

EXPLORING POLITICAL ATTITUDE AMONG EDUCATED YOUTH: A STUDY AT UNIVERSITY OF SARGODHA

Shahid Iqbal

Department of Sociology,
University of Sargodha,
PAKISTAN.

Shahidkhan.mumdani@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The study was aimed to explore the attitude of young people towards politics and political activities. The purpose was to determine the level of interest and political engagement of the youth. The study was based on the background of the current political scenario and the role of youth in the current circumstances. The involvement of youth in politics is crucial in this situation; therefore, the study of youth behavior is an effort to get an insight into their views and their role. Other objective of the study was to understand the voting behavior of young people as it is quite an important factor in promoting the democracy. Yet another aim was to see the perception of youth about politicians and political parties. And ultimately the study investigated the level of satisfaction of young people towards policies of the present government. The study is quantitative in nature. A sample of 178 students was chosen from the University of Sargodha through proportionate stratified sampling method. The universe was divided into strata and then the respondents were selected by applying simple random sampling method. The findings of the researches. It was clear that youth do have interest in politics; however, they are dissatisfied with the current political set up and disagree with the policies of the government. They are not optimistic about politicians and political parties. The research suggests that an environment of trust should be created by the politicians where youth can express their concerns and could engage themselves in decision making.

Keywords: Politics; youth attitude; political parties; voting behavior

INTRODUCTION

Democratic institutions should be open to youth concerns, interests and their participation depends on whether they feel themselves as an important actor in political process. And in turn democracy demands an acceptance, comprehension and development of democratic institutions through youth's own participation even if circumstances do not favor interests. Thus sustained engagement from youth and permanent accessibility from institutions are necessary for youth political participation (Forbig, 2005).

Political stability and promotion of democratic values are in the best interest of the nation and the role of youth participation in this process is critical. The study focuses the youth of age between 18 and 29 and is concerned with understanding their ideals, interests, and major concerns towards current political situation and future of Pakistan politics.

Background

Sociologically youth is defined as the transition state between childhood and adulthood (UNDP, 2000) and W.H.O declares people of age between 15 and 34 years as youth. In Pakistan, the people from 15 to 29 are considered as Pakistani youth. Youth comprises the 27% of the total population. Gender proportion is equal that is 50% each. 63% of the youth is literate and 49% is in labor force while 51% is out of labor force (National Youth Policy, 2009).

The ratio of youth is an important demographic feature of Pakistan's population. The rising

aggressiveness and violence in the country, worsening socio-economic conditions and a decrease in employment opportunities have caused disappointment among the youth. The youth in conflict-hit areas are the most affected because of closing of educational institutions and cutoff of education due to a combination of militancy and security forces' operations. Political violence at university campuses, particularly in Karachi, has also had severe consequences for Pakistani students (Pak Institute for Peace Studies, 2010).

The youth of Pakistan is a reliant human resource and also it is available in high quantity. It keeps in it huge amount of energy which can be used in social, economic, political and ideological development of the country. It is evident from the experience of other countries that youth plays positive role if their capacities are utilized properly and if they are deprived of opportunities, then they can harm social order and get involved in negative activities. Therefore, it is necessary to create opportunities for the youth to make them productive and useful members of society as well as to groom their personalities, potentials and creative capabilities (Aurangzeb, 2008).

Kazilbash (2010) observed that in Pakistan the message to scholars has always been: "your work is not important." Kazilbash and others believe that the Pakistani government and the elites see education as a threat to them and to their control over the state. He also notes that there is a lost generation in Pakistan, those who did not benefit from the reforms attempted after 2002. One result has been, in his words, "Those who were not privileged are finding different ways of punishing us".

Pakistan is a democratic country but without democrats and is stolen by a small group of feudal aristocrats, political elites, bureaucrats and organizations under the influence foreign power. Most of the time, democratic election only commit to rearranging of the same old faces. In 2002 general election, condition of graduate degree opened doors of huge corruption in obtaining fake degrees from the universities of the country. More fascinatingly, there had been a scandal of a member of national assembly for getting a fake degree from an International university. However, a truly educated class in assemblies can play a significant role in altering a true democracy (Ali, 2011).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Siddiqi (2010) reflects that the majority of young people find the survival of Pakistan in a strong judiciary. 80% say that political parties are inherently corrupt. Majority is not a member of any political party and neither would they want to become a member of a party. This shows the poor reputation of politicians. Corruption is the biggest problem near them and they want a change.

