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- Author (s):** Salman Ahmad and Amber Shahzadi
- Affiliation (s):** University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan
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Impact of Demographic Factors, Economic Factors, and Social Media Usage on Political Preferences

Salman Ahmad*, and Amber Shahzadi

University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan

Abstract

The current study explored the impact of demographic factors, economic factors, and social media usage on political preferences. The study incorporated demographic variables including age, gender, and education level. Regression analysis was used to conduct the current study. Race/ethnicity, income level/employment status, and social media activity were examined as independent variables. Data was collected from 150 respondents, which was interpreted using SPSS. Thus, analyzing the data collected from a diverse sample, significant effort was made to extend the knowledge of constructs used in the current study. Vivid correlation with demographic and/or economical characteristics, frequency of social media platforms usage, and political affiliations would be used to gain important information.

Keywords: Economic Factors, Political Preferences, Regression Analysis, Social Media Usage

Introduction

Political preferences in contemporary societies depend on various aspects and social media as well as economic indicators and demographics determine them. To comprehend present-day politics, it is imperative to have knowledge about the ways in which these variables influence the policy preferences of individuals. The current study aimed to identify multiple relationships between economic conditions, social media engagement, and demographics as predictors of political preferences. Moreover, the study also attempted to unravel the complex relationship between economic status, social media usage, and demography on politico-perception. To this end, it focused to enhance the knowledge of modern political processes and features that may help to design appropriate approaches towards encouraging increased political activity, higher levels

*Corresponding Author: Salmanahmad689@gmail.com

of citizens' political activism, and political habits by analyzing the interconnection of these aspects (Blom-Hasnen et al., [2016](#)).

Votes are one of the primary components of developing democracies. They determine the establishment of governments and control the policies that impact the citizens' lives. However, the votes that are cast are not independent of a myriad of factors that herald the voters' decisions. The knowledge and assessment of these aspects plays a critical role in comprehending voters' conduct and election trends. The current study aimed to discuss the factors that shape the voting choice and emphasize their role in defining the results of a vote. Through the evaluation of these factors, it is possible to get a detailed understanding of the peculiarities of voting, the strategies and actions of the parties and the candidates, as well as the processes within democracies (Kulachai et al., [2023](#)).

Social media is commonly used by young people ranging between 18-29 years of age and influences their education considerably. In recent times, people have become more active on the internet, participating in matters pertaining to politics, health crises, and social issues. As liberated beings, young adults feel capable as well as knowledgeable once they share political content, hence enhancing turnout, civil participation, as well as forming part of social justice. It is evident that the information shared on social media platforms plays a crucial role in enhancing the voters' choices, participating in social processes and forming political perceptions among young adults. The current study aimed to highlight the changes in political beliefs and activities based on the role of social media in young adults' lives. The study also attempted to establish that social media has impacted the participation in social causes and political perceptions (Bennett, [2012](#)).

Research Question

Do demographic factors, economic policies, and social media usage influence the political preferences?

Research Objectives

The current study examined the impact of demographic variables on political preferences including age, gender, education level, ethnicity, and geography. Moreover, it also explored the influence of social media on peoples' perceptions, actions, and political opinions. The study also examined the influence of socioeconomic gaps, income levels, and work status on political affiliations and opinions.

Significance

Politics is a basic manifestation of the preference of people and plays a significant role in the society as far as the decisions of governance and policies are concerned. People are guided by numerous factors that are virtually intertwined when it comes to stressing political preferences. Concerning these, the highly especial factors include conditions, demographic characteristics, and the omnipresence of social media. The current study aimed to examine the complex interdependency of these factors as well as their effects on political decisions (Kamoen et al., [2018](#)).

Economic factors play a crucial role in this regard and have a great say in the political decisions. People compare the political performers with economic performers for aspects, such as employment status, inflation, and GDP among others. In the same respect economic policies formulated and declared by political candidates or political parties effect a citizen's economic conditions, and their voting behavior. In the same respect, economic policies formulated and declared by political candidates and political parties' impact citizen's pocket influencing their ballots. Casting light on the relationship between economic determinants and political decision-making, the current study attempted to disclose how people's economic attitudes and economic conditions shape their votes (Elkjær & Iversen, [2023](#)).

