

ELECTORAL INTEGRITY IN THE DIGITAL AGE: MEDIA FRAMING,
PUBLIC TRUST, AND POLITICAL CONFIDENCE IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract

Public trust in the election process is the most crucial part of a democratic government, as it determines the legitimacy, accountability, and effectiveness of elected institutions. Disintegration leads to lower voter turnout, deeper ideological divides, and widespread unrest. This study examines the impact of media, subjective electoral integrity and public confidence in election processes to determine the factors that affect individuals' faith in elections. The study uses data from 500 university faculty in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. It examines the intricate relationships that support public faith in election systems using sophisticated statistical models. The results show that education outreach, election transparency, and voting convenience boost public trust in democratic institutions. Perceived electoral integrity mediates trust and transparency, demonstrating voters' views of voting fairness and reliability. The media effectively moderates civic involvement and institutional transparency, boosting trust results. The results demonstrate that individuals with a good education and awareness of open processes and ethical reporting are more inclined to trust their democratic government. The study recommends short-term procedural openness and voter education. Reforming institutions, expanding media literacy and civic education, and utilizing technology to enhance accountability and justice are medium- and long-term objectives. Working collaboratively to secure election integrity may boost public confidence and democratic resilience in South Asia and abroad.

INTRODUCTION**1.1. Institutions and Structure of South Asian Electoral Systems**

Each South Asian country's election system is distinctive, reflecting its rich political history, diverse institutional framework, and complex social dynamics. Three primary election types dominate the region. Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, and the Maldives have adopted runoff majoritarian procedures in single-member districts. These models aim to facilitate territorial representation by promoting strategic coordination among voters. On the other hand, Bhutan and Sri Lanka both employ mixed-member majoritarian systems that blend proportional representation (PR) and plurality voting to achieve representational balance and governmental effectiveness. However, these systems require intricate vote-to-seat translation mechanisms that necessitate a sophisticated understanding of voting (Bose & Jalal, 2022).

Some South Asian countries, including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, have incorporated aspects of proportional representation into their single- or multi-member constituencies. Proportional representation systems foster a more representative electoral environment, enabling the expression of diverse identities and the choice of candidates by heterogeneous electorates. Regional nations have held elections ranging from four to fifteen direct national elections under various voting systems. To what extent governments can put forward their political agenda without compromising public aspiration hinges on the extent to which the electoral system can convey the voice of the voter into effective policy-making. Such non-compliance can further enrage the public; therefore, there has been increased academic and policy interest in comparative electoral studies within the region (Reilly, 2020).

India and Afghanistan, in turn, have had a more extensive history of employing proportional representation (PR) models. In contrast, most other nations in South Asia have employed first-past-the-post (FPTP) systems or struggled to implement proportional representation (PR)-based systems successfully. Majoritarian FPTP systems tend to breed two-party systems, whereas the leveling effects and vote-pooling mechanisms inherent in PR systems stabilize the competition between parties and

minimize political fragmentation. This has resulted in more stable institutions and lower electoral volatility at the national level in PR-based nations, and a notable difference when compared with the party system instability frequently seen in FPTP nations (Reilly, 2020).

South Asian electoral systems also vary by district magnitude, methods of candidate nomination, proportionality thresholds, ballot and vote aggregation structures, and institutional features. Institutional features that are particularly relevant include the number of proportional representation constituencies, parliamentary entry vote thresholds, compulsory and voluntary voting types, electoral funding regulations, ballot structure, and arrangements for the admission of independent candidates and marginal political forces. They have evolved, incorporating classical features such as reserved seats and block voting alongside more modern features like proxy voting and ranked-choice voting. Hybrid systems combining single-member district (SMD) and PR features are proportionally heterogeneous according to national quotas and distribution of votes (Langford et al., 2021).

1.2. Public Confidence in Electoral Processes: Regional Patterns and Democratic Consequences

South Asia, with eight democracies, operates primarily under a parliamentary system of governance, and presidential elections also take place in certain nations to elect the executive head. The electoral process remains the cornerstone of these democracies, serving not only as a political representation mechanism but also as a platform for policy implementation and people's accountability. However, declining public confidence in the electoral process has recently become a key area of concern. Citizens' trust in the purity of elections—and the integrity of the actors administering them—is the foundation of democratic legitimacy. When such trust is undermined, political participation collapses, institutional legitimacy is damaged, and civil disobedience can follow (Guo & Acharya, 2024).

Trust deficits have become increasingly acute in the region. In Pakistan, there is little public trust in elections because a previous history of military takeover, old election laws, and inadequate

institutional protection has been witnessed. Even following the enactment of the 2017 election laws, opinion surveys indicate that around 60% of citizens remain sceptical about the purity of elections. In India, while public trust in the electoral process is essential to maintaining the world's largest democracy, ongoing problems such as unregulated election financing, malpractice, and transparency issues continue to erode voter confidence. Although there have been attempts to increase electoral integrity, their success is debated (Knight, 2020).

In the remaining South Asian nations, levels of trust in the electoral process differ greatly. Bangladesh experienced a high election turnout in its 2018 general election, although allegations of violence and vote tampering have raised concerns about its legitimacy. The Maldives experienced low voter turnout, while Nepal experienced high voter turnout. Sri Lanka's electoral legitimacy has been examined under conditions of both administrative and political adversity. Bhutan registered increased turnout to demonstrate increased civic participation. Afghanistan, amidst credible threats to security and armed clashes, successfully conducted national elections—a crucial step towards institutional consolidation (Knight, 2020).

The undermining of electoral confidence in the region is caused by a host of factors: political malperformance, endemic complaints of election fraud, voter intimidation, and declining trends in voter turnout. India and Pakistan, among other nations, have witnessed declining votes and growing suspicion of political parties and EMBs. Restoring public trust requires overall electoral reforms that focus on transparency, public participation, and institutional accountability. An improvement in one of the actions includes strengthening civil society, increasing polling transparency, and sending credible electoral observers. There must be meaningful change, or democratic trust will continue to plummet in the region.

1.3. Media Influence as a Moderator

The media is the most influential intermediary in moulding voter opinion, public narrative, and, finally, election results. In South Asia, the media is not just a one-way information disseminator; it actively

mediates the public's faith in elections by influencing narratives regarding candidates, campaigns, and the perceived honesty of the electoral process. Media in nations like Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India encompasses print, broadcast, and digital media, collectively influencing voter consciousness and political activity. In these environments, media has helped improve voter information, expand democratic discourse, and reveal electoral corruption (Javaid et al., 2020).

Media effects are not always positive. Political party bias, media sensationalism, and politically driven propaganda have frequently compromised the integrity of elections, fostering public mistrust and polarization at the polls. In India, for instance, the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) substantial advertisement spending has raised allegations of compromised journalistic ethics and biased reporting, as it allegedly supports the ruling party's agendas. Likewise, in Bangladesh, the incumbent government has employed social media and artificial intelligence technologies to disseminate disinformation, mobilize opposition leaders and influence voters' decisions, thereby undermining electoral integrity (Tapsell, 2021).

