Policy and Political Participation in Developing Countries: A Review of the Literature on Sex Workers in India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan

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Introduction

What influence does public policy have on the political participation of citizens? Many social scientists over the years have successfully answered this question. They found that the government's old-age pension program in the US, namely Social Security, encourages older Americans to engage in politics by giving them more free time during retirement and by increasing their income (Campbell, 2003). Through improved educational achievement, the 1944 G.I. Bill encouraged veterans' political participation (Mettler, 2005). Recently, Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) increased voter turnout among target populations (Clinton & Sances, 2018; Haselswerdt, 2017), by boosting financial stability and, physical and mental health, which are both linked to political participation (Ojeda, 2015; Pacheco & Fletcher, 2015). Voter turnout in Mexico was greater in villages chosen at random to participate in the implementation of a new anti-poverty cash transfer program (De La O, 2013). One of the primary characteristics that set democracy apart from other systems is political participation. Participating in politics is one of the ways for the public to exercise their freedom (Brett et al., 2017). In a democratic system, the significance of public political engagement is a broad topic. Public policies enacted by the government are one of the most established strategies to encourage public participation among individuals (Alford & Friedland,1975; Hyun et al., 2016; Tang et al., 2013). As evident, many scholars of political science have successfully established the influence of public policy on the political participation of citizens. However, most of these studies were conducted in developed countries. The influence of public policy on political participation in developing countries is noticeably under-researched. As scholars have found, the difference in policy processes in developed and developing countries is immense (La Palombara, 1971). A comparison study of tax collections would quickly demonstrate the significant institutional capacity and policy process differences between developed countries and developing countries (Horowitz, 1989). In general, what has been called 'penetrative capacity,' in the literature on political development, is significantly greater in the West than in Asia, Africa, and Latin America (La Palombara, 1971).

This review explores the existing literature on the influence of public policies on the political participation of three developing countries - India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Until 1947, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh were one country. Following its independence from Britain in 1947, India and Pakistan became separate countries and in 1971 Bangladesh became a sovereign country after separating from Pakistan. They have language, culture, traditions, and social norms in common. Since these countries are geographically neighbors, they have more similarities than differences (Mandal, 2017). However, there is a notable difference in policy regarding prostitution in these three countries. In Pakistan, prostitution is criminalized. In India, laws around sex work are relaxed, yet they are not completely legal, as sex work is legal but brothels are not. In Bangladesh, sex work is completely legal and decriminalized. Regardless of the legal status, all three of these countries have heavily stigmatized implications when it comes to sex work (Khan, 2007). Given the similarities between these three countries and the contrasting laws around sex work, measuring the political participation of sex workers would give us a clearer picture of the influence policies have on the political participation of this community. As mentioned above, for this review, I have focused on the prostitution laws of these three countries. For a community, as stigmatized as prostitution, if a relationship can be established between public policy and political participation in developing countries, it would open doors for future studies in this area. As Béland (2010), noted, public policies have feedback effects on the

motivations and values of political actors to affect future policymaking. This review hopes to stimulate further research into the formulation, implementation, and outcomes of policy in emerging countries which, in turn, will have an impact on these countries' future policymaking.

