# SOCIO-CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC FACTORS AFFECTING WOMEN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN DIR DISTRICT OF KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA

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## ABSTRACT

*The focus of this study is to explore socio-cultural and economic factors affecting women political participation in Dir Districts of Khyber Pukhtunkhwa. The study was conducted in two districts of Khyber Pukhtunkhwa. A sample of 342 respondents was taken from the three colleges of the District upper dir and Lower dir. An interview schedule was designed having both open and closed ended questions for data collection. The analysis revealed illiteracy, lack of awareness, lack of women involvement in decision making process, restricted mobility, early marriages, work burden, gender discrimination, patriarchy, strict purdah system, stereotypes, poverty, unemployment, inflation and economic dependency of women on men are the main barriers which affecting women political participation. It is suggested that women political participation can be enhanced in Pukhtun society of district dir upper and lower by giving women equal opportunities of education, jobs and creating flexibility in attitude towards women.*

**Keywords:**  *Socio-Cultural, Economic Factor, Women Political Participation, Gender Discrimination*

## INTRODUCTION

Despite the increasing involvement of women in various fields of life, they remain much behind than men in the sphere of politics. Politics is the most important field of human life and involvement in political activities and access to political power is a fundamental right of all the citizens. Thus politics is the most important field of human life as it is essential for the existence of state and in settling disputes. Providing equal chance to individuals to participate in activities related to politics and in the decision making of their society ensures the accomplishment of their needs (AHMED, K. M., 2013).

Political domain almost everywhere and particularly in developing countries has been dominated by male member of the society. In poor countries,

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women are confined to household activities while public and political domain is occupied by male mostly in the society. No one can deny the fact that a woman is one of the important segments of the society. Similarly, no nation can reach to high success and glory until women are not provided opportunities to work side by side with men (Maccionis, 2009).

Equal involvement of women in various fields is important for the socio-economic development of their country. In spite of their social and economic role in family and economy; they encounter multiple problems in various spheres of their lives. A number of reasons are connected with the male social status in the society and the most dominant one is their physique which makes them suitable for various socio-economic activities (Rustagi, 2000). It is a fact that women from the very start have been facing a lot of problems in various spheres of life especially in political one. Woman at her early ages experience inequality and deals with discrimination in the family (Jalal-ud-Din, and Khan, 2008).

Women political empowerment means the freedom of women to vote and contest election without any barriers. Similarly, political participation means the extent to which people are involved in activities related to politics (Igwee, 2002). It means all those activities which are related to politics mainly voting, campaigning, attending meetings, protesting and contesting election are the part of political participation. Despite the important segment of the society, women have been ignored in social, cultural, economic and political spheres of life. Women confront various problems and challenges in the way of their political participation. Women involvement and participation in politics is of recent emergence dates back to late eighteen century. Women were given the right to vote for the first time in New Zealand in 1883. Finland offered the right of vote to women in 1906; Norway gave them the right in 1913 while Germany bestowed women with the right of vote in 1918. A century ago, almost there was not a single woman holding elected office in the United States, indicating that before 1920 women had no right to cast vote in the United States (Maccionis, 2009).

In Jordan, women were completely ignored in the field of politics up to 1950. Later on, the situation changed and women were given the right to poll vote but still they were deprived of contesting election as a candidate. In Jordanian society the right of polling vote was only given to educated women (Ministry of interior, 2003:33). Women in Greek got political rights in 1952. By 1980 women had only the right to merely cast vote. However, at the end of 1980; women came to participate in political activities and got the right in political

decision making. The participation of women in political activities began to increase recently but is still considerably lower (Maloutas 1998).

Further in global perspective as far as women political empowerment is concerned, they hold just 15.2 percent of seats in parliaments across the world. Women political empowerment varies from society to society. Similarly, in the United States little change has occurred in politics. In 2002 national elections, only six of the fifty state governors were women which, was very low ratio. In South Asia the women political empowerment is also not satisfactory. In Ukraine various measures have been taken to bring gender equality in public sphere especially in political domain but still there is low level of political participation of Ukrainian women (Fund, 2011).

