people of Skardu do not really like to disclose about themselves). The only reason for him to vote for PPP's Syed Mehdi Shah is that his job was given by Syed Mehdi Shah. It had nothing to do with the party.¹³⁴

Same goes for Mr. Kacho Akbar. He always voted for Raja Jalal Maqpoon because his government job was bestowed by him.¹³⁵ Mr. Shahid Rajpoot, who is a staunch follower of PPP and a dedicated worker (who is my neighbor as well) also said that all the jobs holder in my family were given the job during PPP era.¹³⁶

¹³² Nazir, interview.

¹³³ Advocate Zahid Hussain, "Electoral Politics and Voting Behavior in Skardu," November 5, 2023.

¹³⁴ Amjad Ali, "Electoral Politics and Voting Behavior in Skardu," April 12, 2024.

¹³⁵ Kacho Akbar Khan, "Why People Vote," interview by the Author, August 12, 2022.

¹³⁶ Shahid Rajpoot, "Why People Vote," interview by the Author, August 12, 2022.

In the survey conducted 73.3% marked No when they were asked if they had voted to a candidate because of his political party. While only 36.8% agreed or disagreed that the candidates' political party play a decisive role (even though the answer can be said they gave it in another sense which will be discussed in the next heading).

Mr. Muhammad Ali Shah, a police by profession also said that in 2020 elections there was a dispute regarding the PTI's ticket between Raja Zakaria and Raja Jafar Khan. In his opinion, if the ticket had been given to Raja Jafar Khan, PTI would have lost.¹³⁷ However, Mr. Akhond Ahmed was of different opinion that the main reason was Imran Khan himself. In his opinion, his visited in 2015 greatly changed the political landscape and because of this visit Raja Jalal secured such a huge amount of vote (Only lost with one vote in 2015 elections). But majority disagree with Mr. Ahmed.

6.3. RULING PARTY AT THE CENTER/FEDERAL

The survey and interview conducted has shown that there is no ideological follower of any political party (there are extremely less in number) and even if people switch the party, it has nothing to do with the political ideology. But still, party has played a decisive role in electoral politics especially in SKD-I. But it is not because of the ideology but because of the political situation of GB itself.

The election in all the other provinces and GB do not happen simultaneously. Rather, there is almost a two year gap between the General elections of GB and the other parts of Pakistan. This factor plays a very important role in the voting behavior. In the survey, many people mentioned that the election of GB should happen with all the other parts of Pakistan. In this way the voting behavior may change and people would think differently.

¹³⁷ Muhammad Ali Shah, "Electoral Politics and Voting Behavior in Skardu" interview by the Author, May, 3, 2024.

Now, how these different dates of elections has anything to do with the voting behavior? The answer is simple. Which party is ruling at the center. The party ruling at the center/federal, is going to win the elections in Skardu as well. For the last three elections, the ruling party at the center has emerged the majority party in GB as well.

In the survey conducted 30.6% of the participant strongly agreed while 46.9% agreed to that the people of District Skardu vote for the candidate belonging to the party ruling at the center. 14.3% remained neutral while only 8% disagreed or strongly disagreed with this point of view.

The election results also indicates this factor quite vividly clear. In 2009 elections,(when PPP was the ruling party in Federal) PPP's Syed Mehdi Shah secured 6697 votes. He won the elections with a huge margin as his runner up Wazir Wilayat Ali of PML-Q only secured 1990 votes. Similarly, in SKD-II, Sheikh Nisar, belonging to the PPP, won with 8077 votes with the lead of 3387 votes to his runner up Syed Muhammad Ali Shah, an Independent candidate.

However, in 2015 elections, when PML-N was the ruling party at the center, there was a sharp difference. In SKD-I Raja Jalal Hussain Maqpoon lost the elections with only one vote. Akbar Taban the victorious one was able to secure 3331 vote. Many people attribute this to rigging. Now, one may say that the party identity does not play any role then. But again, as Mujtaba Nasiri, a voter of SKD-I said, "who would have even voted for Akbar Taban if he did not belong to the ruling party."¹³⁸ Though we can see the social factors did play a very significant role but on the other hand party identity also played a major role as well. Arif Sahab was of the opinion that if Raja Jalal Hussain Maqpoon was representing the ruling party, he would have cleaned swept 2015 elections in SKD-I. Many people did agree with this point. In 2015 elections Mr. Taqi Hussaini also said that he was of the opinion that we should vote for the candidate belonging to the ruling party because it would be "beneficial" for the development

¹³⁸ Mujtaba Nasiri, "Electoral Politics and Voting Behavior," interview by the Author, January, 27, 2024.

of our area. On the other hand, Syed Mehdi Shah, who was the first ever Chief Minister of GB, only secured 2709 votes in 2015 elections. Many attribute this to the fact that PPP was no longer the ruling party at the center.