Age, gender, ethnicity, education, and income are some of the key factors that define people's political knowledge. People belonging to various age categories are politically affiliated due to culture, social relationships, and economic status (Fakih & Sleiman, [2024](#)). Essentially, the dynamics of these demographic variables in relation with political decisions are useful in exploring the factors behind the results of poll and political representation processes in democratic political systems. It is concerned with the analysis of various demographic attributes and the interactions that may be associated with them as far as political decision-making is concerned (Wiseman, [2024](#)).

The increasing use of social media has affected all communications, especially in the political context. The communication power of political actors is realized through the dissemination of key information, the coordination and unification of supporters, and the promotion of political messages using the context and features of social media. Since social media

lacks censorship, this increases the formation of echo chambers, fake news, and polarity that may influence the public and elections. It is considered that social networks influence political decisions, therefore the current study aimed to explore the effect of social media on voters' decisions and democracy (Ausat, [2023](#)).

The value of current study lies in discovering the complex nature of determinants in political decisions. Thus, dissecting the interconnections of the economic variables and demographic factors with the SNS, the study aimed to shed light on the modern rules of electoral games. In summary, the complex nature of these influences can only be understood to encourage the citizens' enlightenment, to improve the democratic mechanisms as well as institutional responsibilities in the contemporary globalized world.

Scope

The research question posed in the current study has a broader scope, however, large population could not be surveyed. In this research, data was collected from 150 respondents; students in different universities through an online Google survey form and a developed research questionnaire.. The online survey was conducted by random respondents.

Due to the complexity of topic, the study may face challenges in isolating the causal effects of economic factors, demographic factors, and social media usage on political preferences. The study may be constrained by limitations inherent in the availability and reliability of data, especially regarding social media usage patterns and online behavior. The findings may be influenced by contextual factors, such as historical events, cultural norms, and institutional structures which may vary across different settings.

Literature Review

Socio-Economic Factors

Socio-economic status refers to the level of economic resource, influence, and fame firmly connected with the wealth of an individual, any local area, or country. Essentially, socio-economic factors include pay, education, health, business, local area support, and so on. Various researchers have studied the connection between socio-economic factors and multidimensional constructs with numerous aspects of society, such as political patterns, family structure, medical care offices, and consuming way of behaving as well. These studies have analyzed the impact of socio-

economic factors including gender, age, income, education, the access to given information with other major constructs. These studies have empirically tested the effect of socio-economic factors, such as gender, age, pay level, training, and openness to information or admittance to data with other significant builds (Braveman et al., [2005](#)).

The above mentioned economic factors can directly measure the social privileges and financial sustainability of an individual and may also gauge their impact in molding the human behavior (Mugisha et al., [2008](#)). For instance, Principal component analysis (PCA) is frequently adopted to create socioeconomic proxies in order to investigate the independent effects of wealth on the status of disease. Different surveys cleared that low-income and middle-income groups have less access to healthcare facilities that are essential for their lives.

It is, therefore, necessary to design policies that ensure an equivalent distribution of resources among all members of society and to have minimal discrimination among population in terms of socio-economic factors. Poor domestic economic strategies that focus on the development of a limited sector of population instead of having a positive impact on the majority of population may lead towards radicalization among young population. This is because when people are deprived of their basic rights, they have few social and economic opportunities left for them. It is necessary for everyone to have access to viable livelihood and better socio-economic conditions. Government policies and actions must be in everyone's favor, especially the young population as it constitutes almost 60-65% of the whole population of Pakistan (Khan et al., [2024](#)).

Political Trends of Pakistan

Political instability has been a major problem in Pakistan's history since its independence. Quaid-e Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah died after a year of independence when the first prime minister was assassinated, the second prime minister was dismissed, the third one was removed abruptly, and the fourth one was removed by a vote of no confidence. There was a gap between East and West Pakistan due to different geography, psychology, and huge distance. It was perceived at the time that the new Government, being a coalition of the Awami League and the Republican Party (holding majorities in the East and West Pakistan legislatures, respectively), would

bring two parts of the country closer and provide a satisfactory basis for a popular administration.

Due to clashes between the interest groups of both East and West Pakistan, the political situation was continually changing which ultimately led to the separation of East and West Pakistan and as a result, Bangladesh came into being. In the national elections of 2018, the emergence of a new political party transformed the politics of Pakistan after a duopoly, however, it also proved to be another disenchantment. Over the decades, the interchange of democratic and military regimes altogether did more damage to the political landscape of Pakistan except providing benefits.