Similarly, in Kenya, women participation is very low and there is not enough representation of women in political activities. Many reasons such as variations in norms, value system and rigid culture are impeding women participation in political activities but the only and common factors which lower their participation is gender discrimination. Low participation of women in politics is because of their low level of literacy (Davis, 2008). Further women traditionally are considered inferior to male which leads to lack of women political empowerment in the South Asia. Women political representation around the globe is very low and received only 33 percent seats for women in the parliament (UNDP report, 2005).

No doubt the reservation of 33% seats is a change in the political history of Pakistan. It is of course one of the positive changes that encouraged women especially in the urban areas. Further the situation is worst in rural areas especially in the traditional and conservative districts of Pakistan. As it is a fact that gender role is not ascribed instead it is greatly in relation with the culture. In Pakistan women are dealt in every domain of life discriminately and even it will not be wrong to say that woman is considered less important for the public sphere especially in politics. They have very low participation in politics in Pakistan especially in rural areas. Political participation of women is one of the core factors in the development of any nation and also a core determinant of women empowerment. But unfortunately socio-cultural factors like norms and values, patriarchy and misinterpretation of religion prevent women from participating in political activities especially in rural areas. In Pakistan especially in the traditional districts of rural areas, socio-cultural, and economic factors come in the way of women political participation (Shaheed et.al 2009).

Further in economic factors women poverty, unemployment and inflation prohibit and discourage women political participation. In economic domain, women are dependent upon male and their economic instability do not allow them to participate in political activities (Aderinwale, 1997).

Women active role in politics is essential for their empowerment as it is directly linked with women political participation. Women political participation ensures women representation in various spheres and fields. Thus, when a woman is given opportunities of entrance to political domain it provides a path of empowerment to women. Political participation makes women to work for social change which is imperative for the upbringing of society (Stromquist and Fishman, 2009).

In *Pukhtun* society women political participation is significantly very low due to patriarchy setup and male dominancy. Lack of women political participation is the outcome of numerous factors in *Pukhtun* society. More significantly along with male domination, other socio cultural and economic factors i.e. illiteracy and ignorance, lack of awareness, poverty, inflation, unemployment, strict tradition and miss interpretation of religious teachings are affecting women political participation in *Pukhtun* society (Ali et.al, 2010).

**THE STUDY CONTEXT**

Pakistan is one of the male dominated societies where public sphere has largely dominated by male members of the society. Women in Pakistan have always been treated discriminately in various spheres of life due to socio-cultural and economic barriers. Majority of the Pakistani population is consisted of women and their equal representation in political sphere is necessary for the development of society. As (Anita, 2010) stated that women political participation is essential for the social uplift of the society. *Pukhtun* society is more patriarchal and traditional in nature where women cannot participate in political activities. In *Pukhtun* society, they encounter various problems due to their absence or very low participation in political sphere. Various socio-cultural and economic factors such as strict norm and values, male dominancy, restriction on women mobility, strict *purdah* system, poverty and honor exclude women from the domain of politics (Women in Pakistan report, 2000).

In Pakistani society especially in *Pukhtun* society, there is a huge disparity between male and female almost in every domain of life. Women are more

deprived from their basic rights but as far as their political right is concerned they are completely ignored in this regard. Even they have no right and access to cast their vote. In *Pukhtun* society women are not given the right to involve in various political activities (Bose and Rossi, 1983). Various factors have been associated with this deprivation of women from their political right in *Pukhtun* society such rigid culture, male dominancy, *purdah* system, and traditions. On the other hand, overall Pakistan is a patriarchy society in all aspects i.e. social, economic, politics, health and in education, but this is more severe in intensity in *Pukhtun* society. Parents like to provide good education to their male as they deem to investment. Because in such conservative and backward society parents consider them their support in the last days of their age. On the other hand, things do not come in the favor of women because in such traditional society women face troubles and difficulties and that's why they have no access to health, education and more dominantly to politics and therefore women in such society become socially paralyzed.

In *Pukhtun* society, due to patriarchal nature, women are provided with fewer chances to acquire property, having no access to education, health facilities, and work especially in the rural areas and more significantly, they have no access and opportunities to participate in politics. In their routine life women do not have their own choice and goals but work and respond to the needs and demands of others. A woman is mostly considered the honor of the home and therefore they are not allowed to work outside of home. In such traditional and conservative societies women entry to public places and their involvement in the political activities is considered threat to their family life. In *Pukhtun* society, the foremost task and duty of woman is that of wife and mother which is only extended to the circle of their homes. Other activities in such traditional societies especially political one is in the third category for them (Matland, 2004).

