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Conceptualising Overlapping Politics: Cross-Class Political Relationships in Urban Pakistan

Hafsah Haseeb Siddiqui

Abstract

Citizen-led activism to demand and secure adequate housing rights, infrastructure, and services in Islamabad forms part of a longstanding socio-political movement in Pakistan. This activism brings together different classes of urban residents. Drawing from qualitative research comprising of 129 interviews, this article reveals an emerging ‘overlapping politics’, defined as the political relationship between two (or more) distinct socio-economic classes of citizen(s) in response to any form of injustice or inequality. This (re)conceptualises everyday forms of urban political practice by countering existing assumptions that urban politics is rooted in class homogeneity. Inspired by the Islamabad case, I argue that ‘overlapping politics’ emerges largely as an alternative to, and progression from, clientelistic politics through four modes where ‘overlapping’ occurs across class lines: knowledge and information; networks and membership; support; and ownership and responsibility. The outcomes of ‘overlapping politics’ manifest spatially in the city, for example through increased interaction between urbanites, privately organised service provision, and urban protests. Although the practice of ‘overlapping politics’ has limitations, it provides an important new conceptual tool and language for understanding and analysing forms of politics that are embedded in cross-class relationships between urban citizens.

Introduction

Islamabad is characterised by rampant social and spatial segregation. Inequality plots cartographically and politically onto the city as exclusive islands for the wealthy, versus informal settlements (*katchi abadis* or simply *abadis*) housing the urban poor. *Abadi* residents suffer from inadequate, or a complete lack of, public infrastructure and service provision. Due to their illegal status, *abadis* are often targeted for evictions and demolitions by the municipal planning organisation, the Capital Development Authority (CDA). From as early as the 1990s, citizen-led activism to demand and secure adequate housing rights, infrastructure, and services in Islamabad forms part of a longstanding socio-political movement in Pakistan. This activism brings together different classes of urban residents. An active group is the Awami Workers Party (AWP), a left-wing cross-class socialist party which brings together informal settlement residents and middle-class identifying political activists. This article draws on 129 interviews with AWP members and *abadi* residents to highlight a distinct political practice which I term ‘overlapping politics’, defined as the political relationship between two (or more) distinct socio-economic classes of citizen(s) in response to any form of injustice or inequality.

Class is determined by the amount of capital (economic, social, and cultural) that individuals possess (Bourdieu, 1984, 1986). Research on class in cities of the Global South contrasts the middle class with the urban poor (Kamath and Vijayabaskar, 2009). Despite these oft-used labels,

the 'middle class' is a complex label that quantitative predictions and qualitative descriptions do not adequately capture. Lemanski and Lama-Rewal's (2012) review of the scholarly debate on the middle class reveals that it is a broad category that is difficult to categorise and quantify, particularly in Global South contexts. Additionally, 'the urban poor' is not a class group in the Bourdieusian sense, where class positions are based on capital rather than geographic location. This research draws on subjective understandings of being middle class as explained by political activists and uses the 'urban poor' as a descriptive term used by *abadi* residents themselves.

Current research largely conceptualises class groups as isolated, participating in political action in their own ways. For example, scholarship on urban politics distinguishes political practices through the binary of the middle class versus the poor (Chatterjee, 2004; Harriss, 2006, 2007) or analyses the politics undertaken by a singular class group without considering the cross-class interactions that may exist (Bayat, 2000; Holston, 2008). In contrast, I introduce, expound, and evaluate the theory and practice of 'overlapping politics', wherein different class groups work together to address urban inequality. I argue that in Islamabad, 'overlapping politics' emerges as an alternative to, and progression from, clientelistic politics through four modes where 'overlapping' occurs across class lines: knowledge and information; networks and membership; support; and ownership and responsibility. The outcomes of 'overlapping politics' are manifested spatially in the city, for example through increased interaction between urban residents and privately organised service provision. Although there are some limitations in the ways that the practice of 'overlapping politics' unfolds, it serves as a promising and urgent concept in illuminating forms of politics that are embedded in cross-class relationships between urban citizens.

This article begins with an overview of research on urban politics in the Global South, highlighting the need for a concept which considers the role of cross-class relationships. It then introduces the new framework of 'overlapping politics' as an amalgamation of related but conceptually isolated topics which forefronts the role of cross-class relationships in urban politics. This is followed by a summary of methods and the case study. Finally, 'overlapping politics' is applied to the Islamabad case to illustrate how different class groups collaborate in urban politics, and to reveal the spatial implications of this relationship in the city.

Urban politics in the Global South: class fragmentation

Research on urban politics in the Global South delineates between the politics undertaken by the middle class and the poor, with scholars either creating a binary between the two (Chatterjee, 2004; Harriss, 2006, 2007) or focusing primarily on one class group for analysis (Bayat, 2000; Holston, 2008). For example, Chatterjee (2004) contrasts the political practices of 'civil society' with those of 'political society' to argue that there is a divide in the political field of postcolonial societies. Civil society consists of individuals who can claim citizenship and access the state directly on the basis of rights. Political society is made up by those who cannot claim citizenship because they are considered 'illegal' by the state since they violate property norms by squatting on public land. On account of their illegal status, claims that members of political society make cannot have a legal basis. Therefore, any mobilisation undertaken by them is not officially acknowledged as legitimate. Chatterjee's (2004) idea that political behaviour is linked to class is developed by Harriss (2007), who presents a similar binary, wherein 'old politics' of political

parties and trade unions (undertaken by the working class, or Chatterjee's political society) lies in contrast to a 'new politics' of voluntary civil society organisations (undertaken by the middle class, or Chatterjee's civil society).

