Social Factors Hindering Political Participation in Pakistan: A Review Article

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Abstract

Background of Study: In Pakistan, political process has been distracted due to many reasons especially lack of political participation. Political participation is citizens' right but many social factors hinder political participation. This is the reason common people of Pakistan feel secluded from political process. Objective: To conduct a systematic review to identify and explore factors which hinder political participation in Pakistan. Methods: This was a descriptive systematic review of literature pertaining to social factors that hinder the political will to participate the political process. Fifty research articles were reviewed to identify the significant factors hampering political participation in Pakistan. Conclusion: Factors like lack of interest, youth participation, voting behaviour, lack of trust, corruption, oligarchy, inherited politics, caste system and illiteracy were found to be significant as barriers in the way of political participation.

Keywords: *Lack of interest, voting behaviour, corruption, youth participation, oligarchy, inherited politics, caste system, illiteracy, lack of trust*

1. Introduction

In Pakistan, Political leaders take people's money in the form of unidentifiable taxes. They lead to conflicts which are treacherous and write the laws that govern our lives. If politics is for people, then why common people of Pakistan (place to live holy people but full of unholy politicians) are historically deprived of their basic needs and basic human rights. It is because some people choose them and others don't participate in political process. Citizens' participation is required to influence the governmental policies (Box, 2007; Flores, 2005). Broad participation in the decision-making processes is a precondition for proper democratic governance (Dahl 1998; Pateman 1970). People must have to make better involvement in political process if they want to get rid of this system which clearly draws a line between rich and poor, masters and slaves, good Muslim and bad Muslim.

Up to the present time political participation often referred as less important for development in Pakistan. The facts show that every developed and consolidated democracy has emerged from mass democratic culture. Researchers are now convinced that for sustainable and effective democracy mass democratic political culture is needed (Sargent, 2008). Democratic culture emerges when people realise the significance of political participation. Citizens' participation is indispensable for their empowerment (Box, 2007; Haque and Zafarullah, 2006). Participation means "those actions of citizens that attempt to influence the structure of government, the selection of government officials, or the policies of government or to support government and politics" (Janda et al., 2012).

Pakistan is among countries where disinterest in political participation is apparent. There are many socio-political reasons behind this situation. One of these reasons is continuous exploitation of political rights of common people. The right to political participation refers to citizens' right to seek to influence public affairs. Political participation can take many

forms, the most notable of which is voting in elections, but also including joining a political party, standing as a candidate in an election, joining a non-governmental advocacy group, or participating in a demonstration. Political participation is assumed as one of the determinants of empowerment because political participation provides a space for exercising their strength and opportunities for choosing the leaders who have abilities to solve their problems and commitment to reduce disparity. Batliwala (1995) argued that the process of empowerment was nearly impossible out side the democratic political system. Well-functioning democracies need citizens' participation in politics. Political participation is a broader concept than simply voting in elections and it includes a host of activities like volunteering as an unpaid campaign worker, debating politics with others and attending political meetings like campaign appearances of candidates, joining political groups, participating in boycott activities, strikes or demonstrations, writing letters to representatives and so on (Alesina and Ferrara, 2002).

2. Political Participation

Political participation is not static thing. It is a very dynamic and evolving social phenomenon. But it has been observed that electoral turnout and voting, that is the cornerstone of the democratic political process, has been reportedly decreasing over the last decades in almost all European states (O'Toole et al., 2003). It is point to ponder that why people are not paying serious attention to political participation. Political trust has been declining in Canada and all over the world (Nevitte, 1996). Many scholars have connected political processes such as democracy and corruption as important factors in determining economic growth. In individual behaviour studies scholars have consistently found socioeconomic factors predominantly education and income to be robust predictors of political participation in progressive democracies (Brady et al., 1995; Verbaet al., 1995). Moreover, macro-level studies find that participation is higher the more developed the country and scholars argue that this is due to a relationship between economic development and levels of education and income (Blais and Dobrzynska, 2004).

