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Biraderism At The Ballot: Clan, Caste, And Electoral Dynamics In District Narowal (2013-2018)

Dr. Imtiaz Ahmad

Visiting Lecturer, Department of Pakistan Studies, University of Jhang, Jhang, Pakistan. Email: drimtiazahmad3@gmail.com

Saqib Ali

Phd Schollar, Visiting Lecturer, Department of Mass Communication, University of Jhang, Jhang, Pakistan. Email: Saqibsial448@gmail.com

Tatheer Zahra

Email: Zahrasyed1272@gmail.com

Abstract

The study analyzes how biraderism continues to influence electoral results in District Narowal during general elections in 2013 and 2018. A research design using mixed methods analyzes how birders' loyalties maintain dominance in political conduct despite socio-economic developments by merging primary questionnaires and interviews with secondary data sources. Data shows that dominant social groups, including the Jatt, Rajput, Gujjar, and Sayyad biraderis, utilised their caste affiliations as key factors in selecting candidates, organising voters, and achieving electoral victories. Land ownership, economic factors, and historical colonial structures strengthened biraderi-based political relationships, most notably in rural locations. Political mobilisation continued to be strongly guided by biraderism between the 2013 and 2018 vote periods, despite minor changes in voter behaviour emerging during this period. Although Pakistan has achieved democratic progression, the enduring strength of biraderism remains a hindrance to issue-based political development in the country's electoral system. The necessity of implementing policy solutions to advance democratic culture includes enhancing political party structures, teaching civil education nationwide, and developing birders-based alliances for inclusivity.

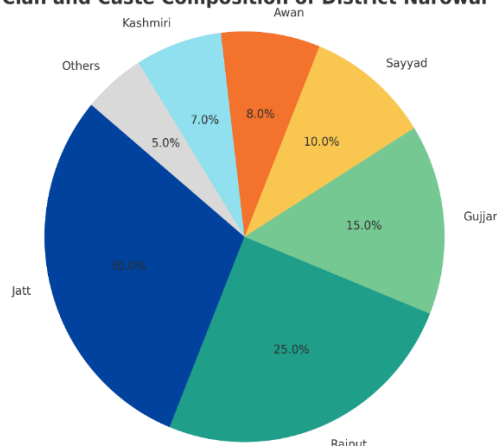
Keywords: Biraderism, Involvement in Elections, Voter Tendencies, Caste and Clan Interactions, District Narowal, General Elections, and Politics, Mobilisation

Introduction

Haider (2014) notes that throughout history, biraderism has had a significant impact on the Punjab region, as voting is often influenced by family and caste connections (Haider). Rural districts including Narowal depend heavily on biraderism as a determining factor for elections, despite many significant social and economic changes (Dar, 2020). Even after colonial periods, the country's political tradition was linked to the biraderi concept of kinship. Colonial officials often acquired political power in Punjab through alliances with groups formed around caste and kinship (Abdullah, S. 1971). Both Alavi (1972) and Shah, Y. H., & Majeed (2022) point out that biraderism which was formed historically during the colonial period, still plays a vital role in elections today.



Clan and Caste Composition of District Narowal



Source: Author-prepared using estimates of different biradari groups in Narowal District (2024).

Research proves that biraderism in Punjab and especially in Narowal mainly influences who seeks political office and affects voter participation as well as the political outcomes. The strong base of Jatt, Rajput, Gujar and Awan plus Sayyad clans financially supports them to control landownership and build political contacts for local election success (Awan, M. W., & Kokab, R.-U. 2016). Manifesto-based electoral politics is not important in campaign battles due to organizations putting most energy into creating broader networks (Waris, M., Bhatti, M. N., & Kokab, R.-U. 2020). As in other districts of Punjab, individuals in Narowal vote along family lines rather than for political parties, mainly in rural areas (Ahmed, 2006). Those with media training and city life commonly show great loyalty to their caste, indicating that family ties dominate how things are decided within the local government (Ahmedi, 2014).

