

The Influence of the Middle Class on Political Transformation: A Study of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Evolving Political Culture

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Abstract: *The purpose of this research paper is to explore the influence of the middle class on political transformation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan regarding their participation in politics and the challenges they face. This study is to examine how the middle class contributes in shaping the political space of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and what hurdles they fall in their capability of making an impact. Qualitative methodology is applied, using semi structured interviews to elicit the perceptions and experiences of sixteen respondents from a wide background of the middle class. It is found that the middle class holds a major role of political instrumentalities in KP as they participate in elections, policy advocacy and social reform. They contribute to political discourse and to the building up of a democratic culture because they rely on their intellectual and educational capital. Serving as bridge between traditional political structures and modern governance, they represent a move away towards more grassroots based political participation. But the research also finds fault with many of the challenges of the middle class in assuming full responsibility in the shaping of political culture. These factors embody entrenched feudal and tribal systems, political instability and the large role of the military in politics. Internal fragmentation with the middle class, as well as economic discrepancies also contributes to their unorganized political engagement. Overall, the study finds that while the middle class in KP is a critical agent of change towards political transformation, their efforts in that direction are limited by structural barriers, as well as by other socio political challenges.*

Keywords: Middle class, Political transformation, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Political participation, Political culture, Socio-political challenges, Governance

Introduction

Socio economic factors play a role in shaping the political culture of any region and the role of the middle class in politics have also been a center of discussion. Political culture is the aggregate set of attitudes, values, beliefs and customs that shape a community's essential political processes and governmental affairs. Therefore, the importance of middle class in shaping up the political culture of developing country such as Pakistan becomes especially important while giving weight to the areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) because of its historical, social and political distinctiveness. This paper examines how the middle class in KP has had a role in transforming the political space, replacing the old order with democratic principles.

Historically, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a province in northwestern Pakistan has been tribally and feudalism influenced, and nepotism, patronage and familial politics have been influential. According to political theorists, such as Huntington (1968), the middle class often occupies a central place as a political catalyst acting to transform democratic societies from traditional to modern to modern to democratic forms. As KPs economy, education and level of urbanization changes, that has driven the opening of the KP middle class, and thereby its growing importance politically.

In some years, the middle class in KP has become the most vocal political players, fighting for transparency, accountability and the rule of law. Rafiq (2016) observes that the growth of the middle class in Pakistan goes beyond economic indicators to comprise a more educated, politically aware and civic responsible class. This group is best suited of all for participation in political discourse, for they have resources and information to challenge the conventional codification of political authority such as feudalism and tribalism. Hence the middle class in KP has gained a big deal of significance for shaping political discourses and making an effect on the public opinion.

Political transformation in KP has been influenced by various factors. It covers urbanization, media and expanding access to education. These have provided the middle class with the means to query the limits of the decisional lock existing upon the political order and to press for reform. The permissive environment especially has meant the rise of middle class women whose educational opportunities have allowed them to break the hold of male elites in the province in terms of political activism. Education, as observed by Rafiq (2016), has always been of critical importance in Pakistan, helping new groups, such as the middle class rise and take on traditional elites over societal structures. This is particularly true in KP, where the more educated the populace, the more politically engaged the middle class becomes, able to pressure for such systems change.

The middle class of KP has impacted the area greatly, as it posed a real threat to the feudalism and tribalism that have run the political landscape for years. According to Siddiq (2017), Pakistan's feudal class has mostly held onto political power by means of patronage networks, over and above the middle and bottom classes. Yet increasing industrialization and urbanization and a proportionally growing middle class have progressively eroded these traditional socio political structures in KP. The result is reflected in electoral participation as middle class become more and more likely to support politicians and political parties that push for greater good governance, transparency and democratic reforms. Cohen's (2004) observations in this respect with an argument that it is the middle class that can become a catalyst for democratic governance in transitional societies when they are politically active.