3. Right to Political Participation

Participation in political and public life is a human right as well as an important step in the process of enjoying other human rights. It encompasses the right to vote and the right to be elected. However, it goes beyond formal democratic processes and includes broader participation, such as participation in decision-making on law and policy as well as participation in development and humanitarian assistance (UNHR, 2012).

Two foundational instruments define the right to political participation: the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Declaration) and the 1976 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Covenant). The Declaration is a statement of general principles. Since it is not a treaty, the standards of behaviour that it defines have the status of only non-binding norms, but the document is nonetheless of enormous legal and political importance, for it provided the foundation not only for later legally-binding international treaties but also for many national governments' rights frameworks. Without active engagement by responsible citizens, democracy cannot flourish and sustainable development is impossible.

4. Methodology

4.1 Study Design

This was a descriptive systematic review of literature pertaining to social factors that hinder the political will to participate the political process, with specific emphasis on examining and exploring the different social issues that hinder the democratic process. No secondary data analysis (meta-analysis or other statistical tests) was undertaken. The available literature on this matter is emerging, uneven, and inconclusive. That's why researchers used descriptive systematic review of literature concerning political participation. The researchers used the different key terms related to the perspective in Pakistani and international politics and political process.

4.2 Inclusion Criteria

This study is based on an extensive literature review. It included almost all types of publications (available on internet) reporting political participation in Pakistan by direct data collection through surveys, interviews, research trials, etc. or secondary analysis of published data obtained through one or more of these methods. No restriction was applied in terms

of type of study, methodology employed, type of data analysis, or peer-review of publications. The researchers almost reviewed one hundred and ten research articles related to the said subject and fifty research articles, notes, and other type of published literature cited in this review article to explore the social factors that hinder the political participation in Pakistan.

5. Discussion

5.1 Lack of Interest

People's interest plays an important role in any political process. According to a Gilani Research Foundation Survey carried out by Gallup Pakistan 45% say they suffer from Political apathy or lack of interest in active political participation (Gallup, 2012). Politicians of all political persuasions have been asking themselves how they can 're-engage' the public with the political process (Bromley, 2001). Shahwar and Asim (2012) found that 62.5% of the respondents cast the vote in the (2008) general election. The male respondents were found dynamic role in casting the vote. In the total population about 64.7% of male respondents had cast their vote and 36% of the female respondents cast their vote. Iqbal (2012) asserts that Pakistani people do have interest in politics. However they are dissatisfied with the current political set up and disagree with the policies of the government. People in Pakistan who are apathetic mostly had a pessimistic point of view about political situation. As a result they had developed the feelings of learned helplessness and believed that no matter what they do all their efforts will be fruitless (Sarfraz et al., 2012).

It was also reported by Anonymous (2010) that the voting turn out in the previous general elections 2008 was 44.5% and in the 2002 general election the voting turnout was 41.8%. It shows that Pakistani people have no much interest in the casting the vote. If we compare with other developed countries such as Sweden, Australia, Switzerland, Denmark and Italy etc. have more than 80% voting turn out. Adma and Schoresch (2007) also depicted that Pakistan had the problem a lack of political participation in the politics. They marked that between 1945 and 1997 about 41.8% of the populations, who had allowed to vote, had voted. This compares with about 90.6% in India, 56% in Bangladesh and 63.7% in Nepal.

