The Political Socialization of Pakistani Youth: A Quantitative Study of Higher Education Institutions in Pakistan

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Abstract

Educational institutions do not only impart formal education but also serve as agents of political socialization. The present quantitative study examines how higher education institutions in Pakistan contribute to the political socialization of youth and to what extent these institutions encourage political participation and informed citizenship. A survey of 100 university students across three cities (Muzaffarabad, Gujrat, and Lahore) was conducted using a structured questionnaire. Results indicate that the political socialization process among university students is dynamic and multi-faceted, involving various formal and informal agents. Family, peers, media, and educational experiences all significantly shape the political awareness, the attitudes and the behaviour of youth. Notably, while most respondents' value democratic participation, gaps in political knowledge and trust in media were observed. The findings underscore the need to integrate civic education and open up discourse in university environments to foster informed, active citizens. In the light of these findings, policy measures to strengthen the role of universities regarding political socialization are recommended.

Keywords: Civic participation; Higher education; Pakistan; Political socialization; Religion; Youth

Introduction

One of the primary purposes of education is to prepare individuals for constructive roles in society – not only economically, but also as responsible citizens. In addition to obvious academic functions, educational institutions fulfill latent social functions such as socializing the younger generation with regard to societal norms and roles (e.g. instilling civic values, discipline, and community belonging). As students progress through higher education, they are continually socialized into the political system – acquiring knowledg[3]e, values, and behaviour relevant to civic life. In Pakistan, an Islamic republic, religion and culture are deeply intertwined with politics. The country's identity as an Islamic state continues to influence its domestic political and social affairs, meaning that the political socialization of youth in Pakistan may be shaped not only by formal curricula but also by religious and philosophical values

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embedded in society. Educational institutions, therefore, occupy a unique position: they provide a state-regulated arena where young citizens can develop political understanding, practice civic skills, and form their identity within the broader socio-religious context of Pakistan.

The political system itself can be viewed as a subsystem of society concerned with the attainment of certain goals such as setting collective goals, making policies, and maintaining social order. Higher education institutions contribute input to this political subsystem by shaping youth who will become voters, leaders, and informed citizens in the future. Through both manifest functions (e.g. teaching about government, democracy, rights and responsibilities) and latent functions (e.g. providing a space for political discussion, instilling norms of participation), universities potentially play an important role in sustaining the political system. Indeed, education's contribution to political socialization is significant, even if sometimes underappreciated. Scholars have noted that in Pakistan, the role of educational institutions in politics has often been criticized or overlooked (e.g. being blamed for political apathy among youth). Nonetheless, these institutions do assist the political system by imparting civic knowledge and values to students, thereby indirectly aiding in the attainment of political goals and stability.

Despite the generally accepted importance of this topic, relatively little empirical research has examined the political socialization of youth through education in Pakistan. Most existing studies of political socialization have been conducted in Western contexts, and only a few recent works have focused on Pakistani youth (e.g. (Ahmad *et al.* 2019), on youth political participation). There is a clear need to investigate how Pakistani higher education institutions influence students' political orientations. The present study addresses this gap by focusing on university students in three different regions of Pakistan. In particular, we ask: What role do educational institutions play in the political socialization of Pakistani youth? How do universities shape students' political participation and sense of civic duty? To what extent are these institutions contributing to producing informed, engaged "good citizens," and what are students' perceptions of Pakistan's political system? By exploring these questions, this study aims to shed light on the educational mechanisms that inform the political outlook of Pakistan's next generation. Ultimately, understanding this process can help policymakers and educators strengthen the positive impact of higher education on democratic culture and the development of citizenship. This is especially pertinent given global calls to empower youth for sustainable development and civic engagement.

Literature Review

Research on political socialization has long identified multiple agents through which individuals acquire political orientations, including family, schools, peer groups, and media. Early foundational studies emphasized the significant role of

childhood experiences. (Hess & Torney, 1967), for example, argued that basic orientations toward authority and politics are often formed by the end of elementary school. In the mid-1960s it was even suggested that political socialization is "virtually complete as early as the end of elementary school," reflecting findings that children's political attitudes show little change from late childhood to adolescence. Children learn about authority figures, national ideals, and political symbols in school, which can either reinforce or modify what they absorb in the family. The family typically serves as the first source of political values but the school is "the only state-controlled arena in which children can practice citizenship skills," making it a critical venue for civic education (Hess & Torney, 1967). Langton's (1969) study similarly found that the formal civics curriculum can have an effect on students' sense of political efficacy, suggesting that what schools teach does matter for certain political attitudes – especially among some subgroups of students. However, not all research agreed on strong curriculum effects.

