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**Article**

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PEGNet Policy Brief, No. 19/2020

**Provided in Cooperation with:**

Kiel Institute for the World Economy – Leibniz Center for Research on Global Economic Challenges

*Suggested Citation:* Chaudhry, Zain (2020) : Mobilizing women voters in Pakistan, PEGNet Policy Brief, No. 19/2020, Kiel Institute for the World Economy (IfW), Poverty Reduction, Equity and Growth Network (PEGNet), Kiel

This Version is available at:

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## KEY POINTS

- In most developing countries, politicians are mostly male, whose politics revolves around male household heads.
- The system does not stop women from voting, but politicians do not campaign directly for the female vote.
- A campaign run by a politician in Pakistan focusing only on women increased his vote share by 3.6 percentage points (in an election where he lost by 0.08 percent).
- The campaign had a much larger effect when information was given to women alone and not alongside men.

# PEGNet Policy Brief

## Mobilizing Women Voters in Pakistan

Zain Chaudhry

In most developing countries, politics is clientelistic in nature (Stokes et al. 2013) and dominated by men (Bjarnegaard 2013): male politicians (patrons) deliver patronage in terms of public service work to male household heads, who in turn are expected to ensure that their household members (men and women) all vote for that politician.

As a result, in this male-oriented clientelistic setup, two things happen that marginalize women. First, women voters are never directly approached because the male client is expected to deliver their votes himself. Second, due to a lack of communication and interaction with women voters, the public service work demands and preferences that get communicated to the politicians are those of men, not women. These two forces start a cycle of women's exclusion from all stages of politics. Politicians do not campaign to convince women voters, resulting in a suppressed female turnout, which in turn emboldens the belief that women are not to be seen as a relevant voting bloc, further reducing their importance in electoral politics. As women are not given huge importance as voters, their public policy preferences are neglected by politicians. We know from a large literature that female and male public service preferences differ. As a result of the aforementioned gender gap in politics, politicians prioritize delivery of public services demanded by men (Gottlieb, Grossman, Robinson 2018). This change was seen in Western countries with women's suffrage: governments started to deliver more health services and changed laws that facilitated women (Lott and Kenny 1999).

This is reflected in economic and political outcomes across developing countries. Pakistan, like many developing countries, is a country with a wide gender gap in political participation. The female turnout in the general election of 2018 was 47 percent compared to 58.3 percent for men. Women's participation in political events remains scarce, perfunctory and often dependent on men (Rai et al. 2017). This, unsurprisingly, is seen at higher levels of participation too, with only 8 out of 272 parliamentarians being directly elected women - all except one belong to

political dynasties. The same problems are seen in India. Out of around 8000 contestants for the lower house, only around 700 were women, of which only 78 were elected to parliament. While about 14% of those elected to parliament were women (Jenselius and Verniers 2019), only 9% of the candidates were women. Hence, candidacy matters a lot. Globally, just 23.5 per cent of national parliamentarians are women, six per cent of heads of state and six per cent of heads of government. The lack of women political candidates is a potentially critical barrier to their eventual representation in government and the first step in this process is basic political participation: women registering as voters, voting during elections, and being part of political campaigns.

There is emerging evidence on direct constraints faced by women to participate in politics. Even in developed economies, for women to be more engaged and successful in politics they have to have support from party superiors (Karpowitz et al. 2017). Whereas in more gender-unequal places like Pakistan, men explicitly control political decisions of women (Cheema et al. 2019). This research not only highlights the restraining nature of men's involvement in women's political decisions, but also provides a silver lining that at least on the margins that are not public, such as vote choice, women do make independent decisions if provided the information that can help them make such decisions.

### Women in Politics: Campaigns, Turnout, Leadership

One reason that women political participation is important is that seeing women active in the political space sends a signal to women and the rest of society about what is normal and achievable. Beaman et al. (2009) show that voter attitudes change for the better after exposure to female leaders in the village councils. They report better perceptions of female leader effectiveness and reduced stereotypes of gender roles. Extended exposure to female political representation has also been shown to increase women's overall labor force participation (Ghani et al. 2013). Political reservations for women have



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been linked to both positively influencing adolescent girls’ career aspirations and educational attainment (Beaman et al. 2012) and increasing investment in public goods and infrastructure that are relevant to and valued by women (Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004). Iyer et al. (2012) show that with women as political representatives, women feel empowered to report crimes against women. Finally, having more women in elected office has been shown to lead to broader societal benefits such as better infant mortality rates (Bhalotra and Clots-Figueras 2014), better education outcomes in urban areas (Clots-Figueras 2012) and lower corruption (Brollo and Troiano 2016) as well.

