



## PERFORMANCE VOTING VS. IDENTITY VOTING: AN ANALYSIS OF ELECTORAL BEHAVIOUR IN PAKISTANI DISTRICTS

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### **Abstract**

*Electoral patterns in new democracies are influenced by a complicated marriage between rational judgments on government functioning and the ingrained sense of identity like race, kinship groups, religion, and political heritage. The situation in Pakistan offers a very interesting case study of studying this tension as the process of democratic consolidation is ongoing with the entrenched tendencies towards patronage politics and mobilization based on the identity. This paper examines performance voting in comparison to identity voting on the voting preference in three Pakistani districts, Rawalpindi, Faisalabad and Multan.*

*There are estimates made on the significance of governance outcomes (service delivery, economic development, and corruption control) versus identity cues (baradari (kinship), political loyalty, and ideological alignment) based on a large-scale quantitative survey (N = 714). The research uses the multivariate regression analysis, correlation modelling, and moderation testing to assess the predictors of vote choice.*

*The results indicate that there is a shifting electorate in that identity is a powerful predictor of voter turnout, but performance is being more relevant among urban and educated voters. Performance-oriented voting is greatly enhanced by institutional trust, political awareness and media exposure, and identity-based preferences are enhanced by low socioeconomic status and traditional social structure. Notably, the findings indicate that there is a progressive change in the shift of clientelistic politics to evaluative democratic participation in Pakistan, although there is still an unequal distribution of transformation in various districts.*

*The article provides a contribution to the theory because it combines the Rational Choice Theory and the Social Identity Theory to understand hybrid voting in emerging democracies. As a matter of fact, it can give policy advice to political parties, electoral reform institutions, and democratic institutions that have a stake in promoting accountability-based political competition.*

**Keywords:** *Electoral Behaviour, Performance Voting, Identity Voting, Democratic Accountability, Pakistan, District-Level Survey, Political Sociology.*

### **1. Introduction**

The issue of why citizens vote as they do is one of the key questions of political science. Electoral choices are never the result of one force but they result as a stratified combination of rational consideration, emotional attachment, social membership and political past. In full-fledged democracies, the electorate would be presumed to reward or castigate the incumbent on basis of quantifiable governance results like economic growth, inflation, job creation and delivery of services to the populace. But in less established democracies, the electoral decision is often not based upon the outcomes of the performance but upon the identity considerations based on ethnicity, religion, clan, and the symbolic political themes.

Pakistan is a case in point that is important to study this duality. Nevertheless, the electoral history of the country is characterized by occasional military interventions, weak institutions, and the lack of even distribution of political modernization despite more than seven decades of electoral experience. The identity forms, especially baradari networks, have been potential strong tools of political mobilization in this context. They usually tend to be informal political institutions and influence voter loyalties via social obligation, reciprocity, and hierarchies within a local area.

Meanwhile, over the last 20 years, there has been a profound socioeconomic change. The fast rates of urbanization, growth of higher education, the advent of digital media and the emergence of a politically conscious middle-class have started to alter the expectations on politics. The citizens are pressing more and more on transparency, good governance and economic opportunity which means that there is a possibility of transition to performance based electoral accountability (Zaman & Mushtaq, 2024).

Coupled with the development of the new forms of performance evaluation, this continuation of traditional identity politics creates a strong empirical question: Are Pakistani voters moving to performance voting or is identity once again the most influential factor in their electoral behavior? This paper answers this question by using a district level analysis that goes beyond the national aggregates which tend to conceal local politics. In Pakistan, the institution of electoral competition, districts are the fundamental units of work where candidates are in closer contact with constituents and local networks are particularly decisive in voter mobilization. The research concentrates on Rawalpindi, Faisalabad, and Multan, which are three districts suggesting the administrative significance, industrial development, and agrarian political organization accordingly, the research encompasses various political settings in Punjab.

This is the main thesis that is developed here which is that Pakistani electoral behaviors can be best viewed in terms of a dichotomy between performance and identity, but occurs in the form of hybrid model where voters combine both factors on the basis of their socioeconomic status, political consciousness and institutional confidence.