These events merely illustrated the two-edged sword that is the power of the media. While it can encourage transparency and accountability, it can also be used as a means of manipulation and disinformation. Region-specific tendencies differ: Bangladesh's state media, increasing censorship in Pakistan, social media activism at the grassroots level in India and Nepal, and investigative journalism aimed at exposing corruption in Sri Lanka all reflect the intricate nexus between media and politics (Javaid et al., 2020; Tapsell, 2021). Bhutan, although relatively new to the media landscape, is slowly evolving in its media environment.

These are issues that require comprehensive reforms. South Asia must prioritise effective regulatory frameworks as its top agenda to facilitate fair reporting, guarantee journalistic freedom, and promote media literacy among its citizens. Sound media governance would take precedence in averting disinformation, upholding election integrity, and safeguarding democratic values. According to Jaffrelot and Verniers (2020), free, responsible, and

accountable media is crucial for an enlightened electorate and sound democratic order.

1.4. Perception of Electoral Integrity as a Mediating Mechanism

Electoral integrity is at the heart of democratic legitimacy, and it has a direct effect on public trust and political participation. South Asian electoral integrity perceptions—operationally defined to include beliefs on transparency, corruption-free practice, and procedural fairness—have a decisive mediating effect on the institutional format-voter confidence relationship. Electoral integrity refers to the extent to which electoral processes are free from undue influence, fraud, and manipulation and to what extent they accurately reflect the will of the people (Haque, 2020).

Democratic institutions have high confidence based on a high degree of perceived electoral integrity. It leads to increased political participation, higher voter turnout, and greater acceptance of election outcomes. If electoral processes are perceived as transparent, inclusive, and accountable, then citizens would be more likely to feel that their votes count and that government power is acquired rightfully. Essential components of electoral integrity include free and autonomous election commissions, clean campaign financing, equal media access, and secure voter registration mechanisms. These factors, when combined, enable electoral processes to provide democratic values and help maintain political stability (Haque, 2020).

While electoral integrity deficits are unwanted, they are also perilous. Fake or tampered elections foster public cynicism, deter people from participating in the voting process, and erode institutional legitimacy. They can also further spread authoritarian practices, exacerbate political polarization, and trigger social unrest. Electoral integrity thus occupies the fine line between state legitimacy and public trust. It operates along four primary channels: (1) provision of inclusive and equitable participation; (2) anti-corruption and manipulation protection; (3) enhancing transparency and accountability; and (4) creating legitimacy and political trust (Haque, 2020).

The study has the following research questions, i.e.,

RQ1: How much do voter access and participation, electoral fairness and transparency, campaign influence, and voter education and awareness contribute to the confidence of the public in electoral systems?

Public trust in electoral systems also heavily depends on whether the voting process is inclusive and accessible. Volatile voter participation, facilitated by well-located polling stations and accessibility for individuals with disabilities, indicates institutional responsiveness and inclusiveness. Web-based registration forms and responsive electoral systems reduce participation barriers, thereby maximizing turnout and enhancing the perception of electoral legitimacy (Addeo et al., 2024). Trust is also naturally connected with fairness and transparency in electoral administration. Communication, prompt response to fraud allegations, and the application of secure vote technologies—like electronic or internet voting—are dependent on citizens' trust in procedural integrity (Amao, 2022). Additionally, political campaigns that address concrete, pragmatic problems will build trust more effectively than those concerned with ideological dichotomies. Voters who can see the results of their actions build trust. Voter education is the driving force behind this formula. Comprehensive, ongoing education helps underrepresented citizens register to vote and increases electoral literacy. Greater access to social media and digital technology has further democratized the availability of information, benefiting young voters and time-poor voters (Addeo et al., 2024). These interconnected processes provide evidence that electoral trust results from the quality of procedure and the perceived efficiency of participation.

RQ2: What is the moderating effect of media power on the relationship between voter accessibility and participation and public trust in electoral systems?

The media is a central factor in reconciling electoral transparency and public trust. Transparent, open, and frequent communication through various media channels not only sensitizes voters but also supports institutional accountability. If the electoral management bodies consciously interact with the media—through press briefings, information campaigns, and public outreach—they promote higher

voter turnout and transparency about procedures (Tobias, 2021). In addition, transparency in the media helps identify and resolve accessibility issues by openly raising impediments and policy shortcomings. In addition to countering disinformation, this openness helps establish public confidence in election institutions. Establishing credibility among election agencies as providers of information, particularly through regular press statements and voter education programs made available, is crucial in building confidence in the process.

RQ3: To what extent does the electoral integrity perception mediate the association between transparency and procedural electoral process fairness and citizens' trust in electoral systems controlling for political campaign influences?

Experiences of electoral integrity are deeply influenced by campaign political behaviour and message. Campaigns provide important avenues by which citizens understand the transparency, fairness, and credibility of the election process and, by implication, its integrity. Equal media access, equal resource allocation, and transparent regulatory rules effectively shape the way people perceive integrity (González, 2024). Inclusive policy-based and democratically rooted electoral campaigns will enhance perceptions of fairness, while manipulative or secretive measures can undermine public confidence. The wider institutional setting—encompassing party competition, electoral system organization, and the level of institutional development—also qualifies this link. Electoral integrity is, therefore, a mediating factor that converts procedural justice and campaign behaviour into public confidence. By being transparent about the rules, fair in distributing resources, and impartial in treating candidates, electoral institutions can foster legitimacy and prevent democratic backsliding.

Based on the research questions, the study has the following research objectives, i.e.,

I. To examine the role of voter accessibility and participation, election transparency and neutrality, political campaigns, and voter information and awareness influence public trust in electoral processes.

II. To analyze the media influence moderating role between public trust in electoral systems and voting participation and accessibility.

III. To analyze the mediating role of perceived electoral integrity between electoral fairness and transparency and public trust, with a specific focus on the political campaign role.

Knowledge of the impact of electoral systems on public trust enables scholars and policymakers to diagnose institutional flaws, design practical reform proposals, and promote participatory inclusiveness. In addition, by drawing attention to the mediating function of electoral integrity and the moderating influence of media effects, the research suggests that multi-dimensional solutions are required to secure electoral credibility.

2. Literature Review

South Asian election systems are of academic interest due to their complexity, sociopolitical roots, and widespread implications on voter choice, public trust, and institutional prestige. There are several voting procedures in the region, ranging from proportional representation (PR) in Nepal and Sri Lanka to the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system in Pakistan and India. These structures affect legitimacy, political involvement, and representation.

