
**AN ANALYSIS OF IDEOLOGICAL POLITICS AND CHANGING
PATTERNS OF POLITICAL THOUGHTS
AMONG PAKISTANI YOUTH**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to analyze the ideological politics, considering history and the evolving political thought, among the youth of Pakistan. Currently, youth seem less interested in political affairs for various reasons, such as aimless use of social media, apolitical curricula taught in educational institutions, and fear and greed in the minds of middle-class youth. Since the middle class has always been a major driving force behind political change in history worldwide, it is the foremost task of powerful forces to corrupt the middle class through different endeavors or to make them afraid through different tactics. The literature review of the study mainly suggests that critical thinking, which is a very important aspect in understanding and participating in political affairs, is lacking in today's new generation. This is one of the major causes that the youth can be misled and negatively used by different political players in the country. On the one hand, it seems youth engagement in politics increased as Pakistan constitutes a huge majority youth population, but their politics mainly revolves around politics that benefit a particular political party or pressure groups. Though the youth is engaging with mainstream politics and participates in the voting process, in third-world countries like Pakistan, voting is just a tool to manipulate the people, as the powerful authorities are the sole actors behind making and overthrowing the governments. The prime example in this regard is the general elections of 2024, in which the people's mandate was stolen. The same happened in the 2018 elections and before, except for the elections held in 1970. The study examines the political patterns of politics revolving around different ideologies. The major source of analyzing youth engagement in politics is to keep an eye on social media. Therefore, the qualitative method is used in the study in order to analyze social media activism as well as youth practical participation in political affairs.

Keywords: Historical Analysis, Ideological Politics, Changing Patterns, Political Thought, Pakistani Youth

INTRODUCTION

Politics plays a very important role in the daily lives of every citizen of the country. It is mainly considered as only the act of casting a vote, but the fact is that it also plays a very crucial role in public affairs (Lall, 2014:535-562). Politics provides a voice for the voiceless and the wretched of the earth. It should be a collective effort by the political parties and groups to enhance the well-being of the people (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1987:1197-1216). As youth are a major force in any country, their participation in politics empowers them to raise their voice for the betterment not only of the youth but also of the other people. Their role in international affairs is also positive and very important (Kim, Wyatt, & Katz, 1999:361-385). The family background, social environment, peer association, and many other factors influence youth political participation (McClurg, 2003: 448-464).

In societies like developing countries, youth adopt political behaviors and patterns mainly from their families. As noted by Tobias, Donwell, and Peter (2017), the young generation adopts political ideologies from their parents' political and ideological inclinations. Since class-based politics has a very powerful impact in such underdeveloped and developing societies, where youth hailing from lower classes gets attracted towards Marxist ideology (Affan Mian and Javed Narejo, 2012). Furthermore, the authors analyze that youth belonging to the elite and upper middle class are mostly attracted towards politics revolving around capitalist and liberal ideologies. Quintelier (2007) identified that youth supporting religious politics and ideologies are less concerned with democratic ethos.

According to Ifra, Mohammad and Rafaqat (2014:25-42), the history of youth politics suggests that they have been engaging in politics through student politics. As Pandian (2014:225-231) observes, student politics flourishes in areas where such space for political activities is available through national and international politics. Khan (2014:79-99) notes that mainstream political parties try to establish their office in educational institutions to spread their political ideology and seek the support of young students. However, Gamini (2015) argues that student wings, operating in educational institutions, are mostly criticized for creating disruption in the educational

environment, which attitude creates hindrances in flourishing student politics.

In the context of Pakistan, before the Zia regime, student unions had played a very active and important role in making the young generation aware of politics, and even many student leaders transitioned into mainstream politics and became members of provincial assemblies and the parliament of Pakistan. During the Ayub regime, the students, in association with opposition political parties, resisted the dictator's anti-education and anti-people policies. Subsequently, General Zia banned student unions on 9th February 1984 in order to suppress students' voices against the military rule.