KP has historically been a staunch bastion for religious parties playing a role in its political culture. This is where we find religious political parties like Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (F) more often than not coming together with feudal elites, preserving conservative political mores, and opposing the modern democratic reforms. The middle class, however, is exposed to the practices of global governance and progressive ideologies, and is arguing for political reforms which emphasize education, health-care and economic development, rather than religious dogma. According to Shafqat (2019), the educated urban (middle class) are more likely to support social welfare policies than religious conservatism. This is particularly germane to KP, where the political terrain is moving toward more pragmatic, policy oriented rule, as a result of demands from the middle classes.

KP's middle class has also been shaped by urbanization. However, due to rising urban migration to cities like Peshawar, Mardan and Abbottabad, the socio economic composition of KP has changed drastically. Familiar access to education, plus employment opportunities and political means to engage, are hallmarks of urban centers, leading to a politically self aware and active middle class. The course of urbanization in Pakistan has been quite influential for political participation, especially among Pakistan's middle class that has drawn benefits from its socio economic status to convince for reforms in governance, infrastructure and public services (Ahmad & Haq, 2021). In KP, this has meant a burgeoning demand for both accountability and transparency in government and more equitable

distribution of resources.

Another important element of political transformation in KP is based on the political participation of women from the middle class. Traditionally, women in KP are marginalized in political processes owing to periphery of patriarchy and dominance of tribal customs. But with more education and easier access to employment, middle class women are now contributing more to political debate. According to Syed and Tabassum (2014), rising educated women in Pakistan's middle class have questioned the traditional gender norms and, consequently, women's participation in politics and in public life has improved. In KP, this period has brought to forefront the advocacy for education, healthcare and women's rights, with middle class women spearheading the movements.

These happy developments, however, are not an end to the political transformation wrought by the middle class in KP, as this section will discuss. It challenges entrenched power by feudal elites, power of the religious parties and a lack of support from the institutional support for democratic reforms. Political change in Pakistan, Jalal (2009) maintains, has often been slow and rife with resistance on the part of entrenched elites who are ill disposed to give up power to emerging social groups, such as the middle class. This dynamic is especially clear in KP where the middle class has yet to convert its political participation in any real way to changes in governance and policy.

Moreover, the political culture of KP is largely tribal and these tribal customs and values are ill in breed with the democratic principles exclaimed by the middle class. Embedded very deeply in the socio political fabric of the province these tribal structures are exerting considerable influence in local governance and processes of elections. According to Ali et al. (2015), tribalism and feudalism are the major hindrances of democratic governance that persist in Pakistan's rural areas mostly because the traditional leaders have the upper hand in local political process. KP's middle class must function in this particular political environment where it can demand democratic reform while being forced to consult with tribal and feudal power structures.

1.4 Research Questions

1. How does the middle class influence the political transformation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa?
2. What challenges do the middle class face in shaping the political culture of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa?

1.5 Research Objectives

1. To explore the influence of the middle class on political transformation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
2. To identify the challenges the middle class face in shaping the political culture of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

1.6 Significance of Study

This study is important because of its focus on middle class in the shaping of the evolving political culture of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa which has its roots too deep in the traditional power structures, like feudalism and tribalism to be ignored. Focusing on the political participation of this emerging social group, this research provides insight onto how this emerging social group is breaking these old systems and is taking a stand for democratic governance, transparency and accountability. The way in which the group of people that make up the middle class has influenced the current political transformation within the region is essential, given that Pakistan is still trying to deal with socio political changes.

Beyond its analytic value, this study is also relevant for policymakers and political analysts concerned with the capacity of the middle class to promote political change. Identifying the challenges for the middle class in forging the political landscape is educative research as it can shape future policy making strategies that can improve the democratic process. Finally, the findings of this study can also be used

as a starting point for analyzing the influence of social classes in other parts of Pakistan's political dynamics where a middle class has an important role in making political stability and inclusive governance.

Literature Review

In regions of socio economic transformation, the middle class becomes salient for influencing political culture. The scholars have examined the capacity of the middle class to politics mobilization, with Lankina and Libman (2021) drawing on it to initiate change. Education and information access, the position of this social group in society, helps to create a space and provides them the ability to actively participate in political discourse, to take part in political life and make it conform to the principle passions. The middle class is not defined solely by an economic status, according to Gilbert (2002), however, but also by lifestyle choices and values which spin around meritocracy and self-sufficiency. The values that result from this social and political mobility sustain the weakening power of the middle class and hence its importance in shaping the political culture.

