

# Unlocking Women's Electoral Participation: Exploring the Impact of Education on Voter Participation in the General Elections of 2018 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Pakistan)

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## Abstract

*This research paper investigates the multifaceted relationship between education and women's participation in electoral processes as voters. Through a comprehensive synthesis of existing literature, empirical studies, and theoretical frameworks, the study aims to unravel the intricate mechanisms by which education shapes women's engagement in elections. Furthermore, the research explores the mediating role of contextual factors including socio-economic development, gender norms, and political institutions in moderating the impact of education on women's voter turnout. By shedding light on these dynamics, the paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between education, socio-political contexts, and women's electoral behavior. This research holds implications for policy interventions aimed at promoting gender equality and fostering inclusive democratic practices worldwide.*

**Keywords:** Women's Electoral Participation, General Elections, Political Awareness.

## Introduction

In the realm of democracy, the active involvement of women in electoral processes serves as a pivotal benchmark for gauging societal advancement and political inclusivity. Pakistan, characterized by its rich cultural tapestry and tumultuous political history, grapples with the imperative of ensuring equitable representation of women within its electoral framework. Despite constitutional assurances and legislative endeavors aimed at fostering gender parity, Pakistani women continue to confront numerous hurdles that hinder their complete and meaningful engagement in the electoral arena, particularly as voters.

## Historical Context of Women's Suffrage

The journey towards women's suffrage has been a landmark in the evolution of democratic principles worldwide. New Zealand set a pioneering example by granting women the right to vote in 1893, marking a watershed moment in history (Grimshaw, 2013). Subsequently, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 1966 further underscored the significance of voting rights on a global scale.

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### **Women's Suffrage in Pakistan**

Women in Pakistan have enjoyed the right to vote since the country's inception, enshrined in the first constitution of 1956 and reaffirmed in subsequent constitutional iterations (Islam et al., 2019). Despite this legal framework, women's electoral participation and representation have remained disproportionately low.

### **Challenges to Women's Electoral Participation**

Despite constitutional guarantees, Pakistan has faced significant challenges in ensuring women's meaningful participation in electoral processes. In various constituencies, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, women's turnout has been alarmingly low, with some areas reporting turnout rates of less than 1% (Naz, 2012; Khan, 2016).

### **Government Measures to Enhance Women's Participation**

To address this issue, the government passed the Elections Act of 2017, introducing measures such as annulling results in constituencies with female turnout below 10% and criminalizing impediments to female voting. Furthermore, political parties were mandated to reserve at least 5% of their non-reserved seats for women (Report of The General Elections of 2018, 2017).

### **Socio-cultural Barriers and Electoral Turnout**

Socio-cultural norms, particularly in rural areas, have posed significant obstacles to women's electoral participation. In response, the Election Commission of Pakistan deployed female staff at polling stations to facilitate female voters (Report of The General Elections of 2018, 2017).

### **Current Status and Challenges**

Despite these efforts, challenges persist. The census report of 2017 reveals disparities in the registration and turnout of women voters, with rural areas particularly affected. In the General Election of 2018, while the overall turnout of women for the National Assembly was 46.89%, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa recorded a turnout of only 32.96% among women voters (FAFEN, 2018).

### **Importance of Women's Electoral Participation**

The importance of women's participation in Pakistani elections cannot be overstated. Their involvement not only reinforces democratic ideals but also stands as a cornerstone for the progression of gender equality and women's rights within the socio-political sphere. However, the reality on the ground reveals a dissonance between constitutional aspirations and pragmatic realities, with women frequently encountering impediments such as entrenched cultural norms, socio-economic disparities, and institutional obstacles that erode their agency as voters. Mounting empirical evidence indicates that the active participation of women in electoral processes yields more inclusive and responsive governance (Razaullah, 2018). Nevertheless, despite constituting nearly half of Pakistan's population, women's voter turnout remains markedly lower compared to men (International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 2018). This glaring disparity not only underscores systemic inequities but also raises apprehensions regarding the legitimacy and representativeness of electoral outcomes.