5.2 Voting Behaviour

Voting behaviour is a form of political behaviour. Understanding voters' behaviour can explain how and why decisions were made either by public decision-makers, which has been a central concern for political scientists (Goldman, 1966). Voting behaviour is very important topic because through this we can know the will of people and also the way they want to have it. Voting is very important tool in democratic societies. Democracy provides a chance to the people to become a dynamic citizens rather than inactive subjects (Jost, 2006). A person who is the citizen of Pakistan, is not less than 18 years of age on the first day of the January of the year in which the rolls are prepared or revised, is not declared by a competent court to be of unsound mind and is or is deemed to be the resident of an electoral area, can get himself enrolled as a voter in the electoral area. The citizens registered on the electoral roll are only eligible to cast their vote (GOP, 2011). Voting defined by Universal Declaration of Human Right as "Voting is the fundamental right of almost all citizens over the age of eighteen. It ensures that will of the people is preserved" (HRCP, 2008). Voting is the expression of a person's preference for a candidate, or a group of candidates, as well as the person's preference of one political system rather than another (Blais et al., 2004). A person who is the citizen of Pakistan, is not less than 18 years of age on the first day of the January of the year in which the rolls are prepared or revised, is not declared by a competent court to be of unsound mind and is or is deemed to be the resident of an electoral area, can get himself enrolled as a voter in the electoral area. The citizens registered on the electoral roll are only eligible to cast their vote (GOP, 2011).

5.3 Illiteracy

The connection between literacy and political engagement is predicated on the assumption that as individuals become more exposed to information about their environment, especially the public institutions and government, they will be more prepared to intervene to make such bodies more responsive to their needs. The connection between literacy and political outcomes, however, is more complex than it seems at first face. A report from USA shows that non-students are less likely to vote, to be registered to vote, to volunteer, or to feel they can make a difference in their communities than their college attending counterparts (Lopez & Kolaczowski, 2003). Illiteracy leading to extremism has made Pakistan volatile to unstable.

Illiteracy undermines the very foundations of our democracy. Illiterate citizens inevitably lack in awareness and reasoning skills. How can we expect a voter to make an informed decision when he/she is unable to even read a newspaper? Illiterate voters are easy to be misled. Small wonder so many Pakistanis either abstain or take the wrong side in politically defining moments. The root cause for frequent intervals of dictatorship and political instability in the country is the illiteracy of 70% voters living in rural areas, who cannot read newspapers and hence can easily be exploited or misguided. These illiterate masses remain indifferent to what is happening at national or provincial level. They are unable to know how their elected representatives are performing in the parliament, or how they are switching over their loyalties for narrow or personal gains, ignoring larger developmental interests of the nation.

Because of illiteracy the people of Pakistan do not have much awareness about the politics. They are inclined by the campaigns and party slogans and vote accordingly. There are also various economic factors behind their decisions (Shahwar and Asim, 2012). Alesina and La Ferrara (2002) found that education is strongly positively associated with participation, a result in line with Glaeser, Ponzetto and Shleifer (2007) who stress the importance of education for maintaining democratic institutions. Many other individual characteristics are in line with what found on trust by. Glaeser et al. (2007) found positive correlation between levels of education and the extent of democratization. Another scholar Fornos et al. (2004) found no significant correlation between literacy and voter turnout in America. Gine and Mansuri (2010) pointed out that lack of information is a barrier to political participation.

5.4 Inherited Politics

In Pakistan people are known according to their caste and creed. More than fifty percent (55%) respondents vote to the candidate because of the candidate and nominee belong to their own *biradri* or caste. *Biradriism* is the most powerful element in Pakistan and it is the main basis of the voting behavior in Pakistani society (Shahwar and Asim, 2012). Ahmad (2004) who found that major part of voters has no political fidelity. People cast their votes to survive as a group or *biradri*. In case of candidates belonging to the same *biradari*, voters use their preferences. There is no party identification that is the psychological connection of a voter to a particular *biradri*. (Wilder, 1999) was also pointed out this phenomenon. He depicts that in Pakistan, particularly in Punjab the leading aspect of the social system is *biradarism*. It has impact on the political system at national as well as at local levels. *Biradari* is a stronger determinant of voting behaviour. In Pakistani culture family is considered the strong element and most of the people live in joint family system that's why family members have strong influence about any decision or matter. Gazdar (2000) suggests that special interests, whether they be landowners or family or clan lines (zaats), appear to be no more cohesive at the local than national levels. In some rural areas, a single family or landowner is dominant.