Policy Feedback, Policy Result, Political Participation, and Prostitution Laws

Public policy is an organized plan of action developed and adopted, generally by a government, in response to social challenges. It is intended to address important and real-world problems (Peters, 2006). Beyond this broad description, there are multiple ways that public policy has been understood. The interests of various stakeholders must be represented by those deemed to be policymakers. The process of creating a policy involves making a conscious effort to identify its impact on citizens and map them practically (May 1992). This is why public participation in political activities rises when public policy is adequately focused on the needs of the general population (Alford & Friedland,1975). Because policies affect political participation among those impacted, public policies have the potential to influence the behavior and attitude of the general public, with implications for subsequent politics (Béland et al. 2022). Public policies have an impact on the general public's actions and attitudes, in addition to the interests and abilities of policy actors and interest groups. A growing body of research examines how policies can change the views of both, the intended group as well as others, and how they can affect political participation (May, 1992). Policies are not merely the results of political processes; they are also significant contributors that change the political environment by affecting public opinion and political involvement. According to Paul Pierson's (1993) theory, public policies have the potential to influence people's attitudes and propensity to engage in politics by providing resources that are relevant from a political standpoint and by sending "interpretive" messages to the public that are either positive or negative about their place in the polity. An example of an impact is when policies, that provide substantial benefits, encourage "protected constituencies" to fight against retrenchment (Pierson, 1993). Enabling policies, for groups like soldiers and senior citizens, are frequently generous and effectively implemented, conveying that the state views these groups as deserving. Contrarily, programs for negatively conceived groups, like the impoverished or criminals, are sparse and arbitrarily implemented, implying that the state views them as unimportant members of the polity.

According to feedback studies, public policy designs have the power to influence public political engagement in ways that go beyond what is implied by factors like socioeconomic status, level of education, and other demographic predictors of behavior (Béland et al., 2022). Scholars have looked at how policies impact participation levels, social equity, as well as various forms of engagement. Resources, mobilization, and political engagement are factors that come through experiences in an institutional setting, which includes profession, volunteer work, and affiliation to religious organizations, as well as from preadult socialization and schooling (Verba et al., 1995). According to the theory of policy feedback, policy experiences have an impact on these motivators of political engagement as well as other elements that affect political behavior, such as stigma, social norms, loss aversion, and traceability (Figure 1). Studies on the effects of current policies have looked at a range of behavioral outcomes, such as voter turnout, vote choice, and individual political behaviors outside of voting. They frequently reveal that offering advantages increases participation (Béland et al., 2022; Claggett & Pollock 2006; Verba et al., 1995). Researchers have also looked at how programs can address participation disparities that

are prevalent in many democracies. The impact of feedback on collective political action or nonpolitical activities like volunteering has also been studied.
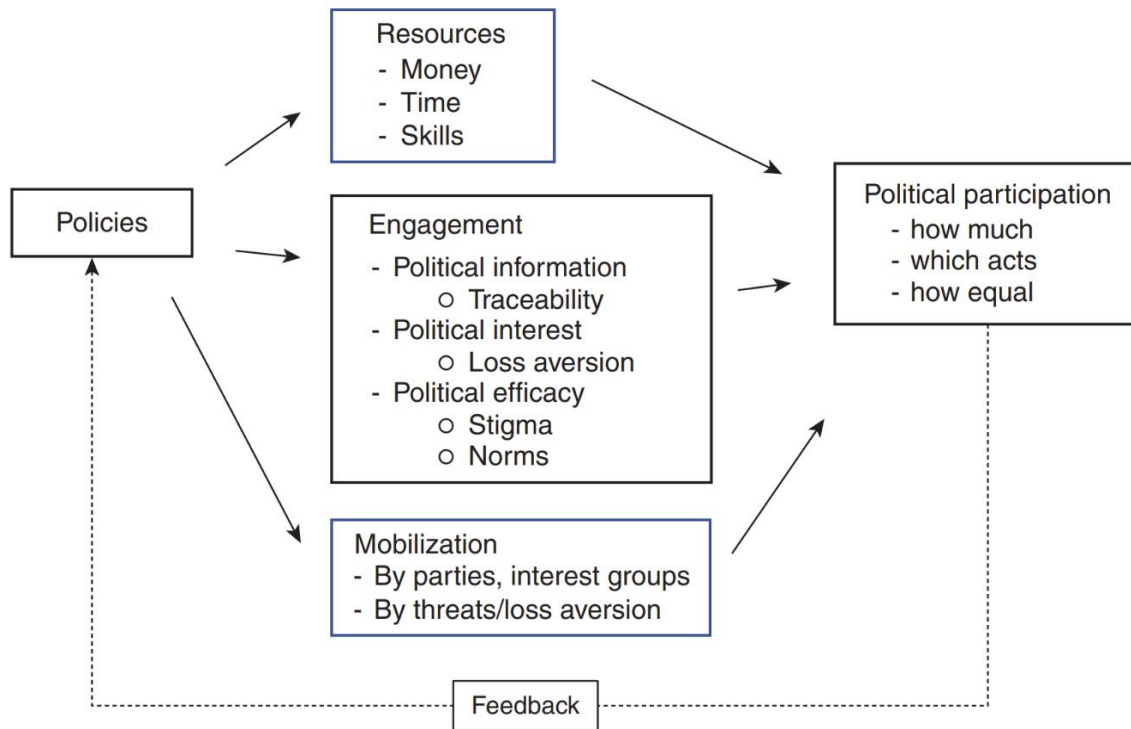