In other words, according to Hunt (2017) the middle class has the moderating role of maintaining sociopolitical stability. They balance forces because of their economic and educational backgrounds and thus support political continuity and gradual reforms. Participants in the middle class through their corresponding high education levels are able to participate in politics hence influencing the political agendas to govern in the middle that includes pushing for transparency as well as governance that involves accountability. According to Lipset (1959) involving the middle class is vital in the development of democratic ideals: the middle class has always stood for predictability and order which are fundamental characteristics of any democratic system.

They (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995) argue middle class individuals are more politically active than lower class counterparts, partly because (of) their access to resources (of) such things (as) time, money, and education. Having these resources will allow them to contribute to political campaigns and that electoral processes. With higher levels education, they understand political issues better than the masses and consequently influence policy decisions that ensure their interests. Consequently, the middle class constitutes a major influence in determining how the public is governed and the wider political course of any country.

The middle class at some point in history has been a force behind political reform. Moore (1966) observes that the European industrial revolution saw the rise of the middle class and that demand for political participation accompanied that, with large scale political reforms such as expanded voting rights and democratic institutions being a consequence. Chua (2003) also saw how in developing countries such as India and China, the middle class has pushed democratic reforms challenging authoritarian governments in spite of low living standards and insisted on transparency. While the relationship between the middle class and political reform may not be so clear cut (and Stepan and Linz [2013] note) it depends very much on the larger context of politics and culture.

To understand how the middle class influences you need the idea of political culture as well. Political culture is defined by Almond and Verba (1963) as the set of attitudes, beliefs and values that constitute the basic element of political systems. The elements serve as key direction on how persons should engage themselves with political institutions and processes. It reflects societal norms and expectations, and directly affects everything from voter behavior, to policy making. Moreover, Elkins and Simeon (1979) go ahead to state that political culture is also instrumental in the formation of structure on political institutions and public policy. Take for instance societies that frown upon privacy are likely to establish institutions that promote accountability.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the interaction between the middle class and political culture makes it especially relevant. This is historically tied to Lipset's (1959) model of how the nature of association with the middle class produces, in particular, acceptance of democratic values: their socioeconomic

status allows them to participate in a range of political activities, from voting to policy activism. They (middle class) can influence public opinion and policy outcomes through active political participation (Verba, Schlozman and Brady, 1995). In KP, the electoral politics represent the vote bank of the middle class that has campaigned for governance reforms and accountability.

Middle class influence in KP has been a major driving force with urbanization. Because of economic opportunities and educational access, the cities such as Peshawar and Abbottabad now have middle class households. The need to advocate for inclusion of city residents has been one that this urban middle class has played an important part in. Urbanization itself encourages political participation and middle class demands better infrastructure, education and health care as per Haq, (2015). The growth of the middle class in urban centers is continuing to have an influence on the political culture of KP as they wield increasing political influence.

There is also the economic impact of the middle class – their political influence. Amjad, Din, Qayyum (2015) find middle class as being a consumer demand driver in real estate, retail, and automotive industries and hence contributing to economic growth. This spending power creates jobs, generates economic activity and so increases their political clout. In addition to this, Ghani, Kerr, and O’Connell (2014) argue that middle class entrepreneurs are major contributors in job creation and innovation and as such their role in politics and in the economy is emphatic.

The political influence of the middle class in KP has been conditioned by socio economic factors and historical events. Religious parties have held a lot of power in this region in the past, as Rehman and Ali (2001) point out, and have frequently functioned as the hand maidens of the feudal elites. As a result, however, the middle class—along with its acquaintance of the world’s governance practices—has been more and more pushing for political reforms to emphasize education, health care, and economic development. This is a move away from when disadvantaged groups were seeking a stronger voice to when they have a role to play in agitating against conservative political norms, advocate for more progressive policies.