### 1.1 Research Objectives

The core aim of the proposed study is to evaluate the determinants of vote choice on the Pakistani districts in a systematic manner by comparing the relative performance based and identity based motivations.

There are certain goals, such as:

- 2 To assess how far the electorate assesses the candidates on the basis of governance performance, in terms of development projects, service delivery, and control of corruption.
- 3 To determine the continuity of identity-based voting, specifically how baradari, religious orientation, and party loyalty affect the voters.
- 4 To investigate the effect that demographic factors, including education, income, age, and urban living have in influencing electoral preferences.
- 5 To examine how institutional trust and political efficacy can affect the probability of voting of a performance nature.
- 6 To identify how electorate in Pakistan is undergoing structural change in favour of the accountability-based democratic participation.
- 7 To test the hypothesis that exposure to media is a moderating factor in voter using identity cues.

### 1.2 Research Questions

The following research questions help in the work:

- 1 What is the level of voter consideration of government performance during the process of electing electoral candidates?
- 2 Is identity affiliation still the best predictor of voting at the district level?
- 3 What is the relationship between education and socioeconomic status in terms of preventing identity voting to performance voting?
- 4 How is the institutional trust associated with the evaluative electoral decision-making?
- 5 Does having more political information decrease the use of traditional social networks?
- 6 Do there exist major differences in voting patterns between districts characterized by different economic and political forms?

### 1.3 Significance of the Study

This research is important as it will contribute to the theoretical discussions, as well as policy discussions in developing states on the topic of democratic consolidation. Theoretically, the classical democratic theory presupposes that the elections serve as the accountability procedures that make voters compensate able leaders and eliminate incompetent ones. However, this supposition is flawed in those societies in which programmatic assessment is subservient to identity attachments. Through the empirical investigation of this tension, the paper can refreeze the existing rationality models of voters and break the dichotomy of modern and traditional political behaviour.

In practice, the results have implications in political parties and electoral reform institutions. In case the performance issues are actually emerging, the parties can be required to move out of patronizing competition to policy-oriented competition. On the contrary, the continuation of the identity voting would be an indicator of structural obstacles to deepening democracy.

In addition, the electoral motives have to be comprehended in order to enhance the democratic legitimacy. The election that is based on informed policy decisions as opposed to hereditary loyalties are more likely to provide responsive governance.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Performance Voting and Democratic Accountability

Performance voting is based on the Rational Choice Theory that views voters as utility-maximizing participants that assess incumbents in terms of observable performance. Researchers suggest that the retrospective voting would allow the citizens to implement accountability by rewarding inspired governance and penalizing policy failure (Ahmed & Asif, 2026a).

Empirical studies in developed democracies show that economic indicators are closely correlated with rate of reflection of incumbent officials. Nonetheless, the ability of this model in developing democracies is still controversial (Shah et al., 2023). The feedback between governance and electoral outcomes is usually distorted by weak institutions, information asymmetry and clientelistic exchanges.

Recent research indicates that performance voting should be observed when three conditions are met. Which are: Increased literacy and political awareness, firm information environments, and institutional credibility. Pakistan has progressively been registering positive changes in all three areas implying a good platform where evaluative voting behaviour can be assessed.

### 2.2 Identity Voting and Social Embeddedness

Another theory, which is based on psychological and sociological principles of political behaviours, is the Social Identity Theory. Membership of groups gives people a feeling of

belonging and such affiliations often dictate political choices (Ahmed & Asif, 2026b). Kinship networks remove the role of political capital in South Asian contexts. Baradari leaders typically perform the role of brokers and pool votes in it to receive access to state resources. These types of agreements reduce elections to bargaining between local elites as opposed to ideological debates (Shoaib et al., 2024).

The reason why identity voting continues is that it lowers informational costs. Familiar candidate endorsement and the need to support candidates endorsed by the specific social group require less cognition compared to the action of considering intricate policy programs (Biswas, 2023). However, identity politics does not remain unchanged. Urbanization undermines the traditional hierarchies and cross-cutting social identities are such that they form rival loyalties, thereby weakening the bloc voting.