Textual evidence demonstrates that network alliances matter more in winning seats in Narowal than the political platform candidate's party represents (Yasir Ali, 2022). Participants know that meeting key clan leader's builds advantages in elections, so they either coalition build or encourage electoral competitions based on the ideas described by (Robina ,1990) and (Afaqi ,1996). People in Pakistan carry on with biraderism, as it indicates a way to mix a family's ranking past with cultural identification which has an impact on their leadership decisions. Democratic values in Narowal are harmed by customs that put stronger importance on family relationships than principles of government (Kamran, T., & Khan, H. A. (Eds.). (2021), (Bashir, 2019). Many Pakistanis now make political choices guided by biraderi solidarity which usually results in clientelism across the country (Haider, S. K. 2014). This pattern sets limits on how future policies are designed and democracy continues to improve. Studying the way biraderism works in Pakistan forms the foundation for recommending new policies to encourage policy-oriented participation in elections (Ullah, H. K. 2013).

Area (Tehsil/Region)	Dominant Clans/Castes	Remarks
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Shakargarh Tehsil	Jatt (majority), Gujjar (significant), Sayyad (pockets)	Fertile agricultural land; Jatt biraderi dominates rural areas; Gujjars are strong in cattle farming areas.
Zafarwal Tehsil	Rajput (majority), Awan (northern villages)	Rajputs are influential landlords; Awans are found in northern and peripheral villages.
Narowal Tehsil (City + Surrounding Rural)	Rajput (urban), Kashmiri (urban and trading communities), Gujjar (villages)	Rajputs dominate politics and business; Kashmiris are strong in business sectors. Rural hinterlands have Gujjar settlements.
Peripheral Rural Areas (Across District)	Mixed (Gujjar, Sayyad, Awan)	Scattered biraderi villages, small religious Sayyad communities.

Source: Data compiled using the work of Yasir Ali in 2022 and Awan & Kokab in 2016.

Literature Review

Longstanding social and cultural customs in the region have helped birder political groups take root in Pakistani Punjab. Biraderi (caste, clan or kinship group) belonging impacts election outcomes and shapes political bonds, how leaders are chosen and how areas are assigned to political parties. Many researchers have found that the success of biraderi at the polls surpasses both political party platforms and policies created by them (Ahmed, 2012) (Wilder, 1999). The biraderi system keeps its main task of helping lineage-centered elections, as noted by (Lok Sujag, 2023). Broadly, it is found that success in elections is based more on Jatt, Rajput, Gujjar and Sayyad support than on a candidate's political skills (Haider, S. K. 2014). Patrick (1966) argues that ethnic groups and family units shape the way conflicts and cooperation influence our current political systems. Because of how the colonial administration worked, more birders showed loyalty to Punjab. Biraderi, because it was recognized and given structure by British rule, helped to unite political offices within a clan structure, Nasir, A., Chaudhry, A. G., Khan, S. E., & Hadi, S. A. (2015).

It has been established by (Visser) that the way individuals stand with their household and neighborhood acquaintances is closely related to their vote decisions. Max Visser's operant conditioning design illustrates that Narowal voters depend greatly on their families and the community before making a decision. Findings in the research published by Usman, A. (2017) note that the lower birders such as artisan and labor groups, usually lack political influence because they are guided by the dominant zamindar (landowner) group. During the process, many village elections form hierarchies that preserve the caste systems. Wildar (1999) found that Punjabi political behavior is based on two important customs called "zat" and "biraderi." According to Haider, families in



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the Sialkot and Narowal districts supported parties centered on caste after the districts became developed. In the words of (Usman, A. 2017), people's preference for birders' political candidates arises from the political socialization they get at home and at school in their youth. The findings of these researchers show that people's decisions at the polling place depend on family and social background more than on careful reasoning and analysis. Without election participation by political parties, local government elections are what form the mechanism leading to birder involvement, says (Waseem, M. 2002).

The control of elections by those with no direct political background began after this change, especially in rural Punjab. Farrell, D. M. wrote in 2011 about how biraderi influences religious sects and weakens democratic actions. According to Akhtar (2016), the way political decisions are made inside biraderis is decided by conflicts among members. As a result, most political rivalries involve little debate about principles and who gets chosen as a candidate and who wins elections comes down to power groups within each party. Bashir (2019) points out that religious groups like TLP and MML use family relationships to back their political campaign in the elections in Punjab, although their main support apparently comes from people with common religious views.

