

p-ISSN: 2521-2982

e-ISSN: 2707-4587

GLOBAL
Political
REVIEW *empowering humanity*



GPR

GLOBAL POLITICAL REVIEW
HEC-RECOGNIZED CATEGORY-Y

VOL. X, ISSUE II, SPRING (JUNE-2025)

DOI (Journal): 10.31703/gpr

DOI (Volume): 10.31703/gpr/.2025(X)

DOI (Issue): 10.31703/gpr.2025(X.II)

Double-blind Peer-review Research Journal

www.gprjournal.com

© Global Political Review


Humanity Publications
sharing research

Article Title

Exploring the Socio-Cultural Challenges to Women Poll Workers in General Elections-2024 in Pakistan

Abstract

Women poll workers play a vital role in conducting free and fair elections in Pakistan. The present study explored the social, cultural, and economic challenges women poll workers faced during the general elections of 2024 in Pakistan. Qualitative research with in-depth interviews of seven women poll workers was conducted in Malakand, Pakistan. The study explored that the mobility of women poll workers to polling stations was socially restricted, family elders restrict women's polling duties, and gender roles in the domestic sphere also constrain women poll workers from election duties. And family elders, including in-laws, discouraged women from performing election duties. Women poll workers staying till evening in polling stations is also considered unethical it is required to compile election results. The study concluded that prior consent should be taken from women government employees, and logistic support should be provided to enhance the women poll workers' efficiency during their election duty.

Keywords: Women, Poll Workers, Social, Challenges, Elections, Malakand, Pakistan

Authors:

Adeeba: MPhil Scholar, Political Science Department, Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan, KP, Pakistan.

Manzoor Hussain: Lecturer, Department of Sociology, Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan, KP, Pakistan.

Hussain Ali: (Corresponding Author)
Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan, KP, Pakistan.
(Email: hussainali@awkum.edu.pk)

Pages: 164-174

DOI: [10.31703/gpr.2025\(X-II\).15](https://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gpr.2025(X-II).15)

DOI link: [https://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gpr.2025\(X-II\).15](https://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gpr.2025(X-II).15)

Article link: <https://gprjournal.com/article/exploring-the-sociocultural-challenges-to-women-poll-workers-in-general-elections2024-in-pakistan>

Full-text Link: <https://gprjournal.com/article/exploring-the-sociocultural-challenges-to-women-poll-workers-in-general-elections2024-in-pakistan>

PDF link: <https://www.gprjournal.com/jadmin/Author/31rvlolA2.pdf>

Global Political Review

p-ISSN: [2521-2982](https://doi.org/10.31703/gpr) e-ISSN: [2707-4587](https://doi.org/10.31703/gpr)

DOI (journal): [10.31703/gpr](https://doi.org/10.31703/gpr)

Volume: X (2025)

DOI (volume): [10.31703/gpr.2025\(X\)](https://doi.org/10.31703/gpr.2025(X))

Issue: II Spring (June-2025)

DOI(Issue): [10.31703/gpr.2025\(X-II\)](https://doi.org/10.31703/gpr.2025(X-II))

Home Page

www.gprjournal.com

Volume: X (2025)

<https://www.gprjournal.com/Current-issue>

Issue: II-Spring (June-2025)

<https://www.gprjournal.com/issue/10/2/2025>

Scope

<https://www.gprjournal.com/about-us/scope>

Submission

<https://humaglobe.com/index.php/gpr/submissions>



Visit Us



Citing this Article

15	Exploring the Socio-Cultural Challenges to Women Poll Workers in General Elections-2024 in Pakistan		
Authors	Adeeba Manzoor Hussain Hussain Ali	DOI	10.31703/gpr.2025(X-II).15
		Pages	164-174
		Year	2025
		Volume	X
		Issue	II
Referencing & Citing Styles			
APA	Adeeba, Hussain, M., & Ali, H. (2025). Exploring the Socio-Cultural Challenges to Women Poll Workers in General Elections-2024 in Pakistan. <i>Global Political Review</i> , X(II), 164-174. https://doi.org/10.31703/gpr.2025(X-II).15		
CHICAGO	Adeeba, Manzoor Hussain, and Hussain Ali. 2025. "Exploring the Socio-Cultural Challenges to Women Poll Workers in General Elections-2024 in Pakistan." <i>Global Political Review</i> X (II):164-174. doi: 10.31703/gpr.2025(X-II).15.		
HARVARD	ADEEBA, HUSSAIN, M. & ALI, H. 2025. Exploring the Socio-Cultural Challenges to Women Poll Workers in General Elections-2024 in Pakistan. <i>Global Political Review</i> , X, 164-174.		
MHRA	Adeeba, Manzoor Hussain, and Hussain Ali. 2025. 'Exploring the Socio-Cultural Challenges to Women Poll Workers in General Elections-2024 in Pakistan', <i>Global Political Review</i> , X: 164-74.		
MLA	Adeeba, Manzoor Hussain, and Hussain Ali. "Exploring the Socio-Cultural Challenges to Women Poll Workers in General Elections-2024 in Pakistan." <i>Global Political Review</i> X.II (2025): 164-74. Print.		
OXFORD	Adeeba, Hussain, Manzoor, and Ali, Hussain (2025), 'Exploring the Socio-Cultural Challenges to Women Poll Workers in General Elections-2024 in Pakistan', <i>Global Political Review</i> , X (II), 164-74.		
TURABIAN	Adeeba, Manzoor Hussain, and Hussain Ali. "Exploring the Socio-Cultural Challenges to Women Poll Workers in General Elections-2024 in Pakistan." <i>Global Political Review</i> X, no. II (2025): 164-74. https://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gpr.2025(X-II).15 .		



