I Give You Vote; What Will You Give Me?
A Vote Exchange Perspective from Democratic Decentralization in Pakistan
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Abstract
Local Government system is seen as harbinger of democracy in developing world and so is the case in Pakistan. Studying the factors that shape the voting behaviour in local government elections, we argue that benefits attached with democratic decentralization are conditional on the criteria around which votes are polled. Analyses based on mixed methods provide evidence raising serious concerns on democratic decentralization in Pakistan. Firstly, a scrutiny of local bodies and cantonment election results entails the evidence for personalized politics and confirms existence of clientelistic associations across the country. Party position serves as patronage to ensure win of already chosen winning horses. Secondly, examination of household data, collected through a field survey, exhibits that people vote through an informal intermediary institution of vote-block built around kinship or neighborhood to extract economic and social security predominantly. Entry into any vote-block is based on rivalry, prestige, security, and personal benefit. Notably, voters vote to candidate having ‘influence’ in different realms of local life. We infer that structural imperatives derive political mobilization and election contestation at local levels. Presence of large social cleavage and income inequality coupled with economic insecurity reduced chances for nurturing horizontal and voluntary associations. It is proclaimed that raising awareness and educating the voter may not generate the required results as voters are making choices rationally and use vote as instrument serving the self-interest best. Making the growth inclusive, development equitable and ensuring economic security may help create an environment wherein collective gain takes lead over the personal immediate gains in making a voting decision.

Key words:
Democratization; Decentralization; Patronage; Voting Behaviors; Vote Exchange; Pakistan; Local Governments;

1. Introduction:
With the advent of 21st century, a new consensus on political democracy emerged and consolidated around the globe. Emergence of this consensus on participatory modes of economic development and planning challenged and replaced the charisma and utility of dictatorial and autocratic rules of business (Mohmand, 2008; Randall & Theobold, 1985). Aligning to the global position, developing countries in the continents of Asia, Africa and America moved to the representative forms of government. Over the time, the concerns and need for more accountability, participation, efficiency and conflict resolution shifted the locus of policy paradigm towards more decentralized methods of governance (Hadiz, 2004; Hicken, 2011). Noticeably however, the character of democracy, political contestation and voting practices in developing countries remain markedly dissimilar to those practiced in and advocated by developed states. Principal reason of divergence could be found in
variegated level of economic development, historical endowment and social structure of the country (Kenny, 2013; Mohmand & Gazdar, 2007). It stretches to the consensus that the transformation towards participatory mode of ruling in developing countries, as asserted by Manor (1999), was initially an outcome of the hurried attempts by authoritarian states to exhaust the accumulated anger of the sections of population previously disenfranchised. The big-bang decentralization experiment in Indonesia is a classical case study of preventing balkanization of the state.

It is in this context, taking of the decentralization road in Pakistan seems, at least at initial stages, to be a tool used by authoritarian dictatorship to gain legitimacy through building clientelistic networks at grass roots level (Cheema et al., 2006; Mohmand, 2008) while ignoring true democratic dispensation (Zaidi, 2014; Zaidi, 2005). The political aspect of participation in democratization process was completely ignored in the 2001 and 2005 local government elections, which were held on non-party basis. As usual, the new democratic dispensation in Pakistan that held sway in 2008 has spun off from local governments and reverted to bureaucratic management of district governments. The obvious reason was the less comfortability of new incumbents at national/provincial level with the former political arrangements at local level. The decentralization in Pakistan, therefore, takes new design, forms and implicit objectives. Cooption of new power contestants is provided through decentralization to prevent any radicle changes in socio-political system. These divergences in demands of devolution and objectives of governments have de-politicized the whole process of devolution and seriously undermine the consolidation of democratic politics at local level.

It remains well argued that participation in democratic process mostly takes a character of exchanging vote for accessing scarce public resources in developing countries (Bardhan, Mitra, Mookherjee, & Sarkar, 2009; Mohmand, 2008; Keefer, Narayan, & Vishwanath, 2003). The concerns on the democratic participation, however, earn a serious consideration if the vote is exchanged for short run (immediate) personal gains at the cost of collective gain of the society/community. The recent move towards decentralization in Pakistan makes the issue worth analyzing given the fact that participation in voting is shaped by expected immediate personal gains. It is common that political victory is ensured through multiple strategies, packed within “influence” on the voter, vote buying, patronage and intimidation. It is further argued that local government elections are more of a one-to-one interaction where “personality pull” plays a significant role in exchange of votes for

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2 We use terms(s) local bodies and decentralization instead of local governments and devolution purposefully. Devolution means complete transfer of power to independent local governments but provincial local government acts in Pakistan did not devolve any substantial power to local tiers. Therefore, it is read as decentralization and not devolution.