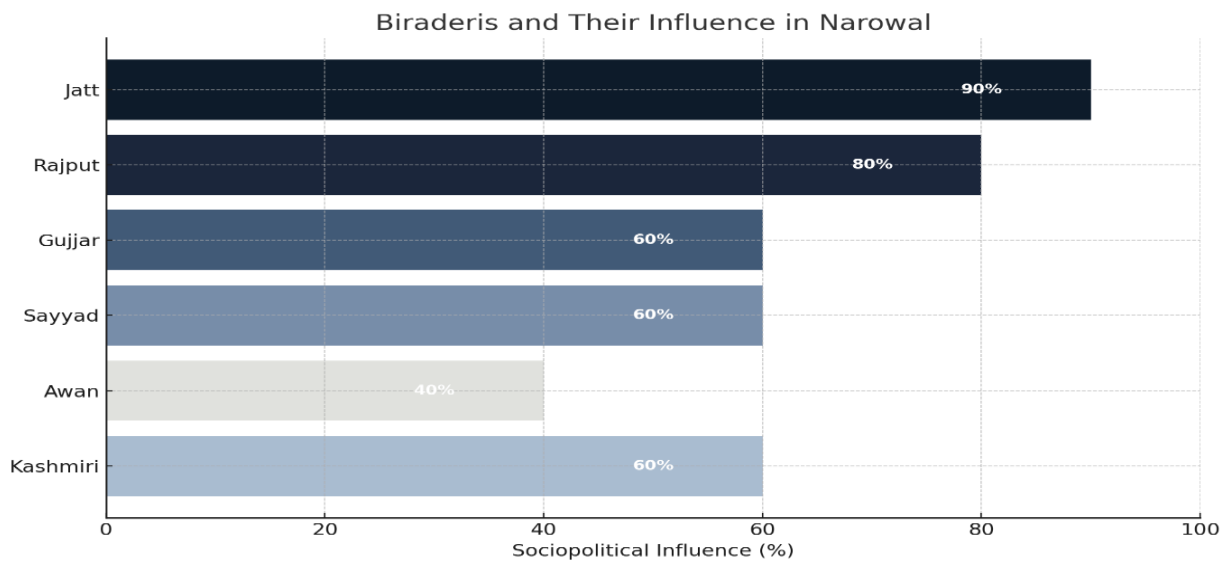
Research Methodology

Qualitative and quantitative research methods were applied to collect information about electoral biraderism in District Narowal. Data was collected primarily through filling out structured questionnaires and talking to participants in semi-structured interviews. Shakargarh, Zafarwal and Narowal tehsil voters were asked to fill out survey forms about their age, their voting habits, any family affiliations and their opinions on politics. The team held interviews with politicians, candidates and both male and female leaders and voters from the kinship networks to find out how kinship affects who people vote for. Data on official election outcomes for both the 2013 and 2018 general elections and supporting materials from scholarly research and government documents are used in this study.