Cite Us



Title

Exploring the Socio-Cultural Challenges to Women Poll Workers in General Elections-2024 in Pakistan

Authors:

Adeeba: MPhil Scholar, Political Science Department, Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan, KP, Pakistan.

Manzoor Hussain: Lecturer, Department of Sociology, Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan, KP, Pakistan.

Hussain Ali: (Corresponding Author)

Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan, KP, Pakistan.

(Email: hussainali@awkum.edu.pk)

Contents

- [Introduction](#)
- [Cultural Challenges to Women Poll Workers](#)
- [Methods](#)
- [Results and Discussions](#)
- [Conclusion and Recommendations](#)
- [References](#)

Abstract

Women poll workers play a vital role in conducting free and fair elections in Pakistan. The present study explored the social, cultural, and economic challenges women poll workers faced during the general elections of 2024 in Pakistan. Qualitative research with in-depth interviews of seven women poll workers was conducted in Malakand, Pakistan. The study explored that the mobility of women poll workers to polling stations was socially restricted, family elders restrict women's polling duties, and gender roles in the domestic sphere also constrain women poll workers from election duties. And family elders, including in-laws, discouraged women from performing election duties. Women poll workers staying till evening in polling stations is also considered unethical it is required to compile election results. The study concluded that prior consent should be taken from women government employees, and logistic support should be provided to enhance the women poll workers' efficiency during their election duty.

Keywords:

[Women](#), [Poll Workers](#), [Social](#), [Challenges](#), [Elections](#), [Malakand](#), [Pakistan](#)

Introduction

Election laws are heterogeneous across the different states, a reflection of the unique political, historical, and legal traditions of the separate states (Powell, 2006). It is observed that in democratic countries, the election laws are often run by independent electoral commissions for purposes of fairness and credibility in the electoral exercise (Mozaffar, 2002).

All the citizens of a state are legally authorized to participate in polling and cast their vote for the political party or leader they support in the

democratic process. It is revealed in literature that gender is one of the major dimensions that influences the political participation of women in developing countries (Birch, 2016). It is stated in various research studies that women are restricted from voting and their political participation is denied due to various factors, including structural, cultural, economic, and institutional. It is explored in political studies that women are socially restricted from voting on polling day due to their minimal involvement in politics and the public sphere.



Women's involvement in the electoral process is a natural part of democratic rule. Although international gender equality movements have enhanced women's access to elections and political participation, structural issues continue to dominate to limit their participation, especially in patriarchal societies like Pakistan (Panday, 2013). Women are not only tried as voters but also as poll administrators, i.e., election workers.

In Pakistan, women have the legal right to participate in the electoral process and vote casting. In the country, it is observed that women with a legal age of 18 years are allowed to cast a vote for a political party candidate in general elections (Hussain, 2017). There are many social and cultural barriers explored in various studies, due to which they are restricted from voting and political participation.

Existing literature by Rahman (2022) highlighted that mobility is restricted, economic dependence, and sociocultural norms deter women from serving as poll officers, especially in rural Pakistan.

Emotionalized cultural and social values in Pakistan keep undermining the complete engagement of women in election administration. Election administration remains a male enclave in most parts of the country, and every attempt by a woman to occupy such positions is met with resistance (International Crisis Group, 2023). Religious and social values in traditional society also constrain women's activity in publicly conspicuous activities, such as working on the polling stations (Shirkat Gah, 2021).

Social conventions and cultural restraints also govern women's participation in electoral administration. Cultural gender roles call for women to prioritize domestic work before doing public service work. Mumtaz & Shaheed (1987) and Kandiyoti (1988) describe how patriarchal thought and gender stereotypes restrain women's political and administrative involvement. Female -electoral workers are regularly compelled to battle opposition from families, judgment, and restrictions that do not enable them to participate in such roles on a voluntary basis. These social restrictions not only limit the professional development of women employed in electoral management but also decrease the general level of electoral management effectiveness. Public information campaigns,

workplace gender-mainstreamed policies, and women's networks in electoral management can bridge the barriers (El Jack, 2003).

