Political Participation of the Educated in Pakistan

Ifra Mushtaq*
Muhammad Abiodullah**
Rafaqat Ali Akber**

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Abstract

This study examined the participatory behavior of the individuals in the political system focusing on their socio economic resource level (SERL). Three categories based on education and income were identified as high, middle, and low SERL referring to their respective education and income level accordingly. Drawing from theories of public sphere and deliberative democracy it was premised that individual belonging to high SERL would likely to consume more of news media and more involved in political talk therefore tend to participate more in the political activities. It was found out that indeed high SERL group, consumes more news media, is more engaged in political conversations and political participation but the difference is not impressionable. They were found to engaged more in passive kind of participatory activities rather than active or pro active kinds.

Key words: Political participation, socio-economic resource level (SERL), political conversation.

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Introduction

Every developed and consolidated democracy has emerged from mass democratic culture. Researchers are now convinced that for sustainable and effective democracy mass democratic political culture is needed (Sargent, 2008). The democratic culture comprising of citizens who are actively interested in public affairs,

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*PhD Scholar, Institute of Communication Studies, Punjab University, Lahore
**Assistant Professor, Institute of Education and Research, Punjab University, Lahore
***Professor, Institute of Education and Research, Punjab University, Lahore

informed about important events and decisions and participates in civic and political affairs (Inkeles, 1974; Harber, 1997; Huber & Harkavy, 2007). Citizens' involvement is a necessary condition for participation, which is required to influence or to help implement the governmental policies (Box, 2007; Flores, 2005). Participation means "those actions of citizens that attempt to influence the structure of government, the selection of government officials, or the policies of government or to support government and politics" (Janda, Berry, Goldman, & Hula, 2012, p. 155). This includes both conventional and unconventional participation. Conventional participation refers to the routine peaceful way of voicing concerns using established institutions of the government and acceptable in the democratic culture (Vorhölter, 2010; Youth Partnership (Organization), 2009; Axford & Browning, 2002). Education is found to be the strongest predictor of conventional participation evident from the fact that those who protest against the governmental policies often tend to be better educated (Jenlink, 2009; Perrin, 2006). According to the standard socioeconomic model of participation socioeconomic status is strongly related to political participation. People with more education and higher incomes tend to participate more because they are more conscious of the impact of politics on their lives and aware of the legitimate ways to influence government actions (Janda, et al., 2012; Wong, 2006; Kim, 2008).

Theories of deliberative democracy (Button & Mattson, 1999; Dahlgreen, 2002; Cook, Carpini, & Jacobs, 2007; Gutman & Thompson, 2004) and public sphere (Habermas, 1992; Dahlgreen & Sparks, 1991; Gastil J. , 2007; Bennett & Entman, 2001) posit that media use and political conversations motivate people for expressing their opinions and preferences by active participation in the political process. Those who are more informed due to news media viewing are more likely to engage in political conversations frequently and motivated to actively express their preferences by political participation (Wyatt, Katz, & Kim, 2000; Eveland, Morey, & Hively, 2009; Dahlgreen, 2002).

Political conversation is accepted as an essential element of any democratic political system, aptly put by John Dewey that "democracy begins in conversation" (Dewey, 1997). The association of conversation and participation is explained by the deliberative theorists as: individuals get information from media, they in their everyday conversations discuss and exchange views on it, these discussions help them to better understand the issue thereby form clear opinion about it and in turn express their opinions or decisions in form of some political action i.e. participation. (The deliberative potencial of political discussion, 2000; Bennett, 2003). Conversation means any ordinary talk that occurs between people on various topics, oftentimes purely expressive, non-purposive and non-persuasive (Conover, Searing,

