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Effect of Political Leaders' Televised Uncivil Language on Society: Citizens' Following of Negative and non-Islamic Language

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Abstract:

Pakistan was established in the name of Islam for the Muslims residing under the control of British India in 1947. This study focuses on the grass root level effects of uncivil language of political leaders used in the electoral campaigns and telecasted on television. The research method was survey and purposive sampling technique was used for data collection from nine towns of Lahore from the Muslim citizens who actually participated in the GE 2018. The theoretical support was taken from The Speech Act Theory and Psycho-Linguistic Theory. The study revealed that the impact of uncivil language of political leaders is witnessed at grass root level as 36.9% citizens re-used the negative phrases of political leaders in their social circles as $\chi^2(4) = 26.809, p < .05$. Hence, the hypothesis "Muslim citizens re-used negative political terms and phrases coined by their party leaders against teachings of Islam" was fully supported by this research study and literature. Negative statements of political leaders repeated on television were also re-used by the citizens in their routine life (by 43.1%) showing a significant effect as $\chi^2(4) = 33.464, p < .05$.

Keywords: *Uncivil Language, Abusive Language, Pakistan General Elections 2018, Society, Negative Terms, Social Circles*

Introduction and Background

Pakistan was established in the name of Islam for the Muslims residing under the control of British India in 1947. Islam was one important dividing power towards a separate homeland. Political leaders use the

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name of Islam to gain the legality for their governments. Before Partition Muslim leaders gave Two Nation Theory that also based on religion. Indian Muslim leadership struggled with motivation, enthusiasm and effective communication to achieve a separate nation.¹

Islam is complete code of conduct for mankind as there are two main sources from one can derive Islamic leadership qualities that is Al-Quran and Al-Sunnah. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is a role model for every Muslim. He never used abusive or uncivil language even against his enemies. The glorious life of Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH) and His Companions (Sahaba) showed the importance of civility, morality, politeness, graciousness, respect and decency for each other in their routine communication when they became great leaders. As Prophet said, “Mark your personality decent for the individuals.”²

Positive attitude and communication are the main attribute of any Imam (leader). All his actions are for the Religion. A bad leader is attributed by ineffective communication using uncivil, objectionable language for the opponents. Quran says:

﴿وَإِذْ تَأَذَّنَ رَبُّكُمْ لَئِن شَكَرْتُمْ لَأَزِيدَنَّكُمْ وَلَئِن كَفَرْتُمْ إِنَّ عَذَابِي لَشَدِيدٌ﴾

“Furthermore, [remember] when your Lord proclaimed' On the off chance that you are appreciative, I will positively rise you [in kindness]; yet in the event that you dismiss, unquestionably, My sentence is unembellished”.³

Leadership is an important matter which can be governed through religion Islam. For the existence of an ideal society, leadership should be based on justice and decent communication style even in the case of opponents.⁴

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said:

“A Muslim is the one who avoids harming Muslims with his tongue and hands”.⁵

الْمُسْلِمُ مَنْ سَلِمَ مِنَ الْمُسْلِمُونَ مِنْ لِسَانِهِ وَيَدِهِ

Negative emotional language, regardless of the context, can influence the evaluations of political policies. The foul tongue leads towards harsh judgments, and when used by the politicians, it persists for a longtime in the memory of people as compared to the simple emotional words' penetration in the minds of individuals. Generalized attitude can be produced by maximum positive and negative language and this mood or attitude is expressed by individuals to inform their political evaluations. In

short, emotions (negative or positive) will weight what kind of image about political leaders is stored in memory.⁶

The metaphors used by the politicians in their political communications plays a vital role in political persuasion and on the same time metaphors help to clarify the vague question in front of individuals. But it may mislead general public in order to understand the realities if political leaders use vague words in political communication.⁷

Language using techniques of political figures have ethical or moral values on people. It was observed that the strategic use of metaphor and rhetorical approaches used by politicians convince the audience about their policies.⁸

Politicians who give insulting remarks for their opponents have very damaging effects on their own image as well. The attacking style of politicians constitutes a strategy resulting in high dangers as potential rewards. Writing negative political speeches and campaign materials, and having abusive language in their speeches will result in low turnover of citizens and increase citizens' disenchantment.^{9,10}

Discourteous and ill-mannered political context has very damaging aftereffects on society's political trust. Abusive discourse not only affects attitudes of people in any society but also damages institutions of governments. And when these conflicts are televised, the distrust on political leaders is strengthened. On the one side viewers watching these uncivilized programs have negativities about the politicians and on the other side they enjoy watching the same programs more than any civil and good-mannered televised show.¹¹