In 2015 elections, Raja Jalal Hussain Maqpoon was the candidate of PTI. So, one may wonder may be for such a great performance for his first try in elections, it may be because of PTI not Raja Jalal Hussain Maqpoon. Mr. Arif Sahab, did pointed out towards that the PTI was getting popular in Pakistan, but he was of the opinion that as far as 2015 elections in SKD-I is concerned, it was all about Mr. Raja Jalal Maqpoon himself not PTI. in the elections under discussion PTI's candidate of SKD-II only secured 445 votes. Arif Sahab, because of this factor claimed that social factors are very important.¹³⁹ But one cannot dismiss the fact that Akbar Taban did manage to defeat him (and if elections were rigged) put a good fight against Raja Jalal Maqpoon and that can only be attributed to the fact that he belonged to the ruling party otherwise, Raja Jalal Maqpoon is a much higher man of stature compared to Akbar Taban. Number of people including myself (I was a worker of ITP at that time) had never even heard the name of Akbar Taban before elections. But Raja Jalal Hussain Maqpoon was a famous personality as being the head of the Maqpoon family.

However, in 2015 elections, SKD-II showed a totally different result. Kacho Imtiaz of MWM won the elections with 10411 votes out of 21508 votes casted. While the candidate of ruling party Syed M. Ali. Shah had secured only 4841 votes. There is not much difference in votes secured for Syed M. Ali. Shah in 2009 elections and 2015 elections (in 2009 elections he fought as an independent and secured 4690 votes). In 2015 elections, MWM was against the PML-N and there was no coalition between them instead there was some sort of confrontation actually. This huge success for MWM can be attributed to the bus incident in 2012 (discussed under the

¹³⁹ Sahab, interview.

religion heading) and Agha Ali Rizvi. It can also be concluded that the Colombian model is more applicable compared to the Michigan model.

In 2020 elections, the factor of ruling party at the center again played an important role in the elections in SKD-I. Raja Zakariya, a candidate of PTI, the party ruling at the center, secured a major victory. He secured 5288 votes out of 10857 votes casted. On the other hand Syed Mehdi Shah of PPP secured 4140 votes. The factor that ruling party played a significant role in the victory of Akbar Taban in 2015 elections can also be confirmed by his performance in 2020 elections. He only secured 1712 votes. So from this results, one may agree with Mujtaba Nasiri. Arif Sahab, also agreed with this point because in his opinion, comparatively, PML-N's rule from 2015 to 2020 was much better where we saw better development especially in infrastructure and better governance. From this result, we can conclude that the performance of a politicians who has won the previous election does not really matter much when it comes to the next elections. Mr. Ahmed, Arif Sahab, Zahid Adovcate and some other interviewees also mentioned that even if the PTI had given the ticket to Raja Jafar Khan, still they could have won the elections in SKD-I but not with the margin won by Raja Zakaria since he was more popular compared to Raja Jafar Khan.

However, in SKD-II, MWM was again successful in securing another term. After 1990s elections it was the first time that a single party has won a consecutive election in a constituency in Skardu (talking about all the four constituencies). But this time, there was a coalition between PTI and MWM which, in Wazir Wajahad's opinion played a significant role in second time victory of MWM. Other than Wazir Wajahat, the other interviewees did not agree with this point of view. Rather, they pointed towards the religious factor and Agha Ali Rizvi's personality in the consecutive victory of MWM. But, one cannot dismiss this point that in 2020 elections, MWM and PTI had a coalition. Comparatively, MWM-PTI did not win the election as it was won by MWM in 2015. MWM's candidate Muhammad Kazim (goes by name of

Mesam Kazim) secured 7988 votes with PPP's Syed M. Ali. Shah securing 7012 votes. M. Kazim won with the margin of 976 votes which is much less compared to Kacho Imtiaz victory from MWM's platform who won the 2015 elections with the margin of 5570 votes. As far as Syed M. Ali. Shah is concerned, he secured less vote than his previous elections (2009 and 2015). On the other hand, PML-N was no longer in the run as its candidate came at fourth place with only 1854 votes.