In *Pukhtun* society of *Khyber Pukhtunkhwa,* the feudal set up as well as strong male dominancy is a great threat to women political participation. Even women are not allowed to poll a vote. In some districts of *Khyber Pukhtunkhwa,* such as Sawabi, Swat and more importantly in Dir districts women face severe restrictions and impediments from society. They are prevented on socio-cultural grounds as the values, norms, traditions do not allow them to participate in political activities. Similarly, due to the patriarchy nature of *Pukhtun* society, especially in Malakand division, women are strictly limited to the boundaries of their home. For instance, in Swabi, Swat and Dir women strictly prevented from polling vote. Further in

Malakand division, women are prevented from participation in political activities on religious ground. In this connection, religious scholars do social boycott of the women who contest election or even who poll the vote (Bano, 2009).

Similarly, in *Pukhtun* society, like family, the feudalistic system is also a threat to women political participation. The famous words of the *Pukhtun* language i.e. *Zar, Zan, Zameen* (Money, Women and Land) is considered the roots of all evils in the society. These local words of *Pukhtun* language are always used against women and favor the status of men and resultantly promote gender disparity and gender discrimination in society (Ali and Gavino 2008:202). Women in *Pukhtun* society are restricted to home and their mobility outside home is prohibited because of the socio-cultural factors and due the fear of labeling social stigma. Women who go outside home face problems from society and even from family and it should be remembered that political participation is a public sphere activity. Similarly, norms, values and strict and rigid culture and male dominancy push women away from authoritative spheres (Isran and Isran, 2012). Various challenges and issues that women face in *Pukhtun* society are a threat to the respect of their family and that's the reason those women remain confined to the walls of home. *Pukhtun* traditions, norms and values based on *Pukhtunwali* strictly prohibit political participation of women in *Pukhtun* society (Naz, Ibrahim and Ahmad, 2012:167).

In traditional society family honor is linked with the women. Woman in such society has more respects when she lives under the walls and boundaries of home. Similarly, strict *purdah* system is observed and followed in the society by women which ultimately comes a hurdle and obstacle in the way of their participation in the political activities. For example, in case of going outside home, she has to cover herself completely from head to feet (South Asian for Human Right, 2009:5). In *Pukhtun* society, due to such restrictions and tradition women do not get equal approach to participate in political activities and face hurdles and impediments in the way of their participation of political activities (Bose and Rossi, 1983). Multiple factors in *Pukhtun* society promote discrimination against women not only in politics but also in education, health and work place. The most important factors that affect women political participation are illiteracy, male dominancy, strict culture, norm and values, misinterpretation of religious teachings, economic instability of women and stereotypical opinions of people regarding women.

Thus due to their lack of participation in political activities in *Pakhtun* society development process is very much uneven and resultantly women folk are facing a lot of problems.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theoretical framework is one of the significant parts of the research process. The present study has its roots in feminist theories. There are different feminist theories about women empowerment but liberal feminism supports the current study.
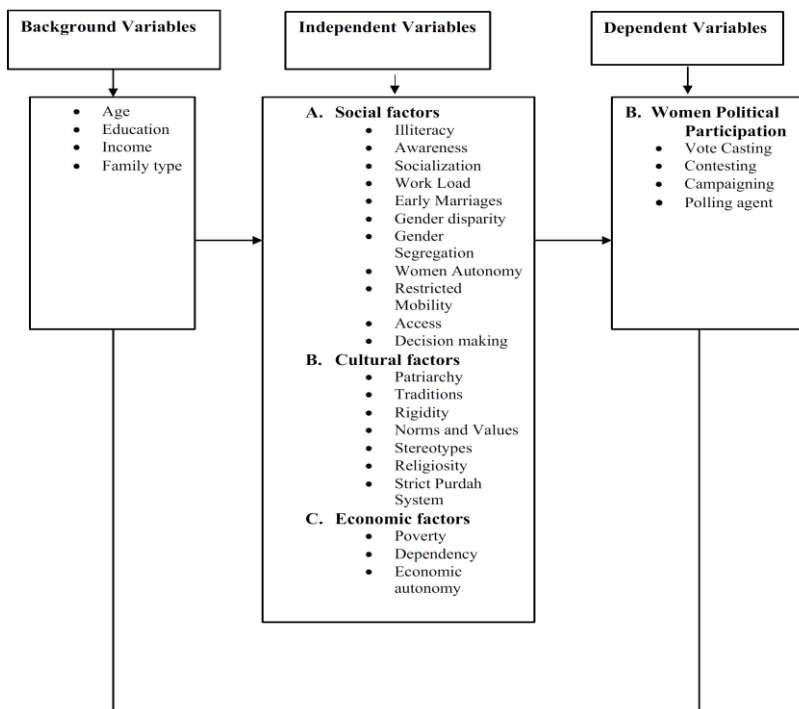
## LIBERAL FEMINISM