Chatterjee's (2004) class-based distinctions of political participation have been destabilised through empirical studies which stress that particular practices cannot be firmly linked to, or determined by, class (Coelho and Venkat, 2009; Jones et al., 2017; Lemanski and Tawa Lama-Rewal, 2012). These claims are important for the 'overlapping politics' framework because they reiterate that different groups cannot be assigned political strategies since the adoption and implementation of such strategies shift according to the political context. Additionally, the attributes of civil and political society are often inverted in practice (Baviskar and Sundar, 2008; Robins et al., 2008). This applies to Islamabad, where the poor attempt to frame themselves as legitimate citizens through 'overlapping politics', and where the rich disregard planning laws and exploit their political connections through 'entitled urbanism' (Moatasim, 2019). As the 'overlapping politics' framework emphasises, the civil/political society binary in fact constitutes a spectrum of political practices. Moreover, while the binary simplifies the political boundaries between the 'rich' and 'poor', the 'overlapping politics' framework attends to the limitations and possibilities at play when these groups interact. The framework offers the opportunity to consider the contributions of members of *all* class groups equally across common modes as they address urban inequality. This is important because while research on 'political society' (Chatterjee, 2004) is rich, 'civil society' tends to be "more of a conceptual reference" (Naqvi, 2018: 1243) than an empirical unit of analysis.

Research on urban politics often describes the poor in terms of their ability to challenge and erode political power structures. For example, Holston (2008) shows how the 'insurgent' poor in Brazil asserted themselves as citizens by constructing their own housing. In doing so, they discovered the legal basis for their inclusion in, and appropriation of, city space. However, Holston (2008) overstates the poor's ability to translate their concerns into the language of the state without tapping into the expertise and experience of intermediary actors. Like Holston (2008), Bayat (2000) also limits his analysis to the politics undertaken by the poor without acknowledging the role played by their links with other socioeconomic classes. He argues that there has been a 'quiet encroachment of the ordinary' in Southern cities, involving "non-collective but prolonged direct action by individuals and families to acquire the basic necessities of their lives... in a quiet and unassuming illegal fashion" (536). Holston (2008) and Bayat (2000) present the 'insurgent' and 'ordinary' as insulated groups. The 'overlapping politics' intervention provides a nuanced analysis of the politics engaged in by a variety of actors fighting against urban inequality.

Overall, much of the literature overlooks the cross-class connections that the urban poor must make with members of different class groups in order to articulate claims and navigate power relations in the socio-political sphere. While this self-contained class-based politics may transpire in some contexts, this article asserts that mono-class analysis is incomplete and there are practices of cross-class politics that are frequently glossed over. In cities of the South, where class is a major factor in social and spatial fragmentation, 'overlapping politics' indicates that cities have greater capacity for socio-political inclusivity than previously thought.

‘Overlapping politics’: ‘overlap’ in scholarly fields

Empirical findings from Islamabad resonate with scholarly work on three related but conceptually isolated topics: political strategies beyond clientelism, mediated citizenship through political parties, and cross-class (urban) politics. The framework of ‘overlapping politics’ pushes scholarly debates further by linking these topics under a conceptual umbrella. It has resonance beyond Islamabad and can be applied to other cities in the Global South where cross-class political practices are already emerging, as will be discussed. ‘Overlapping politics’ is not only empirically driven but is also an analytical framework that ‘overlaps’ concepts to reveal new insights about the multi-layered categories of urban politics.

‘Overlapping politics’: between clientelism and citizenship

Clientelism as a political practice is deeply entrenched in the Global South, and Pakistan is no exception (Akhtar, 2018). This discussion situates ‘overlapping politics’ as a progression from — but not a complete replacement of — clientelism. Clientelism is a difficult concept to define. The traditional definition conceptualises it as “a relationship based on political subordination in exchange for material rewards” (Fox, 1994: 153). The broader definition includes “subtler exchanges, such as those in which (often low-quality) policy directed toward vulnerable populations is later rewarded electorally” (Alvarez Rivadulla, 2012: 39–40).

However, using either of these definitions to examine empirical cases risks glossing over unique specificities. For example, Alvarez Rivadulla’s (2012) study of face-to-face contact between politicians and clients in urban Uruguay does not fit neatly into either definition. There is therefore a potential to conceptualise political practices *beyond* clientelism by pushing further to think about its relationship with other processes and practices. Fox (1994) has previously traced the shift from clientelism (with subordination, unequal power relations, and top-down flows) to citizenship (which gives people unrestricted access to their rights through autonomous means). Clientelism and citizenship are conceptualised as two ends of a continuum, with the notion of ‘semiclientelism’ (Fox, 1994) capturing the processes and practices in between. ‘Post-clientelism’ takes the idea of semiclientelism further. In part, it is understood as the political practices of the poor which lie beyond participation in clientelism (Chatterjee, 2019). However, post-clientelism is not a shift away from clientelism but a fusion with it; both exist in parallel. For Manor (2011), post-clientelism refers to the “somethings extra” (194) that politicians use *in addition to* existing clientelist strategies.