There is also an opinion regarding students' participation in politics. According to Altbach (1984), the student organizations claim to work for the betterment of students on campus, and their leadership mainly consists of those students who are not good at education. Ntshoe (2002) points out that student organizations also get involved in illegal activities on campus, which do not support the student cause but disrupt education.

However, these criticisms are somehow justified as the student politics itself is not harmful for students and their studies, but how it has been practiced that matters. For example, before banning the student unions in Pakistan, the boycotts and other disruptions of educational activities were not as common as they became after the ban was imposed on unions. The main reason behind this was that the student unions comprised the leadership of the students on campus. Though the involvement of mainstream political parties was there, it was nominal, and the student body was comprised of active and sound students.

Sociological analysis explains the ideology that plays a vital role in youth activism. Marxist ideology is influencing the minds of young people. Hence, they are destroying a democratic attitude (Hussain, 2012:157-172). In this regard, the authors believe that Marxist ideology does not destroy democratic culture; it opposes liberal democracy, which serves the interests of a few elitist groups rather than representing the masses. According to Burawoy (1976), academic institutions are the primary platform for youth to engage in political activities, especially in third-world nations. As Chazan (1978) stated, the lack of financial support, quality education, proper training,

unemployment, and poverty made mainstream youth inactive in political activities. These issues are revealed to the youth, and the youth blame politicians who ignore the problems of youth. Haq (2017) articulated that in rural areas of Pakistan, feudalism and a traditional mindset are key factors in creating obstacles for youth to participate in political activities. Moreover, the youth in urban areas tend to have a more democratic attitude, influenced by educational institutions and their family background.

As supported by Hossain, Alam, and Shahriar (2014), education has a significant influence on the political attitude among youth. Therefore, most of the youth are taught a positive attitude to democracy at the school level. Democracy and education have a profound positive connection. Teachers' ideology is essential because they attract the academic youth towards a political attitude. As noted by Alam et al. (2011), female has a more democratic attitude as compared to males. The youth of a democratic attitude argues that democracy creates equality, freedom, and an environment of equality. A considerable number of youths are active in social activities, even without knowing the meaning of democracy in the true sense. The governments also create hindrances for the youth's participation in democratic activities (Afzal, 1986).

Youth politics is seen as a complex phenomenon in Pakistan. Analyzing historical analysis that youth were engaged in various political parties and activities (NELSON, 192011). Marxist and leftist ideology was the primary factor in the motivation to engage youth in politics. In the era of the 1960s, the left political ideology was strong among students, whereas the nature of political ideas changed in the 1980s, and the youth mainstream became a major supporter of democratic and liberal thought (Kanwal, 2017:137-153). The youth of the third-world countries are blamed for promoting radical and violent ideology. Student politics legalized after World War II as a way to enter national politics while promoting socialist ideology. Socialist ideology was perceived as the future of dominance in national politics (Choi, 1991).

Additionally, the media has the power to shape perception about a political framework in the minds of youth. The media is the single source of political exposure in Pakistan. Hence, youth are getting more interested in the political activities and discussions (Noshina, Qurra-

tul-Ain, Aniq, and Ahmad, 2000). Media exposure of political issues created consciousness among youth, and the result of political exposure of media raised political interest among youth (Shah, Cho, Eveland & Kwak, 2005). It is stated in a study that youth political participation is a challenge. Due to a lack of political interest and having less space in mainstream politics, the representation of youth representatives is limited. Lack of political participation also created a gap for youth in the power structure (Lloyd, 2013).

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The researchers have focused on the following objectives.

- To understand the changing patterns of political awareness among youth.
- To highlight the role of mainstream media in political information to youth.
- To examine the current mechanisms of change of political thought among youth.
- To define the role of social media in the shift in political thought among Pakistani youth.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the factors influencing youth to political awareness and participation in mainstream political activities?
- What role does social media play in youth awareness of social and political activities?
- What are the historical aspects of youth political participation and involvement in various political thoughts?
- What levels of political consciousness and attitude among youth are prevailing in mainstream politics in Pakistan?