2.1 Public Trust in Election Systems: Voter Education, Campaign Influence, Transparency, Accessibility, Participation, and Engagement

Public trust influences voting behaviour and election validity. A trustworthy political system relies on fair elections, equal voting rights, and non-partisan political competitiveness. Sari (2024) states that comprehensive and durable voter education raises awareness and motivates more people, particularly minorities, young people, and women, to participate in voting. Effective communication and fraud prevention are crucial to enhancing vote integrity and increasing participation. Utari et al. (2023) found that education, economic instability, confidence in institutions, and web-based engagement influence millennial political behaviour, including turnout. Civic education and social media have increased political awareness, which is strengthened by institutional accountability and transparency, thereby improving voting outcomes. In a world where technology is continually evolving, Olaniyi (2024) highlights the strategic alignment of blockchain

technologies (BT) and information governance to build digital trust in election processes. The research found that decentralized tamper-proof technology and data management may boost public confidence in election security. Wang (2024) states that election legitimacy rests on three key factors: political freedom, election fairness, and the responsiveness of elected representatives to the people. The trilateral model details trust and democratic efficacy. Halder et al. (2020) argue that political engagement is essential to state legitimacy in broad frameworks. Civic awareness, institutional trust, and perceived effectiveness influence voter participation. The situation in Pakistan, as discussed by Mahmood et al. (2024), shows some barriers to political participation, such as powerful elite groups, social class issues, lack of education, and a lack of trust in election systems. Collectively, these factors isolate individuals from institutional political processes, making structural changes crucial. The significance of citizens' involvement in monitoring elections is aptly explained by Muhamad and Hermawan (2023), who state that citizen participation in observation increases transparency and mitigates electoral fraud risks. Their research concludes that institutionalized processes of citizens' participation in monitoring guarantee the credibility of election outcomes. In political campaigning, Fahad and Rashid (2024) use a voter-based brand equity framework to analyze the mechanisms by which political participation affects brand loyalty in Pakistan. The findings validate the argument that political participation entrenches the perception of leadership and loyalty, and political parties must invest in long-term trust-based outreach activities. Lastly, Das et al. (2023) redirect analytical attention to South Asia's subnational dynastic politics. Analyzing "succession moments" inside political dynasties, their analysis uncovers the vulnerability and strategic challenges of sustaining political continuity and hence deepens knowledge on political culture and elite reproduction.

2.2 Voter Access, Participation, Electoral Transparency, and Fairness Contribution to Securing Public Trust through Electoral Integrity Perception

Procedural justice and inclusivity not only influence citizens' trust in voting processes, but also channel it through perceptions of electoral integrity. While transparency, inclusiveness, and organization of elections free from bias contribute to greater chances of the electors realizing the outcome as legitimate, the electors create a sense of suspicion and demolish trust in the democratic process when they experience opaqueness, exclusion, or prejudice.

Voter convenience—particularly for marginalized groups—and active citizenship are critical to developing a sense of felt legitimacy. Transparent disclosure on voting practices and proper transmission of election returns contribute to the strength of belief that the system reflects the public will. However, individual-level challenges can undermine trust when voters feel manipulated or lack sufficient information (James & Garnett, 2024). The creation of new electronic voting technologies, for example, e-voting, has brought possibilities and threats to electoral integrity. De Vega (2024) outlines significant obstacles to successful e-voting roll-out in Asia, including system security, regulatory ambiguity, and ongoing public distrust. The study underscores the importance of using blockchain, biometric authentication, and policy transparency to enhance trust and electoral reliability. In Pakistan, AL-Kubaisi (2024) presents a historical and institutional study of electoral politics with emphasis on the role political parties play in creating citizens' perceptions of electoral justice. Flaws in the system include improvement and institutional reforms to restore voters' confidence. Mannonov (2024), utilizing the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), analyzes public attitude toward blockchain-based e-voting in smart cities. The research discovers that perceived usefulness, ease of use, and security are crucial drivers that play a great role in adoption. Trust on the part of citizens in digital infrastructure, however, directly affects their belief in the integrity of voting.

Adding to this, Sahasra et al. (2023) analyze the revolutionary potential of smart contracts in blockchain-based elections and discuss how such devices have the ability to remove inefficiencies and vulnerabilities from existing systems. The study believes there should be enhanced scalability and reduced latency to enhance responsiveness and trust.

Trung et al. (2024) suggest a better electoral model based on blockchain, NFTs for voter authentication, and IPFS for data integrity. The hybrid system possesses the ability to provide both procedural integrity and public trust by being transparent, traceable, and anonymous to the voters. Hajian Berenjestanaki et al. (2023) review covers the existing terrain of blockchain-based e-voting research with strengths (decentralization, immutability) and weaknesses (scalability, legal constraints). The research revolves around the fact that although blockchain can be used to increase transparency, its deployment is limited by contextually dependent political and infrastructural factors. Stevenson (2024) continues further to critically examine the role of artificial intelligence (AI) within the election process, namely the registration of voters, predictive analysis, and monitoring the elections. Though AI may be deployed to enhance efficiency, its algorithmic black boxes and biases yield ethical and governance issues, making it therefore difficult for the public to adopt integrity. The media also have a crucial role to play in building trust in elections. DADA (2023) conducted an in-depth examination of how media framing and media narratives make a difference in the perceptions and behaviors of voters. It cautioned against sensational reporting and fostered media literacy and journalism good enough to maintain electoral integrity and democratic legitimacy. To fill both traditional and digital trust gaps, Lastly, James and Garnett (2024) suggest a theoretical framework that brings rational choice theory, behavioralism, and constructivism to explain the voter experience. For them, voters' cognitive and affective reactions—refined through observation and involvement in election processes—form a very important lens for viewing electoral integrity.

2.3 The Role of Media in Electoral Processes: Political Campaigns, Voter Education, and Public Trust in Electoral Systems

The media plays a multifaceted role in today's elections. Social media is redefining the relationship between citizens and democratic institutions by facilitating political conversation, voter education, and public outreach. Media, particularly social media, significantly impacts politics, civic

engagement, and public trust in the voting system. Disinformation undermines democratic processes and election integrity, while fair and impartial media promote legitimacy and inclusivity.

Today, democracy consolidation demands media literacy and voter education. Sa'adawisna et al. (2023) emphasise the importance of political education programs in educating and persuading first-time voters to participate in the voting process. These initiatives empower young people to enhance democracy by educating them on civic rights, democratic values, and political processes. Artificial intelligence (AI) is disrupting political campaigns. The public fears foreign involvement, voter disenfranchisement, and result manipulation in internet-based and direct-recording electronic (DRE) voting systems, according to Oladoyinbo (2024). Thus, public trust in electronic governance and robust cybersecurity are essential to the safety of electronic voting systems.

