

Department of Development Studies

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Thematic Focus: Political Economy

Political Economy of Democratic Decentralization and Local Political Associations in Rural Punjab: A Case Study of Sialkot District- Asad ur Rehman (2012-2014)

This research conceptualizes democratic decentralization as the transfer of power to lower tiers of government and bringing state closer to people through representative governments. This research has entailed to respond to: what modes of democratic decentralization are required in increasingly modernizing rural Pakistan, and how citizens perceive it as well as use their political agency and participation in local government politics? These questions are explored by using a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods by using a primary data set of 240 households in six rural union councils of Sialkot District in Punjab province.

Key Findings

1. The research states that parameters effecting local government elections are qualitatively different from other forms of elections. With the transformation of economic relations, new forms of clientelistic political associations, at macro level, have taken roots. It is also found out that both principal and agents are engaged in pragmatic political calculation that undermines horizontal political relations.
2. The study also reveals that increase in spread of informal economy is directly associated with informal political adjustments that use traditional social structures for redistribution of economic surplus.
3. This study also counters the argument about progressive role of middle class in furthering democratic politics. Majority of the respondents were from middle class who engaged and contributed to the consolidation of different forms of clientelistic politics.
4. Underdeveloped economic structures underlie the clientelistic political associations. The voters and politicians participate in political field for pluralistic and materialistic reasons. Collective action suffers in presence of several social, economic, and psychological cleavages along which communities are divided. All participants engaged in traditional politics for structural reasons and this, we argue, awareness campaigns will not suffice to meet democratization goals.

Policy Implications

1. In order to facilitate decentralization process towards better outcome, constitutional amendment for ensuring internal election/democracy in political parties is mandatory.
2. Development of a universal formula for the disbursement of development funds is also necessary.
3. Development of a more nuanced structure of village council with smaller number of candidates is also critical
4. Introduction of good pay scales for elected representative and putting ban on their indulgence in any other business enterprise during incumbency period is also essential.