3 In the aftermath of 18th constitutional amendment, it is mandatory upon the provincial governments to devolve power at local level by establishing a third tier of representative governments at district, Tehsil, and Union council levels for the deepening of democracy, accountability, and civic participation at grass roots levels

4 The clientelism
short run immediate gains raising questions regarding the positive reaps of democratic decentralization.

Against this backdrop, this work is an inquest into the dynamics of political associations underlying the voting patterns for local governments. Our objective in this study is to understand the factors that shape the voting behaviour in local government elections which, in turn, determine the realization of gains associated with democratic decentralization. We argue that holding elections, increasing polling ratio, and/or running party based elections do not suffice and may not restore benefits attached with decentralization and that the basic criteria of success of decentralization is the pivot on which votes are polled. We maintain that voting based on the immediate short-term gains and not on long-term horizon of societal welfare, may leave the fruits of decentralization unrealized. Further, the influence of these associations on voting practices, candidate choices and patterns for local government elections is scrutinized.

To strengthen our arguments, we provide evidence for “personality pull” based on the analysis of results from cantonment and provincial local bodies’ elections held across the country. Given the smaller geographic representation, needless to say, generalization should be drawn carefully. Even then the qualitative in method and anthropological in nature, this study generates the findings and conclusions drawn least sensitive to sample size and locale. The findings, nonetheless, are capacitating to highlight the fabrics of basic knitting of the democratic decentralization in general and that of rural and semi/peri urban Punjab in particular.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: The very next section describes research methodology and details the sampling method and locale. Section 3 provides insights into the nature of decentralization in Pakistan and discusses the ongoing wave of democratic decentralization in the country. The personality pull factor in the context of the winning of independent candidates in the cantonment and local government elections in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is highlighted in Section 4. Section 5 provides survey based evidence and discusses major factors underlying voting decision in local government elections in the context of clientelistic associations. Section 6 concludes the review by providing recommendations based on the implications resulting from the analysis.

2. Research Methodology and Sample Design

Decentralization is a complex phenomenon influenced by multiple social, economic and political factors (Manor, 1999). Trajectory of institutional development, strength of state vis-à-vis civil society, modes of political organization and mobilization and distribution of power among state

\[5\] In addition to structured questionnaire, interviews and focus group discussions, the author(s) spent almost one month in the localities elected for the study and adopted "participant observation" method to capture an unbiased behaviour of the voters.
institutions affect the nature and extent of decentralization of power to local tiers. However, the micro level political association between voters and politicians in local politics is of primary importance in the final dispensation of localized governments.

This study, by using mixed research design method\(^6\), attempts to investigate the nature of local political associations in villages of old settled\(^7\)/ modernized and economically-developed settings. Multi-stage cluster sampling technique was used to pick a representative sample from Sialkot district from where we chose Tehsil Daska, which consists of 24 Union Councils (UCs) of which 20 are rural.\(^8\) Of the rural UCs, six (33\%) were selected for the study. One village was selected from each UC then. Also to capture the impact of clientelistic association, three each candidate based and non-candidate based villages were selected\(^9\). To capture the essence and extent of patronage, the villages were selected with different levels of patronage purposefully, i.e. three candidate based village and the same number of non-candidate based villages. We assume and argue a strong patronage and resultantly strong clientelistic association in candidate based villages. Finally, forty (40) households were selected from each village for interviewing. Lists of the households of selected villages were prepared and representation of the blocks/biradries was ensured through developing strata along kinship lines. After completing the mapping exercise based on participant observation, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions\(^10\), a structured questionnaire was prepared for second round of data collection. The key informant interviews were conducted from 12 people based on their political role and socio-economic status\(^11\).

The logic for selecting Sialkot (Tehsil Daska) was the nature of our hypothesis that whether economic development begets political and social development automatically\(^12\). The modernization theorist like Rostow (1960) Lewis (1958) and Huntington (1965) vociferously argued that modernization of economy would eventually end in political modernity. In this respect, Sialkot is a modernized and developed district of the Punjab, Pakistan (Jamal & Khan, 2007). The district

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\(^6\) Different research paradigms use different set of methodological techniques to examine social reality (Neuman, 2006). Purists on each side argue about the suitability and rigor of their own research techniques (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Given the nature of inquiry, this study used mixed research methodology to triangulate and compare the validity of different observations and results. Triangulation becomes a necessary technique, especially while investigating a case where the responses could show biasness or value bound and infest with endogeneity (Jick, 1979)

\(^7\) We borrow this term from Hamza Alavi; for details see (Alavi, 1976)

\(^8\) The information for sampling was collected by consulting data from 1998 census. It should however be noted that some of these union councils fall now on in newly-established “Tehsil Sambrial” from Tehsil Daska.