Some scholars have pointed out some limitations of schools in the shaping of political attitudes. (Palonsky, 1987) observed that despite years of schooling, young people often exhibit low political efficacy and participation, and increasingly negative attitudes with age. He argued that traditional research had been too narrow, and one must consider how children actively construct political understanding based on *all* contexts – home, community, and school. This perspective implies that while schooling provides knowledge, it is the interplay of family conversations, neighborhood influences and other experiences that truly forms an individual's political worldview. Consistent with this, later research by (Ehman, 1980) reviewed American schools' influence and concluded that the latent aspects of schooling (such as classroom climate and participatory opportunities) have more impact on political attitudes than the formal civics syllabus. According to Ehman's findings, an open classroom environment where students can express opinions and debate issues is strongly linked to positive democratic attitudes, whereas the standard civics curriculum by itself showed little effect on students' political orientations. Furthermore, opportunities for students to participate in school governance or extracurricular activities with civic themes were found to enhance political engagement and attitudes. For example, recent longitudinal research in Sweden demonstrated that participation in extracurricular activities during high school significantly predicts higher political participation in early adulthood. These insights highlight that *how* schools teach (the "latent curriculum") may be as important as *what* they teach in shaping politically aware citizens.

Family influence, of course, remains paramount across these studies. It has been consistently demonstrated that parental political affiliation and discussion at home can clearly predict the political leanings of adolescents. A recent study by (Tyler & Iyengar, 2023) showed that in today's era of growing polarization, teenagers often adopt polarized views similar to their parents, indicating that partisan socialization

begins early. They found that adolescents who share their parents' party identity and whose parents hold more extreme partisan attitudes are apt to voice similarly polarized opinions about political figures and parties. This underlines the enduring impact of family as an agent of socialization – a finding echoed in classic longitudinal research. For instance, (Beck & Jennings, 1991) followed American families over time and found a high correspondence between parents' and children's party identifications, with parent-youth partisan similarity especially strong when children were still living at home. In their 1965 survey, the partisan environment of the family was strongly related to the child's own party ID. Such inter-generational transmission of political loyalties is well documented in Western settings and is highly relevant in the Pakistani context where family and kinship networks significantly influence political loyalties. In Pakistan's stratified society, kinship and patronage ties are often the most important foci of people's political loyalty, sometimes even outweighing ideology. Studies of Pakistani politics have described it as akin to "aristocratic politicking" based on family lineage and alliances whereby individuals strategically use descent and marriage ties to build political support. Thus, we can expect that a youth's political socialization in Pakistan may be heavily influenced by family and clan-based allegiances. Moreover, in societies like Pakistan where religion is a prominent part of family and community life, the transmission of religious values can intersect with political socialization. For instance, parents shape the religious identities of Muslim youth, which can indirectly frame those youths' political perspectives on issues of governance and society (Cheah *et al.* 2021). In Pakistan, religion and politics have often been intertwined; the nation's identity as an Islamic Republic means that religious philosophy and political values frequently inform one another. We can thus expect that a youth's political socialization in Pakistan may be influenced by religious discourse (such as sermons, religious student groups, or the ideological narratives in curricula) alongside secular civic teachings.

Despite extensive international literature on youth civic development, there is a paucity of research focusing on Pakistan's educational institutions as incubators of political socialization. A few local studies have begun to explore this area. For example, (Hussain, 2015) critiques the Pakistani educational system for its shortcomings, yet acknowledges that schools and universities inherently instill certain social and political norms. (Ahmad *et al.* 2019) found variations in political participation among Pakistani young people and highlighted the importance of empowering youth as informed voters. Similarly, (Ahmed *et al*. 2020) discuss how agents of political socialization (family, education, media, etc.) influence voting behavior and state that youth political participation acts as a key mediator. These studies, while limited in number, reinforce the idea that understanding the channels of youth political socialization in Pakistan is critical for strengthening democratic engagement.

In light of the literature, the present study is guided by a theoretical framework proposed by (Massialas, 1970) for examining political socialization. Massialas suggests that political socialization can be assessed along several dimensions or indices, notably: political efficacy (one's sense of influence on the political process), political trust (confidence in government and leaders), civic duty (sense of responsibility to participate, such as voting), political participation (actual or intended involvement in political activities), and political knowledge (understanding of political systems and processes). These indices provide a comprehensive way to evaluate how well young people are being prepared to engage with the political system. Using this framework, our study examines to what extent Pakistani university students have developed efficacy, trust, sense of duty, participation, and knowledge, and how educational experiences may have contributed to these aspects of their political socialization (Campos *et al.* 2016).

Methodology

This research has employed a cross-sectional survey design to capture the current state of political socialization among university students in Pakistan. A quantitative approach was adopted, using a structured questionnaire (administered as an interview schedule) to gather data. The population of interest was students enrolled in higher education institutions across Pakistan. Given logistical constraints, a multistage sampling strategy was used to select a diverse yet manageable sample (Dahl, 1998). In the first stage, three universities from different regions were deliberately chosen to include geographic and cultural variation. The institutions selected were:

i. **University of Azad Jammu & Kashmir** (Muzaffarabad, representing Azad Kashmir in the north),

ii. **University of Gujrat** (representing a semi-urban district in Punjab province), and

iii. **University of the Punjab** (Lahore, representing a major urban center in central Punjab).