Education serves as a crucial catalyst for empowering individuals, particularly women, by enhancing their awareness, critical thinking abilities, and socio-political efficacy (Verba et al., 1995). Research suggests that educated individuals are more likely to engage in political activities, including voting, due to their increased understanding of political issues, policies, and candidates

(Brady et al., 1999). However, the relationship between education and women's voter participation remains complex and multifaceted.

While education offers women opportunities for political empowerment, disparities in educational attainment persist globally, with women in many regions facing barriers such as limited access to quality education, gender-based discrimination, and cultural norms that prioritize male education (UNESCO, 2020). These disparities have implications for women's political engagement, as lower levels of education often correlate with reduced political participation among women (Mondak & Anderson, 2004).

Moreover, education intersects with other socio-economic factors, such as income, employment, and social status, shaping women's political attitudes, behaviors, and opportunities for civic engagement (Nie et al., 1976). Therefore, understanding the impact of education on women's voter participation requires a nuanced examination that considers the interplay of educational, socio-economic, and cultural factors.

This research paper aims to explore the intricate relationship between education and women's participation in elections as voters. By synthesizing existing literature, empirical evidence, and theoretical frameworks, this study seeks to elucidate the mechanisms through which education influences women's electoral engagement. Additionally, it will investigate how contextual factors, such as socio-economic development, gender norms, and political institutions, mediate the effects of education on women's voter turnout.

Through a comprehensive analysis, this research endeavors to provide insights that can inform policies and interventions aimed at promoting gender equality in electoral participation and fostering inclusive democratic processes. By addressing the nexus between education and women's voter participation, this study contributes to advancing our understanding of the dynamics shaping political engagement and representation in contemporary societies.

## Methodology

The selection of District Kohat for the present study is due to its historical and political importance other than the reason that it is the maternal hometown of one of the authors. According to the general elections of 2018, the total electoral turnout of women in district Kohat was 37.24 %. Data have been collected through a survey comprising of a multistage random and systematic sampling. The population of the study is the registered voters of District Kohat. The total number of registered voters in district Kohat as per elections 2018 was 131006 (FAFEN, 2018).

## Sampling Size

The Yamane formula is used as a criterion for selecting the participants.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

where "n" is the sample size and "e" denotes the margin of error, which is 0.05.

### Sampling Size of District Kohat

$$n = \frac{131006}{1 + 131006(0.05)^2} = 398.7$$

$$n \approx 400$$

So the overall sample size came to 400 respondents. These respondents were selected from the voters' lists on the basis of random and systematic techniques. Data was collected using Google forms sent via the internet from the women registered voters of NA.29 Peshawar. Data gathered through the survey was subject to descriptive statistical analysis and logistic regression. Collected data was coded, summarized, and analyzed using SPSS, a comprehensive and flexible statistical analysis and data management system. Statistics were used to describe the following overarching question and sub-questions:

- To what extent do demographic factors affect the decision of female registered voters to vote cast in the 2018 elections?
- To explore whether the educational factor affects female registered voters' decision to vote cast in the 2018 elections?

Variables were measured using a Likert scale, a psychometric scale widely used in survey research to collect ordinal data. Variables are conceptualized and analyzed along a continuum.

### Dependent variable- Electoral participation of women in the general elections of 2018

**Table 1: Electoral participation of the respondents**

Variable	Response options	n	%
Electoral Participation	Yes	153	38.25
	No	247	61.75
	Total	400	100

153 (38.25%) out of the total respondents had taken part in voting in the general elections of 2018, whereas the rest, 247 (61.75%), had not taken part in the voting process. Table 1 shows that a maximum number of respondents had not cast their vote.

### Independent Variable

When analyzing respondents' profiles, researchers typically examine a range of demographic variables, such as age, education level, income, and occupation. Examining these variables allows researchers to identify patterns and trends relevant to their research questions.

**Table 2: Age of respondents**

Variable	Response options	N	%
Age	22-32	149	37.25
	33-42	99	24.75
	43-52	87	21.75
	53 and above	65	16.25
	Total	400	100

The first demographic is associated with the age of respondents. Of the total respondents from Kohat, 149(37.25%) were 22-32 years old, 99(24.75) were having the age group of 33-42 years., 87(21.75) were having the age group of 43-52 years, 65(16.25%) were from the age group of 53 and above. Most of the participants were from the age group of 22-32.