\(^9\) Candidate based village refers to one wherein resides at least one contestor for local government election.

\(^10\) Three in total- One for candidate base villages, one for non-candidate based villages and one with all key informants.

\(^11\) See table 4 (appendix-A) for details

\(^12\) Also, we wanted to challenge the conventional wisdom that clientelistic associations can only sustain in poverty-ridden agrarian society. Sialkot presents a case of interesting transformation from agrarian to industrial working society wherein the socio-economic position of people improved over the time. Another factor was the access to penetrate into and stay with the community for the “participants’ observation” over longer period- which in this study was one month.
registered astounding growth in both medium sized and cottage industry. Sialkot is a perfect location to test this hypothesis. Most of the villages in Sialkot are linked with the city through metaled roads, that's why, agriculture is pushed to margins in rural economy. Rural population is increasingly employed in modern sectors and wage labour has completely replaced the earlier exchange systems\(^\text{13}\). Before we present findings of the study, we provide a brief snapshot of decentralization in Pakistan for the ease of the reader.

### 3. De-centralized Centralization and Pakistan: The WI-FI Empowering

Democratic decentralization has a chequered history of progress and retreat under different political settlements in Pakistan (Zaidi, 2005). Since colonial times the unregulated provinces of Raj, now constituting Pakistan, were treated with legal and political procedures different from regulated provinces (Inayatullah, 1964). Customary local institutions were given authority after introducing the right to private property in land (Cheema et al., 2009). The social power of kinship and inequality in land ownership coupled with limited political franchise entailed a process of strengthening vertical ties of association at the cost of horizontal solidarity. These institutions of representation have helped in the institutionalization of exclusive political institutions regulated through ownership of asset or modern education.

The dominance of landed elite since the day one of modern Pakistan is evidence of this privileged mode of politics (Javid, 2011). Landed elite in rural areas dominated politics, and Salariat (Middle classes) in urban centers dominated state and active politics during colonial times and the first three decades of modern Pakistan. Then the ranks of middle class were swelled by inclusion of multiple sections of traders, small peasants, retailers etc. and the mode of political settlement also shifted in favor of middle classes (Khan, 1999; Sayeed, 2002). The changes in local political economy, domestic demands of political legitimacy, and international strains of cold war politics have forced different political governments in Pakistan to provide universal suffrage to all its citizens and lift all legal barriers to political participation.

However, even these revolutionary steps failed to challenge the structural inequality that feeds political expediency on the part of electorate. Democratic decentralization was innovatively used by all dictatorial regimes to consolidate their unconstitutional and extra-legal grip over power by expanding their networks of patronage by encouraging vertical associations of political participation. The nexus between decentralization and democracy remains to this day oxymoronic; as regimes have used it to consolidate their hold. The recent upsurge of interest in looking at decentralization as a mean to fight against recurrent malaise of corruption, bad governance, democratization, and development provide very extravagant rationale for decentralization but practically it has to deal

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\(^{13}\) Even the urban vs rural ratio has changed a lot since 1998, the last census was conducted, and registered votes are still largely belonging to rural areas.
with a number of problems that are not going to disappear anytime soon. Vote exchange stands at the top of the challenges the democratic decentralization faces.

Blau (1964) has expounded that social exchange framework embeds exchange, both intrinsic and extrinsic, within the logic of reciprocity (Graziano, 1976; Lawson & Greene, 2011). The information exchange, provision of social utilities to a village/community, getting a job for son/daughter, getting a birth certificate or registration of Nikah, all these exchanges are conducted within clientelistic\textsuperscript{14} structure of unequal exchange. The norms of reciprocity demands from the beneficiary to return these favours through voting otherwise all these favours could be denied in future. This exploitative cul-de-sac for a common person is the product of already de-centralized experiments of Pakistani state, which de-centralizes to restrain social formation (Khan, 2006).

3.1. Third Democratic Interregnum and Local Governments: -

By vary nature, this study is more concerned on the latest round of decentralization. Third democratic interregnum started in 2008 after Gen. Pervez Musharraf resigned as President of Pakistan. The new elected government went at length to expunge the 1973 constitution from all dictatorial traces by unanimously accepting 18th amendment (PILDAT, 2010). It has restored the federal character of the constitution and provided constitutional safeguard to the third tier of democracy for the first time in the history of Pakistan. These constitutional changes provided the primary necessary conditions for enhancement and consolidation of democracy in Pakistan.

