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Political Participation in Pakistan: Through the Prism of Social Exclusion

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| Abbreviations | |
|----------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| BHU | Basic Health Unit |
| BISP | Benazir Income Support Programme |
| CNIC | Computerised National Identity Card |
| ECP | Election Commission of Pakistan |
| FAFEN | Free And Fair Election Network |
| MNA | Member National Assembly |
| MPA | Member Provincial Assembly |
| NADRA | National Database and Registration Authority |
| PML-N | Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz |
| PPP | Pakistan Peoples Partly |
| PTI | Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf |
| UC | Union Council |
| WVS | World Values Survey |

| Glossary | |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Amanat | Sacred trust or promise |
| Autaq | Male meeting place in Sindh |
| Biraderi | Caste or kinship group |
| Chaudhri | Powerful landowner |
| Dharra | Faction in Punjab |
| Deh | Administrative or revenue village in in Sindh |
| Dera | Farmhouse/Male meeting place in Punjab |
| Farz/Wajib | Religious obligations |
| Goda | Influential landowners in Muzaffargarh |
| Goda league | Irreverent reference to patronage-based vote bloc in Jinnah Colony Muzaffargarh |
| Goth | Village in Sindh |
| Hur/Hur Jamait | Pledged follower of Pir Pagaro/organisation of pledged followers |
| Jogi | Scheduled Caste Hindu, traditional snakecharmers |
| Kammi | Pejorative term for menial worker |
| Kath or Akath | Community gathering (male) in Punjab |
| Khuh | Well or Hamlet in Southern Punjab |
| MeRh | Used to describe meetings in Northern Sindh |
| Mirasi | Minstrels |
| Mochi | Shoemakers |
| Mohana | Traditional Fisherfolk |
| Mouza | Administrative or Revenue village in Punjab |
| Paoli | Weavers |
| Paro | A single kinship group in Sindh |
| Qasai | Butchers |
| Seyp | A traditional system for the assignment of tasks and grain shares with landlords as grain-providing patrons |
| Tarkhan | Carpenters |
| Vadero | Literally meaning elder |
| Varkar or Varkari | local lexicon denoting an activist and political activism respectively |
| Vasti | Hamlet in Southern Punjab |

1. Introduction

What accounts for low levels of political participation in Pakistan, and how is the deficit in political participation related to other aspects of social exclusion in the country? This report attempts to answer this question and related subsidiary questions about possible entry points for a more inclusive democracy. The study reported here is based on the analysis of secondary data, a review of existing literature on political participation, and primary qualitative research in two relatively under-studied regions of the country - namely, southern Punjab and northern Sindh. Its main contribution to our current state of knowledge is to approach political participation from the prism of social exclusion - or an understanding of social disadvantage associated with gender, class, social identity and personal circumstance.

In global comparisons of democracy Pakistan generally finds itself placed above outright dictatorships but among the lowest ranking countries that are considered democratic.¹ This is perhaps not surprising, given the long periods of direct military government that the country has experienced in its history. The current period, starting in 2008 is the longest spell in the country's history yet, of uninterrupted civilian government, albeit with non-elected state institutions continuing to exercise considerable political power.

There are at least two other significant sources of threat to the country's fledgling democratic transition. The country has been through political violence associated with religious extremism and ethnic nationalism of varying intensity across different parts of its territory. Militant organisations, or military wings of political organisations, have directly challenged the territorial writ of the state in the Pashtun and Baloch regions of the country, as well as parts of urban Sindh. The ability of sectarian religious organisations to mobilise support and to carry out acts of violence against non-Muslims and sectarian rivals within the Muslim community extends to virtually all parts of the country including the largest and richest province Punjab.

This study, however, is interested in the third source of the democratic deficit - namely low levels of political participation and public confidence in democratic institutions. Measured through a combination of voter turnout rates and public opinion polls, sample surveys or expert views on political engagement these indicators are supposed to gauge the legitimacy, and hence robustness, of democratic institutions.²

There are various ways in which observers of Pakistan have understood the relationship between the three sources of threat to democratic consolidation. There is a view, for example, that the military's interference in the political process is responsible for the rise in political

¹ The widely cited Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index, for example, ranked Pakistan as a "hybrid democracy" at 107 out of 165 countries or territories in 2022, with only Afghanistan ranked below it in the South Asia region. Economist Intelligence Unit. (2022). <https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2022/>

² The EIU Democracy Index, for example, computes its overall score based on an aggregation across five sub-indices three of which capture the "supply" side of democracy - namely electoral process, government functioning and civil liberties - while two are meant to represent the "demand" side or public confidence in democratic institutions - viz participation and political culture. Pakistan's low rank among its South Asian neighbours (save Afghanistan) is driven, for the most part, by its particularly poor relative score for the two "demand" side sub-indices.

violence on the one hand, and low levels of popular confidence in democratic institutions on the other. It has also been argued that the existence of potential violent threats and the inability of civilian democratic institutions to deliver security and governance necessitates military interference.

The present study does not try to unravel the causal linkages between these various sources of the democratic deficit. Rather, its focus is on the interaction between political participation and other dimensions of social exclusion at the grassroots level. It addresses the following questions: What are the barriers to political participation faced by various groups of citizens who also experience other forms of exclusion and might these be overcome? In particular, how are barriers to social inclusion and political participation interconnected with each other, and in what ways might they act autonomously? How can greater social inclusion – say with respect to education and economic opportunity – lead to greater political participation? How might political participation be used as a lever for the socially excluded to gain improved access to opportunities and institutions? And finally, what are realistic points of entry for policy intervention and peaceful change with respect to both social and political exclusion?

The study aims to address the above questions through a review of existing research and analysis of available secondary data, but with its main focus on qualitative research in selected communities. Existing sources of statistical data on Pakistan – such as surveys which might include information on social inclusion and political participation – will be used to establish broad patterns and trends. These secondary sources include publicly available data from the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP 2017 to 2022). The ECP's data will be used to determine the rates of electoral participation among different demographic groups, as well as purposive surveys which are either publicly available or have already been acquired by the research team (SDPI-Herald Survey 2018). The World Values Survey (WVS) was conducted in 2018 and data were made publicly available over the internet. These data sets from opinion surveys will be used to draw out demographic characteristics of voters and non-voters. The literature review and analysis of existing secondary data will be used to refine questions and hypotheses for qualitative research.

The primary qualitative research for the study was undertaken in rural communities of two important regions: southern Punjab and northern Sindh. These bordering regions are relatively poor, underdeveloped, and vulnerable to disasters - compared with their counterparts in northern and central Punjab, and urban Sindh respectively. Unlike some of the other relatively less developed regions, however, these two regions have not witnessed particularly high levels of political violence. The presence of political and ideological tendencies which might eventually lead to higher levels of violence and the delegitimisation of democratic institutions, however, cannot be dismissed either.

The remainder of this report consists of the following sections: in Section 2 data on voter turnout is examined using various secondary sources. A review of existing academic writing on political participation is provided in Section 3. Sections 4-7 provided an account of the methodology and findings of the primary qualitative research undertaken in rural communities in southern Punjab and northern Sindh, with Section 7 offering our analysis of the relationship between political participation and social exclusion in these and similar communities. The conclusions of the study which synthesise the analysis of secondary data, the literature review

and the primary qualitative fieldwork, as well as discuss the main entry points for change, is provided in Section 8.

2. Analysis of existing data sources

2.1 Voting Data from the Election Commission

The voter turnout rate, or the proportion of registered voters who cast their ballots at an election, is seen as one indicator of public confidence in a democratic political system. Trends in turnout rates and patterns across population segments can be indicative of variations in the level of engagement of citizens in the affairs of government. The turnout rate in Pakistan’s general elections declined from nearly two-thirds in the 1970s to around a third in 1997 (Table 1). It then recovered steadily to over 50 per cent in the last two general elections (2013 and 2018). The period since 1970 when the first ever national legislature was elected through universal adult franchise is marked, of course, with significant and at times violent political changes, and highly contested interpretations of election results. These political events - including long interludes of military rule between 1977 and 1988, and then again between 1999 and 2007 - had an impact, of course, on the registration, suppression, engagement and participation of voters, and thus on the turnout rate.

Table 1: Voter turnout rate in general elections - 1970 to 2018

| Election year | Registered voters | Polled votes | Turnout rate (per cent) |
|---------------|-------------------|--------------|-------------------------|
| 1970 | 25,730,280 | 16,328,842 | 63.46 |
| 1977 | 27,630,869 | 17,710,918 | 64.10 |
| 1985 | 32,528,996 | 17,468,033 | 53.70 |
| 1988 | 46,277,105 | 20,013,030 | 43.25 |
| 1990 | 47,255,302 | 21,395,479 | 45.28 |
| 1993 | 53,712,319 | 20,293,307 | 37.78 |
| 1997 | 54,151,277 | 19,546,031 | 36.10 |
| 2002 | 71,866,278 | 30,012,407 | 41.76 |
| 2008 | 79,985,016 | 35,518,221 | 44.41 |

| | | | |
|------|-------------|------------|-------|
| 2013 | 86,189,402 | 46,217,482 | 53.62 |
| 2018 | 104,981,940 | 54,321,031 | 51.74 |

Sources: FAFEN, ECP

There are wide differences in the turnout rate across population segments (Table 2). The proportion of women registered voters who turned in the 2018 elections was consistently lower across Pakistan's provinces than men. There were also differences in the overall turnout rate across provinces. Women's turnout rate in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was around half that of the turnout rate for men in Punjab.

Table 2: Voter turnout rate in general elections 2018 by province and sex -votes cast as proportion of ECP registered voters (per cent)

| | All | Female | Male |
|--------------------|------|--------|------|
| Pakistan | 51.7 | 46.7 | 55.7 |
| Balochistan | 43.2 | 38.1 | 46.9 |
| Khyber Pakhtunkhwa | 42.9 | 32.3 | 50.8 |
| Punjab | 56.7 | 52.9 | 59.7 |
| Sindh | 47.1 | 42.5 | 50.9 |
| Islamabad | 58.2 | 53.7 | 62.2 |

Source: ECP

The conventional way to measure the turnout rate is to take as the proportion of registered voters who cast their ballots. If not voting is a signal of disengagement with the political system, not being registered to vote in the first instance ought to be regarded as a more serious form of exclusion. In Table 3 the votes cast by women and men across provinces are presented as a proportion not of registered voters, but of the eligible population calculated from the Population Census.³ The overall turnout rate drops from 51 per cent to 48 per cent if non-registered but eligible people are taken into account, with the female turnout rate declining and the male turnout rate increasing. This suggests that the number of registered female voters was much smaller than the eligible population, while the number of registered male voters was higher than the eligible population.⁴

³ Citizens of Pakistan resident within the country aged 18 or above are classified here as eligible to register and vote.

⁴ Tables 2 and 3 are not strictly comparable at the provincial/regional levels. The large drop in the turnout rates in Islamabad, for example, is likely due to the fact that the Population Census counts all

Table 3: Voter turnout rate in general elections 2018 by province and sex
 - votes cast as proportion of eligible population (per cent)

| | All | Female | Male |
|--------------------|------|--------|------|
| Pakistan | 47.9 | 38.5 | 57.2 |
| Balochistan | 31.7 | 24.3 | 38.7 |
| Khyber Pakhtunkhwa | 47.9 | 30.4 | 66.0 |
| Punjab | 53.0 | 44.2 | 61.8 |
| Sindh | 39.8 | 32.9 | 46.3 |
| Islamabad | 34.6 | 31.6 | 37.2 |

Source: Author's calculations based on ECP and Population Census 2017

Since 2017 the ECP's database of voters has been linked with the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) of the Ministry of Interior. All citizens of Pakistan permanently resident in the country are required by law to register with NADRA and those aged 18 and above are provided a Computerised National Identity Card (CNIC). While the CNIC has been a legal requirement for voter verification at the time of polling, electoral reforms in 2017 created an automatic linkage between the two databases. This measure made voter registration easier, but also led to data anomalies. Table 4 compares the number of voters registered with the ECP (i.e. NADRA records of people aged 18 or above) with the population in various age groups according to the Population Census 2017, and the estimated number of resident citizens of Pakistan in 2018. The Population Census 2017 also asked respondents if they had a CNIC. This figure is also reported in Table 4. The table shows that the total number ECP registered voters (that is, number of valid and active NADRA issued cards) in 2018 exceeded the number of CNIC holder resident citizens in Pakistan in that year by around 14 million. The group where the number of registered voters was smaller than the number of CNIC holders was the population aged between 18 and 25 years. The largest difference was in the oldest age group.

residents while the Election Commission's record only includes those people whose vote is registered in Islamabad. Since many Islamabad residents are migrants from other parts of the country it is possible that their votes are registered in their place of origin.

Table 4: Number of registered voters compared with reference population groups by age

| Age group | ECP registered voters 2018 | Population 2017 | Estimated population 2018 | Estimated resident citizens in Pakistan 2018 | Estimated CNIC holder resident citizens in Pakistan 2018 |
|-----------|----------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| 18-25 | 17,443,094 | 30,180,876 | 30,905,217 | 30,631,455 | 17,717,389 |
| 26-35 | 28,995,230 | 29,670,207 | 30,382,292 | 30,170,169 | 25,131,293 |
| 36-45 | 22,484,020 | 20,799,605 | 21,298,796 | 21,195,537 | 19,437,733 |
| 46-55 | 16,134,508 | 14,371,426 | 14,716,340 | 14,651,904 | 13,877,474 |
| 56-65 | 10,281,338 | 8,849,636 | 9,062,027 | 9,028,498 | 8,586,466 |
| 66+ | 10,617,217 | 7,025,195 | 7,193,800 | 7,168,151 | 6,652,022 |
| All | 105,955,407 | 110,896,945 | 113,558,472 | 112,845,713 | 91,402,377 |

Source: Author's calculations based on ECP data reported in PILDAT, and Population Census 2017

Table 5 provides the rate of CNIC registration by age group and sex as reported in the Population Census 2017. This shows that CNIC coverage is higher across age categories among males compared to females, and that coverage increases with age except for the eldest groups for whom it declines. Women and younger citizens, therefore, are less likely to be registered voters than men and citizens aged between 30 and 70 years.

Table 5: CNIC registration rate in 2017 by age and sex (per cent of eligible population)

| Age Group | All | Female | Male |
|-----------|------|--------|------|
| 18 -- 19 | 39.5 | 28.7 | 49.7 |
| 20 -- 24 | 66.1 | 51.4 | 80.7 |
| 25 -- 29 | 80.4 | 69.6 | 91.9 |
| 30 -- 34 | 86.7 | 78.6 | 95.1 |

| | | | |
|--------------|------|------|------|
| 35 -- 39 | 91.2 | 85.9 | 96.4 |
| 40 -- 44 | 92.3 | 88.1 | 96.5 |
| 45 -- 49 | 94.6 | 91.7 | 97.5 |
| 50 -- 54 | 94.8 | 92.0 | 97.4 |
| 55 -- 59 | 95.6 | 93.2 | 97.7 |
| 60 -- 64 | 94.5 | 91.9 | 97.0 |
| 65 -- 69 | 94.8 | 92.3 | 97.1 |
| 70 -- 74 | 93.0 | 89.7 | 96.0 |
| 75 and above | 90.4 | 86.5 | 94.1 |
| All | 82.0 | 74.2 | 89.6 |

Source: Population Census 2017

Table 6 compares the ratio of ECP registered voters with the estimated eligible population in respective age groups in 2018 and 2023. The number of ECP registered voters exceeded the estimated size of the eligible population (not just CNIC holders) for all age groups above 35 years. The difference is the largest in both years in the oldest age group (those aged above 65 years). It is well-known that the NADRA does not have the means or data at hand to promptly or automatically remove deceased citizens from its record. Although the registration of births and deaths with local government offices includes the entry of a person's CNIC, this information is not conveyed seamlessly to NADRA itself. This implies that many people on current electoral rolls - by virtue of having CNICs - might be deceased or no longer resident in Pakistan. The ECP periodically cleans its data by removing records of people whose demise or emigration has been reported to NADRA.⁵ This exercise does not entirely address the problem of inflated electoral rolls - because many of the deceased or emigrated persons are not reported to NADRA. The convention indicator for voter turnout - the number of ballots cast as a proportion of the number of voters registered with ECP - is a poor indicator of actual electoral participation. This is because while some segments of the population are under-represented - for example younger people and women not having CNICs - the electoral rolls are inflated due to the absence of a mechanism for the prompt removal of deceased or emigrated individuals.

⁵ (<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2360405/four-million-struck-off-electoral-rolls>; <https://www.dawn.com/news/1715266>).

Table 6: ECP registered voters in 2018 and 2023 -
as proportion of eligible population by age group (per cent)

| Age group (years) | 2018 | 2023 |
|-------------------|-------|-------|
| 18 - 25 | 56.9 | 66.8 |
| 26 - 35 | 96.1 | 95.8 |
| 36 - 45 | 106.1 | 116.3 |
| 46 - 55 | 110.1 | 109.9 |
| 56 - 65 | 113.9 | 117.2 |
| 66 and above | 148.1 | 150.2 |
| Total | 93.9 | 98.7 |

Source: Author's calculations based on ECP and Population Census 2017

2.2 Survey Data on Voting Behaviour

The problem of non-registered citizens or inflated rolls do not affect sample surveys of voting behaviour, though it has been observed that people tend to over-report their electoral participation due to the association of voting with publicly-minded behaviour. These surveys also include information about socio-economic characteristics of their respondents. The WVS is one such nationally representative survey. Around half the respondents in the WVS of 2018 in Pakistan reported that they always voted in elections, 29 per cent said they sometimes voted, and 21 per cent said that they never voted (Table 7). The proportion of those who always vote was 11 percentage points higher among men than women - comparable to outcomes in general elections. The breakdown of the propensity to vote by demographic and socio-economic characteristics of voters shows that younger people were less likely to vote than older ones. There were relatively smaller differences in voting rates by education level and self-reported socio-economic class - with people with less schooling and lower on the socio-economic scale being a little more likely to vote than their more educated and better off counterparts.