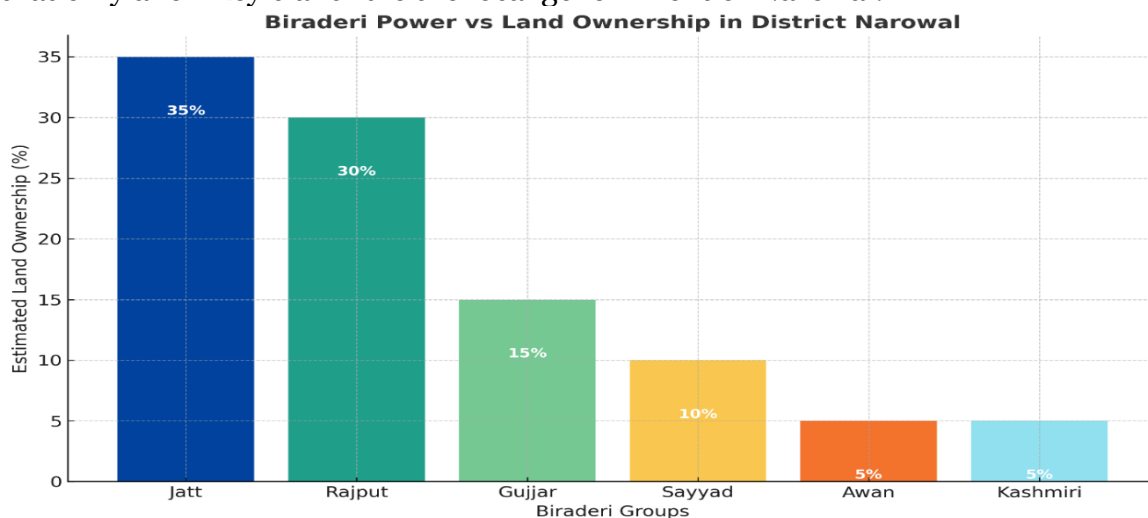
All qualitative interview results were processed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis to identify key themes in biraderi usage, political decisions and the relationships people have in the community. The researchers used quizzes, other records, descriptive statistics and such to understand the voting behaviors of birders. When qualitative methods were used together with quantitative data, the researcher made the study's findings stronger and gave a full picture of biraderism's permanent significance in elections held in rural areas.

Biraderism Dynamics in Narowal

District Narowal's political behavior and election process must be looked at to understand the way various clan groups or biraderis control local politics. Gujjar Sayyad and Kashmiri members are strong because other key communities have supported the Jatt and Rajput clans. The degree of influence among birders is determined by both their population, economic status, land ownership and leadership. According to this breakdown, biraderis and their political strategies are strongly linked to the results of elections in the Narowal district.



It shows that among the two main groups, Jatt and Rajput, 90% of the influence is held by Jatt and 80% by Rajput. Of the land, the Gujjars, Sayyads and Kashmiris possess 60% and the Awan community 40%. The information shows that only a few key clans rule the local government of Narowal.



The chart details how the main biraderi groups control and manage land in the district because of their importance within local politics. As 35% of the land belongs to the Jatt biraderi, it is able to lead. Because they have significant land interests, these groups are able to vote effectively in all three tehsils of Shakargarh, Zafarwal and Narowal. The concentration of political power among the Biraderis in the district is reduced since the Sayyad and Gujjar own less than 20% of the district's land each. Although the Awans and Kashmiris own about 5% of the land overall, they often seek political support from nearby larger tribal groups. The information on the chart illustrates how land ownership helps biraderi politicians and clientelistic systems by changing the way people in rural Punjab vote.



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Role of Biraderies of District Narowal in Elections 2013 and 2018

Results from the 2013 and 2018 elections in District Narowal prove that family connections influence both political actions and outcomes. Most voting decisions in both NA and PP elections are shaped more by family ties than by a political party's ideas or how a government performs.