The 18th Amendment in the constitution has devolved resources and responsibilities to the federating units and made it mandatory for all the provincial governments to conduct free and fair decentralization of political, fiscal, and administrative powers to third-tier of the government\textsuperscript{15}. The idea behind this decentralization is to make government more responsive to the local needs of citizens. Zaidi (2005) has asserted an uncanny hesitation on the part of democratic governments to devolve power at grassroots level. The politicians at top remain uneasy to this day –even if they belong to their own party- about sharing power with local representatives.

Against the implications of 18th Amendment in the context of establishing local governments, all the four provinces have had completed local government elections. Interestingly, cantonment boards have also elected their local representatives for the first time in the history of Pakistan. Without delving into the details of clientelistic structure of politics in Pakistan and

\textsuperscript{14} The socio-economic inequalities prevailing in Pakistan provide the ideal environment for clientelist transactions in any sphere of life especially politics.

\textsuperscript{15} Local government elections were made mandatory in the 18th amendment for the first time. It states that the local government election is a legal obligation of the state under Article 140-A (1) of the Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973 which states, “Each province shall, by law, establish a local government system and devolve political, administrative and financial responsibility and authority to the elected representatives of the local governments.”
associated moral hazard, we would argue that Pakistani populace is one of the most politically charged in the world (Mohmand, 2011). The rate of participation in local elections, especially in rural, areas stood very high. This high rate may be an outcome of the size of the constituency-smaller constituency intensifies competition that force competing parties to utilize every available vote\textsuperscript{16}.

Rate of participation, we argue, is not a very good indicator for strengthening democracy and that the outcomes are hinging on the nature of vote exchange especially when it comes to local body/government elections as it sets the nucleus of the overall democratic system/process\textsuperscript{17}. The informal institutions at village/ward/union council level work according to their own local distribution of power among different social cross sections and logic of politics, of spoils and, of reciprocity. These local conditions directly influence the political choices and shape decisions of voters mostly disregarding loyalty to any abstract notions of citizenship, collective action, democracy or ideology. This prevails in Pakistan- The vote exchange exists. Just a look at recent elections would suffice to locate the influence of informal institutions at local level as furnished in next section.

4. Cantonment Elections: The Personality Pull

After a number of hiccups, reversals, and claims, the first phase of local government elections (in cantonments) completed in May 2015. A brief overview of the results could help in ascertaining and drawing implications for general local governments. The hallmark of cantonment election in Pakistan, held on 25th April 2015 in 56 cantonments across the country, was “personality pull”. High incidence of independent candidates winning their constituencies reflects the presence of “personality-pull” that candidates use to secure their constituencies. One plausible explanation could be the presence of clientelistic associations. While interpreting the results, another caution must be observed that seats going to political parties did not automatically reflect the popularity of any particular party as face-to-face interaction between candidate and voters is high in local elections thus the attributes of Biradri\textsuperscript{18} and repute of candidate stand atop in political competition. Also it is submitted that party bosses vigilantly looked for a winning horse whether s/he belongs to their ranks or not.

It is interesting to note that cantonment areas are usually adjacent to cities and populated by upward mobile social groups endowed with larger stocks of human, social, and physical capitals.

\textsuperscript{16} Observation made during field visits.

\textsuperscript{17} Let’s assume a 90 per cent turnout on Election Day. The information is incomplete for declaring democracy successful. The central question is; what was the people voting based on?

\textsuperscript{18} The patrilineal kinship group people usually identify with in Punjab.
These groups usually enjoy a lifestyle to which Zaidi (2014) has described as urbanism highlighted by urban civic sensibilities and high-consumerist culture. The independents ended up grabbing a good share of the total votes polled on the day in these predominately urban centers (Fig-1).

**Figure 1: Votes Poled to Independent Candidates in Election of Cantonment boards.**

Manifested from figure 1, the percentage of votes polled to independent candidates is significantly higher. Specifically in the Punjab, the competition between independents and party ticket holders is close-fitting. This “personality-pull” factor reflects few structural imperatives that derive political mobilization and election contestation in Pakistan. This pull factor, primarily, seems to be the outcome of entrenched logic of cultural patronage coopted by earlier regimes to meet their political regimes (Lyon, 2002).

In recent local government elections, another trend has emerged questioning the presence of party based voting patterns (Fig-2). In Balochistan, independent candidates won 500 seats (around 50 per cent). The trend continues in KP local government and cantonment elections, and 165 and 55 seats went to independent candidates respectively. Further, 35 more independents remained runner-up with small margins. While in the Punjab, about 50% (2441) seats went to independents. The pattern reflects the strong influence of personalized political associations at micro level.