From the above discussion and the election results, one may conclude that if the political party plays any role, it is the ruling party at the center factor. Other than that, social factors are much more dominant. As in SKD-II, the results had shown the dominance of religio-political party while in other than 2015 election, candidate of ruling party has secured a comfortable victory. By the 2015 elections result SKD-I, we also conclude that the social factors have a very significant role in the voting behavior.

PERSONAL INTERESTS AND THE VOTING BEHAVIOR

7.1. INTRODUCTION

As mentioned in the theoretical framework, there is another theory regarding the voting behavior and electoral politics which is called the Rational Choice or Political Economy Model, where the voters, through their votes, try to pursue their economic interests. The model itself has been discussed in the theoretical framework. Now, the problem to be discussed over here is does this model stand true in District Skardu and if it does, to what extent.

7.2. PROMISES OF JOBS

It is very common practice in Skardu that the candidates and their relatives would go from home to home to gather support. Especially SKD-I is not a very big constituency, so this practice is much clear. Some females who participated in this practice mentioned to me that majority of the homes they visited would always ask for a government job or if anyone of their family is on contract basis, to make him regular if they win the elections. It is also a common practice to promise jobs to different candidates for job. For example, Wazir Waqar Wali, in 2015 voted for PML-N's Akbar Taban. He said that I voted for him because he promised job to me, but later he did not fulfil his promise. So in 2020 election he opted to vote for Raja Zakariya. Wazir Waqar, when asked was any job promised by Raja Zakaria he responded by answering in negative. He voted to Raja Zakaria because he was his relative. But he did said that he was not going to vote for Akbar Taban though.

Mr. Waqar Wali also shared a story that Mesam Kazim (SKD-II representative) and Raja Zakaria (SKD-I representative) were talking to each other that they are getting many calls where people are asking for jobs as we had promised. Kazim asks Raja Zakaria if he knew how

can they provide so many jobs as they promised. Raja Zakaria replied that he wanted to know the same thing as well (God knows if this story is true or not).¹⁴⁰

In the survey 95.6% of the participants answered No when they were inquired if they had voted because they were promised a government job. But on the other hand, 20.8% and 54.2% of the participants strongly agreed or simply agreed respectively that people vote for a candidate who has offered them a job.

But all exactly know that it is not like the jobs are going to flow in after the elections. So, it is pretty much clear that everyone is not going to get a job. But, they do tend to use different connections to get job especially those who have won the elections.

Many people have got their government job especially in SKD-I during the PPP era. We have already mentioned Shahid Rajaput who have been supporting PPP because majority of the jobs of his family was given by Syed Mehdi Shah. We have also mentioned that those who have got any government job because of any politician, has loyally voted them regardless if they would win or not. But, one cannot say that these people make any sort of huge number of voters though.

7.3. THE CONSTRUCTORS

If the Rational Choice theory is significant, it can be attributed to constructors (*Thikkydars*). It is very common practice for big constructors to support a candidate so they could benefit by securing government construction contracts if their candidate would win. The big constructors, always tend to support the candidate belonging to the ruling party. Because in their opinion, this is most “beneficial” for them. A constructor, who on condition of anonymity told me that in 2015 elections he fully supported PML-N ins SKD-I. He used his wealth and all connections

¹⁴⁰ Wazir Waqar Wali, “Electoral Politics and Voting Behavior in Skardu,” interview by the Author, March 23, 2024.

to gather vote for him and invested heavily in PML-N's election campaigns. When Akbar Taban, won the elections it really did brought dividends for him. He said, "In 2020 elections I again voted for him, because during his time, I had made a great fortune. So, it would be very dishonest to not vote for him now."¹⁴¹

