

Citizen Engagement in Punjab: A Comprehensive Analysis of Electoral Participation through the Lens of Human Development Index

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to investigate the correlation between voter participation and the Human Development Index (HDI) in Punjab, Pakistan. Drawing upon secondary data obtained from the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), this study adopts a quantitative methodology to examine the patterns of voter registration and turnout rates in 36 districts within the province of Punjab. The districts have been classified into three distinct groups, determined by the level of correspondence between voter turnout and the HDI. The results demonstrate a multifaceted interaction between the HDI and voter turnout in the region of Punjab. While there is a broad association between the HDI and voter turnout in Group 1, Groups 2 and 3 exhibit notable variations from this observed relationship. The research findings suggest that although the HDI is a useful measure for assessing socio-economic progress, it is not the exclusive factor influencing voter turnout. Additional variables, such as the mobilization of political forces, engagement in social action, and adherence to cultural norms, exert significant influence on the dynamics of electoral engagement.

Keywords: Voter participation, voter turnout and HDI, Democracy, Human Development Index.

INTRODUCTION

The democratic system in Pakistan is characterized by a unique combination of Islamic principles and secular values, setting it apart from other democratic nations. Pakistan is a country where the people follow a wide variety of political and religious beliefs. There are individuals who self-identify as secular, but others self-identify as Islamist. Pakistan's democratic system seeks to provide people of different faiths a chance to participate in politics and hold positions of authority, representing their desire to rule the people. In democratic systems of governance, it is incumbent upon voters to acquire knowledge regarding public matters and scrutinize how their political representatives address these matters, as well as the exercise of authority by their elected officials, who have been entrusted with power by the electorate[4]. People need to have a thorough comprehension of the political system overall. By using this strategy, voters would be able to express their thoughts and interests clearly while casting their ballots in elections, enabling them to make well-informed decisions about the candidates. One of the most important ways that citizens may participate in government is by voting, which gives them the power to determine who becomes leader.

The examination of political involvement in developing nations is crucial. However, it is noteworthy that political researchers in Pakistan have not accorded significant importance to popular engagement in the electoral process, resulting in a dearth of literature on this topic within the country. The primary emphasis has been placed on the devolution of authority to the local level, with particular attention given to enhancing administrative, economic, and social capacities at this level. Nonetheless, a notable insufficiency persists within the existing body of literature concerning citizen participation in political processes inside the nation. The objective of this study is to ascertain the influence of the HDI on citizen engagement in the political process. The research findings can potentially provide a foundational framework for future endeavors aimed at enhancing citizen engagement in the election process. The engagement of citizens in the political process of a country yields several advantages, including the acknowledgment of societal achievements and the stimulation

of further endeavors. This research can ascertain whether the election procedures used in the nation effectively foster engagement in the political process among a diverse range of individuals. Further investigation could yield additional insights into the extent to which the current general election procedure promotes or hinders political culture.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative method to assess public participation in the electoral process. The research design is primarily descriptive, utilizing secondary data from sources such as the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The descriptive research design is apt for this study as it involves the interpretation of secondary data rather than delving into the factors behind the observed phenomena. Voter registration and turnout has been obtained from the official data of the Election Commission of Pakistan. Whereas, the district-wise HDI statistics have been obtained from UNDP.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The political landscape of Punjab, Pakistan, is deeply intertwined with socio-economic factors, historical legacies, and cultural influences. The caste system plays a significant role in shaping political decisions, where candidates are often selected based on caste affiliations, perpetuating a system of kinship-driven politics [6]. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in rural Punjab, where political parties strategically align with specific castes, impacting the entire electoral process from candidate nomination to campaign dynamics [9].

Moreover, the notion of "Biradari" significantly influences Punjab's political landscape. It functions as a body that makes decisions and influences citizens' election participation [7]. A significant proportion of voters from both urban and rural areas attended Biradari-organized meetings in 2008 to make decisions on presidential elections. This suggests that voting behavior is influenced by a group decision-making process [6].

Voting preferences are influenced by Punjab's socio-political structure, which is characterized by a sharp rural-urban split. Research shows that Punjab's rural and urban areas vote differently and that several socioeconomic variables—including caste, wealth, and education—significantly impact these patterns [10]. The importance of caste emphasizes the complex interplay between social structures and political decisions, especially in rural Punjab.

The literature also emphasizes how education affects political participation. While education is generally associated with increased political awareness and participation, Punjab's specific socio-economic conditions may present unique challenges. The urban population tends to display slightly higher interest in political matters compared to their rural counterparts, possibly linked to differences in education levels, media exposure, and economic conditions [8].