Banfield (1958) in a study of a Southern Italian village defines "a moral familism" as a social equilibrium in which people trust (and care about) exclusively their immediate family, expect everybody else to behave in that way and therefore (rationally) do not trust non family members and do not expect to be trusted outside the family. Only biradaries in numerical majority are successful. It means that people cast their votes to biradari supported candidate. The ratio of support to biradari supported candidates in Faisalabad district, Pakistan is 74% (Ahmad, 2004). Wilder (2009) pointed out that every political party wants to win so the party ticket is given to major biradaris because biradari politics is deep rooted in Faisalabad's electoral politics. Political parties carefully weigh the relative strengths and weaknesses of candidates seeking tickets, including the strength of their biradaris. In the elections of local bodies in rural areas, people cast their vote to their groups. So there is no loyalty for a candidate but for a group. The local bodies' elections are held only on biradari basis. First of all the biradari decides to cast vote in favor of biradari supported candidate and then the election campaign begins. Rival Biradaries or groups in National and Provincial elections are allied in local bodies' elections. Group politics means Jatt-Arain, Arain-Rajput, Jatt-Rajput alliance. Nazim is from one group or biradari and Naib Nazim is from other. There are no other criteria for alliance but expected victory. These alliances vary from seat to seat. Jatt-Arain can be allies on one seat but rival on the next one (Ahmad, 2004). Samirenda (1999) found that local groups became active and participate as a representative of political parties but through dominating biradaries. One of the reasons behind this is the presence of dominant biradaris which dilute the hostility between the political parties. These biradaris are more active and effective than the political parties.

5.5 Youth Participation

Pakistan has a long history of student politics and students have played a major role in shaping the directions taken by the state and the government of Pakistan. The political parties, struggling to engage with the youth, have yet to reform

their internal structures and outreach programmes. With 63 per cent of the country's population under the age of 25, Pakistan is experiencing a profound demographic change with wide-ranging socio-political effects. Failure to improve the quality of political engagement with students and the youth in general could have a significant impact on democracy. In the area of political participation, in a third of countries, eligibility for national parliament starts at 25 years old or older. 1.65% of parliamentarians around the world are in their 20s and 11.87 % are in their 30s. The average age of parliamentarians globally is 53 years (UNDP, 2012).

Youth is very important strata when we talk about political participation. In many developing and underdeveloped countries, policy makers are focusing on enhancement of youth involvement. In Nigeria, Nigerian Youth Agenda on Political Participation is now being developed ahead of the 2015 election together with a Nigerian Youth Inter party Forum. In America, researches invested resources to find out the trends of youth involvement in political process (Highton&Wolfinger, 2001; Lopez & Kolaczowski, 2003). Iqbal (2012) stated that Pakistani youngsters are not optimistic about politicians and political parties. That is the major reason behind their disinterest in political process. Historically, the youth in Pakistan have not played any significant role in the elections until 2013 elections. At the same time nearly 84% of the Pakistani youth (18-29 years) have found to believe that politics can be used to bring about a positive change in the society. Furthermore, almost 80% of them are willing to play their part in politics (Hussain, 2007). The PTI (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf) and the PML-N (Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz) focused on the youth and both have developed special schemes, youth policies, and are giving 25% tickets to the youth in order to wow them. The PML-N started a laptop programme and loan schemes for the youth.

5.6 Lack of Trust

In recent years numerous scholars have devoted significant attention to the concept of trust on political system (e.g., Boeckmann& Tyler, 2002; Brehm&Rahn, 1997; Chanley,Rudolph, &Rahn, 2000). Many studies focused on trust as an independent variable. Such studies find that it greatly influences political behaviour and institutional practice. Recent writings identify interpersonal trust along with civic involvement as a determinant of economic development, political participation, and effective democratic institutions. Poor, mismanaged government breeds distrust, not the other way around (Rothstein and Stolle, 2002; Cleary and Stokes, 2006). Lack of confidence in government actually favours corruption (Della Porta, 2000). In Pakistan, common people do not trust politicians for certain reasons. Common people don't trust because the politicians promise to improve the condition of roads, schools, governance and economy but once elected, they forget all their promises so why should people give votes to them (Sarfaraz et al., 2012).