Table 7: Voting behaviour by sex (2018)

| | Always | Sometimes | Never |
|--------|--------|-----------|-------|
| All | 49.8 | 29.0 | 21.1 |
| Female | 43.8 | 28.7 | 27.5 |
| Male | 55.3 | 29.3 | 15.3 |

Source: Author's calculations based on WVS 7th round

Table 8: "Always" voters by sex and education, age group and social class

| | | All | Female | Male | n (all) |
|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------------|--------|------|---------|
| | | Per cent of relevant population cohort | | | |
| Education | No schooling | 52.6 | 50.0 | 57.1 | 464 |
| | Up to primary or equivalent | 47.2 | 44.9 | 49.7 | 407 |
| | Up to secondary | 52.3 | 43.0 | 58.4 | 643 |
| | Above secondary | 45.4 | 33.3 | 53.3 | 478 |
| Age group | 18-29 | 42.2 | 36.5 | 48.3 | 628 |
| | 30-49 | 50.1 | 44.6 | 55.1 | 1114 |
| | 50+ | 67.2 | 64.1 | 69.1 | 244 |
| Self-reported social class of household | Upper/upper middle | 44.4 | 41.5 | 46.8 | 320 |
| | Lower middle | 47.9 | 38.9 | 53.6 | 566 |
| | Working | 52.6 | 43.7 | 63.1 | 808 |

| | | | | | |
|-----|-------|------|------|------|------|
| | Lower | 52.2 | 55.3 | 49.2 | 255 |
| All | | 49.6 | 43.7 | 55.2 | 1992 |

Source: Author's calculations based on WVS 7th round

Another nationally representative sample survey of voter behaviour is the Herald Election Survey conducted prior to the 2018 general elections. This survey asked respondents if they had voted in the previous election (2013), and then if they intended to vote in the coming 2018 elections. Four-fifths of the respondents reported voting in the previous elections (Table 9), compared with 53 per cent who declared that they intended to vote in the coming elections (Table 10). This difference between the recollection of past behaviour and actual behaviour or intent is thought to reflect over-reporting due to virtue signalling.

Table 9: Voted in last elections (2013) - per cent of category by sex

| | | All | Female | Male | % of sample (all) |
|-----------|--------------------|------|--------|------|-------------------|
| Education | No schooling | 82.0 | 81.3 | 83.6 | 14.9 |
| | Only up to primary | 84.6 | 82.9 | 87.0 | 18.5 |
| | Up to secondary | 81.1 | 74.4 | 87.5 | 30.9 |
| | Above secondary | 75.8 | 62.7 | 82.8 | 35.6 |
| Age group | 18-25 | 56.7 | 51.4 | 62.7 | 17.8 |
| | 26-30 | 76.2 | 69.2 | 83.4 | 17.8 |
| | 31-40 | 86.0 | 81.9 | 90.2 | 29.7 |
| | 41-50 | 89.8 | 87.4 | 92.1 | 21.7 |
| | 51-60 | 86.2 | 80.0 | 90.9 | 9.9 |
| | 60+ | 88.6 | 85.3 | 90.1 | 3.1 |

| | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|--------------|------|------|------|-------|
| Occupation/ source of income | Profit/rent | 81.4 | 70.2 | 85.1 | 19.7 |
| | Salaried job | 81.8 | 72.5 | 85.9 | 27.3 |
| | Remittances | 79.6 | 65.5 | 84.1 | 1.5 |
| | Pensioner | 76.5 | 66.7 | 82.2 | 3.7 |
| | Daily wage | 85.3 | 79.1 | 87.1 | 14.0 |
| | Housewife | 77.9 | 77.9 | | 28.7 |
| All | | 80.0 | 74.8 | 85.0 | 100.0 |

Source: Author's calculations Herald Election Survey 2017

Demographic characteristics of voters (Table 10) were similar to election outcomes, voter registration data and the WVS sample. Women across age groups and younger citizens tended to be less likely to vote than others. Unlike the WVS, however, this survey found that people with no schooling were less likely to say they intended to vote, as did people who were lower on the socio-economic scale (daily wage workers). There is a difference, of course, in the question asked in WVS and the Herald Election Survey, that different biases in answering these slightly varied questions might have led to this result.

Table 10: Intend to vote in next elections (2018) - per cent of category by sex

| | | All | Female | Male | % of sample (all) |
|-----------|--------------------|------|--------|------|-------------------------|
| Education | No schooling | 48.0 | 49.4 | 44.6 | 14.9 |
| | Only up to primary | 50.7 | 50.9 | 50.6 | 18.5 |
| | Up to secondary | 51.7 | 46.6 | 56.6 | 30.9 |
| | Above secondary | 58.0 | 48.6 | 63.2 | 35.6 |
| Age group | 18-25 | 40.1 | 38.0 | 42.5 | 17.8 |
| | 26-30 | 46.8 | 42.4 | 51.5 | 17.8 |

| | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------|------|------|------|-------|
| | 31-40 | 57.1 | 52.1 | 62.3 | 29.7 |
| | 41-50 | 60.6 | 56.2 | 64.9 | 21.7 |
| | 51-60 | 58.3 | 54.5 | 61.1 | 9.9 |
| | 60+ | 62.9 | 54.1 | 66.9 | 3.1 |
| Occupation/source of income | Profit/rent | 59.9 | 48.6 | 63.8 | 19.7 |
| | Salaried job | 55.9 | 44.8 | 60.8 | 27.3 |
| | Remittances | 51.0 | 25.3 | 59.2 | 1.5 |
| | Pensioner | 45.7 | 32.8 | 53.2 | 3.7 |
| | Daily wage | 45.1 | 42.4 | 45.8 | 14.0 |
| | Housewife | 53.6 | 53.6 | | 28.7 |
| All | | 53.2 | 48.7 | 57.8 | 100.0 |

Source: Author's calculations Herald Election Survey 2017

2.3 Summing up

The review of secondary statistical data on elections and voting shows that voter participation is relatively low, and particularly so for women and younger people. This is reflected in lower levels of voter registration - even when registration has been linked with the mandatory CNIC - as well as lower rates of actually casting a ballot. There are relatively smaller differences in electoral participation by Individual or household socio-economic characteristics - education, social class, or occupation.

Our analysis also reveals important issues regarding both data quality and electoral processes. While the direct linkage of ECP electoral rolls with NADRA has eased some of the administrative barriers to voter registration - and hence voter participation - it has also given rise to a number of anomalies. Firstly, it is clear that the electoral rolls based on NADRA CNIC records have not entirely reversed the bias against women and younger people with respect to voter registration, because it is precisely among these demographic groups that CNIC coverage is the lowest. Secondly, the fact that the NADRA system has no reliable mechanism

for weeding out deceased persons from its register, means that the electoral rolls remain somewhat inflated, and estimates of voter registration and turnout rates over time and across demographic groups are not consistent or reliable over time. These two factors taken together imply that turnout rates are probably overestimated for women and younger citizens (groups which have low CNIC coverage), and underestimated among older people (age groups with inflated electoral rolls due to the non-removal of deceased persons).

Sample survey and opinion poll data which do not suffer from this registration bias - because here enumerators directly ask interviewees about their voting behaviour. A closer look at these sample surveys reveals another problem of data quality. There is a significant gap in the proportion who report having voted and those who say that they intend to vote in the next elections. This suggests that people might over-report past electoral participation because not having voted is seen as admitting to a dereliction of public duty. Intention to vote in the future, however, elicits greater candour, as it offers the possibility of registering disaffection with the political system.

Sample survey and opinion poll data allow some analysis of a breakdown of voters and non-voters by their socio-economic characteristics. These data confirm that the overall turnout rate - intention to vote, or reporting to have always voted - is broadly within the range estimated by ECP data or around the 50 per cent mark. They further confirm that women and younger age groups tend to have lower electoral participation than men and older groups. The association between voting behaviour and socio-economic characteristics such as education, occupation and household wealth, however, is ambivalent. Moreover, these datasets do not offer very much insight into how people from various groups relate to the political process, and their reasons for taking part in it or not.

3. Review of literature

What does existing literature tell us about the actions, agency, and constraints faced by individuals from various backgrounds in Pakistan with respect to political participation. This literature review is based on online searches of the Google Scholar database using keywords 'voter turnout Pakistan', 'political participation Pakistan' and 'election studies Pakistan', supplemented by manual searches based on prior knowledge of significant studies as well as research projects addressing these themes and their interaction with social exclusion. The studies identified in these searches can be clustered into two types. First, there are detailed case studies which combine ethnographic research with the generation and/or analysis of quantitative data. Second, there are statistical studies based on representative data, or data collected using rigorous experimental design, as well as numerous studies based on relatively small samples either in specific localities, or among other well-defined population segments.

3.1 Case Studies

Wilder's (1999) path-breaking study of elections in Punjab represents a key point of departure. Until then most studies of elections were focused on the big picture analysis of the performance of parties and candidates, or on the fairness and transparency of the electoral process.⁶ The lack of access to data on the agency, interests, priorities, preferences and behaviour of various types of voters (besides, of course, polling day outcomes) was, in part, overcome through detailed ethnographic work combined with polling station level data made available as part of the electoral process. Wilder examined a range of factors that shaped the behaviour and preferences of voters in Punjab in the 1990s - including urban residence, class, kinship, factional alignment, and party identification.

Subsequent studies (notably Javid 2012, Martin 2015 and Khan, M. M., & Hussain, M 2021) also in Punjab, further probed these and other hypotheses about political participation, using a combination of ethnographic research and quantitative data. The methodological approach adopted in these studies allows, or even requires, some level of disentanglement of local political processes from broader macro policy and political issues.⁷ This separation is based, in part, on the observation that relatively competitive elections have been ubiquitous even through periods of military rule, and that, relatedly, they allow insights into an important arena of engagement between the state, elites, and ordinary citizens. An understanding of procedural democracy as witnessed in the conduct of, and participation in, electoral contests, is of value even if those contests occur in a system that does not always allow for substantive democratic control over policy and political decisions.⁸

These studies confirm that elections in Punjab - both in rural and urban areas - have been competitive in the sense that they have been keenly contested. Social collectivities are also found to be significant factors in shaping voter behaviour, though these are not easily reducible to caste or kinship groups. The collectivity might be formed around caste, kinship groups, or a coalition of clientelist networks (Khan Mohmand. S. 2014). Javid (2012) finds that the leadership of any intermediary group is closely associated with class, and the historically privileged position of landowners with respect to access to state institutions is perpetuated through the electoral system. Individuals, families and wider groups belonging to other classes line up behind these landowner-led groupings. Martin (2015) sees coercive patron-client relations, cemented through debt bondage, as playing a key role in the management of vote blocs. Factions or *dharra*s are central to Khan Mohmand's (2020) analysis of the political process. She argues that in her fieldwork area, these *dharra*s with identifiable leaders can be found across various types of villages with distinctive histories of social and political inequality. The factions and factional leaders intermediate between ordinary voters and candidates, and the relationship between the factional leader and his vote bloc can be based on a range of

⁶ Given the overbearing presence of non-representative institutions of the state such as the military and the bureaucracy on the one hand, and identity-based mobilisation on the other, it is not surprising much of the political science writing on Pakistan has been interested in these macro-level issues and not so much on voter behaviour Khan, H. A. (2004).

⁷ It follows that this literature addresses voter agency and behaviour in local and general elections in a comparable manner.

⁸ The literature on the metrics of democratic progress, for example, the representativeness of an elected government and the elected government's 'domain' are seen as distinctive dimensions of measurement (see Adeney 2017).

connections - including caste and kinship, economic dependence, and transactional dealings around access to state institutions and public resources.

The class, caste and family backgrounds of faction heads, vote bloc leaders and candidates confirm the coexistence of local electoral competition with the resilience of hierarchical social structures. The emergence of new coalitions, factions and candidates in these study areas seems to confirm the hypothesis that the electoral system, as it has functioned in the recent decades, has accommodated social mobility but not necessarily been a catalyst for a more egalitarian society. New factions and candidates have emerged in areas - such as towns and migrant villages - that have experienced economic change and diversification away from dependent labour relations.

These studies go some way towards explaining motivations for voter participation under conditions of political oligarchy. They tend to focus on transactional relations between citizens and candidates, usually mediated through vote bloc leaders, which involve different degrees of coercion and consent, depending on prior social structures in a given constituency or community.⁹ Voters who are highly dependent on their local patrons may face punitive sanctions for not turning out. Those who are less proximately dependent do, nevertheless, value the access to public resources and/or state institutions that a strong relationship with a powerful candidate might enable. This framing suggests that the voter turnout rate may not, by itself, be a reliable indicator of the strength and quality of democratic consolidation.

Election case studies offer a cogent framework for understanding the dynamics of political participation. They do not, however, offer a ready explanation of low turnout rates. If voters have active (transactional) relations with factional leaders, value the connectedness of candidates to provincial and national level leaders, and there is competition among local elites to gain elected office, why does the system not ensure higher turnout rates?

Khan Mohmand (2020) asks why some voters remain outside vote blocs, and many identified members of vote blocs end up not voting. She suggests that there might be an implicit agreement that vote bloc membership requires some, but not all, members of the participating household to turn out to vote. It is speculated that individuals for whom turning out to vote, and monitoring turnout has a high opportunity cost - e.g. women, younger people, migrant workers - can be exempt from the household's obligations to vote bloc leaders. Those voters

- around a fifth of her sample - who are not identified as being part of vote blocs represent an interesting group in Khan Mohmand's (2020) study. She finds few clear socio-economic characteristics that mark them out from vote bloc members, but reports that these individuals are more likely to identify themselves with parties or candidates that are thought to represent 'change'.

A qualitative study into the gender gap in voting in urban Lahore - a setting where factions and patronage networks are likely to be less significant - Cheema et al (2013) examine whether and to what extent restrictions on women or women's interest in politics might be responsible for their lower turnout. This study finds that many of the received explanations about barriers

⁹ A related experiment (Liaqat 2019) around the 2015 local government elections in Punjab conducted in Sargodha districts found that voters valued candidates who had strong 'connections' with national or provincial party leaders, and not the party's record of public spending in the recent past.

to women's voting - such as limitations to mobility, perceived threats of violence, gender segregation norms, demands on women's time for care duties - are mentioned, mostly by males. Women in urban Lahore neighbourhoods are mostly of the view that they are not forbidden from voting by men, and that other barriers are also not insurmountable. There is a sense, however, in which the women feel unseen by politicians and parties who rarely reach out to them, and do not address their issues and interests. The issues women raise in this study relate to local infrastructure and service delivery, water supply, sanitation, and solid waste - that are seen by them to be pertinent to their roles as home-makers. According to this study, women's disengagement arises from their disillusionment: "politics is not relevant to us".¹⁰ It is not clear, however, why under competitive conditions, parties and candidates do not make an effort to address this gap.

3.2 Statistical Analyses

The quantitative literature on electoral participation includes a number of statistical analyses based on representative data, experiments, as well as numerous small sample studies focusing on specific populations.

Large sample survey analyses

Akramov et al (2008) is based on a national sample of around 3,500 respondents around the 2005 local government elections. This study directly examines factors associated with voter turnout, and problematises the relatively low turnout in local elections. It finds that age, rural residence, being male, being married, farming, and being unemployed are positively correlated with voter turnout. More educated people are less likely to vote. The survey also probes views of respondents with respect to the credibility of the electoral process. It is found that the low participating groups such as women and educated citizens also regard the electoral process and outcomes as less credible than groups that participate more in voting. This linkage between the credibility of the electoral process and voter turnout seems intuitive, and seems to offer some evidence for the use of voter turnout as an indicator for the legitimacy of elections.¹¹ Akramov et al (2008) moreover try to explain the higher turnout rate among certain population groups - such as rural people, farmers, and the less educated - as evidence of clientelism.¹² They argue that clientelism might, in turn, be driven by the quality of the electoral process in which uninformed voters place their trust in intermediaries who are better informed than ordinary voters about the quality of a candidate.

¹⁰ The difficulties faced by women politicians are part of gender-based exclusion in political participation (Khan and Naqvi 2020). Not only do these barriers marginalise women who are in politics, they make it harder for the voices and interests of ordinary women to be heard and addressed, thus alienating them from electoral participation.

¹¹ Another study of the accountability of local government (Hasnain 2008) also used voter turnout as a measure of electoral competitiveness.

¹² Hasnain, Z. (2008) found that citizens contacted local government officials mostly for intercession on their behalf at police stations, for obtaining identity documents, and dispute resolution. Few approached elected officials for local infrastructure such as roads, water supply and sanitation, and fewer still with respect to education and health services. Liaqat (2019) in a study of voter preferences in the 2015 local government elections also found that voters' demands of candidates focused mainly on issues that were not the mandate of local government.

Chaudhry et al (2018) analyse determinants of voting by explaining variations in district level turnout rates in the 2008 and 2013 general elections using Pakistan Standard of Living Measurement Survey (PSLM) district-level statistics on a range of variables such as literacy, urban ratio, poverty, perception of change in economic situation, and satisfaction with servicedelivery, as well as provincial fixed effects. Voter turnout was found to be higher in more rural districts in both 2008 and 2013, and provincial fixed effects (with a higher turnout in Punjab) were significant in both years. In 2013, districts with higher literacy rates (general and female) and perceptions of economic well being were more likely to have higher turnout rates.

Another study of 2013 elections found that changes in voter turnout over previous elections could be explained, in part, by the effects of the 2010-11 floods - districts with greater flood impact had a higher positive change in turnout rates in elections held three years later (Fair, C.C et al 2017). The authors explained this effect as resulting from greater political awareness and voter investment into acquiring political information in the aftermath of the floods. The study did not investigate the effects of the various compensation programmes in the flood- affected districts and the precondition of acquiring CNICs for receiving compensation as a possible factor increasing voter registration and awareness.¹³

Experiments

The gender gap in voter turnout has received the attention of several experiments around interventions for increasing women's electoral participation. The first of these (Gine and Mansuri 2018) was conducted during the 2008 general elections in one district of Sindh (Khairpur) where women were provided information about the importance of elections and instructions about the electoral process. The intervention was shown to have a significant positive impact, with spillover effects to non-treated women in the near the treatment communities. There was also evidence of more independent voting - that is, women voting differently from men - in treated areas. A higher proportion of women in the sample reported having voted in past elections than in the current ones, and the impact of the intervention was limited to those women who had voted in the past. Women who had not voted before remained impervious to the intervention.

Cheema et al (2013) conducted a similar study in urban Lahore around the 2018 general elections. The intervention here, too, was an information campaign prior to the elections. The key distinction from Gine and Mansuri (2018), however, was the treatment of women as well as men in these communities - based on the idea that men act as "gatekeepers" with respect to women's political participation. The study found that there was a positive impact on women's turnout of an information campaign aimed at male gatekeepers. This study also found that while around two-thirds of the sample (of women and men) reported having voted in the previous elections, over four-fifths said they intended to vote in the coming elections. The actual turnout in the sample, verified by the researchers, was closer to the lower figure. Another experiment that ran women only and men-and-women campaigns Chaudhry et al (2022) found the former to have a positive impact on women's voter turnout. An experiment

¹³ The turnout rate in different elections, moreover, depends on the composition of the voter register. The 2008 elections were held using a voter list which did not require CNIC verification. The CNIC rule was strictly applied in 2013.

in Lahore simulated women's responses to different scenarios with respect to their mobility and time (Rahman, A & Thompson, S 2022) and found that relieving constraints with respect to transportation, being accompanied, child care and waiting time would have a positive impact on turnout.

