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## The Role of Political Trust in Shaping Institutionalized and Non-Institutionalized Political Participation: A Case study of Pakistani University Students

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### Abstract

Political trust, means the confidence and belief of citizen in their government authority, and political institutions, is a critical factor in understanding both “institutionalized” and “non-institutionalized” forms of political participation of Pakistani universities students. This investigation scrutinizes the complex association between political trust and the various modes of political participation, ranging from “institutionalized” political activities like voting to more “non-institutionalized” forms such as protest, demonstration. This research paper draws on a wide-ranging review of the existing literature, containing both theoretical and empirical studies, to examine the complex ways in which political trust is effecting the tendency of individuals to involve in different form of political participation. In this research we employed a quantitative methodology and data analyzed with the help of SPSS by using Generalized Linear Models with Poisson regression. The results reveal that increase in the level of political trust are positively effecting the participation of students in “institutionalized” “non-institutionalized” political activities.

**Keywords:** Political trust, institutionalized political participation, non-institutionalized political participation, Student activism, Pakistani universities students

### Introduction

Political trust has emerged as a key area of scholarly interest globally, as it is widely recognized as a key determinant of the stability and effectiveness of political systems (Ahmad et al., 2019; Kim, 2014), and is considered as a strong predictor of political participation (Cox, 2003; Kaase, 1999; Kim, 2014; Nyćkowiak, 2009). The context of Pakistan is predominantly essential, as the political participation of youth has been widely scrutinized by scholars (Ahmad et al., 2019; Saud, 2020). Youth in Pakistani have been at the vanguard of political activism, using both conventional and unconventional channels to efficiently address their needs, social problems and effect the political landscape (Ahmad et al., 2019; Mangi et al., 2019; Saud, 2020; Saud et al., 2020). This study investigates the effect of political trust, a key factor that shapes the involvement of Pakistani university students to participate in “institutionalized” and “non-institutionalized” forms of political activities. Political trust means the confidence and believe of individuals in their government and political institutions, has been a matter of rising interest among scholars investigating the dynamics of political participation (Levi & Stoker, 2000; Lindqvist, 2019; Schoene, 2019). The prior scholars assert that increased in the level of political trust is strongly related with the possibility of people engaging in conventional or “institutionalized political participation”, such as voting (Hooghe & Marien, 2013); Kaase, 1999; Kim, 2014; Lindqvist, 2019; Schoene, 2019). Conversely, individuals with political distrust motivated to involve in unconventional or “non-institutionalized” forms of participation”, such as protests and demonstrations. (Kaase, 1999; Kim, 2014; Lindqvist, 2019; Schoene, 2019).

Additionally, researchers suggest that political trust has a changing influence on the two forms of political participation. Those people who place their trust in government and political authorities, and its institutions more tend to support the status quo and current political system, and subsequently more inclined towards “institutionalized political participation”(Cawvey, 2023). Though, individuals having political distrust, may feel alienated, afterwards to lessened support for institutionalized democratic practices (Ouattara & Van Der Meer, 2023).

Although existing literature have primarily focused on examining factors other than political trust that effect political participation of Pakistani youth, such as fostering civic awareness, responsibility, and behaviors (Rafique et al., 2016b), improved security, increased political awareness, positive perceptions of leadership (Mangi et al., 2019), internal and external political efficacy (Ahmad et al., 2019), as well as civic education (Munir & Zaidi, 2024). The role of political trust in shaping political participation is mainly important in the Pakistani context. The political stability needs every Pakistani’s citizen to engage in democratic activities and the youth involvement in the political system in order to improve the structure is very significant (Saud et al., 2020). Among youth in Pakistan more likely to participate in political activities who have more political interest and interaction with peer groups (Rafique et al., 2016a; Saud, 2020; Saud et al., 2020).

