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Understanding Voter Motivations and Campaign Priorities for the 2024 Elections in Pakistan

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Abstract

The year 2024 was significant for global democracy, with more than 70 countries holding national elections, representing over half of the world's population and nearly two billion eligible voters. Within this international context, the present study examined voter behaviour and campaign dynamics during Pakistan's 2024 general elections. The research examined factors influencing electoral decisions, including political instability, economic issues, and evolving media consumption patterns. Special emphasis was placed on the growing influence of digital and social media platforms in shaping political awareness and engagement. A quantitative approach was employed, involving a structured questionnaire distributed via Google Forms in January 2024, one month before the elections. A total of (n=245) responses were collected, covering key topics such as voter motivation, political preferences, and media impact. The survey comprised both open-ended and closed-ended questions to gather a broad range of perspectives. Descriptive statistical analysis identified significant patterns and trends. The results showed that social media platforms, such as Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube, have become major sources of political information, particularly among younger voters. Meanwhile, traditional campaign methods, such as rallies, family networks, and community influence, remain effective, particularly in rural areas. Key voter priorities included economic growth, job creation, education, healthcare, and social welfare. Trust in electoral transparency and institutional credibility also significantly influenced voter participation. The study highlights the connection between digital engagement, youth involvement, and voter concerns, providing valuable insights for policymakers, electoral officials, and political leaders aiming to strengthen democratic processes in Pakistan.

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Introduction

The year 2024 was important for a democratic world; more than 70 countries, home to more than half the world's population, held national elections in 2024. It was the largest election year in history, with nearly two billion eligible voters. This massive electoral cycle occurred against the backdrop of a global democratic shift, where incumbents faced strong opposition, populist movements gained traction, and economic uncertainties influenced voter choices (O'Neill, 2025).

In Pakistan, the general election of 2024 was the most critical in the nation's history (Chughtai, 2024). The 2024 general elections were held during one of the most critical periods in Pakistan's political history, taking place amid political turmoil, economic distress, and institutional challenges (Arshad, 2024). The elections were held following two years of political unrest after former Prime Minister Imran Khan of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) was removed by a no-confidence motion (April 10, 2022). Subsequently, Khan was arrested and convicted of corruption and barred from politics for five years. In the run-up to the elections, a Supreme Court ruling stripped the PTI of their electoral symbol for failing to hold intra-party elections for years (Ullah et al., 2024).

The political instability, economic crises, and geopolitical shifts in neighbouring countries influenced electoral results. Along with political unrest and economic struggles, public frustration increased further. The Pakistani Rupee hit record lows (USD1= Rs308, September 5, 2023) against the US Dollar. People faced inflation, unemployment, and financial hardships, exacerbated by International Monetary Fund (IMF) policies and the removal of subsidies (Khan et al., 2024). Climate change-related disasters and extreme weather further damaged the national resources (Hussain et al., 2022). All these factors made the 2024 elections critical to assess voter sentiment and engagement.

A key aspect of this election was the role of the young population; 44% of the voters under the age of 35, young Pakistanis represented a significant force in shaping the country's political future (Chughtai, 2024). They actively use different social media platforms, such as Facebook, TikTok,

YouTube, and Instagram. These platforms have become battlegrounds for political discussion (Saleem et al., 2024).

Problem Statement

During the elections, Pakistan always faces many challenges, including political instability, violence, low turnout, and allegations of electoral misconduct. This results in clashes between rival parties, security concerns, and disturbances in the electoral process, which can discourage voter participation. There are many studies on voter behaviour worldwide and in South Asia. However, a gap exists in understanding the factors influencing voter participation and campaign priorities in Pakistan. This study has not effectively explored the intersection of demographic diversity and socio-political influences that shape Pakistani voter behaviour.

Objectives

The current study aimed to address the following research objectives:

- To understand the diverse motivations driving voter participation in the Pakistan general elections 2024.
- To identify key factors that voters prioritise in election campaigns, including candidate qualities, policy issues, and campaign strategies.
- To assess variations in voting behaviour across demographic groups, such as age, gender, socio-economic status, and geographic location.
- To explore how voters perceive and engage with different campaign strategies, including digital platforms, traditional rallies, and grassroots outreach.

