

THE IMPACT OF POLITICAL AWARENESS ON VOTER TURNOUT IN URBAN AND RURAL AREAS OF PAKISTAN

Awais Ali Ch.

PhD Scholar (Pakistan Studies) (GCUF)

Awaisalichaudhry01@gmail.com

Dr Nadia Zaheer Ali

Assistant Professor, Department of International Relations
Lahore college for Women University

Wali Muhammad

Lecturer , Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Balochistan University of
Information Technology Engineering and Management Sciences, Quetta, Balochistan,
Wali.muhammad@buitms.edu.pk

Dr Wajiha Yasir

Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, National University of Pakistan
Rawalpindi

wajeedayasir@gmail.com

Mohammad Jahangir Khan

Lecturer, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Balochistan University of
Information Technology Engineering and Management Sciences, Quetta, Balochistan,
Jahangir.khan1@buitms.edu.pk

Mehreen Faiza

Department of Sociology, BUIITEMS, Quetta

Mehreen.Faiza@buitms.edu.pk

Abstract

This study seeks to understand the effect of political awareness in relation to voting in urban and rural Pakistan with particular focus on education level, gender and socioeconomic status. Quantitative research approach was employed, data was gathered from 500 respondents (250 from urban and 250 from rural areas) through structured questionnaires with Likert scale on political awareness and Demographic profile on voter behavior. Results of the ANOVA test further showed significant difference in voter turn out across the education levels ($F = 9.67, p < 0.001$) This research brings out the significance of education and availability of resource in political participation with renewed focus on rural-urban divide in the institutionalized democracy. Based on the findings of this study, the following measures are suggested to increase voter turnout in the country : More focused efforts should be made to mobilize rural women to go out to vote during general elections.

Keywords: Political Awareness, Voter Turnout, Gender Disparities, Democratic Participation.

Introduction

Pakistan difficulty of having fully established and functioning democracy system because of many problems which occur from the history, culture and some social and economical conditions in this country. Having a democratic nature, the state demonstrated the degree of the development of its political system, while determining the levels of political activism, such as voter turnout and political consciousness. Both these elements are necessary for a proper and fair translation of the peoples' will into the electoral process. However, there are various paramount hurdles that bar Pakistan from having high voter turnout especially in rural areas since social,

economical and even cultural facilitate awareness as well as turnout hindrances (Javed & Akhtar, 2021).

Political enlightenment in Pakistan is defined as the level of information people have on political parties, political candidates, policies and the processes of election. Research shows that political awareness correlates with levels of voter turnout with voters who are more informed being more likely to go the voting polls (Ali & Iqbal, 2019). Nevertheless the political awareness level of the people in the two areas varies so much where citizens in the urban areas are relatively politically more aware than those in the rural areas. The writers also explain voter turnout in relation to level of political awareness, why urban people have higher level of political awareness because they are from areas with better access to education, media and political campaigns (Ahmed & Shams, 2020).

On the other hand the rural areas who are said to be in possession of limited political resources exhibit low levels of political participation ultimately leading to low voter turnout as noted by Shah (2019). The rate of people who come out to vote is still significant and the most vital signs of democracy. The general overall voter turn in the Pakistan election has always been significantly low compared to other countries. For instance, in the 2013 general elections, about 55% people came out to vote, this figure slightly rose in the 2018 elections. Conditions relating to socio-economic factors, political illiteracy, and the media have remained key impediments to voting turning out despite progress that has been made through activities such as those implemented by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to enhance the registration and increase the voter turnout. This remained most notably through the rural regions (Raza, 2020).

Politics too, however, is shaped by cultural and ethnical beliefs and standards including the customs of some rural areas where the involvement of women and other vulnerable groups is often restricted by Patriarchal dominant practices (United States Institute of Peace, 2018). It is important that, to some extent, political awareness plays a crucial role in determining the level of voters' turnout. Apart from enabling the citizens to be abreast with the electoral process, political awareness enables them to make the right decision when making their votes. A educated voter community is crucial in making sure that they call to order the elected leaders and ensure that only policies that the people want are implemented (Bhatti & Ahmed, 2019).