& Crewe, 2000; Eveland, Morey, & Hively, 2009; Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1987; Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1991; Rojas H. , 2008).These everyday ordinary conversations provide opportunities to exchange information and viewpoints regarding the issues of common concern affecting their community, and more importantly expose individuals to legitimate ways on how to deal with those issues and participate effectively in civic and political matters (Gastil & Dillard, 1999; Klofstad, 2007; McClurg, 2003; McLeod, Moy, E. M., R. L., & et al;Rojas, Shah, J., M., Keum, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2005) 1999). Habermas' (1984) describes conversation as a 'communicative action', according to which individuals in society try to reach common understanding and to coordinate actions by reasoned argument, consensus, and cooperation rather than strategic action strictly in pursuit of specific goals everyday ordinary conversation between the members of a society is clearly distinguished from 'strategic actions' in the political system, like formal discussions or rule based rational debates for achieving specific goals. Thus, well informed engaged citizens who discuss political and civic matters contribute to the effective working of the government.

Researchers and political theorist are divided on the issue what they term political conversation; for some it only means formal, strategic talk as done in legislative assemblies or other organizational forums following certain rules and regulations (Mutz, 2006; Eliasoph, 1998; Schudson, 1997); while for others every informal conversations among people discussing something like news report relating to government etc. is also a political talk (Wyatt, et al., 2000; Anderson, et al., 1996;). Talk leads to recruitment: How discussions about politics and current events increase civic participation, 2007). Despite the differences, all the theorists who emphasize on the central role of conversation in democracy do not see any difference between ordinary talk and political conversation.

Political conversation then is the spontaneous casual talk, done voluntarily between private individuals and does not aim to achieve any predetermine goals. Connection of ordinary conversation or casual talk to the overall political system comes from the fact that these conversations serve as a bridge between citizen's personal experiences and the political world outside. It is through conversation that people understand each other and make sense of the world around them. Though these conversations are done in private spheres of the people but the input i.e. information, topics, and issues, comes from outside political world and political system and in turn output goes back to the political system and political world in the form of public opinion, issue position, voting preference and participatory activities (Kim, Wyatt, & Katz, 1999).

Considerable amount of research has been done examining the relation between frequency of political conversation and political participation and consistently showed the positive association between the both (Katz, et al., 1955;). Talk leads to recruitment: How discussions about politics and current events increase civic participation, 2007; News, Talk, Opinion, Participation: The Part Played by Conversation in Deliberative Democracy, 1999; Understanding deliberation: The effects of discussion networks on participation in a public forum, 1999; Information and expression in a digital age modeling Internet effects on civic participation , 2005)

Political theorists and researchers insist that political conversations have a positive impact on civil and political participation (Jacobs, Cook, & Carpini, 2009; McAfee, 2009; Gastil J. , 2007). Theories of public sphere explain that in the presence of news media the association between conversation and political participation becomes even stronger because media "unifies and invigorate conversations" (Jacobs, Cook, & Carpini, 2009; Bartkus & Davis, 2009; Gastil J. , 2007; Klofstad, 2007; Merritt & McCombs, 2008). Media provides material for conversation and encourages people to engage in more informed and reasoned discussions and thus, motivate them for active political participation.

The level of motivation varies, depending upon the socio economic resource level (SERL) of the individuals. The high SERL group i.e. having high education and income level behaves differently when comes to active political participation as compared to those belonging to low SERL group. The high SERL group is expected to more actively participate in political process order to influence the political decision affecting people directly or indirectly (Verba, et al., 1987; Schroeder, 2008).

Presently media, especially the television news channels have become the key channel for communication and citizen's engagement. The political information and diverse viewpoints obtained through television news channels initiate political conversations among the people. Frequent discussions about political and civic issues of common concern enhance their understanding of the issues, as well as, motivate them for active political participation. Educated and well off being more resourceful, financially and intellectually, constitute the major audience of the political communication on the news channels therefore, considered as strong predictor of participation. This linear relationship between high socio-economic resource level, media use, political conversation and opinion formation, and consequently participation, is substantiated by many researchers. This study aims to verify the extent of prevalence of the same relationship in Pakistan. Following hypotheses will be tested in this study:

H1:   High SERL group tends to consume greater amount of political programmes onnews media as compared to the low and middle SERL groups.