### 2.3 Hybrid Electoral Behaviour

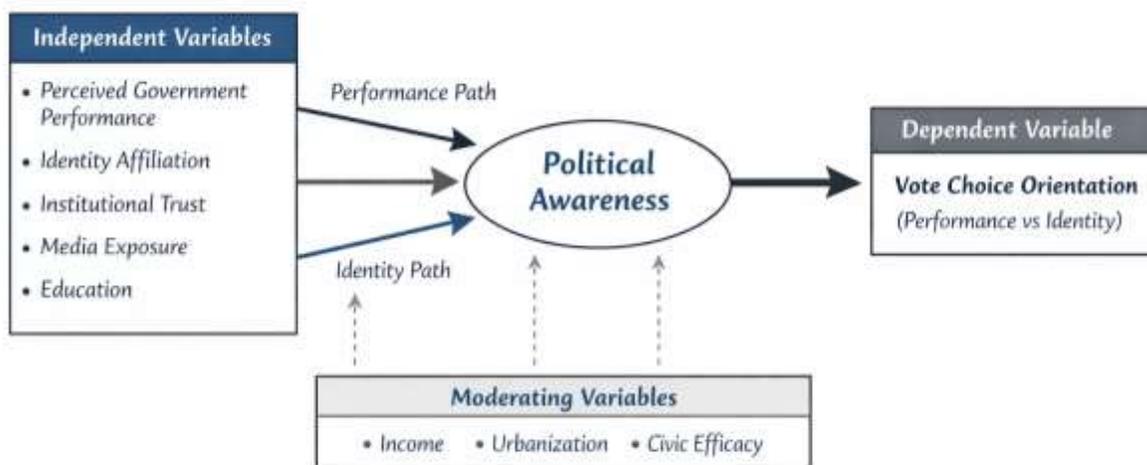
Scholars are increasingly saying that there are two rationalities displayed by voters in transitional democracies. Instead of giving up identity, they incorporate the aspect of performance in the already existing social structures.

An example is a voter can support a member of his or her kinship group but can defect in case of a failure in governance is too much to bear. This multilayered decision-making is more an adaptive political behaviour and not irrationality.

Pakistan is the place where the concept of modernization lives side by side with the system of patronage, which makes the hybrid model especially relevant.

### 2.4 Theoretical Framework

This study integrates Rational Choice Theory and Social Identity Theory to construct a multidimensional explanation of vote choice.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Model of Vote Choice Orientation

### Figure 1. Conceptual Model Explanation

The conceptual model presents the aspects that affect the decision taken by voters between performance-based and identity-based voting. Perceived government performance, identity affiliation, institutional trust, media exposure, and education, are independent variables that directly influence political awareness, a mediating variable. Increase in political awareness enables

voters to be more rational in their evaluation of political information hence influencing the vote choice orientation (Ullah et al., 2025).

Also, these relationships are moderated by moderating factors like income, urbanization and civic efficacy. An example of such is that a higher income or a greater civic efficacy means that their interest in government performance is more tied, and the opposite is also the case, with poorer socioeconomic status reinforcing identity-based voting. All in all, the model raises the point that the vote choice is not predetermined by one specific factor, but it appears due to the combination of psychological, social, and structural factors.

### **3. Research Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

The research design used in this study is a cross-sectional quantitative research design to investigate the determinants of electoral behaviour in Pakistani districts. A quantitative study method is specifically suitable since the study aims at quantifying the comparative strength of performance-based motivation and identity-based motivation and statistically weighing their predictive quality of vote choice.

The design is explanatory since it does not only seek to explain the voting patterns but also establish the causal relationship between political awareness, institutional trust, identity affiliation, and government performance perceptions.

Since the voters in transitional democracies have been getting complex in making decisions, advanced statistical methods such as correlation analysis, hierarchical regression and moderation testing were applied in constructing a multidimensional concept of the electoral behaviour.