The increase in negative language, levelling allegations and opponents character assassination has become the part of our political campaigns. This kind of moral issues are not only the part of Pakistan's political sphere but also all South Asian nations. Pakistan's political heads use such immoral techniques to let down the other political actors.¹²

Foul play through abusive language and blame game is as old as the country's political system itself. Political leaders are supposed to speak on the concerned topics instead of their rivals' character assassination. It is very shameful to set such a bad president of foul, immoral and objectionable language. Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has taken

the lead. Leaders are symbol for their country's disciplined class. They should be at peak on morality, harmony, and courteousness.¹³

PTI Chairman Imran Khan used the word "*Gadha*" (donkey) for a common PMLN supporter. Tehreek-e-Insaf supporters, in actual, attached a paper written 'Nawaz' on a donkey and threw pebbles on it, in Karachi. Some rights activists called this a disgusting act of cruelty and ruthlessness. Uncivil material may lead towards false gratitude on spot but in actual, the society and political spheres are polluted through such language.¹⁴

Statement of Problem:

Since 1947, Pakistan's political system has been facing a lot of problems and barriers in the way of democracy. The instability of democracy in Pakistan is due to weak position of our political leaders. Political leaders are not that civilized and they use negative language and objectionable words for their opponents in electoral campaigns. Which in result, create anarchy and political aggression in society. Political parties' workers and supporters follow their leaders and this negative trend increase in our society. Language of a politician counts a lot in voting behaviour.¹⁵ Civil language is very important especially Islam is the religion of courtesy, humanity and kindness. Muslim Political leaders are liable to behave decently in communication.

Blame game and objectionable language is the culture of South Asian countries. But in Pakistan in General Elections 2018 this was at height by almost all political parties.¹⁶ Negative political campaigning and objectionable language became the norm of our political parties.¹⁷ The use of profane language is now the part of our society, which is a question mark on any civilized and mature society as well as against the teaching of Islam.

Objectives of the study:

Following objectives were set for this study:

- To explore the relationship between uncivil language of political leaders and its effect on society.
- To help improve the usage of civilized language by the politicians in public processions and TV programs.

- To investigate the relationship between Muslim citizens & uncivility telecasted on the screens of people.

Research Questions:

This research paper is based on three research questions covering overall impact of political leaders' uncivil language on citizens and use of the politicians' negative terms by people.

RQ1: What was the effect of uncivil language of political leaders on the Muslim citizens of Pakistan in General Elections 2018?

RQ2: Whether citizens of Lahore re-used the negative terms coined by the political leaders during election campaign against the teachings of Islam?

RQ3: Whether there was any relationship between citizens' re-use of uncivil language of politicians and Television broadcast of such negative terms?

Hypothesis:

Following hypothesis guided the study:

H1: Citizens re-used negative political terms and phrases coined by their party leaders against teachings of Islam. The negative trend of use of uncivil language started by political leaders and candidates penetrated in the society promoting negativity against the teaching of Islam.

H2: There was significant relationship between the uncivil statements of political leaders broadcast on television and citizens' re-use of negative terms used by politicians.

Theoretical Framework:

Theoretical support was taken from The Speech Act Theory and Psycho-Linguistic Theory.

The Speech Act Theory investigates the role that utterance plays in connection to the speakers' attitude or behaviour and the listener in interpersonal communication. It is communication skill related to the intention of the speaker during his conversation and the outcome of his speech on the hearer. Every word has its own communicative drive depending on the exclusive speech discourse. In this research work, we analyse when the political leaders have speeches in campaigns, they have intentions to utter phrases and terms in specific contextual frame. The core

theme of this theory is the manipulation of words and language to obtain a targeted goal.

Psycho-Linguistic Theory:

This theory is the bond between humanistic language and mental capacity to learn from that utterance. It explains that how a man acquires cognitive power to use the language and gain knowledge from that linguistic tools.¹⁸

During the Pakistani election campaigns, politicians use uncivil language to create hate about the opponents in the minds of voters, who perceive the rhetoric according to their own background knowledge and values.

Method:

This is a quantitative research conducted through a cross sectional survey design.¹⁹ The data was collected through a valid self-administered purpose-built questionnaire instrument from all nine towns of Lahore, the capital city of Punjab province through purposive sampling (n=258). A total 500 questionnaires were distributed out of which 290 were returned while 32 were considered invalid due to incomplete responses.