H2:   High SERL group is more likely to engage in political conversations as compared tolow and middle SERL groups.

H3:   High socio economic resource level (SERL) group of citizens are more likely to be involved in conventional modes of political participationas compared to low and middle SERL groups.

Methodology

The survey was conducted among 500 respondents in five cities of Pakistan: Lahore, Peshawar, Karachi, Rawalpindiand Islamabad. The survey questionnaire was designed to assess the patterns and amount of news media (TV news channels) use, conversations, and participation by the respondents. Demographic information about the respondents included age, gender, education, and family income.

For news media use behavior, three aspects were taken: the frequencies of television news viewing, talk shows viewing, and channel preference for news channels.

For mapping the conversational pattern six loci were identified i.e. home, work place, recreational places, shopping places, religious places, and telephone/internet. Eight topics of conversation were selected from everyday casual non-purposive talk goes among individuals. The topics are politics (national and regional or local political matters including discussing personalities), international politics (about foreign countries and their affairs), economy and inflation, law and order (crimes also), personal (related to self, family or job/business), health and education, religion, and entertainment. " A set of questions, asking the for the amount of conversation on the eight identified topics at each loci mentioned above was included in the questionnaire. These questions made 48 items in total.

For participation eight items were included in the questionnaire as: (i)Written a letter to the editor, (ii) Called/e-mailed in a TV/ Radio programme, (iii) Contacted any people' representative, (iv) Attended a public meeting, (v) Joined a rally or march, (vi) Been part of a political campaign, (vii) Made a donation, and (viii) Voted on 18th February, 2008.

SERL scale was constructed from education and family income variables. First, the education and family income variables were dichotomized: For education, BA and above were given higher score (=1) and the others including missing cases were given a lower score (=0); income up to Rs.30,000 were given lower score (=0) and those having

income above 30,000 were given higher score (=1). Consequently, the higher scorers in education and income were classified as "High SERL", low scorers in both education and income as "Low SERL" and the remaining as "Middle SERL"..

Results and Discussion

The questionnaire was given to 500 individuals out of whom 338 responded positively. From the demographic data obtained, first of all the three SERL groups were computed. It turned out as follows: the high SERL (N= 35   or 10.4%), "Low SERL" (N=119 or 35.2 %), and the "Middle SERL" (N= 184 or 54.4 %).

Media use pattern indicates that people of high income and education seem to be more interested in the political and civic affairs and they prefer to watch news channels, news bulletins and political talk shows regularly indicating that they keep themselves updated on the current affairs and are likely to be more informed than rest of the two groups.

Percentage of Media use among the SERLs

Media use	SERL		
	Low	Middle	High
News Channel	50%	58%	80%
News	66.7%	45.9%	34%
Talk Shows	7.4	19.2%	43%

So far our findings support our hypothesis that high SERL group is more interested in political and civic affairs. The media use pattern of middle SERL group resembles more closely to that of the low SERL group.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of media use among the three SERL groups

Media Use	SERL					
	Low		Middle		High	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
TV Hours	1.5	1.0	1.7	1.0	1.9	1.0
News Channel	3.1	1.6	3.5	1.6	4.1	1.4
News Bulletins	3.7	1.7	4.0	1.5	4.4	1.5
Talk Shows	2.3	1.1	2.9	1.3	3.6	1.4
Mean viewing	2.6	1.4	3.0	1.3	3.5	1.4

A very significant difference seen between the high SERL group and the other two groups is that of talk shows viewing. Low and middle SERL groups do not appear to be interested in political discussions on television. The comparative view of the preferences in the television viewing among SERL groups is shown in figure 1.