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The study examines the political activities, interests, awareness, and sources of political information among youth in Pakistan. It explores how social media attracts youth to political participation and shapes youth's political influence. The study also examines the historical and political ideologies of Pakistani youth. The researchers explain the role of youth in political perception and activities at the national level. Moreover, the study aims to analyze the family

backgrounds of youth involved in politics and their political interests across different parties.

The authors explore youth political frustration and extremist thoughts, and the lack of interest in politics, as well as the political problems youth face. The historical role of youth in politics is explained in the study, along with how political parties exploit youth in mainstream politics. The study also defines the changing patterns of youth political participation in local and national politics. The ethnic and religious-based politics among youth are also under focus. Moreover, the study will examine the role of youth at academic institutions in Pakistan.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The article is based on qualitative methods by engaging with secondary sources and provides an analysis of youth engagement in politics. The descriptive as well as conceptual methods have been used to understand youth involvement in politics, both in historical and current contexts. The study does not deal with the youth of any particular political organization or a particular period, but analyzes the situation across party lines. The article discusses how youths have been participating in politics historically by joining either left-wing or right-wing political parties, and their role in the current political scenario of the country. Since this article deals with the youth of the entire country, it was difficult to conduct a study based on primary sources, especially by conducting interviews with the leadership of the youth political parties and groups across the country. Therefore, the study focuses on secondary sources by providing an analytical approach.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature review presents ample material to justify any topic. It also examines whether the collected data is valid. Furthermore, it provides readers and researchers with a better understanding of the topic. A review of the literature makes it clear to the researchers which areas of the study are covered and which need to be addressed. It also gives a view of the justifications presented by the previous researchers.

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF YOUTH POLITICS IN PAKISTAN

The mainstream youth had played a heroic role in supporting democratic parties and movements. In Pakistan, youth played an important role in politics, standing against the dictatorships of Ayub Khan and Zia (Burki, 2012). Later, the youth from Punjab, especially Lahore and more specifically from the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), played a very important role against the emergency imposed by the Musharraf regime. In fact, youth have no consistent ideology; hence, the nature of politics differs among youth, and to some extent they support democracy, while on the other hand they oppose it (Marco and Safiya, 2009). This case can be analyzed in terms of personality cult, as followers of Imran Khan supported him when he was nurtured by the military establishment and was brought to power through general elections in 2018. It was clear at that time that Khan was acting against the democratic norms, yet a huge number of the young population in Pakistan supported Khan blindly. Interestingly, when Imran Khan was dismissed by the same military establishment, his supporters, mainly youth, started talking in support of democracy and against the military establishment. This is a political dilemma in which the youth are surviving.

The Muslim Students Federation organization existed before Indian partition, and in 1948, the Democratic Student Federation was formed in Lahore as a large youth political wing in Pakistan (Rais, 1985:43-61). In fact, student unions were banned during martial law in the Zia regime, and the fear against students' wings has still prevailed among people. As a result of the fear, most academic institutions ban students' political platforms on campuses (Shahid Iqbal, 2012:375-382). Currently, the students are made to sign a document in which they must pledge that they will not take part in any political activity. This document applies to all students, without any difference of their field of study and discipline. This is very unfortunate that the students of bachelor's in political science also have to sign the document that they will refrain from politics. This kind of hate towards politics supports the powerful authorities to make students and youth dumb so that they should not be aware of their rights.

Student politics is shaped by a range of political ideologies, including religious, cultural, regional, and ethnic. Islami Jamiat Talaba is a spiritual student wing that follows the religious ideology. At the

same time, the People's Student Federation (PSF) promotes the ideology of Bhutto (Iqra Mushtaq Fawad Baig & Sehrish Mushtaq, 2018:176-190). Further, the National Students Federation has leftist and Marxist ideology to see Pakistan as a secular state. There are various regional and ethnic political wings active at different universities in Pakistan, such as the Baloch Student Organization, Jeay Sindh Students Federation, Sindhi Shagird Tehreek, All-Pakistan Mohajir Student Organization, and Pashtun Students Federation. All these political wings have various ideologies, supervised by youth, to promote their cultural and regional identities (Hussain, M., & Kokab, 2013:173-178).