Research Questions

The current research attempted to answer the following research questions:

- What are the primary motivations for voter participation in Pakistan?
- How do voters prioritise campaign factors, such as candidate qualities, policy issues, and media outreach?

- What differences exist in voting motivations and campaign preferences across demographic groups?
- How effective are various campaign strategies in influencing voter behaviour in Pakistan?

Literature Review

Elections are the main pillar of the democratic system; people have to decide their country's future through voting (Ostrander et al., 2021). The voters' primary motivators for participation in the elections include belief in democratic values and civic duty (Arshad, 2024). There are psychological, social, and political factors that influence the voter participation in the election processes (Ahmad et al., 2020). The scholars, for instance Verba et al. (1995) presented the Civic Voluntarism Model. This model suggests that individuals who strongly value democracy and civic responsibility are more likely to participate in elections (Verba et al., 1995). It refers to the basic concept that in a democratic system, citizens have a vital role to play by actively participating in their community and government through actions, such as voting, engaging in political discourse, volunteering, and upholding the law, essentially contributing to the well-being of their society by exercising their rights and responsibilities (Akram et al., 2021; Veil, 2008).

Beyond civic responsibility, the desire for change and policy concerns are key mobilisation forces for voters to participate in elections. Inglehart (1997) stated that modernization influences political attitudes, particularly in societies experiencing economic and political transitions. Modernisation helps societies develop economically, and their cultures tend to shift in a predictable direction. Socioeconomic differences are linked to pervasive cultural differences (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). In a country, where economic challenges and political instability persist, modernisation not only influences governance but also reshapes public perceptions and voter behaviour (Riasat et al., 2025; Zaheer et al., 2025).

In Pakistan, public dissatisfaction with governance, economic crisis, and corruption frequently catalyse voter turnout. Bélanger and Meguid (2005) highlighted the issue-based voting concept, explaining how voters prioritise specific policies when selecting candidates. This theoretical foundation aligns with the questionnaire's emphasis on the "desire for change" as a key driver of voter participation.

General political discussions within families, friends, and communities always influence voter decisions during the elections (Nordin & Smith, 2018). Torcal and Christmann (2021) added that public trust in politicians remains low due to corruption and governance failures. Voters frequently rank candidate characteristics over party affiliation, particularly when political institutions face credibility challenges.

Political campaigns are important in positively engaging the voters during the elections. With the development of technology, politicians and political parties are now using digital campaigning (Svensson, 2025). Gibson and McAllister (2015) claimed that digital platforms have transformed political outreach, particularly among the youth and urban voters. In Pakistan, political parties use social media platforms, targeted advertisements, and digital engagement to reach a broader electorate (Rafique et al., 2022). While digital platforms are reshaping political communication, traditional campaign methods remain highly influential, especially in rural and lower-income communities where limited internet access and traditional influences still shape voter behaviour. Green and Gerber (2019) pointed out that door-to-door campaigning, political workers, and public rallies are still influential in mobilising their voters.

Many factors influence voter participation in elections, and one of them is trust in the electoral process. Different researchers have explored the connection between electoral integrity and voter confidence, emphasizing how perceived fairness, transparency, and institutional credibility impact turnout. In Pakistan, voter turnout dipped from 52.1% in the 2018 elections to 47.6% in 2024 (Asian Network for Free Elections, 2024). Its concerns over vote rigging, political interference, and lack of transparency have historically shaped electoral outcomes. Increasing transparency and accountability in the election processes have been identified as the key mechanisms to restore trust in the democratic process (Norris, 2017).

In Pakistan, traditional influences, including tribal affiliations, religious leadership, and local power structures, play a key role in electoral decisions (Suleman & Husnain, 2025). These influences are significant in rural and semi-urban areas, where cultural and historical connections often guide political loyalty. Despite extensive scholarship on electoral participation, certain gaps remain unidentified in studying voter behaviour in Pakistan. The effectiveness of digital campaigning in rural and low-income communities remains underexplored, necessitating further research on how

online political engagement translates into actual voter turnout (Zaheer et al., 2025). Additionally, longitudinal studies tracking changes in voter behaviour over multiple election cycles are lacking, limiting the ability to assess shifting electoral dynamics over time. Furthermore, localised electoral studies focusing on tribal, regional, and religious influences would provide a more nuanced understanding of how socio-cultural factors shape voting patterns in Pakistan.