Aurangzeb (2008) says that majority of youth does not have trust in the government. The important decision making is limited to a few persons and there is no inclusion of youth in decision making. The respondents identified lack of interest of government in taking measures for young people. There is no obvious budget for youth neither there is any significant National Youth Policy. Youth can exert pressure on government through advocacy strategies. They are now in a position to exert pressure on politicians as they are eligible voters from the age of 18.

Mannarini et al. (2008) conclude that the perceived trustworthiness of education and health has negative impact on conventional political participation whereas the confidence in political institutions increases political participation. In contrast to it, trust in religious institutions and the army shows a negative effect. And the perceived trustworthiness of media has no effect on political participation.

Centre for Civic Education of Pakistan (2009) conducted a survey which reports that a vast majority of the youth (61.8 percent) have trust in democracy and peaceful change as they believe that their vote can be a promoter for change. The ratio of hopefulness among male group is 62.8 percent against 37.2 percent who think change through vote was not likely. Geographically speaking, 88 percent of youth in AJK, 67.8 percent in Punjab, 62.9 percent in the NWFP, 61.5 percent in Baluchistan, 60.7 percent in Islamabad, and 54.3 percent in Sindh believe that change through ballot is possible.

Collin (2008), in her study, finds that youth participation in politics enhances young people's skills and citizenship. Young people do feel that it is their duty to participate in democratic process. However, they realize that they have very little power to participate. This lack of political effectiveness of youth influences their attitudes and approaches towards democracy. Young people do not trust unions, political parties and government because they are empowered enough to influence decision making process.

Many citizens, governments, and representatives of the international community often consider young people as part of the problem and not as part of the solution, particularly in countries that are faced with conflict. In most of these societies, youth are downgraded and have little voice in the political developments. Too often, government and elected officials do not involve young citizens. When young people do try to direct their political wishes, government officials often oversee youths' specific concerns. The separation of youth and the perception that their problems go largely ignored leads to frustration and, unfortunately, can lead to violence and conflict (Bryan, 2007).

Henn et al. (2002) report that young people do take interest in politics. The perception is wrong that young people are apolitical. However, political parties are responsible for not actively involving youth in politics. Parties do not give importance to their opinions as well as their problems. That's why youth is not actively engaging itself in politics. The political parties need to pay attention to the voice of the youth as well as consider their problems.

Wekkin and Whistler (2008) find that female and male respondents report similarly low levels of interest in paying attention to politics and government, regardless of what family type they live in. However, males report somewhat higher interest in politics and government than females. And while there is no significant difference in the frequency with which the students discuss politics with their family, females report a slightly higher level of family political discussions than do males. Civic engagement among young men and young women, while similar, is not equal.

Lopez et al. (2005) find that in recent years, young women, particularly college educated young women, have voted and volunteered more and been more civically involved than their young male matching part. In 2004, 18-29 year old female voters were more probable to identify with the Democratic Party while young male voters were more expected to identify with the Republican Party. Young male voters were also more likely to recognize as Independent than their female corresponding persons. Along with voters age 75 or older, voters ages 18 to 29 were the only other age group to support John Kerry in last fall's presidential election.

Edwards (2006) narrates that few young people are involved in the institutions of typical politics. Although most participants would enroll and vote, the pressure was a main motivation for this. The majority of participants considered it important to meet the responsibility of enrolling and voting, but many also described voting as boring and as an irritation. To this end there is some indication to support the view that young people are uncoupling from political life, and, that if voting were not obligatory in Australia that we may

face a crisis of turnout much like many other Western nations.

Analysis of political corruption suggests a malicious circle wherein corruption raises a climate of mistrust that in turn nourishes corruption. Indeed, in looking at the case of Mexico, data from a 2004 national survey show widespread perceptions of corruption, low levels of interpersonal and political trust, and some cynicism regarding the efforts of the government to address the problem. Trust in political institutions affects perceptions of corruption but that although participation in corruption influences perceptions of corruption, it does not necessarily have a strong impact on feelings of trust in public institutions (Morris & Klesner, 2010).