In the second stage, students at these universities were approached and randomly invited to participate in the survey. The principal investigator and research team visited the campuses of the selected universities to administer the questionnaire on-site, which ensured a good response rate and allowed clarifying any queries from respondents. Efforts were made to obtain a reasonably representative sample of the student population within these institutions, balancing gender and including various academic levels.

A total of $N = 100$ students completed the survey across the three universities. The sample was evenly split by gender (50% male and 50% female). Respondents ranged in age from late teens to mid-twenties: about half (50%) were 18–20 years old,

20% were 21–22, 15% were 23–24, and the remaining 15% were 25 or older. The academic levels of the participants were predominantly undergraduate (approximately 70% pursuing bachelor's degrees) with the remainder in graduate programs (around 30% in M.Phil. or equivalent). This mix of undergraduates and postgraduates is useful for capturing both initial and more mature stages of student socialization. Students from both urban and rural backgrounds took part; notably, many youths from rural areas come to these universities for higher education, which provided some insight into locality-based differences in socialization (explored later in the results).

For data collection, a close-ended questionnaire was developed as the main instrument. The questionnaire was prepared in English and then translated into Urdu (the national language) to accommodate respondents who preferred Urdu. It included sections covering demographics and multiple items related to political socialization. Key items probed the perceived influence of various agents (family, teachers, peers, community, media, religious beliefs) on the student's political views, as well as the student's own political attitudes and behaviors (interest in politics, voting intentions, trust in institutions, understanding of political processes, etc.). Most of the substantive items were framed as statements with Likert-scale responses (e.g. *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree*), allowing quantification of agreement levels. Example statements included:

i. *"My teachers have encouraged me to develop political awareness."*
ii. *"I feel comfortable expressing political opinions in class."*
iii. *"My family background has influenced my interest in politics."*
iv. *"My religious beliefs influence my political thinking."*
v. *"I regularly follow political news or discussions on social media."*

(See Appendix for the full list of survey items.) These items were designed based on the literature and Massialas's conceptual dimensions – for instance, items on understanding the importance of voting and knowledge of the electoral process tapped into political knowledge and a sense of civic duty whereas items on discussing politics with friends or participating in campus activities reflected aspects of political participation and efficacy.

Ethical considerations were observed during the study. Participation was voluntary and respondents provided informed consent. They were assured of anonymity and that their responses would be used only for research purposes. After data collection, responses were coded and analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 21) software. Both descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages) and some inferential analyses were carried out to summarize the trends in the data. Given the scope of this article, we primarily report the descriptive findings that illuminate the overall pattern of political socialization among the surveyed students.

Results

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The surveyed students' profiles provide context for interpreting the findings. As noted, the sample achieved a gender balance (50% male, 50% female) and included students from three distinct locales (Azad Kashmir, northern Punjab, and central Punjab). The age distribution skewed towards late adolescents – half of the respondents were in the 18–20 age group, reflecting students in the early years of university. A smaller segment (20%) were 21–22 years old, with the rest above 22, including some postgraduate students. In terms of education level, 70% were enrolled in bachelor's degree programs while 30% were pursuing M.Phil. or other postgraduate degrees. This mix of undergraduates and graduates is useful for capturing both initial and more advanced stages of student socialization. There was also a mix of urban and rural backgrounds; a notable portion of students from rural areas had come to these universities for higher education, which may influence certain responses related to locality (as discussed below).

Political Awareness and Democratic Values

The survey responses revealed moderately high support for democratic norms among the youth. When asked about the importance of political participation for democracy, a strong majority concurred: about 71% of students agreed or strongly agreed that *"a well-functioning democracy cannot work without political participation."* This indicates that most respondents grasp the basic principle that citizen involvement is vital in a democracy – a fact widely recognized in democratic theory (Dahl, 1998). In line with this, many also expressed a sense of civic duty. For instance, when presented with the statement *"I believe it is my civic duty to vote,"* over 70% responded affirmatively (agree/strongly agree), reflecting a prevalent norm that voting is an obligation of good citizenship. (This finding mirrors prior research on Pakistani university students, which also noted strong norms in favor of voting (Ahmed *et al*. 2020). However, knowledge about *how* the democratic system functions was less robust. Only about 53% of respondents agreed that they know how general elections in Pakistan are conducted, with the rest either uncertain or disagreeing. In other words, roughly half of these students admitted to gaps in understanding the electoral process, even while valuing the *idea* of participation. This points toward a need for better civic education regarding the mechanics of voting and governance – a gap that universities could help fill by offering more practical information on political processes (Galston, 2001).