Research Methodology

This study explored voter motivations and campaign priorities for the general elections of 2024 in Pakistan. The study utilized a quantitative approach and a structured questionnaire was distributed via Google Forms in January 2024, one month before the February 8th 2024, elections in Pakistan, to get data from respondents. Participants were selected using convenience sampling via online distribution through Google Forms. The questionnaire was designed to ensure a diverse representation of respondents across different age groups, genders, education, and socio-economic backgrounds.

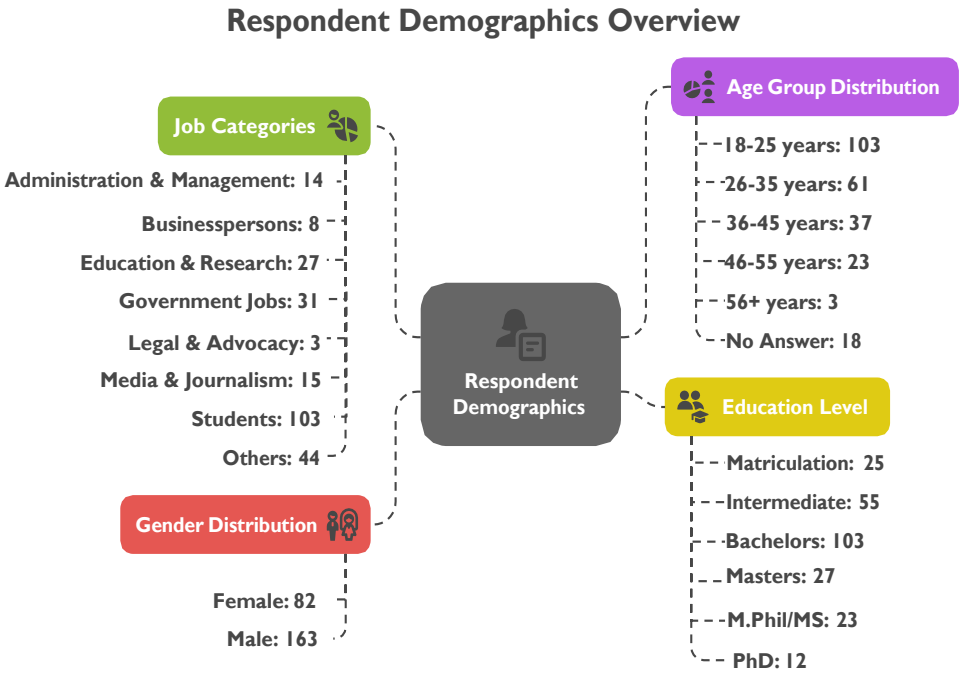
Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire was structured into multiple sections to cover all key aspects of voter behaviour and electoral engagement. Sections included demographic information, voting motivations, campaign priorities, influence of campaign strategies, trust in the electoral process and open-ended responses. This allowed participants to express their opinions on key national issues, the qualities they value in a candidate, and suggestions for electoral reforms. This qualitative data enriched the study by capturing diverse perspectives beyond structured multiple-choice responses.

Data Analysis

After collecting data from respondents, it was analysed using descriptive statistical methods to identify major trends and patterns. This approach allowed for a systematic review of the factors influencing Pakistan voter behaviour, election participation, and campaign priorities.

Figure 1
Demographic Overview



The survey collected responses from a total of (n=245) individuals, with a higher participation of male respondents (163, 66.5%) compared to female respondents (82, 33.5%). This gender distribution reflects broader patterns of electoral engagement, where male participation often outweighs female involvement in political discourse.

Regarding age distribution, most respondents (103 individuals) fell within the 18-25 age group, highlighting strong youth representation in the survey. Sixty-one respondents followed the 26-35 years category, while 37 individuals were aged 36-45. Participation declined in older age groups, with 23 respondents in the 46-55 bracket and only 3 respondents aged 56 and above. Additionally, 18 individuals chose not to disclose their age. The dominance of younger participants suggests that political awareness and engagement are increasing among Pakistan's youth.