Feminist ideologies have not of the recent emergence but it is a quite long history. The main aim of the feminism is that women subordination can be questioned. Liberal feminism wants the equal access of women to various public domains and strictly discourages unequal treatment on the basis of gender. Friedan (1981) also supported the idea that society should make continuous effort to reduce the gender gap and to develop more human social system. Similarly, to reduce gender inequality, liberal feminism suggests planned actions like mobilizing existing political changes channels for change developing equal economic opportunities. The founder of liberal feminism is considered to be Mary Wolsten Craft. However, most of the work of liberalism in the past is associated to John Locke, David Hume, Jeremy Benthan, and John Stuart Mill. It is also called equalitarian or mainstream feminism.

Gender inequality is the result of male dominancy and sexist way of the division of labor in society (Ritzer, 2000). Thus, it means that liberal feminism demands the elimination of sexism that leads and causes gender inequality. Similarly, liberal feminism accepts the existing set up of the society but want to expand the circle of the rights of women. The liberal feminism wants the implementation of gender balance law and also lay stress that women should have equal chance of access to these laws. Liberal feminism agrees with the existing setup as said by Jagger (1993) that liberal feminism does not want any change in the structure of basic organization. Mary Wollstonecraft has focused basically on the eradication of institutional bias and implementation of gender balanced law because in history across the globe all the laws are male dominated and worked to protect masculine interests.

The above mentioned theory shows that women have similar problems everywhere in society. The current study has focused on the political participation of the women. This study has conducted in the conservative and traditional society where women have no access to political sphere. Mostly the laws and norms are male oriented and keep the women inferior and subordinate. Women in *Pukhtun* society are not allowed to cast vote or participate in any political activities. The culture of *Pukhtun* society and norms and rules do not support and encourage women participation in political activities. The liberal feminism also wants equal flexibility in the mind of people toward women as well as implementation of gender balanced laws. The basic philosophy of liberal feminism is that gender inequality is the outcome of patriarchy and sexiest pattern of division of labor. In *Pukhtun* society, these two things are dominant. Women are confined to indoor activities and are deprived from the public domain which leads to gender discrimination in *Pukhtun* society. Thus the liberal feminism is adopted to clarify and support the current problem.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

| Background Variables | Independent Variables | Dependent Variables |
|---|---|---|
| • Age<br>• Education<br>• Income<br>• Family type | **A. Social factors**<br>• Illiteracy<br>• Awareness<br>• Socialization<br>• Work Load<br>• Early Marriages<br>• Gender disparity<br>• Gender Segregation<br>• Women Autonomy<br>• Restricted Mobility<br>• Access<br>• Decision making<br>**B. Cultural factors**<br>• Patriarchy<br>• Traditions<br>• Rigidity<br>• Norms and Values<br>• Stereotypes<br>• Religiosity<br>• Strict Purdah System<br>**C. Economic factors**<br>• Poverty<br>• Dependency<br>• Economic autonomy | **B. Women Political Participation**<br>• Vote Casting<br>• Contesting<br>• Campaigning<br>• Polling agent |

Methodology means rules, procedures and guidelines for conducting a particular research study. The main concern of the present study was to find out socio-cultural and economic factors which affect women political participation. The present study was conducted in three Tehsils of Dir districts of Khyber Pukhtunkhwa and further three colleges of Dir districts was taken into consideration to delimit the area. Total sample size of three hundred and forty-two (342) represents was selected from three colleges of the Tehsils of districts Lower Dir and Upper Dir namely Government Girls Degree College Samrbagh, Government Girls Degree College Timergara and Government Girls Degree College Dir having sample of 39,214and 89 respectively. The selected sample was taken from the total population of 2370 (265+1485+620). Proportionate random sampling technique was used to draw the sample from the total population of three Colleges. The interview schedule was designed having both open and closed ended questions for data collection. The data further analyzed through Statistical Package for the Social Sciences by using frequencies, percentages in univariate analysis. However, the bi-variate analysis has been used for testing the proposed hypothetical statement with application of logistic regression.