Family and Social Identity Influences

Family emerged as a highly influential agent of political socialization in this study. An overwhelming 78% of students agreed (60% *Agree* + 18% *Strongly Agree*) that their family background has contributed to their interest in politics. Many students

come from families where political discussions are common or where elders impart their political views to the youth. In fact, 54% of respondents reported that their families regularly vote in elections, which not only sets an example of political participation but also often aligns the family with certain political parties or ideologies. These findings reinforce the notion that political orientations are often initially cultivated at home, as parents and older relatives transmit their preferences and norms – consistent with the broader literature underscoring parental impact on the political leanings of youth. Additionally, a person's socio-economic status and ethnic/regional identity were found to shape political views. Over half of the students (58%) acknowledged that their socio-economic background affects their views on political issues. Those from higher-income or more educated family backgrounds might have different political priorities and exposures than those from lower-income settings. Meanwhile, 68% of respondents agreed that their ethnic or regional identity influences their political preferences. This is significant in a diverse country like Pakistan – for example, Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashtun, Muhajir, or Kashmiri identities often correspond with distinct political party followings or stances on regional autonomy (Jary & Jary, 2005). A sense of regional or ethnic identity can thus inform which leaders or policies a young person supports.

The survey further found that 69% of students reported that people in their neighborhood frequently engage in political discussions, indicating that community environment provides another forum for political learning. Hearing political talk in one's locality – whether it's debates in village gatherings or conversations on city street corners – can reinforce awareness and interest. Moreover, 70% of students felt that the language they speak at home (Punjabi, Pahari, Urdu, etc.) is represented in national politics, meaning they perceive their linguistic group has a voice in the political sphere (Lundberg & Abdelzadeh, 2024). This sense of linguistic inclusion likely boosts their identification with the political system, as they see their cultural identity reflected in it. Notably, there was a rural-urban dynamic at play: about 70% of students who hailed from rural backgrounds agreed that coming from a rural area affects their political participation. Many rural-origin students felt they had fewer opportunities or faced more barriers to engage in politics, which could be due to factors like less access to political events, lower exposure to civic education in rural schools, or different community expectations. This suggests the need for bridging gaps between rural and urban youth in terms of political engagement opportunities.

Role of Religion

A particularly notable finding was the strong role of religion in shaping political thought. Fully 75% of respondents agreed that *"my religious beliefs influence my political thinking."* This reflects how deeply interwoven religion is with politics in Pakistan. Many of these university students view political issues at least partly through a religious lens – for example, stances on laws, governance, or leaders might be influenced by Islamic teachings or by the views of religious scholars they follow. This

high percentage is unsurprising given Pakistan's socio-political context, where religious ideology has historically been tied to national identity and political rhetoric. It aligns with the idea that Pakistan's Islamic character continues to inform its political affairs, and that youths' values on justice or leadership may be derived from religious concepts. The finding underscores that any discussion of the political socialization of youth in Pakistan must account for religion as a key factor, alongside secular influences (Massialas, 1970). (It is worth noting that "religious influence" here does not necessarily imply negative outcomes; it can motivate political engagement for moral or charitable causes but it might also lead to exclusionary attitudes if civic education does not emphasize pluralism.)

Peer Influence and Campus Environment

Beyond family and identity, peer groups – friends and classmates – were found to significantly shape the political views of youth. An overwhelming 80% of students said that their political opinions are influenced by discussions with friends or peers (with 15% *strongly Agree* and 65% *Agree*). This indicates that university campuses, where young people constantly interact, are hotbeds of political idea exchange. Casual conversations in dorms, debates in classrooms, or chats over social media with friends often expose students to new perspectives and can either reinforce or challenge their pre-existing beliefs. The influence of peers can be positive (stimulating greater interest and knowledge) but can also lead to blind following or the spread of misinformation if everyone in a circle shares the same unchecked sources. Nonetheless, the high level of peer influence suggests that the campus social environment plays a critical role in political socialization – supporting the earlier point from the literature that an open climate for discussion in educational settings strongly correlates with political engagement. In our survey, however, some students noted that they did *not* always feel comfortable voicing political opinions in class if the environment was not open or if faculty discouraged political talk. This points to variation in campus climates: where an open, tolerant atmosphere existed, students benefited from peer learning; in more restrictive environments, that potential was under-utilized. Importantly, the role of peers on political behavior is corroborated by experimental evidence: one study found that exposure to peer opinions in a classroom setting can significantly sway students' political views and increase their propensity to engage in politics. Our findings thus highlight that peer networks, if harnessed constructively, can be a powerful driver of political socialization in the university context (Xenos *et al.* 2014).