In both SKD-I and SKD-II, these constructors do support a candidate for their own benefits. To make sure that they would win the elections they use all their "Social connections" to bring him in power. On the other hand, the old folks of different parties who has stacked to a party is because they had got great benefit when their one was in power. Syed Mehdi Shah has fought elections for 45 years now. And twice has come to power (once before 2009 and the second time in 2009). Whenever he came to power, he had made sure that his loyal ones have got the best benefit possible- that is what Mr. Raza Ahmed, a business man, told me. So, in Raza's opinion, it is not that PPP had any ideological followers. It is just that many people have benefited from Syed Mehdi Shah. And Syed Mehdi Shah has never changed his party. If he changes his party, the PPP's presence in SKD-I could highly be damaged.¹⁴²

But many interviewees during the interview, though not dismissing that people vote according to their interests, were of the opinion that it does not play a much significant role though. Mr. Taqi Hussaini mentioned that some who got some personal interests, especially the constructors vote in this way but these constructors also use their social connections to gather vote for the candidate. So, Mr. Hussaini's opinion was that again social factor is at play here.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Anonymous, "Electoral Politics and Voting Behavior in Skardu," interview by the Author, January 20, 2024.

¹⁴² Raza Ahmed, "Electoral Politics and Voting Behavior in Skardu," interview by the Author, March 4, 2024.

¹⁴³ Hussaini, interview.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE STATUS OF GILGIT-BALTISTAN AND CHANGE IN VOTING BEHAVIOR

8.1. INTRODUCTION

GB has a unique constitutional status. It is a disputed region. It has its own Legislative Assembly and a government led by a Chief Minister, but it does not have any representation in National Assembly and Senate. The GB Assembly has limited power when it comes to legislation. The situation of GB has been discussed in the historical background in detail so there is no need to repeat things.

This unique status has a deep impact on the voting behavior and electoral politics of GB. Similarly, because of this unique status, in future, one can expect significant change in the behavior as well.

8.2. ELECTIONS ON DIFFERENT DATES AND ITS IMPACT ON VOTING BEHAVIOR

Before discussing how this unique status would cause change in voting behavior, we would discuss the impact that it currently has on the electoral politics and voting behavior. Among the 300 participants of the survey 8.3% strongly agreed and 41.7% agreed that this status has a significant effect on the voting behavior. While 27% remained neutral. The remaining out of 100% goes who either disagreed or strongly disagreed.

The questionnaire contained a comment box asking the participants about their opinion regarding how the GB status impacts and may impact the voting behavior in the future. Majority of the participants (who decided to write in the comment box – only 49 people filled the comment box) talked about change it may cause in voting behavior in future but some also mentioned how it has been molding the voting behavior. In their comment box they mainly

pointed out towards the difference dates of elections in all the other places of Pakistan and GB (almost a 2 year gap Approximately). They believed that the election must be held on same day as held in all the other places of Pakistan otherwise, people are going to vote for the party ruling at the center.

This point has been discussed in the impact of party identity on the voting behavior. As we have discussed earlier, the Michigan model/Party Identity model does not imply the way it is supposed to do. And this is because of this unique status.

Mr. Gulzar, an English Lecture and resident of Haji Gam (SKD-I – though has been settled in Skardu but he is amongst those communities who are not “Balti” but has his vote in SKD-I) said that not only in Skardu, in the whole GB, people think that by supporting the ruling party at the center, GB can get more benefits because it is dependent on the Federal. So, many people think that by voting for another party, we are simply inviting confrontation with the federal which will lead to less development in the area.¹⁴⁴

Mr. Gulzar also said that people are not very interested in politics. Because they think that all the powers regarding GB is in the hand of Federal government. So, therefore people do not really care who comes to power, because in the end, the ruling party is going to form the government at GB as well and the representatives will forget about those people who elected them not to mention how powerless they are in the face of mainstream political parties and the federal government. Mr. Gulzar and others in survey were of the opinion that if the elections for federal and GB is held simultaneously, this may bring change in the behavior.

The main reason for social factors to be so dominant in the electoral politics of District Skardu can be attributed to the status of GB. The GB assembly has limited powers, bureaucracy is more powerful, the elected representatives are going to simply bend the knee to the mainstream

¹⁴⁴ Gulzar Hussain, “Electoral Politics and Voting Behavior in Skardu,” interview by the Author, April 12, 2024.

political party they belong to, Federal legislature and government takes the important decision so why would anyone care about who wins the elections? (Something revealed by the survey). So, people are going to simply vote on the basis of social factors and they would look towards the center – who is the ruling party in Pakistan now a days. Therefore, the political ideology has nothing to do with the electoral politics and voting behavior. As Mr. Gulzar mentioned, if the GB's elections would be held with all the other places of Pakistan, people would start to think and would actively participate in elections as ideological followers of any political party instead of looking who is ruling at the center.