Clientelism (based on specific inducements to particular individuals or groups) and the provision of universal benefits to citizens can, and do, coincide (Das and Maiorano, 2019; Elliott, 2016). Clientelism can also seep into participatory development or community-based projects, thus leading to ‘progressive patronage’ (De Wit and Berner, 2009). Similarly, rights-based approaches and clientelism often exist together in ‘governance hybrids’, with outcomes displaying elements of both (Schneider and Zuniga-Hamlin, 2005). These studies point to the importance of reconceptualising the clientelism/citizenship binary to focus instead on the practices and processes that exist between them rather than focusing on each as discrete phenomenon. The concept of ‘overlapping politics’ includes elements of clientelistic politics between middle-class identifying party members and *abadi* residents, but also encompasses the possible enhanced

practices and perceptions of citizenship which emerge for the urban poor through their participation. ‘Overlapping politics’ is a useful conceptual tool which focuses on *how* class-based capacities and resources in political relationships can be used to develop, sustain, and even weaken experiences and practices of political participation and mobilisation within this entrenched political landscape.

‘Overlapping politics’: political parties as mediating institutions

‘Overlapping politics’ draws from ‘mediated citizenship’, which considers the ways that intermediaries between citizens and the state — such as NGOs, political brokers, and social workers — influence the development of political agency in marginalised groups (von Lieres and Piper, 2014). Under this framework, clientelism is one mode of mediation. Anciano (2018) argues that clientelistic strategies have the potential to create democratic interventions. This links to mediated citizenship, through which it has been noted that mediation can have democratic outcomes (von Lieres and Piper, 2014).

Work on mediated citizenship as it relates to party politics points to the blurring between clientelism and citizen autonomy, echoing Fox’s (1994) ‘semiclientelism’ and Schneider and Zuniga-Hamlin’s (2005) ‘governance hybrids’. For example, in Hyderabad, street vendors drew on a long-term clientelistic relationship with a political party to engage with the state but also resorted to contentious action towards the same party when faced with passivity from it (Shankar, 2014). Similarly, although the poor in Kolkata recognise the importance of clientelism, they are also turning to activism to address their needs (Chatterjee, 2019). More recently, Auerbach and Thachil (2023) encourage work on urban politics that focuses on everyday relationships and practices that emerge between actors outside of election periods, and this research on ‘overlapping politics’ responds to their call.

Empirical findings point to the importance of parties in political, economic, and social development. For instance, parties in South Africa and India (Williams, 2008) and Brazil (Taylor, 2004) have advanced participatory modes of politics to challenge governance mechanisms. However, the capacity of party-led efforts to shift power from politicians to citizens remains questionable. In Manila, although the party in power made connections with NGOs and social movement leaders to aid in service delivery and poverty alleviation, the ability to implement policy still lay with political and civil society elites (Reid, 2018). Similarly in China, a party developed a grassroots governance approach in urban villages by co-opting the work of welfare or service-based social organisations to build its popularity (Kan and Ku, 2021). A Turkish case highlights the way that a party implemented grassroots clientelism through the establishment of local neighbourhood-level branches (Ark-Yıldırım, 2017). The difference between these examples and ‘overlapping politics’ is that ordinary urban residents do not have the opportunity to shape parties’ development efforts. In ‘overlapping politics’, members of different classes collaborate to address urban inequality.

‘Overlapping politics’: class in (urban) politics

Research on political cross-class coalitions — particularly in the disciplines of political science and sociology — tends to limit its scale of analysis to the meso and macro levels, focusing on the

structural causes and consequences of these connections, or on national or regional social movements. For example, it has been noted that the class diversity present within the Arab uprisings allowed movement actors to achieve their demands (Del Panta, 2020; Durac, 2015). Also writing about that region, Goldstone (2011) argues that cross-class coalitions are an under-researched but important aspect of revolution because it is difficult for the state to ignore or suppress the views of a broad spectrum of people. Friesinger and Saalfeld (2022) outline the conditions under which the success of political parties with a middle-class leadership depends on the mobilisation of the working class. In contrast, ‘overlapping politics’ places emphasis on the *relationship* between members of different class groups. It delves into the highs of trust and courage, and the lows of betrayal and suspicion within that relationship. Using ‘overlapping politics’ as a conceptual lens allows researchers to shed light on the key moments, processes, and practices that emerge in the fight against inequality.

Although ‘overlapping politics’ is not limited to cities, it is in the hyper-diverse urban context where proximity of difference is most common and where cross-class politics is identifiable. Koenig’s (2011) research in urban West Africa and India highlights how poor and elite groups cooperated to secure mutual benefits amidst an environment shaped by neoliberal policies. In Istanbul, middle-class activists used their networks to increase public awareness about the lack of property rights offered to informal residents (Islam and Sakızlıoğlu, 2015). Similarly, in Guangzhou, well-settled local citizens supported working-class migrants in accessing property rights from the local government (Shin, 2013). Kumar (2011) highlights how the introduction of a transportation policy pressured the poor in Delhi and led to a cross-class coalition between a middle-class advocacy group and poor transport providers. In building upon these studies, the ‘overlapping politics’ framework offers the opportunity to holistically examine cross-class political relationships and pay attention to the contributions of all participating class groups.