Media Consumption and Political Engagement

The habits of media use among the respondents highlight the growing importance of digital media in the political socialization of youth. A large portion of students reported actively engaging with political content through various media. Traditional media still have a presence: 66% of respondents said they regularly watch political talk shows on television to get information. These talk shows – a staple of

Pakistani TV – often feature debates on current issues and can shape viewers' opinions. Even more students are plugged into online platforms: 69% reported that they follow political pages or influential people in politics on social media (such as on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram). These might include official pages of politicians, activist groups, or popular bloggers/vloggers who comment on politics. Social media not only disseminates information but also allows interactive engagement. Indeed, 75% of students agreed that they use social media as a tool to participate in political discussions (for example, commenting on posts, sharing political memes, or debating in online forums). Interestingly, 69% admitted that they are influenced by political memes and satire on social media. Political satire and humorous memes – which are widespread in Pakistani social media – can subtly shape political perceptions by highlighting certain issues or mocking particular leaders. This high engagement with online political content shows that social media have become powerful agents of socialization, providing youth with both information and a sense of participation in the political discourse. The prevalence of social media in our sample's political habits aligns with global trends: studies in other democracies have found that youth heavily use social networking sites to obtain news and express political views, sometimes even helping to equalize engagement among younger citizens. For example, (Xenos *et al.* 2014) noted that in the US, Australia, and UK, social media use is strongly associated with higher political engagement among youth.

However, the credibility and trust in media emerged as a mixed picture. When asked if they consider social media a reliable source of political information, just over half (54%) agreed that it is credible, whereas a substantial 33% disagreed (the remainder were neutral). This indicates a divide: many students rely on social networks for news yet remain wary of misinformation – a valid concern given the prevalence of "fake news" and unverified information online. Traditional journalism did not receive the same evaluation. When asked more generally if *"media can play a strong role in promoting political awareness,"* about 53% agreed, but a sizeable 32% disagreed. So while the media (in all forms) is clearly a major source of political information for youth, there is a healthy skepticism among a portion of students regarding media accuracy and intent. This skepticism could dampen the effect of media on those students' socialization or, conversely, it could motivate them to seek multiple sources and verify facts (which would be a positive outcome). Overall, the data portray Pakistani university youth as highly connected and exposed to political content, yet discerning about media influence. They are not passively consuming information; rather, many are actively participating in political dialogue via media, even as they navigate issues of trust.

In summary, these quantitative findings depict a young generation that is politically conscious and engaged on multiple fronts. University students in the sample generally uphold democratic values like voting and participation, and their political outlook is being shaped by a confluence of family upbringing, social

identities (ethnicity, religion), peer interactions, and media exposure. The process is indeed multi-dimensional: formal education provides knowledge and some inspiration but informal social influences fill in many of the gaps. At the same time, the results highlighted specific gaps and challenges – notably, incomplete knowledge of political processes and ambivalence about media credibility – pointing to areas where educational institutions or policymakers might intervene. These results will be further interpreted in the following section.

Discussion

The results of this study confirm that the political socialization of Pakistani youth, particularly those in universities, is a complex and dynamic process. It does not occur in isolation or in any single setting but rather through the cumulative impact of various societal agents and experiences. Consistent with political socialization theories, we found that formal agents (like educational curricula and teachers) work in tandem with informal agents (like family traditions, peer networks, religious influences, and media) to shape the political orientations of young people. This multifaceted influence means that students develop their political identities and beliefs through exposure to a wide range of elements including their school life, family life, interactions with peers, as well as media consumption. Each source contributes in a different way to the development of political knowledge, values, and behaviour and their relative impact can vary from student to student depending on personal background and context. In short, political socialization "does not happen in a vacuum" – youth are constantly absorbing input from their environment (Neundorf & Smets, 2017). Our findings resonate with recent scholarship that emphasizes how multiple socialization agents jointly influence the making of citizens.

Role of Educational Institutions: As institutions explicitly tasked with educating the youth, colleges and universities have a vital role in providing structured political learning opportunities. The findings showed that many students credited their academic coursework and teachers with increasing their political awareness (for instance, through classes on Pakistan Studies, discussions of current affairs, etc.). This aligns with the notion that higher education can impart civic knowledge and critical thinking skills necessary for informed citizenship. However, the study also uncovered some significant gaps in the university experience. A number of respondents indicated that they lacked sufficient opportunities to express political opinions or debate issues as part of their formal education. This resonates with (Ehman's, 1980) emphasis on classroom climate: an "open climate" encouraging free expression of opinion is strongly linked to positive political attitudes, yet not all students in our sample enjoyed such an open environment. Cultural or institutional inhibitions might be at play – perhaps some universities discourage political clubs or discussions to avoid campus politics turning turbulent. The result, unfortunately, is that some students pass through university without ever engaging in a healthy political dialogue or exercising their voice in an academic setting. This is a missed opportunity.