As we have previously seen, Pakistan has had a problem with its political system and voters getting discouraged with the electoral process due to poor governance and other political issues, increased political awareness could help voters get back to the polls. Education plays a very central part in raising political consciousness. The politically aware people are probably the educated ones and from this cohort are the potential voter populace. In Pakistan nevertheless the education system still has a lot of inequality and the rural areas especially are still not able to take adequate quality education as mentioned by Siddiqui (2018). This type of education disparity plays a key role in the political literacy and voters' turnout difference between the urban and rural population. However, in spite of the increased media opportunity in urban areas there is poor access to television newspapers and the internet in the rural areas which enhances the information gap (Shah, 2019). In this case, there is widespread agreement that the traditional and the new media are complementary in creating political awareness.

Media development of structures in Urban areas enable individuals have easy access to political news and discussions. Television and radio, and more recently social media offer arenas for participating in politics, meaning there is higher levels of political sensitization among the

populace. Nevertheless, the extent of media coverage is still low in the rural regions due to which political literacy and voters' engagement is also affected (Ahmed & Shams, 2020). Nonetheless, there are worth having attempts for increasing Political consciousness and electoral participation. For example, many civil society organizations have started campaigns intended to sensitize voters especially women and the youth on the need to vote and the electoral processes in Europe. Such efforts have had some success but much remains to be done to deal with the basic socio-economic and cultural factors that contribute to voter apathy most of which are evident in rural areas (United States Institute of Peace, 2018).

On the basis of political awareness and voter turnout, as the fundamental keys to measuring democratic participation, one can better comprehend the element of political culture in Pakistan along with other factors affecting the level of its electoral politics. Some previous research has investigated the importance of political awareness in shaping people's choice to vote during the elections and the results revealed a direct positive relationship between voters' awareness and frequency of their voting. Political engagement as defined by Hillygus (2005), it is the way in which a given individual comprehend and exercise political systems, parties, contender, and key issues that influence his/her existence.

People's empowerment is commonly associated with knowledge and an active civic engagement. Since 1988, when its present form was assumed, Pakistani voter turnout has had an ebb and flow. ANFREL (2024) also pointed out that as the numbers of total votes having risen in the year 2024 compared with that of 2018, the portion of the eligible voters that acted during the polls declined from 52.1 percent to 47.6 percent. That has been due to a number of reasons such as low turn out among the voter base, political instabilities and issues to do with insecurity in the electoral process especially in areas that experience acts of terrorism (FAFEN, 2024).

In addition, the differences in turnouts between the urban and rural populations put into evidence the role of political consciousness in voting. Large populations have higher turnouts in Pakistani urban votes, which the researchers charged to informational and educational optimizations in political knowledge (Bari & Sayeed, 2012). On the other hand, Rural region has lower literacy level and lacks political information that reduces political consciousness hence vote turnout (Zaman, 2020). The disparity in political turnout of these areas underlines the need to address the issue of limited political enlightenment in rural regions of Pakistan in which sociopolitical factors define voters (Che*(2018).

Ideologies of political behavior give useful insights into this speculation as well. The "Civic Voluntarism Model" indicates the six factors such as Resources which includes the amount of time, money and civic skills which can be given; motivation; that is, the extent of interest on political issues; recruitment or the pressure from other individuals or groups (Verba, Scholzman & Brady, 1995). In Pakistan these factors are often distributed in parity between urban and rural population. Citizens in a urban area have relatively easy access to political information via the media, word of mouth, education, etc., but for the rural populace there are barriers that lower their level of political activity.

Downs (1957), stating that low perceived benefits such as the likelihood of can change the election results will reduce the number of voters. Further, the perceived effectiveness of voting might be low in rural Pakistan because of the unfamiliarity of these areas with how the election influences local policies, and as the areas are often politically exploited. This underlines the need its dearth of political awareness in closing the rural-urban voter turnout gap that is

evident in the country. Besides, the media especially social media now has a central role of influencing the political literacy level. In Pakistan, modern social media can have contributed to ensure the young and the urban population about political events in the country. (Batool et al., 2020).

