

General Elections 2013: A Case Study of Low Turnout of Women Voters in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

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Abstract

The Constitution of 1973 offers direct elections under adult franchise in Pakistan. However, it is unfortunate that in every election of Pakistan, the ratio of female voters' turnout remained low. This research is an attempt to discuss the potential causes of low female voters' turnout in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The study is based on quantitative data survey from six randomly selected districts from sub-geographical areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province in Pakistan including the districts of Lakki Marwat (Far South), Karak (South), Charsadda (Centre), Mardan (Centre), Lower Dir (North) and Chitral (Far North). The study utilizes Chi-square test for statistical inferences of dependent and independent variables. The research argues that the factors responsible for low turnout of women in these districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa can be categorized as administrative, cultural, political, and religious. The primary concern of respondents' administrative obstacles were followed by cultural barrier and then by religious factors. Moreover, gender, the locality (district) and education of respondents cannot be ignored as they are key parameters as well.

Keywords: Elections, Women Role in Politics, Women Political Participation, Female Voters, Women Leadership.

1. Introduction

This article attempts to explore the problem of women political participation. In particular the study aims to investigate the issue of low female turnout in elections as compared to men. Through data from questionnaires the research study aims to understand the causes of this low turnout in general elections in Pakistan while taking the elections of 2013 as a case study. The focus of the research article is Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan populated by majority ethnic Pakhtuns. In this context, the main question that guides the study is what are the obstacles for female low turnout in elections in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa? Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province is located in the northwest of Pakistan. The boundaries of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are connected with Baluchistan province, Punjab province and Azad Kashmir. Majority of the inhabitants are Pakhtuns and their language is Pakhtu. There are Saraiki, Chitrali and other communities also reside in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Shah, 2019). The political

history of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has many ups and downs. Discontinuity in electoral process affected the political development that resulted low turnout in different elections in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Rauf and Shah (2015) describe that, “elections provide an opportunity to people especially to the marginalized communities such as physically handicapped, ethnic and religious minorities, poor people and women to participate in the political affairs of the state” (p. 115). However, female voting turnout is still lower than male voters in the region (Democracy Reporting, 2015).

Hannan-Morrow and Roden (2014) defined turnout as, “a measure of the number or proportion of people who turn up to vote” (p. 7).

The Formula is:

$$\frac{\text{Votes Cast (Valid and Invalid)}}{\text{Registered Voters}} \times 100$$

Suppose the total number of registered voters in a constituency is 100000 and 10000 voters cast their vote in election. The turnout of the constituency in election is 10%.

$$\frac{10000 \text{ Votes Cast} \times 100}{100000 \text{ Registered Voters}} = 10\% \text{ Turnout}$$

However, Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) has a different definition of turnout. AEC’s defined turnout in a more understandable way as: “The number of ballot papers entering scrutiny, divided by the final enrolment figure, expressed as a percentage”.

$$\text{i.e., } \frac{\text{Ballot Papers Entering Scrutiny}}{\text{Final Enrolment}} \times 100$$

Both formulas are internationally recognized for the measurement of turnout after the counting of ballot papers. Similarly, Solijonov (2016) defines that, “voter turnout is the extent to which eligible voters use their vote on Election Day” (p. 17). International IDEA adopted two measures to calculate the turnout: firstly, the accumulation of the total registered voters in voter lists cast their votes on polling day. Secondly, the estimate of the voting age population (VAP) with total population of the country. The logic behind the use of voter registration and voting age population statistics is to measure the number of eligible voters. In many countries voters’ registration data are either erroneous or unavailable. Therefore, in that scenario, the VAP statistics can be used to estimate voter turnout. On the other hand, VAP data can provide clear depiction of participation in election (Solijonov, 2016:17).