Our findings suggest that incorporating civic education more deliberately into university curricula could help address knowledge gaps (e.g. with regard to understanding electoral processes) and build confidence in political participation. For example, introducing courses on the constitution, public policy, or debating contemporary issues could provide students with both information and a platform for discussion. Outside the classroom, universities can host forums, seminars, or student-led debates on political topics in a structured, respectful manner. Such initiatives allow students to articulate their views, hear diverse perspectives, and learn the norms of civil discourse – all of which are essential skills in a democracy. In essence, educational institutions should not shy away from politics but rather serve as safe training grounds for democratic engagement. By doing so, they would be actively fulfilling their latent function of political socialization and helping produce informed, active citizens, which ultimately benefits the political system at large.

Family and Early Socialization: The strong influence of family observed in this study reinforces the understanding that political socialization begins long before an individual enters higher education. Many students bring to university the political dispositions instilled during childhood – either a habit of discussing news at the dinner table, a loyalty to a political party favored by the family, or a general ethos about civic duty (such as "voting is important" or conversely, "politics is dirty, stay away"). In Pakistan, as in many societies, the family is the first political unit a child encounters, and through both direct instruction and learning through observation, youth acquire initial political cues from parents and elders. Our data shows 78% influence from family and over half of families voting regularly. This indicates that a substantial portion of youth have been socialized into seeing voting as a normal practice. This is heartening as it suggests an inter-generational transmission of democratic norms. It conforms to classic theories that identify family as a primary agent of socialization (e.g. the *civic culture* model by (Almond & Verba, 1963), and subsequent work by (Jennings & Niemi, 1974).

Moreover, this finding dovetails with the notion that family influence often works through identity formation – as also reflected in the ethnic/regional identity influence. A young person's sense of "who I am" (ethnically, religiously, socially) is largely shaped at home and this identity anchors their political outlook. For instance, someone raised with a strong ethnic identity might prioritize voting for candidates who champion that group's interests. Similarly, as noted, religious upbringing at home can incline youth toward political perspectives that align with their faith's teachings. The interplay of family and religion in Pakistan can be especially potent: discussing politics in a Pakistani household might also involve moral or religious reasoning (for example, judging a policy as "Islamic" or not). Our findings support this intertwining – with three-quarters of students acknowledging religion's sway on their politics and implies that many families discuss politics in terms of religious values. This is not inherently problematic; in fact, moral frameworks are important in politics. However,

it does suggest that if one wants to foster certain civic values (like tolerance, pluralism, or respect for the rule of law), outreach may need to involve community and family-level engagement in addition to formal education – to either leverage or gently shape those familial and religious influences toward democratic ends.

Importantly, as students enter university, many encounter new ideas that either reinforce or challenge what they learnt at home. University is often a transformative period. Some students in our study likely experienced a broadening of perspective – meeting peers from different backgrounds, encountering professors with new and different viewpoints, perhaps even questioning family-held beliefs. Others may have had their initial orientations strengthened by finding like-minded groups on campus (for example, joining a student wing of the same political party their family supports). In both cases, the university acts as a critical juncture in political socialization: it's an opportunity for inherited political identities to be reexamined, refined, or reasserted. As one respondent insightfully noted in an open-ended comment, *"University life seems to be a period of transformation in which inherited perceptions are tested – some are doubted or reformed, others reasserted with new reasoning."* This underscores that higher education is not just about gaining academic knowledge, but about developing an independent political self. Facilitating that development in a positive way (by encouraging critical thinking rather than rote learning or authoritarian teaching) is a key challenge for educators.

Influence of Peer Groups: The finding that 80% of students are influenced by peers confirms the significant role of horizontal socialization (peer-to-peer influence) during youth, particularly in late adolescence and early adulthood. At university, friends and classmates often form one's immediate community, sometimes even more influential from day-to-day than family (especially for students living away from home). Discussions among peers can demystify politics – for instance, a student uncertain about how voting works might learn from a friend who has voted before. Peers can also motivate participation; going to a protest or rally is often a group activity for youth. On the flip side, peers can spread disengagement just as easily ("none of us are going to bother voting because nothing changes"). The high level of peer influence suggests a need to ensure that peer interactions are channeled constructively. Universities and student organizations could capitalize on peer networks by organizing activities like mock elections, inter-departmental debates, political study circles, or model parliaments. These not only provide learning experiences but also make civic engagement a social, enjoyable activity among friends.

As our results indicated, when given the chance (through an enabling environment), students eagerly engage in political discussion. Encouraging more such peer-led initiatives could amplify positive political socialization outcomes – such as greater political efficacy and openness to pluralist viewpoints. This aligns with Ehman's conclusion that participatory experiences in school (including extra-

curricular events) correlate with better democratic attitudes. Therefore, fostering a collaborative and participatory campus culture is recommended. By doing so, peer "pressure" can become peer *support* for active citizenship (for example, friend groups reminding each other to vote, or collectively fact-checking news and curbing the spread of rumors). Notably, experimental research has demonstrated the tangible impact of peer discussions: one classroom experiment showed that exposure to peer deliberation significantly influenced students' political opinions and knowledge. In essence, peers are a powerful (if informal) teaching resource for civic learning.