These findings seem to agree with the behavior of high SERL group mentioned by Janda, Berry, Goldman, & Hula, 2012.
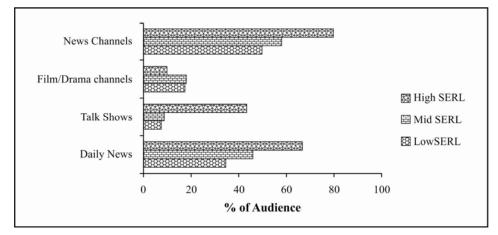

Figure 1: Graph comparing amount of consumption of news media programmes of the three SERL groups.

Descriptive statistics of all the eight conversational topics at each loci of conversations obtained for all the three SERL groups: high, middle, and low provide an overview of their conversational patterns.

Table 3a: Descriptive statistics of the eight conversational topics at six different loci among low SERL group

Conversational Topics	Home		Work		Recreation		Shopping		Religious places		Online	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Politics	0.55	0.62	0.58	0.69	0.28	0.58	0.33	0.58	0.20	0.53	0.25	0.55
Other countries	0.58	0.59	0.55	0.64	0.32	0.58	0.41	0.62	0.15	0.39	0.14	0.35
Economy/ inflation	1.40	0.71	1.26	0.71	0.93	0.80	0.98	0.80	0.39	0.68	0.77	0.84
Law & Order	1.24	0.71	1.20	0.68	0.88	0.72	0.87	0.77	0.43	0.71	0.70	0.73
Personal	1.11	0.76	0.93	0.72	0.66	0.71	0.61	0.73	0.27	0.56	0.76	0.79
Edu&Health	1.19	0.69	1.08	0.71	0.74	0.77	0.76	0.79	0.29	0.62	0.56	0.72
Religion	1.29	0.65	1.14	0.63	0.85	0.73	0.73	0.75	0.88	0.80	0.70	0.73
Entertainment	0.60	0.66	0.58	0.66	0.47	0.65	0.35	0.58	0.16	0.47	0.30	0.55

For low SERL group work (0.58) and home (0.55) appeared as the places where most of the talk takes place. The most talked about topics came out to be inflation (1.40) and religion (1.29) followed by law & order (1.24) and education &

health (1.19). Politics (0.55) and about other countries (0.58) appeared as the least discussed topics (Table 3a).

Table 3b: Descriptive statistics of the eight conversational topics at six different loci among middle SERL group

Conversation al Topics	Home		Work		Recreation		Shopping		Religious places		Online	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Politics	1.05	0.62	0.85	0.74	0.60	0.72	0.54	0.75	0.39	0.63	0.57	0.76
Other countries	1.06	0.58	0.88	0.67	0.66	0.74	0.65	0.77	0.39	0.64	0.66	0.79
Economy/ inflation	1.48	0.61	1.29	0.67	1.00	0.76	1.19	0.79	0.63	0.79	0.87	0.82
Law & Order	1.54	0.58	1.37	0.70	1.06	0.80	1.05	0.82	0.67	0.78	0.92	0.83
Personal	1.32	0.70	1.07	0.76	0.86	0.77	0.67	0.74	0.45	0.68	0.94	0.83
Edu& Health	1.45	0.63	1.34	0.74	1.07	0.79	0.84	0.80	0.56	0.72	0.82	0.81
Religion	1.34	0.68	1.12	0.71	0.98	0.80	0.67	0.74	0.85	0.87	0.77	0.76
Entertainment	0.95	0.72	0.96	0.74	0.92	0.80	0.55	0.71	0.33	0.63	0.64	0.76

For middle SERL group also home (1.05) and work (0.85) turned out to be the place of most conversations. As expected, law &order (1.54), inflation (1.48) and education & health (1.45) followed by religion (1.34) turned out to be the most discussed topics. Politics (1.05) and entertainment (0.95) appear to be the least discussed topic (Table 3b).