Significantly, in a specific area this resultant voter turnout may be different for different social, political or gender classes, based on constraints and opportunities to these groups. In general, there exist different barriers to women political participation across different countries of the world. Ranging from socio-cultural to politico-religious factors, women face different challenges while participating in politics (Bilal et al., 2018; Campbell, 1960). Since 1990s female voter turnout has been declining throughout the world. This declining turnout trend in democracies has raised concerns among the election stakeholders. It is assumed that declining voter turnout and specifically female voters’ turnout is a challenge to the democracies in different countries of the world. Low turnout proposes that smaller number of people consider elections the main instrument for legitimizing parties’ control over decision making. It also

depicts that voters are less interested in electoral activities and political parties which are considered as the important element of democratic representation (Solijonov, 2016: 13). Lipset and Man (1960) argued that, turnout varies from country to country. On the other hand, Rush and Althoff's (1971) work is linked environmental factors with turnout.

1.2. Pakistan's Elections and Turnout Ratio

In Pakistan, the ratio of the voting turnout is also fluctuating like other countries of the globe. Pakistan ranks among the four lowest turnout countries of the world. The average turnout in ten (10) general elections is 47.82%. This is unfortunate that since the 1970 general elections the overall turnout is declining in Pakistan. Turnout in Pakistan in 1970 elections was 64%, in 1977 elections, 62%, 53.2% in 1985, 40% in 1988, 45.5% in 1990, 40.51% in 1993, 35.43% in 1997, 40.69% in 2002, 45% in the 2008 and 55.2% in 2013 general elections. In general election 1997 it reduced to the lowest level of the electoral history in Pakistan (Express Tribune, 2013).

Rauf and Shah (2015) argues that elections ensure that the officials in public offices are answerable for their actions and that this is the most appropriate mechanism for rectification and change if the public office bearers do not fulfil their promises and carry their duties according to the people's wishes. Adult franchise allows all citizens to participate in the public affairs through casting their votes. High turnout in an election builds up the responsiveness of the elected legislators. High turnout shows the effectiveness and confidence of the common people on the political system. On the other hand, low turnout has negative outcomes on governance. Low turnout creates low pressure on the elected representatives by pointing out the lack of interest and political involvement of the common masses. Table-1 shows the overall statistical description of turnout in ten general elections.

Table 1: Turnout in Seven General Elections in Pakistan

No.	General Elections	Turnout Percentage
1	1970	64.00%
2	1977	62.00%
3	1985	53.2%
4	1988	43.07%
5	1990	45.46%
6	1993	40.23%
7	1997	35.42%
8	2002	41.08%
9	2008	44.23%
10	2013	55.02%

Source: Rauf and Shah (2015).

1.3. Women Political Participation in Pakistan

The Constitution of Pakistan prescribes that every citizen (male and female) has equal right to vote with equal weightage; Article 25 states that, "all citizens are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection before the law." Article 34 further states that "steps shall be taken to ensure the full participation of women in all spheres of national life." However, the female turnout ratio in Pakistan has remained low than male voters (Naazer et al., 2017).

Gine and Mansuri (2010) argued that the foundation of a representative democracy is that all those who are subject matter to a policy should be involved in its making. Therefore, in West women were given the right to vote in the twentieth century. After the Second World War, democratic governments extended *de jure* rights to women to participate in political processes. It is assumed that women are comparatively far less likely than men to contest for public office, even in United Kingdom, United States, and other Western democracies. They further elaborated that in the developing democracies, women ratio in public offices is less than men. They are also less likely to participate in the elections as electorate or to exercise independently their vote and candidate choice. In developing countries women voting preferences are pre-occupied and determine by the caste, clan, or household head. In Gine and Mansuri (2010) opinion, there are different barriers which hinder women's political participation, particularly exercising their right to vote. First, women in the developing and 3rd world countries mostly are dependent on male family members. It is thus (in majority of the cases) the decision of the male members of the family whether the female members will exercise their right to vote or not. And to which party or candidate they are to vote if they have to. Thus, independently participating in electoral activities and exercising their right to vote is very minimal.