Furthermore, former researches have revealed a complex association between political trust and political participation, both “institutionalized” and “non-institutionalized” forms of political participation. Some scholarships have suggested that people with high level of trust in the government and its institutions incline to engage mainly in “institutionalized” political activities,

while other with political distrust are more tend to involve in “non-institutionalized” political activities (Kaase, 1999; Kim, 2014; Lindqvist, 2019; Schoene, 2019). Contrariwise, some researchers struggle that individuals with high political trust may still participate in “non-institutionalized” political activities. It is because individuals with elevated trust in the politicians, government, and its institutions may believe that their involvement in protests can drive meaningful change and empower them to hold the state and its institutions accountable when the government fails to meet their expectations, through protests or other unconventional political activities (Ahmad et al., 2019; Thomas, 1998).

However, the association between political trust and “non-institutionalized participation” can be complex, as some scholars have found that in democratic context the moderate levels of distrust can actually increase non-electoral participation, suggesting an inverted U-shaped relationship (Kutuk & Usturali, 2023). Conversely, in non-democratic regimes such as in authoritative political system, low trust may only prompt “non-institutionalized participation” when it falls below a certain threshold (Kutuk & Usturali, 2023). Given the fact that Pakistan is a democratic country with a pseudo democratic system (Farooq et al., 2023), it is crucial to investigate how political trust positively or negatively affects “institutionalized” and “non-institutionalized” political participation in Pakistan. It is because since Pakistan currently does not facing any authoritarian military political system (Farooq et al., 2023), but rather has an ill-designed or weak democratic system (Bibi et al., 2018; Rizvi, 2015).

While existing literature provides understandings into the political participation of Pakistani youth (Ahmad et al., 2019; Mangi et al., 2019; Munir & Zaidi, 2024; Rafique et al., 2016b), there remains a lack of empirical studies in the Pakistani context that specifically examine the role of political trust in effecting both “institutionalized” and “non-institutionalized” forms of political participation among university students. Previous research has examined the relationship between political trust and political participation, but has treated participation as a single construct without differentiating between “institutionalized” and “non-institutionalized” forms variables (Ahmad et al., 2019). Additionally, this studies have focused on the correlational relationship between the two variables, rather than analyzing the causal linkages variables (Ahmad et al., 2019).

### **Student Activism in Pakistan**

Since its inception, Pakistan has experienced various form of political system characterized by the tug of war between civilians and military actors for the power corridors (Malik, 2021; Zain ul Abidin, 2022). The civilian’s government have been characterized by patrimonialism, corruption and prioritizing elite centered interest over national interest and public welfare (Zain ul Abidin, 2022). Similarly, the military regimes, such as those of General Ayub Khan, General Zia-ul-Haq and General Pervez Musharraf, brought democratic structure on the ventilator by manipulating judiciary to legitimize their de-facto into de-jure (Waseem, 2006; Zain ul Abidin, 2022). Moreover, military intervention has curtailed democratic freedom by banning political parties and Student union (Khan & Eijaz, 2022). Student participation in political activities has historically played an important role in shaping Pakistan’s political landscape, from Pakistan movement to the end of Ayub Khan’s regime (Arfan & Usman, 2024). Historically, student unions were highly active in political activities and were strong advocate of human rights, and democratic governance, which were viewed as threat to the Zia regime and eventually Zia government imposed ban on the student in 1984, and was justified as a measure to prevent violence and disorder on campuses (Arfan & Usman, 2024). The Bans on political parties imposed under the Zia-ul-Haq regime were short term and eventually lifted. Whereas the ban on the student union, which were also imposed during Zia-ul-Haq regime, persists to this day (Mushtaq et al., n.d.).

Historically, student activism has a central role in shaping Pakistan’s political and social movements, both pre and post Pakistan eras. During the Pakistan movement, student activism played important role in mobilizing support for the creation of a separate Muslim State, and it had also given birth to leaderships which were prominent in All Indian Muslim League (Mushtaq et al., n.d.). After the creation of Pakistan, Student activism continued and they played important role in the regime change from authoritarian into democratic and were fight for the democratic rights.