Pakhtunwali, the traditional code of conduct among Pakhtuns, strictly limits the mobility and activity of women and denies them administrative roles in elections (Ahmed, 1980). The limited economic independence among women further excludes them because employment in the context of elections demands mobility, independent thinking, and nighttime work, to which many are not devoted due to their dependence on male guardians (Ali & Gavino, 2008). Social beliefs regarding the work of women outside the home are the most realistic obstacle, especially in conventional areas (Bano, 2009).

It is also important that women are not only involved in voting casting, rather they are performing their election duties as poll workers. Women's involvement in election administration also comes to the forefront in guaranteeing public trust in the electoral process. Empirical evidence confirms that the gendered composition of electoral management results in more transparent and credible elections. Quesenbery & Chisnell (2015) state that women's involvement in election administration increases the electors' trust and encompasses a larger number of female voters. In the same way that women are excluded from election administration, electoral processes become less inclusive and vulnerable to inefficiencies (Giné, Khalid & Mansuri, 2020). Notably, acknowledgment of the contribution of women toward strengthening electoral institutions is an attempt to develop gender-sensitive democratic institutions that are sensitive to the needs of mixed societies.

Despite global attempts at gender mainstreaming in electoral administration, there remain pressing issues that still dominate Pakistan. Structural barriers, socio-cultural limitations, and security concerns deter women's participation in elections. Social attitudes against women engaging in paid employment outside the household make up one of the most potent barriers, particularly in traditional areas (Bano, 2009). CSDS quotes patriarchy, party-level low political recruitment, household gatekeeping, and education/economic disqualifications as the explanations of discrepancies between women's participation and under-representation as candidates and legislators.

Slowness of institutional reforms (e.g., discussions on women's reservations) is also mentioned. (Rai, [2011](#)). Politics in Bangladesh takes place within a patriarchal, male-dominated society, where decisions have to be made. Even with quotas placing women in political positions, their full participation is being stymied by social expectations requiring women to stay in subsidiary roles.

Women's political entry is typically dependent on their background as family (as relatives of male politicians). Average women lacking elite family membership are excluded from their own homes, with an unwillingness being able to participate in election contests or even political meetings. Traditional gender roles view politics as a "male domain." Women who try to get engaged actively are exposed to social disapproval, stigma, or pressure to drop out (Panday, [2008](#)).

In Pakistan, the appointment and nomination of women polling officials are managed primarily by the Elections Act, 2017, and the Election Rules, 2017 of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). Poling personnel, such as Presiding Officers, Assistant Presiding Officers, and Poling Officers, are typically drawn from the federal, provincial, or semi-government departmental employees (ECP, [2017a](#)). The Returning Officer (RO) also prepares lists of available staff to be deployed for polling, with a quota of female staff, especially to be sent to women's polling stations or booths (PakVoter, [2020](#)).

The lists are then submitted by the RO to the District Returning Officer (DRO) for verification. Upon verification, the ECP issues proper appointment letters to the recommended staff, male and female (PakVoter, [2020](#)). All poll officials are required to go through ECP's compulsory training programs in order to acquire neutrality, familiarity with the election process, and compliance with the Code of Conduct (Dawn, [2018](#)). ECP is firm in putting forth that, as far as possible, female polling personnel should be deployed at female-only polling stations or at mixed polling stations where women's booths are separated so that women voters may feel comfortable (ECP, [2023](#)).

In certain rural or distant locations, in the absence of trained female officials, exceptions are granted through the ECP; however, at least one female presiding or assistant presiding officer is deployed to women's polling booths (ECP, [2023](#)).

Post-election analysis reports also point towards issues like a lack of trained female personnel, delayed issuance of appointment letters, and logistical limitations, suggesting more local hiring and better facilities for women polling personnel (PakVoter, [2018](#)).

This review of the literature considers the experiences of Pakistani women working as poll workers, specifically in Pukhtun society, with a critical examination of academic studies and empirical data. The discussion includes several factors such as mobility restrictions, security issues, harassment, family influence, and socio-cultural obstacles.

Pakistani women have long had structural barriers to participating in politics, including sociocultural norms, security concerns, and inadequate institutional protection (Shirkat Gah, [2021](#)).

Cultural Challenges to Women Poll Workers

Women poll workers were under severe challenges like security risks, harassment at the workplace, and logistical challenges that affected their performance (Human Rights Watch, [2024](#)). Scholars note that structural impediments, including cultural barriers, mobility restrictions, and institutional lack of support, persist in influencing women's engagement as poll workers in Pakistan's democratic system (Shah, [2019](#)).

