



RESEARCH ARTICLE

FEMALE RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE IN ELECTION FOR VOTE CASTING; A DILEMMA;  
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SOUTHERN PUNJAB

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the constraints that limit women's participation in politics as a voter in southern areas of Punjab Pakistan, among these constraints are socio-economic and cultural in the main stream of this study. The study engages both primary and secondary sources, including field survey, personal interviews and questionnaire. A total of 600 women were selected from three divisions of southern Punjab including Dera ghazi khan, Multan and Bahawalpur through multi stage sampling technique for the administration of the questionnaires. The study reveals that the patriarchal system and male domination of the society, which relegates women to subordinate role, has created women's inferiority complex and alienated them from the mainstream politics especially in the field of vote casting. Besides, the stigmatization of women politicians by fellow women discourages the political participation of the former while religious beliefs and institutional arrangements that restrict women to family responsibilities in the country coupled with lack of decisive affirmative action to encourage women's political participation as a voter, have created a legacy that limit women's political participation in southern Punjab respectively. Consequently, the study emphasizes the need to address those constraints that entrench women subordination in Pakistan especially in southern part of Punjab. These include, among others, the reformation of all religious, statutory and customary laws and practices that perpetuate women's subordination in the country and the explicit specifications and modalities of affirmative actions on women's political participation as a voter and clear guidelines for implementations in the constitution of Pakistan.

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INTRODUCTION

Women in Pakistan have limited political participation. Throughout the history of Pakistan, women rights violated by men everywhere mostly in rural areas like southern Punjab because of dominancy of men. Feudalism has played a key role in violating the rights of women. Women's political empowerment is not a goal in itself but it is instrumental in stimulating the society for political and social empowerment which would further stimulate to overall development and refinement in the society. The presence and participation of women in decision making process would be enable them to revise the policies against gender discrimination and laws. Vote casting is not a new phenomenon but women were deprived to have this right at the same level as it started from the seventeenth century in America when people fought for their political rights but women were neglected, they have

started movements for their civil rights including right to vote casting. In 1848, the Seneca Falls convention an early and influential women rights convention which was held in Seneca Falls, New York. There were 300 members present there at the time of annual meeting and 68% were women and 32% were men who signed the declaration of sentiments which defined the women rights movement. The first national women rights convention took place in 1850 in Worcester, Massachusetts which is the state of New England attracting more than 1000 participants. This national convention was held yearly through 1860 (Filer and Lawrence, 1991).

The people of Pakistan do not have lot of experience in elections. The first general elections in Pakistan were held in 1970, twenty three years after the independence. The election system has been changing since independence. Here in Pakistan there is no objection on women toward casting their vote by laws throughout but in some areas especially in southern Punjab women have been restricted by family head, political leaders and their cultural system (Alam, 2004).

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Percentage of election statistics from 1999-2013

All women percentage who voted in the past	18-22 Age	23-27 age	27 to above
Voted for same party as family head	44.34%	41.56%	49.44%
Voted for different party from head	8.44%	11.18%	9.55%
Voted but male head did not	5.29%	6.64%	5.06%
Total	58.07%	59.38%	64.05%
All women percentage who not voted in the past			
Voted for same party as family head	15.08%	11.21%	11.54%
Voted for different party from head	1.54%	3.27%	0.02%
Voted but male head did not	2.15%	0.99%	1.92%
Total	18.77%	15.47%	13.48%

## Literature Review

Asian Development Bank (2004) stated in their report that there are considerable obstacles for the women to use their vote as a mechanism to exercise demand for improved service provision and gender equality and to hold public service providers accountable. In particular administrative barriers toward vote casting, specifically the lack of identity cards and incomplete registration in election lists prevent women from casting their vote. Poor people and women are particularly affected by these problems. Moreover only half of the respondents believe that the electoral outcomes accurately reflect people's voting decisions. On the positive side, income status and residence in rural areas like southern Punjab do not seem to discourage people from voting. Southern Punjab is an exception, however in this province voter turnout among the very poor was decentralization for the poor and for women particularly low. In general illiterate citizens and citizens from rural areas were more likely to vote than literate and urban citizens. Expectedly, men showed a higher voter turnout than women. Among the people who voted, one can observe that both identity based voting and performance based voting played a key role.