19 It is important to note that cantonments present the predominantly urban trends and have presence across the country.
Another important conclusion from the figure 2 above could be drawn that provincial incumbents secured highest seats in local government elections in their respective provinces. This trend is reflexive of benefits and advantages that incumbency could bring in very personalized political atmosphere. All these locales fall into different geographical regions with different level of socio-economic development and inhabited by different ethnicities. However, the emerging trend of independents securing victories tied them to each other.

As mentioned above, high rate of independents winning all over Pakistan reflects the presence of ‘personality-pull’ suggesting the existence of candidate-centered political associations. Personalization of politics foremost depends on the presence of patron-client relations existing among principal (people) and agent (executives). It is further reminded that few qualifications must be made while interpretation made about party positions. The seats going to political parties did not automatically reflect the popularity of any party because in local elections the importance of kinship networks and personal vote bank of candidate weights more than party ticket. Therefore, contrary to national and provincial practice where ideological aligning may count to some extent in local elections, parties run after strong candidates.

It is important however that one of the underlying reasons for the victory of independent candidates may be the absence of effectual democratic functioning chapters of political parties at Tehsil/union council levels\textsuperscript{20}. This political vacuum is occupied by kinship structures shaping political associations at local level. The kinship mediates between state and society, and old cultural logic of strong men leading the community prevails. Literature and results of hitherto conducted local elections in Balochistan and KPK and the cantonment elections across the country displayed that;

- Personalized politics prevailed in local political dynamics in the country.

\textsuperscript{20} The stress is on effectual functioning and not the presence only
This political logic persists across regional, ethnic, provincial and development level differentials. The personalized politics duly affect the voting patterns and vice versa.

The findings have important bearing on the future of democratic decentralization discussed in the respective section of the study at hands. To get a microscopic perspective of the voting dynamics, we went into the field for the study of the voters and voting behaviours. The next section provides the micro evidence on the factors underlying the exchange of vote in local government elections.

5. Practices of and Perceptions on Voting in Local Elections: Evidence from Survey

To supplement the evidence on the preceding discussion, the information was collected on practices and perceptions regarding voting patterns on local elections. We would investigate stimuli and compulsions which derive a Pakistani voter to use his/her right to vote. Chatterjee (2013) has concurred that in post-colonial societies the route of modernity and institutional making is different from the one experienced in Europe. The civic and commercial associations that preceded bureaucratic set up and participation through political system (voting) are reversed in post-colonial societies. Here, it was the state achieving relative autonomy because of the weakness of civic and commercial associations (Alavi 1972).

After independence, the expansion of voting-franchise without related socio-political settings of Europe has given the marginalized group a duct through which their demands and aspirations could flow. However, the presence of unequal social and economic patterns the voting-practices have remained differentiated, incongruent and contrary to the expectations of democratization theorists. Shandana (2008) concluded that mobilization of marginalized groups during Bhutto era was later curtailed, crushed, and coopted by apolitical democratic decentralization of Zia regime. All three previous attempts of decentralization have incentivized parochial and personalized collective action embedded in local identities.

The uneven economic development has created large social cleavages and income inequality coupled with economic insecurity which reduced any chances for nurturing horizontal and voluntary associations. At the same time, social movements and populist political agencies remained fractured because of continuous institutional power imbalances that non-representative institutions enjoyed in Pakistan replacing the collective gains with vested self-interest as the founding brick of voting decision in terms of choice of candidate. The politics in the Punjab is patronage based (Lyon 2002). The historic trajectory in political space adopted by Pakistani state, as discussed above, is to decentralized despotism (cited by Heller, 2001). That has seriously reduced three key capacities that

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are pre-requisites of successful democratic decentralization i) state capacity to initiate and coordinate decentralized institutional building among different levels of states ii) well-developed civil society that have matured associational linkages and very few social cleavages iii) A programmatic and ideologically cohesive political agency embedded in civil society at grass roots level.

It was observed in this study that most of the respondents, in the absence of any cohesive programmatic party and a long tradition of personalized politics, exchange votes through multiple vote-blocks at village level. The cementing element is mostly Biradri\textsuperscript{22}, Neighborhood, or candidate. The figure 3 below provides an insight into the selection criteria for the voter in choosing the candidate (s) he has to vote.

\textbf{Figure 1} Vote-Block criteria for choosing the candidate (%age)

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{vote_block_criteria.png}
\caption{Vote-Block criteria for choosing the candidate (%age)}
\end{figure}

Authors’ calculation based on survey (2015)

As is evident, central pillar of voting is Biradri. Vote for Biradri fellow is its most common use in local elections (i.e. 37 %). The reasons for voting Biradri fellows usually ranged from emotional and relational to ideological. Respondents were of opinion that being from their kin such politicians are relatively accessible than others. Most of the vote-block leaders belonged to agricultural Biradri; although they could be employed in other professions. These block leaders use all sources of symbolic, social, and physical capital to build and sustain that vote-block. Another majority of respondents vote by taking into account their self-interest (30%). Religion, relatively important vote pivot in national elections, has almost no business in local elections. Noticeably, the most conspicuous absence is of class based voting, which on an environment of social and economic inequality indicate the absence of horizontal solidarity and exhibits presence of clientelistic (vertical) political associations.

