



## The Role of Gender in the Measurement of Political Awareness in Pakhtun Society

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**Abstract:** The Pakhtun Society is a patriarchal society. Men have socio-politically and economically dominant status. Therefore, a man is always head of the family. He runs the affairs of the whole family. Likewise, socio-economic fields a man has dominant role in the political affairs of the family. It is observed that men always try to influence the political decision inside and outside the family. As a result of the strong position of a man the female family member accepts their dominant role in politics. The men always try to suppress the political voice of female family members. Therefore, women are politically not empowered in our society. On the other hand, female have very little understanding of the political affairs. To measure the political awareness of the respondents' five questions were asked from the respondents. These questions included importance of vote, eligibility criteria of vote, manifesto of political party, democracy and voter list. This study is primarily based on quantitative data. Data is randomly collected from twenty union councils of District Charsadda. Chi-square test is used for data analysis.

Keywords: Gender, Political Awareness, Pashtun Society, Political Parties

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### 1. Introduction

Political participation means the involvement of male and female citizens at various levels in national and local politics. Political participation and political awareness are both interrelated terminologies. If in a society citizen are more politically aware their political participation also is more. There are different parameters of political awareness like; awareness about importance of vote, awareness about voters list and eligibility age for vote, awareness about manifesto of a political party through which we can analyse the a gap between both sexes. As the ratio of political awareness increases in a society, the ratio of political participation also increases<sup>1</sup>. It is observed from the current study that still there is a huge gap between male and female in Pakhtun society. Majority of the

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.du.ac.in/fileadmin/DU/Academics/course\\_material/hrge\\_08.pdf](http://www.du.ac.in/fileadmin/DU/Academics/course_material/hrge_08.pdf) (December 23, 2012)

female citizen have lack of political awareness. It is an established fact that political awareness plays a significant role in shaping a real democracy.

Women are lagging behind in various fields of life in Pakistani society in general and Pakhtun society in particular. Women's presence in politics, like other aspects of society, is not so inspiring. Pakhtun women are stripped of the bulk of their fundamental political rights with respect to women's involvement in politics, their participation, contribution and empowerment. Women in Pakhtun society may not have fair access to political events, such as leadership, elections, election competitions, election campaigns, freedom of speech, freedom of will, decision-making and execution of decisions, etc. Several causes, such as illiteracy, ignorance, lack of knowledge, economic vulnerability, gender sensitivity, lack of protection, lack of confidence and false self-awareness, etc., lead to the growing deprivation and prejudice of women in political involvement and empowerment.

In brief, this thesis reflects primarily on the socio-cultural system of Pakhtun culture in relation to the political empowerment of women. Furthermore, the ethnographic specifics of the research field mostly relate to the mechanism of women's disempowerment in their political domain, which takes them to a pathetic and miserable livelihood.

## **2. Theoretical Understanding**

For the present analysis, feminist theory was used as a theoretical paradigm. Feminism insists on gender equality and human treatment in the first place. Yet it stresses women's rights and dominance over the passing of time. That was because women in almost every walk of life, who used to spend impoverished times, were subject to extensive deprivation. Feminism is also a progressive ideology with a range of concepts, centered on women's subordination and suppression, and formulating and developing strategies to get out of this situation. Liberal feminism has been undertaken in this respect to explain the issue addressed in the present review. In the current study, it was conceived as the theoretical structure that was correlated with both the primary and secondary knowledge on the problem. The ethos of enlightenment was ultimately almost like a landmark which gave rise to liberal feminism. As Ritzer (2000) [1] suggests, the ideology of liberal feminism argues that women can demand equality with men and that gender inequality is the product of patriarchal and sexist patterning of labor division, and that gender equality can be achieved by reforming labor division by re-patterning core structures such as law, employment, family, education, and media. Liberal theorists believe that, through democratic and legal reforms, equality for men and women is inevitable. It reflects largely on women's capability issues as they will preserve equity with men through it [2]. Women have the potential to attain equality with men, but this kind of transition involves improvements in the structure of society.