Some cross-class political relationships in cities do not always try to challenge or contest social inequality per se, but emerge as mechanisms to negotiate existing power imbalances within the political sphere. For example, Maqsood and Sajjad (2021) note that the relationships between informal settlement dwellers and their scholar/activist allies create opportunities for the former to navigate prevailing power structures. Yet cross-class political relationships can work in favour of privileged groups. For example, Moatasim’s (2019) account of a cross-class alliance highlights how rich residents were criticised for their calculated use of local villagers to gain the public’s attention when an exclusive residential area on the outskirts of Islamabad was threatened with demolition. The poor could also exploit political relationships, for example by abandoning old alliances in favour of more promising ones (Moatasim, 2019). Involvement in cross-class political relationships therefore does not come without risk.

Overall, the concept of ‘overlapping politics’ adds to the literature on cross-class (urban) politics and furthers it in three ways. First, the primary scale of analysis is at the micro-level, allowing researchers to delve into the impacts of political participation on everyday life. Second, ‘overlapping politics’ is useful in considering the limitations of cross-class political relationships. Given its attention to interactions between people, it can present insights into the nature of political dealings, why political relationships can weaken or fail, and what happens if they do. Third, the concept does not assume that one group is acting for, or on behalf of, the other(s), but can help to recognise cases where this is taking place, either implicitly or explicitly.

Context, methodology, and field sites

This article draws on eight months of fieldwork in Islamabad from October 2020 to June 2021. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 29 current or previously active middle-class identifying¹ AWP members and 100 informal settlement residents (53 in H-9 *abadi* and 47 in Alipur Farash Town²). Interview data was translated from Urdu and transcribed, then coded using NVivo following a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006). Participants have been anonymised for ethical reasons.

The Awami Workers Party (AWP) is a left-wing socialist political party. It was formed in November 2012. The AWP is cross-class; membership of the party includes both members of the middle class and the urban poor, for example *abadi* residents (Awami Workers Party, 2012). The urban poor hold leadership positions and run for elections on the party platform. Within the Islamabad-Rawalpindi chapter of the AWP, the data show that the majority of party members come from the urban middle class, however I met several *abadi* residents who were party members³.

Although the overarching goal of the AWP is to bring socialism to the fore (Awami Workers Party, 2014), this is a long-term prospect; the party's urgent agenda involves "drafting its immediate political programme in light of prevailing material and subjective conditions" (Wiemann, 2019: 33). The party organises protests, assists with legal petitions, and arranges press conferences. In Islamabad, its work in *abadis* involves raising awareness about residents' conditions, improving access to services and infrastructure, and lobbying the local government to grant property rights. The party ran in the 2013, 2018, and the 2024 general elections. It has not won any seats in the National Assembly, which reflects its limited support base. However, its participation in elections and its emphasis on class is crucial in Pakistan, where politics is the purview of the elite and where the urban poor have been marginalised (Malik, 2020).

Field sites represent the degrees of official legitimacy of informal settlements in Islamabad. The H-9 *abadi* is not recognised by the CDA and is considered illegal. Alipur Farash Town, also known as Farash Town/ Alipur, is part of a government-led resettlement plan for previous inner-city *abadi* dwellers and is considered legal. Nevertheless, residents consider it as an informal settlement because of inadequate infrastructure, poor service provision, and absence of property rights.

H-9 *abadi* is located about 10 kilometres from central Islamabad. The settlement comprises a total of 18-20 streets with 40 houses each, housing around 2,000 people. There is no provision of municipal services or infrastructure. Dwellers live without water or electricity, even though pipes and wires run through to service formal neighbourhoods. Some residents have installed solar panels on their roofs for electricity. Residents have no access to public gas. There are no public

¹ These AWP members self-identified as middle class once asked which class group they belonged to. This self-identification was corroborated through details they shared about their education and employment.

² These settlements have not been anonymised because they are well-known and have been covered in the media, in reports by development agencies and NGOs, and/or in academic studies.

³ Where an interviewee is both an *abadi* resident and AWP member, this has been stated.

health or education facilities within the *abadi*. Residents' lack of land registration documentation and non-existent property rights mean that they can be abruptly evicted.

Alipur is situated in a peri-urban area approximately 20 kilometres from the city centre. It is divided into three phases; this research focuses on phases two and three, planning for which was initiated in April 2000 to resettle informal settlement residents (United Nations Development Programme, 2002). These phases, which housed 1,231 families in 2019 (Capital Development Authority, 2019), were chosen because of the long-term ties residents have with the AWP.

Public infrastructure and service provision in Alipur is a point of contention between the CDA and local residents. A report prepared by the United Nations Development Programme states that in the initial stages of development, only “road levelling and metalling, drainage system and installation of hand pumps” were completed, with further infrastructural developments — such as “electricity, streetlights, sewerage treatment plant, landscaping, water supply, gas connections and street pavements” (United Nations Development Programme, 2002: 35) — dependent on future payments. There is no piped water in the area. Residents have managed to secure electricity and gas from the CDA through ‘overlapping politics’. However, the slow installation of electricity meters and gas loadshedding mean that both sources of energy are not readily available. While there are both private and government schools in the area, there is no public healthcare facility. Alipur residents are concerned about the provision of property rights; the scheme dictated that the title transfer would be executed upon full payment (United Nations Development Programme, 2002). However, residents still await the transfer.