Michael and Carpini (2000) report that young adults are less likely to read a newspaper or watch the news. Thirty six percent of young adults (18 to 29) say they follow the news every day. On any given day, just over 40 percent of 19 to 29 year olds watch the news on television, compared to 55 percent of those 30 to 50 years old and 65 percent of those over 50. Less than 20 percent of young adults read the newspaper on any given day. Newspaper readership among young adults is less than half what it was for this age group in 1965.

Cohen et al. (2007) find that a strong majority of youth believe that they can make a difference by participating in politics and that they have the knowledge and skills necessary to participate in politics. At the same time, a majority of youth also believe that the leaders in government care very little about people like them. A significant percentage of youth believe that they have the skills and knowledge to participate in politics. Nearly half of Black youth agree with the statement that the government treats most immigrants better than it treats most Black people in this country.

METHODOLOGY

The universe selected for the study consisted of both male and female young people of the age 18 to 29 from university of Sargodha. A sample of 178 respondents was taken through stratified random sampling. The universe was divided into strata of Social sciences and Natural sciences departments and then the respondents were selected randomly including 50% from each stratum. Self-administered questionnaire was used as data collection tool. Data sheet was developed with the help of SPSS, computer software used for statistical data analysis. Frequency and percentage tables were developed for each variable. Consolidated cross tab for dependent and independent variables were made. Chi-square test was applied to see the relationship between concerning variables.

MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

- a. About 15.2 percent of the respondents were strongly agreed and a major proportion i.e. 43.8 percent of the respondents was agreed with the statement “I like to talk and listen about politics”. So more than a half of our youth likes to talk and listen about politics.
- b. More than one-third i.e. 34.3 percent of the respondents were strongly agreed and a major proportion i.e. 41.0 percent of them were agreed with the statement “It is quite important for me that how the country is run by the government”. So a large majority of the youth were agreed that it is quite important for them that how the country is run by the government.
- c. A major proportion i.e. 40.4 percent of the respondents was strongly agreed and 34.3 percent of them were agreed with the statement “The solution to most of the problems of the nation lies in the reformation/correction of the political institution”.

- So majority of our youth were agreed that the solution to most of the problems of the nation lies in the reformation/correction of the political institution.
- d. A huge majority i.e. 92.1 percent of the respondents reported that they were registered voter, while only 7.9 percent of them replied negatively.
 - e. A major proportion i.e. 42.1 percent of the respondents was strongly agreed and about one-third i.e. 33.7 percent of them were agreed with the statement “My vote has enough value for bringing some change in political setup”. So a large majority of the respondents had opinion that their vote has enough value for bringing some changes in political setup.
 - f. More than one-fourth i.e. 26.4 percent of the respondents were strongly agreed and about one-third i.e. 34.8 percent of them were agreed with the statement “I keep in view the personal abilities of the candidate while delivering my vote”. So a majority of our youth keeps in view the personal abilities of the candidate while delivering their vote.
 - g. A majority i.e. 58.4 percent of the respondents were strongly agreed and about one-third i.e. 32.0 percent of them were agreed with the statement “It is the duty of every citizen to cast his/her vote”. Above results shows that a significant majority of the respondents had opinion that It is the duty of every citizen to cast his/her vote.
 - h. More than a half i.e. 51.7 percent of the respondents were strongly agreed and 35.4 percent of them were agreed with the statement “Politicians are not interested in people’s opinion; they are only interested in their vote”. These findings shows that majority of youth reported that the politicians are not interested in people’s opinion; they are only interested in their vote.
 - i. Only 18.0 percent of the respondents reported that they had membership of any political party, while a huge majority i.e. 82.0 percent of them told that they had no membership of any political party.
 - j. About a half i.e. 50.0 percent of the respondents were strongly agreed and 32.0 percent of them were agreed with the statement “Most of the political parties are corrupt”. It is clear from these results that a huge majority of the respondents had opinion that most of the political parties are corrupt.
 - k. Almost 5 percent of the respondents were strongly agreed and 12.4 percent of them were agreed with the statement “Politicians care about the opinion of young people”. So Politicians never care about the opinion of young people.
 - l. A major proportion i.e. 41.0 percent of the respondents was strongly agreed and 33.7 percent of them were agreed with the statement “Politicians are all the same, there is no much difference among them”. In the light of above results majority of the respondents were agreed that politicians are all the same, there is no much difference among them.
 - m. A majority i.e. 56.2 percent of the respondents was strongly agreed and 20.8 percent of them were agreed with the opinion “Pakistani nation badly needs a visionary leader who could save the country”. So a huge majority of the respondents had opinion that Pakistani nation badly needs a visionary leader who could save the country.