Table 3c: Descriptive statistics of the eight conversational topics at six different loci among high SERL group

Conversation al Topics	Home		Work		Recreation		Shopping		Religious places		Online	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Politics	1.29	0.71	1.08	0.80	1.07	0.75	1.00	0.91	0.61	0.83	0.76	0.74
Other countries	0.93	0.77	1.08	0.70	0.62	0.68	0.66	0.81	0.36	0.73	1.00	0.89
Economy/ inflation	1.66	0.55	1.29	0.86	1.38	0.68	1.32	0.90	0.57	0.69	0.96	0.84
Law & Order	1.45	0.74	1.56	0.65	1.20	0.81	1.11	0.96	1.00	0.94	0.58	0.76
Personal	1.35	0.69	1.15	0.73	0.83	0.79	0.77	0.82	0.48	0.69	0.67	0.78
Edu& Health	1.37	0.61	1.23	0.65	0.93	0.88	0.66	0.77	0.59	0.73	0.78	0.89
Religion	1.19	0.56	1.15	0.73	0.75	0.75	0.57	0.74	0.93	0.86	0.63	0.88
Entertainment	1.00	0.72	1.00	0.82	1.07	0.84	0.83	0.85	0.62	0.86	0.56	0.75

Same pattern of loci was observed among high SERL group. Home (1.29) and work place (1.08) are the places where most of the talk takes place. Inflation/economy (1.66) and law & order (1.45) followed by politics (1.37) turned out to be the most discussed topics. Entertainment (1.00) and other countries (0.93) seem to be the least discussed topics (Table 3c).

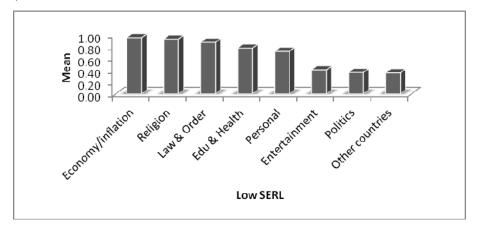For quick comparative view of the proportion of the amount of the conversations on the eight topics among the SERL groups are shown in figures 2a, 2b, and 2c.

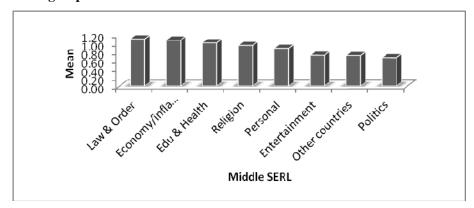**Figure 2a: Amount of conversation on the eight topics at six different loci by low SERLgroup**

Figure 2b: Amount of conversation on the eight topics at six different loci by middle SERL group
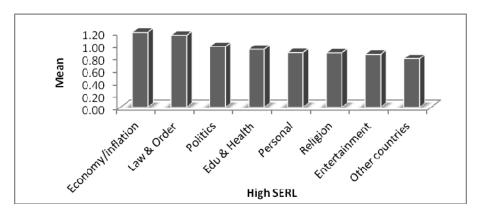
Figure 2c: Amount of conversation on the eight topics at six different loci by high SERL group
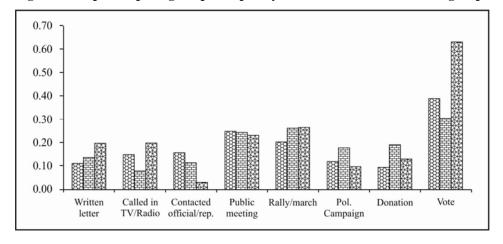
       From the graphs it becomes quite obvious that high SERL group is most engaged in conversations overall. It is seen that amount of conversation specifically on politics is highest among high SERL group. The conversational pattern indicates that the low and middle SERL groups are more concerned with law & order and inflation. After these two topics they talk about religion. They seem to be least bothered with politics. High SERL group seems to be equally concerned about the both issues, but instead of religion they talk about politics; religion comes in the less discussed topics. It appears that low and middle SERL groups when discuss issues like inflation and law & order they talk about religion. It suggests that they tend to look towards God for the solution to their problems and do not seem to comprehend politics as an instrument to solve their problems. It is quite encouraging that high SERL group i.e. individuals having high education realize the relation between problems and politics. It appears that they are aware of the link between government's policies and public woes. The conversational pattern of high SERL supports our hypothesis as well as, goes well with the arguments posited by various deliberative theorists like Cook, Carpini, & Jacobs; Bennett & Entman; to name few of them. Keith's observations in relation to the broadcast media that, better informed people more likely to indulge in political conversations is similar to our findings (Keith, 2010).