Figure 1. Influences on Engagement in Policy Process (Béland et al., 2022)

A rising body of data pointing to the crucial role of resources in explaining electoral participation, as well as political engagement, party membership, or campaign involvement and donations, has emerged from the theoretical and empirical literature on political participation. According to studies, the main socioeconomic factors that positively influence political involvement are education, income, and time (Almond & Verba, 1963; Brady et al., 1995). Political efficacy is another key idea at the heart of theories of political involvement. Political efficacy relates to people's subjective perceptions of their capacities for political participation and the value of that participation (Campbell et al., 1960). Simply said, political efficacy is what motivates many forms of political engagement since it gives participants confidence in their ability and the belief that their participation matters.

Most nations altered their sexual activity regulations following the conclusion of World War II to reflect growing tolerance for personal expression and personhood (Abel, 2014)). The sex work policy, however, did not have the same level of agreement (Skilbrei, 2019). It is a challenging endeavor, rife with methodological challenges, to categorize sex work legislation. Among the various models, this review has focused on three major categories of sex work regulation - the criminalization of prostitution, legalization aspects of sex work, and decriminalization of prostitution. In the first category, both the purchase and sale of sexual services are considered a crime. According to Vanwesenbeeck (2017), this is the most widely used policy in the world. It is used, for instance, in the United States (Dewey & St. Germain, 2015), Pakistan, Afghanistan, West Asia, South-East Asia (Lee et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2016), and several African nations

(Global Network of Sex Work Projects, 2021). The second category, legalization, recognizes or legalizes some forms of sex employment while outlawing others. For instance, India, England, and Wales allow independent escorting but not brothel operations because third parties are prohibited from being involved, but not the act of selling and buying sex itself (Campbell et al., 2019). Bangladesh, Germany, and the Netherlands serve as examples of nations that fall under the third category as they permit more types of sex work, such as operating legally sanctioned brothels (Jahnsen & Wagenaar, 2019). As a result, different countries have different numbers of sex jobs that are permitted and not subject to punishment. The focus on attempting to limit, manage, and constrain sex work, however, is universal. Decriminalizing sex work entails doing away with any sanctions against arranging, purchasing, and selling commercial sex and attempting to mainstream sex work into the workforce (Vanwesenbeeck, 2017). This paper tries to measure political participation through the political efficacy of sex workers in India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. Given the vastly different laws of prostitution in these three countries, this paper proposes a survey of sex workers through NGOs active in the communities to measure political efficacy.

Hypotheses

> **H1:** Workers in countries where sex work is decriminalized or partly legalized are more likely to think their government is responsive to their issues.
>
> I expect workers in countries like Bangladesh and India to be more likely to indicate that their government is responsive to their issues compared to the workers in Pakistan where sex work is completely illegal.
>
> **H2:** Workers in countries where sex work is criminalized are less likely to indicate their government is responsive toward their issues.

Overview of Prostitution Laws in India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan

When British colonization in South Asia dissolved in 1947, it resulted in the emergence of two separate nations, India and Pakistan, along with a shift in political borders and the distribution of other resources (Bhattacharya 2018; Mondal, 2017). The Dominion of Pakistan, which at the time consisted of two regions on either side of India, was made up of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the People's Republic of Bangladesh. The Dominion of India is now known as the Republic of India. In 1971, Bangladesh became a sovereign nation by separating from Pakistan (Mondal, 2017). Having remained under the tutelage of the British, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India have more or less identical histories and inherited the same institutions. Naturally, these three countries have more in common than just parliamentary systems and electoral systems. The language, cuisine, ethnic groups, and customs all continue to be the same.