### Inferential Statistics

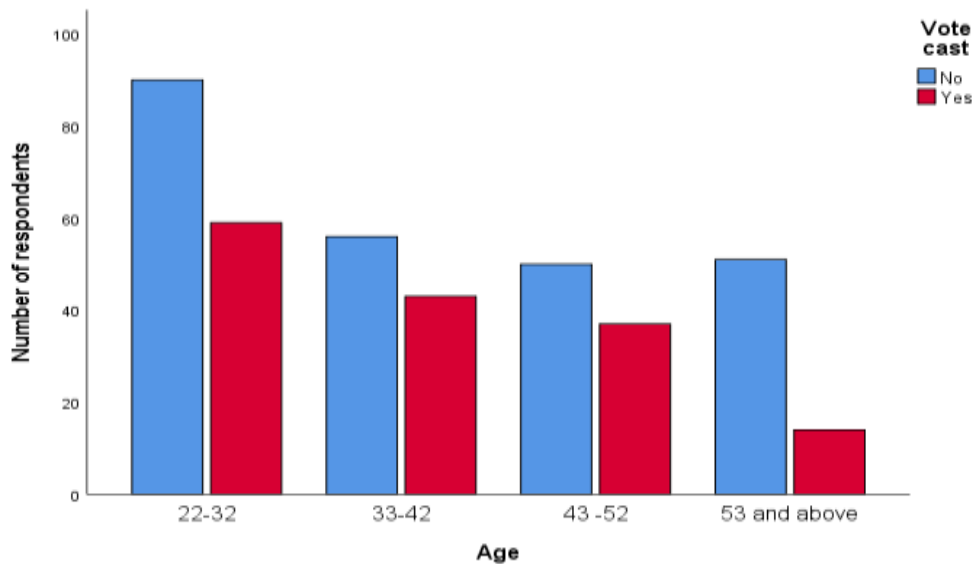
**Table 3: Association between age and electoral participation**

Variables	Response options	No (%)	Yes (%)	Total	$\chi^2$	P
Age	22-32	90 (60.4)	59(39.6)	149 (100)	9.601	0.022*
	33-42	56 (56.6)	43(43.4)	99(100)		
	43-52	50 (57.5)	37(42.5)	87(100)		
	53and above	51 (78.5)	14(21.5)	65(100)		
	Total	247(63.25)	153(36.75)	400		

\*  $P < 0.05$ , \*\*  $P < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $P < 0.001$

Among significant age groups, most of the participants, 43 (43.4%), were from the age group of 33-42, had cast their vote compared to other age groups. Furthermore, a minimum of the respondents, 14(21.5%) from 53 and above age, had cast their vote compared to the other age groups. The result shows age and electoral participation were significantly associated ( $p < 0.05$ ).

**Figure 1: Percentage of respondents according to their age groups**



**Educational level-Descriptive statistics****Table 4: Educational level of the respondents**

Variable	Response Options	N	%
Educational Level	Illiterate	88	22.0
	Primary	15	3.75
	Middle	17	4.25
	Matric	21	5.25
	Intermediate	16	04
	Bachelor	122	30.5
	Masters and above	121	30.25
	Total	400	100%

Table 4 shows that among the respondents of NA. 32 Kohat, there are 88 (22.0%) illiterate, 15(3.75%) have primary education, 17 (4.25%) are from the middle-level education, 21 (5.25%) are matric passed, 16 (04%) are intermediate, 122 (30.5%) having bachelor degree and 121 (30.25%) are from masters and above category.

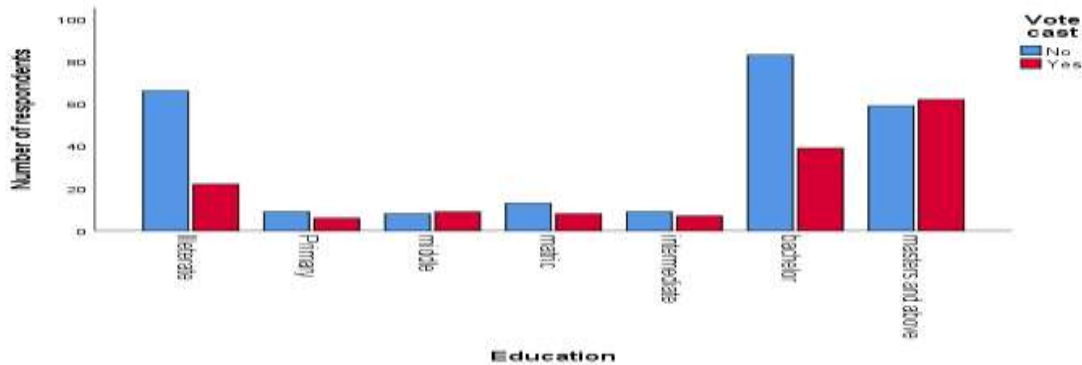
**Table 5: Association between educational level and electoral participation**