Samuel-Okon et al. (2024) propose the Anti-DFK framework to counter disinformation disseminated on YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter in response to deepfake content. Deepfakes damage public trust in political discourse. Thus, they recommend content verification tools, digital watermarking, and network responsibilities. Consequently, Stachofsky et al. (2023) explore how disinformation in the form of Facebook fake news misshapes election legitimacy perceptions. The study uses the motivated reasoning theory to determine that partisan-leaning users are more vulnerable to misinformation than polarization and skepticism toward election results. The findings emphasize interventions on hyper-partisan news viewing and fostering fact-driven political debates. It is also important to know the informational and psychological bases of the voter's decision. Kulachai et al. (2023) provide a consolidated model of viewing the determinants of voting behavior, such as political branding and media messaging. Their examination shows that decisions about voting are based upon the way candidates discuss policy and values, and here the media have a key role. For Pakistan, Yaser et al. (2022) examine the relative effects of television and radio on election behavior in the 2008 elections. Television emerges as the leading medium, especially among the educated, urban, and youth populations. Political

debate shows and talk shows contributed significantly to the development of political thoughts and voter decisions, with more coverage and effects than radio. Nadeau et al. (2023) further posit that election campaigns are mass information campaigns, in which media are the main vehicle for information circulation. From their research, they find campaigns can close gaps in knowledge but also consolidate media-based variation in political learning. The intensity of media cues on a specific issue primarily determines the processing of information and its impact on voting decisions.

2.4 Study Gap and Contribution of Study

A study of Pakistan's electoral systems examines voter behaviour, election integrity, and public trust. This study employs independent variables such as accessibility and voter turnout, fairness and transparency in elections, political campaigns, voter education, and voter awareness. While the dependent variable is citizens' trust in the electoral system, this study aims to illuminate the complex realities of Pakistan's electoral systems, which have a notable lack of literature. Norris (2021) found that voter faith in democracy depends on election integrity. South Asia values fair elections. Since this issue is often neglected, determining which variables affect Pakistan's electoral confidence is challenging. This lack of data hinders democratic administration and electoral transformation in a country. Clark and Golder (2022) found that proportional sign systems promoted honest voting better. The relationship between voting behaviours and election integrity is currently being investigated. Further study is needed to understand the complex interaction between electoral institutions, public trust, and voting patterns in elections. These findings raise concerns about local attempts to promote open, honest, and fair elections. Birch (2018) examined how electoral reform builds public confidence and election integrity. South Asian voting system changes are understudied, particularly in Pakistan. There is a need for more studies on how electoral change impacts public trust, election integrity, and voter behaviour. Due to the limited information, it cannot accurately assess how electoral reforms enhance democratic governance and election integrity in Pakistan.

A comparative voting system approach may be relevant in various areas, including South Asia. Mixed-member proportional representation (MMP) is used in Sri Lanka, whereas FPTP is used in Bangladesh, Nepal, and India (Hassan, 2017). Diversity makes it easier to compare the pros and cons of voting systems. Due to its many parties and coalition governments, the area provides a unique opportunity to study electoral processes and politics. South Asian election systems may reveal how public trust, voter behaviour, voting integrity, and electoral processes interact (Stevenson, 2024).

The research fills a gap in the South Asian electoral system literature by providing fresh insights into Pakistan's voting system, public confidence, voter behaviour, and election integrity. The research examines public trust and voting behaviour in Pakistan's electoral systems and how public trust affects election results. Studying election integrity and election procedures may aid electoral reformers and individuals seeking stronger South Asian democracies and more transparent vote counting. According to the research, the long-term consequences of elections for democratic administration in South Asia are that they must be free, fair, and transparent. This requires election reform, popular trust, and electoral integrity in Pakistan.

2.5. Theoretical Framework

2.5.1. Theory of Electoral Integrity

Electoral Integrity Theory offers a framework for assessing election legitimacy and fairness. Norris (2019) states that an inclusive system of transparency, openness, and inclusion provides democratic integrity when elections can be conducted impartially and without fraud, manipulation, or coercion. The theory's fundamental principles: (1) transparent voting methods, (2) accountable electoral bodies, and (3) voter choice. Neutral and unbiased election management is crucial to electoral integrity. To ensure trust and procedural fairness, it oversees the voting process. Secure voting technology, complete voter verification, and operational investigation tools for election irregularities are the most important integrity tools. These are key components in preventing fraud and guaranteeing electoral outcome integrity (Norris, 2022). The theory also highlights the necessity of voter

education and consciousness. Informed electorates can more effectively assess candidates, know what their vote contributes, and remain less vulnerable to manipulation. Also necessary for electoral integrity is accessible and genuine information on the electoral process and actors involved, which facilitates inclusive participation. Dispute settlement mechanisms also enhance electoral legitimacy. Independent electoral courts and reliable grievance-redress mechanisms contribute to building confidence in the system through providing redressal channels and transparency (Homolková, 2019). These all contribute to democratic governance by developing standards and guidelines for free, fair, and transparent elections—universal pillars of democratic legitimacy. Therefore, electoral integrity theory is both descriptive and normative. It can be used to guide policymakers and practitioners as a diagnostic tool for diagnosing electoral system weaknesses, setting reform agendas, and bolstering institutional strength against democratic backsliding.

2.5.2. Political Culture Theory

Political Culture Theory is a macro theory that offers an enriched paradigm for comprehending regional differences in voter turnout, political participation, and government trust, particularly in terms of South Asia. It argues that long-standing historical, social, and economic structures produce long-lasting political habits, values, and traditions that, merged as a whole, create what has been termed "political culture" (Pathak, 2017). South Asia has some of the most varied political cultures. Pakistan's political culture is moulded by Islamist ideology and an interventionist army, unlike India's democratic politics, which stem from colonialism and nationalism. Legacies impact institutional trust, voter turnout, and political participation. Theories include religion, social position, community activity, and family relationships that influence political behaviour. Electoral systems, political parties, and civil society all influence democracy, as do underlying values. The first-past-the-post voting system favours the dominant party, and civil society organizations promote social responsibility and democracy (Perera, 2017). Political culture theory posits that politics evolves in tandem with society. Social movements, such as India's anti-

corruption campaign, have brought transparency, public engagement, and institutional change. This energy reflects how young people and city residents are getting politically active and what they anticipate from the system (Riaz, 2011). The theory identifies globalization, the media, and international governance principles as external factors that might impact politics. New technology and economic strategy have brought digital democracy, development, and good governance to the forefront. Public opinion and political engagement have evolved in tandem with the economic progress of Bangladesh and India. Lastly, political culture theory is elucidative of trans-regional variations in democratic sentiments, especially for multi-dimensional regions like South Asia. The theory illuminates why citizen trust and voting are expressed differently across states by analyzing the convergence of historical legacies, socio-economic structures, institutional forces, and foreign influences (Steedly, 1999).

3. Methodology

3.1 Population and Sampling Strategy

The population in the research is taken from university-level stakeholders such as faculty members, administrative officers, and postgraduate students from some selected higher learning institutions in South Asia, with a specific focus on Pakistan. These stakeholders are selected based on their educated awareness of the electoral context, political culture, and civic life and are best placed to analyze electoral systems critically, voter behavior, and citizen trust. The purposive sampling method was used to make sure the respondents are socio-politically aware and contextually active. The study collected 1,207 responses from the University of Haripur, Abbottabad University of Science and Technology, Hazara University, University of Wah, and various Government Girls and Boys Degree College of KPK and Punjab provinces.. The institutions were chosen based on accessibility, institutional fame, and social and political science departments. Participants were recruited mostly from the departments of political science, economics, sociology, international relations, and Pakistan studies, which are directly related to the areas of research. The sample is representative at the population level in terms of age, gender, and

discipline, with it being simpler to analyze perceptual and behavioral differences at the disaggregated level.