Small sample studies

The literature review identified numerous small sample statistical studies that probed a range of issues related to voting behaviour. The questions probed by these studies mirror those raised in the broader literature on elections and political participation. Very few of these studies directly probe reasons for voting or not voting among various population segments. Sheikh et al (2012) find in a sample of 600 in Taxila (northern Punjab) that non-voters cite political reasons - such as disillusionment from the electoral process, but also the unavailability of a suitable candidate from their own caste - as reasons for not voting. Rauf and Shah (2015) and Bilal, M. & Ahmad, A. (2018) who examine women's low turnout in different communities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa highlight restriction on women's mobility as a dominant factor.

Many of these small sample studies are focused on the role of caste, biraderi and kinship affiliation on voter behaviour. Most of these are based on small sample surveys in various districts of Punjab.¹⁴ These studies find that caste or biraderi is a factor in voting behaviour - that voters are generally organised into vote blocs in which these identity markers play a significant role. Another popular area of research for small sample studies has been the political participation of women and young people and the role of social media in acquiring and processing information.¹⁵ These studies generally find a positive correlation between social media usage and political awareness and participation, particularly among younger people.

3.3 Discussion

The existing literature - qualitative and quantitative - on voter turnout, political participation and election studies focuses on various aspects of the political process and voting behaviour. The organisation of politics at the ground level, the ways in which parties and candidates interact with voters, the issues that are seen to be salient in this interaction, and questions about the competitiveness or otherwise of electoral politics are the key questions of concern. Explanations for turnout rates, and the links between voter participation and social exclusion, have been examined mostly with reference to the persistent gap in voting between women and men, but not with respect to low turnout rates for both women and men.

Quantitative studies that do address electoral participation generally presume a positive relationship between the competitiveness, legitimacy and inclusiveness of the electoral process and voter turnout. Hasnain (2008), for example, suggests using the turnout rate as

¹⁴ See, for example, Shah, N. H., & Bakht, N. (2019), Anwar, A. (2019), Chaudhry, A. G., & Ahmed, A. (2014), Kaleem, M., & Muhammad, A. (2015), Nasir, A., Chaudhry, A. G., Khan, S. E., & Hadi, S. A. (2015), Tariq, S., & Alamgir, M. (2019), Ahmed, M. (2009), Haider, S. K. (2019).

¹⁵ See, for example: Ahmed et al (2019), Saud et al (2020), Memon & Rehman (2017), Shahzad et al (2021), Shahzad and Omer (2021), Batool et al (2020), Abbas, Nawaz (2014), Javaid (2017) Shami, S. (2019) Khan et al (2019), Tabassum, N. et al (2015), Ahmed & Skovic (2014), and Saleem et al (2012). Naseer, S., (2019), McLeod, J. M., et al (2010)

an indicator of competitiveness. In a multi-party democracy, there is, of course, an implied link between competitiveness and legitimacy - candidates and parties would not actively contest elections which were presumed to be manipulated. Akramov et al (2008) find, however, that the low turnout in the elections they studied might be due to the low levels of trust in the electoral process. A more direct way of measuring competitiveness is through the difference in the vote share of leading candidates - the narrower the difference, the more competitive the elections (Laiqat 2019). This measure of competitiveness suggests that elections in Pakistan (at least in the more closely examined province of Punjab) have been relatively competitive.

Case studies offer insights into the paradox of competitive elections in which the political participation of many citizens does not extend to actually going out to vote on election day. Electoral competition, at least in some parts of the country, is premised on rivalry between different leadership factions belonging to existing or emerging local elites. The role of intermediaries is critical in both mobilising voters and ensuring that members of vote blocs have access to representatives. While the significance of parties as organisations or as promoters of policies is discounted, voters do value those candidates who can demonstrate that they have connections with and access to party leaders and potential government functionaries. In many situations, however, vote bloc mobilisation is premised on coercion and dependence. The turnout rate does not, in itself, indicate political empowerment, and elections may not be vehicles for social or policy change.

Parties, candidates, vote bloc leaders and vote bloc members alike appear to accept an implicit bargain in which some potential voters within a member family - such as women, daily wage workers living away from home, the elderly, differently abled people, and youth - are less likely to participate in political activity. This bargain seems to operate not only vertically (between candidates, bloc leaders and bloc members) but also horizontally (across competing parties, candidates and mobilisers). The procedural factor that unites these otherwise disparate groups is that the cost of mobilisation, transportation, and monitoring them can be considerably higher than the cost of ensuring the turnout of a more connected voter. There are, obviously enough, more fundamental social equity issues at stake too.

Women citizens claim to be “unseen” by contenders, while identifiable groups of male non-voters might be ignored due to their relatively small electoral weight. Women’s marginalisation from politics appears to be closely correlated with their marginalisation in society and economy more generally. The same might be true of other groups such as daily wage workers, seasonal migrants, the elderly, and the differently abled. A number of quantitative studies, including experiments, find that turnout responds positively among hard to reach groups like women through more effective campaigning and outreach.¹⁶

Why do parties and candidates facing competitive contests not make more effort to mobilise voters from these groups? Case studies of political participation around electoral contests taken together can be seen as a story of a relatively stable political system in which competitive

¹⁶ All of the experimental studies reviewed here use interventions that increase voter awareness about the electoral process, and Fair et al (2018) study on the impact of the floods also argues that voters had become more aware of electoral processes in flood affected areas, leading to higher turnouts there. See Hedström, J., et al (2013)

politics allow the emergence of new contenders at the local level within an overarching hierarchy of power relations marked by class, caste and gender. The system is stable in the sense that there is a high degree of continuity in the politicians who are seen as viable candidates. The viability of a candidate, in turn, depends on (mostly) his belonging to the localeconomic elite, his social ties with other members of this elite, and his connections with provincial and national leaders. To the extent that individuals and groups from non-traditionallanded families are able to fulfil these conditions, they can become viable contenders.

Another feature of the stability of this otherwise competitive system rests with the type of political transaction which is at stake - namely, that the candidate offers to provide access to his supporters to various state resources and institutions. Case studies as well as quantitativeanalyses suggest that these offers closely match voter demands and expectations. Broader political and policy issues, including those which might address economic opportunity and social development of excluded individuals and groups, are missing in practice. The most glaring case, but not the only one, in this regard is with respect to women who feel “unseen”,say that their concerns and interests are not addressed, they are not approached by politicians, and are not even expected, in many cases, to turn up to demonstrate their family’spledge of support to a candidate or party.

There is an important caveat with respect to both the qualitative and quantitative studies on electoral participation. The case study material that contributes to the model of a relatively stable and competitive but exclusionary political system is based on work done in north-centralPunjab from the 1980s onwards. This period saw considerable political and fiscal investmentat the macro level in ensuring that electoral politics remained restricted to competition amonglocal elites for the custodianship of access to state institutions and resources. It is possible, therefore, that the model of competitive stability is specific to the particular conditions of this period. Political parties with policy positions on national and provincial issues, and voter mobilisation around such platforms are mostly absent from the local transactional politics examined by the post-Wilder election studies, as are recognised leaders with direct appeal to voters.¹⁷

Historical accounts of Punjab politics at the ground level (e.g. Javid 2012) find continuity between the patronage-based system around land ownership honed by the colonial government, and the contemporary model of competitive stability. The historical perspective shows, however, that recognised national or regional leaders, organised parties or mobilisation around policy issues may disrupt the model. The remarkable and unexpected success of Bhutto and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) in the 1970 general elections, basedon the enfranchisement of subordinate castes and classes in the same region, is one such significant moment of disruptive change.¹⁸ There needs to be a better understanding,

¹⁷ Quantitative studies also tended to focus on process rather than the substance of political engagement. It is difficult to envisage experiments in which potential voters are given information onthe credibility and relevance of a party or candidate’s policy platform, and this would require the researcher herself to rank rival political claims first.

¹⁸ Arguably, Nawaz Sharif’s attempt at building a constituency among urban mercantile classes and anarrative of effective service delivery and infrastructure development was another attempt at disruption. Supporters of Imran Khan might argue that the PTI represented a more potent disruption,by mobilizing supporters and voters in demographic groups (such as youth, educated people, and upper classes) which had remained relatively aloof from electoral politics in the past, around an ‘anti- corruption’ narrative that transcended local patronage linkages.

therefore, of the relationship between periods of apparent stability and episodes of change. It is difficult to do so without making reference to macro-politics: Bhutto's positioning as a champion of the poor in Punjab in the late 1960s and early 1970s, his turn to local landed elites in the elections in 1977, his overthrow in a military coup in 1977, and attempts by the military regime of General Zia-ul-Haq to garner political legitimacy through a reversion to the old 'stability' model based on existing elites and an infusion of new ones.¹⁹

It is also important to examine if conditions in other regions might be significantly different from north-central Punjab - a relatively well-off urbanising region comprising around a third of the national population, which has provided most of the material for the existing literature. It is possible that local political competition, systems of patronage and coalition building, and the significance of broader narratives of representation and change might differ across Pakistan's regions. Even within north-central Punjab it is found that communities based on old pre-colonial villages with a continuity of traditional leadership structures had less competitive elections, and fewer openings for individuals from outside the traditional elite, than either urban areas or rural areas with newer village communities originating in the colonial period (Khan, Mohmand 2020). It is possible that local dynamics in South Punjab and rural districts of Sindh are closer to the traditional rural communities of north-central Punjab than the newer villages. If so, the competitive stability model might, *prima facie*, be even more exclusionary of marginalised individuals and groups in these regions than it is in north-central Punjab.

Primary fieldwork for this study across four provincial assembly constituencies - two each in South Punjab and north Sindh respectively - aims to provide an understanding of the engagement of socially marginalised and disadvantaged individuals and communities with the broader political process in general and elections in particular. Our qualitative research was designed to identify marginalised women and men within these fieldwork sites, and to learn about their experiences and expectations of the political system and electoral process, and reasons for participation or non-participation in these. Our approach to primary research and its analysis is informed by the review of secondary data and literature summarised here. We pay particular attention, of course, to the distinctive positions of women and men, and to the role of class and social identity markers such as caste and kinship in the communities where we conducted the fieldwork. The role of political intermediaries, and perceptions and narratives about parties and national leaders, also informed many of our lines of questioning.

4. Qualitative fieldwork

4.1 Approach to Fieldwork

The selected regions and communities present multiple sources of social exclusion and marginality, and hierarchical relations of power - between women and men, landowners and labourers, dominant castes and marginalised ones. Prior research in these regions

¹⁹ With the interlude of the 1990s, the military regime of General Pervez Musharraf in the 2000s also undermined the position of political parties and nationally recognised leaders by barring parties from local government elections, and by favouring independent candidates over party nominees in general elections.

demonstrates that these exclusions are actively contested by disadvantaged groups within communities through a variety of ways. Individuals and groups within communities operate strategically in these contestations, and use interactions with a range of outsiders - such as public functionaries, political party workers, civil society activists, journalists, and social media influencers - to enhance their relative power, while balancing any risk of adverse reaction on the part of dominant individuals and groups to continuing the research interaction. Our approach to primary research is based on the premise that active contestation – including the actual or potential use of the political process – offers a safe and productive space for conducting qualitative field research in these communities.

Primary qualitative fieldwork relied on a range of research instruments including key informant interviews, group discussions, and subject in-depth interviews to address the research questions. Attention was paid to the specific context of each fieldwork site and conditions of marginality and exclusion as they existed in that context. The fieldwork consisted of building up a profile of the community and prevalent narratives with respect to the research questions (through key informant interviews and group discussions), identification of socially excluded individuals and groups, and subject in-depth interviews to learn about actual experiences and perceptions of the socially excluded with respect to political participation. The main line of qualitative fieldwork was to understand, within the context of specific communities, the nature of political participation of socially excluded individuals and groups [see Annex-1].²⁰

4.2 Fieldwork and Broader Political Currents

The fieldwork was carried out in November and December 2022. It is important to note the broader political and economic context of this period, which saw a number of conspicuous events and developments. The general elections of 2018 had brought Imran Khan's PTI into office at the federal level, and in one of provinces of our fieldwork, namely Punjab. In Sindh the PPP had been returned to office at the provincial level. An economic crisis resulting in high rates of inflation and unemployment had started towards the end of 2021. From early 2022 an opposition campaign began in earnest to remove Imran Khan from office. This was done in April 2022 through a parliamentary vote.

The economic crisis continued throughout this period. At the time of the fieldwork Imran Khan's party was still in power at the provincial level in Punjab and he was leading a charged campaign against the parties that had dislodged PTI from the federal government. Southern Punjab, including the fieldwork district Muzaffargarh was an important target of this campaign as many PTI legislators from the region who had abandoned their party were held up by Imran Khan as examples of political disloyalty and corruption. Although Khan's party had also started voicing its opposition to the country's military leadership, the fieldwork preceded the developments which eventually led to a crackdown on PTI. In the meanwhile, in Sindh, there was unprecedented flooding in August and September due to torrential rains which left large areas of the province submerged, and millions of people without shelter and livelihood. Polling for local government elections had taken place in Sukkur before the flooding, but elected local governments were to take office much later, several months after our fieldwork.

²⁰ Detailed methodology including research instruments is provided in Annex 1.

4.3 Fieldwork sites

Qualitative research for this study was carried out in four administrative villages - referred to as fieldwork sites - across northern Sindh and southern Punjab.²¹ This section provides a brief description of these fieldwork sites based partly on secondary data, but mostly on the qualitative research itself.

The two sites from each province were selected from a single national assembly (NA) constituency, but different provincial constituencies. The territorial demarcation of electoral constituencies is organised in such a way that most, if not all, national assembly constituencies are subdivided into two constituencies in the respective provincial assembly. The relationship between national level candidates and their counterparts at the provincial level is often a critical one with respect to voter mobilisation efforts. Political parties award tickets to national and provincial candidates with wider considerations around cooperation between various local factions and vote blocs, and optimal strategies for mobilisation of a large enough coalition of potential voters in order to prevail on election day. Selecting communities across two different provincial constituencies enabled us to learn about three sets of electoral contests, as well as intra-constituency mobilisation strategies in each province.

In southern Punjab we selected NA 185 in the district of Muzaffargarh, which straddles the Punjab provincial constituencies PP 272 and PP 275. Mouza-1 in Union Council Bakani is in PP 272, while Jinnah Colony Mouza-2 is in the Union Council of the same name in PP 275.²² In upper Sindh two administrative villages - Deh-2 and Deh-1 - were selected in provincial constituencies PS 22 and PS 23 respectively, within the national assembly constituency NA 206. Some basic data from these constituencies and administrative villages is reported in Table 1. In the 2018 general elections Mouza-1, Jinnah Colony, and Deh-2 had one polling station each, with separate polling booths for women and men voters. Deh-1 had two polling stations, one each for women and men respectively. Each fieldwork site had a polling facility for women and men.

In principle, all voters normally resident in the locality served by a polling station (or a paired set of women and men's polling stations), should be registered at that polling station. There were multiple complaints, however, of votes having been assigned elsewhere. This was cited as a reason for non-voting in many cases. It was thought that the mis-assignment of votes was due to some combination of malintent (for vote suppression) and administrative incompetence. The situation was particularly confusing for Mouza-1 voters, many of whom discovered that their votes had been assigned to a neighbouring village with a similar sounding name (Chak Kalro). This complaint appeared to be well-founded. The number of registered

²¹ The administrative or revenue village in Punjab is called 'mouza' while in Sindh it is known as 'deh'. There can be multiple settlements (villages, segments of villages and hamlets) within a mouza or deh which is a geographical unit for the administration of land revenues. The revenue village is, moreover, also a key geographical unit in electoral management. Population census enumeration blocks are based on the sub-division of administrative villages, and these blocks are then used for establishing polling stations and assigning voters to these polling stations.

²² Jinnah Colony is one segment of Mouza-2. The fieldwork in this administrative village was restricted to this one segment which had two polling stations (one each for women and men) where the voters of Jinnah Colony are registered.

voters at Chak Kalro polling stations (1,940) was greater than the entire population of that mouza in the 2017 Population Census (1,867).

| | | Population 2017 | Registered voters 2018 | Turnout rate (per cent) 2018 |
|--------------|------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Muzaffargarh | Mouza-1 | 2,577 | 823 | 55 |
| | Jinnah Colony, Mouza-2 | 3,055 | 1,574 | 61 |
| Sukkur | Deh-1 | 4,315 | 2,322 | 63 |
| | Deh-2 | 3,241 | 1,487 | 65 |

Mouza-1

Mouza-1 consists of a historic settlement, and a number of extensions and clusters on its periphery known as *vasti* (hamlet) or *khuh* (well). The geographical layout of the village and its surrounding settlements has emerged from the evolution of its agrarian economy. The main Mouza-1 village has a mixed population with respect to caste/kinship group and class. The dominant landowners of the village are from the Jaar and Kalro kinship groups - both from traditional landowner castes. The Jaar are more numerous and also have larger land holdings than the Kalro. Syeds also own some land and reside in the main village. A major segment of Mouza-1 known as Ghareebabad (literally 'poor quarters'), consists exclusively of families from service and menial castes. Mouza-1 is accessible by pucca roads, and is connected to electricity supply, and has two government primary schools, one each for girls and boys respectively. All of the public facilities are concentrated in the main Mouza-1 village.

Jinnah Colony

Mouza-2 is a Union Council as well as a mouza with over 21,000 residents recorded in the 2017 Population Census. It is a relatively large mouza in terms of population, with a relatively urbanised Mouza township as its central settlement. Jinnah Colony is located within the territorial boundary of the mouza and the UC around 2 km from the main settlement. The colony was established in the early 1990s on government land for residents of villages along the Indus which were submerged due to a flood that changed the course of the river. The displaced people were allotted residential plots measuring 7 marla each (around 175 sq metres) under the Jinnah homestead scheme of the provincial government.²³ Jinnah Colony has a government primary school each for girls and boys. Most of the streets and lanes within the settlement are paved and with drains. The main Mouza-2 township is nearby and it has various educational and health facilities, as well as markets. Both Jinnah Colony and Mouza-2 township are well-connected with urban centres with roads and frequent public transport.

²³ On the history of residential homestead schemes in Punjab see Gazdar and Mallah (2012).

Deh-1

Deh-1 has several settlements of various sizes. The main settlement of Deh-1 is situated on hilly terrain and is thought to be of historical significance as the site of an ancient city and temple. Although classified in administrative terms as a village, Deh-1 is, in effect, a relatively urbanised setting with government schools, a Basic Health Unit (BHU), gas and electricity connections, and water supply to houses. Most of the houses are pucca structures, and there is a market in the settlement with many shops and restaurants. The floods of 2022 which inundated all of the low-lying farmland and villages in the area had a relatively minor impact on Deh-1 due to its high elevation. The village is close to stone quarries which provide livelihoods to a large part of the male workforce.