Historical example of the strength of student activism can be seen in 1968-1969 in the form of “Student Uprising” against the Authoritarian regime of the Ayub Khan which was succeeded in dethroning Ayub Khan from the power (Arfan & Usman, 2024; Khan & Eijaz, 2022). However, the suppression of student unions by General Zia-ul-Haq in 1984 significantly destabilized and undermined the organizational strength and capacity of student-led movements. It is because his government was considering student unions as a big challenge and threat for their regime and authority, eventually the imposition of a ban on the student unions that weakened the student’s activism. (Mushtaq et al., n.d.; Shehzad et al., 2024).

The ban on Student Unions in 1984, by the Zia-ul-Haq government, restricted the boundaries of public spheres for students to participate in political activities, voice their grievances, addresses their issues, and advocate for human rights and democratic values (Mushtaq et al., 2020). The ban on Student Unions in 1984, by the Zia-ul-Haq government, restricted the boundaries of public spheres for students to participate in political activities, voice their grievances, addresses their issues, and advocate for human rights and democratic values (Mushtaq et al., 2020). Although, despite these ban and limitations, students have remained to actively engage in and organize various political activities including, protests, demonstrations, sit-inns and solidarity marches (Mushtaq et al., 2020; Sheikh, 2024; Yasir et al., 2023). Although their activities are not that much fruitful due to absence of a central unified student union body, but they still remain active in challenging the status quo and advocating for human rights and show solidarity with different marginalized groups (Yasir et al., 2023). Due to the ban on student union in Pakistan, student have been part of various small-scale student organizations limited to the premises of the universities and specific to a district like Baloch student council, Islami Jamiat-e-Tulaba (IJT), Khalq Youth Front (KYF), Pashtun Student Federation (PSF), Latif Student Council, Marxist Student Federation (MSF), National Students Federation (NSF) (Ali et al., 2024; Sheikh, 2023a). Through these platforms, they are addressing their issues and grievances while continuing to challenge the status quo (Yasir et al., 2023).

In Pakistan, students are not only active in traditional means of political activities like street protests but are also active through modern digital platforms like social media. These digital platforms help them to bypass the traditional challenges and connect to a global audience, including human rights organization to address their issues (Yasir et al., 2023). These social media platforms enable students to use different hashtags and taking part in different virtual campaign in order to amplify their cause and also help to create and spread awareness (Ahmad et al., 2019). The ban on the student unions created a vacuum and void of leadership in Pakistan which is very problematic for the future of Pakistan (Mushtaq et al., n.d.; Shehzad et al., 2024).

### Research Questions

1. How does political trust affect the institutionalized political participation of Pakistani university students?
2. How does political trust affect the non-institutionalized political participation of Pakistani university students?

### Hypothesis

**Null H1:** Political trust has no significant impact on institutionalized political participation of university Students.

**Alternative H1a:** Higher political trust increases the institutionalized political participation of university Students.

**Alternative H1b:** Higher Political trust decreases institutionalized political participation of university Students.

**Null H2:** Political trust has no significant impact on non-institutionalized political participation of university Students.

**Alternative H2a:** Higher political trust increases the non-institutionalized political participation of university Students.

**Alternative H2b:** Higher Political trust decreases non-institutionalized political participation of university Students.

### Literature Review

Existing research has explored the nuanced relationship between political trust and political participation, both “institutionalized” and “non-institutionalized” (Levi & Stoker, 2000). However, in the context of Pakistan, the role of political trust in shaping “institutionalized” and “non-institutionalized” political participation is particularly salient. Previous literature asserted that Pakistani youth who have greater political interest and more interaction with peer groups are more likely to participate in political activities, whether institutionalized or non-institutionalized (Buzdar & Fatima, 2020; Saud, 2020). A study conducted which aimed to investigate how factors such as increased security, enhanced political awareness, positive perceptions of leadership, and internal political efficacy contribute to the elevated level of political participation among Pakistani citizens (Mangi et al., 2019). Mangi et al., (2019) conceptualize political participation as a multidimensional phenomenon, comprising diverse actions individuals undertake to engage with the political process. However, the researchers do not examine the role of political trust and do not differentiate between “institutionalized” and “non-institutionalized” forms of participation but instead consider political participation holistically and analyze it as a unified construct.