Why do women not vote in higher numbers in many developing countries such as Pakistan? In a gender analysis of women’s political participation in seven South Asian countries, experts highlight the following issues. First, selecting leaders is viewed as the responsibility of the men in the family. Second, the voter registration process is complex, which discourages women since male relatives assume the responsibility of preparing the necessary documentation. Other researchers have highlighted the role played by expectations of how women should behave in public (Perez 2004), patrilineal family systems (Ospina 2006) and barriers to registration of women prior to voting as reasons for why women do not vote in as high numbers in developing countries. In a survey conducted in India’s largest state of Uttar Pradesh, Iyer and Mani (2019) find that women are much less likely to report being part of other electoral activities such as participation in campaigns, listening to candidate speeches, or membership in political parties. They find that women lag behind on several potential determinants of political participation, such as knowledge about how political institutions work, their self-assessed leadership skills, and their voice in key household decisions (for example, only one-third of women report having a high level of input into household repair decisions). A similar ‘ambition gap’ has been documented for women in the US, despite their much higher levels of education and labour force participation compared to India

(Lawless and Fox 2010). Women in rural India also face significant mobility restrictions (for example, 46% of women in our survey report requiring permission even to go to nearby places such as a friend’s house), while women in urban India often forgo important opportunities due to concerns about safety (Borker 2018). All of these factors, together with education, household wealth and religion or caste, can explain approximately 69% of the gender gap in electoral political participation. This suggests that improving women’s knowledge, self-confidence, voice and mobility can have significant effects on their political participation.

How can we increase women’s turnout? Gine and Mansuri (2011) show that voter awareness campaign led to 12 percentage points increase in women’s turnout and allowed them to make independent decisions for candidate choice. Roza et al. (2014) evaluate a public awareness campaign in Guatemala, but find no measurable impact. Cheema et al. (2019) find that a get-out-the-vote campaign works best in Lahore, Pakistan when information is provided to both wife and husband because they discuss the matter within the household and make a collective decision. Hence, such campaigns can have different impacts depending on the context, and we are as yet unaware of a the fundamental model that allow us to understand when and why such campaigns are successful.

### Mobilizing the Vote in Pakistan

My research team and I evaluated a political campaign run in 151 electoral areas within one constituency in Pakistan (Chaudry et al 2019). This is the first time a direct campaign by a political to court the female vote has been rigorously evaluated. The incumbent ran the campaign in 103 precincts, with 48 precincts serving as a control group. The focus was on canvassing women voters with the help of women canvassers that provided information about the public service delivery performance of the incumbent politician. This was achieved through a door-to-door political campaign for women, in which

non-partisan female canvassers delivered brochures to female household members in treated precincts. The brochures listed actual (and verified) public service delivery undertaken by the incumbent over the last five years in the whole constituency. They covered public service delivery such as women-only parks, vocational courses for women, provision of natural gas in homes for cooking, construction of schools, provision of safe drinking water through water filtration plants, stable provision of electricity, and better sewerage systems.

The politician ran two types of campaigns: women-only and women and men campaigns. In the women-only campaign, information was provided only to women. In the women and men campaign, information was provided to women alongside men.