Deh-1 consists of a number of partly-enclosed single kinship group segments known as *para* (singular *paro*). Deh-1 also includes a number of smaller villages or *goth* such as Goth Badruddin Buriro, Goth Haji Ghulam Nabi Jatoi, and Goth Vadero Din Mohammad. These are agrarian villages dominated by a single kinship group and organised much like a *para*. The residents of these villages are mostly involved in agriculture, some as self-cultivators, and others as tenants and labourers. Many of the men from these villages also work in stone quarries.

Deh-2

Deh-2 has an old settlement by the name of Deh-2 and a number of smaller villages and hamlets in its surroundings. While Deh-2 village and the smaller villages close to it are on low-lying agricultural land, and were badly affected by the 2022 floods, other hamlets and villages are on higher elevation dunes and were protected from inundation. The main village as well as most other settlements are well-connected through farm-to-market roads. There are school buildings in a number of villages but most of the schools became non-functional due to the floods. Most villages had their electricity disconnected due to the non-payment of dues.

5. Socially Excluded and Social Exclusion

This section provides a brief description of social exclusion in the fieldwork communities. People who face social exclusion - inequality and disadvantage in social outcomes and access to public resources - are classified here under three dimensions: gender, economic class and social solidarity groupings such as caste, kinship group, and religion, and individual circumstance such as age and disability. There is, obviously, overlap as well as intersectionality between these dimensions. Gender, or systematic disadvantage faced by women, for example, is an easily recognised aspect of social exclusion and political non-participation, and cuts across economic class, social grouping, and individual circumstance. Further, this section summarises issues faced by the socially excluded and highlighted by them as being salient in their experience of deprivation and disadvantage. These are organised under two themes: hunger and poverty, and access to public institutions.

5.1 Gender

Gender is an all-pervasive dimension of social exclusion in our fieldwork communities. These communities are not very different from other parts of the country in this respect. Some salient features of gender and social exclusion in the fieldwork communities that are pertinent to women's political participation are highlighted here.

Women's vulnerability to threats of violence within and outside the homes is a standard theme that underpins much of the conversation in these communities. The idea of intimate partner violence is normalised to the degree that women and men interviewees mentioned it casually as a 'natural' consequence of women not following instructions issued by their husbands with respect to voting, not voting or other forms of political participation. The threat of violence and sexual predation from the 'outside' is also seen as unexceptional. The firm belief, among women and men, that women would be vulnerable to these threats underpins all justification of gender segregation, restrictions on women's mobility and their participation in economic and political activity.

The layout of villages in the fieldwork communities in Sindh is typical of settlement patterns across the province. Villages generally consist of single or multiple partly enclosed compounds (*para*) where rules of gender segregation are strictly observed. Women must remain in the interior of the village or *para* unless they go out for specific purposes. Men who are not family members cannot enter the interior of the village or *para*, and must conduct their social interactions in designated spaces - usually an *autaq* - on the boundary of the village or *para*. The old village of Mouza-1 and its surrounding *vastis* and *khuhs* are laid out around similar rules of gender segregation. Jinnah Colony in Mouza-2 is not organised spatially into enclosed or semi-enclosed compounds of extended kin, but here too the public-private division of space is highly gendered.

Women and men's roles with respect to work and care are also clearly delineated. The care of children, the elderly and the infirm within the home setting is almost entirely the responsibility of girls and women. While women typically spend a big part of their day also on non-care economic activity, this is rarely recognised as contributing to the family's income which is supposed to be the sole responsibility of men. This absence of recognition persists despite the fact that in all of the fieldwork communities large numbers of women also provide seasonable labour on various crops. This normatively gendered division of activity corresponds with and tends to reinforce the gendered division of space. It is men and not women who are supposed to engage with other men in economic transactions or conversations about public matters. Women have little access to those engagements, and are also not available for them.

Women's access to privately owned resources in these communities is also comparable to other settings in Pakistan, particularly in rural areas. Few women in the fieldwork sites own economic resources such as land, livestock or other forms of capital. Few have salaried jobs. Agricultural work, even if it is remunerated, is undervalued, and conducted in the context of families or teams of women (as in cotton harvesting).

Public resources are relatively more available to women even though there is a high degree of inequality. In all of the fieldwork sites or close to them there were primary schools for girls. Some of these were functional, others not. There are also public and private health facilities nearby which women do visit. The one public resource to which a large number of women in these communities did have access was the quarterly social protection benefit from the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP). Perhaps because of this benefit, or for other reasons, many women from even the poorest and most marginalised families also had CNICs issued by NADRA.

The patriarchal norms and societal conditions that underpin gender-based violations of the person, deprivation and exclusion are mutually reinforcing. Women have limited access to public spaces and economic resources and opportunities independently of their husbands, fathers or sons. There is a perception of vulnerability to gender-based violence and sexual abuse if they venture outside without male protection, and the idea that a patriarchal family's social status and prestige can get easily damaged if a woman is subjected to 'dishonour'. Gendered roles with respect to care work are strongly observed leaving women little time or capacity to be engaged in issues of public interest. The exceptions - for example, women who work outside the home as seasonal labourers, or domestic help - reinforce the rule. Working outside the home setting is associated with lower social status or loss of prestige, and marginalised caste and classes.

5.2 Class, Caste, Religion and Kinship Group

The interaction of economic class on the one hand, particularly ownership and access to agricultural land, and social identity defined by caste, religion and kinship group, on the other, shapes the relative position of an individual with respect to opportunity or disadvantage. All four of the fieldwork sites are, or have been until recently, predominantly agrarian societies in which land ownership, social status and political power have gone together. Even in the two sites, Jinnah Colony in Muzaffargarh and Deh-1 in Sukkur, where the importance of agriculture has declined over time, ownership and control over land remains a strategically significant factor.

There are three sets of historical relationships which underpin the interaction between land and social identity. One, patriarchal families, extended families, and wider kinship groups consisting of castes or tribes are an enduring form of social organisation across classes in these communities. Other identity markers such as religious affiliation are also mediated through kinship based affinities, which constitute the primary solidarity groupings. Two, land ownership locally as well as more widely, has been assigned to families from particular castes and tribes. Three, the agrarian system of these villages is based on dependent relations between large landowners - or landlords - with 'subservient' classes made up mostly of marginalised occupational castes and kinship groups. These dependent relations extend beyond the simple division of labour in the agrarian economy, and extends to the ownership, use and change of use of all land, including land that is nominally communal or government property. The power of landowning families, castes and tribes over others is, therefore, premised not only (eroding) labour relations between the landed and the landless, but also on

the control that the traditional landlords or their descendents have exercised on the settlement itself. The specific conditions across the four fieldwork sites are described below.

Mouza-1

The social structure of Mouza-1 is typical of traditional agrarian communities in Punjab. Agricultural land ownership is concentrated in three kinship groups - Jaar, Kalro and Syed with the former being in a dominant position. Besides the traditional landowners, the main village population, perhaps a majority, consists of families from occupational castes and kinship groups that have or continue to provide various services (pejoratively known as *kammis*) as well as menial work. The *kammis* included *tarkhans* (carpenters), *mochis* (shoemakers), *paolis* (weavers), *qasais* (butchers) and *mirasis* (minstrels). The bulk of the labouring castes is made of Kutas - traditionally a riverine community who harvested river grasses for weaving baskets. Many of the landowning families maintain farmhouses or *deras* on their agricultural lands for managing their fields and for keeping farm animals. Farm servants and their families also live on these *deras*.

A traditional system for the assignment of tasks and grain shares (known as *seyp*) with landlords as grain-providing patrons - had been active until about a generation ago. Since then most economic functions have become wage or piece-rate based, and some of the former *kammis* whose traditional skills were marketable - such as carpenters - have started working as self-employed craftsmen. Many of the men from the former *kammi* and labour castes have migrated to cities as unskilled workers, and a small number have formal sector jobs or have migrated abroad. These latter two groups have experienced noticeable upward economic mobility and have acquired small plots of land to establish their own hamlets outside the main village. A group of families belonging to the carpenters or Tarkhan caste, for example, have established their own *vasti* on acquired land.

Many of the individuals and families from these historically marginalised castes remain in dependent economic relations, however, with the landowning castes, even if most of the older systems of patronage have made way for wage-based work. Residents of Ghareebabad adjacent to the old village consist exclusively of families from service and menial castes. There are rival claims on the ownership of the land on which Ghareebabad is situated. Residents of the segment believe that it is state-owned land which was allotted to them by the government, while landowning Jaar families claim that it is their private land. In any case, the landowners who own agricultural land adjacent to Ghareebabad continue to assert their authority by blocking physical access to the segment, and by preventing the paving of lanes or the construction of drains.

Members of most of the historically marginalised castes have started using caste names and titles belonging to traditional landowning castes. The shoemakers now prefer to be known as Bhatti, the weavers as Lodhray, and the butchers as Thaheem. The adoption of these 'honourable' tribal names, while considered important by the marginalised groups as a way of creating some distance from their 'low' caste occupations, is mostly ignored by the community, its dominant families, and most government offices which rely on the caste assignment provided in the official land record of the village.

Most of the residents of Mouza-1 are Sunni Muslims. There are a few Shia Muslim families -among the Syed and the Mirasis. While the Syeds who enjoy a high social status due to their lineage are openly identified as Shia, the Mirasis prefer to keep their Shia identity inconspicuous. They say that they travel to a Shia-dominated community nearby to observe their religious ceremonies, due to the fear of a hostile response from the majority Sunnis in Mouza-1.

Mouza-2 Jinnah Colony

Jinnah Colony in Mouza-2 has only some remnants of the traditional class-caste hierarchy of the Punjab village. The village was established on government land to rehouse communities whose settlements were submerged by a change of course of the river. The Sahoo kinship group were the main landlords of the submerged village. Other smaller landowners included the Nekokar who claim to have a Syed connection are also considered elevated compared with traditional kammi and labouring castes. Some of the agricultural land is still available for cultivation and is an important economic resource for the Sahoo and the Nekokar. The vast majority of the residents of Jinnah Colony, however, are families from various historically marginalised castes and kinship groups who had been in subservient economic relations with the landowners. These families own their homesteads - some of them being beneficiaries of the government's homestead land scheme, while others having purchased plots from local landowners - but do not own any agricultural land. The men from these families have migrated to work in factories and brick kilns elsewhere in Pakistan. There are also some men from Nekokar as well as historically marginalised castes who work as labourers outside the country. Women from the historically marginalised castes work as seasonal labourers on wheat and cotton harvest. No Sahoo or Nekokar women do this work.

The relationship between the landowning castes - Sahoo and to some extent Nekokar - and the mostly landless families from kammi and labouring castes is no longer based on economic dependence or patronage. Women and men from historically marginalised castes are involved in diverse but low-paid farm and non-farm activities and any work that they undertake for the traditional landowners of the village is also done on casual daily wage or piece rate terms. There are ongoing disputes in which various castes and classes try to assert or resist power over each other, but there is nothing here comparable with the clear class divide in Mouza-1. All the castes and kinship groups in Jinnah Colony are relatively autonomous in economic terms, but are all, including the landowning castes, somewhat marginalised with respect to their access to public resources and political power. The landowners and the landless alike are dependent on more powerful patrons outside the village, and some of that patronage is mediated by the Sahoos and the Nekokars.

Deh-1

The main village of Deh-1 consists of several *para* (enclosed neighbourhoods shared by families belonging to a single kinship group) of various castes or kinship groups such as Banga, Sirohi, Bhatti, Syed, Burira, Memon, Mallah, Jogi, Syed, Sheikh, Rind, Chandia and Bhutta. Some households among the Banga, Sirohi, Bhatti, Burira and Syed own agricultural land, while others such as the Jogi (traditional snakecharmers), Mallah (traditional fisherfolk),

Sheikh and Memon of Deh-1 are historically marginalised castes.²⁴ Residents of Deh-1 claim that the settlement is on government authorised land. Men from landowning castes can also be found in non-agricultural occupations such as government employment. Many men from historically marginalised communities no longer practise their traditional caste occupations and work on nearby stone quarries, and some women from these communities work in nearby factories.

Some of the various castes or kinship groups in Deh-1, notably Syed, Buriro and Banga, own agricultural land. As in the case of Jinnah Colony in Muzaffargarh, however, relations of patronage between landowners and the landless have eroded as the latter have acquired a measure of residential security and economic diversification from agriculture.

Most of the residents of Deh-1 are Muslim and there is no clear hierarchy in terms of social status or religious freedom between adherents of different Islamic sects - Sunni and Shia - in the area. The religious identity of one group - Jogis or traditional snake charmers - is connected with their social status. While Jogis claim to be Muslim, this affiliation is not widely accepted by other Muslims in the area, who regard Jogis as being non-Muslims. Many Jogis have Hindu-sounding names, but are also disciples of Bukhari Syed spiritual leaders. The few Jogis who have government sector jobs are employed as janitors and sanitation workers - tasks that are normally reserved in Pakistan for Scheduled Caste Hindus.²⁵

Deh-2

Most of the households in Deh-2 are engaged in agriculture as self cultivators, tenants or labourers, and women from landless and landpoor families are involved in seasonal agricultural labour. After the floods and the destruction of crops, many of those who were formerly self-cultivators or tenants have joined the ranks of casual wage labourers. Besides men from landowning castes who are in government jobs, other workers in non-farm employment include men who have migrated to work in factories in Karachi and brick kilns in Lahore.

Syeds are a politically and economically powerful caste or kinship group in the deh. They and their sharecropper tenants, families from Phulpota, Pusia, and Shambhani kinship groups have been living here for many generations, while a number of other Baloch and Seriaki kinship groups have migrated over the decades and settled on purchased land on the dunes. Other than the Syeds, people of the Abro kinship group own land, are educated and have government jobs, and live in their own single caste village. The Machhi, a historically marginalised caste now renamed as Solangi, have purchased small plots of agricultural land in a relatively remote part of the deh, and have established their own village. There are ongoing tussles between them and the Abro village - partly rooted in a marginalised caste's aspirations of upward mobility and the reaction of incumbents to it. These tensions sometimes boil over into fights over the right of access through each other's villages. Besides the main

²⁴ The Shaikh and Memon communities in many parts of Sindh are thought to be converts into Islam from Hindu mercantile castes. Members of these communities are themselves associated with commerce and the professions. There are also Shaikh and Memon populations across the province that are thought to be converts from castes far lower in the social hierarchy. The Shaikhs and Memons of Deh-1 belong to the latter group.

²⁵ See, for example, Gazdar and Mallah (2022).

village in Deh-2 there are three other mixed caste villages. Village Karam Khan Mahar is dominated by landowning families of the Mahar kinship group, and includes various Baloch, Sindhi and Hindu Marwari kinship groups living in their own para. The latter are mostly sharecropping tenants of Mahar landlords.

5.3 Individual Characteristics

Age and disability are two conspicuous individual characteristics associated with social exclusion. The importance of patriarchal families in the social organisation of the fieldwork communities has implications not only for women and girls (as discussed in Section 5.1) but also on women and men of different ages. Able-bodied male heads of families - mostly aged between 30 and 60 years - are the most privileged demographic group across classes and social solidarity groups. In fact, much of the activity for constructing social solidarity on public matters revolves around men of this age cohort. Older and differently abled women and men start becoming marginalised across families and communities, as their physical and mental capacities are seen to fade. Girls and young women, by contrast, face the most severe constraints of mobility and social interaction outside the family for some of the reasons discussed in Section 5.1.

Physical and mental disability is not understood in binary terms in the fieldwork communities. The conversation about disability is intertwined with perceptions of dependence on others. Dependence, of course, is socially constructed. Even in the absence of any salient deviation from prevailing norms of physical and mental capacity, social structures prescribe the dependence of women, children and the elderly on able-bodied male heads of families, of families on social solidarity systems within and across kinship groups and classes. Conspicuous cases of disability are identified in these communities with reference to a level of functionality commensurate with prescribed roles. A man who is unable to act as a breadwinner or to take decisions regarding his family due to old age, and whose position has already been overtaken by his son, is less likely to be identified as disabled compared with a man who is still required to play his prescribed role and is unable to do so.

5.4 Poverty: Food and Residential Insecurity

Hunger

Women and men who face social exclusion were asked about some of their pressing economic and social concerns. Food insecurity was a conspicuous issue across the fieldwork communities for families that do not own land, and rely on casual wage labour. For many of these families food insecurity meant vulnerability to or the actual experience of hunger with the preceding month. It is common, in the fieldwork communities, for the poor to cope without adequate staple foods, let alone diversified diets.

The immediacy of hunger and food insecurity is brought home by the experience of families - mostly narrated by women - who worry about not having enough to eat on a daily basis, depending on the ability of their men to earn wages and purchase rations, or for them to get help from relatives, neighbours and others. Many of the families are almost always insecure

about the next day or even the next meal, and in questions about their diets they often mention sweetened tea because this is about the only accompaniment that they can afford to have with simple bread.

Gulnaz Solangi, a woman from a family of landless labourers in Deh-2 sums up the situation of many others:

“All days are hungry days for us and for our animals. The animals can’t produce milk even for making tea. We only buy and nothing else, so that there is something for our children to eat.”

Another woman, Kanwal Phulpoto, in Deh-2 says:

“We are constantly fighting hunger - we eat one meal and miss two.”

Haleeman Shaikh from Deh-1 paints a similar picture:

“My children and I often face hunger. Trust me, hunger is the main issue. Today we have not even had tea because there is no sugar. We are waiting for my father to return from work because he might bring some sugar with him when he comes.”

Haleeman Bhatti, who is a woman from a Mohana (traditional fisherfolk) family in Jinnah Colony reported:

“Last week my children and I had nothing to eat for three consecutive days. This happens almost every month. My husband and sons can’t find work every day. People taunt us and show us disrespect that our able-bodied men cannot earn enough for us to eat. After they had gone hungry for three days a kind-hearted woman gave food to my children.”

Fatima Kokhar, another woman from a family of landless labourers in Mouza-1, faced a similar situation:

“We earn and eat on a daily basis. My husband and son can earn between five to eight hundred rupees each on the day that they can find work. We don’t eat well and face hunger every month. In the old days my husband’s father used to get wheat from the harvest for seyp work [customary in-kind service] but that system does not exist any longer. I myself used to work in agricultural fields, harvesting sugarcane, wheat and chillies, but now I no longer have the energy to do that painstaking work.”

In the flood-affected communities previously food-secure families had also become vulnerable to hunger:

Samina Abro, a woman from a landowning family in a flood-affected community in Deh-2 said: “All our crops including fodder are still submerged. If we have some food, we will eat and if not, we remain hungry. I have nothing to cook today, and our last meal was half a kilo of white rice which I fed my children. The neighbours are also exhausted now - they are unable to help me any longer. I am so weak and my eyesight is poor but my daughters do sewing work”.