However, they have vastly different laws regarding prostitution (Ballhatchet, 1980). In India, prostitution is partially legalized as they have legalized sex work, but operating brothels remain illegal. In Pakistan, prostitution is completely illegal whereas in Bangladesh prostitution is legal.

India: In both the past and the present, prostitution in India has taken many different forms. Following independence, India adopted the toleration system under the 1956 Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act (SITA), later amended to the 1986 Immoral Traffic in Women and Girls (Prevention) Act (PITA). These provisions are meant to make it difficult, but not impossible, for

women to practice prostitution. However, they do not address prostitution-related violence or ways to address it (Gangoli, 2006). The prostitution judgment from 1997 (Jain vs. Union of India, 1997) shaped the public policy sphere. Prostitution practiced privately is not prohibited in India, but soliciting it, performing it officially, and operating a brothel is criminal. Despite the illegality of public prostitution, there are as many as 20 million commercial sex workers in India (Gangoli, 2006).

Pakistan: According to Pakistan's position, prostitution is illegal for clients (through charges of fornication), sex workers (through soliciting and fornication), as well as pimps and traffickers. The Pakistan Penal Code 1860 makes any selling or buying of a person for prostitution illegal; both actions are punishable by a maximum of twenty-five years in prison and a fine.

Bangladesh: One of the few Muslim nations in the world where prostitution is permitted in Bangladesh. Provisions of various laws forbid child prostitution, forced prostitution, solicitation, and the keeping of unlicensed brothels; however, there are a total of 20 official government-sanctioned brothels that operate in the country. In 1999, the Bangladesh Supreme Court authorized the practice and sale of all sex acts involving adults (aged 21 and over). Despite these nations' similarities, there are significant disparities in their prostitution laws, hence any variation in political effectiveness can be attributed to variations in public policy. Both Pakistan and Bangladesh have a majority Muslim population. Yet their respective sex work regulations are fundamentally opposite. As a result, religion as a variable is not considered in this review.

Conclusion
This review seeks to shed light on the existing literature on how political participation and public policy are related in developing nations. Concentrating on prostitution laws in India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan to understand the relationship. Studies have shown that public policy designs may affect citizens' political participation in ways that go beyond what is predicted by aspects like their socioeconomic position, level of education, and demographic determinants of behavior (Béland et al., 2022). The hypotheses proposed in this study find support through an examination of the nuanced prostitution laws in India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan and previous literature. Despite their shared colonial past and cultural similarities, these nations have divergent approaches to regulating sex work. The distinct legal landscapes offer a rich context for exploring how differing policy environments influence citizens' perceptions of government responsiveness to their issues. Studies have further shown how public policy determines citizens' place in politics (Pierson, 1993). Therefore, this review concluded based on previous literature that a group as stigmatized as sex workers in emerging nations with positive policies will have greater political efficacy than those in nations with restrictive or unfavorable public policies. The political efficacy of sex workers in India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan is explored in this research to measure their political participation. Scholars have previously researched the impact public policy has on political participation. The reasons why this paper hypothesizes greater political efficacy from workers in countries where sex work is legal and lack of political efficacy among workers from countries that have criminalized prostitution can be explained with policy feedback literature. Alford & Friedland, (1975) note that making a deliberate effort to identify and practically map out a policy's objectives is an essential part of the design process. This is why when public policy is appropriately focused on the demands of the general community, involvement in political activities increases (Alford & Friedland,1975). Public policies have the

