

The Effect of SMS Service on the Political Participation of Person with Disabilities (PWDs) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Pakistan)

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Abstract: Persons with disabilities have been remained socially excluded in developing societies. The situation is not quite different in Pakistan, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (The Province of Pakistan) as there is no special arrangement for civic participation especially in elections. The following study is pioneering effort in order to understand their level of participation in political process. In addition to this, this study also explores the role of SMS service in enhancing political participation of persons with disabilities. The study was conducted in four districts, Mardan, Swat, Swabi and Malakand. Four hundred and three persons with disabilities were surveyed during this base line study. Findings showed majority of the persons with disabilities did not cast their vote in 2008 general elections due to unavailability of the special arrangements for the disabled persons. For 2013 general elections, the greater proportion of persons with disabilities intended to cast their vote because most of the respondents know about the newly launched short messaging services (SMS) of the Election Commission of Pakistan and most of the respondents checked about registration number and location of the polling station by sending the SMS to 8300. The study confirms a positive association between knowledge about SMS service and voting attitude of person with disabilities, indicating that technology can be utilized in enhancing political participation of person with disabilities.

Key words: Political Participation • Disabilities • Khyber Pakhtunkhwa • Pakistan

INTRODUCTION

According to World Bank, over one billion people, 15 percent of the total world's population, are living with disabilities. Moreover, 110-190 millions of this population of Person with Disabilities (PWDs) experience very significant difficulties in functioning [1]. They face discrimination and have disadvantageous position in society because of their economic [2] and social life conditions [3]. Due to this marginalization, they get lesser chances to make part in social activities. Therefore this deficit should address through social interactions by which person with disabilities could foster their potential to contribute in society [4]. To attain this objective, various legislations have been made across the globe to ensure equal rights of PWDs and several efforts are underway to enhance their participation in society.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) emphasize on PWD's rights and stress out to provide them opportunities for their socio-economic development [5]. Moreover, Council of Europe Disability Action Plan (CEDAP) pays special attention on the rights of person with disabilities who are in need of high level support.

PWDs are less likely than nondisabled people to be involved in community and social activities [6] which are important in influencing political participation [7] and have limited opportunities to participate in public domains [8]. The discrimination associated with disability [9] force them to withdraw from civic engagement and ultimately reduce political participation [10, 11]. Moreover, mobility problems, barriers getting to or using polling places and lower socioeconomic status of PWDs throw away their political interest [12]. These factors all

contribute to their lower level of participation in elections. Even, they do not intend to participate in other forms of political activities such as contributing money for political campaigns, contacting elected officials and attending political meetings [13].

For PWDs, civic engagement can help to promote social integration and develop personal interests in all aspects of life [14, 15-16]. Such participation and involvement can develop a raised consciousness among PWDs [17]. In return they become more aware of their civic rights and responsibilities [18]. To enhance PWD's participation in civic engagement activities, no one can deny the significance of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) which is considered as a valuable tool for improving quality of life and increasing participation of PWD in society [19]. ICT can be used tactfully to help PWDs for their involvement in decision-making processes. Researchers have demonstrated that when PWDs become more tech savvy and start using technology more frequently, then, technology play a pivotal role in helping them to overcome barriers and further develop their problem solving skills [20].

Situation in Pakistan: In Pakistan, the number of total population of persons with disabilities (PWDs) is 5.035 million. Surprisingly, this number is more than the total population of Norway and New Zealand [21]. The Government of Pakistan has taken many initiatives by enacting laws and extending specific provisions to address their issues and problems. The first constitutional effort was made in the "Disabled Persons (Employment and Rehabilitation) Ordinance, 1981" which focuses on the Employment, Rehabilitation and welfare of the disabled persons¹. Moreover, National Plan of Action for Persons with Disabilities², Special Citizen Act³, Special Citizens (Right to Concessions in Movement) Act⁴, Duty free imports of Car⁵ and banking accounts which focuses on visually impaired persons to open their individual account in national and private banks⁶ [22] which altogether facilitate the Persons with Disabilities in Pakistan. Despite these legislations and programs launched for their mainstreaming, they do not enjoy equal rights and face discrimination in all spheres of life. Particularly, their level of participation in civic engagement is much debated. Furthermore, there is a

dearth of empirical evidence regarding their participation in the political process as well.