Table 4 - Descriptive statistics of participatory activities of the three SERL groups

Modes of Participation	SERL		
	Low%	Middle %	High %
Written a letter to a newspaper, magazine, or TV program	11	14	20
Called in a radio or TV talk show	14.7	8	20
Written, called, or otherwise contacted a people's representative	15.4	11.6	3.3
Attended a public meeting	24.3	24.4	23.3
Taken part in public protest rally or march	19.9	26.2	26.7
Been part of a political campaign	11.8	18.0	10.0
Donated money to any political party or organization	9.6	19.2	13.3
Voted in general elections	39.0	30.8	63.3
Mean Participation	1.46	1.52	1.80
Standard Deviation	2.10	1.52	1.73

Participation the ultimate determinant of the effective democratic system was examined among the three SERL groups. It turned out that 63.3% of the high SERL group appeared for voting, as compared to the 30.8% of middle, and 39 % of low SERL groups. High SERL group's participation profile shows that 20% of them are involved in writing letters to the editors and calling in the TV/ Radio show. Participation in public meetings and rallies/march is encouraging 23.3% and 26.7%, almost equal to those of low and middle SERL groups. They appear to donate less only 13.3%

Figure 5-Graph comparing the participatory activities of the three SERL groups

The mean participation shows that high SERL group is the most active political participant. To examine the nature of participation factor analysis was performed. By principle component analysis factors were extracted. Two factors each for low and middle SERL groups were obtained. In both of the cases first factor included all the participatory activities and voting was shown in the second factor. This does not explain much except that voting is considered a different form of participation as compared to all other ways.

For high SERL group three factors were extracted. The factors indicate three levels of involvement in participatory activities and they were identified as Passive participation, Active participation, and Proactive participation. The passive participation includes writing letters to the editor, calling in TV/Radio, attend public meetings, join rally, and vote in elections.

All these activities can be done leisurely without have to take responsibility or being becoming too prominent. These activities can be done remaining anonymous. This kind of participation indicates psychological involvement. Active participation– making donations for political purposes and being a part of political campaign, refers to initiative taken for participation by investing time and money and to a certain degree commitment.

Table 5: Direct Oblimin Rotated Pattern Matrix of the Participation Variables and Correlation Coefficients among the Factors

Modes of Participation	Participatory Factors		
	Passive	Active	Proactive
Written letter to editor	.753	-.421	.037
Called in TV/Radio	.682	-.457	.121
Public meeting	.805	.313	-.261
Rally/march	.729	.439	-.235
Vote	.424	-.496	-.284
Joined Pol. Campaign	.445	.525	.332
Donation	.187	.811	.392
Contacted official/rep.	.231	-.510	.739
% of Variance	33.47	26.44	12.88
Eigen Value	2.67	2.11	1.03

The proactive participation i.e., contacting official or people's representative, is most significant. It refers to a deeper sense of civic responsibility and greater initiative to exercise power over government for the sake of solving public problems. The pro-active participation is suggestive of higher level of political efficacy and awareness of the political system.

The descriptive statistics of the three kinds of participations shows that the passive type of participation is highest among the high SERL group (1.53) and lowest among the middle SERL group (1.04), closer to middle SERL group (1.10). Active participation is higher among middle SERL (0.37) followed by high SERL (0.23) and nearly equal among low SERL (0.20). The most imperative type, the pro active participation is visible among the low SERL (0.16), to lesser amount in middle SERL (0.12) but quite low among high SERL quite contrary to what expected in the light of socio economic status model of participation (Janda, Berry, Goldman, & Hula, 2009).