The study by Saud, (2020) explored the role of youth in political participation in Bhakkar, Punjab, Pakistan, highlighting the importance of political understanding and awareness in driving both “institutionalized” and “non-institutionalized” forms of participation. The findings suggest that among the youth in Pakistani, those who have a deeper understanding of the political landscape are more likely to engage in political activities, whether through formal or institutionalized channels like voting or informal sphere such as protests and social media activism. Saud, (2020) further stressed that growing political efficacy, awareness, and social interaction with peer groups among Pakistani youth is critical for consolidation democratic practices and its democratic institutions in the country. Saud, (2020) used a qualitative methodology in that investigation, but did not explore the role of political trust in influencing youth’s political participation.

Ahmad et al., (2019) examined the educated youth in Pakistani, revealing the positive, significant inter-correlations among the different dimensions of trust in political institutions (trust in legal system, parliament, police, politicians, political party and army). The study asserted that increased trust in political institutions, as well as a sense of internal and external political efficacy, are key drivers of political participation among Pakistani educated youth. Furthermore, the research found a nuanced relationship between political trust and participation, where trust in some institutions, such as parliament, was positively associated with participation, while trust in others, like the politicians, police, army, and political parties were negatively associated. However, the study did not differentiate between “institutionalized” and “non-institutionalized” forms of participation, but rather examined political participation as a unified construct. Additionally, the research focused on the correlational relationship between political trust and participation, rather than analyzing the causal linkages between the two variables.

### Methodology

The study employed a quantitative methodology, utilizing a survey design. The target population consisted of Pakistani university students. This research was conducted in Lahore, the second-largest city in Pakistan, as prior research indicated Lahore has a higher concentration of educational institutions compared to other cities in the country (Mahmood et al., 2022). Consequently, Lahore attracts students from various regions of Pakistan for their higher education (Mahmood et al., 2022).

The study utilized a probability sampling approach, specifically a multi-stage sampling technique. Initially, three universities were selected randomly from the list of Higher Education Commission recognized institutions. In the subsequent stage, proportional samples were drawn from the student populations of each selected university. The final stage involved non-proportional stratified sampling, with the strata representing gender. The sample size was determined using the Taro Yamane formula, which considers the population size, confidence interval, and confidence level. The total sample size across the three universities was 788, with an equal representation of 50% female and 50% male students.

**Political Trust**

Political trust defined the belief of citizen that governmental institutions and their leaders will work in the public's best interest, displaying care for citizens' needs, efficiently managing resources (Mangion & Frenedo, 2022; Mohamad & Othman, 2020; Villoria-Mendieta, 2024), effectively consensus-building in setting service delivery goals (Feldman, 2016; Festenstein, 2020). This trust is influenced by various factors, including trust in federal, provincial, and local governmental institutions, perceived responsiveness of these institutions to public demands, transparency in their decision-making processes, and their capacity to identify and address community needs.

In this research, these factors were measured through a set of seven questions, which were then expanded to 21 questions to capture the perspectives of students at the federal, provincial, and local levels of government. “I generally trust the federal, provincial, and local institutions to do what is right, I think the people running the government really care what happens to me. I think the people in government waste money we pay in taxes. I am satisfied with the following government’s identification of public needs. The following government frequently modifies goals to respond to public demands. I am satisfied with consensus building on goals and objectives for service delivery. I am satisfied with consensus building on service priorities.”