Rationale of Study: Government of Pakistan launched a short messaging service (SMS) in order to help voters in finding their polling stations across Pakistan for the upcoming 2013 general elections. By sending an SMS to provided number, they receive their respective Block Code, Serial number, polling station address and National Assembly Constituency. It was assumed that by using this technology, problems related to mobility faced by voters, especially those confronted with physical disability, would be addressed. The high turnout in 2013 general elections anticipates that technology has played its role in enhancing political participation of people. However, there is no evidence which indicates that PWDs who used this service had also casted their vote in 2013 general elections. The following study aims to see whether PWDs used this service or not. Moreover, PWDs who used this service had cast their vote in the 2013 general election or not.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was conducted in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, one of the leading hosts of PWDs in Pakistan. Four districts were randomly selected from the total districts in 25 by using the lottery method. These districts were Swat, Marian, Swabi and Malakand. To select respondents from each district, list of PWDs was obtained from the district social welfare department, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The list contained 10,000 persons from district Swat, 8,000 persons from Mardan, 1600 persons from Swabi and 3245 persons from district Malakand. The selected sample was selected on the basis of the average of the disables people's population in each district. Total sample of this study was 403. The detailed was as under in Table 1:

To select the respondents, simple random sampling technique was used. Data was collected through a structured questionnaire. The researches got information from PWDs by directly interviewing them or by taking information from their immediate attendant. The information of the respondents was entered in SPSS 20 for statistical analysis.

¹Disabled Persons (Employment and Rehabilitation) Ordinance, 1981; Government of Pakistan

²National Plan of Action for the Persons with Disabilities, 2006; Directorate General of Special Education, Government of Pakistan.

³Special Citizens Act, 2008; Government of Pakistan

⁴Special Citizens (Right to Concessions in Movement) Act, 2009; Government of Pakistan

⁵Trade Policy, 2009-10, Ministry for Commerce, Government of Pakistan.

⁶Daily the News, December 5, 2009

Table 1: District Wise Distribution

Districts	Swat	Mardan	Swabi	Malakand	Total
Total Number of Persons with disabilities	10,000	8,000	1,600	3,245	22,845
Selected Sample Size	176	141	29	57	403

RESULTS

Socio-Demographic Characteristics: The Table 2 sets forth the sampling characteristics of the sample. A total of 403 respondents were included in the sample. As far as the gender of respondents was concerned 326 (80.89%) of them were male respondents and the remaining 77 (19.11%) were female.

The majority of respondents in the sample 176 (43.67%) were from district Swat. While the number of respondents from district Mardan was 141 (34.99%), Malakand 57 (14.14%) and Swabi were 27 (7.20%) respectively. Most of the respondents, were unmarried 218 (54.09%), a marginally less number of respondents were married and only 1 (0.25) respondent was divorced. The significant majority of the persons with disabilities 280 (69.47%) did not get the chance of studying in school setup. While 81 (20.09%) respondents got a secondary school level education, 14 (3.47%) of them completed their graduation and only 9 (2.23%) were post graduates respectively.

The findings revealed that 134 (33.25%) persons with disabilities reported leg disability while 33 (8.19%) persons with disabilities reported hand and arm disability. 12 (2.98%) respondents were not able to listen and speak and 18 (4.47%) PWDs could not see clearly. 87 (21.59%) respondents were affected by polio. 21 (5.21%) persons with disabilities were mentally ill and 98 (24.32%) PWDs were paralyzed. Moreover, the majority of the disabled persons were 312 (77.42%) dependent on others for fulfilling their basic needs. As compared to them, 29 (7.20%) PWDs were running their own business and 18 (4.47%) persons with disabilities were doing jobs to earn their livelihood. There were 35 (8.68%) PWDs that were doing labor on daily wages while 7 (1.74%) PWDs were farmers. It was noted that 216 (53.60%) of the respondents reported the accident as the cause of disability while 187 (46.40%) were disabled by birth.

This study primarily focused on to see political participation of PWDS. In Pakistan, for the registration of voters, computerized national identity card (CNIC) is compulsory. Therefore, information was collected about CNIC to see how much of PWDs did not register their votes when they had CNIC. Figure 1 illustrates that, 341 (84.6%) PWDs had NIC while 62 (14.4) PWDs did not have NIC. Thus majority of PWDs had CNIC and they were eligible for voter registration.