So, this factor is of paramount importance. The status of GB. In the survey, many people commented that as long as the elections of GB is not held simultaneously with Pakistan, people are not going to “be political” and would vote on the old traditional mindset.

8.3. GB STATUS AND CHANGE IN VOTING BEHAVIOR

The advent of TV brought a great change in nature of Politics.¹⁴⁵ The advent of TV exposed people to better communication and it highly increased their awareness regarding politics. Now, in the modern day, internet is going to play a significant role in the voting behavior and political opinion of people.¹⁴⁶

With the introduction of 4G networks and other tools enabling people to access internet. The people of GB's awareness regarding the mainstream politics of Pakistan and their awareness regarding GB also increased. People started to express their opinion on these social media applications like Facebook and twitter (Now called X). This has brought great change in the public opinion in GB. Those, who till yesterday knew nothing regarding the status of GB, have come to know about it via Facebook and other similar social media apps. People express their

¹⁴⁵ Ian McAllister, “Democratic Theory and Electoral Politics,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Elections, Voting Behavior and Public Opinion*, ed. Justin Fisher et al. (Oxon: Routledge, 2018), 46.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 47.

opinion on these media. Many people – the Nationalists – who talk about GB rights and till yesterday could not reach many people, now by using the internet they have brought their opinion to a very large audience via social media and internet. This has brought great change in the Public Opinion when it comes to GB.

Similarly, better economic condition and better infrastructure has enabled people to send their children into universities to obtain higher degrees. With better education and exposure to the other world, has brought great changes not only in the social thinking of the people but also the political thinking of the people. These agents of change have played the most paramount role in molding and changing the Public Opinion and electoral politics in District Skardu.

Because of these factors one may hope for change in the voting behavior of people. A participant in the survey commented, “The deprivation of GB in provision of its constitutional rights compelled me to vote the educated and realistic nationalists of this region.” Another one commented, “The semi-autonomous status of Gilgit-Baltistan plays a significant role in our local elections. We vote for the Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly, which has limited powers compared to provincial assemblies in Pakistan. One of the key issues for us voters is the demand for greater autonomy or full provincial status.” Someone emphasizing on the role of social media said, “I think social media has played a vital role in making people aware of their rights. They have now understood how the mainstream political parties are just ruling over them through few people from them who has no vision except defending the party. Now they are looking someone who will protect their lands fight for their rights and device policies for development of region.” Another one, regarding the future electoral politics said, “The future voting behavior of the people of Gilgit-Baltistan will be dynamic and multifaceted, driven by a combination of demands for greater political rights, economic development, better services, and the preservation of cultural identity. Political candidates and parties that align their agendas with these evolving priorities are likely to resonate with the electorate in GB.”

Another insightful comment while expressing the condition of GB said, “People of this generation are more aware of their status and values, and this awareness will lead them to break the traditions their ancestors followed. Voting is not merely a procedural system; rather, it is the future of any area in the hands of its people. The vague status of GB is significantly impacting voting behavior, as the majority of people are hopeless and tired of repeatedly selecting representatives to no avail. Hence, actions speak louder than words, and to restore the faith in system, real and affective actions are required.” One who called the political condition of GB Pathetic said, “The current status of GB has resulted in plenty of geo-economical, geopolitical and geostrategic problems which have adverse impacts on voting behavior of the people of GB. I have answered the question in this way by keeping the past experiences and pathetic and abysmal condition of GB in view.” And many more expressed similar thoughts regarding the electoral politics and voting behavior.

8.4. DISAPPOINTMENT WITH THE MAINSTREAM POLITICAL PARTIES OF PAKISTAN

In the survey conducted, 76.1% answered in Affirmative when asked if they are disappointed with the mainstream Pakistani Political Parties. In their view, the mainstream political parties only visit at the time of elections and other than that they do not even think of GB. In the opinion of many people of Skardu, the politicians belonging to the mainstream political parties do not represent the aspirations of the people. In their opinion, GB is deprived of its rights and the politicians have not done anything. They do not represent them faithfully.