**Table 1:** *Distribution of the respondents regarding their age and family monthly income*

| **Age of the respondents** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **S.NO** | **Age of the respondents in complete years** | **Frequency** | **Percentage** |
| i | Up to 18 | 57 | 16.6 |
| ii | 19-20 | 153 | 44.8 |
| iii | 21-22 | 116 | 34 |
| iv | 22+ | 16 | 4.7 |
| | **Total** | **342** | **100** |
| | **Mean :     20.13** | **Standard deviation :   1.549** | |
| **Level of education of the respondents** | | | |
| S.NO | **Education of the respondents** | Frequency | Percentage |
| i | Intermediate | 127 | 37.1 |
| ii | Bachelor | 215 | 62.9 |
| | **Total** | **342** | **100** |
| | **Mean :    12.78** | **Standard deviation :   1.183** | |

Table 1 reveals the age and educational status of the respondents. The data illustrate less than half of the respondents (44.8%) were in the age category of 19-20 years, while 34% of the respondents were in the age group 21-22 years. The table further shows that 16.6 % of the respondents were up to 18-year, whereas a small portion (4.7%) was above 18 year of age. The mean (average) age of the respondents was 20.13 years while standard deviation was 1.549.

The table further illustrates educational status of the respondents. The data further show that majority of the respondents (62.9%) had marked their qualification as bachelor while 37.1% of the respondents had intermediate qualification. The mean of education level was12.78 whereas the standard deviation was 1.183.

## Bi-Variate Analysis

**Table 1:** *Logistic regression predicting likelihood of reporting casting vote with reference to women political participation*

| I.V's | B(SE) | df | P-value | Odds |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Age | -0.25(0.202) | 1 | 0.001** | 0.703 |
| Social Factor | -0.11(0.371) | 1 | 0.015* | 1.659 |
| Cultural Factor | 0.72(0.311) | 1 | 0.032* | 2.206 |
| Economic Factor | -0.34(0.132) | 1 | 0.010* | 0.811 |
| Restricted Mobility | -0.13(0.202) | 1 | 0.081ns | 0.376 |

**p<0.01, *p<0.05 and ns=not significant

Binary logistic regression was performed to assess the impact of number of factors on the likelihood of reporting to cast a vote with reference to the respondents' (women) political participation. The model contained five independent variables (age, social factor, cultural factor, economic factor, restricted mobility of women). As highlighted in the table, four of the independent variables made a statistically significant contribution to the model. The strongest predictor of reporting political participation with casting a vote was cultural factors, recording an odds ratio of 2.206. This indicated that respondents with casting vote were over 2.206 times more likely to report as political participation than those who did not caste vote, controlling all other factors in the model. The odds ratio of 1.659 for social

factor indicated that respondents with casting vote were over 1.64 times more likely to report as political participation than those who did not cast vote. The odds ratio of 0.811 for economic factor was less than 1, indicating that for every unit of economic factor, respondents were 0.811 times less likely to report as political participation than those who did not cast vote.

| I.V's | B(SE) | df | P-value | Odds |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Table 2:** *Logistic regression predicting likelihood of reporting Contesting election with reference to women political participation* | | | | |
| Age | -0.33(0.220) | 1 | 0.030* | 0.717 |
| Social Factors | -0.17(0.318) | 1 | 0.040* | 0.837 |
| Cultural Factors | -0.09(0.157) | 1 | 0.030* | 1.991 |
| Economic Factors | -0.59(0.157) | 1 | 0.001** | 0.274 |
| Restricted Mobility | -0.25(0.237) | 1 | 0.272ns | 0.717 |

$**p<0.01, *p<0.05$ and ns=not significant

As mentioned in the table, four of the independent variables made a statistically significant contribution to the model. In this regard, the strongest predictor of reporting political participation with contesting election was cultural factors, recording an odds ratio of 1.991. This represented that respondents with contesting election were over 1.991 times more likely to report as political participation than those who did not contest election. The odds ratio of 0.837 for social factor indicated that respondents with contesting election were over 0.837 times more likely to report as political participation than those who did not contest election. The odds ratio of 0.71 for restricted mobility indicated that respondents with contesting election were 0.71 times more likely to report as political participation than those who did not contest election. The odd ratio of 0.274 for economic factors represented that respondents with contesting election were 0.274 times less likely to report as political participation than those who did not contest election.