Although there are no census data for *abadis*, demographic details can be deduced through interviews. Most residents are uneducated or have completed a few years of primary education. Men are usually the sole earners and mostly work as street vendors, sweepers, or daily-wage manual labourers. Women perform domestic work, but some run home-based businesses or work as domestic help. These low-wage informal sector jobs lack benefits or protections. The average household income for *abadi* residents in Islamabad is 10,000 rupees (£27.50) per month (Rehman et al., 2014), whereas the average national income per capita between 2022-2023 was 36,456 rupees (£99.94) per month (Khan, 2023). Self-funded private infrastructure and service interventions are difficult and *abadi* residents are reliant on clientelistic arrangements. It is this unequal political dependence that the AWP seeks to progress from.

Modes of participation in overlapping politics

Despite the varying levels of resources that members of different class groups enjoy, there are commonalities across class groups that demonstrate why ‘overlapping politics’ is an accurate framework to employ. This ‘overlapping’ exists in four modes across class groups: knowledge and information; networks and membership; support; and ownership and responsibility. The framework reveals how different classes can supplement each other through common modes of political engagement, albeit to different degrees depending upon the input they can offer.

Knowledge and information

The first mode in which ‘overlapping’ occurs is knowledge and information. Information “consists of data and facts which can be easily transferred or shared” whereas knowledge is created by adding “context and applied experience” to information (Jacobs et al., 2015: 426). ‘Overlapping’ refers to the sharing of specialised knowledge and information between members of different classes. Knowledge and information are political (Jacobs et al., 2015); the extent to — and scale at — which they are disseminated (or not) are based on choices about when to share, who to share with, and the reason for sharing.

In this cross-class relationship, it is not the *levels* of knowledge which are critical, but the *forms* that it takes. Within the field of urban governance, Van Ewijk and Baud (2009) categorise three forms of knowledge: tacit, contextual-embedded, and generalised. In Islamabad, two of these are important; tacit and generalised. Tacit knowledge emerges through experience and can be understood as ‘know-how’, whereas generalised knowledge is based on analysis and is used to address technical issues. *Abadi* residents hold tacit knowledge about their settlements, while middle-class identifying AWP members possess generalised knowledge. When shared across class lines, these forms of knowledge become useful for political mobilisation.

The goals of participation in ‘overlapping politics’ are not necessarily the same for everyone involved. *Abadi* residents prioritise material needs such as infrastructure/service provision and improvement, which is tied to the resilient entwinement of political participation and clientelism in Pakistan. Middle-class identifying AWP members, driven by political ideologies, focus not only on assisting *abadi* residents to secure their demands, but also on co-producing political change *with* them. In contrast to research on cross-class political alliances (Guhn-Knight, 2008), ‘overlapping politics’ highlights that actors’ motivations can be dissimilar, allowing for the concept to be applied to a range of empirical cases.

The knowledge held by *abadi* residents is contextual and embedded within the *abadi*’s socio-spatial context and is not easily accessible to middle-class identifying AWP members. Because *abadi* residents are familiar with local customs and processes, they provide important details:

“When they [AWP members] come here, they don't know what kinds of conditions people in this street live in. What kind of attitudes they have. They don't know about every street, right? Or they don't know about every house. So if there's some work, then we guide them...” (H-9 *abadi* resident 9, personal communication, 3 April 2021)

Learning about the realities of *abadi* residents is crucial for building a struggle around residents’ concerns. In Alipur, the AWP has been holding weekly meetings for several years. These conversations include discussions about decisions made by politicians as well as about the party’s priorities. Meetings are open; anyone can provide input. This offers the chance for knowledge and information to flow multilaterally. A similar process took place in Mumbai, where informal settlement residents faced with land dispossession attended ‘people’s hearings’ organised by middle-class activists (Doshi and Ranganathan, 2017). However, the knowledge and information contributed is based on what the holder/sharer considers to be important and is therefore value-laden.

Middle-class identifying AWP members hold information about policy decisions through their proximity to political epicentres:

“We read policy papers, we can do research, we can stay up to date with the news. So of course, we can share whatever new developments are happening with abadi residents.”
(AWP member 26, personal communication, 9 March 2021)

It is crucial for *abadi* residents to gain access to details that are affecting, and have the potential to affect, their lives. The spread of this information is particularly vital because of the ‘information/knowledge asymmetry’ (Kosec and Wantchekon, 2020) between urban residents. In Islamabad, *abadi* residents settle for informal arrangements through street level bureaucrats because they lack the knowledge needed to negotiate for essential services (Naqvi, 2022); ‘overlapping politics’ addresses this asymmetry and acts as a mechanism to fill this gap.