We also find the evidence of large spillover effects dictated by geographic proximity. Control women in treated clusters respond to cluster treatment assignment about as much as do directly treated women. Moving beyond clusters we examine spatial spillovers more generally and find still larger peer effects. The importance of spillover effects and peer pressure resonates well with the theoretical literature on voter turnout that emphasizes the role of the group in coordinating participation either because group members are rewarded by leaders or because they each believe they are ethically obliged to vote and reinforce one another, (Shachar and Nalebuff, 1999 and Feddersen, 2004). The presence of significant spillovers alters the cost benefit analysis quite substantially. An additional vote costs more than seven times as much as it does in the absence of spillovers. Given the relatively low cost of an additional vote (\$2.3, using variables costs only) information campaigns appear to be a relatively cost effective way of increasing turnout among poor rural people women. Mubashir (2000) stated that women empowerment is one of the momentous issues of contemporary development policies in developing countries. Since empowerment is considered a multidimensional concept, it is determined by many socio-economic factors and cultural norms. In this paper an attempt is made to explore the possible determinants of women empowerment using regression analysis based on primary data from a district of southern Punjab. Considering its multidimensional nature and aspects, a cumulative index for women empowerment is constructed using four indices i.e. personal autonomy, family decision making domestic economic decisions and political autonomy.

An empirical analysis shows some new and diverse results for three different areas namely urban, rural and tribal areas. The results show that women empowerment is considerably influenced by education, access to media, socio-cultural norms of the community, job of women and household participation rate. In this study apart from the conventional variable about the knowledge of an Islamic concept of women empowerment is also considered which shows significant positive impact on women empowerment index.

Finally, it is concluded that women empowerment can be improved by concentrating on the significant factors in remote regions and consequently poverty level will also be across the areas. Afzal (1999) stated that "No nation can raise to the height of glory unless your women are side by side with you; we are victims of evil customs. It is crime against humanity that our women are shut up with in the four walls of the houses as prisoners. There is no sanction anywhere for the deplorable condition in which our women have to live. You should take your women along with you as comrades in every sphere of life".

## Purpose of the Study

The present study is premediated to investigate the socio-economic and cultural constraints that are responsible for the limited political participation of women as a voter in southern areas of Punjab. Previous studies address diverse constraining factors for social exclusion of women from political process. This paper also bestows a concise review of the progressive measures and to educate women for the development of gender supportive projects.

## Imperative questions which were addressed in the course of this study include

- To evaluate the difference between social and political rights
- How right to vote of women can affect the development of the country.
- Nexus between education and women attitude towards the right to vote casting
- To draw the government attention towards this unjust situation in Southern Punjab.

## Methods and procedure

The social setup of southern Punjab (Pakistan) expected traditional household role from women, therefore the aspirations, achievements and preference of the women are always neglected. This study used cross sectional survey design to illustrate the influence of various socio-cultural and economic impediments on social exclusion of women from politics as a voter of southern Punjab Pakistan.

## Sample size and procedure

This study targeted women from three divisions of southern Punjab. A sample of N=600 respondents was selected from eleven districts of southern Punjab including Bahawalpur, Dera ghazi khan and Multan through multi stage sampling technique, Rajanpur and Dera ghazi khan districts was selected purposively as they have the maximum number of violation of women political rights especially in the field of vote casting.

## Instruments

The researcher used interview schedule as a tool for data collection procedure.

The question were designed to evaluate the possible socio-economic and cultural constraints that are responsible for exploitation of women from politics as a voter in southern Punjab. The first portion addressed various demographic and structural questions pertaining to female. On the other hand the second portion addressed various socio-economic and constraints that limits women from vote casting and government role to reduce these constraints. While the last portion addressed the determinants of policy failure regarding female vote casting and the role of media and Non-governmental organizations. The researcher compare different responses on pre-coded 5 point Likert scale. Both structured and unstructured questions were used to get maximum response. The data was coded by using SPSS software.

## Data Analysis

The researcher used ANOVA test to evaluate responses of women and to avoid the responses effects such as wording, order and format of the questions the researcher investigates the explanatory relationship among the dependent and independent variables by the application of one way ANOVA test. The value were calculated by the researcher for six independent variables such as low status of women in socio-economic and cultural sphere, patriarchal structure, conservative attitude of the family, preference to male as compare to female. P value illustrated that alternate hypothesis is accepted as there is significant difference among the opinions of all women.