Secondly, cultural and traditional stereotypes, mobility constraints and personal security concerns discourage female to participate in elections. Third, lack of political awareness among women is also an important barrier in their political participation. For example, in Pakistani society (particularly in the rural areas) female have fewer and poorer sources of information about the importance of balloting process and election. It is assumed that lack of political information may also strengthen stereotypes, which further extricate women from public life (Gine & Mansuri, 2010). Similarly; Latif *et al.* (2015) figure out that "religion, economical dependency, insecurity and patriarchy are the main barriers which stop women to participate in politics". Naz and Ahmad (2012) while conducting research on women political participation in Pakhtun society found different socio-cultural obstacles to women political empowerment. Their study highlighted that "discriminatory social structure, patriarchy, feudalism and *Pakhtunwali* are some of the impediments which decrease women political empowerment in Pakhtun society (Ahmad *et al.*, 2019; But & Victor, 2014).

Rauf and Shah (2015) while studying 2008 general elections have identified various factors that were responsible for low turnout in district Charsadda in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Those factors include lack of trust in politicians, (no) or less trust on electoral process, boycott of elections by (some) parties, (long) distance of the polling stations from home towns, domestic problems and agreement between political parties for not allowing women to vote in the elections. On one hand these factors have manipulated the election result, while on the other hand these have strengthened the patriarchal structures of male dominance in the Pakhtun society. As no separate Male and female voters' turnout data of the previous elections (1970-2008) were available with the election commission of Pakistan, the root causes could not be addressed properly (FAFEN, 2013 April 22; Rauf & Shah, 2015).

However, for the General Elections 2013, as a result of the observations of different national and international organizations, Election Commission of Pakistan introduced Statement of Count (Form XIV) to count male and female ballots separately in each polling booth. In the General Elections 2013 Presiding Officers were required to count individually the number of ballots in boxes from men and women polling booths. Statement of the Count (Form XIV) was used to keep this information in the record (FAFEN, 2013 June). With the adoption of this new policy, Election Commission is now enabled to aggregate male and female voters' turnout in

each national and provincial assembly constituency separately. Even the female turnout data is now available at union council and district level as well. The data enable Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), political parties, civil society organizations and researchers to devise and identify the causes of low female turnout in those areas where female turnout is much lower than male turnout in elections. In general election 2008, SPDI identified 478 polling stations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where female turnout was zero. That was around 8.5% of the total polling stations in Pakistan. Due to the policies of ECP, the female turnout in those areas improved, yet, much lower than the male voters' turnout.

Therefore, an in-depth study is required to identify the impediments of female voters' low turnout in different districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The present study attempts to address this research problem while proposing and arguing that there are multiple reasons for low women turnout in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. These include Administrative issues in elections, Religious decrees (Fatwas) of the local Ulema (religious scholars), Socio-cultural impediments like *Purdah* (veil) and mutual agreements of Political parties. The conceptual framework used for the present study is discussed below.

1.4. Conceptual Framework of the Study

Shaheed (2010) argued that politics in itself is “gendered”. In his opinion every person is encircled within his/her specific environment with a different socio-cultural context. In majority of those social contexts the gender of a person determines the level of his/her access to information, opportunity for power and resources. Shaheed (2010) justified that if a female has no role models in political sphere, she will not likely desirous to be a political leader or activist. Being half of the total population in Pakistan, women voting issue is significant to be conceptualized, analysed, and debated while keeping in view the hurdles and constraints women can face in politics and elections.

The current study argues that there are multiple factors and various causes which are combinedly limiting the political participation of women in the particular context of Pakistan, thus resulting in differences in turnout on the basis of gender. Men avail an advantage and a higher turn out as compared to women. Moreover, some of these factors are peculiar to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province which is populated by a majority of ethnic Pashtuns. These factors can be categorized into administrative, cultural, political and religious. Also, the role of education of the participants and sub-locality cannot be ignored. According to this framework, the data variables have been designed to understand the problem of low female turnout in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

1.5. Significance of the Study

According to Election Commission of Pakistan in 2007 more than eighty million registered voters were in the Final Electoral Rolls. SPDI, a non-government organization, reported that out of total 64000 polling stations for the 2008 general elections 50% were combined polling stations (where men and women voters both cast their vote), while the rest 50% were catered separately to male and female voters. SDPI (2013) reported that there were around 14000 polling stations for female voters in Pakistan, out of which 564 had zero female votes. However, 478 polling stations that are 85% of the total were located in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The table 2 portrays the number of those polling stations where female did not cast their votes in 2008 general elections (Election Commission of Pakistan, 2008).