According to Ghullam Nabi Sirohi, a man from a formerly well-off family in Deh-1: “I have one son who works and we all depend on his wages. When faced with hunger we did not beg but borrowed in cash or kind to cope. During the rains and soon after the government had provided ration including flour.”

Poverty, in our fieldwork communities, therefore, is not only about low levels of income or wealth, or the inability to afford a range of basic needs. For many of the families belonging to socially excluded classes and kinship groups, poverty is manifested as the actual experience of hunger. There is reliance on informal social networks and coping mechanisms and these too get disrupted for a variety of reasons. In the communities in Southern Punjab, for example, some of the traditional forms of patronage (for example *seyp*) have disappeared. In the Northern Sindh communities where landlords still maintain patron-client relations with tenants and landless labourers, the floods have significantly eroded their ability to support the people facing food insecurity.

Residential security and infrastructure

Residential security and physical infrastructure around their homes were the next set of concerns. Many of the socially excluded families did not have secure rights of ownership or possession over their homesteads. There were various forms of insecurity across the fieldwork sites. Some families, for example the Scheduled Caste Hindu Jogis in Deh-1 live on plots of land belonging to local Syed landlords. The same is true of Odh families in Deh-2 who work as share tenants and have been provided homestead plots by their landlords. These families know that they could be evicted from their homes on short notice.

Many of the others face residential insecurity even though their homes are not, strictly speaking, on private lands belonging to other individuals. In Deh-2, for example, many of the landless families from socially excluded castes, who are or have been tenants of local landlords, live on dunes and higher land which nominally belongs to the government. Conventional systems of land ownership have provided rights of preemption to private landowners with holdings that are adjacent to state-owned dunes or other parcels of uncultivated area. Landless residents of villages on state-owned “wasteland” feel vulnerable, therefore, to pressure from these neighbouring landlords.

Kareeman Phulpoto a woman from a sharecropping tenant family in Deh-2 says:

“Our home is on government’s land but the Syed landowners often threatened us to take possession of the plot. We are poor so we will not be able to resist them.”

This is echoed by another woman Gullan Mai Mangrio:

“We live in a home made of mud and thatches. There is no latrine inside. Our homestead is one government land but it is adjacent to the Syed landlords’ property. They can evict us any time because this Deh belongs to them”

Then there are communities such as the residents of Ghareebabad in Mouza-1 who feel that they are secure in their possession of their homesteads, but are perpetually at odds with the village landlords over access to their homes, and the drainage of water out of the locality. In

a group discussion, women belonging to socially-excluded castes residing in Ghareebabad in Mouza-1 explained:

“We had asked our landlords to allow us to make a footpath for access to and from the main road which is about half a kilometer away from our part of the village. We have many problems with access because Ghareebabad is adjacent to crop fields and there is no proper road or path. There is no space to even a funeral process, or a vehicle in case there is an emergency with respect to a delivery. Sometimes the landowners inundated their fields blocking all access entirely. Our children have slipped and had to be rescued from being drowned when it rained. But we must remain silent. The main landlord Malik Muzafar said that he is ready to give us space but that the other landowners are not willing.”

A male respondent in Ghareebabad, Muhammad Bashir Khokhar, had a less benign view of the dominant landlord:

“We can’t refuse Malik Muzafar anything as his lands surround our village. If we do not obey him, he will not allow us to cross his land to access the main road and he will not allow us to collect shrubs and weeds for our livestock.”

Socially excluded families in Jinnah Colony and Deh-1 felt that they were relatively secure with respect to tenure, and had basic infrastructure in their localities. The fact that the government rather than a private landowner was the main stakeholder with respect to residential land accounted for this measure of security.

The *khuhs* and *vastis* in Muzaffargarh and the smaller *goths* in Sukkur were attempts by marginalised groups at attaining some measure of autonomy from locally dominant landowner families and kinship groups. The *Tarkhans* in Mouza-1 and the *Macchis* in Deh-2 represent cases of upward mobility of historically marginalised groups through non-farm employment. The residents of these two settlements continued to face some measure of resistance from locally powerful landowning families, but were also gradually acquiring infrastructure and residential security and autonomy. The provision of various forms of public infrastructure and facilities such as the paving of streets, drains, water supply and electricity, are important in themselves. It is also seen as contributing to security of tenure as the provision of infrastructure or a service signals official recognition (or *condonement*) of actual possession.

Floods

The floods of 2022 caused large-scale destruction in Sindh. Of the two fieldwork sites in Sukkur, Deh-1 was relatively protected due to its high elevation, and diversified economy. Some houses were damaged due to the rains, and the inundation of surrounding agricultural lands had an impact on the livelihoods of seasonal labourers. The fact that a large number of Deh-1’s workforce is engaged in stone quarrying and associated industries, made them less vulnerable to crop and livestock losses due to the flood. Deh-2, by contrast, was badly affected by the flood, with much of the cropland inundated, grain stores lost and buildings and roads left badly damaged. Although most of the villages in Deh-2 are on higher ground (on dunes) and escaped inundation, the damage to private and public infrastructure was substantial. The loss of livelihoods due to the destruction of crops was preceded, due to the long spell of rains by

the disruption of markets and essential services. Schooling and electricity were yet to be restored at the time of the fieldwork. The floods exacerbated hunger and food insecurity, as well as problems relating to housing and infrastructure. Although the fieldwork sites in Punjab were not affected by the floods of 2022, Jinnah Colony, a settlement for communities displaced by flooding, offers a useful historical comparative case.

Demand-making around basic needs

Food insecurity is only seen partly as a legitimate concern of policy or the government. Those who face food insecurity as well as those who are food secure frame food insecurity mostly as an issue of individual misfortune, and look to private means, such as help from relatives, neighbours, employers and other economic patrons, as coping strategies. The idea that an individual might have a right to food, a state-backed entitlement to freedom from hunger, or a legitimate political demand to be fed, is only mentioned with reference to disasters such as the flood. The presence of a large-scale government social protection intervention (Benazir Income Support Programme or BISP) with a large number of active and former beneficiaries in these communities is also seen as a matter of good fortune.

The other conspicuous source of economic vulnerability - viz insecure residential tenure - is also regarded as an outcome of individual circumstance rather than a political entitlement. The provision of infrastructure, however, is seen as a legitimate political demand in these communities.

The situation is different in the context of a disaster such as the floods of 2022, or the earlier floods in Muzaffargarh which led to the establishment of Jinnah Colony. Public or charitable provision of food and shelter, and relief supplies such as tents and medicines, or the deployment of pumping machines to drain water, is seen as a legitimate expectation- even an entitlement. In the Sukkur fieldwork communities, much of the discussion about the functioning of government and the efficacy or otherwise of elected representatives revolved around their role in the provision of flood-related support.

5.5 Formal and Informal Institutions

The ability of an individual to engage in collective action, or to access public goods, is an essential feature of her or his inclusion as an equal member of the community. Sections 5.1 to 5.3 above have provided a brief description of the various dimensions of social exclusion and inequality in the fieldwork communities. We have already highlighted the significance of patriarchal kinship group solidarity and the close association of social identity markers such as caste, tribe and religion with economic class. This subsection discusses how formal and informal institutions work in these communities with respect to essential public goods and services such as security, dispute resolution, local infrastructure, and social protection, and how those who face various dimensions of social exclusion access these institutions. An understanding of how these institutions actually function on the ground - particularly the contrast and interaction between formal and informal institutions - offers insights into existing structures of power, authority, leadership and organisation.

Security and dispute resolution

Disadvantaged individuals and groups face various types of security threats to the person and to property. The range of threats which our respondents have directly experienced or witnessed in the fieldwork communities include physical violence, sexual harassment and violence, theft of property (mostly livestock), and non-payment of dues. Structural violence including threats of eviction is embedded in their relationships with locally powerful families, and most actual disputes are more likely to occur with their own peers or groups that are of a comparable social and economic standing.

The presence of a formal system of administration, law enforcement and justice is no guarantee, in itself, of security or peaceful dispute resolution. An essential feature of social disadvantage is mediated access to formal institutions such as the police, courts and local land and irrigation administration. This is the case not only for women, who can rarely access any of these formal institutions independently of male members of their families, but also for men belonging to socially excluded classes and castes. In the Muzaffargarh fieldwork sites the common term for locally influential landowners with access to formal institutions is *goda*. A *goda* is the first point of access with respect to any dealings with the police, courts and the administration. A *goda* is also the person to approach for the arbitration of disputes if they cannot be handled within the family or the kinship groups, or with respect to any disputes with people of another kinship group. In the Sukkur fieldwork communities the term *vadero* (plural *vadera*) literally meaning elder, but implying a person with landed and political power, is used for local influential who performs this mediation. The institution of the *autaq* or male meeting place is an essential feature of this mediation.

Socially excluded groups often experience threats of insecurity in the form of crime, which they often associate with powerful local patrons. A group of women in Jinnah Colony explained:

“Here in our colony, theft is very common and if you complain you need to pay money as a bribe to police, and you have to pay money to the criminals for the recovery of your property. We are enslaved by powerful people. We are not in big cities where there is no influence of a *chaudhri* [powerful landowner] or *vadera*.”

According to a group of women belonging to disadvantaged kinship groups resident in the Ghareebabad segment of Mouza-1 mentioned:

“We let them (our *godas*) do whatever they want to do, and why should we confront them? Why should we face them? We are helpless and they can get us killed, kidnapped, get us arrested, and create all sorts of problems for us. These things happen all the time but we just have to forget about them. If we fight anyone, we will be jailed. In any case we don't want enmity therefore we don't go outside.”

The women also allude to sexual harassment at the hands of the patron and his men, as a way of keeping their families under a constant state of threat:

“We are poor but everyone values their honour. They don't hesitate to abuse or beat someone and they don't care if it is night or day. We don't keep domestic animals because of the fear of theft. After any theft they ask the police to arrest our own men

in Ghareebabad but not the actual thieves. The goons of political parties forcibly enter our homes. Our honour is always threatened.”

The all-encompassing role of the goda or the vadero with respect to institutional access, particularly in matters relating government functions or arbitration has several facets that are typical of a broader patronage relationship. The goda/vadero provides institutional access and arbitration in return for subservience and membership of a loosely or tightly constituted solidarity network. The client is obliged to demonstrate his affiliation to the patron by being available to offer political support. The relationship, furthermore, also involves some degree of protection to the client from other powerful men, and from state officials. The position of the goda/vadero and the relationship are both stable in the sense that both sides are predictably affiliated with each other. Neither the position of the patron nor the relationship of patronage are unchanging. A patron might become less powerful or fade away, and others from within his family or elsewhere might emerge. Clients do develop new relationships with other patrons.

The position of the patron has increasingly become a political one. While control over economic resources such as agricultural land, and the use of common or nominally state- owned resources for development, residence, passage and irrigation are important strategic levers, clients in our fieldwork communities are not necessarily tenants, servants or otherwise economic dependents of patrons. The ability of a patron to cultivate and maintain relations with administrative officials, police and higher level politicians, therefore, is a critical aspect of his power over clients, and his local power, in turn, is a factor in his access to these state functionaries or political leaders.

The role of the patron as an arbitrator in disputes is a source of legitimacy and political power. Somar Abro, a man belonging to an upwardly mobile kinship group illustrated this with a recent example:

“Just 20 days ago there was a dispute between us Abro and another caste over the drainage of flood water from the land. We called upon our chief and he resolved the issue. He appointed me as a guarantor between the two parties. He announced my name - that ‘vadero Somar’ is taking responsibility that both parties will not fight in future.”

Access to the patron himself is mediated through the prevailing power structure within the community. Male heads of kinship groups, extended families and then families are the main channels of communication which are regarded as public transactions. Women are marginalised, almost by definition, in these networks, as are younger men and older or differently men who are themselves dependent on able-bodied male heads of household. The patronage system also privileges other markers of hierarchy such as caste and religion, and reinforces to a great extent the existing hierarchy of power. In both Muzaffargarh and Sukkur some of the patrons are from the Syed caste which is respected for its lineage. Almost all others are from other landowning kinship groups.

Social protection

Informal social protection systems have traditionally relied upon patronage-based relationships involving economic dependence. Landlords, for example, are expected to cover the consumption smoothing needs of their tenants, farm servants and labourers. The traditional seyp system in Punjab was an institutionalised arrangement which combined elements of livelihood security, social protection and patronage. The dependence of kammiss and servants on grain producing farmers was one side of the bargain - the other being their assured entitlement to a share in the harvest. Share tenancy is still present to some extent in villages in Deh-2. In other fieldwork sites traditional economic relations of dependence have given way to casual wage relations. Informal social protection is mostly limited now to mutual support among relatives and within kinship groups.

Formal systems of social protection, in the meanwhile, have also developed. The federal government's unconditional cash transfer (BISP) which provides a quarterly allowance to ever-married women in eligible households targets beneficiaries on the basis not of the recommendation of a local patron, but of a poverty score calculated using data collected from applicants. The payments too are disbursed directly to the women using online transfers for which their NADRA identity cards are required. This system leaves almost no scope for local or political intercession on behalf of a beneficiary.

Even so, there are still gaps in the working of formal social protection systems. First, while the BISP is widely understood as not being connected with local patronage, it is still not quite seen as a right. Since targeting is based on a poverty score - which, virtually by design, is calculated using an opaque formula - there are many people who consider themselves poor, and are even deemed by the community as being poor, who can be excluded. There are also some people who are considered by the community as not being particularly poor, who might be included due to data errors or other factors. Given that there is relatively little communication between the programme and its beneficiaries other than the cash payment itself, for many of the poorest people in the fieldwork communities it becomes easy to believe that their inclusion is due to some arbitrary process. This is interpreted by some as sheer good fortune, and by others as a personal favour by either Benazir Bhutto and in some cases by Imran Khan. In a wider institutional setting where patronage-based intercession is the norm, the local patron has been displaced, in the imaginations of some of the most marginalised people by higher level political patrons, at least for now.

Despite the success of the BISP and other impersonalised systems for the disbursement of public funds, many (non-cash based) elements of the overall formal social protection response continue to operate through local patronage. Access to various forms of flood relief - an issue that was conspicuous for respondents in the Sukkur fieldwork communities - were mediated by the vadero in concert with his higher level political or administrative connections. The supply of cooked meals, the provision of shelter, dry rations, medicines and tents were often attributed by the beneficiaries to specific intermediaries, and complaints about the non-delivery or inadequacy of these supplies was blamed on the ineffectiveness, disloyalty, or corruption of these intermediaries.

6. Political Participation

6.1 Forms of Participation

Political participation takes many forms in the fieldwork communities. These include voting, of course, but also a range of activities around elections such as taking part in canvassing for votes as a mobiliser or a subject, taking part in community-level discussions and agreements about voting behaviour, belonging to a vote bloc or faction, taking part in organising or attending political activities for a party, candidate or local political worker for the party or candidate, and being a political worker. There are also political activities - though far fewer ones - that parties, candidates or local politicians initiate outside of the election season. Moreover, some of our interviewees recall taking part in adversarial political activities such as protests.

People speak about political participation in various ways. The generic Urdu word for politics - *siyasat* - is widely used in our fieldwork communities in both the districts. In these communities, however, the word has a negative connotation. It is taken to imply negotiation which often involves deception or manipulation, and rarely used to describe engagement with public concerns, collective action, or representation. Even while many of the residents of these communities are deeply engaged with political activity - in these of participation in public affairs - there is no local term which can convey the range of activities covered under 'political participation'. The Urdu language translation which is commonly used in the media - *siyasi amal mein hisa lena* - literally, taking part in the political process - or any other equivalent term is absent from the local metaphor in these communities.

Individual political activities, however, are named and talked about in the local metaphor. 'Vote', for example, has been adapted into all the local languages, and is spoken of, mostly in a positive sense. Unlike *siyasat* which is considered a dubious activity, many of the interviewees in these communities speak of the vote and voting as ethical. A vote, or the right to vote, is spoken of as *amanat* or sacred trust or promise - the word *amanat* is generally used to invoke a moral and religious obligation for the honest guardianship or disposal of another person's property. Another description of vote is using the terms such as *farz* and *wajib* which literally mean religious duty.

Taking part in collective decision-making with respect to voting choices and behaviour is also seen to be endowed with moral value. In Muzaffargarh (and elsewhere in Punjab) the word *kath* or *akath* is used to signify a community gathering where matters of public interest are to be discussed and decided upon. In the fieldwork sites in Sindh the word *meRh* was used to describe meetings where members or representatives of the community receive candidates or their agents and agree to provide support. The word *meRh* is used otherwise for gatherings where other matters of community or kinship group interest - for example dispute resolution - can be initiated or officiated by local notables. It is taken for granted that in gatherings such as *kath* or *meRh* there is discussion not only about offering political support to a candidate, party or faction, but also about airing demands which the voters expect to be heard and addressed.

As for the vote, English language words have been adapted for taking part in organised political activity on behalf of a party or candidate. The words ‘political worker’ or ‘party worker’ have come to describe someone who is a dedicated political activist. Local words derived from these terms such as ‘*varkar*’ and ‘*varkari*’ have become part of the local lexicon denoting an activist and political activism respectively. In the Sindh fieldwork sites the term ‘*kamred*’ which is derived from comrade is used to describe an activist for one of the secular political parties or candidates. There are cases in the fieldwork communities of individuals who become full-time paid party or candidate workers for various lengths of time - particularly around election time.

Siyasat, in the fieldwork communities, is the domain of relatively well-off and influential men. Men who can act as local leaders, intermediaries and negotiators - including those from relatively marginalised castes and kinship groups - are seen indulging in various forms of siyasat. Participation in informal and socially-sanctioned meetings and negotiations such as *kath* and *meRh* are also mostly male prerogatives. The organisers, leaders and hosts of these gatherings are usually older and able-bodied adult men from leading castes and kinship groups, particularly those with land or other economic assets. But these gatherings are only considered successful if they include a wider range of participants from other classes and castes. The structure of these gatherings is similar to other social or traditional events such as weddings or dispute arbitration forums - where the main interaction is between the hosts (local notables) and guests (candidates or their agents), with the presence of other participants demonstrating the support enjoyed by the notables in the local community.

A wider group, still, among men is involved in canvassing and activism - various degrees of *varkari* - on behalf of parties and candidates. These include individuals from dominant as well as marginalised classes and castes - in fact, the bulk of the *varkars* come from the latter. The next rung, with respect to political activity, is to obtain news on public issues, and to discuss such matters among peers. Many of the men in the fieldwork communities say that they keep themselves informed and engage in political discussion. Finally, voting is one political activity in which a wide range of people - women and men from various classes and castes - participate. In fact, the participation of women from dominant classes and castes is far more limited due to stricter gender segregation among these families.

