

# **Comparative Analysis of University & Madrasa Students towards Democracy**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study assesses the political attitudes in relation to democracy among university and madrasa students in Pakistan. Owing to different approaches to education in modern universities and Islamic madrasas the students develop different perceptions towards democratic processes. This study explores and compares the political attitudes towards democracy among these two students' societies, specifically analyzing the social-cultural, educational and ideological factors that influence their attitudes. Therefore, the overall purpose of this study is to understand how educational environments contribute to the knowledge and promotion of democracy among students in order to assess the current state and potential development of democracy in Pakistan. The study uses a comparative research strategy to assess the democratic dispositions of university and madrasa students, relying on principles from political psychology and educational sociology. The results demonstrate that university students, who are groomed in liberal curriculum and critical thinking, view democracy as a tool for promoting civil activism and human rights. On the other hand, the madrasa students who are confined to Islamic teachings, may interpret and practice democracy within the framework of Islamic laws or jurisprudence. This study, therefore, highlights the need for systematic educational changes and the enhancement of the civil subjects' curriculum within a range of educational systems to cultivate a stronger, united, and more democratic Pakistan. This qualitative study juxtaposes different significant works on the subject to bring forth the important differences in political attitudes of university and madrasa students towards democracy in Pakistan.

**KEYWORDS:** Democracy, Political Attitude, University Students, Madrasa Students, Pakistan

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Democracy is widely recognized as a form of government based on the principles of liberty, representation and active citizenship. Therefore, the evaluation of attitudes towards democracy are significant for measuring its sustainability and efficiency. Political attitudes refer to individuals' values, opinions of current state of affairs and their desire either to maintain status quo or bring any kind of change. Political attitude means the opinions and values that individuals hold about political issues, events, and personalities. They routinely take part in discussions, debates, and critical thinking activities that can aid in their understanding of complicated democratic ideas. University education encourages critical thinking by challenging conventional

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knowledge, questioning authoritative figures, and vigorously advocating for social change. There are four main categories of political attitudes; radicals: liberals, conservatives, reactionaries (O'Neil, 2009).

In the context of Pakistan there exists two-tier education system: modern universities and Islamic madrassas. There is immense influence of these institutions on development of political perceptions among the students. It is therefore a necessity to have a clear understanding of the political perceptions defining student populations drawn from these different streams of education for Pakistan's democracy to function and be sustainable.

Students, in many universities, come from all classes of society. They get introduced to different fields of knowledge. Much of their participation in debates, critical discussions, and analytical exercises usually leads to developing a better appreciation of the tenets of democracy. University education also cultivates critical thinking, whereby students are taught to question the status quo and authorities, leading to advocacy for civil liberties, equal opportunities for all, and liberties of citizens. Furthermore, the freedom embraced in the universities blends the students with different political, religious, and cultural standing, which fosters tolerance and acceptance of diversity in societies governed by democracy.

On the other hand, most of the madrasa students are from the low-income background, attending schools with education based on Islamic principles. The curriculum of madrassas is basically concentrated in Islamic subjects and memorization of scriptures. As a result, madrasa students have a tendency to understand democracy in the light of Islamic teaching and when they feel that certain Islamic values are diametrically opposed to democratic principles, they may have certain level of scepticism or ambiguity towards that system. The influence of the Islamic law that emphasizes justice equity and obedience to Allah also plays a central role in the formation of their Political stance (Arslan, 2015).

The principal aim of this research is to compare and contrast the political attitude of university and madrasa students regarding democracy in Pakistan and the factors that influence these orientations and thus, the potential impact on political engagement and democracy in Pakistan.

Past research emphasizes the need to measure political attitudes to understand voting behavior, opinion formation, and policy preferences across various sociopolitical systems. This approach provides valuable insights into how individuals make political decisions and are influenced by their environments (Dalton, 2017). In more general terms, people's attitudes can be viewed as crucial for understanding various questions and challenges, such as the beliefs in the democratic political system, its stability and legitimacy (Diamond, 2015). Moreover, it is important to describe intellectual and political views of a given state employing ideologies including socialism, conservatism, and liberalism (Heywood, 2017).

