

**POLITICAL INFORMATION BEHAVIOR, POLITICAL IGNORANCE, AND
VOTING BEHAVIOR OF RURAL DWELLERS IN PAKISTAN**

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Abstract

This study explored political information behavior, political ignorance, and voting behavior of citizens residing in a rural setting using a qualitative research design. Face-to-face interviews of 71 individuals were conducted using an unstructured interview guide. Each interview was carefully recorded and transcribed. The transcribed data were analyzed and grouped into recurrent themes using content analysis. The results indicated that a large majority of rural inhabitants were politically ignorant and did not seem to be in need of political information. They were not politically conscious as they were unaware about the existing political system, the way government operates and affect their lives, current affairs, and rural development programs. However, a good number of participants required political information on current affairs, rural development policies, government policies and decisions, and both local and national political news. They mainly depended on mass-media particularly television for political information followed by newspapers, radio, and interpersonal relationships.

The analysis also revealed that a large majority of these participants (n=61, 86%) did not know the value of their votes as a they, especially males, cast their votes using their preferences for their caste/clan, endorsement by the community leader, fear of enmity of village elite, and friendship with community leader. It was interesting to mention that the female participants mainly cast their votes considering the wishes of their household heads which was in contrast with the male voting behavior. There were only a few

participants who choose a social worker for vote casting. Illiteracy, low education, language barriers, electricity shortage, bad timings of television talk shows were the major constraints restricting the rural dwellers in obtaining political information.

These results have quite serious implications on the existing political system known as democracy in Pakistan. In addition, the results will assist the government officials in the development of a need-based, unified, and integrated rural information delivery system. These will also be helpful for NGOs, civil society, mainstream mass-media, and community based organizations in shaping public opinion, overcoming socio-political inequalities, altering existing socio-political arrangements, and strengthening socio-political participation. This research may provide new directions for more detailed and in-depth inquiries in the proposed area as no other study appears to have been conducted so far on the rural citizens' political ignorance, political information behavior, and voting behaviour.

To my teachers, parents, friends and my wife

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List of Abbreviations

- P Participant
- QR Qualitative Research
- RQ Research Questions

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the study

Democracy is, generally, supposed to be the government of the people, by the people, and for the people. The primary premise of democracy is that every member of the society, whether literate or illiterate, who is subject to policy should have a voice in its formulation through elected representatives. For effective political participation and wise voting behavior, people need credible political information (Bartels, 1996; Delli, Carpini, & Keeter, 1996; Druckman, 2005; Lau & Redlawsk, 2001; Sniderman, Brody, & Tetlock, 1991). If they are politically ignorant, it becomes difficult for them to cast their ballots wisely and, thus, unable to hold political leaders accountable for their actions and performance (Craig, Michael, & James, 1999; Druckman, J. 2005; Niemi, & Weisberg, 2001). Similarly, Eveland and William (2004) state that political knowledge is essential for citizens in making informed decisions about government. Although there are differences of opinion about whether or not political information matters, it does suggest that political ignorance ultimately weakens the case for decentralizing power of the government.

Pakistan is a developing country where 61% of its population lives in rural areas (World Bank, 2015). The rural people are either predominantly illiterate or have low educational levels and are ignorant of new ways of improving their lives. They usually struggle for their survival. The factors such as poverty, ignorance, disease, high rate of illiteracy and lack of basic

infrastructure keep rural people stagnant (Naveed & Anwar, 2014). Consequently, they are unable to make a meaningful contribution in the socio-economic areas, particularly political development. Arnove (1973) defined political development as “the institutionalization of widespread opportunities for effective mass participation in decision-making” (p.198). In other words, it is “the capacity of the political system to satisfy the changing needs of the members of the society” (Park, 1984, 58). According to Eckstein (1982), it is “the growth that occurs in politics as such” (p.470). Unfortunately, the knowledge of rural people about politics is disturbingly low and the political participation of rural population, in general, is either minimal or negative. In addition, the rural people often do a poor job of evaluating political information they do have. A widespread and persistent political ignorance keeps them politically unaware and hinders them in making an active political participation which is a measure of political development.