

GOVERNANCE UNCOVERED EPISODE 62 TRANSCRIPT

Democracy under Inequality in Rural Pakistan

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In this episode, we have the pleasure of listening to Shandana Khan Mohmand, a Research Fellow at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, and an Associate Fellow at the Institute of Development and Economic Alternatives in Pakistan.

Shandana and host Ellen Lust met to discuss Shandana's book, *Crafty Oligarchs, Savvy Voters: Democracy under Inequality in Rural Pakistan*, which was published by Cambridge University Press in 2019. The book explores political engagement in rural Pakistan, blending perspectives on clientelism and voting in the global South. Shandana starts by examining the contrasting political dynamics in two villages within the same district, revealing the complex and varied nature of rural political power. She combines rich fieldwork, election data, and case studies to uncover how historical, social, and structural factors influence voter behavior and political stability. Keep listening to hear Shandana share insights from her extensive research, the collaborative efforts behind the book, and the relationship between land, kinship, and electoral politics in Pakistan.

So Shandana, thank you for joining us today. I'm really excited to talk to you about your book, which is *Crafty Oligarchs, Savvy Voters: Democracy under Inequality in Rural Pakistan*, and it came out in 2019 about the time of the pandemic, unfortunately. So I think it's slipped off my radar and maybe others. And I wanted to give you a chance to talk to us about it, to give us some of the main messages, which I found just absolutely fascinating. When you presented it at a workshop that we were both at a little while ago, I was so excited because I think what you do is really bring together different perspectives on clientelism and understanding voting. Maybe if we think of it in sort of the global South. So I was excited about the message and then I got a chance to read the book following that and I have to say in addition to being it a very exciting theoretical piece, it's also just really beautifully written and incredibly engaging. So congratulations

both on a book that we want to read and in one that I've learned so much from. It's it's really, really exciting. You start off in it sort of, your main question is to understand political engagement under structural inequality, and you start off with examples of life in 2 villages, one which is Sahiwal and the other which is Chak or Chak one, as you call it. And there are 2 villages in the same district and yet you find very different dynamics or political dynamics taking place. Can you just kind of situate us in the differences that you saw?

First of all, thank you Ellen, for having me on the podcast. I'm absolutely thrilled and it is wonderful to be able to speak about the book again and to be speaking to you about this because your own work come so close to so many of the themes that the book picks up on. So thank you very much. I started the book exactly on the puzzle that I was trying to solve, and I. Wanted to put that. Right up front, which is this idea that when we think about Pakistan, we think of these very large, very macro level abstract ideas about. Why it is the way it is, it's politics is it's stuck in this issue of military dominance in its politics because of which it has these political parties that strive for survival all the time, and that in all of this, the voting bid just happens because there the political power lies with landed rural elites and that they dominate. Politics through these ready vote banks. And this is the story advanced for the entire country. Essentially, when we talk about politics in Pakistan, people will tell you, oh, it's just about, you know, these big landlords and all. So I wanted to explore to what extent there was still true because so many changes were occurring constantly around me at this time. So this is work that started around 2001, 2002. We've just gone into another round of military dictatorship at the. This point, and I went out to this village with with my team. I was at a university in Pakistan at that time and what we saw there, and this is where the book starts, was everything that we knew about politics, which was this large landlord presiding over the entire village telling them how things are. And all of these people organized around this circle around this village square. Sitting around separated by kinship groups, and each one speaking very differently to him with great deference, some of them others were questioning him. Others were just completely silent. And and so this supported everything. But then we knew of someone we were working with somebody else as well, went off to the Southern village and saw something completely different. And it's in the same district. It's in the neighbouring constituency political constituency. And there it was an entire story of class based opposition between landlords and. Farm workers, farm labourers and a smaller land owners. And it was a completely different story. And so when when I put up, there's a puzzle. Isn't just that I'm trying to construct a puzzle. It very much was a puzzle for me. It's trying to figure out why would I see such complete difference in the power of the rural landed in this one district that is known for its landed power for these very large landlords that have presided over Pakistani politics over a very long time. And

I see this level of difference across villages there. So what must be happening in the rest of the country.