Regarding education levels, a significant portion of respondents held undergraduate (103 respondents) or master's degrees (27 respondents), indicating a well-educated sample group. The distribution further included

55 individuals with an intermediate (12-year) education, 25 with matriculation (10-year) education, 23 holding "M. Phil/MS degrees", and 12 respondents with a PhD. The high proportion of university-educated participants suggests that formal education plays a role in political awareness and engagement.

When categorised by professional roles, the largest number of respondents were students (103 individuals), reflecting strong participation from the academic community. Government employees (31 respondents) and education and research professionals (27 respondents) also had notable representation. Other categories included media and journalism (15 respondents), administration and management (14 respondents), businesspersons (8 respondents), as well as legal and advocacy (3 respondents). Additionally, 44 respondents were classified under the "others" category, capturing diverse occupational backgrounds. The dominance of students and educated professionals highlights the role of academic and knowledge-based communities in shaping political discourse.

Analysis of Voter Motivation for the 2024 Electoral Process in Pakistan

The data reveals several key factors driving voter participation in the then upcoming 2024 elections in Pakistan.

Table 1
Voter Motivation

S No.	Options	Respondents	Percentage
1	The desire for change or improvement in government policies	97	24.68
2	Concern for social justice and equality	74	18.83
3	Belief in the importance of civic duty and responsibility	67	17.05
4	Influence of family and community values	30	7.63
5	Impact of historical or current events on your perspective	30	7.63
6	Personal experiences with the electoral system	24	6.11
7	Desire to support a specific candidate or party	36	9.16
8	Interest in specific policy issues	35	8.91
	Total	393	100.00

The majority of the respondents (24.7 %) specified that their *desire for change or improvement in government policies* was the primary motivator in the 2024 elections. The ***"Tabdeeli"*** (Change) is the political slogan of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). Voters, Particularly the youth, seek

leadership that can bring transparency, accountability, and progressive reforms. This reflects a growing public sentiment that the current governance structure needs reform in terms of economic policies, rule of law, or overall political stability. This suggests that voters actively seek leadership to address Pakistan's pressing challenges, including inflation, unemployment, and governance failures.

Following this, concern for social justice and equality (18%) emerged as another key factor. It is a key challenge in Pakistan due to prevailing economic disparities, gender inequality, and limited access to basic rights, such as health, education, and justice. The United Nations Development Programme (2024) report places Pakistan in the 'low' human development category with a Human Development Index (HDI) value of 0.540 and a global ranking of 164 out of 193 countries. It reflects gaps in wealth distribution and social services. Women and religious minorities face systemic discrimination, limiting their opportunities in political, economic, and social spheres.

Some respondents (17%) also participated in the 2024 elections. They stated that they believe in civic duty and responsibility. This suggests that many people understand the importance of their votes in changing the country's future. While this number is slightly lower than those motivated by the desire for change, it still underscores a growing democratic consciousness in Pakistan.

The family and community influence (7.3%) and the impact of historical or current events (7.3%) were reported at similar levels. The relatively lower response for personal experiences with the electoral system (6.11 %) suggests that while people have interacted with the voting process before, it may not be a strong enough factor to drive participation. This could imply scepticism about the effectiveness of elections in bringing real change or a lack of direct engagement with electoral issues beyond voting itself.

Additionally, the desire to support a specific candidate or party (9.16 %) and interest in specific policy issues (8.91 %) indicate that political allegiances and issue-based voting are not the primary motivators. Instead, voters appear more driven by broader concerns about governance and justice than party loyalty or single-issue politics.

Overall, the data paints a picture of a politically-aware electorate that is motivated by the need for systemic change rather than just party politics.

The challenge for political leaders would be to address these concerns effectively in order to earn public trust and engagement.

How do you stay informed about political and electoral matters?

Table 2

Political and Electoral Matters in Pakistan

S No.	Options	Respondents	Percentage
1	News websites and online platforms	85	23.55
2	Social media and digital communication	130	36.01
3	Traditional print media (newspapers, magazines)	31	8.59
4	Television and radio news -	37	10.25
5	Conversations with family, friends, and colleagues	60	16.62
6	Attending political events and rallies	18	4.99
	Total	361	100

The data presents a clear shift in how people in Pakistan consume political and electoral information, with social media (36%) and news websites (23%) together making up (59%), as a primary source during the 2024 elections. In January 2024, Pakistan had 71.7 million active social media users, which is 29.5% of the country's total population (PromiAD, 2024). The increasing dependence on digital communication highlights that youth and tech-savvy voters are actively engaging with political content, sharing opinions, and using updated social media channels rather than depending solely on traditional news sources. However, this raises concerns regarding misinformation and fake news, which are major challenges in the digital world.