Variables	Response options	No (%)	Yes (%)	Total	$\chi^2$	P
Educational Level	Illiterate	66 (75.0)	22 (25.0)	88(100)	19.002	0.004**
	Primary	9 (60.0)	6 (40.0)	17 (100)		
	Middle	8 (47.1)	9 (52.9)	17(100)		
	Matric	13 (61.9)	8 (38.1)	21(100)		
	Intermediate	9(56.25)	7(43.75)	16(100)		
	Bachelor	83 (68.0)	39 (32.0)	122(100)		
	Masters and above	59 (48.8)	62 (51.2)	121(100)		
	Total	247(59.6)	153(40.4)	400		

\* P < 0.05, \*\*P < 0.01, \*\*\*P < 0.001

The educational level also shows variation among respondents who had voted in the general elections of 2018 and who had not cast their votes. Of the total respondents, 22(25.0%) illiterate respondents had cast their votes, and 66(75.0%) had not. 6 (40.0%) of primary passed respondents had cast their votes, and 9(60.0%) had not cast their votes. 9(52.9%) of middle-pass respondents had cast their votes, and 8 (47.1%) had not. 8 (38.1%) of matric passed respondents had cast their votes, and 13 (61.9%) had not cast their votes. 39 (32.0%) of bachelor graduate respondents had cast their votes, and 83 (68.0%) had not cast their votes. Lastly, 62 (51.2%) of master's graduate respondents had cast their votes, and 59(48.8%) had not. There is also a remarkable association between the educational level and electoral participation as  $\chi^2 = 19.002$  with a p-value < 0.05.

**Figure 2: The educational level of the respondents and electoral participation**



**Occupation- Descriptive statistics**

**Table 6: Occupation of the respondents**

Variable	Response options	N	%
Occupation	Agriculture	1	0.25
	Business	21	5.25
	Govt. Employee	36	9.0
	Housewife	183	45.75
	Labor	26	6.5
	Non-Govt. Employee	87	21.75
	Sports	5	1.25
	Unemployed	41	10.25
	Total	400	100

For the current study, respondents from the agriculture sector were 1(0.25%), from business, 21(5.25%), government employees 36 (9.0%), house-wives 183(45.75%), from labor group, 26(6.5%), from non-governmental group, 87(21.75%), from sports category, 5(1.25%), from unemployed group, 41(10.25%).

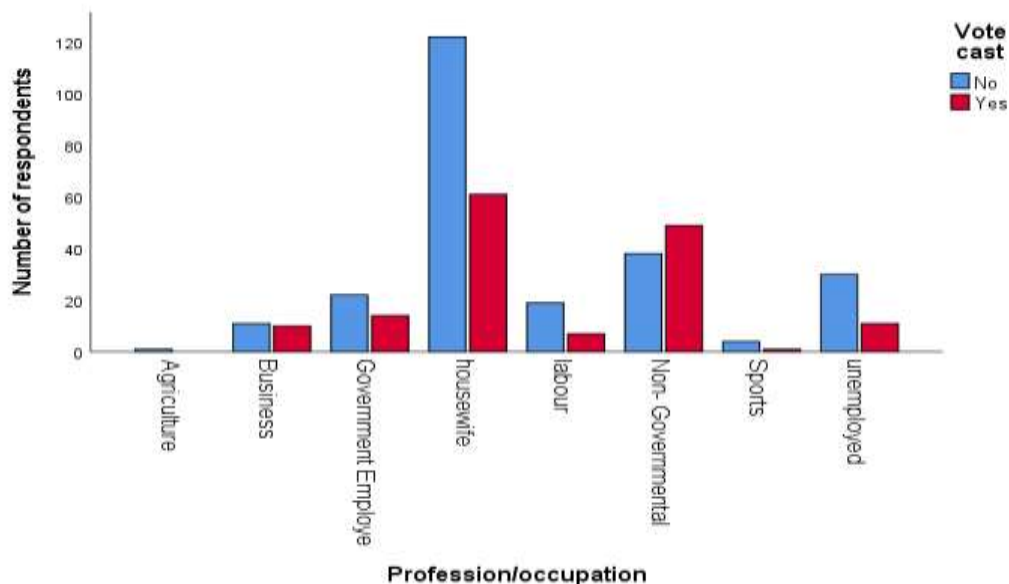
**Table 7: Association between Occupation and electoral participation**