These are not the only challenges in the relationship between the middle class and political culture. Traditional power structures, including feudalism and tribalism, are still shaping KP in a major way. According to Hussain (2017), these systems entrenched the middle class from bringing forward the political reforms. While rising political participation of the middle class marks a major change in the political scene in the region, they are asking for greater transparency and accountability from the political leaders.

The political influence of the middle class is largely due to education. According to Javaid (2015), education become the means to empower the belonging of middle class to participate in political dialogues and to question the existing power arrangements. In particular, educated middle class women, have played a meaningful role in advocating for gender sensitive policies and for women having more opportunity to participate in politics in KP. The work of these one hundred has resulted in an elevated awareness of women’s rights, and a calling for policies and programs which support gender equality.

In KP, we also witnessed a rise in the middle class, and their demands for transparency and accountability within the government also rose too. According to Naseem (2012), the middle class being politically active will support policies that help strengthen rule of law and decrease incidence of corruption. But their influence is strongest in local elections, where middle class voters have tended to back candidates who favour public services and accountability. This changing voting pattern shows the increasing role of middle class in determining political arena in KP.

KP’s political culture is still deeply religious. According to Ali and Rehman (2001), religious parties who formed government earlier have historically mobilized support on the basis of conservative ideologies. But, the middle class, which relies on education and economic development, has started pushing for policies that tackle social problems: education and health care. Shafqat (2009) paves the

way for the growing influence of the middle class in advocacy of social welfare policies instead of religious conservative policies that was a hallmark of KPs politics.

While these developments have been positive, the middle class in KP is continuing to struggle to convert their political power into real change. For instance, the status quo that remains the entrenched power of feudal elites and tribal structures remains difficult for the middle class to overcome and get the political reforms done. These changes to Pakistan's political system were advocated by Jalal (2009) as slow and fiercely put up a fight by traditional power holders. This is particularly evident in KP, where the middle class is forcing its way into a conservative elite dominated political field.

Moreover, political influence of the middle class in the region is often dented by economic inequality and underdevelopment. Populist and religious parties, in keeping with Ali and Rehman (2001), sometimes exploit these economic divides to win favour with the lower classes; they promise social reforms that appeal to these classes. Where now is the pull for the middle class? There's a dynamic where the middle class, when they push for progressive policies, they push into the middle of an array of political actors who benefit from the status quo.

Finally, the middle class of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is becoming more sympathetic in governing the political culture of the region. As middle class political participation and support for democratic governance is growing, the middle class is putting traditional power structures in the warrant, and promoting increased transparency and accountability. But traditional feudal and tribal systems as well as economic inequality hold them back. This is likely an influence on the future political landscape of KP; as the middle class continues to grow and assert itself politically.

Methodology

This research applies a qualitative study to explore the significance of middle class in forming the emerging political culture of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan. Creswell (2012) highlighted that qualitative research is driven by understanding people's meaning attached to social issues. Qualitative methods were critical to this study given the need to deeply get under the skin of experiences and views of the middle class in KP. Through in depth interviews, the research documents personal perspectives that highlight how the middle class influenced the transformation of the political.

Due to its suitability to exploring personal experiences, opinions and judgments, a qualitative approach was selected. A strength of this method is that it enables in depth investigation of the participants' thoughts, in order to understand the role of the middle class in KP's political culture. Political involvement is inherently subjective meaning we need to develop an approach that focuses on personal narratives and experiences.

The main tool for gathering data was the interview, which allowed the respondents' comments to be open as well as dynamic. Using these interviews to give participants freedom to say whatever they wish allowed us to achieve more nuanced and informative insights into their political involvement.

Research Design

The design involved phenomenological research which seeks to understand human experiences from the point of view of the people who have experienced them. However, this approach was best suited for capturing the rich and varied experiences of the middle class in (KP). Instead, the design narrows on how participants see and translate their part in forming political culture. Through analysis of personal narratives, the researcher was able to uncover the hidden meanings and patterns in data of these experiences.