Now it's a fantastic puzzle, but it's also just a very real a real difference right to be explained, and you'll talk about the distinction between thinking about land and power in kinship and sort of the need and part to also disentangle that. And I want to come to the lessons that you learned from your work is incredibly rich work, so you're also draw. Going on everything from election data to field work and case studies, and there's a really broad range of very detailed and in depth work. And one thing I want to point to is not only sort of its richness, but the way in which you speak about it in the book, because I thought this is brilliant. You you make a point where you say, I'm going to talk about the field work in terms of we because it was a team and then I'm going to talk about the analysis in terms of I because of course, you're driving the analysis and it is your analysis of the work. And and I thought that that was something that I kind of took away from thinking, OK, many more of us should make that distinction. But I also want to hear a little bit from you about how you came to have this team, how you managed it, what was the sort of division of labor, if you will, on the team and and a little bit more about what you did, what what's the resources that we're going to be bringing to answer the questions you do?

So first I'm I'm thrilled that that you picked up on that because I think that is a little bit of a political point that I make in there. I mean, there's there's 2 points. One is on centering the eye and and making sure that we do speak about ourselves in these spaces and the fact that that we're observing this, that this is not some abstract. Sort of scholarship on something. And then within that realizing very quickly that we're never alone in these spaces, no matter how much we. Centered the eye. We are almost never alone and doing this entirely by ourselves, and we're always with. Teams and in my case that was I was teaching at a university in Pakistan and I have built very strong relationships. And so I had colleagues who were with me and who were developing their own work in our own collaborative work at the same time. So we all had a very clear sense of which part really belonged to us. And which bits we were collaborating on, but we also built teams of research assistants through all of this that were working at the university with. And then the happiest bits of field collection really were. When we took these entire teams of students out to the field as well as part of course work. So the team came together also across students, and many of these students are now scholars who have been pursuing this kind of work of their own as well. And they're referenced in the book for their work that subsequently. Came out as well. Once they had finished their PhD. So it was a team of all types of people engaged in that effort, and it was a lot of fun and it needs us to acknowledge the fact that we don't work on these large projects alone.

Actually, I fully agree with you and what's interesting when you're talking about the student component of it, at least in my experience and of course. This are the places I work. I'm also more of an outsider in a sense than than you were in Pakistan. But we talk about them often, as you know, building capacity right or capacity building projects. And I've always sort of resisted that because the extent to which my capacity gets built by working with teams is also really astounding. I mean, it's a wonderful way not just to collaborate, work with people in the field, but it really has. Such a kind of symbiotic relationship and learning that goes on. And so I'm curious to know if you find the same when, of course you're much more embedded in in Pakistan than I am. If I'm, for example in Zambia or Kenya or elsewhere.

I mean absolutely. But so it's interesting this inside or outside of perspective because even though I was I'm I'm from Pakistan, I was working in Pakistan, I was an outsider even to these villages. So one, I'm not from there. I'm a city girl essentially in this space. And that is very visible even with all of our stuff. We have so many wonderful stories of of the ways in which people either found themselves fitting into these spaces and not fitting at all, and then having to navigate that as researchers. But also I I'm a completely different ethnic group and in Pakistan that really matters. And that's essentially part of the story as well, of how people vote along these ethnic lines and the extent to which I want to actually refute. That, but in social life, ethnicity matters a lot, so I have to say that I felt very much an outsider even in these spaces because people will ask you immediately which group you're from and which ethnic group you're from. And mine is very far removed from the Punjab. Where this where this work was based. So in that sense, the collaboration. With students who may be more locally embedded, who may be closer in language. All of that is something that's so important and how to navigate these spaces. Sometimes it's really people who were assisting us with this research or the students who built those linkages for us in these villages as well and allowed us greater access. So you're absolutely right about the symbiotic relationship, but it's really. It was this fantastic learning process for all of us, regardless of where we sat within that team, and I can't imagine having been able to do this on my own.