Variables	Response options	No (%)	Yes (%)	Total	$\chi^2$	P
Occupation	Agriculture	1 (100)	0 (0)	1	19.031+	0.005**
	Business	11 (52.4)	10(47.6)	21		
	Govt. Employee	22 (61.1)	14 (38.9)	36		
	Housewife	122(66.7)	61 (33.3)	183		
	Labor	19 (73.1)	7 (26.9)	26		
	Non-Govt. Employee	38 (43.7)	49 (56.3)	87		
	Sports	4 (80.0)	1 (20.0)	5		
	Unemployed	30 (73.2)	11 (26.8)	41		
	Total	247(68.8)	153(31.2)	400		

P < 0.05, \*\*P < 0.01, \*\*\*P < 0.001, + Fisher’s exact test \*

Variations among various occupations, employment status, and electoral participation have been observed. Of respondents belonging to those occupations such that none were from agriculture, 10(47.6%) from Business, 14 (38.9%) from Government employees, 61(33.3%) from housewives, 7(26.9%) from labor, 49(56.3%) from the non-government employee, 1(20.0%) from sports and 11(26.8%) from unemployed had exercised their right to vote. However, 1(100%) from agriculture, 11(52.4%) from Business, 22(61.1%) from Government employee, 122(66.7%) from housewives, 19(73.1%) from labor group, 38(43.7%) from non-government employee, 4(80.0%) from sports and 30(73.2%) from unemployed category had not cast their votes. Moreover, a significant association is found between occupations/employment statuses the electoral participation, as the p-value is less than 0.05. The overall conclusion is that occupation plays a pivotal part in women's electoral participation.

**Figure 3: Occupation/profession of respondents and electoral participation**



### Monthly income of respondents-Descriptive statistics

**Table 8: Monthly income of the respondents**

Variable	Response options	N	%
Monthly Income	< 10000	42	10.5
	11000-20000	12	3.0
	21000-30000	20	5.0
	31000-40000	18	4.5
	41000-50000	24	6.0
	>50000	61	15.3
	None	223	55.7
Total		400	100

Monthly income shows the financial condition and well-being of individual respondents. According to current data, 42(10.5%) respondents earned below 10000. Of the respondents,