DISCUSSION

The study is concerned with understanding youth attitude towards politics which includes their interest in politics, awareness about political issues, their affiliation with political parties

and their voting behavior. Here, some of the findings are discussed with reference to previous researches.

While talking about level of interest of youth in politics, this study indicates a positive response from youth. About 15.2 percent of the respondents were strongly agreed and a major proportion i.e. 43.8 percent of the respondents was agreed that they like to talk and listen about politics. So more than a half of our youth is interested in political issues and these findings are supported by the study of Henn et al. (2002) who report that young people do take interest in politics. The perception is wrong that young people are apolitical.

While exploring the level of awareness among youth, this study finds a high level of awareness among youth. A major proportion i.e. 42.1 percent of the respondents was strongly agreed, and about one third i.e. 33.7 percent of them were agreed that their vote could bring a change in political set up. These findings are supported by the study of Centre for Civic Education of Pakistan (2009), which reports that a vast majority of the youth (61.8 percent) have trust in democracy and peaceful change as they believe that their vote can be a promoter for change.

Similarly, another question indicating the level of awareness was about duty of vote casting. A significant majority of the respondents had opinion that it is the duty of every citizen to cast his/her vote. These findings are supported by the study of Collin (2008) who reports that young people do feel that it is their duty to participate in democratic process. However, they feel that they have very little power.

While investigating the level of trust of youth in politicians, this study finds that youth are not optimistic about politicians. More than a half of the respondents were strongly agreed and 35.4 percent of them were agreed with the opinion that politicians are not interested in people's opinion; they are only interested in their vote. It shows the lack of empowerment of youth. Politicians do not give them a chance to give their opinions about the issues. These findings are supported by the study of Aurangzeb (2008) who says that a majority of youth does not have trust in the government. The important decision making is limited to a few persons and there is no inclusion of youth in decision making.

While asked about having a membership of political party, only 18.0 percent of the respondents reported that they had membership of any political party, while a huge majority i.e. 82.0 percent of them told that they had no membership of any political party. It shows that youth do not have trust in political parties and do not like to join them. These findings are supported by Siddiqua's (2010) study, which reports that majority of youth is not a member of any political party and neither would they want to become a member of a party.

The hypothesis that "there is an association between gender and voting behavior of the respondents" is accepted. Male and female show a difference in their voting behavior. It is also supported by the study of Lopez et al. (2005) who report that in recent years, young women; particularly college educated young women, have voted and volunteered more and been more civically involved than their young male matching part.

The hypothesis that there is an association between gender of the respondents and their level of interest in politics is accepted. Females show a lower level of interest than males. It is also supported by the study of Wekkin and Whistler (2008), who find that males report somewhat higher interest in politics and government than females.

The hypothesis that there is an association between gender of the respondents and their opinion about political party affiliation is accepted. It is also supported by the study of Lopez

et al. (2005) who find an association between gender and political party affiliation of 18-29 year old young people.

CONCLUSION

In this research, it was explored that to what level the youth are interested and involved in politics. It was found that youth do take interest in politics. A majority of respondents admitted that it was important to them that how the country is run by the government. While in terms of voting, young people do like to cast their vote in the general elections and they are well aware of the value of their vote. These findings are in line with previous researches. However, youth's opinion about political parties is negative. They think that politicians are not interested in their opinions and most of the political parties are corrupt. The hypothesis that there is an association between gender of the respondents and their level of interest in politics is accepted. Young females showed less interest as compared to males.

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