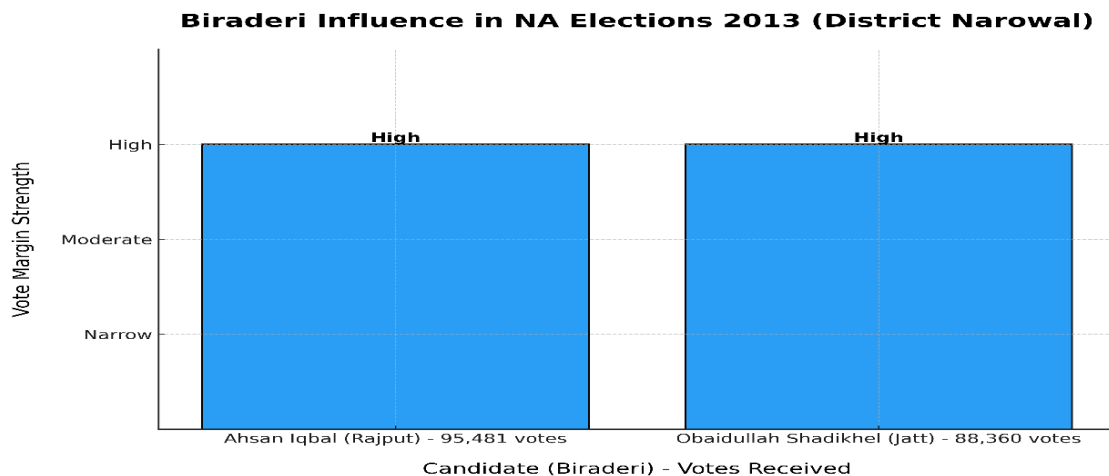


Figure 1: Biraderi Influence and Electoral Strength in National Assembly Elections (District Narowal, 2013)
Source: Election Commission of Pakistan (2013); Yasir Ali (2022)

As a result of the 2013 National Assembly elections, Ahsan Iqbal (Rajput) and Obaidullah Shadikhel (Jatt) succeeded due to their broad clan outreach among voters. The political campaigners made good use of their family bonds to secure significant rural backing in the two constituencies (ECP, 2013). People in the district depended on the Rajput and Jatt clans as their leaders, even as party programs didn't allow only one influence and different political areas had varying views.

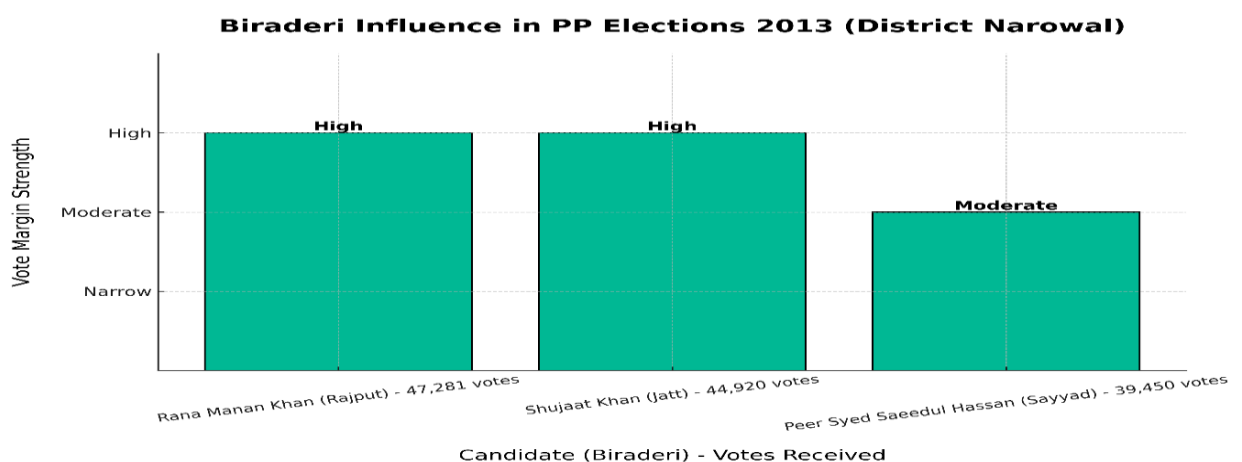


Figure 2: Biraderi Influence and Electoral Strength in Provincial Assembly Elections (District Narowal, 2013)
Source: Election Commission of Pakistan (2013); Yasir Ali (2022)

The patterns found in assembly districts for past elections persisted in this vote. The election outcome showed great victory for Rana Manan Khan (Rajput) and



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Shujaat Khan (Jatt), but for Peer Syed Saeedul Hassan (Sayyad), it was a fairly modest win. Observations show that small groups of Rajput and Jatt birders receive strong backing from the public at elections even after failing to organize (ECP, 2013).