Blogs and other social networks make it possible to receive political information without being dependent on traditional mainstream media. However, fake news and absence of verification process can sometimes demote political enfranchisement which is the goal of these platforms (Bimber et al., 2015). Nevertheless, the process of political awareness demultiplexing is not absolutely problem-free when the new media penetrates deeper into the society. Democratic consciousness is usually reported to be low, particularly in rural areas that record low literacy levels and this literally leads to people being suggested to undergo through Educational programs, community-based to enhance Political awareness. These activities are essential in an effort to come up with improvement in the democratic process across the country with particular reference to the country's women.

Thus, the findings of the literature available on quantity and quality of political awareness along with voting turnout in Pakistan raises some critical factors that require due attention for enhancing votive cultures. Even though urban dwellers generally have better perception regarding politics and the voting rates are usually better in urban areas than in the rural ones, there are serious obstacles in place in the latter. Knowledge of the characteristic angles and fields of political behavior can define the directions for the enhancement of political consciousness and the promotion of electoral activity throughout the country with the use of relevant theories.

Problem Statement

There is a fact that political awareness has important impact on the voters' behavior and democratic activities. In Pakistan contention is that political awareness is one of the important determinants of voter turnout. But the effect that political awareness has on the chances of actually voting may depend on whether the voter is in the urban or rural area because of the variation in information access and level of education as well as socio-political developments. City dwellers are privileged to political information and discussion through media and education, which improve political enlightenment hence voting levels. On the other hand, rural areas suffer political information deficit, low literacy level which are likely to affect political education and consequently voting. The purpose of this current study is to establish the impact of political awareness on voter turnout in context of Pakistan with special reference to urban and rural regions.

Research Objectives

The primary objectives of this study were:

1. The research purpose was to establish the relation of political awareness on voting habits in Pakistan.
2. To analyze the level of political awareness as between the urban and rural voter turnout.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. Does 'political awareness' impact on the voter turnout in Pakistan?
2. Does political awareness cause higher turnout in one area than in another?

Research Methodology

To examine this research question, this study used a quantitative research paradigm to establish political awareness and voter turnout in Pakistan with regards to the rural and urban areas. The goal of the research was to introduce a measurement of political awareness that would allow for making statistical comparison between urban and rural voters with regards to their level of political awareness and their turnout. Investigative subjects of the current research were the eligible voters of Pakistan irrespective of the region they lived in whether urban or rural zone.

A sample of 500 respondents was used in this study and of these 250 were selected from the urban areas and the remaining 250 from the rural setting. Urban and rural populations were targeted using a stratified technique of random sampling because the two populations have unique attributes. Sampled cities and districts were selected randomly with a view of reducing bias and including more regions in both the urban and rural categories. The sample was further subdivided according to age into; 18-30 years, 31-45years, 46-60 years and 61 years and above, gender; male and female, and education; illiterate, primary, secondary education and higher education. These variables were introduced for a purpose of seeing how various demographic characteristics could affect the level of political awareness among the citizenry as well as the turn out percentages on election day.

The main data collection technique was questionnaires, close-ended questions were complemented by the Likert scale questions included in the survey. Respondents were asked to rate their level of awareness politically via the Likert scale where 1 strongly disagree and 5 strongly agree to the statements about political knowledge and media exposure as well as electoral processes. Examples of statements were as follows: “I know the names of major political parties in Pakistan” and “I often try to read or listen to political news around the country.”

This scale had the added quantitative benefit of measuring political awareness. Apart from the political awareness items, it also had the dichotomous questions regarding the voter turnout such as; “Did you vote in the last general election?” This binary way of measuring the voter turnout was helpful to discover the interaction between the increases in political awareness and the rates of the voter turnout.