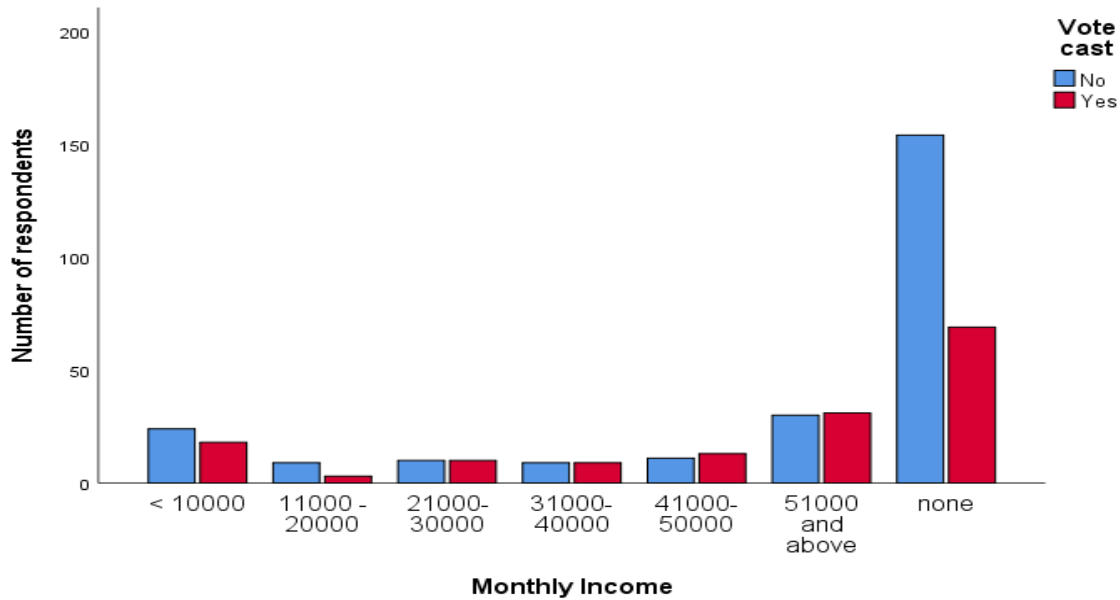
12(3.0%) made 11000-20000 monthly. Out of the total, 20 (5.0%) respondents earned 21000-30000 monthly, 18 (4.5%) of the total respondents earned 31000- 40000 monthly, 24 (6.0%) respondents earned 41000-50000 monthly, 61 (15.3%) of total respondents were earning more than 50000 monthly, 223(55.7 %) of respondents were not earned and financially dependent on their male family members.

**Table 9: Association between monthly income and electoral participation**

Variables	Response options	No (%)	Yes (%)	Total	$\chi^2$	P
Monthly Income	< 10000	24 (57.1)	18 (42.9)	42(100)	15.199+	0.017*
	11000-20000	9 (75.0)	3 (25.0)	12(100)		
	21000-30000	10 (50.0)	10 (50.0)	20(100)		
	31000-40000	9 (50.0)	9 (50.0)	18(100)		
	41000-50000	11 (45.8)	13 (54.2)	24(100)		
	>50000	30 (49.2)	31 (50.8)	61(100)		
	None	154 (69.1)	69 (30.9)	223(100)		
Total		247(56.6)	153 (43.3)	400		