Table 2: Zero Percent Female Turnout Polling Stations

Province/Region	Number of Polling Stations
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	478
Punjab	31
FATA	23
Balochistan	20
Sindh	11
ICT	1
Grand Total	564

Source: SDPI Report 2013

According to SDPI report, Swat, Charsadda, Swabi, Buner, Peshawar and Malakand Protected Area districts had the highest proportion of polling stations with Zero percent (0%) female turnout. In district Swat 29% of the women's polling stations were untouched while in Charsadda, Swabi and in Peshawar the ratio was 15%, 12% and 9% respectively (Election Commission of Pakistan, 2008). It becomes highly significant to probe into the causes of this low turnout in the province. This present study is an attempt to identify those factors responsible for the low female turnout in elections in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

2. Research Methodology

In this study quantitative approach is used for data collection. Data is collected through a closed ended questionnaire. The population of the data is the total voters of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. As it was not easily to collect data from the whole population, therefore, a probability sample technique was used for data collection. A multi-stage sample that consists of random and systematic sampling methods was used for data collection. In the first stage Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was divided into three geographical clusters i.e. North, Center and South. In the second stage two National Assembly constituencies were randomly selected from each geographical region. Thus, a total of six national assembly constituencies were randomly selected in the second stage. From north NA-32 Lower Dir, NA-34 Chitral, Center NA-8 Charsadda-1, NA-9 Mardan and from South NA-27 Lakki Marwat and NA-15 Karak were selected.¹ In the third stage two union councils were randomly selected from each constituency. The total number of selected union councils is twelve. In the final stage 50 male and 50 female respondents were selected from each union council through systematic sampling. Different dependent and independent variables have been taken and correlated with the causes of low female turnout. Chi-square test is used to identify the impact of variables on each other.

3. Causes of Female Voters Low Turnout

In terms of gender consideration, the table-3 shows that 30.5% male respondents and 22.7% female respondents said that administrative issues in elections are hurdle in female turnout. 15.3% male and 12.6% female respondents said that there is no proper arrangement for 'Purdah' in polling stations. 2.3% male and 1.9% female respondents were of the opinion that due to the religious cleric's role. *Fatwas* against female political participation) women are stopped from casting their votes. Moreover, 4.3% male voters and 4.4% female voters responded that political parties' agreements (in some areas) kept away female voters from casting their votes. The Chi-square test provides insignificant p-value. The p-value>0.05 shows that there is an association between the gender and the causes of low female voters' turnout in general election 2013.

Table 3: Gender Wise Voters Turnout

Gender	Administrative Issues	No proper Arrangement of Purdah	Lemma's verdicts (Fatwa)	Parties Signed Agreement	No Problem at All	All Problems	Total
Male	345	172	26	48	33	2	626
	30.7%	15.3%	2.3%	4.3%	2.9%	0.2%	55.8%
Female	255	141	21	49	30	0	96
	22.7%	12.6%	1.9%	4.4%	2.7%	0.0%	4.2%
Total	600	313	47	97	63	2	122
	53.5%	27.9%	4.2%	8.6%	5.6%	0.2%	100%

Chi-square test= 4.250^a, p-value=.514

In terms of educational consideration in Table-4, among the total respondents, 3.7% Primary, 4% Middle, 9.2% Matric, 5.2% Intermediate, 7.6% Bachelor, 14.1% Master, 0.7% MPhil, and 9% illiterate respondents said that administrative issues caused low female turnout in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Whereas, 2.9% Primary, 2.4% Middle, 4.9% Matric, 2.4% Intermediate, 5.1% Bachelor, 3.8% Master, 1% MPhil and 5% illiterate voters responded that there is no proper arrangement of *Purdah* in polling stations. However, 0.2% Primary, 0.7% Middle, 0.9% Matric, 0.6% Intermediate, 0.4% Bachelor, 1% Master and 0.4% illiterate respondents identified the role of *Fatwas* in low female turnout. On the other hand, 0.3% Primary, 0.5% Middle, 1.4% Matric, 0.7% Intermediate, 2% Bachelor, 2.9% Master, 0.2% MPhil, and 0.6% illiterate respondents said that political parties' agreements were the main obstacle in female low turnout in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The Chi-square test provides highly significant p-value. The p-value<0.05 shows that there is an association between the education and causes of low female turnout in general election 2013.