Pakhtun and Baloch gender values are preventing women's mobility in the form that they do not get employed, as does the role of election officials, particularly in the rural areas (Mumtaz 1987). Women are also dissuaded from taking on the responsibility of becoming poll officers on security grounds. There have never been elections without violence, and women as poll officers are at another threat of being harassed and beaten (Zia, [2013](#)). Women in risk-prone areas, including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, were reportedly intimidated by hardline groups, discouraging others from conducting election duties (Noreen, [2013](#)). Women poll workers in Pakistan face distinctive challenges in conducting their work on the basis of gender-based restrictions, cultural practices, and security threats. Women poll workers face resistance from local communities and local authorities in the majority of areas, particularly rural and conservative

regions, which impede them from conducting their work effectively (Shirkat Gah, [2021](#)).

Women election officials usually encounter resistance, questioning, and restrictions from their families that do not enable them to work in such roles with ease. Such social taboos not only hinder women's career progression in election management but also compromise overall electoral management effectiveness. Public awareness campaigns, gender-sensitive office practices, and support mechanisms for women in election management are necessary to overcome such barriers.

Household commitments are a key disincentive towards the engagement of women as poll workers. Married women are mostly subject to social pressures for domestic work compared to work commitment (Shirkat Gah, [2021](#)).

Mobility limitations are a major challenge for women election officers, particularly in rural and conservative regions. There is a dense concentration of polling stations located at far distances or difficult-to-reach locations, thereby making the poll officials travel considerable distances without conducive and safe means of transport (FAFEN, [2024](#)). The unavailability of safe public means of transport and social taboos against women traveling alone restrict them from taking part in electoral processes (IFES, [2023](#)).

The women election officials are mostly confined to performing activities behind the scenes, upholding patriarchal gender roles (Shah, [2019](#)). However, gender-sensitive election observing programs and organizational policies have been implemented to minimize these constraints.

Pakhtunwali, the Pakhtun conduct code, restricts the activity and mobility of women and bars them from administrative duties in elections (Ahmed, [1980](#)). Economic autonomy among women is also restricted and bars them because election work necessitates mobility, independent reasoning, and nocturnal work, to which many are not committed, as they are dependent on male guardians (Ali, [2008](#)).

Methods

Research methodology is generally categorized into three types: qualitative research, quantitative research, and mixed-method research. Qualitative research is an approach and an inductive analytical

approach employed in the examination of human behavior or action and events or social processes based on non-statistical information (Creswell, [2014](#); Kothari, [2004](#)). The objective of qualitative research is to provide a profound and detailed understanding of people's daily lives, perceptions, or social or cultural processes. This contrasts with the quantitative method based on numerical data and statistical calculation, where depth in relation to breadth is emphasized, which allows for a more nuanced understanding of complex social problems (Denzin, [2011](#)).

The researchers used a qualitative research design to explore the socio-cultural challenges to women Poll Workers in the district of Malakand in the 2024 General Elections. Seven face-to-face interviews were conducted through a formal interview guide; it covered structural challenges such as socio-cultural norms, Pakhtunwali, and Economic opportunities and challenges.

With standardized interviews that include open-ended follow-up questions, there is a balanced method with the consistency of the standardized questionnaires and qualitative richness of data (Denzin, [2011](#)). It is a very good method for exploring the multi-faceted issues of women poll workers so that research results will be as valid as they will be richly descriptive. In the present study, the researcher used in-depth interviews as a technique to collect data from women poll workers in the study locale.

The study was conducted in the district of Malakand, and all the women poll workers who performed their duties in the 2024 general elections were the target population of the study. In the study population, the researcher focused on women presiding officers, women assistant presiding officers, and women polling officers. They were chosen knowingly because they directly participated in the election process and witnessed firsthand the inherent challenges of such a job.

The participants were adequately informed about the study aims and questions prior to carrying out interviews. All the participants provided written informed consent, which stated their rights, including the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty (Patton, [2015](#)). Interviews took between 45 and 60 minutes to allow adequate time to collect rich responses without wasteful talk (Silverman, [2015](#)). With respondents'

consent, interviews were recorded on tape to allow for accuracy in transcription, and notebooks recorded main points, body language, and contextual data (Bryman, 2012).

Thematic analysis was used to identify themes and patterns. The researcher analyzed data through the six steps of Bruan and Clark (2006).

Results and Discussions

Theme: To Explore Socio-Cultural and Economic challenges and opportunities to Women Poll Workers in the General Elections 2024 in District Malakand, Pakistan

Socio-cultural and economic challenges and opportunities to women poll workers in the general election of 2024 in the district of Malakand

In interviews with study participants, it was explored that some of the participants' socio-economic and cultural context greatly influenced their experience as poll workers in the general election of 2024 in the district of Malakand. It was highlighted that the intersection of economic security, education, and cultural norms facilitates or inhibits women's engagement in election-related duties.

One of the participants shared;

"According to my experience, Pakhtunwali, the Pashtun code of conduct, the perceptions about women's involvement in public responsibilities are slowly changing in my area. I was able to persuade my people that election work is a proper part of my professional obligation, and eventually it was accepted. Mobility away from home was a serious concern for me, since I spent three days away from home traveling to a distant polling booth, for women in traditional societies whose cultural constraints, in most cases, define the sphere within which they can move. My experience mirrored the socio-cultural challenges faced by women in juggling professional duties with societal pressures" (Pr.O1).