As advocated by Bell [3], mainstream feminism focused predominantly on topics such as reproductive and abortion rights, sexual abuse, voting, jobs, "equal pay for equal work," free childcare, affordable health services, and exposing the prevalence of sexual and domestic violence against women. In the context of such conception, the same is the case in the region under review where women are almost thoroughly stripped of the above rights and the right to cast a vote and to contest the election in particular. Liberal feminism's founders focus largely on eradicating social sexism and introducing gender-balanced rules [4]. As Jagger (1993) [5] said, the liberal feminists worked on the core theory of women's emancipation and freedom, Liberal feminists support the fundamental organization of our society, but maintain that women do not yet have the same rights as men that are ultimately relevant in the field of science. For Wollstonecraft, it is not rational and correct to consider female inferiority dependent on her physique and intelligence. It appears to be embedded in the formal and informal rules of their inadequate schooling and injustice. In this respect, the key issue for modern feminism remains the need for improvements and changes to old principles. Liberal feminism is specifically concerned with providing both men and women equal and equal opportunities in education [6, 2]. Women shall therefore have access to government and law enforcement services, voting and property rights conveniently and fairly. Moreover, modern feminists emphasize equal work opportunity

for both men and women. They are seeking a good role for women in both the private and public sectors. For them, oppression is not the product of legislation; rather, discrimination against women is generated by male domination and male-oriented values [2,6,7]. Liberal feminism formed as a single party with the passing of time, portraying women as a whole. As confirmation of the factual details alluded to above concerning liberal feminism and its philosophy, it is clear that the established shortage of women is comprised of women in the sector under review. In a traditional Pakhtun society where the real image of the Pakhtun code of life (Pakhtunwali) is profoundly prevalent, the present thesis has been performed. Studies reveal that the Pakhtun Code of Life has little space for women's equality and equal rights [2, 7]. In addition, they intend to bring about gender-balanced improvements in the form of legislation and its execution. Liberal feminists' situational analysis is close to that of the culture under research where patriarchy is an institutional network and codes of life and the role of traditionalism (Pakhtunwali) regulates women's lives. This man led institutions and male-interpreted laws and rules that aim to make women inferior and subordinate where males make the ultimate decisions, including the political affiliation and equality of women. In reality, women are deprived of contesting the election and casting the vote and enjoying their civil and formal rights. Liberal theory provides a framework for knowledge and strategies to bring in improvements and enforce laws in society that will make women equal to men as people. In the Pakhtun community under research, this kind of approach is very productive. Moreover, the relational studies of the theory and ethnographic structure of the study of liberal feminism indicate a close connection with each other that justifies the role of the researcher to pick liberal feminism as the theoretical basis of the study [8].

### **3. Political Awareness**

The practice of free and fair elections is one of the most fundamental ideals of any democratic culture. It is an easy, productive and comfortable way of involving people in democratic processes. In the joint decision-making process, even a single vote will play a deciding role and tip the scales towards one side or the other [8]. The main cause of low turnout in election is lack of political awareness about the importance of vote, voters list and manifesto of a political party. Political awareness of the voters is playing a significant role in the voting behaviour.

#### **3.1 Did you cast your vote?**

Pakhtun's culture is dominated by patriarchy. In the politics, females do not have a proper role. Female voters are prevented from voting. The candidates and political parties in some of the KP constituencies have signed an agreement on the subject of refusing to encourage female voters to cast their votes in elections. Therefore, a large portion of our society is kept away from polling stations during elections. This deprivation of women from politics significantly affects the turnout ratio.

**Table No.1**

**Views of the respondents with regard to the question, “Did you cast your vote?”**

Answers	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Yes	134 (75.3%)	44(24.7%)	178 (100.0%)
No	63 (43.4%)	82 (56.6%)	145 (100.0%)
Don't remember	7 (53.8%)	6 (46.2%)	13 (100.0%)
Total	204 (60.7%)	132 (39.3%)	336 (100.0%)

**Chi-square=34.215, p-value= 0.000**

Pakhtun society is a male dominant. Male are more responsible to run the family affairs as compared to female. Therefore, as opposed to women, men are more politically conscious and engage in large-scale political events. The statistic in Table-1 indicates that in the last elections held, male voters represented the majority, while female voters constituted 1/4 of the total number of voters polled, compared to 3:1=4. There is a large number of male who voted in elections while some of the female voted in previous election. The outcome of the chi square test suggests a highly significant p-value. The p-value<0.05 suggests that gender plays an important part in turnout.

### **3.2 Voters’ Perception about the Importance of Vote**

The ignorance of the individuals about the political system and the problems confronting, it can lead to low political participation. Vote is the future of a nation. But some people of district Charsadda were not aware about the importance of vote. The degree of political awareness among the people of Charsadda was attained during the survey. The importance of vote has been discussed in the light of different variables like age, gender, education, profession and economic position of the respondents. Each of the variables has an impact upon the behaviour of the respondents regarding the importance of vote.

Male and female are the two wheels of a vehicle of a society. If one of these wheels (means male or female) failed to work it means the social set up will be useless. Male and female both have equal right to cast their vote. Females are comparatively less aware than males about the importance of vote. The main cause of this ignorance is our social set up characterized by manmade limitations on females.