Table 4: Education Wise Analysis of Female Voters who didn't Cast their Vote

Educational Qualification	Administrative Issues	No proper Arrangement of Purdah	Lemma's Verdicts (Fatwa)	Parties Signed Agreement	No problem at all	All problems	Total
Primary	42	32	2	3	0	0	79
	3.7%	2.9%	.2%	.3%	.0%	0.0%	7.0%
Middle	45	27	8	6	3	0	89
	4.0%	2.4%	.7%	.5%	.3%	0.0%	7.9%
Matric	103	55	10	16	10	2	196
	9.2%	4.9%	.9%	1.4%	.9%	0.2%	17.5%
Intermediate	58	27	7	8	3	0	103
	5.2%	2.4%	.6%	.7%	.3%	0.0%	9.2%
BA/BSc	85	57	4	22	13	0	181
	7.6%	5.1%	.4%	2.0%	1.2%	0.0%	16.1%
MA/MSc	158	43	11	33	23	0	268
	14.1%	3.8%	1.0%	2.9%	2.0%	0.0%	23.9%
MPhil	8	11	0	2	2	0	23
	.7%	1.0%	.0%	.2%	.2%	0.0%	2.0%
Illiterate	101	61	5	7	9	0	183
	9.0%	5.4%	.4%	.6%	.8%	0.0%	16.3%
Total	600	313	47	97	63	2	1122
	53.5%	27.9%	4.2%	8.6%	5.6%	0.2%	100.0%

Chi-square test= 76.270^a, p-value=.000

As far as district-wise consideration is concerned, among the total respondents, 11.5% Chitral,

3.7% Lower Dir, 9.4% Charsadda, 9.2% Mardan, 10.5% Karak and 9.2% Lakki Marwat respondents were of the opinion that administrative issues are responsible of low female turnout in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. While, among the respondents 3.3% Chitral, 3.3% Lower Dir, 4.4% Charsadda, 5.8% Mardan, 6.3% Karak and 4.8% Lakki Marwat accepted that there was no proper arrangement for *Purdah* in the polling stations. However, 0.4% Chitral, 2.6% Lower Dir, 0.3% Charsadda, 0.3% Mardan, 0.3% Karak and 0.4% Lakki Marwat respondents said that the negative role of the religious clergy cause low female turnout in elections. Lastly, regarding the political parties' role and their mutual agreements for stopping female voters from casting their votes, we can see a great deviation in different districts. For example during the survey it was revealed to us by different respondents that in such agreements local leadership of the parties' are involved with the consensus of the elders of the locality. District Karak in this regard was exception where no such mutual agreement occurred among the local elders or political parties. Among the other districts 0.4% respondents in Chitral, 6.1% in Lower Dir, 1.6% in Charsadda, 0.1% in Mardan and 0.5% Lakki Marwat said that agreements between the political parties or candidates and elders of the localities were responsible for low female turnout in elections. The Chi-square test provides highly significant p-value, which shows the existence of different impediments in the way of female political participation.

Table 5: District Wise data of Female Voters who didn't Cast their Vote

District	Administrative Issues	No proper Arrangement of <i>Purdah</i>	Lemma's Verdicts (Fatwa)	Parties Signed Agreement	No problem at all	All problems	Total
Chitral	129	37	4	4	29	0	203
	11.5%	3.3%	.4%	.4%	2.6%	0.0%	18.1%
Lower Dir	41	37	29	68	2	0	177
	3.7%	3.3%	2.6%	6.1%	.2%	0.0%	15.8%
Charsadda	106	49	3	18	6	0	182
	9.4%	4.4%	.3%	1.6%	.5%	0.0%	16.2%
Mardan	103	65	3	1	6	0	178
	9.2%	5.8%	.3%	.1%	.5%	0.0%	15.9%
Karak	118	71	3	0	11	2	205
	10.5%	6.3%	.3%	.0%	1.0%	0.2%	18.3%
Lakki Marwat	103	54	5	6	9	0	177
	9.2%	4.8%	0.4%	0.5%	0.8%	0.0%	15.8%
Total	600	313	47	97	63	2	1122
	53.5%	27.9%	4.2%	8.6%	5.6%	0.2%	100.0%