“This interplay of religious fundamentalism, sectarianism, ethnic cleavages, and regional economic disparities has made the country volatile and unstable” (Husain, [2009](#)). Pakistan is vulnerable to many internal and external challenges including the intolerance of diversity, extremism, and no prophecy of national identity among the masses which is a threat to national and political stability. Few studies have also established a strong link between political stability and economic growth (Husain, [2009](#)). It can be concluded that political instability is one of the causes of poor economic growth and GDP in Pakistan.

Socio-Economic Factors and Political Trends

The position of any unit in a society can be represented by social and economic hierarchy. It contains both objective material resources or capital and subjective experience of those resources. The objective of social economic status is assessed by indicators of wealth, education, and occupational prestige. Hence, subjective socio-economic status can be defined as a measure of how an individual views himself in terms of socio-economic status and; how it situates him or her in the social ranking system in a society. There is a close relationship between political change and social change. In an educated society, where social classes, especially the middle class, start evolving, a corresponding change occurs in politics (Giskemo, [2012](#)). This change inherently alters the landscape of societal dynamics, public discussions, norms, and values. The definition of democracy differs in a society ruled by elite class as compared to the society ruled by middle class or by the majority will. The proliferation of literacy or the emergence of 'social media' can profoundly influence both the society and politics.

In literature, “socio-economic status has been discussed as the most important predictor of political participation”. Due to the lack of awareness, education, income, or professional status, people on lower side of socio-economic status are less interested to participate in political participation and decision-making (Gurr, [1974](#)).

The socio-economic status of individuals is related to their political trust. It is evident that the higher socio-economic class has more political trust as compared to the lower socio-economic class. Moreover, the results also showed that a higher level of anomie reduced the interpersonal trust which reduced political trust (serial mediation). These results highlight the key role of anomie while considering the relationship of socio-economic status with political trust. The recognition of anomie is a pivotal factor in comprehending the contrast in political trust between individuals with low and high socioeconomic statuses (Bornand & Klein, [2022](#)).

Socio-Economic Factors and Political Trends of Pakistan

Political and social change occur at all levels, for instance national level, provincial level, and local level. Somehow, they are greatly influenced by global development, on the other hand, the local level of society and politics is not fully considered. This might be taken into consideration that national politics is rooted in local circumstances and changes. While, national trends play an important role and same is the case with local conditions, interests, and power dynamics due to the significance they hold in national politics (Rafique et al., [2023](#)).

In Pakistan, the above mentioned local factors exert substantial influence, particularly in the context of provincial and national elections. The intricate interplay between national and local politics has not consistently received full recognition. Therefore, a study, 'Changing Patterns of Political Dynamics in Pakistan - Exploring Social and Political Realities at the Grassroots', investigated the fundamental trends of social change in Pakistan (Mahar & Malik, [2021](#)). The study included aspects, such as demography, educational levels, and media consumption. Subsequently, the study delved into four specific localities: Lyari (in Karachi), Nankana (in Central Punjab), Multan (Southern Punjab), and Larkana (Northern Sindh); the hub of regional politics of Pakistan. It also highlighted that how politics is different in different socio-economic conditions.

Pakistan having a history of (civil-military relation, military interventions, incompetent civil governments, and linguistic and ethnonational divides) is already polarized politically. The socio-political fabric of Pakistan is already polarized at different levels, for instance political elite to the masses with a noticeable lack of consensus on fundamental democratic norms (Ali & Analoui, [2023](#)).

Political polarization may be better understood in Pakistan as a top-down phenomenon rather than a bottom-up phenomena. In Pakistan, political elites or power groups tend to shape the narratives and influence the sentiments of common public. They penetrate the social fabric and as a result political polarization occurs. The struggle to attain power or authority between state elites (establishment and judiciary) and political parties may be observed at primary level of political polarization (Hanif et al., [2024](#)).

In the history of 75 years, Pakistan has not been able to observe continuous political harmony and convergence between state institutions and political parties. Pakistan's political system was basically established on democratic principles, however, it is questionable if the country has experienced true democracy (Qasim, [2023](#)).

The reason why social groups do not need real democracy, or why they want to have little need for "messy" democracy is because the social groups or people who have the most to gain from establishing democratic institutions in Pakistan, have already access to the state and to the nexus of power. They do not need participation and accountability from others. Pakistan may be increasingly ruled by urban middle class factions and groups unlike other regions where urban middle class struggles for collective social independence and democracy. These studies argue that the Pakistan's urban middle class most likely tend to show their interest in authoritarianism and military governments (Qasim, [2023](#)).