The Role of Social Media in Youth Politics

The media is one of the significant sources of information expanding among the masses. Public communication has mainly been done through mass media at a single time. The media is taking an important place in politics, and it also makes people informed about political issues (Ali and Hassan, 2014:4-9). The media provides political information and emphasizes political events and topics that help people understand the current political situation in a country (Schudson, 1997). Politics and the media have a deep and complex association in shaping youth awareness and participation in politics. New media have changed the patterns of political awareness among youth.

As noted by Lee, Karen, and Lee (2005), the use of mass media has created political awareness among youth. New social media has created awareness among mainstream youth, especially regarding academic institutions. The use of the internet has increased political awareness among youth, and they are more interested in politics now than they were a decade ago. Dahlgreen (2002) found that new media are an agent for providing information that increases political awareness and behavior among youth. Political perceptions and voting behavior among youth have changed due to social media. Most political discussions are covered by the mass media. According to a study, the mass media have played an essential role in shaping public perception of various political issues, especially during elections, and introducing new public policy. It is playing its central role in political debates among youth (Tahir and Bushra, 2015:349-358).

Pamela & Stephen (1991) have argued that social media is a silent source of information, and that users also respond less to its political posts and issues. The media still conveys to people that politics and political structure are essential in their everyday lives. The media's influence is changing youth behavior regarding political issues and participation. It is observed that greater media consumption among youth leads to more political discussion and greater involvement in political activities. The mere touch of social media increases engagement in political activities. The media has made youth aware politically in Pakistan (Sheikh, Bokhari and Naseer, 2012). If we take an example from Pakistan, social media has been playing an important role in mobilizing people, especially the youth. As mentioned above, the students of LUMS agitated against Musharraf's emergency, and their source of communication and gathering the people was email, as social media did not emerge as a powerful tool at that time as it is today. Yet, since most LUMS students hail from the upper or upper-middle class, they used BlackBerry mobiles as a tool and communicated their message with students and their teachers during the political mobilization. Now, it is visible that social media has become a viable tool, and most of the youth use it. The hashtag campaigns on former Twitter (now X) are very powerful for political and social movements.

Analysis of Youth Politics in Developing and Developed Countries

The youth of developing nations have a less national political agenda, while the youth of the developed world are much interested in national politics. Youth politics in third-world countries is unstable due to the constant involvement in violence, and youth organizations at academic institutions and cities are going to vanish and be banned. Political disinterest among youth is not an issue in developing countries, but it also prevails in developed nations such as England (Klofstad, 2007). Youth perceive that politics is not an adequate means to improve their well-being. They have less hope in politicians, and they do not deliver on the rights and needs of citizens. Youth's political participation serves various agendas in national building. Youth political participation contributes to freedom movements worldwide (Iqbal & Shahid, 2013).

As noted by Weeramunda (2008), University students are apathetic toward the political system, yet some are very interested in getting involved in politics. There are numerous causes of becoming apathetic, and an optimistic view of politics. Students interested in politics have an optimistic view of the system and believe their involvement could change the political structure. Students' apathetic view is pessimistic: they feel a sense of hopelessness and think that putting their efforts into the political process is a fruitless endeavor.

Youth Politics and Family Influence

An individual's political affiliation depends on their socioeconomic status. The higher the level of economic and social resources individuals have, the more they participate in politics, especially in parliamentary politics. In fact, political awareness is considered one of the most important sources of political participation. The poor strata of society are closely linked to resistance politics, in which many examples can be cited, as the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) has been led by Pashtun youth, and the organization is based on a resistance movement for the rights of the Pashtun people. Likewise, the Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC), led by Baloch people, mainly young women, is a prime example of resistance politics to counter the issue of Baloch missing persons. And, for youth involvement in politics, political debates are considered vital to the youth's political consciousness (Daniel and Reuben, 2006).