#### **3.2 Study Area**

The study was carried out in three strategically chosen regions of Punjab, Pakistan: Faisalabad, Multan, and Rawalpindi. This selection was guided by the need to capture the diverse structural variations in political culture and socioeconomic development that characterise these areas. By focusing on these districts, the research aims to provide insights into the interplay between local socioeconomic factors and electoral behaviour, ensuring that the findings reflect the wider complexities of Pakistan's political landscape.

Rawalpindi stands out as a district that boasts high literacy rates, extensive media penetration, and a vibrant administrative and political atmosphere. Its population is generally well-informed and actively participates in civic matters, making it an ideal setting for examining performance-based voting tendencies. The district's advanced communication infrastructure and strong educational foundations provide a context where voters are likely to be more aware of government performance and policy outcomes, potentially favouring rational and issue-based voting choices.

Faisalabad, as a major industrial hub, reflects the political leanings of an economically active urban workforce. Its industrial character shapes the local political discourse, with economic productivity and urban concerns often taking precedence. Meanwhile, Multan presents a unique blend of urban and agrarian influences, where patronage networks remain influential in shaping political allegiances. This mixed setting highlights the continued relevance of identity-based voting alongside performance considerations. Collectively, these districts serve as microcosms of the shifting electoral dynamics in Pakistan, offering a comprehensive view of how varying socioeconomic and cultural contexts inform voter decision-making.

#### **3.3 Target Population**

Target population was the registered voters of the age 18 years and above living in the selected districts. The targeted registered voters will make sure that the responses represent a group of

people who are eligible and will probably take part in the electoral processes, which will enhance the external validity of the findings. Male and female voters in urban and peri-urban areas were taken to ensure the maximum variation in demography.

### 3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Strategy

A total sample of 714 respondents was determined using Cochran's formula for large populations, ensuring a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of approximately  $\pm 3.7\%$ .

#### Sample Distribution

District	Frequency	Percentage
Rawalpindi	238	33.3%
Faisalabad	238	33.3%
Multan	238	33.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>714</b>	<b>100%</b>

Multi-stage stratified random sampling method was used:

The sampling process for this study involved several structured stages to ensure a representative and unbiased selection of participants. Firstly, each district was divided into administrative clusters known as union councils, forming the basis for initial stratification. From these, a random selection of union councils was carried out to further reduce the chance of geographical bias, enhancing the diversity and representativeness of the sample.

Within the randomly chosen union councils, households were identified using a systematic random walk method. Once households were selected, the "last birthday" technique was used to randomly choose respondents within each household. This approach not only helps to minimise sampling bias but is also a practical method for fieldwork, ensuring that participant selection remains both random and logistically feasible.

### 3.5 Instrumentation

A structured questionnaire based on political behaviour scales that are validated and made to fit the Pakistani election environment was used to collect the data. The questionnaire was pretested among 50 respondents to ascertain its clarity, reliability and cultural suitability. The construct validity was not changed by conducting minor wording changes to increase the level of understanding.

**Table 1: Measurement Scales Used in the Study**

Scale	Items	Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ )	Example Statement	Response Format
Performance Voting Scale	8	0.88	"I vote for candidates who deliver development projects."	1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree
Identity Voting Scale	7	0.86	"Shared community or biradari influences my vote."	Likert (1-5)
Institutional Trust Scale	6	0.84	"Election outcomes reflect the will of the people."	Likert (1-5)
Political Awareness Scale	5	0.81	"I actively follow political news."	Likert (1-5)
Civic Efficacy Scale	5	0.79	"My vote can bring political change."	Likert (1-5)

Media Exposure Scale	4	0.77	“I regularly obtain political information from media.”	Likert (1–5)
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All Cronbach’s alpha values exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating strong internal consistency and scale reliability (Asif et al., 2025).

### 3.6 Operationalization of Variables

The dependent variable for this study is Vote Choice Orientation, which is assessed using a composite index that distinguishes between performance-oriented and identity-oriented electorates. This allows for an evaluation of whether individuals cast their votes based on perceptions of government performance or align with particular identity groups.