Kimball and Patterson (1997) studying the American Congress have argued that dissatisfaction with Congress stems from a discrepancy or a gap between citizen's expectations and perceptions for the performance of the Congress. This is this gap we are interested in, the difference between the policies citizens favour and the assessment they make of the performance of the government on those specific policies.

5.7 Corruption

The mounting empirical literature on political corruption shows trust (interpersonal and political) to be both cause and consequence of corruption. Scholars define corruption "as the abuse of public office for private gain," whether pecuniary or in terms of status.

Corruption has links to conflict. Although corruption is not likely to be the only factor responsible for the destabilization of a country, it can have a major impact on undermining the government and public confidence in governing institutions which, in turn, can become a driver of conflict. Corruption, governance, and conflict have complex and interrelated links. This is an apparent reality in many countries. In the Pakistan, corruption and conflict are intertwined in the states and breakaway regions. Corrupt rulers, powerful and contending families, and networks of elites who have a shared stake in corruption have used "state power to intrude into the economy with impunity" and created "violence and protection" markets. A study by Javaid (2010) revealed that Corruption severely impacts the life of the citizens through less returns on resource use and adds manifold to their cost of living. The roots of corruption in Pakistan date back to the colonial period when the Britishers rewarded lands and titles to those who were their loyalists leading to nepotism and corruption (Awan, 2004).

Goldstein and Udry (2005) describes how leaders in Ghanaian villages exploit their political power for economic purposes. Experts have long cited corruption as one of the most important factors affecting political participation in Africa (Lemarchand, 1972). More recently, cross-national survey data provides convincing evidence that in many African countries, citizens want clean and accountable governments and perceptions of corruption prompt citizens to vote against

corrupt leaders (Bratton et al., 2005). There is evidence that corruption is especially disruptive in democracies because it undermines the basic principles of a free state. It is widely noted that corruption contributes to the de-legitimizing of the political and institutional systems within which it takes root (Rock, 2009).

5.8 Oligarchy

When democracy combines with oligarchy, the result is a distinctive fusion of equality and inequality. Meyer (1969) provides evidence that in the two decades after Independence Indian politics was dominated by rich landowners, and Besley, Pande, and Rao (2005) show that this is still true of rural politics in India, relative to other villagers, politicians in South Indian villages own significantly more land. Bourguignon and Verdier (1999) argue that an "oligarchy" will oppose widespread education because educated peoples are more likely to demand political power, i.e. democracy. Therefore, it is evident from the given facts that deterioration of the political system in Pakistan, has resulted from "the issues of centralization of Authority and political participating which have arisen simultaneously in the political order (Laghari, 1991). The flaws in the system are leading to more corruption benefiting only the rich ignoring the common people (Sarfraz et al., 2012). Pakistani parties exhibit fairly high levels of organizational centralization combined with average levels of organizational extensiveness (Kitschelt and Palmer, 2009).

6. Conclusion

This systematic review identifies and explores factors associated with lack of political participation in Pakistan. The lay men in Pakistan have not a lot of experience in electoral process and the nation faced the a long period 23 years without election. While from 1970 to 2010 nation has experienced 4 regime of dictatorship. In Pakistani history the political system favored the feudalists, industrialist, inherited politics, and the illiterate economically strong and corrupt people. That's why people don't take the interest due to the lack of trust on the whole political system. Due to the lack of interest on politicians the voting turnout in Pakistan is very low and especially youth a major chunk of the population is cut of the whole political process. The Pakistani political system also not favored to those who don't contain much wealth that's why the lay man cannot contest the election in general seats. So, it is suggested that the proper legislation and encourage to working class, educated middle class, youth and women to take part in the electoral process and paved the ways and encourage the lay man on politics.

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