But it is equally recognized today that the durability of democracy depends on the political orientations of the people which are shaped by political attitudes. According to the view expressed by Hu (2003), democracy itself has positive attitudes towards democracy as a pre-requisite for the development of democratic systems. In the same way, Tessler Altinowicz (2004) has also underlined the fact that in order for democracy to be sustainable there is need for change in political behavior for democracy.

The primary objective of this study is to assess and compare the political attitudes of university and madrasa students towards democracy. By examining these attitudes, this research aims to identify the underlying factors that influence the political orientations of these distinct groups and to explore the potential implications of these perspectives for their participation in democratic processes. In doing so, the study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the role that youth play in shaping the future of democracy in contemporary societies.

## **2. DETERMINANTS OF DEMOCRATIC ATTITUDES AND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT**

Democracy is a political system that ensures a government that represents the people, distributes power to the citizens, protects basic rights, encourages active involvement, enforces oversight mechanisms, administers fairly, and maintains equality (IDEA, 2021). Democracy's definition and features are debated, but several values and attitudes are widely accepted as necessary for its establishment and growth. Contemporary democratic theories recognize a specific set of pro-democratic principles that include the diverse range of democratic attitudes held by individuals in various regions of the globe. In his study, Gibson (1996) examined the correlation between specific democratic values and the concept of democracy. These views contain a wide range of factors, such as political determination, promotion of transparent elections, and adherence to liberal principles, acceptance of divergent opinions, unrestricted media, and knowledge of political rights.

Political perspectives and the opinions of people are vital elements of democracy, particularly in cultures passing through a transition to democracy. The presence of favorable attitude towards democracy among the majority of the people is considered a necessary condition for the establishment of a democratic system (Hu, 2003).

The preservation of democracy depends on modifications in political conduct or attitude that create a more genuine form of governance. An ideal democratic setup is durable if the majority of public opinion, despite significant economic challenges and deep dissatisfaction, believes that democratic procedures and institutions are the most efficient means to manage the people (Tessler & Altinoglu, 2004). So it is necessary to understand political attitudes to evaluate the essence of democracy.

O'Neil (2015) classifies political attitudes into four distinct categories: radical, liberal, conservative, and reactionary. Radicals, situated on the far left, argue for major and transformative changes to the current political, social, or economic system. They see the existing system as inherently defective and advocate for its full replacement. Radicals even advocate for the use of violence to achieve these breakthroughs. Liberals also advocate for substantial changes, but they prefer a gradual and evolutionary method of implementing change within the existing system. They hold the belief that gradual reforms of existing institutions may result in incremental enhancements without necessitating a total overhaul of the system. Conservatives have doubts about the need for substantial changes and maintain the belief that existing institutions provide crucial organisation and steadiness. They see change as potentially disruptive and detrimental, generally believing that efforts to resolve issues would only substitute them with fresh challenges. Reactionaries oppose current changes and seek to restore political, social, and economic institutions to a previous state they consider superior. Similar to radicals, reactionaries may support the use of violence to achieve their aims. They often idealize a past era or an

envisioned past ideal they believe was better than the present. These attitudes form a spectrum, with radicals and reactionaries at opposite ends. However, they sometimes use similar methods, like pushing for dramatic changes and even supporting the use of violence

### **3. EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON POLITICAL ATTITUDES**

In any society, education plays major role in molding ideas, attitudes and beliefs. This means that control over educational discourse and access to classrooms is necessary in a conflict (Raheem, 2015). Currently in Pakistan, there are three distinct educational systems in operation. The education system consists of parallel entities, including state-run schools, private schools, and Madrassas (religious institutions) or seminaries. Elite private English medium institutions, sometimes referred to as "A-type" schools dominate bureaucratic institutions. Businesses and public offices are privileged over madrasa students, who are most marginalized. Many People have little representation in governmental and private work. These three educational systems are the result of distinct historical evolutionary processes. They possess distinct textbooks, varying various learning methodologies and the diverse discourses to which individuals are exposed, both internally and externally. Their educational institutions as well as their familial lineage (socioeconomic status), varies significantly from one another. In addition, it has been suggested that it could be the underlying factor contributing to the division and polarization within Pakistani society (Rahman, 2004).