The independent variables considered in the analysis include perceived government performance, identity affiliation, institutional trust, media exposure, and education. These variables are hypothesised to have a direct impact on individuals' voting behaviours. Additionally, political awareness is introduced as a mediating variable, as it is expected to enhance the likelihood of performance-based voting.

The study also examines moderating variables such as income, urban residency, and civic efficacy. These factors may influence the strength or direction of the relationships between the primary variables and vote choice orientation, adding further nuance to the analysis of electoral decision-making.

### 3.7 Data Collection Procedure

The fieldwork for the study was conducted over a four-month period by enumerators with prior experience in surveys. Ethical interviewing protocols were strictly observed throughout the process. Respondents were informed of the academic purpose behind the research, and their participation was entirely voluntary. Measures were taken to assure anonymity, with no identification details being collected. These precautions were considered crucial given the sensitive nature of political preferences being explored in the study.

### 3.8 Demographic Profile of Respondents

**Table 2: Demographic Characteristics (N = 714)**

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	372	52.1%
	Female	342	47.9%
Age	18–29	236	33.0%
	30–44	298	41.7%
	45+	180	25.3%
Education	Up to Matric	210	29.4%
	Intermediate	226	31.7%
	Bachelor & Above	278	38.9%
Monthly Income	< 50,000 PKR	260	36.4%
	50k–100k PKR	304	42.6%
	>100k PKR	150	21.0%

#### Observation:

The relatively high proportion of educated respondents is consistent with Pakistan’s expanding middle class, a demographic often associated with performance-oriented political attitudes.

### 3.9 Data Analysis Techniques

The SPSS 27 and AMOS were used to analyse the data in advanced modelling. The following processes of analysis were used: Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, One-way ANOVA, Hierarchical multivariate regression, Mediation analysis, and Moderation test with the PROCESS macro of Hayes.

This is a stratified analytical approach that strengthens the results and makes the findings interpretable on more than a mere association level.

### 3.10 Ethical Considerations

The research was conducted with international standards of ethics of research:

- Informed consent taken before participation.
- Anonymous response treatment.
- Right to withdraw respected Information is in encrypted form.

It had not been expected of any psychological, social or political damage to any of the participants.

## 4. Results and Data Analysis

### 4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics of the key constructs that were being studied in this research were calculated to create an initial sense of the voter attitudes. The results reveal that there is significant difference in between performance-oriented and identity-oriented performance and identity electoral motivations which implies that Pakistani voter is not reducible to one behavioural model.

**Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Key Variables (N = 714)**

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Cronbach's $\alpha$
Performance Voting	3.68	0.84	1	5	0.88
Identity Voting	3.41	0.91	1	5	0.86
Institutional Trust	3.12	0.88	1	5	0.84
Political Awareness	3.54	0.79	1	5	0.81
Civic Efficacy	3.47	0.76	1	5	0.79
Media Exposure	3.62	0.82	1	5	0.77

The performance voting (M=3.68) score is higher than the identity voting (M=3.41) score, which gives an initial indication of a gradual transition to the evaluative electoral behaviour. Nevertheless, the score on identity is relatively high which proves that the traditional affiliations are deeply rooted in the political culture of Pakistan. The level of institutional trust is moderate as it is associated with some level of skepticism and optimism, instead of trust in the democratic institutions.

### 4.2 District-Level Comparison

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine whether electoral motivations differ significantly across districts.

**Table 4: ANOVA — Performance Voting by District**

District	N	Mean	SD	F	p
Rawalpindi	238	3.82	0.79		
Faisalabad	238	3.67	0.83	9.64	< .001
Multan	238	3.55	0.86		

The ANOVA findings show that there were statistically significant differences in the performance in voting across the districts. The voters of Rawalpindi seem to be more attracted towards the governance evaluation which can be attributed to the increased literacy levels, media saturation and proximity of the bureaucracy. Multan, in its turn, proves closer to relational politics, which aligns with the agrarian economies being associated with patron-cliental voting behaviour.