Once built, clientelistic networks sustained through political means, which eventually cause misuse of public office for meeting personal ends. The constitution of vote-block in all guises incentivizes

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\textsuperscript{22} Kinship, a patrilineal community identified through common ancestor.
clientelistic relations and internal dependency. Vote-blocks then strategically tie themselves with candidates who, in their calculation, could provide the best bargain. The vote-block leaders/brokers could be associated with any one or other political party and usually act strategically by making alliances with other counterparts at union council level. Such political associations thwart any transformational capacity of politics and help sustaining old patron-client relations albeit in more instrumentalized ways.

As is evident from the preceding discussion, the formation of vote-block has far-reaching implications for the local government elections. Given the smaller scale of constituencies, a single major block can be decisive in victory/defeat. One vote-block supporting any candidate consists of individuals who gelled together for different reasons and possibly the loyalties of its member would shift in next elections. The voters are very conscious about it and use it pragmatically to their advantage. A look into formation of voting block clearly suggests that very limited exposure of common voters to inclusive politics at local level has made political arena a place where customary notions of Izzat\textsuperscript{23}, rivalry, and reciprocity influence the voting decision of any individual; the decisions limited by dhara bandi\textsuperscript{24}.

Collective action, one of the key arguments of democratization proponents, is not very popular in our part of the world. Trifle disputes and rivalries, archaic notions of prestige (belonging to high social status group) along with simple and direct purpose of maximizing self-utility largely influence the formation of these informal, unstable and not-so-democratic political institutions. Dhara or vote-block has different reasons of formations and remain open to inclusion of people with different socio-economic characteristics\textsuperscript{25}. The formation of the vote-block, “dhara bandi” provides an interesting picture of clientelism as is given in figure 4 below:

**Figure-4: The pillars around which vote-block\textsuperscript{26} is formed: The Dhara Bandi**

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
 & Rivalry & Prestige & collective action & Security & Securing benefit & Other \\
\hline
19\% & 21\% & 10\% & 12\% & 77\% & 16\% \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Authors' calculation based on survey (2015)}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{23} Prestige

\textsuperscript{24} The making of vote-block

\textsuperscript{25} Vote-block in Sialkot is not a very stable institution as its constitution changes with every election. This instability can be attributed to the strong penetration of capitalistic economic relations into rural social formation.

\textsuperscript{26} The fault lines that structure vote-blocks or different raison d’etre of vote-block formation in Punjabi society.
Interestingly and very importantly, of the 240 respondents, only 24 (10%) enter into a vote-block for the collective gain and the rest of 90% enter into any vote-block based on rivalry, prestige, security, and personal benefits (Figure 4). The evidence is indicative of strong bases of clientelism and the failure of collective gain as a pivoting factor in the making of vote-block which has very serious implications for democratic decentralization.

Further analysis suggests that while joining dhara, the individuals primarily consider the “self-interest\(^{27}\)”. While seeking the individual reasons behind joining any one or other dhara, we came to know the increasing role of rational choices that voters make; they use their vote as an instrument to maximize their immediate benefits. This is a sign of increasing clientelism where both clients and patron extract gains\(^{28}\). As is evident from figure 5, none of the 240 respondents was found entering into dhara for collective gain reasserting the extent to which vote is exchanged for personal gains.

Figure 5: Why do individuals join vote-block, the dhara

![Bar chart showing reasons for joining dhara](chart.png)

Authors’ calculation based on survey (2015)

It was also observed that voters popularly evaluate candidates for his/her influence over local state institutions, his/her status and access and availability to them. Any person, with low status and influence can neither manage to attract attention of any of the political machines (parties) nor voters. Education, integrity and reputation weigh very little in the political calculations. Influence with local administration always has a cost and any politician, who wants to survive, first pays it and then extracts it while in office.

This personalized method of service delivery is equated with performance in local parlance (Figure 6). Previous record in the provision of these services or their promises in future is the best rhetoric used extensively by all competing candidates. It is evident that more than 70 per cent people vote for the candidate showing higher influence amongst his or her competitors\(^{29}\).

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\(^{27}\) This self-interest is generally an immediate gain against which the vote is exchanged.

\(^{28}\) This reciprocal exchange has dire consequences for accountability of elected officials.