So I want to. Turn us to the question of what you learned then. So you again, you're in some ways separating or thinking about power with regards to land and kinship, and recognizing that those can be distinct. And then how does that then result in, you know, the mobilization of votes and the ways in which people. And divide in different groups. Can you help walk us through what you see as the difference between the relationship of land distribution, if you will, and inequalities in that sense. And then the political outcomes that are derived from that?

So the question that I was really asking in all of this is that if politics is the way that everybody tells us it is dominated by the army and then these landed groups that work with the army to bring out the vote when it is needed. Then essentially it should just all be very stable. But we know that it isn't stable and it is actually deeply competitive. And but also the question that really arises is why do voters engage in this kind of politics under such extreme forms of inequality and political systems that don't really delivered to them? So it could be dependence. That's the answer given is that they don't. Have a choice, but that's where all of the changes that we were observing was coming were were coming in, there were multiple political parties. There's been social transformation. There's been the growth of centers and other forms of employment all around these voters. So then why do they engage? And then everybody very quickly, not just in Pakistan but in different parts of the world will come to this explanation. Of what is essentially ethnic voting or clean. Actualism and those are the 2 big ideas that we have of why voters in most of the global South will engage in politics. That's the other thing that's then put through. But even then, so my big issue always with ethnic politics has been that again, it should mean that it's all very stable because ethnic groups. Really shift at any great speed and yet we know that politics isn't that stable. So the questions that really came up for me then is our landed groups really. If we're trying to understand why voters engage in the ways that they do or how do they engage. Then the questions that arise very quickly are are landed elites really in power to this extent, if they are, do voters have any agency at all? And if we find any variation in for either one of these questions, then what explains that variation? And I'll go over that very quickly. And we used multiple methods working with everybody. It goes from. And living in these villages for a long time, so in depth qualitative. Work, but also combined with survey work across a large number of households in each village, but across numbers of villages. Some of these villages were case villages where we spent a lot more time in other villages. We did quicker service to to get more to see how generalizable our findings are and to what extent these patterns hold across multiple. Villages and there was lots of archival work that helped us sort of understand the history of the settlement of these villages. And I mentioned that because that's such a central part of the explanation that I eventually give for all of this. So just running through it very quickly, I look at variation across villages that sit in the same district and variation across households that then sit in these villages and I find variation in in each case briefly on the variation that I observe across villages, this is essentially something that's based on a on an over 100 year. History now of colonial structures and the ways in which these villages were settled and which is where the colonial archives and their importance comes in, is that the main explanatory variable. Eventually that comes that that put across as the main explanation in this book. Is the difference between what you call proprietary villages and crown villages and the main difference across them is how

large a group is. The proprietary body are the people to home. Proprietary rights were given and in proprietary villages those who were just sometimes the single individuals. Sometimes a specific family. And in Crown villages these were tenants of the state, so they don't get proprietary rights for. Yeah, did much later. And that creates a social structural difference in hierarchy and the relationships between the elite and other groups that we still see determining politics. So. And I use this to get us what I call the measure of political engagement and what we see are differences in much more vertical linkages between landed elites and other groups in proprietary. Villages and much more horizontal, more equal relationships in in what are crown villages and that's the main difference we see the.

So just to clarify then, so if we go back to the original vignettes that you start the book and that we've just talked about at the beginning of this podcast where we have the the landlord sitting around with each of the different groups paying different levels of deference to him speaking to him and you sort of beautifully describe it in, you know very differently some of them. Only bowing towards him and not touching him at all other touching his knee. So that is your proprietary village, right? Where there's a family or an individual who took a lot of land or or was given a lot of land. Versus near Chalk Village, where there was many more people who will eventually have access to land is just to be correct is that is that the right distinction?

