CRAFTY OLIGARCHS, SAVVY VOTERS:

DEMOCRACY UNDER INEQUALITY IN RURAL PAKISTAN

Pakistan Institute of Development Economics
Spirit of Free Inquiry
1957
Islamabad

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SAVVY VOTERS
DEMOCRACY UNDER INEQUALITY IN RURAL PAKISTAN

📅 January 15, 2021
At 7 PM PST

MEET OUR SPEAKER

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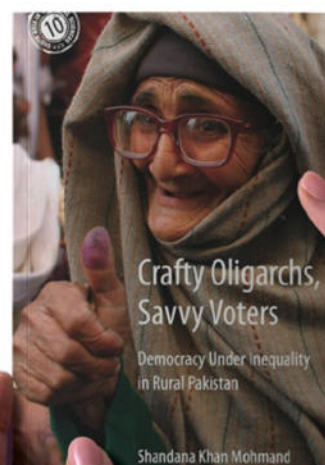
OUR DISCUSSANTS

O **Dr Hassan David**
(LUMS)

O **Prof Adeel Malik**
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O **Dr Mahmood Khalid**
(PIDE)

O **Ms. Lubna Hassan**
(PIDE)

Crafty Oligarchs,
Savvy Voters

Democracy Under Inequality
in Rural Pakistan

Shandana Khan Mohmand

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PREAMBLE

This book preeminently focuses on understanding the Pakistani voters particularly the rural voters in depth. The book is revolving around the voting behavior of the rural people: why they vote and what they think about it. Most of the literature on Pakistan revealed that the rural voters are very constrained in terms of ability to consent as leaders and inclusion. This is because of socio-economic inequality and that limits their bargaining power and their agency in electoral politics. Therefore, given this how then does contestation and inclusion work in rural Pakistan? The findings exposed that in Pakistan democracy is working under extreme levels of inequality.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- It all started after the British captured Punjab in 1849. To control the local population and rebellion after the war of independence in 1857. British gave large land grants to the people who fought with them in the war of independence. Sahiwal village in the Sargodha district is one of the examples of land grants that were given by the colonial masters to their loyalists. These landlords through their landholdings control the village. Villagers vote only for those whom the landlord approves. Because their livelihood depends upon the landlord. So, the landlord controls the votes of the whole village.
- After independence in 1947, these villages are still controlled by landlords. Owing to the inefficient implementation of the land reforms over the years.
- In rural areas, voters organized their vote depending upon whether the villages are proprietary villages or crown villages. Proprietary villages are those where large tracts of land are controlled by either one person or family. On the other hand, Crown villages are those where many families control land in the village. In these villages live Zamindar, Kami, and Muslim sheikh.

TYPES OF VOTERS IN PAKISTAN

There are four types of voters in Pakistan.

1. **FEUDALISM**

   In feudalism, one powerful person or family controls the whole village. In this system, voters are not independent but instead depend upon the feudal. Feudalism no longer exists instead capitalism has taken root in the country. In the rural areas, landlords are still powerful.

2. **KINSHIP**

   In kinship, the voting behavior of a person is determined by kinship affiliations(baradari). To gain access to the limited resources of the state, people adhere to kinship. They all together decide the votes. In this system, people are bound by the kin.

3. **PATRON-CLIENT RELATIONSHIP**

   In the patron-client relationship, people vote for the person, who offers them higher incentives. Although this system is not very popular with Pakistani scholars. But still, it is gaining ground in Pakistan.

4. **CLASS AND PARTY IDEOLOGY**

   This type of voting behavior is very rare because of the dependency on the feudal lord and kinship. Party-affiliated voting is not active in Pakistan because of the long history of military intervention in politics.

MAJOR FINDINGS

- Village politics is underpinned by strategic interactions that draw on clientelistic relationships and collective action even within poorer groups.
  - From above (leaders and landlords): 68% are engaged in clientelistic behavior (clients + baradari alliance).
  - From below (voters): 51% are engaged in collective strategies to counter the impact of unequal access to power and services.

- o From above (leaders and landlords): 68% are engaged in clientelistic behavior (clients + baradari alliance).
  - o From below (voters): 51% are engaged in collective strategies to counter the impact of unequal access to power and services.
- ➢ Perspective matters mobilize the voters in rural Punjab, Pakistan.
- ➢ Differences were also visible like political engagement and collective bargaining that underpin the relationships of clientelism and kinship.
  - o Voters in proprietary villages more likely to connect to leaders as clients,
  - o Those in Crown villages through kinship networks.
  - o Voters in proprietary villages and unequal villages have less bargaining power
  - o Proprietary villages perform consistently poorly than Crown villages.
- ➢ Democracy works better, where land and social structural inequality is lower. However, inequality may limit contestation more than inclusion and it affects service delivery.
- ➢ Upper caste and more landed groups across all types of villages have more horizontal, equal linkages with greater bargaining power.
- ➢ Savvy voters among the poor are forcing entrenched oligarchies to resort to all of their skills to negotiate the terms of political engagement.
- ➢ Villages that are close to the urban areas are more independent in their vote than those who live far away from cities.

DISCUSSANT(S) COMMENTS

1. This book is about the politics and condition of rural inequality and it retrieves the role of the marginal landless voters. So, essentially, it is also about sort of strategic political participation in rural areas but broadly offers a fascinating sort of view on a long decay which is about the role of power and dominance landed elites in Pakistan. The leading input of this book is that it retrieves the agency of politics of marginalized landless groups.
2. The book shows a system that continues to be characterized by the dominance of local leaders. However, now there is more pressure on leaders to include voters within the decision-making process to cater to the needs of voters when it comes to service provision. Also, the emergence of more leaders has led to more competition. One of the main points of this book is that many changes are being driven by the electoral competition. However, the mode of politics remains the same that is centered around the individuals whether they are leaders or voters.
3. The author has identified the misnomer that generally is presented towards how the electoral process works and it seemed a feudalistic kind of society. Besides, a public choice framework was selected to dispel the notion that these oligarchs were established by colonial masters for their terms of engagement with locals.

CRITICISM

1. The writer has not taken into consideration that the rules of the game are still the same as introduced by colonial masters. Since Independence, the village structure has not been changed. Laws are still the same as passed by the British.
2. Age factor was also missing. Young voters are now more independent and have more bargaining power than their old generation.

WAY FORWARD

1. The government should introduce land reforms, to curb the power of the elite in the country.
2. Transfer of power to the lowest tier of the government is important. The local government system is important for the inclusion of the marginal segment of the society. Local Government reforms are the need of the hour.
3. The government should reform the institutional structure. This in turn ends the patron-client relationship.

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