On the other hand, 63% shows the willingness to vote for a national-indigenous party if in future such party participates in elections. During the interviews, almost all of the interviewees

expressed their disappointment with the Pakistani Political Parties. They even said that there is a need for a GB party who can represent the people of GB and fight for the rights of GB.

But Arif Sahab, depicted a much pessimistic view regarding the future electoral politics. In his view, the voting behavior is not going to change. He argued that people do say that GB is deprived of its rights but the nationalist leaders who talk about the rights of GB, are not much welcomed and supported by the people, especially in District Skardu.¹⁴⁷ However, Dr. Nazir argued that in the future changes may occur. Because the coming generation is getting more aware of their rights and the public opinion, as expressed through social media do indicate towards a “wind of change” though slow and gradual.¹⁴⁸ In one of the comment boxes a participant said, “Given the current scenario, in coming days, people might not even go to cast votes.” Especially if we talk about youth, those who have studied in Pakistani universities and have been exposed to the other cities, a sense of deprivation and backwardness can be witnessed. Mr. Sohail Zahidi, an MBA, also said that in Skardu, the whole political mechanism is controlled by the establishment. The Bureaucracy is much more stronger compared to the elected representatives of people. The GB Council has more authority compare to GB Legislative assembly, which is headed by PM himself. Therefore, the only thing people expect from these representatives is some construction contracts, a few roads and street lights and a couple of jobs. Nothing more, nothing less.¹⁴⁹ Such, thinking amongst the youth has not only awoken a feeling of disappointment with the mainstream political parties, but also have sowed a feeling of hatred towards all the Pakistani institutions.

¹⁴⁷ Sahab, interview.

¹⁴⁸ Nazir, interview.

¹⁴⁹ Zahidi, interview.

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS, SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

9.1. INTRODUCTION

Till this point, the voting behavior and electoral politics has been discussed in detail. The thesis has not only explored different opinion and used the elections data to investigate the voting behavior of the people of Skardu, but also has analyzed how the models are applicable in the region and to what extent.

In the following paragraph, the thesis will be concluded while also presenting the final findings and recommendations.

9.2. FINDINGS

Through the investigation conducted, the researcher has reached to the followings:

- In democracy, participating in electoral politics means to express yourselves in the political condition and process of your region which gives one the sense of some sort of participation in the political process of the region or state you live in. The main reason for people to participate in elections is that this is the only political process they are most familiar with which gives them a sense of inclusion in the political situation and process of the region. Moreover, many factors which determine their voting behavior also compels them to express themselves through electoral process.
- Social Factors (the Colombian Model) is more applicable to the voting behavior of people of Skardu.
- Factors like religion, Candidates personality, his social stature and his own family status in the society plays a vital role in electoral politics.

- Voting is a collective act in District Skardu instead of being an individual one.
Mostly, the family as whole decide to vote for a candidate. Even if the vote is divided because of social relations with different candidates, it is again a family decision rather an individual one.
- Women usually follow the lead of the male head of family. It is not very common for women to vote according to their own wishes.
- Language, Sect (religion), Biradari, locality and relationships play a vital role. People tend to vote for a candidate who belongs to their locality or if any candidate is their relative. Also, politicians try to find different communities by winning the support of the influential personalities of those communities.
- The number of people who are ideological followers of a party is very rare. Some parties have staunch followers though, but that is because that they have economically benefited from the party. It has rarely to do with party ideology.
- The party only in one sense has a very decisive influence over the voting behavior of people of District Skardu. That is if the party is the ruling party at the center. Since the Michigan model is silent about this factor (As this model was presented by American Researchers, and they do not have any region with such unique status as GB), the model needs a revisit to include such region having such unique status.
- People tend to vote for economic interests as argued by Rational-Choice Model, but majority of people do not get any major economic benefit. Only the big shot constructors get such benefits and they use their social connections (again the Colombian model) to secure vote for the politician they support.
- The status of GB plays a vital role in the electoral politics of District Skardu.
- The disappointment with the mainstream Pakistani political parties is increasing amongst the youth as they are becoming more conscious about the status of GB and

their political rights which may give rise to the nationalist politicians and nationalist parties. But this may take some huge amount of time for now.