Table 2: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the respondents N=403

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage %
Gender		
Male	326	80.89
Female	77	19.11
Districts		
Swat	176	43.67
Mardan	141	34.99
Malakand	57	14.14
Swabi	29	7.2
Marital Status		
Married	184	45.66
Unmarried	218	54.09
Divorced	1	0.25
Education Status		
No Formal Education	280	69.47
Matriculation	81	20.09
Intermediate	14	3.47
Bachelor	19	4.71
Master	9	2.23
Disability Type		
Leg	134	33.25
Hand/Arm	33	8.19
Listening/Speak	12	2.98
Sight	18	4.47
Polio	87	21.59
Mentally ill	21	5.21
Paralyzed	98	24.32
Livelihood Activities		
Dependent on Others	312	77.42
Own Business	29	7.2
Job	18	4.47
Daily Labor/wages	35	8.68
Pension	2	0.5
Farmer	7	1.74
Disability Nature		
By Birth	187	46.4
By Accident	216	53.6

Voting registration is the requirement for the citizens and residents to check the registry for the purpose of being allowed to cast the vote on election. This process can increase the involvement of any group in the decision making process. In order to see the voter registration in PWDs, the Table 3 highlights that 295 (86%) PWDs responded that they registered their votes while 21 (6%) disabled persons who did not register their votes. There were 25 (7%) PWDs who did not know either they register their votes or not. This showed that the majority of the PWDs had awareness about their rights.

Table 3: Political Participation of PWDs

Responses	Frequency	Percentage %
Registration of PWDs as voter		
No	21	6.2
Yes	295	86.5
Don't know	25	7.3
Checking of vote through SMS		
No	70	20.5
Yes	192	46.3
Don't know	83	23.2
Participation in 2008 Election		
No	148	51.9
Yes	192	47.9
Don't know	01	0.20
Vote casting in 2013 Election		
No	48	14.1
Yes	293	85.9

Table 4: Association between Short Messaging Service Knowledge with Voting Attitude in the 2013 General Elections (N=403)

	Voting Attitude in 2013 General Election		
	No %	Yes%	P value
SMS Service Knowledge			
No	31.4	68.6	<0.0001
Yes	5.7	94.3	
Don't Know	19.0	81.0	

Short messaging service (SMS) had been launched by the government of Pakistan to check the verification of voter registration and particulars of voter lists. This service is a great convenience through e-governance using state-of-the-art technologies. In order to see the usage of this service by PWDs, Table 3 reveals that 192 (56%) PWDs verified their votes through short messaging service while 70 (20%) did not check. There were 79 (24%) PWDs that even did not know the whole idea.

Freedom to participate especially in making decisions that affect one's life and the lives of others as being a key form of development and fundamental to human well-being [22]. In order to see the participation of PWDs in the decision making, there was need to assess that either these PWDs casted their votes in 2008 general elections. Table 4 indicates that 148 (52%) PWDs did not cast their votes while 192 (48%) PWDs had casted their votes. Only 1 (2%) PWD did not remember about vote casting in 2008 elections.

Table 3 shows the results that whether PWDs intended to cast their vote in the 2013 general elections. The majority of the PWDs said that they would cast their vote as 293 (86%) reported in this category. On the other hand, 48 (14.1%) disabled persons responded that they would not cast their vote in the 2013 general elections.

These figures showed a positive attitude among PWDs in casting vote in 2013 general elections.

Effect of SMS Service Knowledge on Voting Attitude:

Table 4 showed that persons with disabilities who used this service were more intended to vote in 2013 general election as compared to those who did not use this service. Majority of the respondents (94.3%) were intended to cast their votes that had knowledge about sort messaging service. While a marginally less PWDs (68.6%) that had not knowledge about this service. The chi-square value was also less than .01 and significant. This showed a very significant relationship between SMS service knowledge and voting attitude of PWDs in 2013 general elections. Therefore, it can be concluded that SMS service had influenced voting attitude of PWDs in 2013 general elections.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The abovementioned findings of the study states that majority of the persons with disabilities did not cast their vote in 2008 general elections due to unavailability of the special arrangements for them. A significant majority did not get any formal education that showed their less interest in the participation of political process. The greater proportion of persons with disabilities intended to cast their vote in the 2013 general elections because most of the respondents know about the newly launched short messaging services (SMS) of the Election Commission of Pakistan. Most of the respondents checked about registration number and location of the polling station by sending the SMS to 8300. Most of the respondents were intended to cast their votes in the 2013 general elections due to knowledge about the short message service.

Persons with disabilities are less likely than those without disabilities to vote and engage in other forms of political activity. Analysis confirms that there was a substantial disability voting gap, indicating increased turnout of people with disabilities could make an important difference in elections. If the disability gap were fully closed, there would be additional voters with disabilities. Much of the gap comes from the unavailability of arrangements to ensure participation of persons with disabilities and from the lower average education levels of people with disabilities. While addressing the persistent barriers people with disabilities face and increasing their participation could make a difference in electoral outcomes and public policies and help to create a more vibrant and inclusive democracy.

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