Chi-Square Test= 4.013E2^a, p-value=.000

In Table-6, among the total respondent of different union councils, 5.2% Charun, 6.3% Chitral-1, 2% Haya Sarai, 1.7% Tazagram, 3.9% Hisara Nehri, 5.5% Gandera, 3.9% Mangah, 5.3% Saro Shah, 5.2% Jandari, 5.3% Metakheel, 5.3% Tajori and 3.9% Suleman Khel, indicated administrative issues as the basic factors in low female turnout in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In the others opinion i.e., 1.5% Charun, 1.8% Chitral-1, 2% Haya Sarai, 1.3% Tazagram, 2% Hisara Nehri, 2.3% Gandera, 3.1% Mangah, 2.7% Saro Shah, 2.7% Jandari, 3.7% Metakheel, 2.4% Tajori and 2.4% Suleman Khel, the "no proper arrangements of *Purdah* in the polling stations" was the basic cause for female low turnout in elections. Whereas, 0.4% Charun, 1.2% Haya Sarai, 1.3% Tazagram, 0.1% HisaraNehri, 0.2% Gandera, 0.1% Mangah, 0.2% Saro Shah, 0.3% Metakheel and 0.4% Tajori respondents' opinion is that the religious clergy role

regarding women political participation was the main hurdle in the female turnout in elections. Some of the respondents i.e., 0.1% Charun, 0.3% Chitral-1, 2.9% Haya Sarai, 3.2% Tazagram, 1.3% Hisara Nehri, 0.3% Gandera, 0.1% Mangah and 0.5% Suleman Khel responded that it was mainly because of the political parties' mutual agreements which stopped female from casting their votes. The Chi-square test provides highly significant p-value. The $p\text{-value} < 0.05$ shows that there is an association between the union council of the respondents and causes of low female turnout in the general elections 2013.

Table 6: Union Council Wise Data of Female Voters who didn't Cast their Vote

Union Council	Administrative issues	No Proper Arrangement of Purdah	Lemma's Verdicts (Fatwa)	Parties Signed Agreement	No Problem at All	All problems	Total
Charun	58	17	4	1	22	0	102
	5.2%	1.5%	0.4%	0.1%	2.0%	0.0%	9.1%
Chitral-1	71	20	0	3	7	0	101
	6.3%	1.8%	.0%	.3%	0.6%	0.0%	9.0%
Haya Sarai	22	22	14	32	1	0	91
	2.0%	2.0%	1.2%	2.9%	0.1%	0.0%	8.1%
Tazagram	19	15	15	36	1	0	86
	1.7%	1.3%	1.3%	3.2%	0.1%	0.0%	7.7%
HisaraNehri	44	23	1	15	5	0	88
	3.9%	2.0%	0.1%	1.3%	0.4%	0.0%	7.8%
Gandera	62	26	2	3	1	0	94
	5.5%	2.3%	0.2%	0.3%	0.1%	0.0%	8.4%
Mangah	44	35	1	1	2	0	83
	3.9%	3.1%	0.1%	0.1%	.2%	0.0%	7.4%
Saro Shah	59	30	2	0	4	0	95
	5.3%	2.7%	0.2%	0.0%	0.4%	0.0%	8.5%
Jandari	58	30	0	0	7	0	95
	5.2%	2.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%	0.0%	8.5%
Metakheel	60	41	3	0	4	2	110
	5.3%	3.7%	0.3%	0.0%	0.4%	0.2%	9.8%
Tajori	59	27	5	0	8	0	99
	5.3%	2.4%	0.4%	0.0%	0.7%	0.0%	8.8%
Suleman Khel	44	27	0	6	1	0	78
	3.9%	2.4%	0.0%	0.5%	0.1%	0.0%	7.0%
Total	600	313	47	97	63	2	1122
	53.5%	27.9%	4.2%	8.6%	.6%	0.2%	100.0%