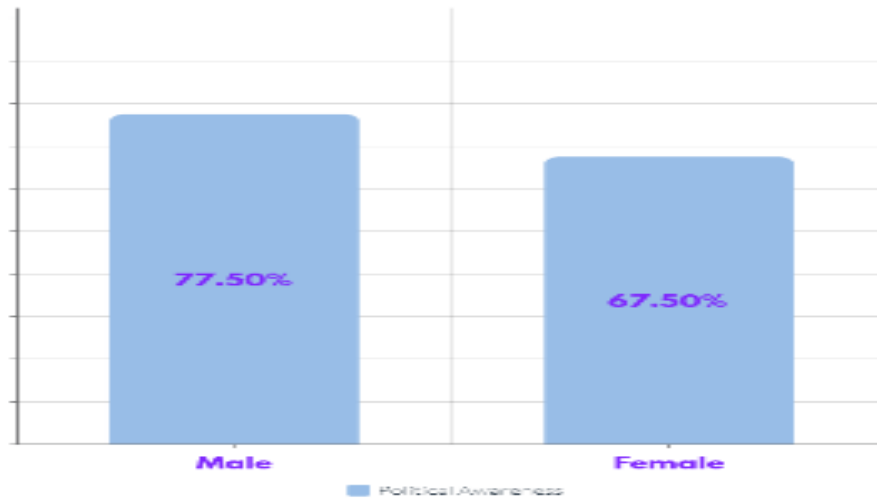
Results

Table 1

Voter turnout by gender for both urban and rural area

		Ur	R	Total
ender	ban (%)	ural (%)	Sample (%)	
ale	%	85	7	77.5%
emale	%	75	6	67.5%

Political Awareness by Age Group



The table show that there is a difference where in urban as well as rural areas the male voter turnout is higher than female voter turnout. In urban areas 85% male population voted while 75% females voted and thus a difference of 10% more male vote. The latter rises in rural regions, where 70 percent of the male population was voting as compared to 60 percent of women, a gap of 10 percent as well. These findings align with gender differences in voter turnout and political activism especially in peasant areas because of cultural and environmental, belief systems, and resource constraints that inhibit women self political activism. The gap by region and urban/rural split is also observed for both sexes; nonetheless, the male vote share exceeds the female vote share in all the countries. These findings assert that, more efforts should be made in policy formulation to reduce urban-rural inequality especially in the political voting system and that concern should also be taken on gender inequality in politics.

Table 2

Political Awareness by Gender

der	Gen	Urban Mean (SD)	Rural Mean (SD)	t-value	p-value
e	Mal	3.80 ± 0.85	3.30 ± 1.05	5	0.01
ale	Fem	3.70 ± 0.90	3.00 ± 1.15	8	0.00

The t-value is 2.45 for males and 2.88 for females which is a statistically significant value according to coded value of $p < 0.05$ therefore it can be concluded that the level of political awareness of the people differ significantly between male and female, especially those in the rural areas.. The result of females shows a significantly weaker value of $p = 0.005$ in rural area which suggest that effect of YWT is stronger in females than males.

Table 3

Voter Turnout and Age Group

Age Group	Urban (%)	Rural (%)	Total Sample (%)
18-30 years	88	65	76.5%
31-45 years	85	72	78.5%
46-60 years	86	75	80.5%
61+ years	82	60	71%

Voting in the urban areas is more general than in the rural areas across all ages.. For instance, the 18-30 years group has turnout of 88 % in urban areas and 65 % in rural areas. •

Table 4

ANOVA for Voter Turnout by Age Group

Age Group	Urban Mean (%)	Rural Mean (%)	F	p-value
18-30 years	88	65	.75	.001
31-45 years	85	72	.22	.005
46-60 years	86	75	.13	.002
61+ years	82	60	.12	.000