Political conversations with family, friends, and, colleagues (16.62%) remained a significant method to obtain information and made a decision in the 2024 elections. Political opinions are often shaped or changed by discussions within different personal circles, where opinions are shared, debated, and reinforced. This interpersonal exchange of political information is essential in shaping voter behaviour, especially in communities where formal news is consumed.

Traditional media, including television and radio news (10.25 %) and print media (8.95 %), show a decline in influence compared to digital sources. While television news remains relevant, especially among older generations and rural populations, print media appears to have taken a

backseat in the digital era. The lower engagement with newspapers and magazines suggests that the immediacy and accessibility of online platforms have significantly reduced dependency on traditional forms of journalism.

On the lower end, attending political events and rallies (4.99%) has the least engagement. This suggests that while political rallies remain a staple of election campaigns, they are not the primary way people gather information. Instead, voters prefer staying updated from the comfort of their homes rather than physically attending political events. However, rallies may still serve as a means of mobilisation rather than an information source. This analysis highlights the rapid transformation of information consumption habits in Pakistan, where digital platforms have taken centre stage.

What are the most effective methods for political campaigns to engage and motivate voters?

Table 3

Most Effective Methods for Political Campaigns

S No.	Options	Respondents	Percentage
1	Social media and digital advertising	128	23.57
2	Traditional media (television, radio, print)	34	6.26
3	Grassroots community organising and outreach	44	8.10
4	Public events and rallies	59	10.87
5	Door to Door campaign	45	8.29
6	Community meetings	49	9.02
7	Role of Religious Scholars	33	6.08
8	Role of Political Workers & Leaders	56	10.31
9	Socioeconomic Position in the society	26	4.79
10	Role of Family members	32	5.89
11	Display of Banners, posters and signboard	37	6.81
	Total	543	100

The data shows that social media and digital advertising (23%) are emerging as the most effective methods for political campaigns in Pakistan. Social media is considered as a primary source of news and information, especially political information (Riasat et al., 2025). Digital media can quickly reach a large audience, and with targeted advertising, they have become essential tools for modern political campaigns.

Despite the digital transformation, public events and rallies (10.87 %) still hold significant influence. In Pakistan, political rallies have

traditionally been essential for mobilising supporters, showcasing party strength, and energising voter bases (Zaheer et al., 2025). These large gatherings create a sense of unity and commitment among voters, reinforcing party loyalty and engagement.

The role of political workers and leaders (10.31%), religious scholars (6.08%), and family members (5.89%), a total of (22.28%) is another key factor in motivating voters. These individuals are considered as opinion leaders in society and play a crucial role in shaping public perceptions and influencing political choices. Grassroots political figures serve as intermediaries between party leadership and the general public, helping bridge the gap between political messaging and local concerns. Strong and credible political workers can significantly influence voter behaviour, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas.

Community meetings (9.02%), door-to-door campaigns (8.29%), and grassroots organising (8.10%), a total of (25.41%), collectively indicate that personalised, face-to-face interaction remains essential. While mass media and social media create awareness, direct engagement at the community level builds trust and personal connections with voters. These methods are especially effective in areas where digital access is limited or traditional community structures play a vital role in decision-making.

Traditional media, including television, radio, print (6.26%), banners, posters, and signboards (6.81%), have a relatively lower impact than digital and direct engagement strategies. While television and print media were once dominant campaign tools, they appear to be losing ground to social media's broader and more interactive reach. However, in certain demographics, especially among older voters and rural populations these traditional methods still hold significance.

Interestingly, socioeconomic position (4.79%) ranks lower, indicating that political campaigns may no longer rely as heavily on social or familial influence to secure votes. This suggests a shift towards more issue-based and direct engagement rather than purely relying on social status or familial ties.

This analysis suggests that successful political campaigns in Pakistan must adopt a hybrid approach leveraging social media for mass reach, public rallies for mobilisation, and grassroots organising for trust-building and personalised voter engagement.

Which factors are important for you when deciding to vote for a candidate or party?