The AWP also holds regular public study circles in Islamabad’s F-9 park. These draw on journal articles or book chapters in addition to magazine articles and opinion pieces in newspapers (disseminated through WhatsApp in Urdu wherever possible). *Abadi* residents are encouraged to join but it is difficult for them to sacrifice daily-wage work to attend and arrange transport (the park is located 8 kilometres from H-9 *abadi* and 26 kilometres from Alipur). Middle-class identifying AWP members see *abadi* residents’ attendance as an opportunity for them to remain informed about the political climate:

“...Around four to five [abadi] folks do show up in every single study circle. And they interact, they talk, they talk to other people as well, and it's a way for them to meet different kinds of people and obviously just sit down and have a conversation as well...”
(AWP member 22, personal communication, 2 February 2021)

Middle-class identifying AWP members have also made *abadi* residents aware of their constitutional right to shelter. The sharing of this information (and subsequent knowledge about it) is enveloped within organisational beliefs about the legitimacy and legality of *abadi* development, the acceptability of state-led evictions/demolitions, and the significance of a lack of infrastructure and services in these areas. As the AWP’s manifesto states: “the party considers education, health, *housing* and employment to be the *fundamental right of every citizen*” (Awami Workers Party, 2017: 25, emphasis added). This information is transmitted to *abadi* residents so that it may encourage more informed mobilisation.

Middle-class identifying AWP members share legal and political facts (information) with *abadi* residents, and also impart their awareness of the implications (knowledge) of these governmental decisions. The flow is mirrored when *abadi* residents reveal their problems (information) and offer context-based insights (knowledge) about the socio-spatial makeup of *abadis* to middle-class identifying AWP members. Crucially, the benefit isn’t necessarily mutual; *abadi* residents gain more from this ‘overlap’ than middle-class identifying AWP members. Additionally, sharing is uneven; these AWP members share information/knowledge that is detached from their lives, but *abadi* residents share experiences that intimately define theirs.

With regards to information-sharing between (middle and upper-class) political party members and members of lower class groups, research tends to focus on clientelistic relationships. Auyero's (2000) study of clientelist networks reveals how information that could help solve clients' problems was hidden in order to maintain the dominant power structure. In 'overlapping politics', members of class groups offer knowledge and information *to each other* openly and generously. In contrast to clientelism, the flow of information *and* knowledge is reciprocal, coherent, and useful to everyone involved — but not necessarily to the same extent.

Two conclusions can be drawn about knowledge and information in 'overlapping politics'. First, all participants have unique knowledge and information which is situated in their lifeworlds and can be used as a collective resource. Second, unlike clientelism, where material is co-opted and controlled, 'overlapping politics' is embedded in the knowledge and information that participants hold. This is not to say that clientelistic actions do not occur in 'overlapping politics'; knowledge and information is not neutral and can be manipulated. However, the flow is not one-sided in 'overlapping politics', even when the outcome is to improve the position of one group more than another.

Networks and membership

The second mode where 'overlapping' transpires is through the mobilisation of class-based networks. *Abadi* residents play a crucial role in 'overlapping politics' by offering access to local networks. On an individual level, *abadi* residents introduce their circles to middle-class identifying AWP members. On an organisational level, each *abadi* that the AWP works in has at least one focal person who creates ties with *abadi* residents by making regular visits. The focal person maintains contact with the local *abadi* leader(s), or *chaudhry(s)*. The leader usually enjoys a higher status in the *abadi*, through their external connections, the information they possess about the political context, and/or their ability to secure material benefits for residents (Auerbach, 2016). This organisational structure, which places the *chaudhry* at the summit of the hierarchy, is reminiscent of the use of local residents as brokers by clientelistic parties (Auerbach and Thachil, 2023; Auyero, 2000). This is not the goal of the AWP; using the *chaudhry* is a convenient way to get access to residents. However, if access to these groups is controlled by local leaders — who have their political goals and self-interest in mind — then relying on them becomes problematic. The mobilising potential of 'overlapping politics' in *abadis* will be revealed when this access can be gained. The current structure displays a shade of clientelist politics and falls within Fox's (1994) continuum between clientelism and citizenship.

Abadi residents do not have direct access to middle-class identifying AWP members' networks, but the presence of a range of professionals within these networks is used tactfully for their advantage. For example, these networks were mobilised in 2015 when an *abadi* was faced with eviction:

"We were lobbying with people in the state. For example, we were trying to get in touch with all the people in the leadership positions [...] And then there were different ministers and MNAs [Members of the National Assembly] through whom we could get the word out that there is a housing crisis in this country [...] And then we would engage with journalists and activists and tried to get them involved [...] Basically this collective of

ours back then comprised of people who were intellectuals, professors [...] So we had these really resourceful people who knew what the Pakistani system was...” (AWP member 12, personal communication, 13 December 2020)

Although this seems reminiscent of mediated citizenship (von Lieres & Piper, 2014), it differs because mediated citizenship studies the relationship between state and citizen through the mediator in a vertical direction, whereas ‘overlapping politics’ also considers the horizontal networks of mediator(s) and citizens (for example, the community within *abadis*, or middle-class identifying AWP members’ professional ties).

The use of networks within and through cross-class political relationships can have profound consequences. While based in a rural context, Rizvi’s (2019) study of the tenant farmers movement in Punjab shows how connections between farmers, urban activists, left-wing parties, and civil society organisations not only helped to publicise the movement, but also transformed it to the degree that it strayed from its original goals and aggravated internal conflicts. Therefore, the stimulation of networks in ‘overlapping politics’ can be both beneficial and deleterious for the wider struggle and the individuals involved.