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used for data analysis. Cross tabulation and graphical depiction were presented based on all the variables drawn from the questionnaire.

Data was measured using chi-square and simple frequencies analysis shown in percentages in order to test hypothesis. The aim was to get the effect of objectionable language of political leaders on societal levels.

Data Analysis and Discussion:

Table 1: Chi-Square Test: The level of your political affiliation is very strong. * In your routine political discussions, you repeat the negative phrases used by political leaders.

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	26.809 ^a	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	25.153	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	19.811	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	258		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 12.60.

This table reflects that there was a significant relationship between level of party affiliation and citizens' use of objectionable terms coined by political leaders as $\chi^2(4) = 26.809$, $p < .05$.

The citizens with strong political affiliations used the negative terms coined by their political leaders and party candidates. This reflects the trends that the negative campaign against political opponents started by the party leaders and party candidates and later promoted and projected by the party workers and the supporters who have stronger affiliation with their parties.

Leaders of top three political parties of the country i.e. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Chairman Imran Khan, PML-N President Shahbaz Sharif and Pakistan People's Party Chairman Balawal Bhutto Zardari used uncivil language against their opponents and the same terminology and re-used by their workers and supporters. In an Islamic society where speaking negatively and uncivil even against enemies is considered bad, promoting such negativity openly in public processions and projecting these ills in the society was witnessed during the General Elections 2018.

*Table 2: Chi-Square Test: The level of your political affiliation is very strong. * You use negative statements of politicians which are repeated on television.*

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	33.464 ^a	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	32.517	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	24.361	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	258		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 14.11.

Table 2 depicts there was a significant relationship between strong party affiliation and citizens' use of objectionable terms coined by political leaders telecasted on television as $\chi^2(4) = 33.464$, $p < .05$.

This table shows that a majority of respondents repeated the same objectionable phrases which were commonly used by political leaders on television.

Television channels broadcast uncivil language used by politicians against their rival candidates. Ones they utter such sentences, TV channels take point of view of their opponents who in retaliation also, often, use objectionably. Later, in current affairs programmes there is a debate on the

uncivil words and sentences. Thus those people who did listen such uncivil talk they also witness the objectionable stuff in repeated telecasts and ultimately television talks set the agenda of public talks. Next day in offices and other work places people speak in favour or against depending on the level of their political affiliations.

Conclusion:

The hypothesis H1: “Citizens re-used negative political terms and phrases coined by their party leaders against the teachings of Islam and that political leaders and those people having strong political affiliations spread uncivil language in society”, was fully supported by the results of this research. Negative political language used by party leaders significantly impacted citizens in their routine life, as most citizens having strong political affiliation repeated the objectionable terms and phrases coined by their political leaders during the campaign for General Elections 2018 in Pakistan as $\chi^2(4) = 26.809, p < .05$.

H2: “There was significant relationship between the uncivil statements of political leaders broadcast on television and citizens’ re-use of negative terms used by politicians.” This hypothesis was also supported. The citizens with stronger political affiliation promoted this trend further in their social circles as $\chi^2(4) = 33.464, p < .05$.

In Pakistan the political temperature remains high during election campaigns. Politicians indulge in blame game and uncivil language to propagate negative perception of their opponent candidates and parties. People having strong party affiliation repeat the same kind of language which their party leaders use during campaign damaging the societal ethics and social fabric. However, citizens who are either neutral or who have no strong affiliation with any party, they dislike such negative language and negative campaigning by the political parties and their candidates.

This study’s results also confirmed the findings of previous literature, presenting evidence that political uncivility have adverse effects on political confidence. Earlier Mutz & Reeves (2005) in their experimental design research found that uncivil and insulting political discourse has adverse effects on political regard and trust. Similarly, research by Hibbing & Morse (2002) also investigated the issue that

general public dislike the offensive and uncivil exchanges which eventually destabilize the country's political structure.²⁰

Recommendations:

Based on the findings, it is recommended that the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) and the Islamic Ideological Council (IIC) must take notice of the spread of uncivil language during election campaigns in Pakistan. Strict action should be taken against those political leaders and candidates who promote incivility in society through their objectionable or abusive language. The ECP and PEMRA should include this issue in their code of ethics to stop projection of such a negative trend. Also, this issue may be highlighted through awareness campaigns before elections in the country.

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