**Table 3:** *Logistic regression predicting likelihood of reporting to run an election campaign with reference to women political participation*

| I.V's | B(SE) | df | P-value | Odds |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Age | -0.24(0.102) | 1 | 0.015* | 0.780 |
| Social Factors | -0.04(0.073) | 1 | 0.041* | 0.960 |
| Cultural Factors | -0.02(0.067) | 1 | 0.001* | 1.002 |
| Economic Factors | -0.34(0.393) | 1 | 0.031* | 0.711 |
| Restricted Mobility | -0.09(0.089) | 1 | 0.51ns | 0.912 |

**p<0.01, *p<0.05 and ns=not significant

Binary logistic regression was performed to assess the impact of number of factors on the likelihood of reporting to run an election campaign with reference to women political participation. The model comprised five independent variables (age, social factor, cultural factor, economic factor, restricted mobility of women). As mentioned in the table, four of the independent variable made a statistically significant contribution to the model. The strongest predictor of reporting political participation with running election campaign was cultural factors, recording an odds ratio of 1.002. This represented that respondents with running campaign were over 1.002 times more likely to report as political participation than those who did not run campaign, controlling all other factors in the model. Similarly, the odds ratio of 0.960 for social factor indicated that respondents with running campaign were over 0.960 times more likely to report as political participation than those who did not run campaign. The odds ratio of 0.912 for restricted mobility indicated that respondents with running campaign were 0.912 times more likely to report as political participation than those who did not run campaign election. The odd ratio of 0.71 economic factor was less than 1, represented that for every unit of economic factor, respondents were 0.71 times less likely to report as political participation than those who did not run campaign election.

**Table 4:** *Logistic regression predicting likelihood of reporting to work as polling agent with reference to women political participation*

| I.V's | B(SE) | df | P-value | Odds |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Age | -0.14(0.136) | 1 | 0.049* | 0.689 |
| Social Factors | 0.07(0.142) | 1 | 0.015* | 0.843 |
| Cultural Factors | -0.48(0.118) | 1 | 0.011* | 1.062 |
| Economic Factors | -0.13(0.183) | 1 | 0.031* | 0.594 |
| Restricted Mobility | -0.37(0.190) | 1 | 0.454ns | 0.893 |

$**p<0.01$, $*p<0.05$ and ns=not significant

As described in the table, four of the independent variable made a statistically significant contribution to the model. In this regard, the strongest predictor of reporting political participation with working as a polling agent was cultural factors, recording an odds ratio of 1.062. This represented that respondents working as a polling agent were over 1.062 times more likely to report as political participation than those who did not work as a polling agent. The odd ratio of 0.893 for restricted mobility revealed that respondents with working as polling agent were over 0.893 more likely to report as political participation than those who did not work as polling agent. The odds ratio of 0.843 for social factor indicated that respondents working as polling agent were over 0.843 times more likely to report as political participation than those who did not work as polling agent. The odd ratio of 0.594 for economic factors represented that respondents working as a polling agent were 0.594 times less likely to report as political participation than those who did not work as a polling agent.

## CONCLUSION

The data analysis revealed that socio-cultural and economic factors impede women political participation in *Pukhtun* society. In social factors the dominant factors that impede women political participation are illiteracy, work burden and lack of involvement in decision making process. In cultural factors the most important factors that hinder women political participation are patriarchy and strict purdah system of the *Pukhtun* society. Economic factors also have a great effect on women political participation. In economic factors the vital factors are poverty, economic dependency and unemployment of women. These factors strictly impede women political

participation in *Pukhtun* society. Moreover, the restricted mobility of women and cultural stereotypes also prevent women to participate in political activities. Usually women in *Pukhtun* society have been assigned duties within the four walls of home and their mobility outside home is disliked and discouraged. Overall the cultural factors are most dominantly barring women political participation. Thus, it is concluded that due to the prevalence of these factors women political participation is very low in *Pukhtun* society.

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