\(^{29}\) This finding has serious and far reaching implications for accountability of local government representatives and shall be discussed in forthcoming note of this series.
This snapshot of political perceptions and practices endorses the view of political theorists of South Asia that modernization here did not help in the elimination of patron-client relation albeit changed its functional forms (Akhtar, 2011; Khan, 1998). All this clearly indicates towards vote exchange which is deep-rooted in the society to the extent that introduction of the political parties may stand redundant. As one can see, figure-7 reiterates the similar inferences although in different fashion.

It is observed that 53% of the respondents opined negatively on the participation of political parties in local bodies’ elections. The lack of support for political parties at grass roots level is once again because of informal arrangements people are embedded for survival and maintenance. The modernization of economy replaced old associations with new ones but hierarchy remained intact. The shear economic insecurity, lack of public goods’ availability and increasing demands of a modernizing economy have pushed back the voter towards older mediums of social and psychic stability (Güneş-Ayata & Roniger, 1994). The respondents in villages of Sialkot (a highly industrialized district) also raised skepticism about the introduction of party-based local elections. The reasons are similar as described by Heller (2001): the loss of old certainties and patron-client networks.

6. Conclusion and Implications:-

Democratic decentralization is seen usually as the most effective system to make social policy further responsive to the needs of citizens. The preceding discussion, however, clearly manifests
that the attempts of top-down decentralization with technocratic impulse have failed to make state
and public policy responsive to the needs of political society more entrenched within the informal
sector of economy. “I give you vote, what will you give me” trend is observed in the context of
immediate personal gains extraction.

Economic underdevelopment and top-down development model of state coupled with apolitical
decentralization has led to personalization of politics. The culture of patronage has perfectly wielded
with this model of decentralization in Pakistan attenuating the political development and restricting
social transformation required for a sustainable economic growth and development. Presence of
local informal political institutions seriously undermines the democratic nature of local politics
because of differentials of power locally. A vote exchange, regulated by customary rules and
informal institutions embedded in local cultural norms, is emerging, which in the absence of
democratic political parties only helps in recreating economic inequalities into political realm.
Previous role played by the state in decimating progressive political and social narratives is mostly
responsible for the present state of affairs.

All household members vote as a unit and this unit is further a sub unit of a vote-block, dhara.
Household and vote-block head take mostly political decisions. Therefore, although people
participate in local elections the participation is conditioned by informal institution of vote-blocks
and Biradri30. This presence of hierarchy made political parties redundant in local equation of
politics and ask for analyzing results carefully. This political informality is highly co-related with the
informalisation of economy. Informalization of economy is duly linked with this existing political
informality and inequality in access to state and market which affect the voting patterns. Majority of
the labour force, employed in informal sector, is coalesced, manipulated or forced to negotiate and
determine terms of political action31. The confounded impact of these factors posits a dilemma that
demands new methods of investigation and critical perspectives to understand such emergent
sociocultural phenomenon. Public policy and democratization narratives must look at the process in
a reflexive not a linear way.

Most of the voters, in the absence of any cohesive programmatic party and a long tradition of
personalized politics, exchange votes through multiple vote-blocks at village level. The cementing
element is mostly Biradri, Neighborhood or personality pull (candidate itself). Most of the vote-block
leaders belonged to agricultural Biradri although they could be employed in other professions. They
use all sources of symbolic, social and physical capital to build and sustain that vote-block. The vote-
block then strategically tied itself with candidates who, in its calculation, could provide the best

30 The voting based on household and dhara has serious repercussions for the female participation in general and the voting decisions of the females in particular as they are not allowed making their choices and have to vote as “directed”.

31 Off the 498 workers, 166 were unskilled and manual workers (Table-1 appendix-A)
bargain. The vote-block sustains it through developing an internal hierarchy and bargaining mechanism. The organizing principles or underlying needs of these vote-blocks could be of different kinds and could depend upon multiple power-relations found in different social settings. This informal regulation of political action has serious implications for representative democracy at large.

Social context for efficient, effective, and sustainable democratic decentralization must be studied to make decentralization purposeful and successful. Emergence of middle classes in Pakistan is not co-related with deepening of democracy and institutional development. The reasons are of historically shaped interaction of middle class with both the state and social structure. The entrenched nature of political relationships that pivot around an unequal exchange relation between political brokers and voters, reinforce an internal dependency. Unlike economic intermediaries, the role of political brokers is more destructive, backward looking and oppressive in nature. The programmatic and cohesive political parties that could effectively mobilize citizens along horizontal solidarities are required for deepening democracy.