9.3. SUGGESTIONS

Followings are the suggestions which the policymakers should ponder about which can bring “positive change” in the voting behavior and electoral politics of not only district Skardu but overall GB.

- GB should be given representation in both NA and senate. By this the increasing feeling of distrust and deprivation can be eradicated amongst the people of GB. GB, as part of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, should have a say in the mainstream politics of Pakistan.
- Elections should be held in GB simultaneously with all the other places of Pakistan. This will bring a sense of equality amongst the people of GB and people would think more about the politics instead of simply following the dominant party at the center.
- Democracy is a system where people should choose representatives based on their competence not on the basis of relations and other factors. For this purpose, better internet facilities and Social Sciences should be promoted in district Skardu which will lead towards more awareness making electoral politics a healthy activity rather a passive one. Today, there is only one university in Baltistan (The University of Baltistan) but it does not have a proper faculty of Social Sciences. So, government have to take steps to improve the quality of the university and bring awareness through education amongst the people.

- The government should not repeat the mistake of the past. The sense of deprivation of the people of the then East Pakistan was vividly expressed in 1970 General Elections. Which later led to the Fall of Dhaka. Government must take steps to eradicate the growing sense of deprivation amongst the people of GB by either giving the region more autonomy or taking steps towards inclusion of GB in the mainstream politics of Pakistan.

9.5. CONCLUSION

Electoral politics is the essence of democracy. Not only it gives people the feeling of participation in the political arena and policy making of the country, it also gives the people to express their will and hold the ruling class accountable by voting in favor or against them. Thus, a free and fair election is a must for the democratization of any political unit.

While participating in the electoral politics, every person follows a particular behavior while determines for whom and why he votes or even why he participates in the electoral process. The behavior is influenced by different factors and every geographical area, given its distinct characteristics may demonstrate a unique and distinct voting behavior. So, it is very important to study the electoral politics and voting behavior at smaller regional areas like provinces or districts or even constituencies.

GB, which lies which constitutes the Northern Areas of Pakistan is a geo-strategically an important region. It is a disputed area between India and Pakistan as the part of larger Kashmir. But people of GB feel that they have their own identity separate from Jammu and Kashmir. Since it is a disputed area, it has a very unique constitutional status. It contains a provincial setup (After the self-government and empowerment order 2009. Before that it was called Federally Administrated Northern Areas of Pakistan FANA). But it did not have any

representation in the Pakistani Parliament. Moreover, it is the only Shia dominated area in Sunni dominated Pakistan.

The people of GB has been engaged in electoral politics for a long period of time. This research was an attempt to investigate the electoral politics and voting behavior of District Skardu from 2009 to 2020. Through this investigation the researcher reached to the conclusion that the social factors i.e. religion, personality, social connections, relationships, Salam Dua, personality, family etc. play a very important role in the voting behavior and electoral politics in District Skardu. So in researcher's point of view, the Colombian Model is more applicable to the elections of GB. The party identity did not play any important role but in only one case. If the party is ruling at the Center, that party would have a better chance of winning. And it has been witnessed that from 2009 to 2020, the parties ruling at the center has dominated the elections not only in District Skardu but in all over GB.

This point must also be stressed on that with better facilities and the advent of internet in GB, people of GB, especially the youth is getting more and more conscious about the status of GB. It is very possible that in the future, this sense of deprivation amongst the youth, as they feel that they are left out from the mainstream politics of Pakistan and the mainstream political parties has always betrayed GB, may lead to the feeling of distrust towards the federation and it may lead to the rise of nationalist leaders and GB's nationalist parties. In the coming elections, this feeling of deprivation and disappointment will be expressed in the electoral politics.

To conclude, the Government of Pakistan must give more attention towards GB. It is the most underdeveloped area of Pakistan with a load shedding of 19 to 20 hours a day. The government have to take steps to develop this region. Bring better opportunities and solve the problems of GB. The Head of State – Prime Minister – Should visit this region more so the people of GB

would feel part of this Nation and State. These actions will lead to more trust and confidence amongst the people towards the mainstream political parties thus paving the way for more stronger bond with the whole Pakistan. The government of Pakistan should learn from its mistake. They should revisit the 1970 General elections and do everything in their power so such disaster would be never repeated and our beloved Pakistan's integrity would never be endangered.

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