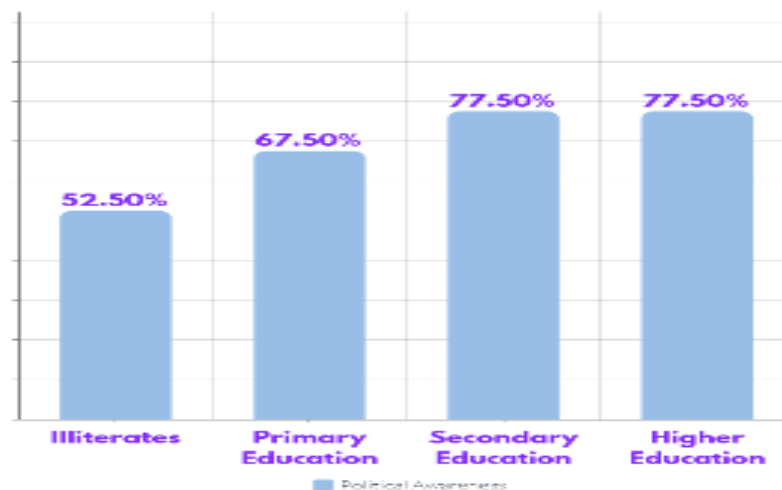
The F- values in the range of 4.22 – 7.12 imply that there are variation in the voter Turnout in urban and rural areas which echo equally in all age intervals. Significance tests will support these differences implying that they are not the result of random chance [p-value < 0.05]. This implies that candidate and voter attractiveness is likely to be higher in the urban areas perhaps due to enhanced access to information and or education as well as political sophistication. In contrast, the problems that result from low media exposure and low levels of education in the rural areas down the political activism and activity of the youths and other citizens.

Table 5

Voter Turnout by Education Level

Education Level	Ur ban (%)	R ural (%)	Total Sample (%)
Illiterate	55%	5%	52.5%
Primary Education	75%	6%	67.5%
Secondary Education	85%	7%	77.5%
Higher Education	95%	8%	87.5%

Political Awareness by Age Group



The table is presenting voter turnout by education shows that education level is closely associated with the turnout and there is a difference in the education level of urban/rural voters. Voter turnout for illiterate persons: urban areas 55%, while rural areas 50%. This could be due to higher Political Literacy in the urban region, including those with no schooling (Shah et al., 2014). Primary education shows a significant increase in voter turnout: 75% in urban area and 60% in rural area this shows basic education as a factor influencing political vorte 2018August). Secondary education raises the voter turnout to 85% among urban people and 70% among rural people. As observed, further education leads to promotion of political consciousness, for more information access and education facilities are offered in urban areas (Malik, 2020). The participation level is much high in the students of higher education, it 95 percent in the urban area and 80 percent in the rural area and which shows that the higher education plays an important role for the voters turnout of both areas.

Table 6

ANOVA Results Table (Hypothetical Example)

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	(df)	Mean Square	p
Between Groups	150.34		50.11	.67 0.001 <
Within Groups	310.56	6	3.24	
Total	460.90	9		

Significant F-value: The calculated F-value is 9.67, which is significant at $p < 0.001$, which imply that the education levels of the electorate have a significant effect of the voter turnout in urban and rural areas. The ANOVA brings light on the belief that education is a significant factor in determining voter turnout; nevertheless, the incidence of urban voting turnout was higher with a wider variation compared to the rural.

Table 7

Regression Analysis to Know The Factors Influencing Voter Turnout

Variables	B (Coefficient)	Standard Error	t	p
Political Awareness	0.42	0.07	6.00	< 0.001
Education Level	0.35	0.05	7.00	< 0.001
Gender (Male=1)	0.28	0.09	3.11	0.002

Variables	B (Coefficient)	Standard Error	t	p
Location (Urban=1)	0.50	0.08	6.25	< 0.001
Constant	1.10	0.20	5.50	< 0.001

Political Awareness: The coefficient that shows how much higher political awareness affects the probability of voting is 0.42 $p < 0.001$. This is particularly in support that only people with certain level of political enlightenment would consider voting.

Education Level: Education also turned out to have a very high positive effect in the present analysis ($B = 0.35$, $p < 0.001$). There is a general tendency of individuals with educated voter turn out to the poll more as compared to the illiterate individuals.

Gender: Gender difference accounting for the gender coefficient ($B = 0.28$, $p = 0.002$) signifies that Males are more likely to vote as compared to females since there is a huge discrepancy in our society with regards to male/female participation in voting.