Gyampo (2013) argued that academic youth are compelled to focus on their studies; as a result, they remain detached from the mainstream and educational politics. In fact, youth with a background in history and political science, more specifically having a social sciences background, are more interested in political issues and activities. As well as social class, religion, and family background are directly linked with the shaping of the political attitudes of young people. Furthermore, female youth show less interest in politics due to a traditional mindset and limited opportunities for women in mainstream politics. In this regard, this is a positive gesture that women-led organizations, like Women Action Forum (WAF) and Sindhiyani Tehreek (ST), have been providing a platform to women, including young ones, to actively participate in politics in the past as well as present. However, this is encouraging that since 2018, women

of urban areas have been organized on the platform of 'Aurat Azadi March (Women Liberation March)'. A more encouraging aspect of this political mobilization is that the young women and girls are leading the movement. Likewise, since the same year (2018), the 'Students Solidarity Marches' started from the major cities of Pakistan and continue to march every year in November. The primary focus of these marches/movements is to safeguard students' rights. In this regard, family background matters in mainstream politics. Hence, the family's political background is a more decisive factor in developing a political attitude (Shahwar and Asim, 2012).

Democratic Attitude of the Youth

Civic education plays a vital role in the political development process. It also constructs a democratic attitude towards youth. Political socialization develops political ideologies and knowledge among youth (Javaid and Elahi, 2014). Religious people have less favorable attitudes toward the democratic political process. As Daniel (2009) noted, religion and democracy have fewer relationships. More religious youth are less supportive of democracy. The liberal concept of democracy is ignored by religious orientation. In the Pakistani context, youth aware of the history of the Pakistan Movement follow Allama Iqbal's concept of 'Spiritual Democracy' rather than liberal or other forms of democracy. Rural youth have more political consciousness and attitude, but different ideological influences. They argue that democracy is not the only source of change, because they believe it is all about power and corrupt elites (Bynner and Ashford, 1994). The reason behind this approach is to see rigged elections and malpractices during the elections, which portray how the so-called elected representatives of the people cheat the same people who voted for them.

It is stated by Burawoy (1976) that a democratic political culture can develop through the creation of practical public democratic ideas among a nation. The citizens of a country must be aware of the country's political affairs and events. Citizen involvement is necessary for the formation of a democratic culture. According to Shahid (2012), education and income matter because they play an essential role in citizens' political consciousness.

The Role of Women in Politics

Women's participation in politics is not a new trend in Pakistan's political landscape. As mentioned above, the women had been playing role in politics since the creation of Pakistan through different platforms. However, this role further increased in the Zia regime, when so-called Islamization was introduced, which suppressed women. In retaliation, the Women Action Forum and the Sindhyani Tehreek were formed. Later, many other organizations were formed, which not only challenged the patriarchy it also created political consciousness among the women. The NGOs related to women's issues also spread knowledge about civic and political rights of every individual, especially women. It also had a positive impact on the country's politics. Women's political participation has changed the old political culture (Iqra Mushtaq, Fawad Baig & Sehrish Mushtaq, 2018). Women coming out of their homes have been changing the traditional mindset in Pakistani politics (Ahmad, Akhlaq and Haq, 2017).

Theoretical Analysis of Politics and Government among Youth

Theoretical analysis helps us explain youth political activities and their involvement in Pakistan's mainstream politics. Western democratic ideology is most widely believed and frequently discussed among youth as a political perspective. Youth believe in democracy and liberal values, and they can also agree on a religious political sphere. Youth argue that democracy is a kind of socioeconomic system beyond the structure of power and authority. Economic prosperity and transparency are closely linked to democracy. Further, youth with an inclination towards religious parties believe that religion also maintains financial and social justice in society. The youth want to form a structure, whereas democracy and religion together can work to make a better society. Democracy and religion are analyzed among youth from the perspective of a better life for citizens, focusing on socioeconomic factors. Youth view these two institutions as an aspiration for change in people's lives. Further, they claim that political leaders failed to implement the true spirit of democracy and religion within a country's political structure; hence, social and political problems are becoming major issues. In fact, the religiously oriented youth explains that religion is playing its role as a welfare

orientation, and the same case is within democracy to serve the whole population of a country equally (Muzaffar, Muhammad and Fariha, 2017).