Exactly right. So those 2 villages that we talked about right at the beginning, Sahiwal is a proprietary village and Chuck, one is the Crown village and most crown villages will usually start with this word, Chuck, and then have a number that pinpoints them to a particular location on the canal network that was put into place by the British. So these villages were then created along this irrigation network. And therefore the state held on to that land and to how these villages functioned till much. Later and the difference in land grants would have been in Sahiwal that landlords ancestor received about 4 and a half 1000 acres, whereas the person in Chuck one, his ancestor would have received. I think about 300 acres. So we're talking magnitudes of difference within there, and even those 300 acres. They didn't have proprietary right to that. And the way that that really functions in terms of the social structure is the fact that that gives the landlord 's family then rights over everything that happens in that village, because even those that other people who live there are essentially then living on the land of the landlord, whereas on Crown estates, which are then owned by the state. But the reason why I I pinpoint this social structural thing is because my hypothesis at the start ask. About think about this colonial structure, but then also pinpoint the fact of this landed inequality of just the fact that land is distributed very differently. That could be a completely separate reason for why we see such differences in them. And then a 3rd one is just distance to a town.

And so like I said over the last 100 years, Pakistan is a fast urbanizing space and most of that urbanized. Thing has happened in these small towns, so it has these huge metropolises with 10,000,000 plus populations, 20,000,000 in plus in Karachi. But it's these really small towns that have grown and it's the peoples ability to move from villages to these towns for daily employment. That changes so much of what is happening in villages because they now have. The opportunity to work somewhere else, so I also control for that and I'm constantly conscious of where a village is located, what is land inequality is. So the explanation that we come up with eventually, the fact that it is social structural inequality, is that we've been able to cancel out the other 2 explanations as having any effect the. All almost all of the effect that we see is coming from this fact of social authority sitting with these people with these landed elites and not just land inequality from which they draw all of this power.

That's amazing. And and then when you look at the individuals, because you also mentioned that you have individual level variation even within each of these types of cases, if we will, what does that look like?

So that's essentially then thinking about whether if a village is proprietary or crown and we see that they behave differently and there are more horizontal linkages in Crown villages and more vertical and proprietary villages, does that mean that everybody has the same relationship and this is where we come to another major factor in studies of South Asia, which is caste? This is different. And that in itself is a little bit surprising because caste is not associated with Islam and it certainly isn't part of accepted explanations of differences in Pakistan. It's such a big part of what is happening in these villages is what we call kinship. In Pakistan functions to a great extent as caste, which essentially. Brings in a hierarchy, hierarchically organized kinship groups that are separated by a different placement connected to occupations. So the top of the hierarchy are you agricultural castes. And then there's the artisanal costs. And then there's the labour cost, and then they're broken, and they're they're divided. Because different kinship groups and and that makes it really important to ask whether everybody in a village would then have the same kind of of agency. So I develop a measure of what I call bargaining power, because eventually what matters in what is happening in these villages is the extent to which you as a voter are able to. Bargain for something in return for your vote with the village landlord, and so all of this story sits inside what I call vote. Blocks village politics is organized around vote blocks. Vote blocks are led by the landed elite, so the answer to the first question are they dominant in village politics is yes, all vote blocks are led by them. Does that mean that voters have no agency? No, it doesn't mean that because it varies by their caste group and bargaining power. Correlates closely to which caste herefrom and some have more, more bargaining power than others. It works hierarchically across these different caste

groups. So I separate bargaining power by 4 categories. You can be a dependent voter, a clientelistic voter, a voter that votes based on kinship ties, or somebody who has more of a party identity or other payer based linkages with the vote block leader and. And we see more kinship based linkages in Crown villages and more clientelistic linkages, which is what I call the vertical linkage in proprietary villages. But you have almost all kinds of voters in every village. There's a difference in degrees, in percentages and proportions, but they all exist in these different villages and there is a difference based on caste and that's an important one. Keep in mind, in the middle of that village variation, it's also important to realize that there is a power dynamic happening across these social categories that sit within each village.