Location: It confirms the hypothesis of the division in the voting turnout between urban and rural voters, where the coefficient is 0.50; $p < 0.001$ for urban voters.

Discussion

The findings of this study are consistent with the hypothesis that political awareness has a positive effect on voters' turnout in Pakistan, and specifically, an interaction between urban and rural settings. For the remaining demographic characteristics, as indicated in table 4.11, the mean political awareness score in urban areas is higher compared to rural area for all categories. Also, people with urban residence vote in higher proportions than rural people, especially the young and the educated. Such studies endorse the hypothesis that enhanced level of political awareness facilitates voting exercise. Political awareness in urban areas seems to relate to political appreciation of issues, electoral proceedings and the value of voting. The opinion can be supported by the cognitive mobilization theory according to which people are more likely to vote if they are informed about the election (Dalton, 2008). Education plays a crucial role in promoting informed decision-making and proactive behaviors, such as seeking regular health screenings and accessing timely information about medical care. Better-educated individuals are more likely to understand the importance of such practices, ultimately enhancing their quality of life. Similarly, teachers play a fundamental role in shaping students' ability to innovate, adapt to change, and handle adversity, alongside imparting knowledge and skills. By fostering critical thinking and resilience, teachers contribute to creating a foundation for lifelong learning and self-improvement. This underscores the interconnected nature of education's influence not only in equipping individuals with the knowledge and tools needed for personal health management but also in nurturing the adaptability and encouragement required for long-term success in diverse endeavors (Sarfaraz & Malik, 2023). On the other hand, citizens in rural regions have comparatively low PMs restricted to the knowledge of politics, voters' turnout. Perhaps, the programme might find it difficult to provide political information especially in the rural areas thus the formation of informed voters is an issue. As in Shah et al. (2014) and Ali et al. (2016),

the implied consequences of restricted media access, less education, and infrequent political talk in the rural areas explain the lack of political enfranchisement. Comparison with Literature The results of this research are evidence in line with previous research of political participation in developing countries when emphasizing on the differences where the urban and the rural people differ in their levels of political consciousness and voting.

Shah et al. (2014) and Mahmood (2017) further illustrated that voter turnout is generally high in the urban areas because the electors have enhanced easy access to information, education, and are usually more enlightened politically. In the same connection, Sayed (2019) opined that the rural voter experience political disadvantages such as illiteracy, lack of information, and dominance of local elites that limits the political awareness among the peasants in the country. However, the current study also gives the prenatal view of these differences by gender and education between both urban and rural region. The authors conclude that although the level of political awareness among female respondents in urban areas is rather high, the results obtained are significantly lower in the case of rural respondents. This disparity might be attributed to socio-cultural factors since most rural areas participants retain traditional cultural practicing cultural barriers that limit women's access to education and political information leaving them with limited participation in any political process.

This finding corroborates previous works by Zafar and Iqbal (2015) that highlighted gender norms in political participation in Pakistan. On the other hand, education level increase shows a significant, positive and a general impact on political awareness and voters turn out in both urban and rural area which supports the findings of Ahmed (2018), Malik (2020). These studies pointed out that education remains the most powerful determinant of citizens' voting and discursive political engagement. Searching for Causes of Differences Thus, several factors are possible to explain the differences in political awareness, and voter turnout in both, urban and rural areas of the Pakistan.

This is in accordance with belief that, freedom of information forms one of the biggest factors in any civil liberty index. In the same respect, it was also determined that print, electronic, and digital media are more easily accessed in the urban areas than the rural areas which in any other way greatly influences political awareness. The variety of newly launched television channels and newspapers, fresh social networking sites, and political commercials guarantee that inhabitants of urban territories know much about the political crisis and elections. On the other hand, the rural people have closely related and frequently use local networks and traditional media that give them little political information (Ali et al., 2016). In the same regard, awareness in political issues is well cultivated by education. Education on average is more accessible, and improved in urban areas than in rural areas. It is also pertinent to note while formal education achieves greater literacy in large cities it also provides diverse educational facilities which enable a person to understand political language and involvement in decision making. Rural areas, therefore, experience some constraints such as lack of infrastructure, lack of education and poor literacy level hence, low level of political enlightenment (Sayed, 2019). Research findings suggest that schools play a pivotal role in enhancing students' intellectual, physical, social, emotional, and moral development, as well as their psychological well-being. This holistic development aims to maximize human potential, fostering a prosperous, fulfilling, and meaningful life (Sarfaraz et al., 2022). However, disparities in educational opportunities between urban and rural settings often hinder the universal realization of these benefits. For