Youth democratic ideology is associated with the political, religious mind, without supporting religious parties in Pakistan, and they support the Islamic system. According to a study, 59% of youth prefer Pakistan as an Islamic state, and the ratio of support for secular ideology is less among youth in Pakistan (Mashkoo, 2017). This phenomenon shows how the state has propagated against secularism, as, being a teacher in a university, one of the authors has observed that whenever a question was asked like ‘what is secularism?’ or ‘how will you elaborate secularism?’, 99% of students’ response was ‘secularism is atheism’. In this case, it is not difficult to understand how the aforementioned study is correct or justifiable.

Rational choice theory clearly portrays the choice of an individual and collective masses of society, explaining how patterns of behavior are developed for personal and collective benefit. William Riker is the founding father of the rational choice theory, who applied the theoretical approach to a political concept, explaining why and how political leaders make alliances. This theory is very popular in the field of political science. The theory holds that people act in their own best interests and do not make decisions that affect others. The theory explains that advantages and benefits are the primary interests of the people. Further, politicians have all the opportunities, and they influence the entire political decision-making structure and their own actions. The election process and political campaigns involve a vast number of decisions, many of which influence electoral outcomes through youth engagement and social media. The participation of youth and media affects electoral campaigns and political activities. The use of media is easily achieved through power and prestige, while youth participation can be achieved only through reshaping political manifestos. No doubt that individual participation and political decisions are taken based on cultural and social background, but ideological influence is an essential factor in an individual’s life (Joe, 2008).

Rational choice theory applies to youth political participation at the mainstream political level. Youth are mobilized in political activities and campaigns, but they do not become informed about

election decisions. Politicians are influenced by the same political settings; hence, they exclude the youth from their party's ideological choices. Youth are just used in political campaigns and activities based solely on empty slogans; hence, political education and sense help youth understand the benefits of politicians (Riker, 1995). In this context, the personality cult is another issue that hinders the inculcation of political knowledge among youth. The prime example in today's Pakistan is the political orientation of youth who support Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and almost blindly trust PTI leader Imran Khan.

CONCLUSION

In fact, a large amount of research has already been done on the changing patterns of political thought among youth, but the least on youth participation and the role of new media. This research focuses on both quantitative and qualitative aspects. The data has been collected through both primary and secondary sources. The study examines a historical analysis of ideological politics and changing patterns of political thought among Pakistani youth. The study critically analyzed youth participation in politics, that how patterns, especially in the context of their ideology, shift from one political ideology to another. This is very unfortunate that parliamentary politics is controlled by the feudal and capitalist classes, who propagate regressive ideas. On the other hand, as the majority population of Pakistan consists of youth, they cannot absorb the policies and traditions followed by the older generation. The younger generation is more prone to the digital era rather than the life standard adopted by the previous generations. And, as the examples from surrounding countries like youth movements in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal are in front of us, the powerful circles are trying their best to depoliticize the younger population of Pakistan. In this regard, the state apparatus has become successful as the majority of the population is involved in useless activities on social media. Likewise, the educational institutions do not support political activities by the students. Even as mentioned above, students are bound to sign an affidavit that they will not indulge themselves in politics. This affidavit is also being signed by the students of the political science discipline. In this phenomenon, this is very challenging for the

political parties to engage youth with resistance politics, and unfortunately, most of the political parties fail in this regard. Resultantly, youth become inclined towards religious parties or parties like PTI, which use youth only for their personal and political benefits.

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