The fieldwork included questions about whether a person had considered offering herself or himself as a candidate, or canvassing for votes for a party or candidates. Responses to these questions mirrored the broader patterns of social exclusion. Women are virtually absent, in our fieldwork communities, as protagonists or subjects, from the whole range of political activity up to voting. The most common answer to the question about their absence from these activities is that it is the task of men to engage with other men about public matters. According to this view, the men of the family instruct women about voting - whether to vote, and whom to vote for.

The perspective of Fatima Khokhar, a woman from a landless family, in the main village of Mouza-1 was echoed by many others:

“We are poor and uneducated so we don’t know what siyasat is, but our men know what it is. We dare not take part in these things. God forbids us.”

Bashiran Memon from Deh-1 says:

“If our men ask us, we can take part in political activities but it is pointless for us to do so because the poor have no say in these matters anyway.”

Shabana, a woman from a historically marginalised kammi family in Jinnah Colony, Mouza-2, reiterates this linkage of status with the value of political activity, and also implies that it is unacceptable for a woman to be seen outdoors:

“We are so poor and powerless so how will I take part in politics or do varkari? Our men also can't do it. And also, my husband will never allow me to leave home.”

The association of women going outdoors and taking part in political activity is conflated with the loss of respect and status associated with women's mobility. In a group discussion women from one historically marginalised group in Gareebabad Mouza-1 implied that they were more respectable than their counterparts from another caste because the latter were seen at public events:

“Here all caste groups decide their votes themselves - the men decide whom to vote for. There is one low caste group which is 'forward' [implying sexually uninhibited] in various political activities. The women of this caste attend and dance at political gatherings but we feel shy. Our women and young girls don't go to take part in political activities, and in any case, we can't take part in politics because we are mostly illiterate.”

A similar point was made in a group discussion with marginalised men in Deh-1:

“To take part in politics you need to be financially sound. There is a Jagirdari [feudal] system here. No one says openly that women should not take part in politics or not work outside but all men are actually not willing that their women should be active. In education women are left behind. Most men believe that if girls go out they will be thought of as immoral. That is why they don't allow the young girls to go out.”

Many of the women and men from marginalised classes and castes said that it was out of the question for them to put themselves forward as candidates, or even to imagine canvassing for votes. Saeed Ahmed, a man from the historically-designated kammi caste (paoli or weavers) in Mouza-1 explained:

“No one from our caste can ask a person of any other caste to vote but people from other castes can ask and pressurise us to vote. They can ask me who I had voted for. People of our caste are not capable of asking someone to vote. Our votes, like those of other low caste groups, do not amount to anything for us. So, no one from our caste dared to fill candidature forms even for a councillor's seat, and if someone had dared he would be harmed and punished. If I stand in the election people will taunt - look, a paoli is now contesting elections and he will now decide for us”

According to Soni, a woman interviewee from a meerasi family from Ghareebabad in Mouza-1 - a caste traditionally associated with providing musical entertainment at social gatherings of landowners:

“We poor can’t take part in political activity. On election day ‘they’ see us and call out ‘look, the drumbeat dancers are here to vote’ How we can do politics? We are perceived as a low caste so we have no status to take part in any social or political activities. No women or men from our caste are active in any political party. We can’t vote on our will. Personally, I am a fan of Imran Khan and wish to vote for Imran’s candidate but we have to follow the goda’s orders.”

Active political participation is not only difficult for women and men from socially marginalised classes and castes. There are constraints for the more mainstreamed groups too, as Banheen Sahoo from a small landowning family from Mouza-1 recounted:

“My husband got involved in the election campaign in the hope that he will be rewarded with a candidature in the local elections. But the goda who was managing the campaign cheated him. He got my husband to pay for campaign expenses in return for a promise to help him stand. My husband ended up borrowing a lot of money from family and friends. The creditors started to threaten us, therefore my husband sold a plot of land and our family house.”

While voting is seen, almost universally, as a political activity in which most people can and do participate, engagement with other aspects of political participation is highly constrained by social position. Membership of or activism with political parties or candidates (*varkari*) is almost exclusively a male domain in the fieldwork communities. Other forms of participation such as collective decision-making regarding voting - for example attending *akhat* - is also confined to able-bodied men. The participation of men from socially excluded classes and castes is limited to giving acquiescence to decisions taken by men from more powerful families. The constraints to political participation in activities other than voting are partly imposed - through both coercive means as well as through more subtle acts such as holding people to public ridicule - and partly self-enforced.

6.2 Reasons for Participating

For socially excluded individuals and groups in the fieldwork communities the reasons given for participation in political activity - in most cases in voting, and in some cases also activities other than voting - could be classified under four broad themes. The same individual or group could cite multiple, overlapping and at times contradictory reasons.

Obligation: vote as amanat

As noted above, across the board, and particularly among respondents from socially excluded groups, there was a narrative of the vote being *amanat*. It is not clear immediately what the origins are of the cross-over of a religious-moral term, as well as others such as *farz* and *wajib*, into the electoral realm. But what is striking is that the idea of the vote as a moral obligation was present across fieldwork communities in the two provinces.

Very few respondents, if any, expanded the idea of obligation to cover public duty or service. The conversation about vote as amanat, therefore, was often infused with the notion of an explicit or implied pledge to a candidate, a vote bloc leader, or a party.

The idea of voting as redeeming an amanat or farz was also a way, at times, of avoiding a more intrusive discussion about the merits or otherwise of a particular party or candidate. Under conditions of political competition, and with often vociferous rival claims and counterclaims about the qualities of particular politicians, parties, candidates and local factional heads, invoking a moral duty allowed people to obviate the need to express their own political opinion as a positive reason for voting for a particular candidate.

There was also a sense, particularly among the social excluded classes and castes, that they were true to their word. In some ways, then, reference to amanat was a way of reassuring others that a person or group were reliable interlocutors in a potential political transaction.

Patronage and transactional relations

Affiliation with a vote bloc or a patron, and transactional relations with the political system, mediated by the vote bloc or patron, was perhaps the most widely cited reason for political (or electoral) participation in the fieldwork communities. At the core of the vote bloc or patronage-based mobilisation and organisation of votes, however, is the patriarchal family. Virtually all of the conversation about vote bloc and transactional politics was with adult men, and within this demographic group, the most marginalised or the most dependent families and men were least visible. This does not mean, of course, men representing families from otherwise socially excluded classes, castes and kinship groups were not a part of vote blocs or patronage networks. On the contrary, they formed the main bulk of participants in these political alignments in our fieldwork communities. The inclusion of these adult men, however, highlighted the non-participation of, or passive acquiescence of women in general, and women and men from extremely dependent and marginalised families in particular.

The political interaction of adult men from various classes and castes mirrors their interaction in other social and collective matters. The patron - goda or vadero - are accessible to adult male heads of families, either directly, or through local intermediaries. The same channels of communication and collective action, presided over or mediated by the very same individuals, are evident with respect to electoral mobilisation. The relationship with the patron is premised on the view that all access to public resources and state institutions needs to be mediated through someone with influence, and the electoral transaction is a good opportunity for establishing, strengthening or reviving the relationship. The exclusion of women from these interactions is systematic. Women and men say that women have to abide by the decisions and instructions of adult males of their families.

The exclusion of many of the men from direct participation in transactional politics is a function of their perceived capacity and autonomy. Those men who are dependent on others - due to frailty, disability, or economic despair - or those who are considered to be outside social networks due to disputes or forms of isolation are left out of transactional politics too.

There is a range in the degree of autonomy or power enjoyed by an individual or family in transactional politics. Even among the socially excluded classes and castes there are many men who deal with vote bloc leaders and local patrons and their agents on relatively equal terms. Those seeking political and electoral support need to approach potential members of the vote bloc, listen to their concerns, and ask for votes. Many of the respondents mentioned taking part in these encounters, while also acknowledging that they would have little option but to become part of a vote bloc or to reiterate their support for one.

Then there were individuals who said that they had no choice but to give their political support to a dominant patron and that it was out of the question to show any dissent. For these individuals it was taken for granted that they would support a particular patron or his agent, without any need for even a perfunctory semblance of a transaction. In fact, the transaction that was implied, as well as explicitly stated in these relationships was that providing political support was necessary to avoid coercive sanction including physical violence, threats of eviction.

Ghullam Hussain Pachar, a landless man from Jinnah Colony, Mouza-2, faces coercion but also sees an opportunity in politics:

“We follow the goda’s orders and if we defy, his people would barricade our street through encroachments. If you will not obey the goda’s orders they will not beat you openly but will get revenge for non-obedience by various means. But I am better off than others like the low-caste Paolis who would vote on my advice. We are local and poor so we know the core issues of our people and we can better guide them than the goda.”

The case of Faraz Hussain Jaam, a landless labourer from Mouza-1, is illustrative of the more nuanced situation in which many socially excluded people find themselves:

“No one from our family is in politics. We just cast our votes and return home. In the last general elections, we had voted on the instructions of goda Safdar Khan. He asked to vote for Syed Basit Shah who was contesting against Chunoon Khan’s son. He called a meeting here to ask people to vote. The landlords use both gentle persuasion and pressure to get votes in their favour. The candidate never asked us directly for vote but they fully rely on the local goda. But if they suspect that our 8 families would not vote for them they call the goda to follow-up and get a promise from us. We have no direct access to the candidates. We need to spend money and approach him through our local goda.”

In a group discussion pro-PTI men belonging to landowning castes in Jinnah Colony were candid about who supports whom and why:

“The [marginalised] qasai caste has ten families here. They are all in the ‘goda’ league [irreverent reference to patronage-based vote bloc]. They have voted on the will of their goda since the 2018 elections. Among the qasai caste only two households are well-off, one is middle income and all others are very poor. They are dependent on the patron.”

The element of coercion exists not only in the relationship between the adult male head with the vote bloc leader or patron. It extends into the family. Women, for example, cited a blend of consent and coercion in their political behaviour. Some women stated, for example, that they see no advantage and plenty of inconvenience in turning out to vote. They said, however, that their men's respect in (the wider male) community had to be protected, and that turning out to vote when their men had given their word to someone was a way of doing so. Women also mentioned that they faced the threat of domestic violence if they did not comply with the instructions of the male heads of their families with respect to turning out and voting for a particular candidate.

There is clear differentiation in the conversation in our fieldwork communities, including among those from socially excluded groups, between party affiliation, and transactional politics through a local patron. In the Muzaffargarh fieldwork communities, for example, some people speak of local patrons as the 'goda league' - or the goda party. In the Sukkur fieldwork sites where the main patrons belong to the Syed caste, people speak generally of the Syeds in distinction with the party they might represent. The fact that many local politicians and patrons have shifted party affiliations, or at times pursued factional interests at odds with their party, simply underscores the perception in the minds of ordinary voters that parties and patrons are different entities which come together in various combinations at election time.

Political affiliation and positive preference

Electoral participation is not shaped by transnational local politics alone. As noted above, respondents, including those from socially excluded groups, make a clear distinction between patronage-based mobilisation and political parties. In the fieldwork communities, parties are generally identified, by supporters and opponents alike, with individual leaders. The only notable exception in this regard was an Islamic religious party in the Sukkur fieldwork site. People who were not active supporters of that party referred to it casually as the "mulla party" without clearly identifying it by the name of its leader. Also in the Sukkur communities, the Pir Pagaro and his followers who are organised as a political party were known popularly as *hur* or the *hur jamait*.

A number of national leaders were recognised by respondents from among the socially excluded in all the fieldwork communities. To the extent that people spoke about particular characteristics and narratives associated with these national leaders, it is possible to say that there was some understanding of different ideological or policy positions. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the founding leader of the PPP was mentioned by a number of elderly respondents in Muzaffargarh as a leader they followed and admired. He was associated, in their minds, with virtues such as "giving awareness to the poor", and "giving voice to the people". Specifically, he was thought to be associated by elder respondents from the marginalised classes and castes in Muzaffargarh villages with their own residential security.

There was comparable recognition of his daughter and successor Benazir Bhutto who was widely admired (and lamented) as a brave woman who had been unjustly assassinated. Some of the Muzaffargarh respondents, such as those in Jinnah Colony, attributed their allotments

of homesteads through a provincial government programme to Benazir and her tenure as Prime Minister. Among some respondents in Muzaffargarh and many in Sukkur, Benazir was seen as a saintly figure. In Sukkur, for example, a number of respondents mentioned visiting her mausoleum periodically to pay their respects to the slain leader as a spiritual and not a political activity. In both districts Benazir was also thought to be associated with the eponymous BISP. It was commonly believed by women respondents who were BISP beneficiaries that the benefit was a personal bequest from the leader.

Another national leader who was widely recognised by respondents from socially excluded groups was Imran Khan, the head of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and a former Prime Minister. Many individuals who expressed a commitment to electoral participation did so due to their support for Khan. There was no specific benefit - like residential security or social protection - which was attributed to Khan, but there was some understanding and appreciation for his narrative about corruption in public life and misapprehensions about professional politicians as 'thieves'. The underlying aversion in the fieldwork communities to politics or *siyasat* as an unethical and duplicitous activity favoured the perception that Khan was not, himself, a professional politician. The ubiquitous presence of the PTI chief in the imaginations of respondents could be seen even in the way that individuals who opposed him perceived his power and influence. Members of a community in Sukkur that faced the threat of eviction because of a court order for removing encroachments said that they were protected by the PPP but that they had faced insecurity when Imran Khan was Prime Minister, because they feared that he did have the capacity to displace them. Women in both Muzaffargarh and Sukkur complained that they had stopped receiving their BISP benefits because Khan had personally blocked them.

Beyond these three leaders - two of whom are deceased - respondents from socially excluded groups did not identify other national or provincial level politicians and party leaders as factors in their voting behaviour. Many of the respondents in the Muzaffargarh communities who identified with Bhutto and Benazir also stated that they no longer voted for the PPP. These respondents mentioned local leaders who influenced their voting choices, and the fact that some of those politicians had shifted their party affiliations from the PPP to other parties. Leader of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his brother Shehbaz Sharif were not mentioned as independent factors influencing voting behaviour. If they were mentioned at all in the Punjab fieldwork communities it was either with reference to the affiliation of a particular *goda*, or in a negative light to underscore Imran Khan's narrative of corrupt politicians.

District level politicians were recognised and mentioned by respondents, including socially excluded groups, across the fieldwork communities. These were almost always spoken of with respect to their positions in the patronage system. Even if these politicians had maintained a long allegiance to a particular party - for example, the Member National Assembly (MNA) and his supporting candidates in Sukkur - these individuals were recognised primarily as people at the top of a patronage network, and only secondarily for their party affiliation. As though to underscore this distinction between party/national leaders and local politicians, respondents pointedly spoke of instances when individuals belonging to a patronage network had opposed or undermined the candidature of someone from their own parties.

One important factor in aligning oneself with a national leader and voting for her or his candidates was precisely the narrative, among some of the socially excluded groups, of treating the national leader or party as a foil to the power of the local patron. Individuals, even from socially and economically disadvantaged groups, and particularly from them, spoke of their direct connection with the party leader - connection which did not involve other politicians as intermediaries. Being recognised as a supporter of Benazir or Imran Khan, for example, was presented as a small act of resistance to the local goda or vadero.

Individual and group identity and pride

Participating in elections, being identified with a party, candidate or vote bloc, and then ‘their’ candidate winning or doing well, were all mentioned by respondents from socially excluded groups as sources of individual and group identity and pride.

Kareeman Phulpoto, a woman from a landless family in Deh-2 said:

“We are poor and can’t abstain from voting and we feel happy when our zamindar [landlords] win but they should also take care and think about us.”

Similarly, according to Mai Bhagi a woman from a low caste family in Jinnah Colony, Mouza-2:

“If you cast your vote and your candidate wins it becomes a matter of pride for you. It makes you happy.”

In a group discussion, men from socially excluded castes in Mouza-1 combined the concept of the vote as an obligation with the feelings of pride at voting:

“It is known that the vote is an amanat so everyone should cast their votes but there is also some direct benefit to a voter. If their preferred candidate wins it brings a moment of happiness and celebration. In either case, people spend their own money to reach polling stations. For some people elections are festive events and they enjoy celebrating and taunting opponents.”

Marium Khatoon Mirbhar, a woman from a traditionally fishing community in Deh-1 also identified with the success of a winning candidate:

“We feel happy if through our vote someone rises up in the world”.

This sense of identity and pride was a significant factor among socially excluded groups who sought symbolic parity with the dominating segments of the community. Contributing to a victory - even at the level of a polling station, if not an entire constituency - was a source of celebration because it underlined their value to the winning candidate. For some of the socially excluded classes and castes electoral participation offered an opportunity to demonstrate that they were reliable political partners who were capable of delivering on their word (that is, make a credible promise to vote a particular way).

6.3 Reasons for not participating

Although ECP data show that a large proportion of registered voters in the fieldwork communities did not turn out to vote in the 2018 general elections, very few respondents admitted to not having voted.²⁶ The reasons given by those who did admit to not having voted can be broadly classified into four categories: inconvenience, unfamiliarity, incomplete documentation, and not voting as an expression of dissatisfaction or dissent.

Inconvenience

The most common reason given for not voting by women was that of inconvenience. In some of the fieldwork communities the polling stations were at some distance and women voters were put off by the time that needed to set aside for the commute. There was also a sense that the experience was not comfortable and that there might be long queues.

In Mouza-1 the issue of inconvenience was tied up with the complaint that many of the votes were incorrectly placed at the village of main Mouza which made it difficult for voters to exercise their right.

Unfamiliarity

Some non-voters from marginalised communities expressed unfamiliarity with the voting process as a reason for not turning out. They had not voted in the past and the mental barrier of actually turning out and going through the experience of casting their vote appeared to be high enough to deter them from voting. Other individuals from a similar socio-economic background who had voted in the past, and were familiar with the process, thought that it was both simple and convenient. The issue of convenience, therefore, was partly linked to familiarity. Those who were used to voting did not regard the distance and the waiting time experienced in their most recent experience of voting as particularly onerous.

Documentation

The absence of complete documentation - namely a valid CNIC - played out in many different ways. There were many young people who had not yet applied for a CNIC, and were therefore not registered as voters. A number of families across the fieldwork communities reported that they did not apply for a CNIC for a young woman until such time as she got married. There were others who said that they wanted to apply for a CNIC but faced difficulties in obtaining one - usually because of family quarrels or the unavailability of family members who were needed in order to complete the documentation process required by NADRA. Finally there were many individuals who were unable to vote because, although they had applied for and received their CNICs, they no longer possessed a valid card which was lost or damaged.

²⁶ There is likely to be a reporting bias - with non-voters being unwilling to report that they did not vote. The prevalence of the 'vote as amanat' narrative across these communities is one likely explanation of such a bias.