The educational backgrounds of university students and madrasa students influence their political ideas about the democracy. University students, by their exposure to a variety of educational experiences and active participation in intellectual debates, are inclined to develop refined perspectives on democratic principles. On the other hand, students who go to madrasas, which are strongly influenced by religious teachings and community values, may priorities religious interpretations above democratic norms. Diverse educational environments impact students' viewpoints and understanding of governance, emphasizing the need of considering educational backgrounds while analysing political views towards democracy (Ali, 2021).

### **4. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF UNIVERSITY AND MADRASSA STUDENTS' POLITICAL ATTITUDES**

Studies show that students' political opinions evolve mostly under the influence of their institutions. All of which are crucial for active involvement in a democratic society, the university offers a broad spectrum of students from many backgrounds, promotes honest communication, and helps critical thinking abilities to grow. According to Smith (2018), actively participating in debates at colleges and being surrounded with diverse viewpoints could help to promote more positive opinions about democracy. Jones (2020) backs up this point of view by underlining how academic freedom and the chance to participate in democratic procedures within colleges help students to develop their respect for democratic values. Conversely, madrasa pupils are exposed to a different learning environment mostly focused on religious education. The political attitudes of pupils are clearly shaped by the Madrasa curriculum, which emphasizes religious teachings and exposes students to little secular political discourse. Less favorable opinions of democracy in comparison to universities can result from the lack of focus on democratic values and procedures at madrasas. If taught this way, students could not completely appreciate and understand democracy values (Khan, 2021).

Particularly among young people, the evolution of political ideas is highly influenced by the media. Research conducted in Pakistan indicates that, when seeking political information, most college students believe online news sources more than reputable media sources. The several points of view present in internet news sources help to shape political ideas by also facilitating more interaction with political information. Facebook and Twitter among other social media sites let people express their political beliefs, share news stories, and participate in political debate. Understanding democracy and government requires one to know how media shapes the political views of university and madrasa students.

The formation of political opinions towards democracy in university and madrasa students is much influenced by social and cultural aspects. Social conventions, cultural customs, and religious beliefs all help to define how people in Pakistan view democratic values and government. Through exposure to many cultural ideas and interactions with classmates from many backgrounds, university students can grow more pluralistic in their views about democracy. On the other hand, madrasa students typically come from areas well-known for their robust religious and cultural customs. Individual beliefs and points of view in these societies are significantly influenced by religious education and societal ideals. One has to grasp the social and cultural factors influencing political opinions in order to appreciate the different points of view of university and madrasa students on democracy. This information offers helpful specifics on the larger extent of young people's involvement with democratic processes in Pakistani society (Ahmad, 2023; Ali, 2021; Khan, 2019). Development of democratic attitudes depends on political engagement (Norris P, 2011; Diamond, 1999). Examining student opinions on political engagement could help one better grasp political philosophy and politics (Oross, Róna, & Szabó, 2017).

Students' political opinions in universities are much shaped by their socioeconomic level. Stronger socioeconomic background pupils find higher support for democratic values since they have more access to knowledge and resources. Their exposure to democratic ideas via the media, family discussions, and educational prospects shapes their positive attitudes about democracy (Taylor, 2017). Conversely, Madrasa students typically originate from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, which has a special impact on their political opinions. Because of restricted access to many media and educational materials, students in madrasas could have a more limited awareness of democratic values. These students sometimes put their immediate financial requirements before of democratic values because of their socioeconomic constraints. Addressing socioeconomic inequality will help to encourage inclusive democratic activity (Rahman, 2020).

Similarly, parts of the university curriculum are courses specifically teaching democratic ideas and values. Miller (2016) underlined the crucial part political science and civics courses play in helping university students to see democracy favourably. Students in these courses participate in political events including speeches, voting, and community service in addition to learning about democracy in an intellectual capacity. This exposure helps students to understand the need of actively participating in political processes and absorbing democratic values.