3.2 Data Collection Instrument and Process

The research employed a structured questionnaire as the main tool for collecting data. Structured questionnaires are best applicable in large samples when standardized measurement of attitudes and behavior is required (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The questionnaire was built upon existing scales and tailored to the South Asian context with both closed-ended Likert-type items and open questions to collect thoughtful views. The tool was structured into five thematic areas: voter accessibility and participation, electoral impartiality and transparency, electoral campaign influence, voter awareness and education, and citizen confidence in the electoral process (Creswell, 2014).

3.3 Variables and Construct Measurement

This research considers the following:

- Independent Variables:

- I. Accessibility and participation of voters
- II. Electoral transparency and fairness
- III. The influence of political campaigns
- IV. Voter awareness and education

- Dependent Variable:

- Public trust in the electoral process

- Mediator:

- Electoral integrity perceptions (Norris, 2014)

- Moderator:

- Media influence (Strömbäck & Kaid, 2008)

All scales were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Sample items are as follows:

"I have the impression that equitable access to voting opportunities increases electoral credibility."

"Political campaigns in the media influence how I perceive the integrity of political parties."

"Social media increases my knowledge of political issues."

The use of a mediator and moderator enhances the understanding of conditional relationships and internal processes affecting electoral trust.

3.4 Analytical Framework and Statistical Techniques

Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression was applied in analyzing the predictive power of the independent factors towards public trust in the electoral process. The study controlled for potential multicollinearity, linearity, and homoscedasticity, providing reliable coefficient estimates. Interaction terms were entered through hierarchical multiple regression to determine the extent to which media effects moderate the association between variables related to voters and electoral trust. The moderation model increases the explanatory power of the model by revealing conditional effects. The method used within this research balances empirical rigor with contextual sensitivity. With a well-designed measure, validated scales, and rigorous statistical tests, the research yields a reliable framework within which dynamics among voter turnout, openness, campaign effects, and media explain South Asian electoral trust. Not only does the framework advance scholarly understanding, but it also offers policy-relevant insights for policymakers, electoral commissions, and civic educationists interested in promoting democratic participation and electoral integrity in new democracies.

4. Results and Discussions

The research employed a sample of 500 respondents, which is a well-defined and purposively sampled student population comprising university lecturers, administrative staff, and graduate/postgraduate students. The demographic composition of the sample is varied and representative for each of the dominant academic roles and gender groups, so the study is valid and in-depth analysis-wise when it comes to observations about electoral systems and citizen trust (see, Figure 1).

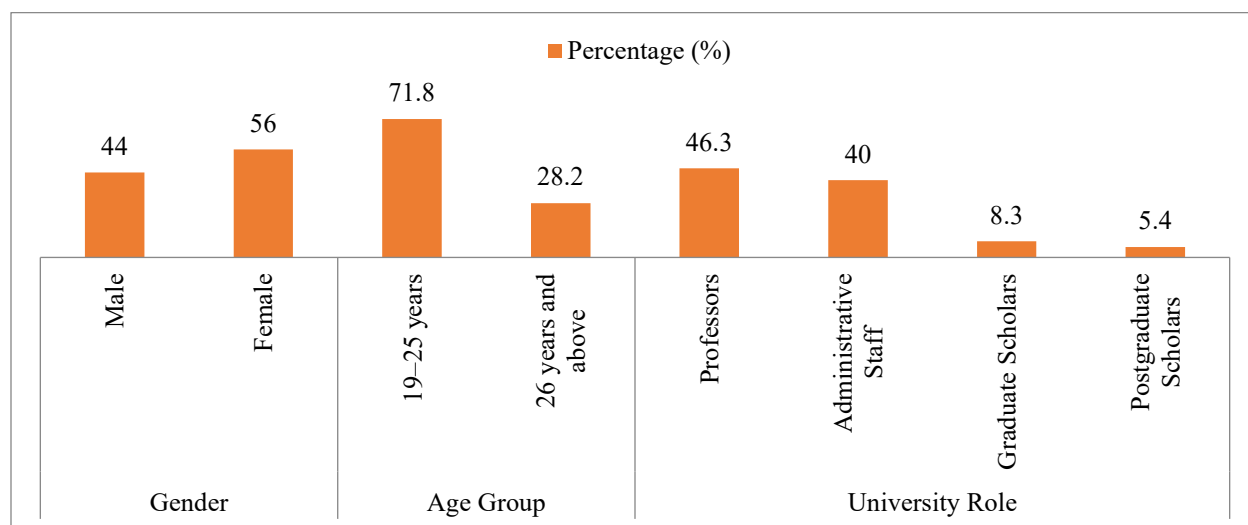


Figure 1: Demographic Survey of the Respondents

Source: Author's work.

As far as gender division is concerned, it was observed that the sample was relatively evenly divided, with a small number of female-dominated responses (56.0%) and males making up 44.0% of the sample. This division indicates a slight gender bias but is adequate to provide proper representation in both samples to enable comparison of gender-specific differences in electoral opinions and voting. The sample's age composition was dominated by young adults between 19 and 25, who accounted for 71.8% of the total respondents. This politically conscious and web-active generation provides strong evidence about the modern-day mind-set of electoral acceptability, accessibility, and faith in democratic means—especially in a technology-unfolding South Asian scenario. Inclusion of young participants in the sample broadens the validity of the study to present and future electoral movements driven by social media, civic awareness, and youth voter education. The sample also includes a varying professional and academic composition, and it reflects the range of opinion in the university environment. Professors comprised the highest proportion of respondents, at 46.3% of participants, a representation of the sample's academic experience and subject-matter expertise. Administrative staff comprised 40% of respondents, the institutional and procedural know-how critical to organizational participation in civic processes. Graduate scholars comprised 8.3%, postgraduate

scholars 5.4%. These categories include informed comment from the new researcher and politicized student point of view. This stakeholder multi-design allows the study to investigate electoral trust and voting behavior from various points of view—academic, administrative, and student-based—thereby enhancing the scope for analysis and widening the scope of generalizability of findings in Pakistani higher education. Furthermore, the presence of both staff and faculty enables cross-functional analysis between the actors involved in institutional governance and curriculum construction and provides a rich understanding of how various types of university actors observe and enact democratic actions. Combined together, the occupational and demographic heterogeneity of the sample not only represents the empirical basis of the research but also corresponds to the research goals of studying electoral integrity, public confidence, and democratic engagement in the differentiated but related segments of the university population. The heterogeneity adds analytical vigor and external generalizability to the study and provides implications for research as well as policy intervention into electoral reforms as well as civic education in South Asia.