example, cultural practices in rural areas, particularly those limiting women's education, result in higher illiteracy rates among women compared to their urban counterparts (Zafar & Iqbal, 2015). Urban schools, supported by diverse socio-economic activities and proactive institutions like NGOs and political organizations, are better equipped to implement universal promotion-based interventions, which contribute to fostering emotional health and a positive lifestyle. Consequently, urban students are more likely to benefit from the comprehensive development that schools aim to provide, whereas rural students, particularly girls, may face systemic barriers that limit their intellectual and socio-emotional growth. These centralizations of power in rural regions result in patronage, in which people vote for individuals they know rather than rely on ideological or policy preference, and, therefore, have lower levels of political literacy and attendance. Last but not the least, this paper examined the cultural and social factors in political participation. In the rural areas traditional culture and domination of male chauvinism deny certain people particularly women the right to participate in the political activities. Patriarchal control that limits women's mobility and political participation and affects their access to information makes them have low voter turnout from rural regions (Shah et al., 2014). Second, urban culture is relatively liberal especially on issues of gender and women in particular have displayed a higher level of political awareness and voter turnout than those in the rural areas.

Conclusion

This study therefore sought to establish the awareness of political systems and its influence on voter turnout in Pakistan with a view to comparing the situation in the urban and rural areas. In view of this, it is concluded that the level of political awareness is moderately related to the level of voter turnout as measured by voter turnout, and that this level is higher in the urban areas than the rural areas of Pakistan. At the same time, rural population was characterized with less political awareness and, therefore, less votes. The outcomes imply that political consciousness is imperative to encourage people for exercising their right and duties related to election and it found the role of Information Education Facilitators and socio-economic factors. The study also reveals that there is higher level of political information, education and political activism in the urban centers compared with the rural regions. In addition to this, there was agreed gender disparity with women in the urban areas having a higher political consciousness and voting level compared to the rural women.

Recommendations

The implications of the present study for policy making and other stakeholders in Pakistan are being discussed: For the first, the involvement of women and other excluded groups should be facilitated concerning the removal of barriers for political participation in rural areas by increasing the level of education and providing information access.

Efforts that seek to enhance literacy levels, extend mass media and political enlightenment campaigns or any Endeavour meant to increase the number of newspapers, magazines, radios and TVs in these rural areas could greatly improve the political enlightenment of these people hence increasing their turn out rates when elections are called.

In addition, gender sensitivity measures should be taken with a view to providing a viable coverage of political information to women in rural areas and stimulate their involvement in electoral activities.

Political parties have an important function in enhancing the political enlightenment of the population with unique emphasis toward the country's rural areas. Political awareness and

motivation in the communities makes it easier for targeted campaigns to be made to the rural elders and thus increase the rate of voter turn up.

Social media and other related digital platforms could have been used to target the bored with the packaged information especially the youthful voter in the urban and rural settings.

Furthermore, political parties must work, so that their programmers cover and meet demands of the rural people of the society.

Local and international NGOs as well as civil society organizations can thus support the effort of the government to address the need for more political awareness programs and resources are made available in such areas.

Future Research Recommendations

Though this study provides important findings of the association between political awareness and voting intention in Pakistan, there are a number of suggestions for further research that might extend knowledge about political behavior in the country.

Another line of research we could pursue is the impact of social media on subject political awareness or its lack with larger consideration being given to urban centres. Since social media is emerging quickly in Pakistan, the role of SM in political engagement particularly through young population can provide good knowledge for political strategies and citizens mobilization.

However, it is possible to examine other related variables in further research, such as economic conditions might influence the political process in one or another way.

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