potential to shape citizens' attitudes toward their government, with implications for subsequent politics, because they increase or decrease levels of political participation among those affected (Béland et al., 2022). According to Paul Pierson's (1993) theory, policies have an impact on people's attitudes and propensity to participate in politics by giving them access to resources that are pertinent from a political standpoint and by conveying to the general public "interpretive" messages that are either positive or negative about their place in the polity. Policies that offer significant benefits, foster "protected constituencies" that fight against retrenchment, which is an illustration of the self-reinforcing effect. Pierson (1993) further theorizes that a country's constant generosity and successful implementation of policies for positively created groups, such as soldiers and senior citizens, conveys that it believes these groups to deserve. On the other hand, programs for groups that are seen unfavorably, such as the poor or criminals (in this review sex workers), are sparsely and arbitrarily adopted, suggesting that the state sees these groups as minor contributors to the polity. The capacity of public policy designs to affect people's political engagement goes beyond those predicted by their socioeconomic status, degree of education, and other demographic predictors of behavior, according to feedback studies (Béland et al., 2022). Previous studies have examined the effects of policies on participation rates, equity, and other forms of engagement. Resources, mobilization, and political involvement are elements that result from institutional experiences, such as employment, volunteer labor, and membership in religious institutions, as well as from early socialization and education (Verba et al., 1995). The relationship between a person's social and political environment and, the development or decrease of their political effectiveness is less well understood. A notable exception to this rule is policy feedback studies, which can help determine whether participants' interactions and experiences with government efforts overshadow established drivers of involvement such as education, time, and money (Watson, 2015). The policy feedback approach contends that there is a dynamic interaction between citizens and governmental policies. In addition to influencing who is elected and the policies that are implemented subsequently, voting by citizens also influences the policies that individuals like, how they view the government and democracy, and even how likely they are to vote in the future (Campbell, 2012). Therefore, it seems sensible to assume that a group as stigmatized as sex workers will have more political efficacy in developing countries with favorable public policies than those with restricted or negative public policies. Although the literature on policy feedback has grown significantly in recent years (Campbell, 2012; Larsen, 2019; Ziller, 2019), the notion that public policy can influence how people engage in politics is an established theory. One of the founders of the policy feedback technique, Schattschneider (1935), is commonly cited for his assertion that "new policies create new politics." Later, Schattschneider (1960) questioned the notion that poor people themselves were to blame for their apparent political apathy and lack of political engagement. Perhaps the reason lower classes stayed out of politics was not a lack of civic or moral standards, but rather a lack of political opportunities to mobilize or engage their political participation (Mettler & Soss, 2004). According to Paul Pierson (1993), resource effects and interpretive effects are the two primary mechanisms through which policy feedback takes place. Resources required for political engagement can be (re-)distributed by social policies: Political engagement may be encouraged by an increase in the recipient's capacity to participate (in terms of time and money), depending on the size or generosity of rewards (Campbell, 2012). Since a policy is directed at a program that one experiences personally, that individual may be more interested in politics and more inclined to participate in it. Politics can be followed and studied to increase internal political effectiveness. According to Pierson (1993), policies can also have interpretive or cognitive

consequences on citizens. These effects are likely the most significant in terms of political efficacy, especially for the external aspect. For instance, a social policy may indicate to people or groups that they are entitled to and deserving of support, and that they have a right to specific benefits or services, depending on how it is designed. Citizens' standing can be shown through the messages that policies deliver to them. The messages policies send to citizens can provide information about their standing within society (Schneider and Ingram, 2008). Drawing upon the extensive body of literature exploring the nexus between public policy and citizen engagement, this review noted the profound impact of policy frameworks on individuals' perceptions of government responsiveness and their position within society. Specifically, the stark contrast in policies concerning sex work across India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan illuminates the disparate political efficacy experienced by marginalized communities, such as sex workers. This review highlights the imperative of analyzing public policy frameworks in assessing political efficacy among marginalized groups. Moreover, this study advocates for further exploration of policy feedback theory within diverse socio-political contexts of marginalized communities. By recognizing its relevance and potential to inform evidence-based policy interventions, policymakers can advance efforts aimed at fostering inclusivity and equity in governance. The conclusions drawn from this study underscore the need for continued research into the intricate interplay between public policy, citizen engagement, and social equity, paving the way for more informed and effective policy-making processes.

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