**Political Participation**

In this research, “institutionalized political participation” refers to engagement in formal political activities, such as voting, meeting with a politician, or sending a letter (Kaase, 1999; Kim, 2014; Lindqvist, 2019; Schoene, 2019). In contrast, “non-institutionalized political participation” involve informal activities, including participating in protests, demonstrations, and signing petitions (Kaase, 1999; Kim, 2014; Lindqvist, 2019; Schoene, 2019).

**Data Analysis**

**Political trust as a Predictor of Political Participation by using Generalized Linear Model**

The study used Generalized Linear Models with Poisson regression and log link to address the research questions. This analytical approach was suitable since the data did not follow a normal distribution, and the independent variable was a count variable. The variable was coded such that 0 represented no participation in political activities, 1 represented occasional participation, and 2 represented frequent political participation. The table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of “institutionalized” and “non-institutionalized” political participation of universities students.

**Table 1: Mean, Standard Deviation for Political Participation**

Measure	Political Trust		
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Institutionalized Political Participation	788	1.03	0.834
Non-Institutionalized Political Participation	788	0.89	0.819

The results indicate in table 2 that political trust has a significant positive impact on both “institutionalized” and “non-institutionalized” participation. The p-values are less than 0.05, that indicate the null hypothesis is rejected and hypothesis “Higher political trust increases the institutionalized political participation of Pakistani university Students” is accepted. The positive b-values of 0.02 suggest that political trust have positive effect on each form of political participation. The estimate values of 0.02 further reinforce these positive relationships, implying that as political trust increases, the levels of both “institutionalized” and “non-institutionalized” political participation tend to increase accordingly. The coefficients for political trust are 0.02, indicating that a one-unit increase in political trust is related with a 0.02-unit increase in the respective form of political participation.

**Table 2: Poisson regression results for the effect of political trust on political participation**

Measure	Political Trust	Political Trust			
		B	Standard Error	Wald Chi-Square	Sig.
<b>Institutionalized Political Participation</b>	<b>Political</b>	0.022	0.009	5.474	0.019*
<b>Non-Institutionalized Political Participation</b>	<b>Political</b>	0.024	0.010	6.112	0.013*

\*P < .05

**Discussion**

The results of this research contribute to the literature in the area of political trust and the political participation of university students in Pakistan. Our finding offer significant insights in which political trust positively affect various forms of political participation. The result of study have important implications for the civic engagement theory, which postulates two elements of political participation: the one is active civic engagement and the second is passive political interest. Passive political interest means to a concern with political ideal, knowledge, and awareness, deprived of necessarily involvement into civic or political activities (Espinal et al., 2006). In compare, civic engagement is the active involvements of individuals in political activities (Goldfinch et al., 2009), which this research result has found in the casual relationship of political trust and political participation.

Moreover, earlier literatures have asserted different and contradictory findings on the relationship between political trust and political participation. This study does not align with those researchers who have argued that high levels of trust in government and its institutions can lead to lower and more passive forms of political participation (Goldfinch et al., 2009), as in this way citizens may consider that active engagement in political activities is not very much necessary. Conversely, this research paper also unsupported to prior researchers who have emphasized that those individuals who were civically engaged they incline to be more cynical, distrustful, and critical of the government, and are more active in holding the government accountable and pushing the government to improve the performance (Oakeshott et al., 1996). Scholars also perceive that when a formal political system of a country remain unresponsive to their concerns and feel that their voices are not adequately heard through conventional channels (Foley & Edwards, 1996; Hollander & Longo, 2008; Long, 1980). As a result, citizens participate in unconventional means of political expression to address their demands, grievances and advocate for positive change (Foley & Edwards, 1996; Hallet & Crutchfield, 1975).