Dissatisfaction

There were some respondents from socially excluded groups who said that they did not vote, or that they voted despite not wanting to vote, because they were unhappy with the candidate, his agent, or vote bloc leader. Some of them said that if they had the choice they would not have voted, but they were bound to vote because of their relationship with the patron or vote block leader. The option of not voting was sometimes used as a bargaining lever in the negotiation with vote-seekers - even though it was expected that ultimately a commitment will be made and will need to be fulfilled. Those who raised the possibility of not voting as a mark of dissent, therefore, were from families who were less dependent and had some leeway to bargain.

7. Interaction between Social Inclusion and Political process

Section 5 identified salient features of social exclusion in the fieldwork sites, and the intersection between them. Political participation, as seen from the perspective of socially disadvantaged individuals and groups was described in Section 4. In this section we turn to some of the main dimensions and processes of social exclusion, to examine if or how they were manifested or addressed in the prevailing system of political representation on the ground.

Women's exclusion from various formal and informal institutions is, of course, a recurrent theme. In this section we ask whether and how the existing political system reproduces or counters female disadvantage. We also examine how other individuals who are deemed to be dependent, such as differently abled people, young people and the elderly, interact with the political process (Section 5.1). We showed in Section 3 that class, caste, social identity and kinship groups are deeply interconnected in the fieldwork communities, in shaping social and economic inequality. Here (Sections 5.2-5.4) we examine three key areas through which these social and economic disparities manifest themselves - namely hunger and poverty, residential insecurity, and patronage. We use insights from the fieldwork communities to ask whether and how these salient concerns of the socially excluded classes and castes interact with the political process.

7.1 Women and other "dependents"

Women face systematic exclusion from economic resources and social institutions based on their gender. As we have shown in Section 3.1, female disadvantage is often premised on the active policing of social norms with respect to a gendered division of space, and restrictions on women's physical mobility in public spaces. Gender interacts with age and class, in these communities, in determining access. The role of women in decision-making within the context of the home and family too is prescribed, with the expectation that matters relating to the public realm are a near-exclusive domain of adult able men. While in the case of women, dependence on male family members is an enforced norm, men who are differently abled, elderly, or very young, are deemed to be dependent by the virtue of their limited capacity.

The institutional framework of citizenship-based rights, entitlements and obligations is, at least nominally, at odds with the assignment of entire groups as being dependent or enjoying limited agency on grounds of gender, age and disability. The vote is an obvious citizenship-based entitlement of all adults regardless of socially-constructed dependence based on gender, age and difference in ability.

The act of voting, which in the Pakistani context depends on having a valid CNIC, turning up at the polling station, and navigating your way through the polling process, is in itself an equaliser for most women and some of the men who face dependence. Although the CNIC is a mandatory citizenship document, the process for acquiring it is not always a straightforward one. Getting out of home and one's neighbourhood to a public building, often away from the village, also involves a disruption of the normal practice of adult women and men facing infirmity or disability staying at or close to home. Navigating through an official process, likewise, can expand the range of experiences that "dependents" are familiar with. It might be argued that acquiring the prerequisites to voting - such as a CNIC - and gaining practical knowledge of official spaces and processes can lead to greater confidence in approaching other public places and institutions.

The case of Waheedullah Lakho, a 29 years old man in Jinnah Colony, Mouza-2, who faces multiple challenges with respect to physical ability and social connections, is illustrative of the difficulties:

"I suffer from polio. My wife is also disabled. We don't have any children. My father's first wife was killed in a family feud in our native village. Due to enmity with my phupho [paternal aunt's husband] we had to flee from our native village called Lakha Moosa. My uncle is a violent man who has murdered six people. We just had to leave. No one in our home had cast a vote in 2018 because we lost our documents due to the displacement. I will vote in the next election because now my CNIC is in process."

It is not only the act of voting which can disrupt patriarchal institutions. Other forms of engagement with politics - such as those identified in Section 4 - might have the same effect. Of the four main drivers of voting or political participation that our respondents spoke about - viz citizenship-based obligation (amanat), political affiliation or preference, identity and transactional politics - three refer in some way to individual agency outside of the prevailing social structure. In fact, these three factors dominated the narrative of women respondents including those from socially disadvantaged classes and castes. The direct, if symbolic, connection with remote institutions and entities such as citizenship, political leaders, and parties bypasses all of the patriarchal structures that normally act as necessary intermediaries between adult women and the outside world. Positive feelings of group membership and taking part in a collective activity, and happiness with "their" side winning, are also, at least, in part, disruptive of patriarchal norms which limit women's social affiliation to family and kinship-based groups.

The organisation of transactional politics, on the other hand, which is cited in the fieldwork communities as another important reason for political participation, is mostly along the lines of existing patriarchal institutions. The main protagonists are adult and able men, including those from socially disadvantaged classes and castes. Interaction with women is almost explicitly

ruled out from both sides. Women are neither allowed to nor expected to participate in any meetings or discussions with politicians and their agents, and the candidates make no effort to reach out to women voters. Women's votes are promised by adult male heads of their families, and women's compliance is ensured through a range of instruments from wholehearted enthusiasm to physical coercion. Transactional politics would normally address women's concern only insofar as the men representing those women in the political negotiation and relationship-building are able or willing to reflect those concerns.

Of the main reasons cited in our fieldwork communities for not voting - inconvenience, unfamiliarity, incomplete documentation, and dissent or protest - the first three refer almost exclusively to women and "dependent" men. These are mostly direct outcomes of women's restricted autonomous access to public spaces and institutions. Factors which improve women's integration into the mainstream - say, for example, obtaining CNICs in order to access social protection programmes such as the BISP - reduce some of the impediments to their political participation. Not voting or threatening to not vote as a sign of protest was mentioned mostly with reference to the relationship between potential or actual constituents of vote blocs with vote bloc leaders, candidates or their local agents. The dissent, therefore, was almost invariably driven by collective action among adult men deciding for their entire families.

7.2 Hunger, Poverty and Social Protection

Extreme poverty, manifested as vulnerability to hunger, was cited by many respondents, women and men, from disadvantaged classes and castes as a reason for not taking an active part in political activity. Economic precarity was compounded with the absence of resources, time, and capacity, as well as social marginality - all of these working together to prevent any possibility of engaging in collective action.

For example, Faraz Hussain Jaam in Jinnah Colony said:

“We are struggling with *tukar pani* [basic staples] - how will we be able to come into politics and ask others to vote for us or follow us.”

Vulnerability to hunger and precarious economic conditions become political issues for the socially excluded in our fieldwork communities in a number of ways. First, it needs to be noted that unlike other perceived rights and entitlements - say, for example, electricity connections or local infrastructure - food security is not articulated directly as a political demand other than in the context of flood relief. In the two flood-affected fieldwork sites in Sukkur mainstream and socially excluded classes and castes alike speak openly and candidly about their expectations with respect to relief supplies, how they went about demanding these, who was responsive and how, and then the likely impact of that experience on their future political behaviour.

There are other demands and issues which could be interpreted as being driven by chronic food insecurity or vulnerability to hunger. The demand for a secure government job for a family member or relative, for example, can be seen as a means of achieving food security. Some respondents in the fieldwork sites in Sukkur mentioned that a member of their family, kinship

group or even village getting a government job through political intercession would be regarded as an important factor in their support for a candidate. It was not considered a realistic possibility, however, of someone from a disadvantaged class or caste gaining such an opportunity.

There was an active conversation among women and men from disadvantaged classes and castes across the fieldwork sites about social protection in general and the BISP in particular. There were many BISP beneficiaries in the fieldwork sites, and for them the quarterly cash stipend was an important source of avoiding vulnerability to hunger. Their understanding of the programme and their own status as beneficiaries, however, was usually in terms of personal patronage. It was well known that local politicians, their agents or vote block leaders had little or no influence in getting a person selected as a beneficiary. There was, nevertheless, confusion about the process. Many of the women thought that they had been favoured by Benazir Bhutto herself, and that the cash transfer was a bequest from the personal estate of the deceased leader. The situation of others, who thought that they were as poor if not poorer than their neighbours who had been selected as beneficiaries, reinforced the perception that selection was somehow a favour granted to her devotees by Benazir. A policy-driven exercise for updating beneficiary lists, which resulted in some former beneficiaries being de-selected, was also seen by many respondents as a directed act of political victimisation by the then prime minister.

A woman, Samina Abro, in Deh-2 who was a BISP beneficiary invoked the support from the programme in explaining her devotion to Benazir Bhutto:

“The candidate of Imran Khan had offered us money but we had not accepted their offer. I am a fan of Shaheed Benazir and my heart has decided that if I will be able to vote I shall vote for teer [arrow - election symbol of PPP] and teer. Because I fed my children with her money. I stamp on teer also in a hope that PPP will come into power again and they will reinstate mine and other women’s money which were stopped by Imran Khan”.

In a group discussion with relatively well-off men in Mouza-1 explained that BISP could also be a catalyst for protest:

“The women who are not getting BISP often retaliate and refrain from casting their vote altogether. And if Abdul Malik (councillor) and Malik Muzafar (landlord) would go to ask for votes for their favoured candidate the voters say we and our children are facing hunger, we are not getting any cash support like others who are receiving BISP. They often argue that we are surviving on daily wages so how can you ask us to forego our earnings and waste time in queues in harsh conditions at polling stations. You people don’t feed us. They vote only in case they have any personal interest. There was a big social change a decade ago. People were interdependent then. Now, the first question the voters ask is what have you people done for us. Now it would be a blessing if you could even prevail within your own household.”

7.3 Residential Security and Local Infrastructure

Socially disadvantaged classes and castes in the fieldwork communities consist, in the main, of those who have been on the margins, historically, with respect to ownership and control over land. Even as the salience of agriculture and class-caste divisions of the agrarian economy have diminished over time, land inequality remains important because of the often-contested rights over homesteads and common spaces necessary for the development of essential infrastructure. In the fieldwork communities some of the socially disadvantaged classes and castes have acquired secure property rights through government schemes or private purchase. Others have a degree of secure tenure, but remain vulnerable to pressure from neighbouring landowners who at times contest their rights of access or block the development of local infrastructure such as roads, streets and drains. Yet others report that they can be evicted from their homes because the land on which they live belongs to a powerful local landlord.

Residential insecurity and the development of local infrastructure, therefore, are both impediments to autonomous political participation. The decision to belong to a vote bloc, and to be counted as a supporter or voter for a particular candidate, is often premised on dependence on a local patron for residential security.

Participation in the political process is also an important source of leverage, among others, for socially disadvantaged groups to acquire greater security and autonomy. The consolidation of kinship group based compounds within villages, or the establishment of new villages (vastis and goths) is often associated with bargaining with local elites over land and resources, and the use of numerical strength at the time of elections as a bargaining chip. This corresponds with the transactional motivation for political participation, as well as the assertion of group-based identity in conducting a political transaction, using moral markers such as amanat, and feeling pride for the group in securing a local electoral victory.

The political significance of residential security can be seen also in narratives about the role of national political leaders in the establishment of settlements. The older residents of Ghareebabad in Mouza-1, for example, traced the history of their part of the village to the government and the figure of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in the 1970s. Similarly, in Jinnah Colony in Mouza-2 the allotment of plots on government land was widely attributed to Benazir Bhutto in the 1990s. In the Sukkur fieldwork community where many of the landless families lived on encroachments, there was a story about being protected by the PPP, but then also having felt vulnerable during Imran Khan's government when a judiciary-led eviction drive had been underway.

Invoking national leaders allowed these respondents from socially disadvantaged classes and castes to assert a personalised source of validity for their entitlements from a power centre much above any local patron from the landowning class. This is comparable to the attribution of the grant or withdrawal of social protection benefits to Benazir Bhutto or Imran Khan. People were aware that personalised patronage connections with local politicians and their agents were not implicated in the provision or withdrawal of some entitlements. For many of them it was easier, nevertheless, to interpret this innovation too as personalised patronage, but that

of a higher level leader, rather than the abstract and impersonal workings of the state machinery.

7.4 Patronage

In the fieldwork communities, the formal political process shapes local patronage systems - particularly the hierarchical relationship of individuals and families from socially disadvantaged classes and castes with economic (mostly landowning) elites - in multiple and at times contradictory ways. The vote is a citizenship-based individual right or entitlement, and creates an additional arena of bargaining between ordinary people and local elites. Higher level players in the form of political parties or national leaders offer an alternate source of power which has the potential to disrupt a simple vertical bond between patron and client. Elections, however, also offer an opportunity to both sides - patron and client - to reassert, revive, repair or revise the relationship.

National level leaders and political parties need the support and mobilisation power of local patrons, and local patrons, conversely, require access to higher level centres of power to retain or enhance their local position. There is a comparable set of relationships further down the chain between candidates, vote bloc leaders, and patriarchal heads of kinship groups and families.

Figure 1: Party, voter and patron

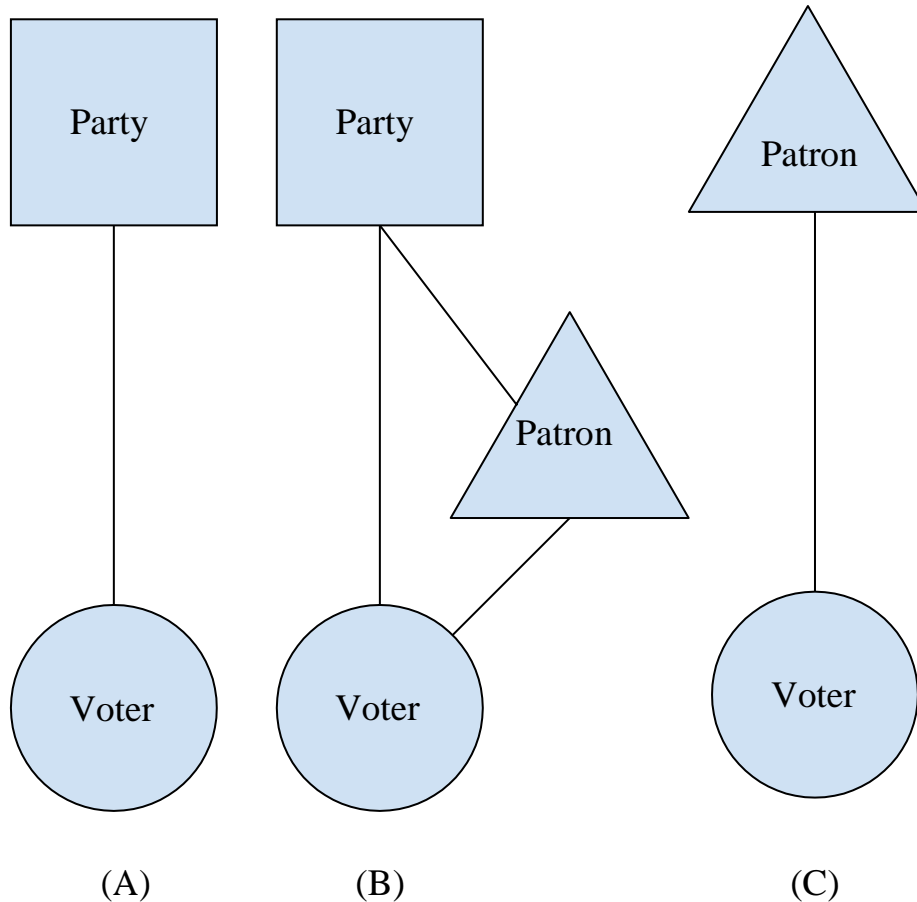


Figure 1 illustrates possible alignments in the relationship between a voter and a higher level entity such as a party or leader. Diagram (A) represents a situation where there is a direct relationship between the voter and the candidate, in which there is no role for an intermediary level such as that of the *goda* or *vadero*. Diagram (C) shows the opposite end of the spectrum where the only relationship that matters is the one between the voter and the patron - the patron's onward relationship with the party or candidate is not shown. Diagram (B) is the situation closer to that observed in the fieldwork communities - where the voter has a direct relationship with the party or candidate, but also a relationship mediated by the local patron.

The qualitative fieldwork for this study has been concerned, for the most part, respectively, with the relationship between the voter (or non-voter) with party or candidate and her or his relationship with the patron. The former relationship is, of course, both direct and mediated (as in Diagram B). We find that voters' direct linkage with parties was predicated on their identification with the main party leader - rather than their preferences for particular policy platforms. Their perceptions of party leaders, however, were often infused with narratives about particular policies or programmes (e.g. BISP and the *marla* housing schemes associated with Benazir Bhutto and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto respectively) or platforms (e.g. Imran Khan's framing of corruption in politics).

The relationship between the voter (or non-voter) and the patron - which was probably the dominant factor in shaping actual (as opposed to preferred) voting behaviour - had many facets. For most women in the fieldwork communities this relationship was itself mediated by

family males. The role of extended families led or represented by patriarchs is another form of mediation. Some of the most marginalised and dependent individuals and families were directly under the tutelage of landlords and patrons. Others had a more negotiated transactional relationship.

8. Conclusions

We return now to the research questions posed at the outset. What are the barriers to political participation faced by various groups of citizens who also experience other forms of exclusion and how might these be overcome? In particular, how are barriers to social inclusion and political participation interconnected with each other, and in what ways might they act autonomously? How can greater social inclusion – say with respect to education and economic opportunity – lead to greater political participation? How might political participation be used as a lever for the socially excluded to gain improved access to opportunities and institutions? And finally, what are realistic points of entry for policy intervention and peaceful change with respect to both social and political exclusion?

Voting and political participation

Voter turnout is the most commonly used indicator of political participation and it does capture some important patterns and trends. Diverse data sources confirm, for example, that around half of the registered voters have consistently stayed away from polls, and voter turnout rates are particularly low for women and younger people. These data provide few insights into broader issues in political participation, and dimensions of social exclusion other than gender.

Political participation, of course, encompasses a much broader range of activities and relationships than turning up to vote. These forms of engagement can be arranged hierarchically - from offering oneself for candidature, to leading or being active in a vote bloc, being involved at the community level in decision-making about voting, attending a political gathering, and actively canvassing for a candidate and helping out before or on polling day. Women are almost entirely absent from most of these activities, and in rural communities such those covered by our fieldwork, patriarchal narratives are often used to put down families and social groups whose women do go out to participate in public activities. The class-caste hierarchy in these communities can also be seen filtering out the participation of men of lower socio-economic status from decision-making actions. The patriarchal system expects older able-bodied men to represent families, extended families and kinship groups, which form the basis of viable vote blocs that dominate political activity on the ground.