This sub group consisted of participants who were selected to ensure diversity in profession, age, and education among the middle class of KP. Respondents were interviewed in open-ended fashion so they could speak freely about their experiences. This data was recorded, transcribed and analysed to examine

recurring themes relating to involvement in politics. It guaranteed that findings were grown from the participant's lived experiences, from their standpoints regarding the KP political landscape.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

The primary data was collected through in-depth open ended interviews. The goal of these interviews was to try and gain personal insights into the role played by KP's middle class in its political transformation. Published articles, reports, and books composed the secondary data that was used to give background context and support the primary data analysis.

The interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis. At this method, we searched for patterns and themes and grouped the results into relevant headings. Thematic analysis enabled the researcher to go deeper into the participants' views to bring out some of the subtle ways by which the middle class shapes KP's political culture.

The analysis organized the data into key themes in order to determine consistencies and differences in participant responses. By adopting this approach, the researcher was able to detect recurring patterns in how the middle class interacts with the political processes, and thus have a better sense as to their contribution to forming of KP's political landscape.

Respondents

This included 16 respondents from KP's middle class, chosen according to their occupation, education and economic condition. Seven open ended questions were asked of the respondents to probe their understanding of political culture and the role of the middle class in KP. These questions were concerning their opinions about political culture in both KP and Pakistan, the effect of the middle class on politics and their expectations from the future.

To achieve this, the respondents were selected with an effort to capture a whole range of middle class views, resulting in data that reflected a broad spectrum of experiences. Each participant was prior informed about the objective of the study and then consent was taken for proceeding with interviews. Due to anonymity to all participants their personal information being kept confidential.

Interviews were conducted to make respondents feel comfortable, to feel encouraged, in sharing detailed insights. Capturing the nuanced role of the middle class in KP's political culture was crucial, and this method helped do that.

Ethical Considerations

Ethically speaking, research was strictly done, so that the rights and dignity of the participants would be protected. The participants obtained informed consent and were informed of their right to withdraw at any time. To ensure anonymity, all data collected was treated as private and used only for this study.

Analysis

Influence of the Middle Class on Political Transformation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's middle class is contributing to political participation and their education, economic stability and rising awareness of democratic values makes their contribution notable. Beyond voting they are also part of political debates or social movements, and advocates for reforms of the way we manage our governance. As middle class acquire more access to information, it has also become more articulate in its demand for transparency, accountability and public services. Given that this demographic also swings support towards candidates and policies that will best tend to their interests, they also influence electoral outcomes. They have an important role in determining political dynamics, promoting change, and contesting traditional power concentrations.

The middle class in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) has a particular role in deciding political participation in the region, and are a force for change in the political culture present in the region. Their active

participation in the election and civic activities has one of the largest impacts of impact. In this regard, respondents claim that owing to an increasing political consciousness of, and active participation of middle class in elections, advocacy for governance reforms and policies that are in line with their interests has intensified. Another respondent says he votes, lobbies for specific policies, and do activities with civil society. Several scholars concur with the notion that an active middle class helps produce a more lively and participatory political culture.

Political participation of the middle class is shaped by their educational background. Middle class people in KP, many respondents point out, have had more education, and hence, tend to be more politically conscious and analytical. Most of the middle class people are intellectuals, academics, educators, a participant remarked. This intellectual capital allows the middle class to interrogate critically (through these tools) political entities and phenomena, and thus better engage in political discourse. According to this it is backed up by Ali et al. (2015) which states that intellectuals and academics play an important role in generating informed political debate.

A major theme that emerges is the relationship between participation by the middle class and the advocacy of an active political sphere. The middle class in KP however is not only required to vote but also striving and encouraging certain effects and policies and reforms in corruptions, good governance and social justice. A purported participant said that unlike Punjab, KP's middle class supports parties like PTI that are pro anti corruption and pro social justice. Similar is the claim of Siddiq (2017) about middle class KP not being in the favour of autocratic regimes in KP as they are the promoters of democratic reforms and for keeping the government accountable.

Politics also depends upon the role of women from middle class in KP. The middle class women are empowered by both political awareness and education to actively participate in politics. Respondents observed that while women's political participation has increased in KP, particularly in the middle class, where education and technology has helped topple down traditional barriers. The voices of middle class KP women now being heard and heard loudly is a progressive shift in the political culture of KP where women are beginning to take part in decision making.