Chi-Square Test= 4.678E2^a, p-value=.000

4. Barriers of Low Female Turnout in Elections in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

The study identifies four kinds of barriers, which are responsible for low female turnout in elections particularly in 2013 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as follows:

4.1. Administrative Issues

Administrative issues got the maximum weightage among the different factor affecting female

turnout in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Among the respondents 53.5% responded that administrative issues are responsible for low female turnout in 2013 elections in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. These issues are related to Election Commission of Pakistan, National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) and district and local administration. Among the different administrative issues mentioned in the questionnaire, the respondents identified the grave administrative issues. First, the location of polling stations at a large distance makes it hard for female voters to reach there and cast their votes. Second, many of the respondents were of the opinion that due to male interference in female polling stations, women are reluctant to cast their votes. Third, in some of the respondents view the male and female combined polling stations have a significant share in the low female turnout. Forth, in many of the polling stations no proper arrangement for drinking water and washroom was done. Last, due to the polling staff non-cooperative behaviour in the past, many of the female voters refused to vote.

4.2. No Proper Arrangement of *Purdah* in Polling Stations

Critelli (2010) argued that in Pakistan the “inside-outside” dichotomy still exists. In her opinion though there is no legal obligation for *Purdah*, yet, the concept of *Purdah* (veil) in Pakistan is responsible for women seclusion from the public affairs like access to education, employment, training opportunities, political activities and social services. There are different perceptions about *Purdah*. One perception is that *Purdah* (veil) is religious obligation and identity of Muslim women. Second perception is that it is a protection from sexual objectification (Ahmad, 2005; Burn, 2005). Furthermore, it is also having socio-cultural importance and recognition in different areas in Pakistan. In Pakhtun society men and women both are very cautious about *Purdah* and it is connected with *Ghairat*, an important feature of Pakhtun code of life or Pakhtunwali. Due to socio-cultural recognition and religious backup Pashtun women consider *Purdah* an important element and essential aspect of her life. She only gets herself involved in those activities where her *Purdah* is not at stake (Naz & Chaudhry, 2012; Shah et al., 2019). While responding to different questions, many of the respondents said that in the polling stations no proper arrangements are done for ensuring *Purdah*. That is why many of the female do not go to polling stations for casting their votes. The data shows 27% respondents believed that *Purdah* is the main obstacle in female turnout.