Pluralism is one of the key features of democracy that may be obtained by tolerance. A pluralistic society gives respect and endorses different opinions, beliefs, and the interests of population. Polarization may be observed in a society which lacks pluralistic characteristics. It is basically the outcome of a division between different political and ideological groups. There is no room for negotiation or finding common grounds in this type of political system since it may hinder the smooth functioning of democracy.

Therefore, it is necessary to overcome all the damaging factors for smooth functioning of a single political practice (Barkey, [2021](#)).

As per the information mentioned above, it can be said that there is a link between socio-economic factors and the political setup of a region or country. Socio-economic indicators play an important role in the participation of the population in politics. If there is high level of education and income access to information, there would be high participation of public in the political processes (Rathore & Ghani, [2023](#)).

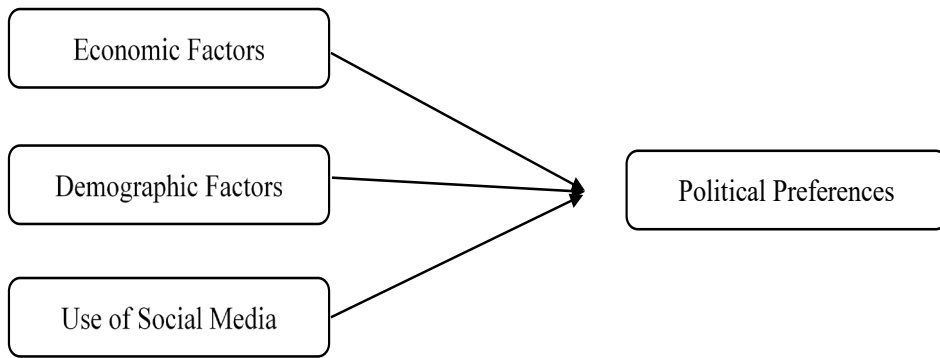
The political behavior of people may be altered through changing the socio-economic factors in a society. Lack of education and access to information as well as poverty may lead towards less involvement in the political processes of masses. There are many factors that may polarize the population or brainstorm people towards any political party or political trend. Pakistan is a country where population has been divided based on ethnicity, geography, and religion. In this type of society, political behavior always attracts respective groups of politicians. Pakistani politics has been intervened by other state institutions that work only for their own benefit instead of benefiting the common public. Pakistani voters are young, educated, and are well aware of political trends in Pakistan, so it can be said that these things would challenge the status quo or the traditional methods of ruling in the coming days (Saddique et al., [2023](#)).

Research Model and Framework

A research framework, otherwise called an exploration technique, is a bunch of standards, presumptions, and systems that guide the plan and execution of a research. It provides an organized way to conduct the research and guarantees that the study is valid, reliable, and credible. Research structure exhibits the dependent and independent variable as well as moderator. In this, political preferences are independent variables and economic Factors, demographic factors and use of social media are dependent variables.

Figure 1

Theoretical Framework



Methodology

While conducting a research, the selection of a representative sample from population is a major step. Sampling is a process of selecting the subjects from population with almost the same properties as the population and the results could be generalized over all the population. Faculty was selected as a unit of study analysis. The estimated target population of current study was 170 respondents. After defining the population, the next step was to select the sample size. Taking into consideration, Morgan ([1970](#)), the sample of study was 118.

The current study was conducted by using survey method in the universities of Pakistan. These universities included Punjab University (PU), University of Management and Technology (UMT), and Government College University (GCU). The questionnaire was administered in these universities by using electronic means. The time period of three weeks was assumed suitable for participants to complete the questionnaire. Data was collected via cross-sectional survey involving the distribution of structured questionnaires among the students. The survey was designed to ensure clarity, neutrality, and relevance of questions, while considering the validity and reliability of the survey as well.

Data Analysis Techniques

To analyze political preferences using SPSS, various techniques including regression modeling, ANOVA, and frequency statistics were employed. Initially, the dataset must be prepared, ensuring proper labeling

and handling of missing values. Descriptive statistics, such as frequency analysis for categorical variables and measures of central tendency for continuous variables, provide an overview of the data. Bivariate analysis explores relationships between political preferences (dependent variable) and demographic, social media, and economic factors. Subsequently, multiple regression analysis is conducted to assess the combined effects of these independent variables while controlling for potential confounders. ANOVA is employed if categorical independent variables are present, allowing for the examination of group differences in political preferences. Finally, interpretation of results involves understanding the direction and significance of relationships, considering both statistical and practical implications. Reporting findings comprehensively, including tables and figures, is crucial to communicate results effectively.