The second reason is that with the rise of technology and access to all type of information, middle class have strengthened their role in political participation. However, the research reflected in the report reveals that the middle class uses social media and other digital platforms to voice their concerns, to engage with political issues and to be advocates of change. According to one participant, however, social media has transformed into a means for the middle class to rally behind a cause and create awareness about an issue politically. This is consistent with Rafiq (2016), who points out that digital platforms have mobilised the middle class for political purposes, and opened up new routes to participate that go beyond traditional votes.

Besides outcome oriented political participation among middle class in KP, moreover they are also inclined towards holding the government accountable and for taking transparency. Again and again, respondents cited the middle class's desire for good governance, action against corruption and quality public services. That the middle class in KP are also demanding transparency and accountability from political leadership, and therefore engage in elections and political movements, one of the participants disclosed. The notion that the middle class in KP succeeds in bringing about governance reforms and in demanding accountability from the politicians mirrors Jamal (2017).

Moreover, the class that engages in KP civil society organizations, that supported good causes, making social and community changes. Others remarked that many middle class people work, on the ground, in civic groups, and non governmental organizations (NGOs) in motivating some of these actions about education, health and social justice. Many middle class people in KP are involved in NGOs and working for the betterment of society and sending their voice to the government to take policy changes. By engaging, the middle class participates in the overall political participation of the middle class, which

is marked by influencing policy making from outside the formal political system.

It is also evident from their voting behaviour as how their political engagement is reflected in the middle class of KP. In contrast to the traditional political culture of other parts of Pakistan, the respondents noted that the middle class vote on policy issues, rather than on the basis of personal or familial loyalty. This participant commented that in KP, it is not feudal loyalty but party policies and ideologies which matter for middle class votes. This is a marked shift in the way KP's political landscape has traditionally worked, with political participation becoming a more issue based affair than a question of allegiance towards an individual.

Political participation of the middle class in KP has an ethnic and regional identity dimension as well. Respondents stressed that though the middle class in KP may be classed based on socio economic status, their political preferences are mostly based on ethnicity and region. The ethnicity is one of the key factors influence political participation in KP, even in the middle class, stated one participant. According to Syed and Tabassum (2014), this matches the findings that ethnic and regional identities still continue to shape political behavior in KP but now increasingly the middle class is also becoming interested in national political issues.

Conclusively, the participation of middle class in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in the sphere of elections, civil society and political advocacy creates their influence on formation of political participation. Access to technology, their educational background and demand for good governance motives them to participate in the political process. In the meantime, the region's political culture is taking a progressive turn, with middle class women and youth taking a greater role in politics. Ethnic and regional identities still shape political behavior to some extent in KP but while the middle class in KP moves away from the traditional forms of ethnic and regional based voting and lobbying, they increasingly come to become issue based voters and protestors. The function of the middle class in political participation is transformative in reshaping the present political panorama of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Challenges the Middle Class Faces in Shaping the Political Culture of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Political culture plays an important role to influence in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) by middle class. But it meets several obstacles that constrain its impact. One problem is that the area is not cohesively organized. The impact of the middle class,... commented another respondent, 'is dependent on its size, organization, and cohesion.' It suggests that the potential for the middle class to condition politics is slight while its indistinctness dilutes its influence. The middle class has in many cases been fragmented and thus unable to come forward on a united front in political matters. Fragmentation of society diminishes potential for collective action required to push for changing of political culture.

The region is marred by another major challenge that the deep rooted traditional and tribal structures. One respondent suggested that the middle class is a bridge between the traditional, tribal faction and the modern political dynamic. The middle class has tried to negotiate between traditional tribal traditions and contemporary politics but its activities are constrained by the entrenched power of tribal and feudal elites (Syed & Tabassum, 2014). Second, because the tribal system puts so much precedence on loyalty and hierarchy, it sometimes keeps the middle class from engaging in politics, as it usually favors those who have power in place over those in the middle class who represent new political actors.

