

What disrupts the stable but non-inclusive patronage-based political machine?

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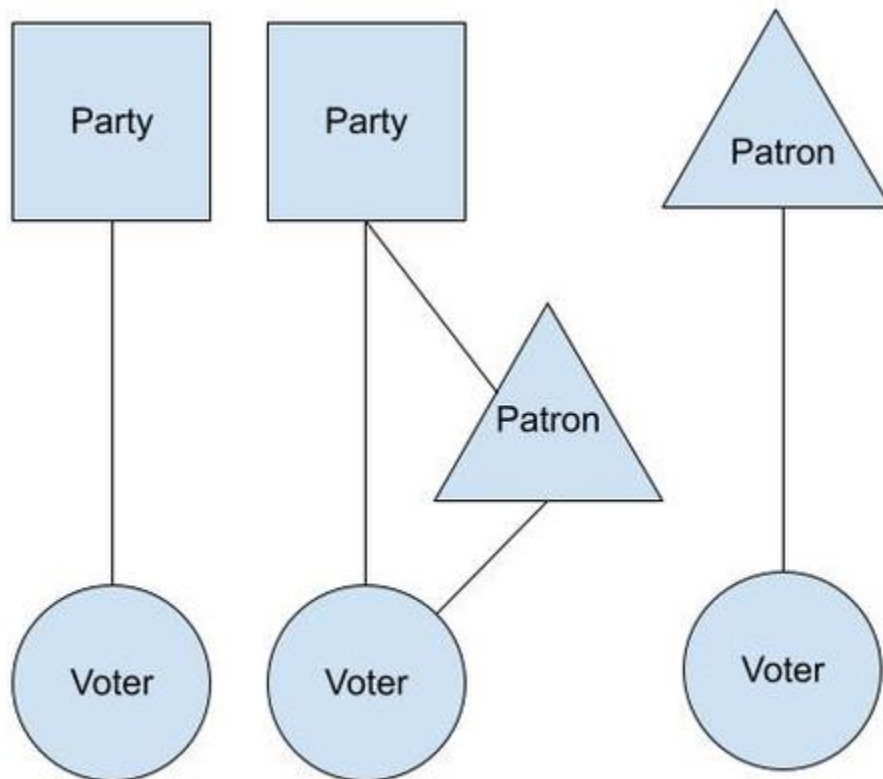
What do socially excluded women and men say about political participation? Siyasat is negotiation and coalition-building. It is described as amoral, even unethical. Yet the vote is spoken of in quasi-religious terms: *amaanat*, *farz*, *wajib*.

Who does *siyasat*? Socially excluded women and men say they wouldn't, and in any case, can't. Local patrons do. It involves deception and deal-making. Who takes part in actual political activity? Everyone says they do. It is *farz*, *wajib* and *amaanat*. What is going on?

They give four types of reasons for taking part in political activity - mostly voting. One, that it is a moral duty. Two, they are drawn to a leader. Three, win or lose, they gain a sense of power and identity through belonging to a wider group.

And four, and this is the dominant and practical reason, they cannot opt out of local patronage-based networks because they rely on these for all kinds of access to public resources and institutions. Election is an occasion to renew and renegotiate patronage-based ties.

What disrupts the stable but non-inclusive patronage-based political machine



Rural Pakistan may not look like (A) in the above picture, but it also doesn't look like (C) either. It is more like (B). Patronage yes, but also individual agency, even among the most marginalised women and men.

Charismatic leadership disrupts the patronage-based system. Women and men from socially excluded groups use their notional affiliation with a national leader as a counter to their dependence on local patrons, who do 'amoral' siyosat. Anti-politics resonates with that too.

Government policies and programmes that deliver directly to the socially excluded, bypassing local patrons are also disruptive. More profoundly so. People often associate these with national leaders to assert their autonomy from patrons over actual contests on resources.

Women from socially excluded groups say they are unseen and unheard. Local patrons and candidates rarely meet with them or hear their concerns and priorities. Their voices must be channeled through men.

Vulnerability to hunger is a big concern, but articulated as a political issue only during disasters. A new conversation. The national social protection programme (BISP) is an actively raised political issue. Even if women refer to it as patronage from a national leader

Residential security, another key issue, is tied up with autonomy from local patrons, who make people insecure. Government steps for secure tenure from decades ago are recalled as evidence of solidarity. Local infrastructure is a proxy for state backing of possession.

The patronage-based system offers stability and mediated access at the cost of inclusion and agency. It is vulnerable to challenges. From charismatic leadership. Anti-politics. Even non-democratic actors. In fast changing times the stability it offers might be illusory.

Local patronage yields space to policies that directly address the concerns of socially excluded citizens. Strong narratives are already present among marginalised women and men around individual agency. Social inclusion policies can dilute patronage and change politics!