This is a conclusion repeated in wider socio-cultural issues in recorded academic literature. (Jamal, 2014) Outlines how Pashtun society men's mindsets influence women's access to education and public life, emphasizing that change is underway gradually, though slowly.

Another participant stated;

"In addition, mobility was still a perennial issue among the women poll workers, particularly when sociocultural values like purdah and the inhibition of the free movement of women restricted their mobility. Inadequate transport arrangements by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) provided a further fuel to these problems" (APr.O2).

It was explored in an interview with a participant.

"In our society, social ethics and cultural morals discourage women from being part of election duty, and it's not a light issue. Women, particularly conservative women such as Pashtun women, are particularly unable to adapt to men in public places such as polling booths. This reflects historically entrenched controls over women's mobility and freedom. My own experience of conducting election duty almost 25-30 years ago was a wake-up call. I had to encounter a lot of problems because of inclement weather, and the fact that the polling booth was situated in an interior area added to their difficulty. But my safe return home was ensured by the prompt action of the army. I felt uneasy traveling with male soldiers in a car late at night, which is an indication of the cultural inhibitions that women have to undergo. The dynamic of cultural values, family, and personal independence is complicated. Women belonging to conservative societies are usually opposed by their husbands and male relatives, who are accustomed to their role in election duty. This resistance is grounded in the same cultural beliefs that limit the interaction of women with men" (Pr.O4).

Previous research studies also indicated that the social structure does not accommodate women's active participation in politics, reinforcing gender-based discrimination (Moghadam, 2004).

The study explored in an interview with a participant that;

Gender roles and gender stereotypes have a profound influence on women poll workers at home and at work. Women must balance home responsibilities over job responsibilities, a firmly established fact in society. Mobility is the greatest challenge for them, particularly in conservative areas like Malakand. They are not generally allowed to go out alone or go out late at night, a reflection of societal values that prioritize the safety and modesty of women. This can be discouraging to women from reporting to work during election days or

compelling them to play multiple roles, leading to stress and burnout” (PO6).

Another participant explained about Pakhtunwali as a code of conduct and stated that;

“Such cultural norms as Pukhtunwali place rigid codes of conduct on women, keeping them at home and not even permitting them to spend one night out of home. This renders it hard for them to cover long distances to far-off polling stations or spend a night in their allotted sectors, as required during election duty” (PO7).

In interviews, it was explored that some of the participants experienced economic challenges and opportunities for low-income poll workers.

As some of the participants said;

“The financial limitations of poll workers can also have a big impact on their capacity to carry out their responsibilities efficiently, and thus the result of the election. I will expound that individuals from lower economic classes like to work at polling stations close to them so that they can make some money, since traveling to far-flung places can be financially debilitating. An example is my staffer, who was not allocated a charge for the 2024 general election but was then allocated a close-by polling booth. This is an example of the fate of economically backward workers who are not prepared to go to far-flung areas to work during elections because of

poor compensation rates and the necessity to arrange for their own transportation and spending money. This is opposed to those in more favorable economic positions, who can afford burdens in distant places, which calls for policymakers to act on poll workers' economic vulnerability towards safeguarding the voting process's integrity” (PO3).

Similarly, a study by Hall (2009) delves into the human aspect of elections, where it is stated that poll workers are also responsible for ensuring public trust in electoral processes. However, financial limitations might infringe on their performance, thereby affecting the general integrity of elections. This applies to female poll workers, who are likely to suffer from economic constraints that restrict their mobility and participation in far-flung polling stations. This scenario raises the need for policy reforms that mitigate the economic vulnerabilities of poll workers in order to ensure fair and effective election administration.

“Certain women electoral staff members earning low income also desire to serve on election duty, as it serves as an invaluable source of revenue for them. But when sent to remote locations where there are no or limited means of transport, they incur additional costs. That is because they have to pay cash for transport charges. I had a car, and I did not spend extra money because the government arranged transport for the presiding officer, but not for other polling officials. That shows inadequate assistance to low-paid workers, especially women who depend on the election work for earning a living” (Pr.O4).

As one of the participants shared her experience regarding her poor economic status;

“My family's poor economic status was a key concern, as it did not enable me to cover costs such as fuel and transportation, which were inadequately remunerated by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). The remote site of my polling station required me to travel alone, usually at my cost, which was an additional financial burden. This absence of funds further underscored the challenge faced by low-income women in undertaking election work, as we do not have the means to bear additional charges that accompany our work” (PO5).

“Class and earning are the chief determinants. Poor women command very few material resources, and it is quite difficult for them to organize any means of travel or other support needed for the purpose of poll duty. Apart from that, they are under extra pressure from political parties since they are easily swayed by pressure from external sources for economic reasons. As far as women who belong to more affluent backgrounds and better facilities and treatment are concerned, poor women may lack the ability to withstand the pressure of election duty in addition to their domestic burden” (PO7).