Though, the findings of this research suggest that citizens with a high level of political trust are in fact more actively participate in political activities, both in formal and informal political participation. This finding challenges the belief that high political trust necessarily lead to decrease in political participation (Goldfinch et al., 2009) or individuals with low level of political trust only involve in “non-institutionalized political participation” (Oakeshott et al., 1996). This study's findings are align with research of Christensen, (2016), which suggests that satisfied citizens who have high level of political trust with a strong sense of subjective political empowerment are also involve in “non-institutionalized political participation”, such as protests. This commitment helps to hold the government and decision-makers accountable, as well as to demonstrate political support (Christensen, 2014).

Besides, prior research by Christensen, (2018) suggests that the level of political trust does not directly specify the decision of citizens to engage in protests. Instead, the level of subjective political empowerment, based on individuals' sense of internal efficacy and political interest, plays a more significant role. Those with high level of subjective political empowerment are more likely to inclined in “non-institutional political participation” like protests, regardless of their level of political trust, while individuals with low level of subjective political empowerment are less likely to engage in “non-institutionalized participation” like protest, regardless of their level of political trust (Christensen, 2018). Moreover, the previous literature asserted that educated citizens and youth in Pakistan who have a high degree of political trust also tend to have a high degree of political interest (Mangi, 2018) and internal political efficacy (Ahmad et al., 2019), which may be positively affect their engagement in both institutionalized and non-institutionalized political activities. Earlier scholarships have found that political interest (Saud et al., 2020) and internal political efficacy (Ahmad et al., 2019), are positively associate with political engagement. However, they did not find out the cause and effect relationship.

This investigation results emphasized that political participation of citizens in Pakistan is influenced by different factors beyond just political trust, including sense of civic responsibility, civic awareness, and behaviors (Rafique et al., 2016b), as well as both internal and external political efficacy (Ahmad et al., 2019), enhanced political awareness, increased security, positive perceptions of political leadership (Mangi et al., 2019), political interest, peer groups (Saud et al., 2020), and civic education (Munir & Zaidi, 2024).

### Limitations

This research paper has not fully measured numerous other variables (mediators and moderators) that could significantly affect the causal association between political trust and two form of political participation. These factors include civic skills, civic knowledge, civic education, demographic factors such as gender and ethnicity, and social factors. Both internal and external Political efficacy can also play a significant role in shaping this relationship (Denemark & Niemi, 2012). Civic skills influence the trust of individuals in government and their political participation both “institutionalized” and “non-institutional activities” (Christensen, 2018b). Minority groups may be particularly sensitive to political trust and are often more involve in street protest and demonstrations (Wu et al., 2022), which has not adequately addressed in this research study. Additionally, age and gender differences may influence individuals' preferences for straight participation in the political decision-making process over traditional forms of political participation (Christensen, 2014). Civic education is another important variable that has not been considered in this research (Galston, 2001). The exclusion of these significant variables may limit the ability of the research to fully understand the dynamics of political engagement. Forthcoming researches should incorporate these factors to provide a more inclusive analysis that effecting political participation.

### Conclusion

Political participation, whether institutional and non-institutional, is very much important for a healthy democracy. Globally, there is a declining trend in political participation have been observed, which necessitating a closer examination of the underlying reasons (Hooghe & Marien, 2013). This study investigates the complex relationship between political trust and political participation both “institutionalized” and “non-institutionalized”, with a specific focus on university students in Pakistani. Previous research literature suggests that political trust significantly influence citizens' participation in various political activities. The work also examines different factors that shape individuals' participation in both “institutional” and “non-institutional” political domains. Compared to prior studies, findings suggest a more nuanced dynamic, particularly in the context of Pakistan's relatively weak democratic system, where the link between political trust and political participation is not straightforward. Earlier research literature has often found a straightforward link, where higher political trust correlates with greater involvement in traditional, “institutionalized political participation”, while lower trust leads to increased “non-institutional participation”. While in this research higher trust is linked with greater involvement in traditional, “institutionalized political participation”, lower trust does not necessarily lead to increased “non-institutional participation”, indicating a more complex interplay of factors.

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