In summary, political participation in Punjab is a complex interplay of caste dynamics, kinship affiliations, and socio-economic factors. Understanding these nuances is crucial for interpreting voting behaviors and citizen engagement in the electoral process in this region.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

We have divided 36 districts of Punjab Pakistan, into three different groups. The first group has identical voter turnout as compared to HDI. The analysis of this research is elaborated based on each group as below.

Group 1: Identical Voters Turnout with HDI

Table 1 is characterized by matching voter turnout rates with their HDI values, consists of eleven districts and encompasses nearly all three primary regions of Punjab, namely southern, northern, and central Punjab

Table 1: Voter participation in Punjab districts according to HDI value category

S#.	District	Registered Voters [3]	HDI[2]	Human Development Status [2]	Total Polled Votes in 2018[1]	Voter Turnout (%) [1]
1	Attock	1,210,741	0.786	High Medium	707,738	58.45
2	Bahawalpur	1,881,393	0.645	Medium	1,074,250	57.10
3	Dera Ghazi Khan	1,329,079	0.535	Low Medium	695,272	52.31

4	Hafizabad	684,447	0.705	High Medium	405,134	59.19
5	Khushab	828,530	0.706	High Medium	486,580	58.73
6	Mianwali	916,481	0.645	Medium	517,518	56.47
7	Nankana Sahib	783,220	0.740	High Medium	458,930	58.60
8	Okara	1,739,098	0.705	High Medium	1,013,093	58.25
9	Rahimyar Khan	2,425,998	0.625	Medium	1,370,182	56.48
10	Toba Tek Singh	1,348,066	0.763	High Medium	801,274	59.44
11	Vehari	1,595,893	0.655	Medium	909,125	56.97

Table 1 shows that six districts, namely Okara, Nankana Sahib, Hafizabad, Khushab, Toba Tek Singh, and Okara have relatively high to medium HDI values. Furthermore, these districts also demonstrate similar patterns of voter turnout. This observation aligns with the broader phenomena referred to as the correlation between the HDI and voter turnout.

Attock exhibits the most elevated HDI value, precisely 0.786, within the aforementioned six districts, while Okara demonstrates the least HDI value of 0.705. When examining the voter participation among this group of six districts, it becomes evident that Okara exhibits the lowest HDI and consequently records the lowest turnout rate, namely at 58.25%. This observation aligns with expectations. Nevertheless, the region with the highest HDI value, Attock, did not exhibit the highest voter participation. Surprisingly, after Attock, Toba Tek Singh, with the second-highest HDI value of 0.763, had the highest voter turnout of 59.44 within the studied group. This represents a little departure from the typical progression of events. It is noteworthy that these six districts' HDI scores and voter participation often fall within the high-medium range. In the same vein, the districts of Vehari, Bahawalpur, Mianwali, and Rahimyar Khan collectively constitute a quartet of regions characterized by moderate HDI values. Furthermore, these districts have a voter turnout within the medium range. Vehari exhibits the greatest HDI value, precisely 0.655, while Rahimyar Khan demonstrates the lowest HDI value of 0.625. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the districts mentioned earlier did not have the highest or lowest turnout values. It is worth noting that Bahawalpur, with an HDI value of 0.645, had the highest voter participation of 57.10% among the four districts with medium HDI values. Conversely, Mianwali, with an HDI value of 0.645, demonstrated the lowest voter turnout of 56.47% within this group. The final district within the group exhibiting congruent voter turnout values in relation to their HDI values is Dera Ghazi Khan. According to the 2017 UNDP report on the HDI in Pakistan, the country is classed under the low-medium group with an HDI value of 0.535. The district's voter turnout was 52.31%, which falls within the low-medium range based on its HDI category.

Group Two: Higher Voter Turnout than HDI

Table 2 shows districts with voter turnout rates surpassing the corresponding HDI-value categories. This table comprises eleven districts that serve as representatives for the central and southern parts of Punjab. None of the districts in northern Punjab have been included in this particular collection of districts.

Table 2: Districts having higher voter participation than their HDI value in Punjab

S#	District	Registered Voters [3]	HDI[2]	Human Development Status[2]	Total Polled Votes [1]	Voter Turnout (%) [1]
1	Bahawalnagar	1,549,468	0.630	Medium	921,718	59.49
2	Bhakkar	871,657	0.628	Medium	586,514	67.29
3	Chiniot	748,050	0.657	Medium	438,689	58.64
4	Jhang	1,425,801	0.682	Medium	868,011	60.88
5	Kasur	1,847,712	0.714	High Medium	1,117,234	60.47
6	Khanewal	1,597,719	0.699	Medium	954,934	59.77
7	Layyah	906,623	0.729	High Medium	579,864	63.96
8	Lodhran	912,951	0.659	Medium	538,967	59.04