The researcher explored in theme two that the socio-cultural and economic constraints to women poll workers in District Malakand of the 2024 general elections reflect underlying limitations to participation. Cultural barriers such as Pakhtunwali limit women's mobility and movement into the public sphere, and thus hinder fulfilling their election functions. Economic hurdles contribute to the constraint, whereby low remuneration and failure to provide facilities for transport unfavorably impact low-income women. In spite of these obstacles, some women consider election work as a

means of economic sustenance and professional service. Overcoming such socio-economic impediments through policy changes and increased logistical assistance is vital to achieving comprehensive and effective electoral participation. The role of the family towards women poll workers in the general elections 2024 in the district of Malakand.

In interviews with participants, it was explored that the role of family really affected the election duties and mobility of women poll workers, either by supporting or discouraging them.

As some of the participants discussed;

“I would say that social setup positively affected my experience because I come from a joint family setup that turned out to be helpful and cooperative. My family gave me a private car and even asked my 20-year-old nephew-in-law to travel with me for my protection and comfort during the process. However, not all joint families are enthusiastic, and women in most situations are not given permission to participate in election work, especially in risky or remote locations. Family decision-making also worked in my favor in taking on this responsibility, and the value of having an educated and perceptive husband. My husband's education and modernity, I affirm, that his education and awareness helped me a lot to overcome socio-cultural limitations; if he were not present, I would have had to cope with conventional gender roles and societal expectations that dissuade women from working in public sector occupations. My mother-in-law, a former poll worker, realized the situation and helped immensely by reducing the burden, for instance, taking care of my kid so that I could work. This kind of family support was crucial in helping me perform my responsibilities confidently” (Pr.O1).

The interviewee highlighted the significance of support from the family, particularly from her husband and mother-in-law, in facilitating her ability to carry out her election duties. This corroborates studies on how women's access to public life is facilitated by family systems. (Kabeer, 1999) Outlines how the family, particularly male kin, helps women transcend socio-cultural constraints. The interviewee's experience demonstrates how education, family encouragement, and cultural pressure all converged to propel women into electoral participation.

“As a presiding officer, I would like to share my experiences and observations. My family was aware from the beginning that, as a working woman, I would have to follow government instructions and directives, and they couldn't restrict me from doing so. This was based on their awareness of the responsibilities borne by holding a government position. My family is well-educated and sensitive towards these issues, but most of the women attempt to avoid their duty for domestic work. I am thankful to have the backing of my husband, father-in-law, and brother-in-law, who also went with me to the Returning Office (RO) when submitting results. I drive myself to the polling booth, demonstrating independence and autonomy. I will emphasize the difficulty of those without such support, who are sure to be out on Election Day under compelling reasons. This is likely due to family emergencies, sickness, or other unexpected situations. Therefore, there are usually no polling members, and this impedes the free conduct of elections” (Pr.O4).

Another participant shared her experience about the discouraging role of her family.

“Mental health was also a significant issue for me. I was always concerned about my husband's reaction to my absence from home for extended periods. My husband's abusive and negative attitude made the environment tense, and it was difficult for me to focus on my duties. I would be concerned a lot about his reaction when I returned home, whether he would physically assault me or use abusive language, and what he would say about my work. This perpetual anxiety and fear had a severely damaging impact on my mental well-being, disrupting my concentration and productivity at work. All this highlights the imperative of a healthier support system, both familial and that of the Election Commission, to maintain good health and moods of the women poll officials without compromising on their end. Although educated, he was not aware of my aspirations and needs, and his lack of support hindered my mobility and career growth. His socially conditioned assertive nature restricted my movement, particularly to distant polling stations. His authoritarianism and refusal to approve my job outside the home not only restricted my freedom but also removed my self-belief and power. For example, he would say to me that if I were placed in a better position outside the

household, I would have to resign because he would never approve of it. Such discouragement on the part of my husband and his cruelty rendered working life at home unbearable, and hence it became hard for me to achieve a balance between my professional and personal life. The lack of familial support, in this case my husband, and the need to have someone take care of my children highlighted the added issues of women with family responsibilities, especially in patriarchal and conservative settings where women are more likely to be asked to prioritize their home role over professional activity” (PO5).

Empirical research conducted in rural Pakistan supports the argument that patriarchal systems significantly reduce women's decision-making power in both private and public spheres (Shaheed, [2010](#)).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The researchers found that women polling workers encountered socio-cultural and familial issues when posted to serve as election officials.

Socio-cultural and economic factors were substantial burdens on the role of women in election work. A mixture of socio-cultural norms, such as Pakhtunwali (customary values and norms in the cultural practices of Pakhtun society), restricted women's mobility with gendered customs that restrict women's public participation.