Table 1 shows the results of overall level of public confidence in the electoral process among respondents. A vast majority (59.5%) of respondents very much agreed that Pakistan's elections are fair,

with only a few disagreeing (7.1% disagreed, 3.3% strongly disagreed), while 9.0% were neutral. For the declaration, "Electoral processes reflect the will of the people," the same pattern existed, with the majority agreeing in faith but with a small minority (4.8% strongly disagreed, 4.3% disagreed) questioning it. Most of the respondents preferred the credibility of election results, with 52.2% strongly agreeing that the results of elections are believable. Nevertheless, 5.7% strongly disagreed and 3.8% disagreed, posting a low

but perceptible level of distrust. Participation and access appear to be resilient, as 52.2% strongly agreed that voting procedures are open to all eligible voters. Most respondents (7.2% strongly disagreed, 5.3% disagreed) did not experience problems related to obstructions, suggesting that some institutional deficits still exist. Another 50.2% said that no significant obstructions to participation exist, upholding procedural inclusion.

Table 1: Frequency Distribution

Variable Name	Questions	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
Public Trust in Electoral System	I have confidence in the fairness of the electoral system in my country.	7.1%	3.3%	9.0%	21.0%	59.5%
	Electoral processes reflect the will of the people.	4.8%	4.3%	8.7%	20.2%	62%
	I believe election outcomes are generally trustworthy.	5.7%	3.8%	16.6%	23.4%	50.7%
Voter Accessibility and Participation	Voting procedures are easily accessible for all eligible voters.	7.2%	5.3%	7.7%	27.8%	52.2%
	Participation in elections is encouraged by the system.	9.1%	5.3%	7.7%	19.7%	41.8%
	I feel that I face no significant barriers to participate in voting.	6.8%	8.7%	15.0%	19.3%	50.2%
Electoral Transparency and Fairness	Electoral authorities conduct elections in a transparent manner.	7.7%	5.8%	4.8%	25.5%	56.3%
	I believe election officials act impartially during the process.	8.7%	5.3%	5.8%	25.1%	55.1%
	The counting and reporting of votes are done fairly.	5.3%	4.3%	11.1%	25.0%	54.3%
Political Campaign Influence	Campaigns provide voters with accurate and unbiased information.	7.2%	2.9%	7.2%	28.4%	54.3%
	Campaign spending influences election outcomes.	4.9%	5.8%	6.8%	26.7%	55.8%
	Political campaigns shape voter preferences significantly.	5.9%	2.9%	17.2%	20.6%	53.4%
Voter Education and Awareness	Voters are well-informed about their voting rights and responsibilities.	7.2%	2.9%	7.2%	20.8%	61.8%

Variable Name	Questions	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
	Educational initiatives enhance public understanding of the electoral process.	6.3%	4.8%	10.1%	23.7%	55.1%
	I feel adequately informed to make a voting decision.	7.8%	3.4%	15.0%	20.9%	52.9%
Media Influence on Electoral Processes (Moderator)	Media coverage during elections is fair and balanced.	10.2%	3.9%	11.2%	22.4%	52.2%
	Media platforms shape public opinions about electoral outcomes.	8.7%	3.8%	12.5%	23.6%	51.4%
	The media plays a critical role in ensuring electoral transparency.	7.2%	3.8%	9.6%	26.0%	53.4%
Perception of Electoral Integrity (Mediator)	Electoral processes uphold international standards of integrity.	6.8%	5.3%	9.2%	24.3%	54.4%
	Public perception of integrity influences trust in electoral systems.	8.1%	5.7%	10.5%	22.5%	53.1%
	The perception of fair elections impacts voter participation rates.	7.1%	5.2%	8.6%	19.0%	60.0%

Voting freedom perceptions were also positive. Again, 56.3% firmly believed that the government holds elections in an open manner, while 7.7% and 5.8% strongly disagreed. Then, 55.1% agreed that the election staff were neutral, and 54.3% were confident about fair counting and reporting votes, although there was a slight resistance. Regarding political campaigns, 54.3% of the survey respondents saw campaign messages as a truthful and unprejudiced representation, and 53.4% claimed that the same substantially influence voter opinions. Concerns did exist regarding how campaign expenditure influences the election, with 55.8% agreeing that it affects outcomes, indicating an awareness of potential imbalances in electoral competition. Effects of education on voters were highly positive. Most (61.8%) thought that the voters were well informed of their responsibilities and obligations, and 55.1% thought that civic education played a role in

increasing electoral knowledge. Also, 52.9% felt confident enough to make the choice to vote, despite a small number (3.7%) being unsure. People perceived the role of media in electoral processes as influential. Over half (51.4%) agreed that media significantly shapes electoral perception, and 53.4% emphasized its importance in ensuring transparency. This notwithstanding, there were still perceptions of bias, with 7.2% strongly disagreeing and 3.8% disagreeing that there is objective media coverage. Lastly, the view of electoral integrity was widely supported, as 54.4% strongly concurred that elections are up to international standards of integrity. A majority (53.1%) concurred that citizens' perception of electoral integrity has a direct impact on institutional trust, while 60% replied that votes do turn out based on perceptions of integrity. But some remain doubtful, as 6.8% strongly disagree and 5.3% disagree with the election's integrity.

The descriptive statistics in Table 2 provide useful information regarding the central tendency and variability of the key variables of interest in the study. The mean score for public trust in the elections is 4.21, which shows that the mean level of respondents

has a comparatively high level of confidence in the integrity and legitimacy of the elections. The 1.03 standard deviation indicates moderate attitude variation, i.e., although most of the respondents are trusting, there are a few others with differing views.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
Public Trust in the Electoral Process	4.2051	1.02759
Voter Accessibility and Participation	4.0809	1.12423
Electoral Transparency and Fairness	4.1610	1.10107
Political Campaign Influence	4.1766	1.08569
Voter Education and Awareness	4.1748	1.09506
Electoral integrity perceptions	4.0837	1.03412
Media influence	4.1343	1.14185

Voter access and participation has an average value of 4.08, which indicates that most respondents see election processes as inclusive and open. The comparatively higher standard deviation value of 1.12 indicates a spread of responses, which may be an indication of unequal access or opportunities to participate across different demographic or institutional groups. On electoral fairness and transparency, there is a mean score of 4.16 at a standard deviation of 1.10. It indicates that there exists a positive attitude among the respondents regarding the impartiality and transparency in election processes, though with discernible variation, which may be due to varying exposure or experience to the electoral processes. The influence of political campaigns has a mean value of 4.18 and a standard deviation value of 1.08, indicating that the respondents would agree with the strong influence of political campaigns in making the voters' decision and influencing the election outcome. This is an indication of the effectiveness and magnitude of campaign techniques, as perceived by the public. Voter awareness and education is also rated the same, with a mean of 4.17 and standard deviation of 1.09, and thus it seems that the respondents are quite well

educated about their voting right and about the voting process. It brings more evidence to substantiate that the education campaign is reaching at least effectively, if not widely, the target population. For electoral integrity perceptions, the standard is 4.08 and the standard deviation is 1.03. This is indicative of high but moderate belief in the electoral process to be of standard with regard to integrity but distribution indicates underlying fears among a segment of respondents. Lastly, media has a mean of 4.13 and the maximum standard deviation of the variables at 1.14, suggesting that although majority of the respondents feel that media has an important role to play in elections as well as in the opinion of citizens, they are most varied with respect to it. It is likely that the variation corresponds to different opinions about the credibility, partisanship, and accessibility of media. The regression results in Table 3 show that three important factors—Electoral Transparency and Fairness, Voter Accessibility and Participation, and Voter Education and Awareness—were significantly linked to increased Public Trust in the Electoral System. These variables all showed a positive beta coefficient, thus affirming their substantive and directional role in electoral trust building.