Media Literacy and Trust: The high engagement of youth with media, especially social media, is a double-edged sword in the context of political socialization. On one hand, today's youth have a wealth of information at their fingertips and can voice their opinions on platforms that previous generations could not. Our respondents largely take advantage of this – consuming news, following political debates, and participating in discourse online. This can accelerate the learning process; a student can watch parliamentary proceedings live, fact-check statements via Google, or directly interact with politicians on Twitter. On the other hand, the problem of misinformation and polarization via media is a real concern. The fact that only about half of the students found social media information credible, with a third explicitly saying it's not reliable, shows that many are rightly cautious. Exposure to unvetted information or extremist content on social media could negatively skew a young person's political socialization (for example, inducing cynicism, radicalization, or confusion). Therefore, a key takeaway is the importance of *media literacy* as part of political socialization. Educational institutions should incorporate training on how to critically evaluate news sources, recognize bias, and discern facts from falsehoods. Some universities elsewhere have begun offering workshops or courses on digital literacy, and Pakistani institutions could follow suit, perhaps as part of general curriculum requirements.

Research in the United States has shown that media literacy education can indeed improve students' ability to detect misinformation and reduce the influence of false or biased news. For instance, (Kahne & Bowyer, 2017) found that teenagers who received media literacy lessons were less likely to believe misleading political posts on social media. Given that 69% of our sample enjoys political memes and satire – which often blur truth and parody – students would benefit from guidance on interpreting such content in context. The goal is not to reduce their engagement (which is largely positive) but to ensure that engagement leads to informed opinions rather than echo chambers or misinformation-fueled views. Interestingly, despite concerns, students still believed media has a role in raising awareness (as 53% agreed media can promote political awareness). This implies they see potential in media; if credibility issues are addressed, media – including social media – could indeed be harnessed as a powerful civic education tool. Journalists, educators, and tech platforms might collaborate to improve the quality of political content accessible to youth and to

promote critical consumption habits. For example, partnerships with civil society organizations could bring fact-checking workshops or "news literacy" seminars to campuses. In an era of information overload, teaching young citizens *how to think*, not *what to think*, about political information is crucial.

Religion and Political Thought: The strong influence of religion observed in the results invites reflection on the philosophical underpinnings of political socialization in Pakistan. Given that three in four students acknowledged that their faith shapes their political views, it is clear that any effort to understand or guide the political socialization of youth must respect the religious context. Religion here serves as both an identity marker and a moral framework for politics. For many Pakistani youths, concepts of justice, law, leadership, and rights are at least partially interpreted through an Islamic philosophical lens (for instance, ideas of justice might connect to Qur'anic principles; the concept of an ideal leader might be influenced by religious figures or teachings of the Prophet, etc.). This can have constructive effects – such as a strong sense of morality in politics or the motivation to improve society – but it can also lead to exclusionary attitudes if not balanced with democratic pluralism (e.g. the risk of viewing politics as a zero-sum game of religious righteousness).

From a policy perspective, incorporating discussions on how religious values coexist with democratic values could be valuable. Since our data show that youth are receptive to religious influence, one could involve ethical and religious considerations in civic education – for example, highlighting how principles like justice, equality, and *consultation* (*shura*) in Islam complement democratic ideals of human rights and participatory governance. In essence, bridging religious philosophy with civic concepts might resonate with students and mitigate any perceived conflict between religious and secular duties. Encouraging dialogue on religion and politics in educational forums – carefully moderated to avoid sectarianism – could help students navigate these dual influences. For instance, universities could invite scholars of religion and scholars of political science for joint seminars on topics like "Islam and Democracy," providing historical and contemporary perspectives. Such initiatives would acknowledge students' religious identities rather than ignoring them and channel them into a discussion of civic responsibilities and tolerance.

Implications for Policy and Institutions

The findings and discussion above lead to several implications and recommendations:

i. **Recognize Political Socialization as an Educational Goal:** Universities and higher education policymakers in Pakistan should formally recognize the formation of informed and engaged citizens as an important educational outcome. Much like producing employable graduates is a goal, so should be the production of enlightened, politically conscious citizens. This could be reflected in curricula by introducing mandatory or elective courses on civics, governance, or Pakistan's political system across all disciplines (not just for

political science majors). An interdisciplinary approach could be effective – for example, blending philosophy, religion, and political science to discuss what it means to be a responsible citizen in a modern Islamic democracy. Such efforts would align with international calls to empower youth for sustainable development and civic participation.