Table 4

Factors Influencing Voter Decision

S No.	Options	Respondents	Percentage
1	Candidate's policy positions and proposals	81	23.34
2	Candidate's character and integrity	107	30.84
3	Party affiliation and ideology	98	28.24
4	Campaign advertisements and messaging	33	9.51
5	Recommended by public figures and organisations	22	6.34
6	Other	6	1.73
	Total	347	100.00

Data reveals that a candidate's character and integrity (30%) are the most important factors influencing voter decisions. This highlights a growing public demand for honest, trustworthy, and competent leadership. Given Pakistan's history of political instability and corruption scandals, voters prioritise ethical leadership over party loyalty or campaign rhetoric.

Party affiliation and ideology (28%) also play a significant role, suggesting that many voters remain committed to political parties based on their historical performance, values, and leadership. This response aligns with long-standing voting patterns in Pakistan's political landscape, where party identity often outweighs individual merit. However, the gap between candidate integrity (107) and party affiliation (98) indicates that some voters may prioritise individuals over party loyalty.

Candidate's policy positions and proposals (23.34%) rank third, demonstrating that a substantial portion of the electorate values concrete plans and policy directions. This suggests a shift towards more issue-based voting, where economic plans, governance strategies, and development agendas influence voter preferences. However, the lower number compared to character and party affiliation implies that while policies matter, they are not the sole deciding factors for most voters.

Campaign advertisements and messaging (9.51%) appear to have limited influence, reinforcing that voters are sceptical of political marketing tactics. This suggests that flashy ads alone do not sway public opinion, and voters seek deeper, more credible sources of information when making electoral choices.

Similarly, endorsements by public figures and organisations (6.34%) hold minimal weight in voter decision-making. This indicates that celebrity endorsements, religious leaders, or institutional recommendations are less persuasive than personal evaluations of candidates and parties.

The 6 respondents selecting "other" suggest individual preferences or niche factors but the small number indicates that most voters fall within the broader categories identified.

What were the top priorities for candidates in the then upcoming elections 2024?

Table 5

Key Priorities for Voters in Pakistan's 2024 Elections

S No.	Options	Respondents	Percentage
1	Economic improvement and job creation	132	24.04
2	Healthcare reform	74	13.48
3	Education policies and funding	106	19.31
4	National security and defence	65	11.84
5	Environmental and climate change initiatives	70	12.75
6	Social welfare and poverty alleviation	102	18.58
	Total	549	100.00

The data clearly shows voters' expectations from candidates in the 2024 elections. Economic improvement and job creation (24.04 %) is overwhelmingly the top priority, reflecting deep public concern over Pakistan's struggling economy, inflation, and unemployment crisis. Given the rising cost of living and financial instability, voters demand leadership to offer concrete solutions for economic growth and job opportunities.

Education policies and funding (19.31 %) come in second, signalling a strong public demand for improved access to quality education. Pakistan's education system faces challenges such as low literacy rates, lack of infrastructure, and disparities in educational opportunities. The high response rate suggests that voters see education as crucial for national development and social mobility.

Social welfare and poverty alleviation (18.58 %) is another major priority, emphasising the need for candidates to address inequalities and support marginalised communities. With increasing economic hardships, voters expect policies that relieve lower-income groups, such as subsidies, housing initiatives, and financial aid programs.

Healthcare reform (13.48 %) also receives significant attention, highlighting concerns about inadequate medical facilities, rising healthcare costs, and the overall inefficiency of Pakistan's healthcare system. Voters want better hospitals, affordable medicines, and improved access to healthcare services, particularly in rural areas.

While not the highest priority, environmental and climate change initiatives (12.75 %) remain relevant. With Pakistan facing environmental disasters such as floods, smog, and water shortages, some voters recognise the urgency of climate action. However, the lower ranking suggests that economic and social issues precede immediate voter concerns.

National security and defence (11.84 %) are the least prioritised factor in this dataset. While national security remains important, voters focus more on domestic challenges, such as economic instability and social welfare, rather than external threats or military strength.

How much do the following factors influence your decision to vote for a particular candidate or party?