Results

Table 1
Statistics

	Gender	Age	Education	Income
<i>N</i>	118	118	118	118
Valid Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean	.5300	2.2200	3.1500	2.1400
Std. Error of Mean	.0470	.0520	.0860	.1240
Median	1.000	2.000	3.0000	1.00
Mode	1	2	3	1
Std. Deviation	.5010	.5610	.9260	1.3380
Variance	.2510	.3150	.8570	1.7900
Range	1	3	4	3
Minimum	0	1	1	1
Maximum	1	4	5	4
Sum	61	258	365	248

The mean (average) value for gender is 0.53, which indicates that there is slightly more of one gender than the other (assuming gender is coded as 0 and 1). The standard error of the mean for gender is 0.047, suggesting variability in sample mean. The median value for gender is 1.00, indicating that the middle value is 1. The mode for gender is 1, which is the most frequently occurring value, suggesting that one gender is more prevalent in the dataset. The standard deviation for gender is 0.501, which measures the

dispersion or spread of data points around the mean. The variance for gender is 0.251, which is the square of standard deviation and indicates the average squared deviation from the mean. The range for gender is 1 (from 0 to 1), indicating the spread of values. The minimum value for gender is 0 and the maximum is 1.

The mean age is 2.22. The standard error of the mean for age is 0.052. The median age is 2.00, suggesting that half of the observations fall below this value. The mode for age is 2, which is the most frequently occurring value. The standard deviation for age is 0.561. The variance for age is 0.315. The range for age is 3 (from 1 to 4). The minimum age is 1 and the maximum age is 4.

The mean education level is 3.15. The standard error of the mean for education is 0.086. The median education level is 3.00. The mode for education is 3. The standard deviation for education is 0.926. The variance for education is 0.857. The range for education is 4 (from 1 to 5). The minimum education level is 1 and the maximum education level is 5.

The mean income is 2.14. The standard error of the mean for income is 0.124. The median income is 1.00. The mode for income is 1. The standard deviation for income is 1.338. The variance for income is 1.790. The range for income is 3 (from 1 to 4). The minimum income is 1 and the maximum income is 4. Overall, these statistics provide a snapshot of distribution, central tendency, and variability of variables in the dataset.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics

Variable	<i>N</i>	Minimum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Political Preferences	118	1.00	3.4461	.57465
Demographic Factor	118	1.00	3.6690	.63799
Economical Factor	118	1.00	3.9138	.78163
Social Media Factor	118	1.00	3.1379	1.01261
Gender	118	1.00	0.53	.501
Age	118	1.00	2.22	.561
Education	118	1.00	3.15	.926
Income	118	1.00	2.14	1.338

The dataset provides significant bits of knowledge into different elements through its rundown measurements. The mean political preference score is 3.4461, with a standard deviation of 0.57465, in light of 118 perceptions. Likewise, the mean demographic factor score is 3.6690, with a standard deviation of 0.63799, additionally obtained from 118 perceptions. For the economic factor, the mean score is 3.9138, joined by a standard deviation of 0.78163, across similar number of perceptions. The social media factor shows a mean score of 3.1379 and a better quality deviation of 1.01261, demonstrating more noteworthy inconstancy among 118 perceptions. The gender variable has a mean worth of 0.53, mirroring a 53% extent, with a standard deviation of 0.501. Age has a mean worth of 2.22 and a standard deviation of 0.561, in view of 118 perceptions. The mean score of education remains at 3.15, with a standard deviation of 0.926, while the mean income is 2.14, with a standard deviation of 1.338, each determined from 118 perceptions. These insights provide a complete outline of the focal propensity, changeability, and test size for every variable, revealing insight into the dispersion and qualities of the information.

Table 3

Reliability and Validity Table

Variables	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's alpha	AVE
DF	0.763	0.755	0.565
EM	0.864	0.768	0.455
SM	0.756	0.771	0.577

The degree to which a test correlates with a subtitled fraction of a related dimensions is known as convergent validity (Hair et al., 2012). The average value utilized in recent research is displayed in Table above. Every value, therefore agreed with the 0.50AVE, proving that the estimated model used for current study is accurate. While, each quality met the AVE's relying a boost value of 0.50, nevertheless it demonstrated adequate simultaneously convergence validity for the measurement designed used in the current study.