Table 3: Regression Estimates

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t-value	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		

(Constant)	.357	.346	----	1.031	.304
Voter Accessibility and Participation	.278	.064	.304	4.333	.000
Electoral Transparency and Fairness	.338	.073	.365	4.640	.000
Political Campaign Influence	-.064	.070	-.068	-.911	.363
Voter Education and Awareness	.313	.065	.338	4.822	.000

The study found a positive correlation between electoral transparency and fairness and public trust in the electoral system. The positive beta coefficient suggests that as perceived transparency and fairness in election processes increase, so does public trust. This is aligned with the democratic principle that posits that if there are free, fair, and responsible elections, then these ensure that they bring about public trust in electoral institutions. Since citizens will feel freedom from manipulation and coercion, then the citizens will experience legitimate and representative election outcomes in their minds (Alvarez et al., 2023). Therefore, transparency in processes, enhancing accountability mechanisms, and the impartiality of institutions are conditions precedent to the consolidation of democracy and citizens' participation.

Secondly, Voter Accessibility and Participation also had a positive and statistically significant correlation with Public Trust. The implication is that electoral system trust is not just an issue of institutional effectiveness but also electorates' ability to effectively participate in democratic processes. Where voters find few logistical, legal, or informational impediments to voting, they will be inclined to perceive the system as open and responsive (Birch et al., 2024). Of greater importance, the research indicates a self-perpetuating loop—more trust yields higher turnout at the polls, which underlies perceived legitimacy in the system. Therefore, electoral reforms that serve to minimize obstacles to participation—e.g., enhancing access to voting sites, simplifying registration, and guaranteeing equal representation—can contribute a significant amount to public trust and voter turnout.

Third, the advancement between voter education and awareness and public trust is also very highly positive. An educated citizenry is at the core of a healthy

democracy, and evidence confirms that citizens' sense of trust in elections has a positive relationship with knowledge of their rights, the electoral process, and electoral law. The greater the voter education and awareness, the stronger the belief in the credibility of election results (Alvarez, 2021). These programs not only provide citizens with knowledge to engage but also instill a sense of civic duty and faith in the honesty of the system. Such findings are supported by more recent scholarship highlighting the overriding importance of voter education in combating political disengagement and developing civic voice (Franklin, 2024).

Together, the evidence verifies the thesis that institutional openness, procedural affordability, and civic education are the pillars to maintaining public confidence in the electoral process. Each one of these elements interacts synergistically with citizen attitude and behavior in significant respects, supporting the two-way interdependence between electoral legitimacy and democratic functioning. These observations bring into focus the imperative that policymakers, election bodies, and South Asian and international NGOs should place utmost priority on reforms and programs promoting higher transparency, increased participation, and political awareness of citizens.

Moderation analysis in Table 4 shows how media influence moderates the direction and strength of the relationships between the most important independent variables—electoral transparency and fairness, voter accessibility and participation, and voter education and awareness—and the dependent variable, public trust in the electoral system. The findings reveal that media play a significant moderating role in these relations, affirming their central role in electoral processes and democratic consolidation.

Table 4: Moderation Analysis

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.553	.132		4.199	.000
	Media × Voter Accessibility and Participation	.294	.061	.322	4.848	.000
	Media × Electoral Transparency and Fairness	.292	.072	.316	4.079	.000
	Media × Political Campaign Influence	-.052	.071	-.055	-.738	.461
	Media × Voter Education and Awareness	.293	.067	.319	4.393	.000

Results reveal that media coverage has a significant impact on the positive relationship between free and fair elections and public trust. The public perceives elections as transparent when news sources disclose election procedures, campaign finances, and vote counts impartially, fairly, and accurately. Media coverage of elections boosts public trust in their validity and fairness. However, skewed or sensationalized media coverage might overshadow legitimate efforts at transparency, sowing suspicion and reducing participation. Thus, the media's moderating function shows its ability to build or destroy public trust in political institutions (González, 2024; Kostelka, 2023). Media honesty and tone impact easy voting, participation, and public confidence. The media may influence people's views on voting rights, voting accessibility, and representative governance, according to the research. Media coverage of accessibility measures, including polling station locations, registration, and accommodations for minorities, enhances institutional responsiveness and increases election participation. However, spreading misinformation or excusing systemic failures may lower voter participation, particularly among marginalized groups or first-time voters. Thus, media organizations foster trust and promote voting (Daraghmi et al., 2024).

Moreover, media influence significantly moderates the positive relationship between voter education, awareness, and public trust in the electoral system.

The media is at the heart of communicating civic education, electoral literacy, and awareness campaigns in various formats—traditional media, digital media, and social platforms. Straightforward communication through the media can improve voter understanding of democratic processes, promote participation, and promote institutional process trust (Ali, 2022). However, underreported or distorted voter education content due to ideological biases can lead to flawed communication, undermining awareness efforts and public trust. Thus, the credibility and quality of media coverage are crucial to providing quality and effective voter education campaigns that meet their desired goals (Baudier et al., 2021).

In fact, the media's moderating function in these relationships bears a dynamic relationship between popular opinion and institutional performance. Media doesn't passively mirror election realities—active construction occurs in citizens' minds. Media freedom, professional journalism, and regulator protection are thus required to serve electoral processes' legitimacy. These observations have far-reaching implications for electoral management bodies, civil society, and policymakers. To deepen democratic governance, it is necessary to encourage media literacy, guarantee ethical journalism standards, and allow fact-based election coverage. This will magnify the beneficial effects of openness, accessibility, and voter education on citizens' trust, thus deepening democratic resilience in South Asia

and similar political contexts. Figure 2 depicts how media influence acts as a mediator between transparency and electoral fairness and public trust in

the electoral system. Under high media influence, the impact of transparency on public trust is reinforced.