**Table No.2**

**Views of the respondents with regard to the question, “Do you know the importance of vote?”**

Answers	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Yes	186 (64.6%)	102 (35.4%)	288 (100.0%)
No	18 (37.5%)	30 (62.5%)	48 (100.0%)
Total	204 (60.7%)	132 (39.3%)	336 (100.0%)

**Chi-square=12.662, p-value= 0.000**

Among the respondents, the ratio of male respondents with a ratio of 186 (64.6%) were more aware about the importance of vote than female with a ratio of 102 (35.4%). The chi square test provides highly significant p-value. The p-value<0.05 reveals that gender matters in political awareness.

### **3.3 Eligibility for a Citizen to Cast His/Her Vote**

In 1970-71, the first general elections based on adult franchise took place in Pakistan. In 1970-71 eligibility age for vote was 21 years. Later on, it was reduced to 18 years. Any citizen of Pakistan with 18 years of age is eligible to cast his/her vote in elections. Awareness about the eligibility age is very important for the voter. If an individual does not know about the eligibility age he/she cannot get themselves enrolled in the electoral list. To know the eligibility age it means that respondents are more politically aware than those voters who have no any knowledge of the eligibility age for voting. The voters’ knowledge about the eligibility age for vote was judged from different variables such as, age, gender, education, profession and economic position of the voters. Each of the variables is playing a key role in shaping behavior of the voter regarding awareness about the eligibility age for voting.

Females are comparatively not much aware about politics than males in a family. Female in our society only obey the males and follow them. They haven’t their own idea about the politics. Majority of the females receive their Identity Cards after marriage. They have very small knowledge about the political set up.

**Table No.3**

**Views of the respondents with regard to the question, “Do you know the eligibility age for a citizen to cast his vote?”**

Answers	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Aware	159 (62.4%)	96 (37.6%)	255 (100.0%)
Unaware	45 (55.6%)	36 (44.4%)	81 (100.0%)
Total	204 (60.7%)	132 (39.3%)	336 (100.0%)

**Chi-square=1.191, p-value= 0.275**

Among the respondents, majority of the males (62.4%) were aware about the eligibility age to cast vote, followed by a large number of female respondents to cast vote in election. The chi square test result delivers insignificant p-value. The p-value>0.05 clarifies that gender haven’t any role about the awareness of eligibility age for the individual to cast vote in elections.

### **3.4 The Respondents’ Awareness about Voter List**

The people of Pakistan do not have adequate knowledge about elections. Therefore, a large number of people are still unaware about the documentation for the registration of vote. Voter list has the names of all registered voters of a constituency. There are different parameters through which we can get information about the political awareness of the citizens of a society like voters list. A voters list is a list in which the names of the voters of a particular constituency are mentioned. The Election Commission of Pakistan, after each election, revises the voters list. In the voters list, any voter can find his vote and polling station where he/she can poll his/her vote in elections. Those respondents who know about the voters list were more politically aware than those respondents who did not have any idea about the voters list. The voters’ perception about the voters list was discussed in the light of various variables such as, age, gender, education, professional affiliation and income status. These variables influence the behaviour of the voters regarding knowledge about the voters list.

Both male and female names are registered in electoral list. Some of the males had seen their names in the electoral list but very few of the women had availed this opportunity. Since these lists are available with the party activists and the election commission office, nobody allows his wife, daughter or sister to go and check their name in the voters list.

**Table No.4**

**Views of the respondents with regard to the question, “Does your name appear in the voters list?”**

Answers	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Yes	187 (67.0%)	92 (33.0%)	279 (100%)
No	2 (18.2%)	9 (81.8%)	11 (100%)
Don't know	15 (32.6%)	31 (67.4%)	46 (100%)
Total	204 (60.7%)	132 (39.3%)	336 (100%)

**Chi-square=28.235, p-value= 0.000**

A majority of males (67.0%) and a large number of female respondents replied in 'yes', while the rest either replied in negative or declined to answer. The ratio of male respondents was larger than the female. The chi square test result shows significant p-value. The p-value<0.05 indicates the importance of gender consideration in knowing about voters list.

### **3.5 Awareness about Manifestoes of Political Parties.**

It is easy to vote a candidate but it's not easy to vote a deserving political party. For this purpose, a voter needs to study the manifestoes of political parties and then to decide to which of the several political parties he should vote for. If the manifesto of a political party focused on the promotion of national interests, a voter may vote for that political party. Manifesto is a program or future plan of a political party. Because of dynamic features, the manifestos of the parties are adjusted in line with the change in political environment of the country. Keeping in view the above statement, every party tries to bring change in its manifesto because of the rapidly changing political scenario of the country. The voting behavior of a person reveals his level of political awareness. Before joining a party, one needs to familiarize himself with the manifesto of that political party. While conducting the survey a question was also asked whether the respondent had gone through the manifesto of the party he had voted for in the last held general elections. The answers given to this question was evaluated while keeping in view the age, gender, education, profession and economic status of the respondents and based on this the voting behaviour of the respondents was determined.

