

Exploring Frameworks for Civic Engagement in the Global South

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Abstract

Democracy depends on public participation, yet Pakistan has seen declining voter turnout over the last two general elections in 2018 and 2024 with participation rates at 52.1% and 47.6%, respectively. In a country where the median age is under 21, declining youth engagement in politics is a serious threat to democratic processes. The Civic Club Pilot Project, funded by the Institute of International Education's Centennial Fellowship Program, aims to promote civic engagement among the youth in public schools in Karachi. The goal is to intervene from an early age to provide them with an opportunity to learn more about relevant issues and to give them a platform to take small localized action. This paper uses this larger intervention to explore three potential models for promoting civic engagement: a hands-on approach that focuses on raising awareness; an in-depth engagement through summer camps; and an independent school-based model focusing on capacity-building for teachers and students. A one-group pre-test and post-test approach was used to evaluate the first two, while a randomized control trial was used to evaluate the third model. Based on findings from these, the next phase focuses on an in-depth qualitative evaluation of the civic club model to be run in selected public schools during the academic year 2025-26. Consolidated findings from all of these will result in a broader framework for civic engagement, rooted in the local realities will add great value to the field.

Keywords: capacity-building; civic Clubs; community engagement; public education; student leadership