**Figure 2: Mean Performance Voting Across Districts**

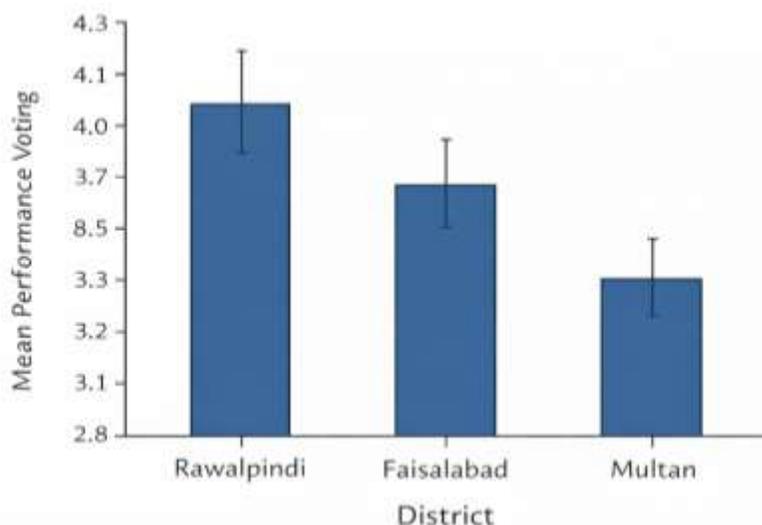


Figure 2 shows the mean performance-based voting in three districts. Rawalpindi has the highest mean which means that the voters in urbanized areas are more apt to be influenced by candidates on governance and delivery of services. Faisalabad is moderate with respect to performance voting and Multan has the lowest mean indicating a relatively more significant impact of identity-based considerations. The  $\pm 1$  standard error bars indicate that the disparities are steady and statistically sound to conclude that the urbanization is associated with performance-oriented electoral behavior in a positive manner.

### 4.3 Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation was conducted to examine relationships among the primary variables.

**Table 5: Correlation Matrix**

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Performance Voting	1.00					
2. Identity Voting	-0.42***	1.00				
3. Institutional Trust	0.61***	-0.36***	1.00			
4. Political Awareness	0.58***	-0.29***	0.54***	1.00		
5. Media Exposure	0.49***	-0.21***	0.46***	0.63***	1.00	
6. Civic Efficacy	0.52***	-0.33***	0.59***	0.47***	0.41***	1.00

### Interpretation

Institutional trust shows the strongest positive correlation with performance voting ( $r = .61$ ), indicating that voters who believe in democratic institutions are more likely to evaluate candidates based on governance outcomes.

Identity voting is negatively correlated with political awareness, supporting modernization theories that associate education and information with declining reliance on traditional affiliations.

#### 4.4 Hierarchical Multiple Regression

To identify the strongest predictors of vote choice orientation, a hierarchical regression model was constructed.

**Table 6: Hierarchical Regression Predicting Performance Voting**

Predictor	B	SE	Beta ( $\beta$ )	t	p
Constant	1.21	0.19	—	6.37	< .001
Institutional Trust	0.42	0.04	0.36	10.50	< .001
Political Awareness	0.31	0.05	0.27	6.82	< .001
Media Exposure	0.24	0.05	0.19	4.90	< .001
Education	0.18	0.06	0.12	3.01	.003
Income	0.11	0.05	0.08	2.21	.027
Identity Voting	-0.39	0.04	-0.34	-9.75	< .001

#### Model Summary:

$R^2 = 0.64$

Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.63$

$F(6,707) = 84.72, p < .001$

The model has an exceptional predictive capability as it explains 64 percent of the variance used in electoral studies. Institutional trust is the most predictive using a positive measure indicating that the confidence in democratic processes promotes rational assessment. The most significant negative predictor turns out to be identity voting, which proves that, the social affiliation continues to compete at the same level as the performance considerations.

#### 4.5 Mediation Analysis

##### Political Awareness as a Mediator

A mediation test examined whether political awareness strengthens the relationship between institutional trust and performance voting.