Table 6

Key Influences on Voter Decision-making

S No.	Options	Respondents	Percentage
1	Political debates and public forums	55	17.52
2	Campaign advertisements and messaging	44	14.01
3	Recommended by community leaders and organisations	36	11.46
4	Personal Experience and Candidate Evaluations	174	55.41
5	Other…	5	1.59
	Total	314	100.00

The data reveals the most significant factors that shape voter decisions when choosing a candidate or party in Pakistan's 2024 elections. Most voters prioritise personal research (55.41%) when making electoral decisions. This suggests that personal interactions with candidates, their track record, and the real-world impact of their governance play a major role in voter decisions. This suggests that authenticity, accessibility, and a candidate's past actions matter significantly to the electorate. Voters seem to draw conclusions based on direct experiences rather than just rhetoric.

Debates and public discussions (17.52 %) hold value for some voters, reflecting an appreciation for direct political discourse. Candidates who engage in open debates and public forums can sway undecided voters by

demonstrating their competence, leadership, and clarity of vision. The campaign advertisements and messaging (14.01%), despite heavy investment in campaign ads, slogans, and political messaging, this factor does not appear to be a top decision-making influence. Voters may perceive advertisements as biased or unreliable, emphasising their preference for independent research.

Recommendations from community leaders and organizations (11.46%) are a relatively low influence. This suggests a shift away from traditional power structures and political endorsements. This could indicate that voters prioritise personal judgment over external influences, signalling a more independent and informed electorate.

What issues were important to address in the then upcoming elections 2024?

The responses collected from the open-ended questions provided valuable insights into the key concerns of the public regarding the then upcoming elections. Most respondents (40%) highlighted the "economic crisis and inflation issue" to be addressed due to concerns over rising prices, unemployment, and financial instability. The second most significant concern, according to 20% respondents, is the need for education reforms. They pointed out that the government should increase funds for the education sector and create job opportunities for youth.

The (15%) respondents identified "corruption" as a major issue in good governance. They strongly recommended that transparency, accountability, and anti-corruption measures restore faith in the political system. Other respondents' concerns about poverty (10%), national security (8%), and political stability (7%) were issues to address after the elections. They also stressed law enforcement and foreign policy reforms to maintain order and economic growth.

Only (5%) focused on "healthcare and public services", improving medical facilities, affordable healthcare, and infrastructure development. Only (3%) pointed out that "climate change and environmental issues" indicate some awareness of sustainability and the need for policy reforms. Overall, the findings highlighted that economic improvement, governance reforms, and education policies were the dominant factors influencing voter preferences in the then upcoming elections. Ensuring fair elections and addressing public concerns through concrete policy measures are essential in shaping voter trust and participation.

Do you have any specific qualities in mind that you think a candidate should possess?

The responses highlight several essential qualities that people expect from a political candidate. The responses reveal a clear expectation among voters regarding the qualities they seek in a political candidate, with honesty and integrity (45%) emerging as the most important traits. Many highlighted that leaders should be truthful, transparent, and free from corruption, reflecting the public frustration with dishonest politicians. Education and awareness (28%) also ranked high, as people believe a candidate should be knowledgeable about governance, economics, and social issues to make informed decisions. In comparison, (15%) of respondents stressed the importance of "leadership and vision", pointing to the need for strong decision-making skills, the ability to unite people, and a long-term vision for national development.

Additionally, fearlessness and courage (7%), empathy and social welfare focus (5%), and religious and ethical values (5%) were mentioned as essential characteristics. The findings concluded that voters seek leaders with leadership qualities and competence to work for public welfare.

Some respondents pointed out that political parties should engage the grassroots leadership because they are directly connected with the public. Additionally, "women and minority representation" need space in the political parties. Voters also stressed that political parties must actively promote inclusivity, ensuring that underrepresented communities have a voice in shaping the nation's future.

Discussion

The general elections of 2024 were held during the most critical time in Pakistan's political history. The country faces political and economic instability, unemployment, and public distrust of electoral institutions. This research aimed to examine voter behaviour and campaign priorities during the elections. The data was collected from (n=245) respondents through a structured questionnaire in January 2024, one month before the elections. The data was analysed using descriptive statistical methods.

Most respondents were young individuals aged 18 to 25, with notably high male participation. This may be attributed to social norms, the types of professions involved, or the outreach strategies employed. The education levels of the respondents demonstrated that they were a well-educated

group, with many individuals holding at least a bachelor's or master's degree. Additionally, many respondents were students, while other professional categories, including administration, business, and media/journalism, also participated.