The actual relationship between citizens - voters and non-voters - and elected representatives (or candidates for office) is active and mostly transactional, but operates at some variance from the liberal ideal of a direct contract between the individual and the party/candidate around issues, policies and programmes. This relationship is seen to exist along two channels. One is a direct association between individuals and families and recognised national level leaders. The role of policy platforms and party identity tends to be compounded with stories about a leader and her or his perceived association - warranted or not - with particular programmes, actions and narratives. The second channel is made up, in these rural communities, of a chain

of intermediaries who are powerful men, mostly from landlord families, and with existing patronage-based ties with dependent classes and castes.

This latter channel, which has received much attention in existing studies of political participation, can also be seen as a bastion of stability around a hierarchical order. The fact that this channel is also based on transactional relations implies that it offers some openings to individuals - usually able-bodied older men - who have risen due to education or economic opportunity to also acquire political power. But for the most part, the candidate-patron-voter channel rests upon and reinforces existing systems of social exclusion. Women are marginalised in these dealings, and their interests and concerns are not represented in the political transaction. Electoral politics becomes yet another dimension of patronage-based relations in which socially excluded classes and castes depend on mostly landowning local power wielders for their access to state resources and public institutions. It is not surprising, therefore, that women and men from socially excluded groups often speak of their direct (albeit notional) relationship with a party or leader as a counter to the power of local patrons.

There are significant and urgent problems faced by socially excluded families which have potential solutions through policies and programmes. Vulnerability to hunger is an acute issue that is routinely faced by a large number of the landless poor in rural communities. It becomes part of the political discussion exceptionally at the time of a disaster, when the government and those who have access to government resources, are expected to step up and provide protection from hunger. It has also started to be addressed indirectly through social protection programmes (notably the BISP) being viewed through a political lens.

Similarly, the absence of residential security, or the security of tenure over one's residence, is an almost perpetual manifestation of social and political inequality in these rural communities. Even if many of the landless poor no longer work as dependent tenants or labourers of local landlords, they remain vulnerable to powerful patrons who can threaten to have them evicted or otherwise put obstacles in the development of local infrastructure. The presence of government programmes and interventions for formal recognition of individual property rights or collective rights of possession is acknowledged by the socially excluded in political terms. The provision of local infrastructure such as the paving of streets and the lining of waste water drains, as well as the acquisition of public services, leads to the involvement of various tiers of government in these communities and provides greater security of possession to them. Demands for local infrastructure and public services which are often raised as part of the political transaction are aimed, in part, towards the protection and consolidation of property rights acquired incrementally by socially excluded classes and castes.

There is a close association between political participation and other dimensions of social exclusion in Pakistan. This is captured vividly with respect to gender in voter turnout rates. Virtually all other aspects of political participation, including decision-making for oneself or influencing decision-making in broader political collectivities, also mirror existing patterns of social exclusion. Classes, castes, kinship groups and others who have historically faced and continue to face social disadvantage, remain on the political margins too, despite having equal legal rights to vote. The disadvantage in political participation comes from existing structures of transactional politics in rural communities where political collectivities are formed not around class or policy interest, but around hierarchical patronage-based networks.

The reliance of all major political parties and viable candidates on local systems of patronage explains the coexistence of competitive politics with relatively low turnout rates. Local level political mobilisation across party lines is based, for the most part, on hierarchical social structures that normatively exclude and marginalise women, individuals who are dependent on others, and disadvantaged classes and castes. There are elements of domination and resistance in the relationship between these intermediary structures and socially excluded individuals and groups. Turnout rates, in any case, are not always a reliable indicator of political inclusion. Voting may signify an individual or group's entry into a transactional relationship, or it might signal their complete lack of agency. Not voting might be seen as the marginalisation of an individual or group's voice, or it might represent an act of choice and resistance in face of local pressure.

Access and opportunities

In the type of rural communities of Southern Punjab and Northern Sindh studied here it is possible to identify four ways in which political participation offers access to opportunities and institutions to the socially excluded.

First, the normative equality between citizens on which formal democratic procedures are based allows those who face other forms of social exclusion to achieve at least momentary parity with others. While it is true that turnout rates remain low, it is also significant that women and men from socially excluded groups do recognise their right to take part in voting. This is in contrast with many other informal and also formal institutions where participation is actively suppressed. The narratives about the vote as amanat, and the expression of pride in taking part in voting are both examples of ways in which the normative parity foundational to electoral democracy is utilised by socially excluded women and men to assert their individual and collective identities.

Second, transactional politics at the local level confront the socially excluded with a range of choices and constraints. This system rests on the central position of the patron in organising vote blocs and coalitions, as part of his wider role as an intermediary between ordinary citizens and higher levels of political power and authority. In many cases the position of the socially excluded in this relationship is one of utter subservience born out of outright threats of coercive sanction. Moreover the patriarchal institutions of family, extended families and kinship groups that participate in transaction politics rely upon the power of older able-bodied adult male heads of household over women and dependent men. At the same time, and often for the same people, these transactional politics also allow some degree of bargaining, negotiation and consent. Transactional politics at the local level also allow for the accommodation of individuals and groups that might have acquired upward social or economic mobility.

Local transactional politics are partly about establishing and maintaining patronage based relationships, and can be utilised by men from disadvantaged classes and castes to renegotiate their positions in the hierarchy. To the extent that these political transactions involve public goods and services, they tend to be limited to local infrastructure such as the paving of streets, lining of drains, and electricity or gas connections, which are useful in their own right, but also endow settlements and neighbourhoods with a greater degree of tenurial security.

Third, there are broader policy and political issues, including some which have a direct bearing on the lives of socially excluded individuals and groups, that have traction in electoral politics. Some government interventions - such as the social protection system or schemes for residential security - which are valued by the socially excluded are not negotiated through local patrons. These interventions are significant because they represent rare cases where important interests of some of the most disadvantaged segments of the population become part of a broader political conversation. Another example of a higher level policy issue finding traction at the ground level is an anti-corruption narrative against professional politicians, and is interpreted by socially excluded individuals and groups as targeting local patrons.

A fourth and related source of inclusion is the identification individuals have with national political leaders. The connection with charismatic leaders gives people from socially excluded groups a sense of empowerment similar to narratives such as “vote as amanat” and “pride in voting”. A notional association with powerful leaders is seen as a counterweight to their everyday reliance on local patrons.

Entry points for change

Our understanding of the political system as it is experienced by women and men who face other forms of social exclusion in rural communities in southern Punjab and northern Sindh has implications for possible entry points for a more inclusive democracy. These entry points correspond with the four broad sources of inclusion and empowerment that we observed in the actual practice of democracy in these communities: procedural equality; transactional politics; policy and political platform; identification with parties and leaders.

Existing democracy strengthening interventions which focus on election management, awareness raising, and supporting local accountability can and do support socially excluded women and men overcome obstacles towards the realisation of procedural equality, and try to improve their bargaining position with respect to transactional politics. Measures such as the promoting of legislative change to ease voter registration, discourage local agreements around barring women voters, and technical and process interventions for greater transparency of elections can help to overcome the barriers that people face in turning out to vote. Similarly, awareness campaigns around the importance of voting can have a positive impact in reinforcing narratives such as “vote is amanat”. Mobilising opinion and generating evidence at the local - as some democracy strengthening interventions have done - as measures for increasing voice and accountability can also have a positive impact on the terms on which the socially excluded participate in transactional politics.

There is value in these interventions, and others that might address some of the obstacles to political inclusion that we came across in our fieldwork communities. The placement of polling stations, for example, can be a major barrier to the participation of the socially excluded, particularly women. The assignment of votes to polling stations, similarly, can have serious flaws which place women and other socially excluded individuals at a disadvantage in voting. Similarly, while the linkage between ECP and NADRA datasets has eased voter registration for many people, it has highlighted another set of constraints faced by the socially excluded. NADRA registration can be challenging for people who are not educated, and do not have support from others who are experienced at navigating official systems. Many of the requirements with respect to documents are also difficult to meet for those who have been

marginalised for some reason or other by their community or family. Interventions on procedural issues, therefore, can and ought to address a range of problems faced by the socially excluded women and men. Dependence on others - due to gender, age, disability and inexperience - is an important source of exclusion, and there is a need to proactively counter the need for intermediaries between the democratic process and socially excluded individuals.

In actual practice, however, exclusion ordered through relations of dependence is not only a procedural issue, and there are limits to how far technical and process related interventions can overcome it. Dependence is, to a large extent, a social construct that maintains an unequal political order. The two main and interconnected sources of disruption in an otherwise stable transactional system - higher level policy and political platforms, and the rise of parties and recognised leaders - implicate substantive political issues which are not amenable to procedural interventions. These avenues of change towards a more inclusive democracy are not readily available as entry points to non-partisan interventions. Democracy strengthening programmes can hardly be seen to be endorsing particular leaders or policy platforms, and it is doubtful, in any case, if their endorsement will have the desired impact.

It is possible, nevertheless, to articulate positions which are consistent with the goals of building a more inclusive democracy. Our findings show, for example, that factors which shift the balance of power within the political or electoral machine from local patrons to parties and leaders can lead to greater inclusion - or at least a higher sense of identification with the democratic process - on the part of socially excluded women and men. Policies and platforms which offer direct entitlements to disadvantaged individuals and families, without the discretionary intercession of officials or local patrons, have a similar effect. Conversely, non-democratic interventions in the political system - such as those emanating from the overreach of unelected institutions - tend to weaken the position of parties, national leaders and policy platforms, and enhance, at their expense, the power of local patrons engaged in transactional politics.

Legitimacy of the democratic system

Voter turnout rates are often used as indicators of the popular legitimacy of a democratic system. Pakistan's low turnout rates suggest that there may be much work ahead to ensure the consolidation of democracy. Our qualitative research concurs with this view but with important nuances. We find, for example, that the turnout rate might not be a very good gauge of the community's ownership of the democratic system. There is a widespread opinion, for example, that the vote is an *amaanat* - or a moral obligation - while politics or *siyasat* is an unethical activity. Yet a significant underlying reason for turning out to vote is obligation to, or pressure from, a local patron. The system is highly unequal also in terms of who gets to participate in democratic activities leading up to the vote. There is no denying, however, that the competitiveness of elections is a way of playing out local political factional rivalries for access to state institutions and resources.

There are political currents in the fieldwork communities in both southern Punjab and northern Sindh which leverage the "siyasat as unethical" sentiment. Imran Khan's anti-corruption narrative is an obvious case in point which illustrates the potential power of this sentiment. But there are also other actors visible at the peripheries in our fieldwork communities who are less

interested in making the current democratic system more inclusive than in replacing it altogether with a sectarian religious order, or a secular ethno-nationalist one. In the absence of strong political parties and policy platforms it is the local patrons who occupy spaces which might be coveted by these, as yet, peripheral players. This cannot be a reason, of course, for supporting patronage based politics and the semblance of (the exclusionary) order and stability that these politics preserve. Rather, it is an argument for enhancing the legitimacy of the democratic system through making it more inclusive.

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Annex 1 Research Instruments

Primary qualitative fieldwork will rely on a range of research instruments including key informant interviews, group discussions, and subject in-depth interviews to address the research questions. Attention will be paid to the specific context of each fieldwork site and conditions of marginality and exclusion as they exist in that context.

The main line of qualitative fieldwork will be to understand, within the context of specific communities, the nature of political participation of socially excluded individuals and groups through in-depth interviews which will focus on their understanding and perceptions of political processes and institutions, their actual experiences and interactions with these processes and institutions.

The fieldwork will consist of building up a profile of the community and prevalent narratives with respect to the research questions (through KIIs and group discussions), identification of socially excluded individuals and groups, and subject in-depth interviews to learn about actual experiences and perceptions of the socially excluded with respect to political participation.

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

Key informant interviews (KIIs) will be used to:

- (a) Construct a community profile focusing on social, economic and political conditions, and the main dimensions of social exclusion – gender, socio-economic class, caste, ethnicity, religion, and their mutual interaction - as they are thought to operate in the community.
- (b) Prevailing narratives on political participation by the socially excluded
- (c) Identification of potential participants for further KIIs, for FGDs and IDIs

Key informants will include women and men who are recognized in their local communities as being stakeholders in, or otherwise knowledgeable about, factors which promote or hinder political participation of various types of individuals and groups within their communities. They may include community leaders, social workers, and political activists, from dominant as well as disadvantaged groups.

KII Checklist

Note to interviewers

Use this as a semi-structured checklist to initiate a conversation about the community and local experiences and narratives about political participation. Probe further and ask follow-up questions about topics and experiences brought up by the subject's relevant to the study research questions. During probing questions or after the main interview identify potential subjects for further KIIs, FGDs and IDIs using the relevant Tracking Sheet for snowball sampling.

Questions/pointers

- What is the total number of households in this settlement?
- Can you count separately the households in caste, religion and occupational groups? (Probe: give number for each category)
- Can you give a rough number of households in each group with respect to their poverty status (very poor, poor, medium, well-off)?

- Give the number of households who own agricultural land/homestead land? (Probe: by caste and religion)
- Can you share information on infrastructure/amenities (electricity, water, health and education facilities)? Are there some parts of the settlement devoid of those facilities?(Probe: If yes, which parts and which households? (Probe: mention households and their caste or religious)
- Describe livelihoods (employment, occupation, women' work) along the line of caste, religion). (Probe over time changes)
- Give details on: (identification of caste and kinship groups (disadvantaged), dispute resolution, elections and voting, elections and community participation, political/election campaigns, protests) Probe: Calendar political events (elections, rallies, protests and other campaigns such voter registration, CNIC).
- Who are the newly emerged political leaders in your area? (Probe: identify women and men from disadvantaged groups)
- What are the main sources of information on local and national politics? (Probe: print, electronic, social media). (Probe: overtime changes)
- What are the main factors that promote or hinder the participation of poor and marginalised women and men in this community in the political process? How? How are the conditions changing? Why? (Probe: Changes overtime)
- What are the advantages to poor and marginalised women and men engaging in politics? How do they work? What are the disadvantages? Why?

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Focus Group Discussions will be conducted separately with groups of women and men from dominant and disadvantaged groups respectively. The classification of dominant and disadvantaged groups specific to the community will draw upon the community profile constructed as part of the study. FGDs will be used to:

- (a) Probe and document diverse narratives and perspectives on political participation by the socially excluded
- (b) Identification of potential participants for IDIs

FGD Checklist

Note to interviewers

Use the semi-structured checklist to initiate a discussion with a group of five members, women and men to get views and perceptions, difference of opinion on social exclusion and political participation. Probe further and ask follow-up questions about topics and experiences brought up by the group members relevant to the study research questions. During probing questions or after the main group discussion identify potential subjects for IDIs using the relevant Tracking Sheet for snowball sampling.

Questions/pointers

- What is the total number of households in this settlement?
- Can you count separately the households in caste, religion and occupational groups?(Probe: give number for each category)
- Can you give a rough number of households in each group with respect to their poverty status (very poor, poor, medium, well-off)?
- Give number of households who own agricultural land/homestead land? (Probe: by caste and religion)

- Can you share information on infrastructure/amenities (electricity, water, health and education facilities)? Are there some parts of the settlement devoid of those facilities? (Probe: If yes, which parts and which households? (Probe: mention households and their caste or religious)
- Describe livelihoods (employment, occupation, women' work) along the line of caste, religion). (Probe over time changes)
- Give details on: (identification of caste and kinship groups (disadvantaged), dispute resolution, elections and voting, elections and community participation, political/election campaigns, protests) Probe: Calendar political events (elections, rallies, protests and other campaigns such voter registration, CNIC).
- Who are the newly emerged political leaders in your area? (Probe: identify women and men from disadvantaged groups)
- What are the main sources of information on local and national politics? (Probe: print, electronic, social media). (Probe: overtime changes)
- What are the main factors that promote or hinder the participation of poor and marginalised women and men in this community in the political process? How? How are the conditions changing? Why? (Probe: Changes overtime)
- What are the advantages to poor and marginalised women and men engaging in politics? How do they work? What are the disadvantages? Why?

In-Depth Interviews (IDIs)

In-depth Interviews will be conducted with equal numbers of women and men who are identified in prior community profiling as individuals who might be vulnerable to social exclusion/disadvantage due to various causes. In-depth interviews will focus on individual experiences and perceptions.

IDI Checklist

Note to interviewers

Use this as a semi-structured checklist to initiate a conversation with individual women and men about their personal experiences and narratives about political participation. Probe further and ask follow-up questions about topics and experiences brought up by the subject/is relevant to the study research questions.

Questions/pointers

- Since how long you are living in this area? (Probe: where the family living before, why did you move here)
- What is your occupation or income sources? (probe: ask about other family members)
- Give details regarding your caste, religious status?
- Give details regarding your family member? (Probe: family occupation, education, employment, income, asset ownership)
- Are you on any sort of financial assistance from the government (e.g., BISP) or otherwise? If yes, since when? (any other source you get financial assistance in case of need)
- Who do you go to for resolution of minor or major disputes? Why? What is their relationship to you? (Probe: overtime changes)
- Is any member of your household part of any decision-making body of the community? Has any relative been in the Union/Tehsil or district council? Have any members of your household ever been involved in any village organization?
- What are major problems (social, political, income) you have faced in your life?

- Are you affiliated with any political or religious party/organisation? (Probe: history of affiliation, choice of party).
- Have you participated in political activities? (if yes, can you calendar your activities- political campaigns, protests, gatherings. election work, support people in getting CNIC (voter registration).
- Have you ever voted? If Yes, when, why, whom? If No, why?
- What are benefits of being part of a political and religious party/organisation?
- What are the benefits to be a registered voter?
- Did you vote in the last elections? Why? If not, why not? [probe if respondent was notable to vote/register to vote or chose not to vote] (Probe: Hindering and encouraging factors- political or religious leaders (clerics), dominant caste groups/individuals and others)
- If the respondent did not vote: Do you think you are at a disadvantage because you did not vote? (probe: exclusion from community participation, respect etc) Is there any difference between you and someone who voted?
- If the respondent did not vote: Would you vote in the next elections? Why/why not? What do you think needs to change in order for you to vote next time?
- What was your experience of voting on election day? Describe in detail – including getting there, who helped, food being served by political parties information about voting process, use of SMS service for information, etc. (probe: If respondent did not vote, ask them about the experience of others in their household or community]
- How did you learn about the different candidates and parties? Is there any campaign, election rally, protest events in your area that you knew about, or attended? Describe. Did candidates/leadership or their agents approach you personally?
- How did you decide for whom to vote? Who had influence in your decision, and why?
- Do you think you have influence on other community groups and individuals' decisions to vote? How?
- What you think about importance of your vote? (probe: Or other poor people)
- Do you think your participation in politics (affiliation/voting/rallies, protests) can support peaceful change in the political system (inclusion of non-participant communities and individuals).
- Do you think women should vote? (probe: give details on importance women's vote)
- Can you access directly to your elected representatives? (probe: if not why and details about the process i.e; middle men/agent, local influential)
- Do you or any person from your household use cell phone for political activities?



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