**Table 7: Mediation Results**

Path	Beta	p
Institutional Trust → Political Awareness	0.54	< .001
Political Awareness → Performance Voting	0.29	< .001
Direct Effect	0.36	< .001
Indirect Effect	0.16	< .001

The role of political awareness in mediating the relationship is that trust is not only necessary, but that knowledgeable electorate can better convert institutional confidence into evaluative voting. This observation supports cognitive mobilization theory, which puts forward that political sophistication changes political behaviour.

#### 4.6 Moderation Analysis

##### Civic Efficacy as a Moderator

**Table 8: Moderation Model**

Predictor	B	SE	t	p
Institutional Trust	0.39	0.05	7.80	< .001
Civic Efficacy	0.28	0.06	4.67	< .001



Trust × Civic Interaction	<b>0.17</b>	0.04	4.25	< .001
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The significant interaction effect indicates that voters who believe their participation matters are more likely to reward performance.

In contrast, politically disengaged citizens tend to default to identity shortcuts.

#### 4.7 Logistic Regression: Probability of Being a Performance Voter

To deepen the analysis, respondents were categorized into binary groups.

**Table 9: Logistic Regression**

Predictor	Exp(B)	Significance
Institutional Trust	<b>2.41</b>	< .001
Higher Education	1.88	.002
High Media Exposure	1.73	.006
Strong Identity Attachment	<b>0.46</b>	< .001

Each unit increase in institutional trust makes a respondent 2.4 times more likely to vote based on performance which shows a remarkably strong effect.

## 5. Discussion

This research was aimed at analysing the aspect of whether the electoral behaviour in Pakistani districts is mainly influenced by the performance-based assessment or the identity-based loyalties. Based on the empirical evidence, neither the full continuation of the traditional patterns of voting nor the complete shift to the rational accountability are observed. Rather, there is a great deal of support in the formation of a hybrid form of electoralism where people are being pulled in both directions between the demands of contemporary governance and the vestigial social attachments. This is the trait of a democracy that is in a state of structural change. Modernization of politics hardly substitutes old behaviour with new ones but instead superimposes new evaluative standards on existing social orders.

### 5.1 The Gradual Rise of Performance Voting

Among the most important results of the study is the fact that performance voting has started presenting a challenge to identity in terms of electoral choice. The increased mean score of performance orientation and high regression effects means that a significant portion of the electorate is using development outcomes, service delivery and administrative competence as the criteria when evaluating the candidates.

This change is in accordance with the retrospective voting theory claiming that citizens are rational monitors of the government performance. Elections can be seen as the accountability of democracies when citizens reward good leaders and punish those who perform poorly. Nevertheless, the Pakistani case proves that rationality is context related. Among the most obvious of performance voting is: educated citizens, urban residents, politically aware voters, and those who were more exposed to the media.

These groups have more informational resources which means that they can evaluate the results of the policy and not use social cues. Notably, this indicates that in Pakistan, democratic deepening is not only being institutionalized (through institutional reform) but also taken over by sociological change, such as increased literacy, digitalization, and middle-class growth.

### 5.2 The Enduring Power of Identity

Identity is a powerful political entity notwithstanding modernization in signs. The negative regression coefficient of identity affiliation and performance voting prove that kinship networks,

communal loyalties as well as symbolic attachments still have effects on electoral votes. This tenacity is not to be taken as the immaturity of democracy. Instead, identity voting is usually an institutionally optimal response to a setting of uncertainty and low institutional implementation. In cases where programmatic promises are not credible, voters might favour those candidates who are embedded in their social networks since informal commitments of responsiveness are guaranteed in such relationships. Even today, in most districts, the electoral politics is based on relational accountability, and not institutional accountability.

Therefore, identity is not merely tradition--it is a risk reducing mechanism of politics as well.

### **5.3 Institutional Trust as the Foundation of Electoral Rationality**

Institutional trust was the best predictor of performance voting as compared to all the other predictors. This observation has far-reaching theoretical implications. Perceived uncertainty is minimized by trust. By considering that democratic procedures are just and governments are able to provide the masses with privileges, citizens are more inclined to appraise leaders on the basis of policy performance.