P < 0.05, \*\*P < 0.01, \*\*\*P < 0.001, + Fisher's exact test \*

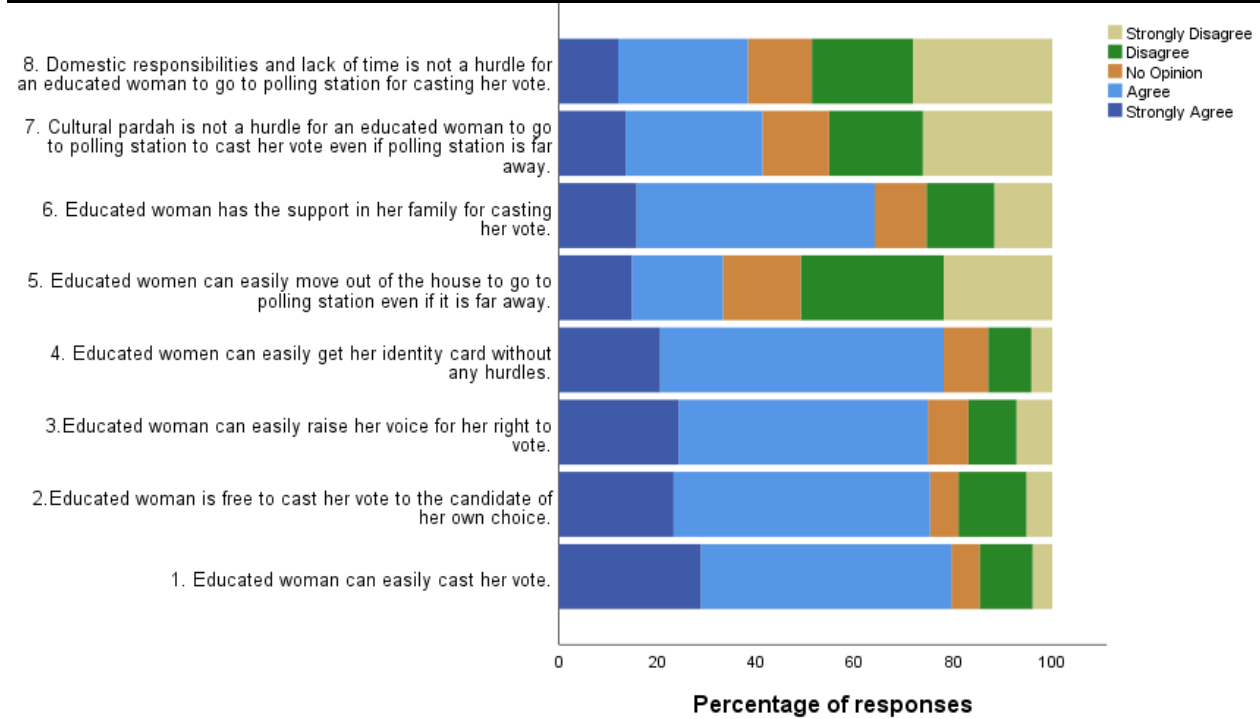
Variations in the decision to cast a vote concerning monthly income ranges have been found as 18 (42.9%) from a range of monthly income less than 10000 had cast their votes. Among other respondents who had cast their votes are; 3 (25.0%) from a monthly income range of 11000-20000, 10(50.0%) from a monthly income range of 21000-30000, 9(50.0%) from a monthly income range 31000-40000, 13 (54.2%) from monthly income range 41000-50000, 31 (50.8%) from monthly income range above 50000 and 69 (30.9%) from not earning group had cast their votes. However, 24(57.1%) from a range of monthly income less than 10000, 9(75.0%) from a monthly income range of 11000-20000, 10(50.0%) from a monthly income range of 21000-30000, 9(50.0%) from monthly income range 31000-40000, 11(45.8%) from monthly income range 41000-50000, 30 (49.2%) from monthly income range above 50000 and 154(69.1%) from not earning group had not cast their votes. Moreover, there is a remarkable link between monthly income and electoral participation as a p-value among variables remained less than 0.05. Results can be seen in the figure below.

**Figure 4: Monthly income of respondents and electoral participation****Educational Variable****Table 10: Responses about the education variable of the total respondents (n=400)**

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Educated women can easily cast their vote.	16 4.0%	43 10.8%	23 5.8%	203 50.7%	115 28.7%
2. Educated woman is free to cast their vote for the candidate of their own choice.	21 5.3%	55 13.8%	23 5.8%	208 52.0%	93 23.3%
3. Educated woman can easily raise their voice for their right to vote.	29 7.2%	39 9.8%	33 8.3%	202 50.5%	97 24.3%
4. Educated women can easily get their identity cards without any hurdles.	17 4.3%	35 8.8%	36 9.0%	230 57.5%	82 20.5%
5. Educated women can easily move out of the house to go to the polling station even if it is far away.	88 22.0%	116 29.0%	63 15.8%	74 18.5%	59 14.8%
6. Educated woman has the support of their family for casting their vote.	47 11.8%	55 13.8%	42 10.5%	193 48.3%	63 15.8%
7. Cultural purdah is not a hurdle for an educated woman to go to a polling station to cast her vote even if the polling station is far away.	105 26.3%	76 19.0%	54 13.5%	111 27.8%	54 13.5%
8. Domestic responsibilities and lack of time is not a hurdle for an educated woman to go to a polling station for casting her vote.	113 28.2%	82 20.5%	52 13.0%	105 26.3%	48 12.0%

As discussed earlier, education plays a significant role in creating awareness of voting rights among individuals. In responses to education and its association with the voting decision by women of Kohat, various responses can be observed, such as in response to question no 1, educated women can easily cast her vote. 79.4% agreed. While in response to question 2, educated woman is free to cast her vote for the candidate of her own choice, 75.3% agreed. For question 3, educated woman can easily raise her voice for her right to vote, 74.8% agreed. Answering question 4, educated women can easily get their identity card without any hurdles, 78% agreed. In response to question 5, educated women can easily move out of the house to go to the polling station even if it is far away, 33.3% agreed. For question 6 educated woman has the support of her family for casting her vote, 64.1% agreed. While for question 7, cultural *purdah* is not a hurdle for an educated woman to go to the polling station to cast her vote even if the polling station is far away, 41.3% agreed. In response to question 8, domestic responsibilities and lack of time are not a hurdle for an educated woman to go to a polling station to cast her vote, 38.3% agreed. Results can be clearly seen in the figure given below.