Economic barriers have disenfranchised many poor women from election work, with low pay and limited work-related transport support. However, there were observations of women involved who

thought of election work as part of a professional discipline/enterprise.

Family role provides another important consideration of women's service and work and performance as election workers. Those women who had supportive families, particularly educated husbands or supportive relatives, were able to carry out their election responsibilities more effectively. In contrast, restrictive relatives provided mobility challenges, emotional discomfort in carrying out responsible work, and reluctance to want to fully participate as election workers-rather than just as observers. Patriarchal values influence women's participation in roles for election work, especially in more traditional areas where approval from families for women's involvement in local/state elections is important.

The study recommends that, The Election Commission of Pakistan shall develop a gender-responsive policy for poll workers considering the political, social and economic conditions of employed women in their respective government departments, The Election Commission of Pakistan should manage secure and timely transportation facilities for women poll workers to avoid any inconvenience during their duty as poll workers, The Election Commission of Pakistan and other security departments should place women security personnel for the election day, The Election Commission of Pakistan has to ensure that all personnel involved in conducting elections undergo mandatory gender-awareness or gender-sensitivity training. This will help to develop a proactive and secure workplace for female poll workers

References

- Ahmed, A. S. (1980). *Pakhtun economy and society: Traditional structure and economic development in a tribal society*. Routledge.
[Google Scholar](#) [Worldcat](#) [Fulltext](#)
- Ali, T., & Gavino, M. I. (2008). Violence against women in Pakistan: A framework for analysis. *Asian Journal of Women's Studies*, 14(2), 36–63.
[Google Scholar](#) [Worldcat](#) [Fulltext](#)
- Bano, S. (2009). *Women in parliament: Beyond numbers*. International IDEA.
[Google Scholar](#) [Worldcat](#) [Fulltext](#)
- Birch, S. (2016). *Full participation: A comparative study of compulsory voting*. Manchester University Press.
[Google Scholar](#) [Worldcat](#) [Fulltext](#)
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
[Google Scholar](#) [Worldcat](#) [Fulltext](#)
- Dawn. (2018, June 2). ECP issues code of conduct for polling staff, security officials for upcoming elections. *Dawn News*.
<https://www.dawn.com/news/141163>
[Google Scholar](#) [Worldcat](#) [Fulltext](#)
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2011). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
[Google Scholar](#) [Worldcat](#) [Fulltext](#)
- El Jack, A., Bell, E., & Narayanaswamy, L. (2003). *Gender and armed conflict: Overview report*. BRIDGE, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex.
[Google Scholar](#) [Worldcat](#) [Fulltext](#)
- Election Commission of Pakistan. (2017a). *The Elections Act, 2017 (updated)*. Government of Pakistan.
<https://www.ecp.gov.pk/storage/files/2/Elections%20Act%202017%20updated/Updated%20Elections%20Act%202017-231011-105435.pdf>
[Google Scholar](#) [Worldcat](#) [Fulltext](#)
- Election Commission of Pakistan. (2023). *General Elections Report (GER-1): Guidelines for polling arrangements*. Government of Pakistan.
<https://ecp.gov.pk/storage/files/1/ger-1.pdf>
[Google Scholar](#) [Worldcat](#) [Fulltext](#)
- Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN). (2024). *Challenges faced by female poll workers in Pakistan's elections*. <https://fafen.org>
[Google Scholar](#) [Worldcat](#) [Fulltext](#)
- Giné, X., Khalid, S., & Mansuri, G. (2020). Canvassing the gatekeepers: A field experiment to increase women's turnout in Pakistan. *American Political Science Review*, 114(4), 1038–1055.
[Google Scholar](#) [Worldcat](#) [Fulltext](#)
- Hall, T. E., Monson, J. Q., & Patterson, K. D. (2009). The human dimension of elections: How poll workers shape public confidence in elections. *Political Research Quarterly*, 62(3), 507–522.
https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912908324870?urlappened=%3Futm_source%3Dresearchgate
[Google Scholar](#) [Worldcat](#) [Fulltext](#)
- Human Rights Watch. (2024). *Gender-based challenges in Pakistan's electoral process*. <https://www.hrw.org>
[Google Scholar](#) [Worldcat](#) [Fulltext](#)
- Hussain, S., Ahmed, W., Khan, A., & Ullah, F. (2017). Factors affecting women's participation in local bodies' elections in Pakistan. *Journal of Gender and Social Issues*, 16(1), 91–91.
[Google Scholar](#) [Worldcat](#) [Fulltext](#)
- International Crisis Group. (2023). *Pakistan's electoral challenges*. <https://www.crisisgroup.org>
[Google Scholar](#) [Worldcat](#) [Fulltext](#)
- International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES). (2023). *Women's participation in election administration: Global best practices*. <https://www.ifes.org>
[Google Scholar](#) [Worldcat](#) [Fulltext](#)
- Jamal, A. (2014). Men's perception of women's role and girls' education among Pashtun tribes of Pakistan: A qualitative Delphi study. *Cultural and Pedagogical Inquiry*, 6(2), 16–40.
<https://doi.org/10.18733/C3RC7B>
[Google Scholar](#) [Worldcat](#) [Fulltext](#)
- Kabeer, N. (1999). Resources, agency, achievements: Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment. *Development and Change*, 30(3), 435–464. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-7660.00125>
[Google Scholar](#) [Worldcat](#) [Fulltext](#)
- Kandiyoti, D. (1988). Bargaining with patriarchy. *Gender & Society*, 2(3), 274–290.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/089124388002003004>
[Google Scholar](#) [Worldcat](#) [Fulltext](#)
- Kothari, C. R. (2004). *Research methodology: Methods and techniques* (2nd ed.). New Age International Publishers.
[Google Scholar](#) [Worldcat](#) [Fulltext](#)
- Moghadam, V. M. (2004). Patriarchy in transition: Women and the changing family in the Middle East. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 35(2), 137–162.