The AWP’s structure as a cross-class party means that in addition to middle-class identifying AWP members, several AWP members are also *abadi* residents; there is a cross-class ‘overlap’ in membership. The presence of local party representatives is effective: parties can benefit from the networks and knowledge of these individuals, and parties’ ideologies can filter through everyday interactions (Ark-Yıldırım, 2017). There are multiple challenges of this blurring between class groups. Individual(s) may incorrectly and unfairly be attributed with the successes and failures of a larger cross-class political relationship. Additionally, the individual(s) acting as liaisons carry power that can be misused to represent each class group inaccurately. This could undermine the overarching motive of ‘overlapping politics’, which is to respond to injustice and inequality rather than to augment it. Nonetheless, the ‘overlapping’ of networks and membership allows all class groups to get access to people and spaces that wouldn’t normally be accessible or easy to navigate. While this comes with certain limitations, the mobilising possibilities that this ‘overlapping’ offers cannot be underestimated.

Support

Abadi residents and middle-class identifying AWP members support each other as they participate in ‘overlapping politics’. *Abadi* residents vote for the AWP during election periods, supply logistical arrangements, and offer mass presence at events. In return, middle-class identifying AWP members lead the resistance against urban housing inequality in Islamabad. These exchanges are reminiscent of clientelism, but ‘overlapping politics’ highlights the radical practices embedded within them. This particular mode of ‘overlapping’ illustrates the endurance of clientelism (or at least clientelist thought) in political initiatives seeking to move beyond it (Gay, 2006; Manor, 2011).

The persistence of clientelism in ‘overlapping politics’ is revealed through participants’ contrasting perceptions of elections and voting. *Abadi* residents emphasised that they were AWP voters and stressed the value of their votes. This is because political norms dictate that needs are

met through clientelism. Indeed, as Naqvi (2022) shows in Islamabad, residents link themselves with, and support, any political actors who they believe can get their claims heard. As such, there can be simultaneous instances of ‘overlapping politics’ existing within the same space and timeframe. While this article considers only one type of relationship, the framework could be used to study the web of cross-class political relations that exist within a particular city.

In contrast to *abadi* residents, middle-class identifying AWP members have a forward-looking agenda that gives precedence to the co-production of an alternative politics beyond clientelism along with *abadi* residents. They reiterated that the primary type of politics the AWP currently engaged in was resistance rather than electoral politics, which is grounded in clientelism:

“...AWP cannot get votes in the current political situation. One reason for that is when voting happens, you have to give a lot of money [...] We mostly do resistance politics, not electoral politics...” (AWP member 2, personal communication, 27 October 2020)

Resistance is a step towards progressing from clientelism. Resistance is defined as “a response to power” (Vingathen and Lilja, 2007: 1216). In Islamabad it involves rapid mobilisation in response to a threat. In an emergency, the AWP’s focal person can be contacted by *abadi* residents. Only a handful of residents have these contact details. There is therefore an asymmetry in terms of access; it is easier for middle-class identifying AWP members to contact *abadi* residents than vice-versa. This illustrates that ‘overlapping’ does not happen to the same degree in each of the four modes, and nor is the effort put into this ‘overlapping’ equal across class groups.

Abadi residents who are members of the party are encouraged to run for elections. As such, the party platform includes *abadi* residents, thus bringing in an element of post-clientelism (Chatterjee, 2019; Manor, 2011). In the 2015 local government elections, an *abadi* resident who was an AWP member was supported by the party as a candidate along with a middle-class member of the party. Additionally, *abadi* residents are encouraged to build upon and apply the knowledge and information exchange described earlier:

“We have elections coming up, so we'll find a candidate from the abadis who will run in the elections on the party ticket. So we do have expectations that after learning about how to speak up for their rights, people should use what they have learnt.” (AWP member 11, personal communication, 8 December 2020)

Outside of election periods, there are two ways that *abadi* residents provide support: making logistical arrangements and generating a mass presence. Residents provide spaces for events in *abadis*. They set up tables and chairs, provide refreshments, and make announcements. They take on organisational and planning roles to support middle-class identifying AWP members because of the tacit knowledge (Van Ewijk and Baud, 2009) they hold and their local networks. They encourage other residents to attend and understand that their involvement is critical:

“We're the ones who have to make some noise. If [a leading member of AWP] raises his voice alone, no one will listen to him [...] We have to cry out [...] But [the leading

member of AWP] has to support us from above [...] In that sense, we really need people like this." (Alipur resident 2 and AWP member, personal communication, 18 May 2021)

In summary, *abadi* residents offer their support by organising and planning for AWP events, building a mass presence, and voting. Middle-class identifying AWP members participate in electoral politics, but their focus is on promoting their party platform and co-producing an alternative politics beyond clientelism (Fox, 1994) with *abadi* residents. However, clientelism lingers in 'overlapping politics', empirically and conceptually.