**Figure 5: Educational variable and electoral participation**



**Relationship between educational variable and electoral participation**

A point-biserial correlation is run to find the link between the educational variable and electoral participation. The results are given below:

**Table 11: Correlations between educational variable and electoral participation**

		Education	Electoral Participation
Education	Pearson Correlation	1	.276**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	n	400	400
Electoral Participation	Pearson Correlation	.285**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	n	400	400

The correlation between education variables and electoral participation is positive which is statistically significant ( $p=0.000$ ). Therefore, it is found that there is a remarkable correlation between education and the decision to vote cast.

### Findings

The findings of the current study are based on data analysis (quantitative). Through the close-ended questionnaire, respondents presented their views about the electoral participation of women in the General Elections of 2018 in District Kohat. Following are the findings.

- In NA 32 Kohat, 153 (38.25%) out of the total respondents had cast their votes, whereas the rest, 247 (61.75%), had not.
- The electoral area as a demographic variable shows the p-value in District Kohat as 0.217.
- The chi-square test provides the p-value of age as  $<0.05$  in District Kohat.
- The p-value of educational level and the decision to vote is  $<0.05$  in District Kohat.
- Taking occupation as a demographic variable, the p-value is 0.005 in Kohat.
- Monthly income as a variable shows a p-value of  $<0.05$  in District Kohat.
- The p-value of education as an independent variable remains  $< 0.05$  in District Kohat.

### Conclusion

The findings from the analysis of voter turnout in district Kohat of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa reveal several significant associations between demographic variables and the decision to vote. Notably, education emerges as a key factor influencing women's turnout in elections within this region. The data indicate that various demographic variables, including age, educational level, occupation, and monthly income, exhibit different levels of association with voter turnout. Specifically, education consistently demonstrates a significant correlation with the decision to vote, as evidenced by its p-value remaining consistently below the threshold of 0.05 across multiple analyses. The chi-square test results underscore the importance of education, with educational level showing a significant association with the decision to vote. Furthermore, the p-values for education as an independent variable and in conjunction with other demographic factors reinforce its role as a crucial determinant of women's electoral participation in district Kohat.

### Suggestions

Based on the findings, several recommendations can be proposed to enhance women's turnout in elections in district Kohat;

*Investment in Education:* Given the significant influence of education on women's electoral participation, there is a pressing need for increased investment in education infrastructure and initiatives aimed at improving literacy rates, particularly among women. This could include

expanding access to quality education, providing scholarships and incentives for female students, and implementing awareness campaigns highlighting the importance of education in empowering women politically.

*Promotion of Civic Education:* Integrating civic education into school curricula and community outreach programs can help cultivate a culture of political awareness and engagement from a young age. By equipping women with knowledge about their rights, responsibilities, and the electoral process, they are more likely to feel empowered to exercise their right to vote.

*Addressing Socio-Economic Barriers:* Efforts to address socio-economic disparities, such as unemployment and low income, can also contribute to higher voter turnout among women. Initiatives that promote economic empowerment, such as vocational training programs and job creation schemes, can enhance women's socio-economic status and, consequently, their political agency.

*Community Engagement and Outreach:* Community-based initiatives that foster dialogue, participation, and collective decision-making can play a pivotal role in encouraging women to engage in electoral processes. Creating spaces for women to voice their concerns, discuss political issues, and mobilize support for electoral participation can help overcome social and cultural barriers to women's involvement in politics.

*Policy Reforms:* Policymakers should consider implementing targeted policy interventions aimed at addressing the specific needs and challenges faced by women in District Kohat. This could involve measures such as gender-sensitive electoral reforms, quotas for women in political representation, and initiatives to combat gender-based discrimination and violence.

By prioritizing education and addressing socio-economic barriers, policymakers and stakeholders can work towards creating an enabling environment that empowers women to participate fully and effectively in electoral processes, thereby strengthening democracy and promoting gender equality in District Kohat and beyond.

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