- [Google Scholar](#) [Worldcat](#) [Fulltext](#)
- Mozaffar, S., & Schedler, A. (2002). The comparative study of electoral governance—Introduction. *International Political Science Review*, 23(1), 5–27. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512102023001001>
[Google Scholar](#) [Worldcat](#) [Fulltext](#)
- Mumtaz, K., & Shaheed, F. (1987). *Women of Pakistan: Two steps forward, one step back?* Zed Books.
[Google Scholar](#) [Worldcat](#) [Fulltext](#)
- Noreen, S., & Musarrat, R. (2013). Political participation of women in Pakistan: A study of struggle and obstacles. *Asian Journal of Social Science & Humanities*, 2(3), 134–142.
[Google Scholar](#) [Worldcat](#) [Fulltext](#)
- PakVoter. (2018). *Post-election review report: General Elections 2018*. Democracy Reporting International. <https://paktvoter.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/post-election-review-report.pdf>
[Google Scholar](#) [Worldcat](#) [Fulltext](#)
- PakVoter. (2020). *The Election Rules, 2017*. Democracy Reporting International. <https://paktvoter.org/wie/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/The-Election-Rules2017.pdf>
[Google Scholar](#) [Worldcat](#) [Fulltext](#)
- Panday, P. K. (2008). Representation without participation: Quotas for women in Bangladesh. *International Political Science Review*, 29(4), 489–512.
[Google Scholar](#) [Worldcat](#) [Fulltext](#)
- Panday, P. K. (2013). *Women's political participation in Bangladesh*. Springer.
[Google Scholar](#) [Worldcat](#) [Fulltext](#)
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
[Google Scholar](#) [Worldcat](#) [Fulltext](#)
- Powell, G. B. (2006). Election laws and representative governments: Beyond votes and seats. *British Journal of Political Science*, 36(2), 291–315. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123406000160>
[Google Scholar](#) [Worldcat](#) [Fulltext](#)
- Quesenbery, W., & Chisnell, D. (2015). Poll workers and election integrity: Security as if people matter. In M. Hattingh, M. Matthee, H. Smuts, I. Pappas, Y. K. Dwivedi, & M. Mäntymäki (Eds.), *Human aspects of information security, privacy, and trust* (pp. 559–569). Springer.
[Google Scholar](#) [Worldcat](#) [Fulltext](#)
- Rahman, F. (2022). Women and election administration in Pakistan: A study of institutional barriers. *Journal of Electoral Studies*, 18(1), 134–156.
[Google Scholar](#) [Worldcat](#) [Fulltext](#)
- Rai, P. (2011). Electoral participation of women in India: Key determinants and barriers. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 46(40), 47–55.
[Google Scholar](#) [Worldcat](#) [Fulltext](#)
- Shah, A. (2019). Gender and electoral integrity in Pakistan: Barriers and opportunities. *Journal of South Asian Studies*, 42(3), 275–290.
[Google Scholar](#) [Worldcat](#) [Fulltext](#)
- Shaheed, F. (2010). The women's movement in Pakistan: Challenges and achievements. In A. Basu (Ed.), *Women's movements in the global era: The power of local feminisms* (pp. 1–26). Westview Press. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08b29ed915d3cfd00ob92/Shahheed_Womensmoveme nt.pdf
[Google Scholar](#) [Worldcat](#) [Fulltext](#)
- Shirkat Gah. (2021). *Women's political participation in Pakistan: Barriers and opportunities*. <https://shirkatgah.org>
[Google Scholar](#) [Worldcat](#) [Fulltext](#)
- Silverman, D. (2015). *Interpreting qualitative data* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
[Google Scholar](#) [Worldcat](#) [Fulltext](#)
- Zia, A. S. (2013). Women's representation in Pakistan's politics: A critical review. *Journal of Law and Society*, 44(2), 112–130.
[Google Scholar](#) [Worldcat](#) [Fulltext](#)