**The formula for one way ANOVA is as follows:**

$$SS_{Total} = \left( \sum_{n_1} x_1^2 + \sum_{n_2} x_2^2 + \sum_{n_1} x_1^2 \right) - \frac{(\sum x_1 + \sum x_2 + \sum x_1)^2}{N}$$

$$SS_{Total} = \left[ \sum_{n_1} (x_1)^2 + \sum_{n_2} (x_2)^2 + \sum_{n_1} (x_1)^2 \right] - \frac{(\sum x_1 + \sum x_2 + \sum x_1)^2}{N}$$

$$SS_{within} = SS_{Total} - SS_{Among}$$

$$Df_{among} = r - 1 \quad Df_{within} = N - r$$

$$MS_{among} = \frac{SS_{among}}{Df_{among}} \quad MS_{within} = \frac{SS_{within}}{Df_{within}} \quad F = \frac{MS_{among}}{MS_{within}}$$

## DISCUSSION

Discrimination of women political rights especially in the field of vote casting in southern Punjab due to the conservative

attitude of the male family members in rural areas as well as in urban areas because of the dependency of women on men. The above mentioned table demonstrates that 23.5 % of the women agree on the knowledge of their social and political rights while rest of the others are totally disagree. The knowledge about their social and political rights always come through education and the literacy rate of the study area is very low. It is evident from the above mentioned table that 60% of the women have registered their vote while rest of the others don't know about their vote registration issue. Hence they have always deprived from the equal participation in vote casting as compare to men (Mubashir and sultan, 1999).

When the question was asked about the participation of women in political assemblies and processions 82.5% of women denied because of their culture patterns. While rest of the others have mixed response on their participation. The table shows that 17.5% of the women agree that electronic media is the only source for them to get information about the election. While rest of the others get information about the election from their male family members. Hence 71.5% of the respondents agree that women have always restrictions to get permission from the male family head to cast their vote. While rest of the others can cast their or participate in election without any restriction. Another factor of the women political rights deprivation is that preference given to male in every sphere of life as compare to women on socio-economic and cultural rights. Alternatively 81.5% of the respondents agree that patriarchal system within society as well as in family is a major cause of their political right deprivation especially in the field of vote casting.

The table pop up this standpoint 21.5% of the respondents agree that religious leaders as well as political leaders of southern Punjab are the major factors of exploitation toward female vote casting. On the other hand 79.5% of the respondents agree on this point that women of southern Punjab are economically dependent on the male family members that's why male members deprived them from their voting rights according to their will. There are certain ways of modesty and purity are the characteristics of Muslim women in Pakistan. Correspondingly this biasness escort towards different type of preference for male and female in southern Punjab.

In Pakistan women have limited access toward political participation as a voter therefore they are always at the lower end. Political rights alone cannot safe the women from not participating in political sphere but yet it plays an imperative role in making them empower in their socio-economic matters by giving them awareness especially in the patriarchal structure with conservative environment about their rights. A variety of obstructions associated with female vote casting and their political rights deprivation ( $p = 0.000$ ). When women are given equal chance in their decision making process then they can better utilize their socio-economic rights in making a phenomenal change in their status in all sphere of life. The most important barrier to women political rights especially in the field of vote casting is uneven patterns of development. Women are also constrained to do the domestic work. Girlhood is culturally mate and they have diminutive preference to social, economic and cultural rights, level of awareness and poor self-concept that confines its aspirations. Decision making is restricted due to lack of access to resources including finance, low education level, low skill levels and inadequate mobility due to cultural restrictions.

**Table no.1. Percentage distribution of the respondents with respect to socio-economic and cultural constraints**

Socio-economic and cultural constraints to female vote casting	Percentage of the respondents agree on these variables		
	Agree	Disagree	Neither
Knowledge about female's social rights	23.5%	59.5%	16.5%
Knowledge about female's political rights	12.5%	60.5%	27.5%
Registration of vote	78.5%	10.5%	11.5%
Participation in political assemblies and processions	2.5%	82.5%	14.5%
Electronic media is a source to get information about election	17.5%	67.5%	13.5%
Information of election through the male family members	82.5%	9.5%	8.5%
restrict to get permission from male head of the family to cast vote	71.5%	22.5%	7.5%
Self-esteem can be raised by casting vote	62.5%	15.5%	21.5%
Patriarchal system in the family is a main cause of political rights deprivation.	81.5%	9.5%	9.5%
Main reason of political rights deprivation are political leaders	21.5%	54.5%	23.5%
Main reason of political rights deprivation are Religious leaders	39.5%	42.5%	17.5%
Economically dependent on family head	79.5%	10.5%	9.5%
Cultural barriers for females	62.5%	21.5%	16.5%
Religious barriers for females	69.5%	23.5%	8.5%
Male domination of polling staff	32.5%	54.5%	15.5%
Recession and disappointment with the political system	44%	29%	27%
NGOs make positive contribution during election	79.5%	7.5%	12.5%
Elections are always free and fair in southern Punjab	40.5%	36.5%	23.5%
female voters are most likely to be victimized by violence or intimidation in election	71%	20%	9%
Government can play key role in encouraging to women political rights	84.5%	11.5%	5.5%