As discussed earlier, women in Pakistan for the most part, are dependent on men about their political decisions. They have the right but they do not exercise it freely. The ratio of education is very low in female; hence, there is no point of reading a given manifesto of the political party.

**Table No.5**

**Views of the respondents with regard to the question, “Have you gone through the manifesto of the party, you are inclined to?”**

Answers	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Yes	97 (68.3%)	46 (31.7%)	143 (100.0%)
No	92 (56.4%)	72 (43.6%)	164 (100.0%)
Don't remember	12 (42.9%)	17 (57.1%)	29 (100.0%)
Total	201 (60.4%)	135 (39.6%)	336 (100.0%)

**Chi square=8.382, p-value=0.015**

As for as gender is concerned, majority of the male respondents (68.3%) were aware about the manifesto of their political parties whereas, female voters with percentage less than half of their male counterparts had read the manifesto. The socio-cultural structure of Pakhtun society restricted women to participate in political activities. Therefore, the ratio of male respondents was more than females. The chi square test result provides significant p-value. The p-value<0.05 presented the role of gender in the awareness about manifesto of a political party.

### **3.6 Voters' Perception about Democracy**

Liberal democracy, with its slogans of people's autonomy, independence and solidarity, is a result of three historical transformations, including the English legislative system, the French Revolution of 1789 and the Scientific Revolution. There are various paradigms about democracy in our society. Based on people's perception regarding democracy, a gap has been observed between the opinions of literate and illiterate voters. A high level of awareness has been observed among literate people as compared to the illiterate.

An important observation about the misconception of democracy is religious traditionalism and fanaticism in our society. Some of the religious *Ulamas* are of the opinion that democracy is anti-Islamic. Therefore, a common man believes on his words and move against democracy. Due to low literacy rate, a large number of people are ignorant about democracy in District Charsadda and they consider it as duple in the dark. The people will get politically socialized once they understand Abraham Lincoln's well known statement: "democracy is the government of the people, by the people and for the people". As per this statement, it can be said that the diverse opinions of the people about democracy disturbed political harmony in the District Charsadda as is the situation in Pakistan. A question was asked from the respondents: "which kind of government do you recommend for Pakistan? The views of the respondents about the democracy have been assessed through different variables like age, gender, education, profession and economic position. Democracy needs a spirit of tolerance and a sense of responsibility among all. There is no gender discrimination in democracy as it firmly stands for equality of all. All are equal and have right to vote in elections.

**Table No.6**

**Views of the respondents with regard to the question, “which kind of government do you like”.**

Answers	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Democracy	117(68.0%)	55(32.0%)	172(100.0%)
Martial law	32(56.1%)	25(43.9%)	57(100.0%)
Kingship/Monarchy	31 (73.8%)	11 (26.2%)	42 (100.0%)
Don't Know	22 (34.9%)	41 (65.1%)	63 (100.0%)
Total	202 (60.5%)	132 (39.5%)	334 (100.0%)

**Chi square=24.885, p-value=0.000**

A majority of the male respondents (68%) were in favor of democracy while the population of female supporters for democracy (32%). This wide difference by more than 50% can be attributed to the education of males who, compared to their female counterparts, had more access to education to familiarize themselves about the attributes of democracy. The chi square test result provides significant p-value. The p-value<0.05 shows that gender consideration plays a key role in the awareness of people about democracy.

#### **4. Conclusion**

To sum up, it can be stated that vote is not a piece of paper, but it is the future of a nation. Those who cast their vote as a social and political obligation can hope to have a government that is committed to the welfare of the people. The example of UK, USA and India are in front of us where voters demonstrate extraordinary care while exercising their right of adult franchise. The net result of this care is that the governments formed there do all such things that satisfy the urges of the electorate. The socio-political & economic status of an individual is significant for his/her political participation. Effects of these variables can be determined clearly by an assessment of the data gathered about the election results of 2008 in the District of Charsadda. Because of the aforesaid variables, the overall turnout was substantially affected. Education is the real path towards political awareness of the people because it goes up with education ratio. It is observed by the researcher that a majority of the respondents of the target area casted their vote to various political personalities. During the survey, another factor clearly visible was the difference between the voting behavior of the old age people and youth because of education. A majority of the aged voters did cast votes without knowing the value of the ballot paper and even didn't know to whom they voted and this was all because of their being illiteracy. Therefore, it can be concluded that education is the building block of democracy because without education a human being can't differentiate between deserving and undeserving candidates running for assembly seats first and then for a position in the government survival.

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