9	Muzaffargarh	2,030,891	0.584	Low Medium	1,232,760	60.70
10	Pakpattan	1,017,459	0.660	Medium	596,726	58.65
11	Rajanpur	887,990	0.506	Low Medium	530,378	59.73

Upon closer examination, it is evident that two districts, namely Layyah and Kasur, falling at serial No 5 and 7, respectively, exhibit HDI values that fall within the high-medium range. However, it is noteworthy that both districts demonstrate a high level of voter turnout beyond the expected category based on their respective HDI values. Layyah exhibits a HDI score of 0.729, placing it within the high-medium range of HDI values. Additionally, the district has achieved a notable voter turnout of 63.96%, surpassing the average turnout and ranking as the second-highest turnout in the Punjab region. Kasur, the second district within the designated group, exhibits a HDI value 0.729, placing it within the high-medium range. In comparison, the voter turnout recorded was 60.47%, indicating a relatively high level of civic participation. Furthermore, this figure positions it as the sixth highest voter turnout among the regions within Punjab. The primary cause for this disparity cannot be definitively determined; nonetheless, it is plausible that other factors may have contributed synergistically to produce these outcomes.

The seven districts viz Khanewal, Jhang, Pakpattan, Lodhran, Chiniot, Bahawalnagar, and Bhakkar exhibit moderate HDI scores, however, they have demonstrated either high or medium-high levels of voter turnout. Among these districts, Khanewal exhibits the highest HDI value of 0.699. However, it is noteworthy that Khanewal did not achieve a corresponding level of turnout. However, the turnout value of 59.77 achieved by this district is within the high-medium category, placing it in a middling position compared to the other seven districts. Illustrating a highly unpredictable research environment, the region of Bhakkar, characterized by a moderate HDI score of 0.628, exhibits a voter turnout rate of 67.29. Not only does it own the highest value within the group, but it also holds the distinction of being the most significant voter turnout value in Punjab. Chiniot exhibited the lowest turnout value among the seven districts under consideration, with an HDI score of 0.657, falling under the medium group. Despite being the lowest of the seven districts, it nonetheless falls inside the high-medium group and surpasses the HDI-value category in classification.

The final two districts under consideration are Muzaffargarh and Rajanpur falling at serial no 9 and 11 respectively, exhibiting HDI values of 0.584 and 0.506, respectively, falling within the low to medium range. However, it is noteworthy that these districts were able to achieve a relatively high turnout rate of 60.70 and 59.73, respectively.

Group Three: Lower-than-Expected Voter Turnout

Group three contains districts with a lower voter turnout rate than those observed in the remaining groups categorized by HDI values. The fourteen districts' collection primarily encompasses the Punjab's northern and central regions. The southern regions of the province are only represented by Multan and Sahiwal.

Table 3: Districts with lower voter participation than their HDI value in Punjab

S#	District	Registered Voters [3]	HDI [2]	Human Development Status[2]	Total Polled Votes [1]	Voter Turnout (%) [1]
1	Chakwal	1,103,534	0.792	High Medium	639,528	57.95
2	Faisalabad	4,029,604	0.782	High Medium	2,310,087	57.33
3	Gujrat	1,913,648	0.795	High Medium	959,447	50.14
4	Gujranwala	2,776,851	0.769	High Medium	1,497,258	53.92
5	Jhelum	945,508	0.829	High	493,667	52.21
6	Lahore	5,398,623	0.877	High	2,857,448	52.93
7	Mandi Bahauddin	1,022,878	0.716	High Medium	556,284	54.38
8	Multan	2,556,140	0.718	High Medium	1,387,450	54.28
9	Narowal	1,024,244	0.748	High Medium	564,644	55.13
10	Rawalpindi	2,679,145	0.871	High	1,525,187	56.93

11	Sargodha	2,282,913	0.728	High Medium	1,308,501	57.32
12	Sahiwal	1,470,330	0.71	High Medium	830,970	56.52
13	Sheikhupura	1,701,429	0.738	High Medium	976,266	57.38
14	Sialkot	2,334,498	0.834	High	1,303,654	55.84

Upon closer examination, it becomes evident that Lahore, Rawalpindi, Sialkot, and Jhelum standing at serial no 6, 10, 14, and 5 respectively have higher HDI values. However, these districts have not been able to achieve significant levels of voter turnout. In contrast, the voter turnout values of the group were comparatively lower when compared to the HDI category that corresponds to their HDI score. The four districts mentioned above exhibit the greatest HDI values within the Punjab region, maintaining the same order as presented in the aforementioned table. Based on the election results, it is evident that the four districts in question had turnout values falling under the lower two categories, namely medium and low-medium. Specifically, two districts were classified under each of these categories.

