

Political Economy of Slums in Islamabad: Class, State and Judiciary

In August 2015 when I finished my doctoral coursework and began working on my dissertation prospectus, a slum-settlement (I-11 *katchi-abadi*) in the capital city of Islamabad was demolished by the state authorities. Majority of the people living in this slum settlement were daily wage-laborers, domestic servants and petty-commodity producers. The postcolonial state officials termed this slum-demolition as a victory for the rule of law against land ‘encroachment’. The human side of this story --- thousands of working-class people became homeless overnight --- was not just suppressed but celebrated in this neoliberal ‘development’ discourse. It is in this background, I decided to study slum-settlements of Islamabad for my doctoral dissertation. Furthermore, there is also a dearth of academic work on the political economy of slums in the context of Pakistan. In my dissertation, I explore the following question: why some slum-settlements are allowed to exist and secure public goods, while others are demolished or excluded from the provision of public goods? To address this question, I use interdisciplinary approach by drawing from economics, development, political economy, human geography, political science and urban studies literatures. By drawing from my earlier fieldwork, I argue that the political economy of slums is interwoven in a complex web of rent-seeking and clientelism by state official and political elites, respectively¹. My preliminary findings are consistent with the results of other studies conducted on slum settlements².

One important aspect that development literature has not incorporated while studying slums is the role of the resurgent judiciary (Supreme Court). I propose to fill this void in the literature. In recent years, the Supreme Court (SC) of Pakistan has taken an activist role on the pretext of protecting basic human rights of its citizens. Especially, in last few months, SC has given ‘landmark’ decisions in the Grand Hayat and Bahria Town Karachi cases³. But apparently judiciary has not intervened when it comes to protecting human rights of slum-residents who constantly live under the fear of eviction and have inadequate and deplorable access to public goods. How can we explain this? Does it have to do with the class background of slum-dwellers? How does SC see the legality of slums? To address these unexplored aspects of the political economy of slums, I propose to interview former and current justices of the SC of Pakistan. I will also conduct semi-structured interviews with lawyers and human rights activists who deal with housing issues in Islamabad. By adding this politico-legal dimension, I would be able to better explain the persistence of the tenure insecurity and unequal provision of public goods in urban slums.

¹ I have collected primary data from eight slum settlements of Islamabad from November 2017 to April 2018. I have developed an econometric model to estimate the differences in provision of public goods. Due to space constraints, I have not shared it here, but I can share it with the AIPS, if needed.

² Auerbach, Adam Michael. 2017. “Neighborhood Associations and the Urban Poor: India’s Slum Development Committees.” *World Development* 96, pp. 119-135. Jha, Saumitra et al (2007) “Governance in the Gullies: Democratic Responsiveness and Leadership in Delhi’s Slums.” *World Development*. Vol. 35, No. 2 (2007): 230-46. Krishna, Anirudh (2013) “Stuck in Place: Investigating Social Mobility in 14 Bangalore Slums.” *Journal of Development Studies*, 2013: 1010-28.

³ <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2019/01/09/sc-reverses-ihc-decision-in-grand-hyatt-case/> & <https://www.dawn.com/news/1438353>.