

Significance of Presentation for Pakistan Studies

“Voters and Foreign Aid: Evidence from a Survey Experiment in Pakistan” explores the impact of foreign aid on governance in countries that have low tax-to-GDP ratios. Pakistan is a relevant site of research, not only because it has been amongst the highest recipients of developmental foreign aid since the early 2000s but also because foreign aid funded projects often substitute for the lack of government-funded public goods. This project analyzed voter preferences and decision making by fielding a survey experiment amongst 1200 undergraduates at 13 public undergraduate institutions from all across Pakistan. Presenting this work at CPSA not only introduced researchers to the feasibility of using experimental methods in South Asia, but also filled in a major research gap on voter decision making in the country. Therefore, it presented both a methodological and comparative nuance to the agenda of the Experiments in Political Science workshop.

As a comparative scholar working on Pakistan, I find such regional representation key in the process of securing fieldwork grants and building relationships with co-authors. Particularly in the field of Political Science where the focus on South Asia leans heavily in favor of research on India, presenting work on Pakistan is important to provide a more holistic view. From a theoretical perspective, my research seeks to overturn the conventional wisdom that voters in developing countries are ignorant, whose skewed decision making can be fixed by providing information. Instead, I argue that purely rational voters can make decisions that may seem irrational but are welfare-enhancing and selfishly rational for voters in uncertain political environments. I hope such research can pave the way for a larger research agenda on political development, akin to the field of development economics within the larger discipline of Economics.