Lahore, with an HDI value of 0.877, holds the greatest place in terms of HDI value within the province. However, it achieved a voter turnout of 52.93 percent, falling below the low-medium category of voter turnout. Jhelum emerged as the second district characterized by a relatively high HDI value, juxtaposed with a turnout level that can be classified as low to medium. The district exhibited an HDI score of 0.829, indicating a relatively high level of human development. However, the voter turnout in the district was recorded at 52.21 percent, placing it within the low-medium range of voter participation. The districts of Rawalpindi and Sialkot, in addition to the aforementioned district, possess HDI ratings of 0.871 and 0.834, respectively. These ratings position them among the provinces' districts with quite high HDI scores. Nevertheless, some districts were unable to achieve a substantial voter turnout rate due to unspecified factors. However, they were able to acquire only moderate levels of voter turnout, specifically 56.93 percent and 55.84 percent, correspondingly. The underlying rationale for this unequal distribution cannot be definitively determined, however, it is plausible that a compound impact may arise from a combination of multiple factors.

Table 3 illustrates that ten districts exhibit HDI scores that are categorized as high-medium. However, these districts demonstrate either a medium or a low-medium level of voter turnout. The enumerated districts encompassed under this compilation consist of Sahiwal, Chakwal, Gujranwala, Faisalabad, Norowal, Sheikhupura, Sargodha, Multan, Mandi Bahauddin, and Gujrat. Out of the ten districts under consideration, Gujrat has the most elevated HDI score of 0.795, while not attaining an equivalent level of voter participation. In contrast, the voter turnout in this particular district was recorded at 50.14 percent, being the lowest participation rate among the ten districts within the Punjab province. Among the ten districts described above, Sahiwal has the most modest HDI value. With an HDI value of 0.710, the country is classified within the high-medium group. However, the voter turnout observed was 56.52, placing it in the medium category of voter turnout.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

A comparative analysis across the three groups reveals intriguing patterns. According to the data presented in Table 1, it is evident that out of the thirty-six districts in the Punjab region, eleven districts exhibited a congruent voter turnover rate with the corresponding HDI values of these districts.

Table 2 displays the data indicating that out of the thirty-six districts in Punjab, eleven districts exhibit a higher voter turnover in correlation with their HDI values. As an illustration, it can be observed that Layyah exhibits an HDI value of 0.72 alongside a voter participation rate of 63.96%. Similarly, Kasur has an HDI value of 0.729 accompanied by a voter turnout rate of 60.47%. Furthermore, Khanewal showcases an HDI value of 0.699, while its voter turnout rate stands at 59.77%. Bhakkar exhibits a HDI value of 0.628, while its voter turnout stands at 67.29. In comparison, Muzaffargarh and Rajanpur demonstrate HDI values of 0.584 and 0.506, respectively, alongside voter turnout rates of 60.70 and 59.73.

Table 3 presents an analysis of the voter turnover in the thirty-six districts of Punjab. It is seen that eleven districts exhibit a higher voter turnover compared to the HDI values associated with these districts. As an illustration, it is noteworthy that Lahore exhibits the highest HDI value, standing at 0.877. However, it is important to highlight that the voter turnout in Lahore is rather low, amounting to merely 52.93 percent. The city of Jhelum exhibited a HDI score of 0.829, indicating a relatively high level of human development. Additionally, the voter turnout in Jhelum stood at 52.21 percent, reflecting the level of civic engagement within the community.

IMPLICATIONS

It may be deduced from a study of voter turnout and HDI values that districts with high HDI tend to have lower voter participation rates. Conversely, certain districts with lower HDI values may experience higher levels of voter turnout. Therefore, it may be inferred that voter participation is influenced by various additional elements, such as cultural, religious, and political considerations, in addition to HDI values.

CONCLUSION

This empirical investigation examines the correlation between the HDI and electoral engagement in Pakistan, with a particular emphasis on the provinces of Punjab. The available body of scholarly work indicates a favorable correlation between the HDI and electoral participation. However, there is a dearth of comprehensive research that thoroughly investigates this relationship. The observed data is consistent with the research hypothesis, suggesting a statistically significant association between the HDI and levels of electoral participation. Nevertheless, the study highlights supplementary variables that impact this correlation, such as level of education, socioeconomic disadvantage, religious indoctrination, political consciousness, and a restricted comprehension of governmental frameworks. The results highlight the significant importance of education in promoting political engagement, emphasizing the necessity for early instruction on governmental operations and the active engagement of universities in political endeavors. The study posits that the attainment of enhanced human development is of paramount importance in fostering citizen consciousness, underscoring the significance of an educated and well-informed population in facilitating meaningful political engagement.

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