4.3. Religious Verdict (*Fatwa*) Against Female Voting

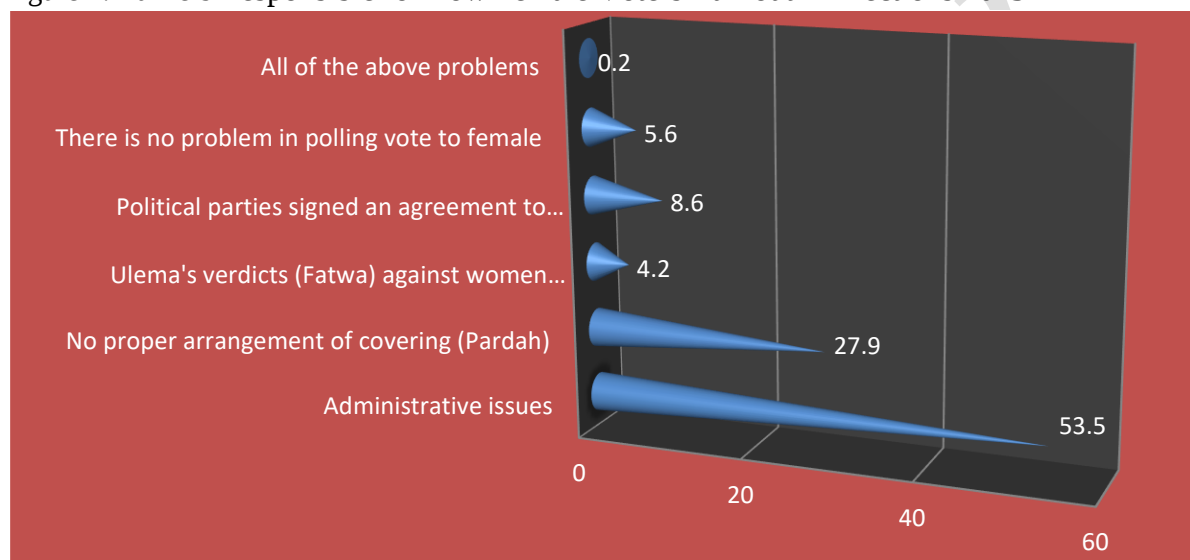
Religious verdict (*Fatwa*) is an important source of knowledge in Islam. Whenever, a new issue is raised in the world, the Muslim jurists or Ulema research on that issue and sort out its solution. There are two kinds of *Fatwas* (religious verdicts). One is formal and written *Fatwa* and the second one is informal or un-written. The formal *Fatwas* are more authentic than informal *Fatwas*. In Pakistan in general and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in particular, religious clerics due to different socio-cultural and religious reasons are not in favour of women political participation. Not all but in some areas of the province some Ulema have issued *Fatwas* against female voting (Ahmad et al. 2017; Azim, 2018; Badshah et al., 2018). Among the total respondents 4.2% accepted that the religious cleric’s role in issuing *Fatwas* against women political participation is one of the important obstacles in female turnout.

4.4. Political Parties Signed Agreements against Female Voting

SDPI (2013) report identified some 478 polling stations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with zero female turnout in the 2008 elections. The study identified those polling stations in Dir, Swat,

Charsadda, Swabi and Peshawar. There were 88 polling stations in NA-29 and 78 polling stations in NA-29 Swat where female turnout was zero. While in NA-8 Charsadda 48 polling stations were pointed out with zero female voters' turnout in 2008 general election (Election Commission of Pakistan, 2008). Many of the respondents were of the opinion that the main reason behind this was the mutual agreement of keeping women at homes among different stake holders including independent candidates, political parties' local leadership, religious clergy and local elders of the locality. Though many of those stake holders later on justified their agreements on the basis of some grounds (most importantly lack of transport facility to and from the polling stations, male and female combined polling stations, and the issue of *Purdah* etc.). Yet, stopping someone from using their legal and political right cannot be justified in any way.

Figure 1: Barriers Responsible for Low Female Voters Turnout in Elections 2013



5. Conclusion

As a result of 2008, election female low turnout in different constituencies ECP decided to change the election rules to improve female turnout, yet, the female turnout is still gendered as it is lower form women than men voters. This study identified four major categories of obstacles which caused female low turnout in general election 2013 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The first category is administrative. Among the total respondents a large number (53.2%) highlighted that administrative issues are responsible for the low female turnout in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The second is the lack of proper arrangement for *Purdah* in the polling stations. However, a significant ratio (27%) of respondents blamed the ECP because of no proper arrangement for female voters on polling day. On the other hand, some (8.6%) of the respondents said that political parties have signed some kind of mutual agreements for not allowing female voters to cast their votes. Lastly, a small number (4.2%) of respondents argued that there were *Fatwas* against the female political participation which influenced low turnout of female voter. Thus, it argued that though the literature may emphasize more on religion and culture, administrative issues are also of prime importance when it comes to low turnout of women in the region. None the less, cultural factors and religious clergy influence cannot be ignored as well. Such factors shall be taken into consideration while attempting to bring in policies and reforms for higher women turn out.

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Notes:

¹ For 2018 general elections these constituencies were shuffled and relocated. For example NA-32 Lower Dir is renamed as Lower Dir-1 NA-6, NA-34 Chitral is now NA-1 Chitral, NA-8 Charsadda is NA-23 Charsadda-1, NA-9 Mardan is NA-20 Mardan-1, NA-15 Karak is NA-34 Karak and NA-27 Lakki Marwat is NA-36 Lakki Marwat.