Table 6: Mean participation of the three SERL groups regarding three kinds of participation

| SERL | Participation | | | | | |
| | Passive | | Active | | Pro Active | |
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Low	1.10	1.47	0.20	0.55	0.16	0.37
Middle	1.04	1.22	0.37	0.66	0.12	0.32
High	1.53	1.53	0.23	0.57	0.03	0.18

In the context of Pakistani society, the pro active participation, which refers to contacting officials or representatives, among low and middle SERL groups might mean contacting for seeking favor in routine matters and not necessarily influencing political decisions or policies, but among high SERL group this might be taken as for influencing governmental decisions or policies. This suggests that high SERL group does not tend to involve pro actively political participation. However, it evident from the empirical data that people in general are not inclined towards political participation, or interested in politics except for the small segment of high SERL group which constitutes only 10% of the total population. This behavior seems to support video malaise theory, according to which too much television viewing, especially the political programming, alienate people from political participation (Norris, 2010). For better understanding of the pattern of participation mean paired difference test was conducted. The results are summarized in Table 6.

Table 7 - Paired mean difference between the three types of participation among the SERL groups

| SERL | Participation | | | | | |
| | Passive – Active | | Passive – Pro Active | | Active – Pro Active | |
	t	df	T	df	t	Df
Low	8.429*	131	8.494*	131	1.096	131
Middle	9.069*	170	11.101*	170	6.045*	170
High	4.573*	29	5.467*	29	1.795	29

No significant difference was found in the level of active and pro active kind of participation among the low and high SERL. Overall the participation pattern of all the three SERL groups appears to be nearly the same i.e. more passive or non-committed one.

The high SERL group appeared most vigorous participant as voter reaching the limit of 80%. To get the idea how all the groups participate by opting ways other than voting the participation pattern was examined without including voting option. One way ANOVA was used to get the comparison between the three levels. The findings revealed that there no significant difference between the level of participation between the three groups, however, high SERL group shows a slightly but insignificant increased level of participation even without voting. It is quite contrary to the findings of Junda and his colleagues claiming that high SERL group is likely to be the major participant group. One of the explanations of low political participation or no participate at all could be the lack of basic knowledge of politics and lack of necessary skills required to utilize the available means of participation as pointed out by Utter, especially among the low and middle SERL groups. (Utter, 2010). Our findings with respect to participation do not fit well with the observed behavior in the western societies as observed by many deliberative democracy proponents like Gutman, Dahlgreen and Kim to name a few might be due to poorly developed public sphere, a space where people come together and exchange ideas and information without coercion and on their own free will open to all without any kind of distinction. Public sphere lies between public and private spheres, not owned by government. It is not a physical space rather it is a happening came about by people's interaction (Habermas J. , 1991). Television channels are trying to create that public sphere but yet it is in its formative phases. Still television news channels are engaging people in political discussions and motivating them for participation.

Table 8: One way ANOVA for comparing level of Participation excluding Voting option

Participation Level	M	SD	F-value	p-value
Low SERL	0.71	1.27	0.299	0.742
Middle SERL	0.73	1.08		
High SERL	0.90	1.29		

Conclusion

It is therefore, concluded that media has not yet been able to convince people that politics is relevant to their everyday practical lives. Low and middle SERL group seems to have no idea how politics can cause or relieve their problems. They tend to find recluse in religion. Whereas, high SERL group who appear to understand the link between politics and its effect on their lives are yet not prepared to take a pro-active

role and participate in political process to influence it the better interest of masses. Political intolerant culture and tradition of vengeance and victimization might be one of the reasons. Improvement in education system is required to develop democratic attitudes among the people. Moreover, media content, which is more discussed with entertainment among low and high SERL groups, need to be improved to raise political consciousness among ordinary citizens and impressing upon the relevance of politics to them. This requires competent and well trained media personnel.

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