We argue that multiple challenges of good governance, delivery of social utilities, social development and deepening of democracy can be met only through taking into account the local context. Absence of collective action and lack of horizontal solidarity are big hurdles that democracy at grass roots level needs to overcome. The economic inequality, regard for kinship affinities and patronage embedded within cultural system are at odds with individualistic norms of modern political democracy. In order to break the hold of these personalized ways of politicking, internally democratic and accountable political parties are argued to be a sine qua non for a representative democracy but this option may fail to buy the proponents given the construct of our society and political parties.

The greatest challenge lying ahead is the defiance of clientelistic associations as these association buy sustainability from the rationally made choices by the voters. Modernization is associated with newer forms of rationality and association as Weber famously stated. The increasing rationality in an underdeveloped (increasingly informal) economy leads a rational political agent to manage his/her survival through informal mediatory political institutions and relations. The failure on the part of state to institute rule of law and provision of basic necessities make politics a game of

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32 Rehman & Amin (Forthcoming).
33 Middle class peasant shows a relatively more inclination and regard for kinship solidarities. For details see (Alavi, 1973).
34 This provides the very base of patronage and unequal exchange
35 Modernization in Pakistan is mostly forced from above pursuing the only target of economic growth. Inclusive political institutions were deliberately denied because it may not sit well with economic plans of ruling elite in Pakistan. Sustainable development is only plain rhetoric if stripped away from its social and political aspect and inclusivity in economic gains.
rational calculations striping away its ethical and constitutional content. Social exclusion fragments the political space and turned vote into tradeable commodities\textsuperscript{36}. Thus facing economic insecurity and cultural dislocation, common voter is left with only one choice, i.e. to use his vote as an instrument and not a political obligation.

We assert that making the democratic decentralization work, primarily, needs the remedies waning away the patronage bonds between the candidate and the voter. It is further proclaimed that the interventions based on common practices of, for example, raising awareness and educating the voter may fail to generate the required results as voters, given the situation, are making choices rationally and that they are well aware of the fact that vote can be used as instrument serving the self-interest best. So they do it.

We conclude that making the growth inclusive, ensuring economic security and equitable economic development and reshaping the economy from predominantly informal to formal may dwindle the clientelistic associations prevailing at the grass roots of democracy and help reaping positives of democratic decentralization in an environment where collective gain takes lead over the personal immediate gains in making a voting decision. Finally we want to assert that findings of this study in no way discourage the role of democratic decentralization in the dispensation of opportunities of economic wellbeing at grass roots level but to look at it in a reflexive way. The contention is that the milieu, in which this role of democratic decentralization can work, needs to be ensured.

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**Appendix-A**

Table 1- Occupational distribution in respondent households by village

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Village Name</th>
<th>Badoke</th>
<th>Ghoinkey</th>
<th>Gojra</th>
<th>Lodikay</th>
<th>Khrolian</th>
<th>Jindo</th>
<th>Sahi</th>
<th>Total Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main occupation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture(skilled worker)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>68</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>63</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crafts related occupations</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>91</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unskilled/Manual labor</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>166</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plant/Machine operators</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>498</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2- Village level Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Candidate Based</th>
<th>Non-Candidate Based</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Voters</td>
<td>Non-Farm employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghoinkey</td>
<td>4000</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gojra</td>
<td>9000</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jinddo Sahi</td>
<td>2500</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3- Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Statistics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average Household size</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average education (years)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean age (Years)</td>
<td>26.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacca (cemented) houses</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Number of Rooms</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of Electricity</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Farm employment</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependency Ratio</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Size of Landholding (Acre)</td>
<td>2.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House ownership</td>
<td>99.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual employed workers</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Votes through Blocks</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males to Female Ratio</td>
<td>56:44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households Receiving Remittances</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taped Water</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low interest in Politics</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for Political Parties</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Total number of households is 240.

Table 4- Key-informants’ occupation and political role by village

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Political role</th>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Political role</th>
<th>Village</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>Vote block leader</td>
<td>Ralioke</td>
<td>Farm manager</td>
<td>Active participant</td>
<td>Gojra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Observer</td>
<td>Lodikay</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>Vote block leader</td>
<td>Ralioke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Teacher</td>
<td>Political broker</td>
<td>Khrolian</td>
<td>farmer</td>
<td>Vote block leader</td>
<td>Jindo Sahi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>Candidate</td>
<td>Badoke Cheema</td>
<td>manager</td>
<td>Vote block leader</td>
<td>Ghoinkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self-employed</td>
<td>active participant</td>
<td>Lodikay</td>
<td>self-employed</td>
<td>ex-councillor</td>
<td>Khrolian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union council Secretary</td>
<td>Observer</td>
<td>Ghoinkey</td>
<td>Advocate</td>
<td>active participant</td>
<td>Gojra</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>