Madrasas' curricula give more weight on religious topics than on democratic ideas. From a secular standpoint, the educational approach applied in madrasas clearly emphasizes religious knowledge over political education. Because of their limited exposure to democratic concepts, students attending madrasas can have a different viewpoint and respect of political systems.



Since formal democratic education is not offered by madrasas, more comprehensive civic education becomes even more important (Hussain, 2018).

Siddiqui (2015) claims that 67% of Pakistan's young population consists largely of students. This group is necessary to be understood for the more democratic and rich future. As seen by the different perspectives of university and madrasa students, educational surroundings significantly influence students' views on governance and democracy (Khan, 2019). Students from other institutions have also been shown to have varied sociopolitical opinions. Regarding jihad and militancy, even students from madrassas see different things. While madrassa students were less likely to agree, all students agreed that education should encourage enterprise and economic growth (Crozier, 2012).

Pakistani madrassa teachers influence students' political views. University students often come from urban areas, where exposure to democratic practices and political engagement is higher compared to rural areas, where many madrassa students originate (Rahman, 2008). Students from affluent backgrounds and those who participate in public and political activities are more inclined to support democratic principles. Such relationship points out the necessity for economic development strategies as well as those supporting public engagement in order to popularise democratic values (Mangi, 2021).

Democratic institutions should be open to youth concerns and interests, and their participation depends on whether they feel relevant in politics. Youth engagement in democratic institutions is necessary to accept, understand, and develop them, even when conditions do not favour interests. Youth political participation requires sustained engagement and institution accessibility. This study examined young political engagement. It was found that youth like politics. Most respondents said government governance was crucial. Young people like to vote in general elections and know the worth of their vote. These findings match earlier research. However, youth dislike political parties. To achieve political maturity and stability, it is important to encourage youth to participate in politics, therefore it is necessary that we comprehend their disillusionments and current attitudes (Iqbal, 2012).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

A comparison of the political view of democracy among University and madrassa students in Pakistan presented in this paper have shown that students attitudes towards democracy is highly influenced by their educational systems. University students are relatively more liberal in their attitude as regards democratic norms such as civil liberties, political pluralism and the rule of law. Their outlook is said to be as a result of exposure to different opinions, critical matters and most important academic freedom which all enhances the students' understanding and embracement of democratic values. Madrassa students have a myopic attitude towards democracy in comparison to students from other schools; more often they express doubts about the ability of democracy to work in Islamic context and stay closer to religious rules. For them, compatibility of Islam with democracy runs as a context in their attitude formation process when they interact with the democratic principles in the country.

Thus, the outcomes highlight the role of educational contexts in the formation of the political positions. Group activities and other exposures in university education promote freedom of

speech and exposure to different opinions in tackling some of the challenges of democracy. All these exposures help in improving their knowledge as well as support the tenets of democracy. On the other hand, madrassa education deliberately tries to impart religious knowledge and provides little importance to the terms and conditions of political democracy hence results in being more conservative and less supportive of democratic systems.

Socioeconomic background is also brought out as an influential factor for development of political orientation. University students come from affluent class which provide them with more resources, media and information that support democracy. On the other hand, students in the madrassas usually come from poor background hence are unlikely to have access to any information resources as well as centers of power.

Moreover, different perceptions of political parties are of great significance for political participation in Pakistan. University students have exposure to student wings of mainstream political parties consequently some information about political parties manifestoes. On the other hand, Madras students by design, can only align with the religious political party that belongs to the same Islamic school of thought which was taught in their madrasa. Hence, curriculum taught at madrasa shapes the mind for the tilt towards a specific religious political party. It is for this reason, university educated people are more likely to vote or politically activate themselves as they are products of a democratic system. While students at a madrassa can be expected to be less likely to vote or to engage in politically related activity due to their religious and conservative leaning. Hence, the society divides into poles as a consequence of parallel education systems.

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