Biraderi Influence in NA Elections 2018 (District Narowal)

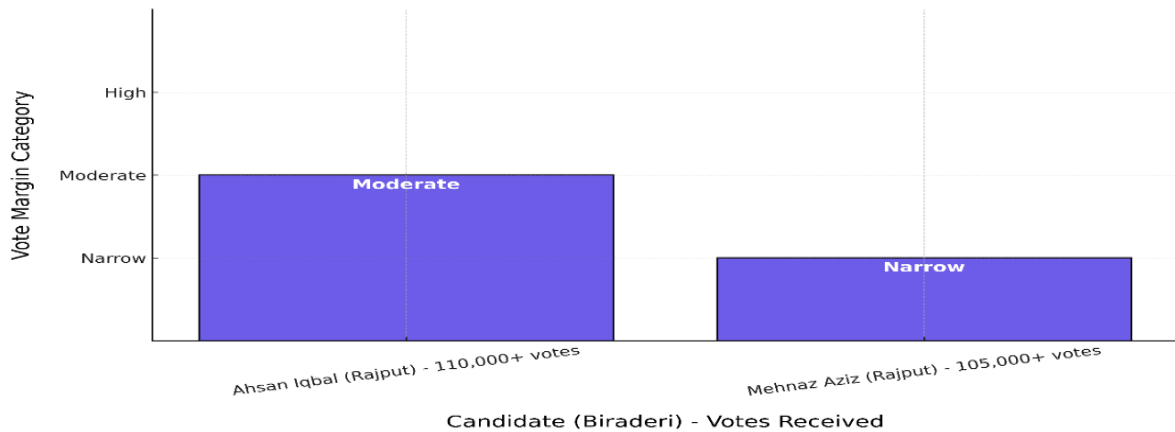


Figure 3: Biraderi-Based Voting Patterns in NA Elections 2018 (District Narowal)
Source: Election Commission of Pakistan (2018); Yasir Ali (2022)

While PTI won nationwide in 2018, the traditional biraderism system continued to lead in the Narowal elections. With average vote margins, Ahsan Iqbal (Rajput) kept his position in NA-77 (ECP, 2018) and Mehnaz Aziz (Rajput) became the winner in NA-78 (ECP, 2018). All Rajput candidates voted as a bloc in the election and both of them won, despite the overall defeat of incumbents across India in 2018. It appeared that a small part of the candidate's previous vote lead was lost, although both public awareness and cities grew, their role as parents in their constituency's lives was still the key factor influencing votes.

Biraderi Influence in PP Elections 2018 (District Narowal)

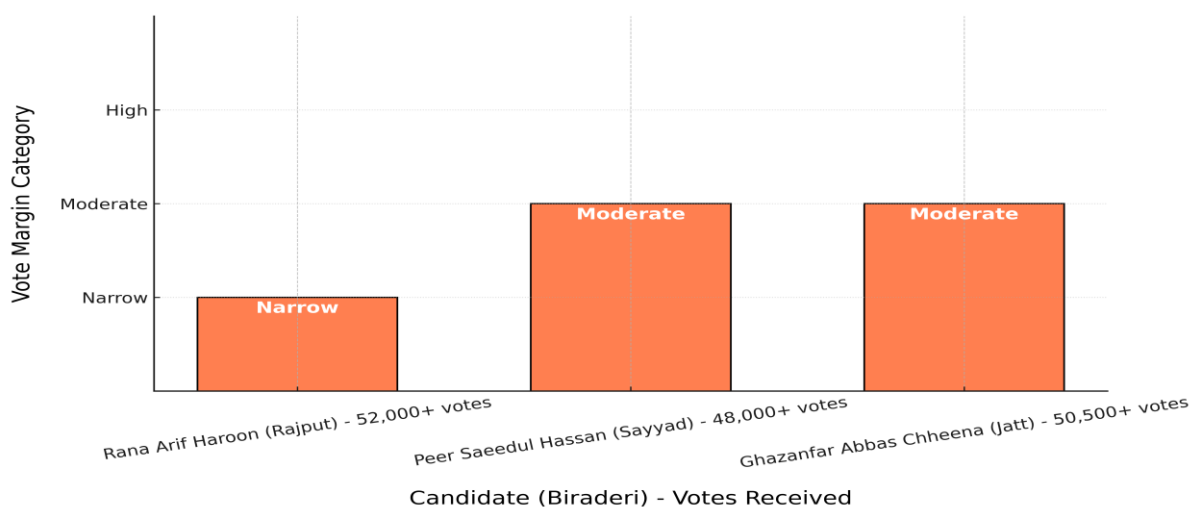


Figure 4: Biraderi-Based Electoral Outcomes in PP Elections 2018 (District Narowal)
Source: Election Commission of Pakistan (2018); Yasir Ali (2022)