In addition to these challenges, social and electronic media have given the middle class opportunities and challenges to become politically engaged. Though these platforms provide room for political discourse, they provide a megaphone for those from other social classes, which scales down the political engagement from the middle class. A respondent said, the Political culture in KP is of many types, which is a complex tapestry woven by different classes of Khan. As a result, Naseem (2012) suggests this means that the middle class's role in creating political culture is complex because of other social groups' active participation and leads to conflicts of interest and reduced efficacy in middle-class initiatives.

Political instability continues to be one of the most critical challenges in KP faced by the middle class, which may also be one of a series of challenges in the region. This instability, commented a respondent, we are positively aware of the present day political instability that has gripped the country Pakistan. This instability often gives rise to a difficult political environment for middle class individuals to plan long term politically. It therefore tends to diminish middle class participation via loss of faith in the political process. It is hard for many of the middle class to become involved in politics because disillusioned by frequent changes of government and government direction.

KP middle classes also face another major hurdle, feudalism and family politics. Powerful families were controlling politics for generations and influenced the political culture of the region. One respondent observed that Pakistan's political culture is still wholly inhabited by and dominated by 'family fiefdoms, feudalism and family politics'. Siddiqua (2017, claims that this entrenched system of inherited political power prevents the possibility of the middle class to reach to a position of political leadership. y challenge is the lack of cohesive organization. As one respondent observed that the impact of the middle class... can vary depending on its size, organization, and cohesion. This suggests that while the middle class holds potential to shape the political landscape, its lack of unity weakens its influence. In many cases, the middle class is fragmented, preventing it from presenting a unified front in political matters. This fragmentation diminishes the potential for collective action, which is necessary to push for changes in political culture.

Another major challenge is the deep-rooted traditional and tribal structures that dominate the region. A respondent mentioned that that the middle class acts as a bridge between the more traditional, tribal elements and the modern political dynamics. While the middle class has attempted to mediate between traditional tribal customs and modern politics, these efforts are often hindered by the entrenched power of tribal and feudal leaders (Syed & Tabassum, 2014). The tribal system, with its emphasis on loyalty and hierarchy, often limits the political participation of the middle class, as it tends to favor established power holders over new political actors from the middle class.

Moreover, the influence of social and electronic media on political engagement presents both opportunities and challenges for the middle class. While these platforms offer a space for political discourse, they also amplify voices from different social classes, which can dilute the impact of middle-class political engagement. As a respondent noted that the Political culture in KP is a complex tapestry woven by various social classes. This suggests that the middle class's role in shaping political culture is complicated by the active involvement of other social groups, which can lead to conflicts of interest and reduce the effectiveness of middle-class initiatives (Naseem, 2012).

One of the most significant challenges faced by the middle class in KP is political instability, which has been a recurring theme in the region. A respondent reflected on this instability, stating that we are positively aware of the present-day political instability which has engulfed Pakistan. This instability often creates an unpredictable political environment, where long-term political planning and strategies become difficult for middle-class individuals. This uncertainty leads to a lack of faith in the political process, discouraging active participation from the middle class. Many members of the middle class are disillusioned by the frequent changes in government and political direction, making it harder for them to engage meaningfully in politics.

Feudalism and family politics present another major hurdle for the middle class in KP. The political culture of the region is heavily influenced by powerful families who have controlled politics for generations. One respondent noted that Pakistan's political culture is still the domain of family fiefdoms, feudalism, and family politics. According to Siddiqua (2017, this long-standing system of inherited political power limits opportunities for middle-class individuals to rise to positions of political leadership. Feudal and family based politics tend to exclude anyone without traditional power bases, effectively making politics next to impossible for middle-class citizens to achieve.

These structural challenges in KP are what added to it the problem of the KP middle class faces on the matter of economic insecurity. They are many who feel the pinch of economic pressures which reduce their participation in political activities. A respondent remarked that economic stability and the future worry the middle class a lot. However, these worries have made it difficult for the middle class to prioritize being politically involved since it's much more about securing your own livelihood. Additionally what may be lost on many people is that the majority of the middle class does not have the financial means to participate in a political environment that demands copious amounts of money for campaigns and political power.