**Table no. 2 Testing of hypothesis**

<b>H1: Higher the education of family higher will be the rights to female vote casting</b>					
Source	DF	SS	MS		
Factor	2	79.88	41.93		
Error	597	675.01	2.35	F	P
Total	599	754.82		25.91	0.000
<b>H2: More the social impediment decreases will be the female political participation as voter</b>					
Source	DF	SS	MS		
Factor	2	218.57	109.29		
Error	597	871.83	1.45	F	P
Total	599	1090.40		73.84	0.000
<b>H3: Lesser the legitimacy of government during election lesser will be the chance of female voter turnout</b>					
Source	DF	SS	MS		
Factor	2	225.61	112.81		
Error	597	970.86	1.62	F	P
Total	599	1196.47		69.37	0.000
<b>H4: More the family is religious lesser will be the rights to female vote casting in family</b>					
Source	DF	SS	MS		
Factor	2	96.37	48.19		
Error	597	675.01	1.92	F	P
Total	599	754.82		25.13	0.000
<b>H5: Higher the patriarchy in the family there will be lesser female political empowerment</b>					
Source	DF	SS	MS		
Factor	2	81.84	40.97		
Error	597	876.01	1.47	F	P
Total	599	957.85		27.91	0.000
<b>H6: Higher the role of media in the area higher will be the inclination of female toward vote casting</b>					
Source	DF	SS	MS		
Factor	2	262.29	131.15		
Error	597	840.37	1.41	F	P
Total	599	1102.66		93.17	0.000

## Conclusion

The idea of the current study was conceived to find out the attitude of female along with their family practice toward vote casting. When questions were ask about the attitude and family practice from female towards women empowerment in the areas of voter registration and vote casting. They have shown positive attitude and proactive family practice. It shows that because of better level of education and awareness on gender issue, the attitude of female has been transform. At the same time they also show positive practice in the areas of voter registration and vote casting which may be is a result of personal gains of family males to support the desired person. When questions were ask in the areas of decision regarding job participation, political participation and participation in public protest and political campaign.

The findings reveal that both the attitude and practice were negative. The respondents reported that women should not make the decision of doing job. The environment of working areas political places and protests are worse so women should not participate in the above mention fields. Moreover they reported that these fields are strictly associated with males and not with females. This is clear indication of patriarchal culture in Pakistan as well as southern Punjab. Respondents also reported that it is against Islamic values which are simply a misinterpretation of Islam by an average cleric which is followed by the majority of the people. It shows that attitude is changing but the male dominating culture in Pakistan is restricting its transformation into practice. There is need to amelioration in gender prospective by redefining gender roles for the meaningful women empowerment in the society. There is work going on to change the attitude and to transform it into

action. But female participation in political sphere is a social phenomenon so any change in a social phenomenon is gradual and slow in nature. It will take time to bring a change in the situation of women participation in every aspect of life in Pakistan. At the given time it is not in equilibrium.

### Recommendations

- Introduce policies which guarantee basic human rights to all, including women
- Without any geographical discrimination.
- Should take special measure for the awareness, promotion and protection of Human rights, particularly women political rights in Southern Punjab Pakistan.
- There is an urgent need for the ECP to make public the consolidated result of polling stations Prepared by returning officers (Form XVI).
- ECP should also make public the statement of the count (Form XIV) and ballot paper account (Form XV) prepared by Presiding officers.
- ECP should ensure the implementation of separate vote counting in combined polling stations.
- ECP should make sure that 100% voters are registered before the next general elections to meet the desired projections of turnout.
- ECP should ensure the implementation of existing laws that protect women's right to vote, and should recognize that Pakistan also has international treaty obligations in this regard.
- ECP should take initiative to resolve the disputes and agreements between political, tribal and Religious parties in those areas where voting is not allowed for female
- There is need that ECP should initiate for legislation to protect the voting rights of marginalized groups for their meaningful participation in electoral and political process.

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