So what we're thinking about your lower caste or your lower placed voters, they're more likely to be clientelistic, they're more likely to be voting on the basis of kinship. How should we understand the distinction between somebody who's coming from, for example, the lowest of the castes versus higher ones?

To put it really simply, proprietary villages have vertically linked mostly clientelistic voters. Crown villages will have more horizontally linked, mostly kinship based voters. But across both villages, if you're from the lower caste groups, you're probably the ones that are in those clientelistic relationships. But that is constantly changing. So I observed these villages. Across a number of elections, we asked questions about the 97 election. We were there soon after the 2002 elections. We observed 2008 and then I went back for the 2013 elections as well. And there's huge shifts and this is one of the main points that I wanted to make with this book is. Things are not. Stable and despite the fact that we think of these as really stable forms of politics, military dominance weakly organized. Parties, ethnic voting, ethnic politics. None of this is very stable and and to put it really simply, voters at every level are constantly looking for ways out of these arrangements that they also recognize as oppressive and not allowing them their full agency. And so as soon as they can find a way. Out of this they will find it if they're staying in it, it is because it is strategically useful for them to stay in it, and because this is the best way for them to access a quite distant state, and this is the best way for them to. Access services that don't come easily to these villages and there they need to be drawn down from the state into these villages by these connected local elites. And these local elites power now lies not in repression and not in economic dependence, not through economic dependence, but because they can go and talk to bureaucrats to bring services into these villages. And they have closed linkages with powerful politicians who will bring things into these villages. So these are what we broadly categorize as patronage relationships. But what lower gas groups or or lower place voters are doing constantly is banding together to in order to increase their strength in order to be able to negotiate with the landlord, who also is bringing together these

numbers constantly so that he or she can then negotiate with these politicians as well. So all the way down this ladder of political engagement, you've got this constant relationship of. Even take negotiations, bargaining and everybody checking on what their level of agency is and how to increase that. And So what you get is a sense of real shifts happening all the time, a real sort of back and forth, but a constant sense of bargaining and which is why bargaining power became such an important measure for me. And that really is the main measure that I developed at. The household level. And for that, lower caste groups will have less of it, but they also come together in their kinship groups in order to increase their ability to speak to the landlord about the things that they need.

Now, and that's the crafty and savvy part of this right that basically everyone is trying to be resourceful, trying to find new ways to do things. You know, you talk about the idea that from the oligarchs perspective, what they risk is losing power. So they have to constantly kind of reinvent and remake the ways in which they can be useful. Just as the voters are trying to figure out ways in which they can essentially kind of do better or extract. More and so it is a great sense of dynamics, right? And at GLD, we've been working on some things about trying to think about the dynamics of change over time and using more complex systems models for it. And we're at the very beginning of that. But I kept thinking, wow, this is a perfect case to look at some of those issues in, I want to get a sense from you because you. Mentioned at the outset that you were looking at the rural story right and that you were very cognizant of the extent to which as you got closer to urban areas, things could be different. And now I understand you're working on the urban side of this. Can you tell us a little bit about what you found some so far, what you think is different and what you think is not so different?