Table 4

Coefficients

Variables	Beta	t-statistics	Sig.	Result
Demographic Factor	.114	1.109	.000	Accepted
Economical Factor	.240	2.394	.270	Accepted
Social Media Factor	.206	2.212	.018	Accepted

The constant term (intercept) is 2.644. Among the predictor variables, demographic factors, economic factors, and social media factors have statistically significant positive effects on dependent variable, political preferences, with standardized coefficients of -0.114, 0.240, and 0.206, respectively. Gender has a marginally significant positive effect ($p = 0.061$) with a standardized coefficient of 0.194. Age, education, and income do not have statistically significant effects on political preferences. Collinearity statistics suggest that multi-collinearity is not a significant issue in this model, as indicated by tolerances above 0.1 and VIF values below 10.

Conclusion

The current study provided valuable insights into the determinants of political preferences by utilizing regression analysis to examine the impact of demographics, use of social media, and economic factors.

Firstly, pertaining to the past researches conducted on demographic factors, the patterns revealed a significant connection with political preferences. Findings showed that personality characteristics have a considerable impact on political affinities. Secondly, social media usage is evident as another variable strongly indicates the respondent's political inclination. These instances demonstrate the increasing role of web applications in molding the public opinion and political actions. Therefore, it is crucial to analyze the operation of social media since it is a major factor in understanding the modern politics. Lastly, the demographic data concerning employment status, income disparity, and economic stability bear significant relationships with political inclination. This highlights the dynamic nature of the interaction between a country's economic fortunes and political stances, proving that clearly defined socio-economic factors play substantial roles in shaping people's political beliefs.

The findings underscore the multifaceted nature of political preference formation, with demographics, social media usage, and economic factors playing integral roles. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities underlying political decision-making processes. As such, policymakers, political analysts, and stakeholders may leverage this knowledge to develop more nuanced strategies in order to engage with diverse populations and addressing societal challenges effectively.

Recommendations

Undoubtedly, appealing to demographics, the use of social networks and the related economic policies can do a lot towards raising the political preferences' quality and encouraging people to vote. The current study presented some recommendations to utilize these factors positively. These recommendations are as follows:

Targeted approach and demographic data was used in the section of education programs where the special educational programs for different targeted populations were developed. It is quite possible that knowing peculiarities of behavior and main problems of different groups of people will help political actors to deliver better message to these groups and build proper call to voters. This contributes to the prevention of discrimination even in matters concerning politics and ensures that one is partial based on various aspects. The policy dubbed as transparent and responsible social media engagement recognizes the importance of social media in influencing political leaning and affirms to relate responsibly on social media. In their strategic level, political entities should maintain integrity in their online communication. It was also revealed that through the dissemination of information and encouraging positive communication, social media work has a potential to enhance knowledgeable decision-making and effective citizen participation.

Economic policies addressing socioeconomic disparities support the implementation and carrying out economic policies that address the theory concerning the major areas of socioeconomic disparities. Increasing government attention to the factors, such as job generation or focusing on pay inequality or access to healthcare and education would help in enhancing the wealth capacity and economic standard of people regardless of their age and gender. The management of economic issues increases the confidence of people in political institutions and builds positive political predispositions based on the perceptions of actual improvement of living conditions.

The new approach that is chiefly identified with the community residential based projects and the cooperation that involves people in the political processes. The involvement of grassroots organization, community leaders, and other stakeholders is crucial since it enables the certainty of grassroots dialogues and problem-solving. The locales that put forward the

cited initiatives can empower the construction of the SMO political preferences, which in turn cultivates what the population needs and/or desires. Demographic changes, propaganda on the social networks, and fluctuations in the economic factors must be tracked in the course of the political processes and development of the political directions and decisions.. Flexibility and responsiveness are essential to effectively address the evolving challenges and opportunities in the political landscape. By staying attuned to shifting preferences and concerns, political entities can remain relevant and responsive to the needs of their constituents. By leveraging the demographics, social media, and economic policies positively and inclusively, political entities may foster a more robust and participatory democracy. Through targeted outreach, good communication, inclusive economic policies, community engagement, and adaptive governance, it is possible to cultivate political preferences that reflect the diverse perspectives and aspirations of society.

Conflict of Interest

The authors of the manuscript have no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

The data associated with this study will be provided by the corresponding author upon request.

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