We find that the campaign had a substantial effect on the campaigning politician’s vote share. In areas where the campaign was run (women alone and women and men together), the incumbent’s vote share increased by 3.7 percentage points. These are very large gains for any political campaign, particularly one focused on women in developing countries. Further, in the women only campaign, the politician’s vote share increased by a

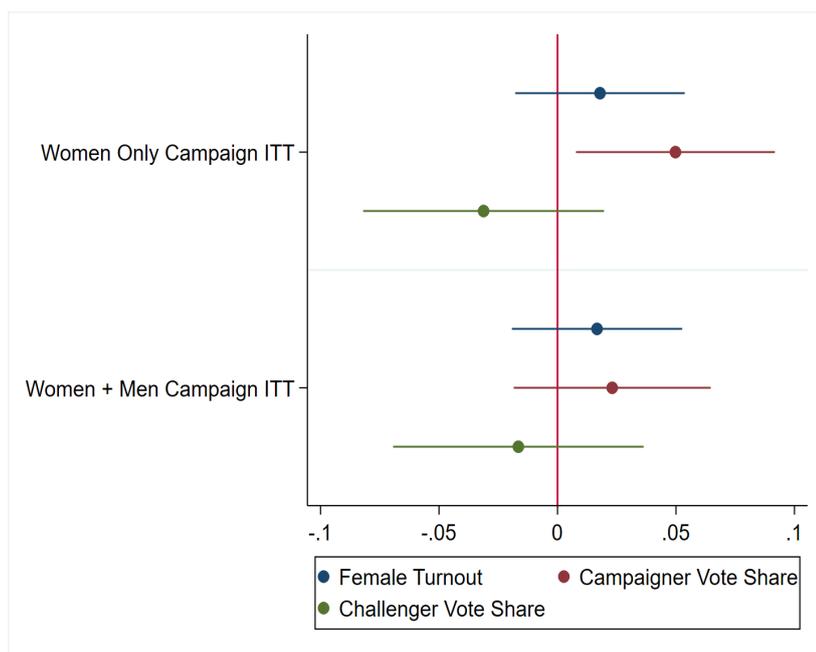


Figure 1: Effects on Turnout and Vote Shares - ITT

substantial 5 percentage points (as shown in Figure 1). We find that the women-only campaign led to twice as big an increase in vote share for the politician than the women and men campaign. This shows that providing information to women alone is a much better strategy if we want to empower women as voters. Hence, undertaking public service delivery and campaigning to inform women directly of this work can yield substantial returns for politicians. Based on prior work (Gottlieb 2016; Guarnieri and Rainer 2018), we may have expected a backlash from men due to a rare political campaign focused primarily on women, however, it is clear that the incumbent did not lose electorally in any way as his vote share rose significantly.

Pakistan has polling stations of three types: male-only, female-only and combined-gender polling stations. We look at how voters react differently to the women-specific campaign based on whether they are in a combined polling station precinct or gender-segregated polling station precinct. We find that the precincts in which there is a combined polling station, and that were treated with either campaign, show an increase in female voter turnout of 6.8 percentage points. This effect is not driven by transport because we find no difference in turnout between precincts with combined polling stations and female-only polling stations. Our hypothesis is that this is driven by laxer social norms of combined polling station precincts. These are areas where since decades women are used to voting alongside men and venturing more into the public sphere at least with regard to political activity. Hence, the norms with regard to women going out and voting and being in public in general are less conservative.

In contrast to our work, Iyer and Mani (2019) find some evidence of a 'backlash' effect for new women candidates. In states where gender bias is known to be deeply entrenched (we proxy this by the share of women in the population, a lower share being indicative of sex-selective abortions and/or neglect of women's health), a woman's electoral victory is followed by a significant decline in the share of new women candidates in the next election.

## Policy Recommendations

Women have different policy preferences than men in many developing countries. However, the conventional assumption is that they vote according to the preferences of the men of their families. This understanding latently assumes that women do so with the full knowledge of what they want and what their representatives provide. We show above that women may not be completely informed about their representatives. When they are provided information about the women-specific policy actions and development projects of the incumbent they turnout more on the election day.

This is important from policy perspective. It will help address at least one of the structural reasons behind the gender gap. The politicians and parties follow the conventional wisdom that women are not independent voters and that households act as a unitary agent when deciding whether to vote or no. However, that appears not to be the case. Women do appear to make an independent decision about voting. Hence, if politicians across the world changed their campaigns, and directly made efforts to inform women about their performance, they would stand to gain electorally. We believe that this would lead to an increase in women's turnout, and eventually an increase in women's candidacy and success in politics. This can be done at an earlier step by registering women as voters, on election

day by providing safe transport for women, and by implementing informal or formal quotas for women to help them overcome the structural barriers they face.

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