Before I do that, Ellen, I just want you to I just want you to point out that part of the effort then here and I know that this connects with the work that you've been doing is how do we reconcile kinship, politics, ethnic politics with clientelism. And there has been work that suggests that maybe the distance between them isn't that far, and that's what I'm really hoping to. Have contributed to through this work as well. Is that they work really comfortably together, and the difference really is which which lens you used to look at them. Which way are you looking at these? If you look at them from the point of view of this landlord who's organizing these vote banks and then negotiating with politicians, all he sees this clientelism up and down, and he's just bringing everybody together. He's hearing from them. All the time between elections, they're negotiating with him. They're telling him what's going to be expected and he's having to manage these relationships and in the process, changing the way he and I, I need to say she for the one woman and that's in that book who is a vote block lead. As well, and they're constantly trying to

figure out how to stay relevant. So they take on activities that their grandparents would not have recognized. And because they're starting to stay relevant, as you said. But if you lift that lens, then you look at it from the point of view of why people come into this network. A lot of that is collective action with their own kin. Is the question we can ask is why kin groups here, why ethnic politics and that has to do with what's happening at the national level and whether political parties have provided another channel, another mechanism through which collective action can happen. And that's where Pakistan's military politics becomes important. That has fought against unions of any sort, organizing of any sort farm. This collectivization all of this was essentially destroyed in the 70's into the 80s, and so there's not very much left except ethnic politics, as a way of coming together. But what's really happening is collective action. So if you ask them what they're doing, they say. Baradari, which is the local word for what are these caste groups and these kinship groups Baradari is the most important form of politics for us, but by that they don't mean that they're banding together only on that basis or they're only vote for a candidate who's from that ethnic group. What they're saying is, this is my main way of increasing my power and that they explain to us very clearly. Is my power exists inside this group and in the way that I'm able to increase my number strength together with others? And that's not clientelism, they don't see it as that that to them is very much about collective action and using ethnicity to do that as soon as you move into urban areas, all of that falls apart. Ethnic politics in urban areas doesn't work in the same way, because cities simply are. These fast urbanizing large, which lots of migrants are coming together from all of these areas, and to some extent there is a sense that there is some ethnic politics that happens, but the ethnic categories become quite big very quickly. The collectivization becomes less, but the main thing that we're finding is that clientelistic linkages are quite weak. The broker based clientelism of these large law. Loads becomes quickly about machine politics. The sorts of things that has been studied across Latin America and in India to to a great extent as well. But what we're really finding and this is in conversation with work that's happening by Adam or Bach and Eric Thatcher have done across India as well is that. We're finding a lot of engagement with party identity rather than clientelistic networks, and most people in urban areas are voting on the basis of their party identity and how they're picking between political parties, which is not something we saw in rural areas. That is a huge difference, and the second one there is is in the ways that in what happens to women in these spaces. So just to talk very quickly about that in rural areas, women don't and that's a major issue with this book. Women don't feature very strongly in it. And we tried, we tried very hard. But as soon as we started talking about politics, women would just immediately bring in the man into the household and say, talk to her about that question, right? Pointing to me and saying, well, she wants to know about this. Can you please tell her who we voted for in the last election and who I voted for in the last election? So they weren't really engaging with it and. That's essentially because all of this vote bank politics is based on large numbers. You want to get your whole

family out, vote. Landlords are interested in you bringing out your family. They promise you things on the basis of family. So that draws out the women's port. That doesn't happen in urban areas. Those clientelistic networks don't function in the same way. And so what we find. Across Pakistan's large cities is that women are not engaging in politics and there is a huge gender gap in. Voting in Pakistan. So it's one of the largest in the world, it's about 11,000,000 fewer women. That amounts to about 9% gap, which has reduced a little bit in this 2024 election, but it stays the same and that we think is largely because of the fact that they're not being mobilized by political parties. Not by clear and realistic link networks, but also then not by political. Yes.

That's interesting. First, a question for you with regards to Pakistan, because I know elsewhere we actually find that rural voting is just percentage wise higher right? The turnout is higher in rural areas than it is in urban areas and at least much of the Middle East for instance is that also the case in Pakistan.

It seems to be yes, and especially. For women, yeah.