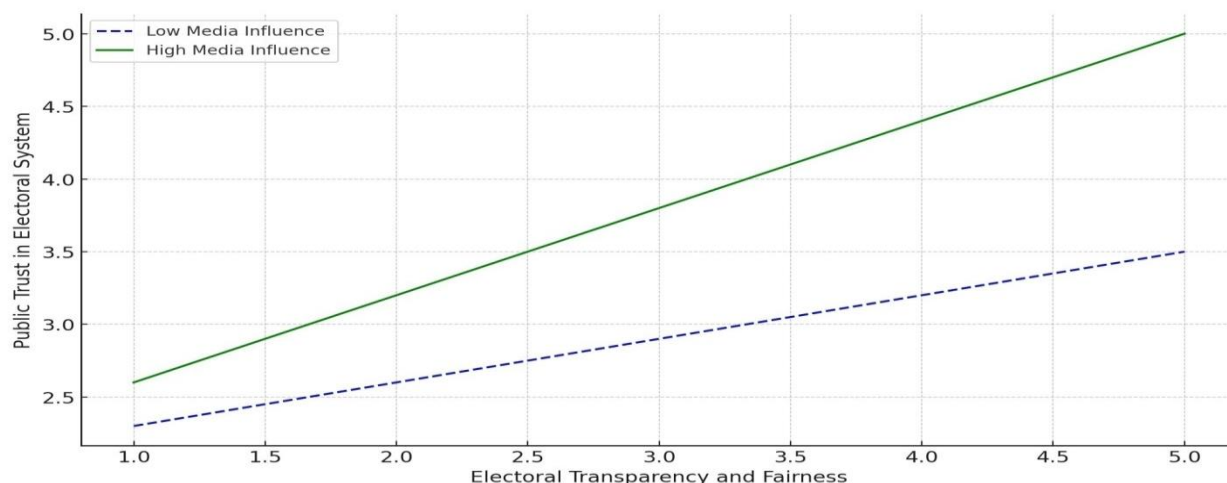


Figure 2: Moderating Effect if Media Influence on Electoral Transparency & Fairness

Source: Author’s work.

Electoral fairness and transparency and public confidence in the electoral system are both influenced directly by electoral integrity perceptions (see, Table 5). Having fair and open election processes not only generates procedural legitimacy but also adds to maximally increased public trust in democratic institutions. Public confidence in government outputs and governance mechanisms is also maximally maximized when citizens believe that elections are unmanipulated, unbiased and accountable. It is

facilitated through the belief that electoral processes are being undertaken with integrity—upholding virtues such as the independence of electoral institutions, compliance with electoral legislation, and openness in campaign finance. Strong electoral integrity perceptions therefore act as a civic and psychological driver, reinforcing the causal connection between institutional openness and public trust in election results.

Table 5: Mediation Analysis

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t-value	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	Perception of electoral integrity → Voter Accessibility and Participation	.589	.129		4.559	.000
	Perception of electoral integrity → Electoral Transparency and Fairness	.296	.062	.324	4.787	.000

Perception of electoral integrity → Political Campaign Influence	.311	.072	.335	4.328	.000
Perception of electoral integrity → Voter Education and Awareness	.306	.069	.331	4.445	.000

In the same vein, the affirmative correlation between voter accessibility and participation and public trust also rests upon the public's perception of the integrity of the electoral process. If elections are perceived to be open and accessible—i.e., free from burdensome registration procedures, limited polling place availability, or suppressive voter ID laws—citizens are more likely to be active in the democratic process. Accessibility and participation are not solely organizational matters; they are also dimensions of fairness and inclusiveness. The image of integrity here plays the role of an intermediary that makes the effect of accessibility more potent in generating trust. If people feel that the system is being controlled in a manner to encourage equitable and fair participation, then people's confidence in the system is increased. Electoral institutions that encourage access firm faith that the voice of every individual is heard—thereby instilling trust in process and outcome.

The high positive correlation between voter education and awareness and public trust in the electoral system is also strongly supported by perceived electoral integrity. A well-educated electorate is the mark of a successful democracy. It is only when citizens are adequately informed about electoral procedures, candidate agendas, legal rights, and responsibilities that they are in a good position to critically engage political processes. This intellectual engagement is heavily dependent upon the faith that elections are being conducted in a free and open manner. Properly educated voters can instill confidence by ensuring that the system is not rigged and that citizens can make an informed choice. Thus, the image of integrity is a robust instrument whereby civic education comes about as increased electoral trust.

Hypothesized associations are tested using mediation analysis. Perceptions of electoral integrity greatly amplify the association between electoral transparency, fairness, and public trust. This is in accordance with literature that identifies the

preconditional function of electoral integrity in building democratic legitimacy (Daraghmi, 2024; Garrett, 2023). Similarly, public trust is largely mediated by perceived electoral integrity in its relation to voter accessibility and participation. If voting is seen to be inclusive and accessible and if these dimensions of accessibility are integrity-based, public trust is significantly higher. According to Mutawalli (2023) and Baharun (2022), minimizing logistics and procedural impediments has the tendency to enhance democratic inclusivity, which then enhances confidence in the electoral system. Ultimately, perceived openness is linked to public trust, voter education, and awareness. Voter education extends beyond knowledge transmission to the integrity of the institution. People trust elections better under a responsible and equitable system (Kochel, 2021).

5. Conclusions

The study examines electoral institutions, public confidence, and voting behaviour in Pakistan to consolidate democracy. The study's primary premise is that transparent, accountable, and inclusive election processes enhance public trust and increase vote participation in Pakistan, thereby strengthening democratic institutions. Studying how voter education and awareness, campaign influence, election transparency and fairness, and voting accessibility and voting affect public trust in political processes is the key focus. Voter perceptions of electoral integrity regulate the link between trust, transparency, and fairness, and media moderates the relationship between public trust and voter accessibility. The results show that voter education, accessibility, and electoral transparency increase public trust in elections. Since media coverage of elections shapes public opinion, the research shows that media consumption directly affects these links. Voter education is crucial because knowledgeable people trust the democratic process more.

Additionally, media depictions of accessibility and involvement may boost or lower confidence. Voters' perceptions of voting integrity mitigate the positive association between trust in democratic systems, accessibility, education, and openness. The findings emphasize the need for transparency, accessibility, and education to foster democratic trust. Election authorities may also gain credibility by making voting more straightforward, free, and accurate and giving voters up-to-date information.

The study examines how education, accessibility, and transparency boost election trust in Pakistan. These practical proposals may help policymakers, civil society stakeholders, and election administration authorities maintain the legitimacy of democracy. By improving election integrity, our study helps sustain democratic achievements in the region and fosters more credible and inclusive democratic processes. Short-term electoral commissioners should prioritize voter education and awareness. These committees should streamline the election process and make voting facilities more accessible. In these efforts, state agencies, civic society, and electoral commissions collaborate. Since election transparency and public confidence are closely linked, consolidating them may enhance democratic trust. Medium-term electoral institutions require both financial support and independence. Increased media literacy to combat disinformation and thorough vote integrity safeguards are priorities. These approaches may promote democracy by rebuilding electoral trust. Long-term legislative frameworks must include accountability and transparency. Establishing independent electoral organizations with sufficient power and funding may boost confidence. Civic education should be an integral part of academy and community life to promote democracy. New technologies, such as web-based voter registration and secure electronic voting, may enhance participation and system integrity. These measures provide a solid and stable electoral strategy for Pakistan.

Highlights

- Examines the factors that influence public confidence in Pakistan's electoral processes.

- Voter education significantly enhances confidence in the integrity of the electoral process.
- Transparency in elections has a strong positive influence on trust.
- Media mediates the relationship between electoral transparency and public trust.

Perceived integrity mediates the relationship between transparency and electoral trust.

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