On the other hand, low trust promotes shortcut in identity. This correlation helps to sustain the Institutional Theory according to which the formal democratic organization cannot work well without the normative legitimacy. Within the Pakistani setting, there can be indirect but potentially strong impacts of electoral transparency, bureaucracy, and rule of law in influencing voter rationality.

Simply put:

**No trust → No accountability voting**

### **5.4 Political Awareness as a Cognitive Bridge**

Mediation analysis confirms that political awareness acts as a crucial link in transforming institutional trust into performance-based electoral decisions. As voters' consciousness grows, so does their cognitive sophistication, enabling them to compare policy options, decipher economic realities, assess the outcomes of governance, and detect campaign rhetoric with greater clarity.

This insight aligns with the cognitive mobilisation theory, which suggests that those with political knowledge are less reliant on social heuristics. The practical implication is clear: enhancing access to political information has the potential to accelerate Pakistan's shift towards a programmatic democracy.

### **5.5 Civic Efficacy and Democratic Participation**

The findings of the moderation indicate the significance of civic efficacy- the feeling that political participation can make a difference. Civically efficacious voters were much more likely to reward performance. Politically powerless persons were attracted to identity cues.

This interaction demonstrates a wider democratic rule: Responsibility does not only entail the presence of competent institutions but also psychologically empowered citizens. Performance-oriented politics could thus be boosted by encouraging voter turnout, safeguarding the electoral process, and encouraging civic education.

### **5.6 District-Level Variation and Political Context**

The results of ANOVA demonstrated significant geographical differences. Rawalpindi performed best in the orientation of performance and Multan had a relatively high identity reliance. These differences support the thesis that local political economies influence electoral behaviour.

In urbanised regions, certain features are commonly observed. These include extensive media reach, higher levels of literacy, greater occupational mobility, and a tendency for traditional kinship ties to lose their influence. Such characteristics collectively contribute to a more dynamic and

informed urban population, where social and political interactions are less determined by familial or tribal affiliations and more by individual achievements and access to information.

Conversely, rural or agrarian environments typically maintain patron-client relationships, where social hierarchy and dependence are prominent. This contrast suggests that the evolution of democracy in Pakistan is likely to progress unevenly across different regions, with urban and rural areas experiencing distinct trajectories in their political development.

### **5.7 Toward a Theory of Transitional Electoral Behaviour**

The synthesis of the findings supports the establishment of what may be termed a Transitional Electoral Behaviour Model. This model posits that voters in developing democracies, such as Pakistan, operate along a continuum that ranges from identity-based voting, through hybrid forms of voting, to performance-oriented voting. The position of individuals along this spectrum is shaped by factors including modernisation, the credibility of institutions, and the availability of information.

Currently, Pakistan appears to occupy a middle ground within this hybrid zone, which represents a blend of traditional identity influences and emerging performance considerations. Significantly, this hybridisation is a constructive step towards democratic consolidation, as historical patterns suggest that robust democracies often undergo a period of hybridisation before fully maturing. Such a transition indicates positive movement in Pakistan's democratic evolution.

## **6. Conclusion**

This work was an attempt to answer one big puzzle of the history of political sociology:

Do Pakistani voters follow an identity-loyalty rule or are they becoming judgmental evaluators of government performance? The solution is not absolute or static. Rather, Pakistani electorate is gradually but clearly changing. The issue of performance is on the increase especially among the educated and politically sensitive citizens. However, identity structures are very strong and they still predict the results of the election in most of the districts. The main point of this study is that it is not a revolutionary democratic change, but an incremental one. The disappearance of identity politics is not being experienced in Pakistan, but the overlay of accountability demands on conventional social bases. This form of layering can eventually enhance democracy through a substantive political contest. This is not however a sure path. In the absence of institutional trust, civic empowerment and sound governance, voters will tend to go back to relational modes of political security. Therefore, the future of accountability in Pakistan is not only about the electoral processes but on the credibility of the state itself.

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