But it also sort of raises the question not of why women don't vote. To me, it raises the question of why the men do or why anybody does so. If we move it away from saying, OK, we expect these sets of rewards or benefits from voting and we expect that they will be distributed to some extent based on how much the family can, can mobilize or the. Asked can mobilize? Then it you know in places where that's relatively easy and kind of visible if not because you can have the ability to look inside the ballot box, but rather because you know that this village or this section of the village and this ballot box all map on to certain certain groups. That is what we lose when we get to a lot of urban areas. Right, this idea that you can have an expectation in this village or in this sector of the village, we should have been getting this number votes. My question for you and I also love Adam and harks work on this as well. But is on what basis? Then? Our parties mobilizing cause, it still seems, at least in their story that there's a brokerage and a clientelism that's taking place or machine politics as you called it. So in the Pakistani case, what are you saying?

The story again is around the fact that it's it is this kind of machine politics. But that's really where our work differs a little bit from the work in India is then we find that that party identity has really taken root and it's not about the. The connectivity of the intermediaries that work in these neighborhoods, it's really about the identity. We know that the story in India as well is that there's a narrative from political parties that has certainly taken a route and that's not very different in the cities of Pakistan as well.

Certain parties have always been able to count. On a particular vote. There is now a new party that has really mobilized voters in this last election. In particular, we saw this. It was a quite surprising element of the 2024 election is the extent to which people came out on the basis of party identity and to fight against what they think is an injustice against that. Party, but this is something that we've been actually seeing as a trend that has been developing at least in Lahore where we study this in quite some detail is that when we ask people what is the main trait in these intermediaries that sit inside these party. Means what really matters is not their connectivity, but what matters is which party are they from. So there is an identity there and just in very casual conversations, my sense is I'm going to find a little bit of that in rural areas as well now. So which is quite exciting in terms of just the length of democratic, not consolidation in Pakistan. With just the happening of elections and elections coming at regular intervals, it creates a momentum that starts to change. The logic at these micro foundations, and that's what I was trying to establish in this book is that microfoundations what is happening inside household? Inside these vote banks in these remote villages has the ability to start changing the very logic of politics. The missing link for me right now is why parties have not understood that because I feel that parties are not mobilizing voters, they don't. They're not mobilizing based on a very particular. Constituency there isn't a mobilization of the urban working class. There isn't a mobilization of what is actually. Runs voting majority, which is the rural landless poor. It's still, I think, is the largest group of voters, and it certainly isn't mobilizing women as a constituency on separate issues from men. So you asked, why do men vote? Men are still being sort of talked to at their door before an election. At least and being drawn out on these different narratives. Especially the economy or inflation and all of these things, women are not even being contacted, so we've got numbers for these and there is no contact between party workers and women. And women don't know their local councillors as well. So there is a real disengagement and they're not being seen. I know from all of this work that people are deeply engaged with politics and despite all of this sense of dependence. Instability. They're deeply engaged in what is village politics, but that has a real repercussion and and resonance right up to the national level. Why parties can't see that and see that as a way to really strengthen themselves against the military as well is a puzzle that still needs to be solved.

It's a puzzle that needs to be solved, but it also makes me think that in some ways, scholars have also been very slow at recognizing this, and I'll even put myself in that camp, right? I just did a paper with Prisca Yost and Matt Kronke and Sarah Lockwood, and we went into it. It was to decide in her understand, using a conjoint in Zambia, whether or not people responded. Mostly on part of your ethnicity or, you know, kind of what, what drove response and I fully expected it to be identity issues, right, ethnicity predominantly and what we actually found was that partisanship really mattered to people. People and that it mattered to people independent of ethnicity, even though

there's often been a linkage between ethnicity and various parties. So, you know, I feel like some, some of these issues that, yes, the world changes parties develop stronger roots, they develop identities, people can sort of start to map them in real ways. And yet there's a stickiness. Right. We get sort of stuck with the idea that they don't matter so much and it's all about ethnicity or past, etcetera. And we get similarly with regards to women and the numbers of times I've done work recently on women in the Middle East and myself and other scholars have become surprised because we don't get the results and people being unwilling to support female candidates or unwilling to think that women make good positions or or make good decisions. Yeah. So I do sometimes think that that we're a little slow, as they might say, it's just you're not quite willing to realize that the world changes. And so it's almost like, you know, we look at say for example, it's 1970s, we're looking at the States and thinking it's the 1950s. And those are entirely different. Time, so. So maybe the parties are exactly where many scholars are, and we really need to update much more. Recognizing we're not saying that we were wrong 20 years ago, it's just that 20 years have passed.