ii. **Encourage an Open Campus Climate:** Universities should strive to create a campus culture that encourages free yet respectful political discourse. This involves training faculty on how to handle political discussions impartially and constructively in class, setting up debate clubs or "student parliaments," and ensuring that student unions or societies (where they exist) function democratically and inclusively. The goal is to make campuses a microcosm of a healthy democratic society, where diverse opinions are heard and debated on merit. Research from Western contexts suggests that such open classroom climates are associated with greater tolerance and civic knowledge among students. Our study similarly indicates that students benefit from environments where they can voice their views. University administrations, therefore, should review any overly restrictive policies on student expression and aim to facilitate more dialogue (within reasonable, non-violent bounds).

iii. **Involve Families and Communities:** Given the critical role of families and communities in shaping youth attitudes, initiatives could be designed to involve parents and local leaders in the civic education of youth. For instance, universities (or NGOs in collaboration with universities) could host community seminars or parent-student workshops on topics like the importance of voting, how local government works, or how to critically evaluate the daily news. This would bridge generational gaps – educating both youth and their parents, and signaling that political learning is a lifelong, community-supported process. Moreover, since many attitudes are set early, collaboration with secondary schools could encourage civic education to begin before students reach university. University students might even volunteer for outreach programs in their hometown schools to talk about civic engagement, creating a framework for informal education.

iv. **Integrate Digital Literacy and Media Education:** The influence of media on youth means that any civic education in the 21st century must include components of digital citizenship. Universities should consider adding modules or workshops on media literacy – helping students learn to navigate social media and online information critically. This includes understanding one's rights and responsibilities online, being able to identify credible sources, and being aware of the pitfalls of echo chambers and conspiracy theories. Partnerships can be formed with media organizations or fact-checking groups to conduct training sessions. For example, a short course on "Information Literacy in the Digital Age" could be offered, covering skills

like verifying news, recognizing propaganda, and constructive online discourse. Studies have shown that even brief programs (such as a 1-hour workshop or an online game about fake news) can significantly improve the young people's ability to spot misinformation. Empowering students with these skills will not only improve the quality of their political participation but also contribute to a more informed electorate overall.

v. **Encourage Moderate Religious Voices:** The prominence of religion in shaping views implies that religious scholars and institutions could be valuable partners in promoting civic values that are in harmony with cultural values. Mosque leaders or Islamic studies faculty who emphasize, for example, the ethical obligation to be honest and just in civic matters or the importance of consultation (*shura*) and community welfare (which can include political engagement), can reinforce positive socialization. This is already happening to some extent in Pakistan's efforts to counter violent extremism – involving moderate religious voices to guide youth towards peaceful citizenship. A similar approach can mainstream the view that being a good Muslim and a good democratic citizen are not in conflict but in fact mutually reinforcing. Universities could invite respected religious figures to speak on topics such as "Ethics in the Public Service" or "Islamic Principles and Civic Responsibility," thus framing civic duties in a culturally acceptable way.

By introducing these measures, educational institutions and policymakers can strengthen the means of political socialization and produce a politically aware and tolerant youth population.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has highlighted the way that higher education institutions in Pakistan contribute to the political socialization of youth and the myriad factors intertwined in that process. We find that universities do play a significant role – providing knowledge about political systems and fostering environments where young adults can form and exchange opinions – but they are only one part of a larger social ecology influencing youth. Family upbringing, religious and cultural values, peer interactions, and media exposure all work together with formal education in shaping the way that young Pakistanis understand and engage with politics. The political socialization of Pakistani university students is thus best described as dynamic, multifaceted, and multi-dimensional, echoing the idea that it *"does not happen in a vacuum"* but through constant exposure to various elements of life.

Encouragingly, the majority of students in our sample demonstrate an awareness of democratic principles and a willingness to participate. This bodes well for the future of Pakistan's democratic project. Yet, the study also highlights important areas for improvement. Educational institutions could better harness their potential by

integrating civic learning in curricula and encouraging open discussion, thereby addressing gaps in political knowledge and critical thinking. Building trust in credible information – through media literacy – is another challenge that educators and policymakers should tackle so that youth can navigate the information landscape more effectively. The influence of family and religion, while largely positive in inculcating values and interest, should be complemented with broader perspectives to ensure that youth appreciate diversity and uphold inclusive democratic norms.

Ultimately, empowering young people with knowledge, skills, and confidence to participate in politics is an investment in the country's democratic resilience. If universities across Pakistan embrace their role in political socialization, they can produce graduates who are not only skilled professionals but also enlightened citizens – individuals who can critically analyze political matters, engage in constructive dialogue, make informed choices at the ballot box, and perhaps even take up leadership roles with a commitment to the public good. Such outcomes would strengthen Pakistan's civic fabric and help fulfill the promise of its democratic ideals. The findings of this study should thus encourage educational authorities, scholars of religion and philosophy and political stakeholders to collaborate in enriching the political socialization experience of Pakistani youth. In a society as complex and vibrant as Pakistan's, nurturing a politically aware, tolerant, and active younger generation is the key to achieving stable and participatory governance in the years to come.

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