This study supported the Civic Voluntarism model proposed by Verba et al. (1995). This model stresses that civic responsibility and democratic values are important motivators for voter participation in the election process. The data confirmed that voters in Pakistan, particularly the youth, are motivated by a sense of civic responsibility and a strong desire for political change, reflecting an increasing awareness of democracy (Chughtai, 2024; Ullah et al., 2025). The study also concluded that Pakistani voters are willing to change and improve government policies, especially in response to current economic challenges, political instability, and governance issues. The youth play a significant role in bringing transparency, reforms, and accountability.

Due to the development of new technology, social media has become a major source of news and information, especially political information (Saleem et al., 2024; Ullah & Iqbal, 2025). This digital development also brings challenges, particularly concerning the spread of misinformation (Riasat et al., 2025; Ullah, 2025). Data shows a clear change in how people in Pakistan consume political and electoral information. Participants pointed out that social media and news websites combined primary information sources. The study further concluded that despite the growth of digital platforms, traditional methods, such as conversations with family and friends and television still hold significance, especially among rural and older populations.

The findings indicate a hybrid information landscape, were modern and traditional channels influence voter perceptions. The study noted that during elections, engaging with social media and digital advertising are viewed as the most effective tools for motivating and engaging voters. This supports the argument made by Gibson and McAllister (2015) regarding the transformative impact of digital platforms on political outreach. However, traditional campaign methods, such as public rallies and grassroots community engagement, still play a significant role, particularly in rural areas with low literacy rates and limited internet access.

Torcal and Christmann (2021) pointed out that trust and integrity in leadership are important. This study also concluded that the character and integrity of candidates were the most critical factors. Pakistani voters needed candidates with honesty, integrity, education, and leadership skills. The party affiliation and candidate policy positions are also important but secondary to personal integrity. Interestingly, campaign advertisements and endorsements from public figures had minimal influence, further suggesting that voters are becoming more discerning, relying on personal judgment rather than external influences or media portrayals. Respondents also called for grassroots-level representation and greater diversity in political leadership, advocating to include marginalised voices in decision-making processes.

Currently, Pakistan is facing one of the biggest economic challenges, including inflation, unemployment, and fiscal instability (Khan et al., 2024). Economic issues were the top priority for voters, identifying economic improvement and job creation as the most pressing concerns (Rasheed et al., 2024; Shah et al., 2024). Other key priorities included education reforms, poverty alleviation, and healthcare improvements. While environmental concerns were noted, they were less prominent, highlighting the electorate's immediate socio-economic priorities.

In conclusion, the 2024 Pakistani general elections highlighted significant challenges and opportunities for strengthening democracy. The electorate is increasingly focused on concerns regarding economic stability, governance, and leadership integrity, meaning campaign strategies must adapt to this changing landscape. While social media plays an important role, traditional forms of engagement remain vital. Addressing voter concerns through inclusive, transparent, and issue-driven campaigns would improve democratic participation. Ultimately, empowering voters through education, ensuring institutional integrity, and fostering inclusive political engagement would contribute to a more robust and participatory democratic process in Pakistan. These findings highlight the need for inclusive, transparent, and youth-focused democratic reforms in Pakistan.

Recommendations

There are several recommendations to improve the electoral process. Firstly, enhancing electoral transparency is crucial. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) must strengthen its mechanisms to ensure

fair and transparent elections, particularly in digital reporting and vote counting. Secondly, digital literacy campaigns are needed to combat misinformation and promote ethical engagement online. Thirdly, political parties should adopt inclusive strategies, encouraging the participation of marginalised groups, including women, minorities, and rural populations. Fourthly, campaigns should focus on issue-based platforms that address economic reforms, education, and healthcare, rather than solely on personality-driven politics. Finally, civic education initiatives are essential to empower voters with knowledge about democratic processes, voter rights, and the importance of participating in elections.

Author Contribution

Rahman Ullah: conceptualization, methodology, literature review, writing – original draft. **Sana Ullah:** methodology, investigation, formal analysis.

Conflict of Interest

The authors of the manuscript have no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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Data supporting the findings of this study will be made available by the corresponding author upon request.

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