The importance of these shifts, like you said, is really important to recognize is how fast the change is. So I know that some of these other parties that don't. Win in rural. Punjab will say to me it doesn't matter because they've they've decided which party really represents rural Punjab. But what I'd really like them to see is how in every single of those case villages that I was. Looking at, even if it's not the largest vote bank, as voters found their independence from the landlords and were able to construct their own vote banks, they were forming those vote banks for these other parties. So all of the other parties had. A vote bank. In these other villages, and that was without mobilization. They do a quick visit. But they're not really speaking to them directly about their needs. And so the move is is quick. It happens from election to election and to me, kinship politics is simply a response to an incentive structure that is created by the state of institutions and very often at at the national level. It's the ways in which the parties compete. It's the narratives that are being used. It's their incentive for mobilization. Of voters as well, and voters will exit these constraints that we put on them off ethnic voting or of clientelistic relationships as a response to. Yeah. So what I was trying to say in this book is ethnic politics exists. It is skinship based, but it's kinship based because they need to come together. And if they could just be mobilized by political parties, they will have no need to come together and prioritize or make their kinship the most salient identity for themselves. It could shift very quickly to a party identity. But will not be mobilized here.

So what would you advise political parties on the one hand, if you were speaking with them, or would you advise donor community or the policy making community, what would you see as positive steps forward?

I think one of those is about lens and that's essentially what we've been talking about so far. Is that to recognize that we don't want to take a homogenized view of rural voters, Women Voters, urban voters. These are not homogenized groups. There are different reasons for why they will find themselves voting in very different ways. And we need to recognize where that variation. Comes from, which means we need much more nuanced understanding of the main factors or or the main axes of differences in rural and urban areas and across different types of rural areas. And the fact that it's not static as we just said, so it's not homogenized and it's not static and things can change very quickly. And clientelism itself is very weak. It loses its salience very quickly with we know from past work, it loses its salience with economic growth when other narratives become really important. Sometimes it's a negative narrative. More and more nativist narratives and polarized narratives can end the logic of clientelism very quickly. In other cases, it sort of working class groups coming together to fight against more neoliberal. The forms that are happening, all of that can shake the basis of clean and tourism very quickly. None of these are static categories and a lot of it then just comes down to institutional change. But that's where what you were saying earlier becomes really important is when we work in the global South, we use these lens of perspectives of clientelism and ethnic politics. So what I'd really like to advocate for is. The fact that. We're really dealing with varying levels of institutional weakness in different places and that everything else is an incentive structure that that institutional weakness is creating. So to me, I mean, I live in England. I don't think I've seen anything that isn't ethnic politics. Here, over over. That's it. Or over the immigration issue, immigrants in in the England or immigrants in the US, these are all things that fall under understanding of ethnic politics. But we don't use that lens for these countries, but we immediately impose that lens on on the global South when we talk about it. And then we come up with very different understanding. So yes, if I was speaking to donor. Agencies or political parties. It's about understanding the institutional incentives that are being created that keep. Ethnic politics and business, or that keep clientelistic politics in business and think of them as these static, unchanging categories that will always be and everything in this book says no. It changes so quickly.

Thank you so much Shandana. This is again excellent. Just really amazing work, but it's also been great talking to you about it. Thank you.

Thank you, Ellen. Thank you.

Thank you so much for listening! If you enjoyed this episode, then please like, share, and subscribe to Governance Uncovered.