Ownership and responsibility

'Overlapping politics' involves the provision of material benefits to members of disadvantaged groups. However, this mechanism is unlike the traditional clientelist mode of service provision; there is an emphasis on shared ownership of these benefits between middle-class identifying AWP members and *abadi* residents. *Abadi* residents are involved in securing and maintaining those benefits. This process is effective in some ways, but prone to shortcomings in others.

The status of *abadis* determines the 'overlapping politics' approach taken. The practice of 'overlapping politics' has improved or provided new facilities and services without the involvement of the CDA in H-9 *abadi*. However, middle-class identifying AWP members visit the CDA with Alipur residents and request government officials to fulfil their needs. This is because it is easier to make claims to the local government when the *abadi* under discussion is considered legal. The nature of the urban setting (e.g. informal) and the status of the people involved (e.g. illegal) vis-à-vis the state therefore impact the way that 'overlapping politics' unfolds.

An example that highlights 'overlapping' in ownership and responsibility is the installation of a tube well⁴ in H-9 *abadi* in 2016. This decision was based on *abadi* residents' needs, which were communicated across class lines. It was installed outside a resident's home and costs were shared between *abadi* residents and middle-class identifying AWP members. Residents emphasised that there was a partnership in place (rather than a heavily one-sided power dynamic, as in clientelist politics):

*"They [AWP] didn't do it alone. They did it together [with us]. There was just one bore[hole]⁵. All the people, all the households said, 'We want to install a bore[hole] here. You [AWP] have connections. Put some little money into this, maybe 4000, 5000 rupees. We'll do the rest ourselves.'" – (H-9 *abadi* resident 5, personal communication, 1 April 2021)*

The collaborative nature of this effort is reflective of bottom-up approaches for infrastructure provision, usually led by community-based organisations and NGOs (Devkar et al., 2017). This case is slightly different; a political party — which would traditionally engage in clientelism —

⁴ A tube well is a well consisting of a pipe that is drilled underground to extract groundwater. A motor drives water upwards, and a manual hand pump is used to collect it.

⁵ This resident uses the word "bore(hole)" to refer to the tube well. Although the two are different, *abadi* residents often used these words in lieu of each other.

has adopted a participatory approach for micro-level development. The grassroots approach of the AWP is grounded in the concerns of the marginalised urban residents. This is unusual given that negotiations with state institutions for service delivery and property rights in Islamabad are characterised by informality — even for formal residents — and require clout, networks, and wealth (Moatasim, 2023; Naqvi, 2022).

Residents' enthusiasm for the project is unsurprising. Bottom-up approaches take into account local needs (Narayanan et al., 2017) and invite community involvement (Devkar et al., 2017). Access to water was available to all residents, not only to those who contributed or who were involved with the AWP. The responsibility was shared; middle-class identifying AWP members supplied an electricity generator, and *abadi* residents funded its petrol. In theory, *abadi* residents would contribute to the petrol fund and access the water. This arrangement collapsed due to local power dynamics. The individual whose house the tube well was installed outside of took control of water access, and today it is defunct.

This example points to some of the challenges associated with 'overlapping' ownership and responsibility between class groups who are engaged in a political relationship. Tensions between people *within* the groups themselves may undermine the potential offered by 'overlapping' ownership. 'Overlapping' responsibilities may also lead to problems because there is no individual or group that holds full responsibility. Therefore, while the intentions behind 'overlapping' ownership and responsibility might be altruistic, such endeavours may be unsustainable.

Conclusion

This article has offered a novel way of conceptualising cross-class politics which considers the contributions of all class groups involved. 'Overlapping politics' moves beyond insular framings of class-based urban politics that do not take into account cross-class political relationships (Bayat, 2000; Chatterjee, 2004; Harriss, 2007; Holston, 2008). The framework highlights that political practices are ever-changing and contextual. Urban residents — regardless of their class — employ common strategies when engaging in politics, albeit to different degrees and for varying purposes. This framework encourages researchers to consider the consequences of this form of politics on urban residents and the city. It does not assume positive or negative outcomes; it invites researchers to think through the advantages and challenges of cross-class political relationships, and to dwell on the consequences. This avoids the romanticisation of such relationships, particularly with regards to their ability to transcend political structures such as clientelism.

Additionally, this framework allows researchers to identify and analyse how cross-class political relationships can offer modes of political participation that were not previously accessible and/or known to marginalised urban residents. This framework highlights the prospect for diverse classes of urban residents to mutually collaborate, thus opening up the opportunity to address inequality and/or injustice together in socially, spatially, and politically fragmented contexts.

By bringing together literature on party politics and clientelism and 'mediated citizenship' (von Lieres and Piper, 2014), this article highlights how the practice of 'overlapping politics' carries

the potential to forge a progression from the entrenched political norm. In Islamabad, 'overlapping politics' helps participants develop a political practice beyond clientelism and move towards bottom-up approaches to articulate their claims through four modes. These efforts often succumb to obstacles which are in themselves elements of 'overlapping politics'.

This analysis of 'overlapping politics' reveals the irreplaceable role played by those with different class backgrounds in addressing issues of urban inequality. These developments suggest that claims-making by marginalised groups in urban contexts necessitates the formation of cross-class political relationships. However, further investigation is required to understand the consequences of 'overlapping politics' as a practice, particularly whether it can be identified as a step towards long-term political change in cities of the Global South.

Accepted Version

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