Another important constraint on the middle class's role as arbiters of political culture in KP is the dominance of the military in KP's politics. A respondent commented that Pakistan's political culture might explain why the military is the most powerful political actor in the system. The military's role in politics is usually above that of civilians in shaping political culture, especially the military's direct and indirect involvement. The middle class on the other hand have their efforts to shape political decisions thwarted by military interventions, which take precedence over cases of democratic governance in favour of national security. The sheer military dominance of this region constricts the meaningful impact of civilian political actors, especially the middle class, to effect any real change.

A second challenge concerns the prevailing conviction of voters apathy and disappointment in the democratic process. One respondent pointed to this problem when stating that most Pakistanis think their vote doesn't count. The lack of faith in this system of election, made worse by this perception of corruption and manipulation, makes it so the middle class does not believe in the process and does not take the pains to vote. But many think their votes make no difference, since political power lies with traditional elites and the military. This powerlessness feeling of middle class voters decreases their democratic means of shaping the political culture of KP (Ali et al., 2015).

In addition, the political representation of middle class in KP is also bleak. Some middle class people have risen to become politically prominent, but these are few and far between, often exceptional. But one respondent commented that in some regions and in some instances middle class people come up from masses to become political leaders but not in all the regions of KP. From Cohen (2004) she states that the inconsistency of middle class representation in leading political positions inhibits the middle class to exercise policy and governance influence. Lacking with powerful political representation, the middle class doesn't get a fair representation of its problems and interests in the political space.

Education, which has been considered a source of strength of the middle class, also constitutes a paradoxical problem. Although the middle class is educated, and that education allows it to engage in informed political discourse, it also makes the middle class feel alienated from the population at large. One respondent claims that that chunk of the population who are educated is the middle class. Sometimes this educational edge can distance the middle class from less educated groups in society, cutting it off politically from the less educated on issues and strategy. Because the middle class may advocate for policies that seem elitist or that simply have little connection to the very real lived experience of those in the working class, this lessens their greater political draw and effect.

Limited political experience is also a challenge shaping middle class influence on KP's political culture. KP many middle class people are relatively new to politics and have historically been marginalized in political process. One reason for this is a lack of political experience which can help in making political negotiations, alliances and decisions essentially more difficult. Thus, middle class individuals may have difficulties to impose impact on a political system where political actors from the elite class have been entrenched and experienced (Shafqat, 2009).

To summarize, the middle class in KP has a long way to go in their attempts to bud up the political culture in the region. The problems that make these challenges hard to address are lamentably; fragmentation and lack of cohesion, the conservative domination of tribal and feudal structures,

economic insecurity, military intervention in politics, voter apathy, limited political representation and gender inequality. Even against these odds the middle class is still very important in KP's political culture as a bridge between the traditional and modern political dynamics. Yet over how to tackle these challenges will be critical to ensuring the middle class becomes a transformative force in KP's political space.

Conclusion

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), the middle class form a significant, but complicated, part of the region's political culture. This work has highlighted that the middle class has an impact in political participation and nonetheless has difficulties with it. There has, in KP, been a rise of the middle class which has served as a bridge between traditional tribal politics and modern democratic practices. The middle class was politically transformative in KP through its active play in the elections, the political campaigns and in civil society campaigns. Because of its intellectual capital, education, public awareness, the tool can direct politics, influence the political discourse and involve policy that prioritizes governance, development and transparency.

But the role of the middle class is no cakewalk. The middle class still believes in political fragmentation, economic insecurity and in the domination of traditional tribal and feudal structures. The middle class also faces the challenge of working around the military's strong influence in politics, and of managing voter apathy while making meaningful change. These obstacles notwithstanding, the middle class plays a significant role in KP's fluid political environment, although this role depends on its internal cohesion and the contours of 'objective conditions' outside the provincial politics.

Finally, the middle class in KP is a force for political transformation, which cannot be discounted, however structural and cultural challenges tend to work against it. For the middle class to extract its full potential in setting campaign in the political culture of KP, unity among the middle class is required; they need to be better represented politically; and they need to overcome traditional barriers. The way the middle class manages to deal with these challenges and play its political role in the rapidly changing political landscape will determine the future of KP's political landscape.

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