The 2018 Provincial Assembly elections saw Rana Arif Haroon (Rajput) win over



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Peer Saeedul Hassan (Sayyad) and Ghazanfar Abbas Chheena (Jatt) take his political office (ECP, 2018). The dominance of biraderi family ties over elections did not change, even when voters changed in small or medium amounts. Voters in Narowal supported Rajput and Jatt choices, as the Sayyad candidate managed to earn more of the religious vote. In District Narowal, community networks are such an important part of daily life that their decisions affect voting patterns more than national changes. Even so, the influence of both mass media and city growth has lessened the number of voting differences in that period. Still, dynastic alliances, caste groups and local authorities are more powerful than national political parties and government programs. Birders are the key to election victories here, since voters choose who to support by listening to them. Efforts to get people involved and feeling like one group Membership in one political group decided who would be nominated for election in District Narowal in both 2013 and 2018. In that era, parties like PML-N chose candidates from their own clans in the belief that it would ensure all clan members would vote as a team for their candidate. Instead of choosing people who were loyal to their Biraderi, political parties ran those with greater ability to activate such loyalties. skills for management or for thinking about politics. Campaign strategies were primarily made to win over biraderi leaders who served as advisors to their kin. Backing their party was not the result of distributing policies or platforms, but of panchayats, clan leader sponsorships and clan group vows. Because mass voter support helped biraderi leaders, they didn't have to visit individual homes to mobilize people. According to the election results, from 2013 to 2018, the people of District Narowal preferred a biraderi bond over those who supported the party's ideology. Even as issues related to trafficking and corruption from the PTI were of key interest to the nation in 2018, local leadership in Narowal continued to be based on family ties. Because they depended on their family connections instead of the party's polices, PML-N biraderi candidates were winners even while PTI achieved victory nationally. Biraderi relationships were more important than commitment to political parties in the two election cycles.

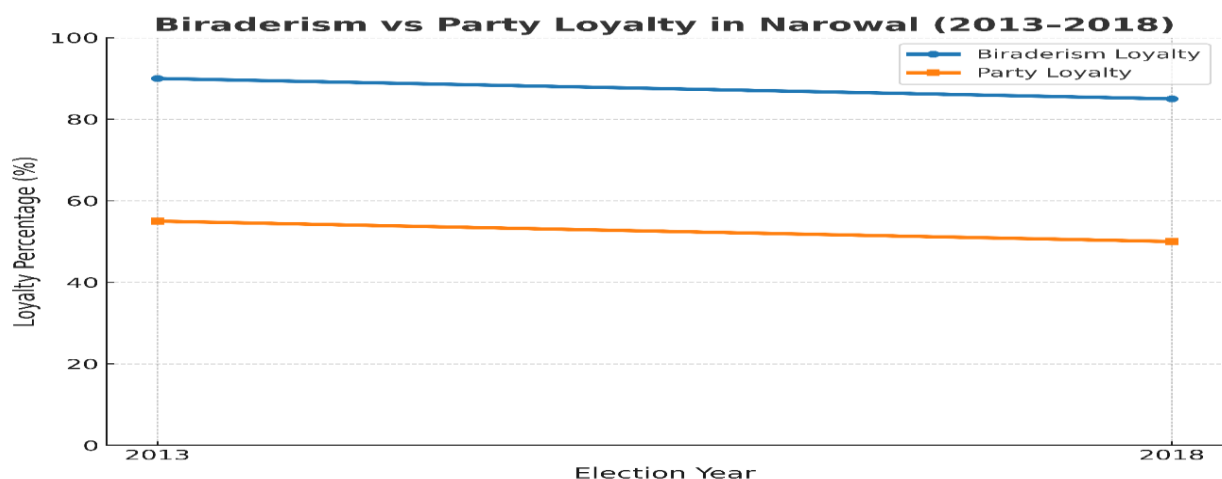


Figure 5: Loyalty Trends between Biraderism and Party Affiliation (District Narowal)
Source: Yasir Ali (2022) based on Election Commission Data

