

Department of Development Studies

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Thematic Focus: Governance

Informal Institutions and Governance: Examining the Impact of Clientelism on Electoral Accountability in Rural Punjab, Pakistan- Zahid Aqil (2011-2013)

This study examines the extent to which electoral politics in rural Pakistan is dominated by clientelism and measures its impact on electoral accountability in the country. Quantitative and qualitative evidence from district Kasur of the Punjab province suggests that electoral politics in rural Pakistan is dominated by clientelism which undermines electoral accountability in the country. Correlational analysis of the three indices of; dependence, clientelistic voting choices and electoral accountability capacity suggests that more dependent a household is the more clientelistic it is in its voting choices and is less able to hold accountable her vote bloc leader or candidate for legislative assembly.

Key Findings

1. This study has shown that elections are instruments of democratic good governance. These empower citizens to formally express their will by choosing between policy alternatives presented by contending candidates and political parties, and hold them accountable through their vote. Nonetheless, poverty and dependence of the voters has the potential to undermine the choices of the electorates through patron-client networks.
2. The findings showed that significant majority of the voters in rural Punjab are bloc voters. They are dependent on Vote Bloc Leaders (VBLs) for their access to social and public resources and services.
3. Votes are exchanged for targeted goods and services. Voters hold Candidates for Legislative Assemblies (CLAs) accountable for targeted goods and services. They quit supporting those CLAs who do not or are no more able to provide targeted goods and services. Delivery of targeted goods and services is perceived by CLAs to yield high rate of return in terms of votes.
4. Majority of the voters in rural Punjab does not have the capacity to hold their VBLs or CLAs accountable.
5. Electoral accountability in rural Punjab has very limited capacity to constrain the behaviour of the Members of Legislative Assemblies (MLA).
6. The more dependent a voter the more clientelistic it is in its voting choices and less able to hold its VBL or MLA accountable.
7. Clientelistic mode of citizen politician linkages undermines electoral accountability in rural Punjab.

Policy Recommendations

1. State needs to focus on the provision of basic services on universal basis to minimise dependence of the electorates for such resources and services.
2. Campaigns meant to make the voters better aware of needs to be undertaken.
3. Political parties need to develop their organisational structure at the grassroots level to establish direct linkages with the electorates instead of through vote bloc leaders.
4. A ban should be imposed on allocation of constituency development funds to the members of legislative assemblies.
5. Local government system should be in place and the development funds currently being allocated to members of legislative assemblies should instead be routed through the local governments.
6. A ban should also be imposed on discretionary allocation of public offices.
7. Transfers of public sector employees should be subject to the rule of Law.