When people focus on biraderism, the real development of democracy cannot take place. Most political activities avoid talking about development and issues



because relationships and loyalties among kin and communities are vital in local politics. As a result, issue-based participation and recruitment based on qualifications are both challenged which delays the development of a democratic culture. People in Narowal taking part in elections actually follows a system where community connections rule election results, rather than a system based on evaluating the platforms of politicians for their decisions. There were important adjustments between urban and rural life during both election cycles in Narowal. All the components of rural areas are managed by biraderi families. Many voters treat politics as linked to who they're related to in the clan and what they can gain from their local leaders and relatives.

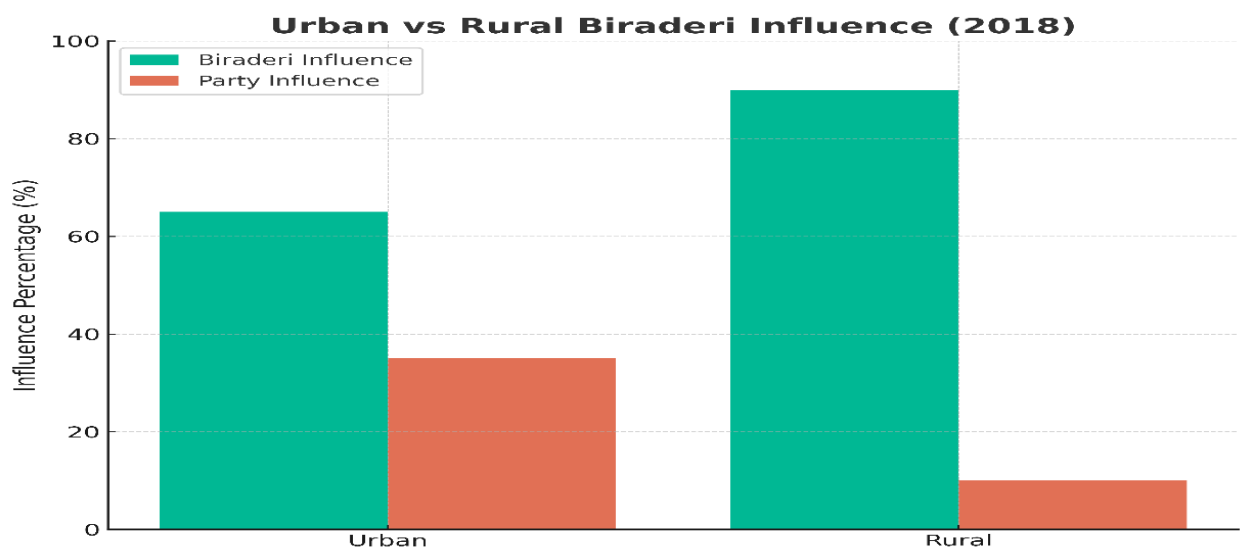


Figure 6: Comparison of Urban and Rural Biraderism Influence (District Narowal, 2018)
Source: Yasir Ali (2022)

According to our study, the attitudes of young urban voters in Narowal on politics and issues have improved slightly. Because of changing social groups and political views, biraderism has developed differently in urban areas, not led to its abolishment. Though the way people vote in cities has changed, the birader party is still powerful among rural constituents since its main support has not disappeared.

Conclusion

District Narowal made its political decisions guided by Biraderism between the years 2013 and 2018. Even though the country underwent big political changes, people in Narowal made their choices through family relations in 2018 as well. PML-N nominated candidates from among relatives and they led their ethnic group allies by using age-old political practices as the campaign went on. In cities, people might lean toward both voting for parties and on issues, though in rural areas traditional loyalties kept the system under the control of biraderi. Dependence on traditional values of unity hinders both the progress of democracy and the appearance of leaders chosen by educated voters. In order for Narowal to be politically democratic, people need to escape the dominance of their biraderi over electoral decisions.



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