



RESEARCH PAPER

**Perceptions and Challenges of Women as Mobilizers during
Political Campaigns in Pakistan**

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore the role of women in the mobilization of voters during political campaigns. Moreover, the purpose was to study the experiences and challenges have been faced by women workers during the campaign process. Data were taken from 140 women workers from different political parties across the different constituencies in Lahore. A self-developed questionnaire was used to study the perceptions about the involvement of women in political campaigns. The analysis showed that women are more effective than men at mobilizing voters' particularly towards women voters. Furthermore, it concluded that women are considered helpful because of their convincing ability and style compared to men and perform the supportive role usually for the public gatherings and meetings during the campaign. Women highlighted many challenges during the campaign; lack of support from men co-workers, long working hours during elections, mobility issues, transportation facility, less daily wages, public stalking, importantly, lack of proper training as the majority of women highlighted that they even do not know the complete profile of a candidate for whom they do campaign. In the light of the above key findings, the study recommends that the party should promote the role of women regarding their challenging task in mobilizing the voters by ensuring their access to basic facilities and training before and during the campaign.

Introduction

The democratic process requires the participation of both men and women in political discourse. Notably, women's participation in politics is the prerequisite for democratic governance. However, women's involvement in political campaigns

varies throughout the world, and their participation in the democratic process has become an integral part of contemporary discourse on development and governance. Hence, research consistently shows that women remain behind in the political realm in many parts of the world. Their participation in government structures and the democratic process remains low, and they usually perform insider roles (Vissandjee et al., 2006).

Research showed that campaign affects voter mobilization in direct democratic votes, and we know even less about who is mobilized by these campaigns (Donovan & Bowler, 1998). Besides, Political parties served as the avenues for women's participation. They usually select women as a campaigner for conducting political campaigns for convincing or mobilizing the voters. However, they rarely assumed leadership roles and made up a minority of all top party officials (Kittilson, 2006) and appointed them in low-status decision-making committees in the Punjab Assembly (Javed & Malik, 2020).

Literature showed that the political parties are selecting women because they are considered loyal party support in the mobilization of voters (Fenno, 1978). As gatekeepers of elections, political parties play a crucial role in promoting women for conducting campaigns in elections for mobilizing voters. Another study highlighted in most democracies, women are more active than men in their ideology, mobilizing voters and party attachment (Lipset, 1960). Literature showed that political parties assign some women ancillary roles such as mobilizing voters, giving speeches, and conducting campaigns (Freeman, 2010). A recent study showed that women worked more effectively than men on campaigns to communicate with public officials and gather voters (Kittilson&Schwindt-Bayer, 2012).

Another study highlighted that women are important in convincing voters because women, as compared to men involved in social networking, have convincing potential and skills of socializing with friends about political opinion. Male campaigners are typically perceived as more aggressive, whereas women are viewed as more compassionate (Norrander, 2009). Furthermore, another study argued that women do not spend all their time planning with the candidate or backstage at big rallies, especially on the more effective campaigns. Most of them either sit behind a computer or at a field office talking to volunteers, and when it comes to financing, women had low funding than their male colleagues during election campaigns (Fridkin et al., 2009).

Hence another study highlighted the challenges that women play an essential role in drafting a message and enlisting a plan. Being a campaign manager is challenging, and jumping from campaign to campaign is not easy. Women are the backbone of every democratic campaign. On every campaign, women are the ones who make it run. We are the phone callers and the door-knockers, the coffee-hostess and the friend-bringers (Kittilson & Schwindt-Bayer, 2012). Another study argued that globally, women's participation is low in a democracy than men's; however, women continue to report their political involvement in participatory activities such

as political campaigns as campaign managers. Women have historically participated in political activities such as speaking at public meetings and convincing voters. Women in political campaigns talk about women's rights, such as health issues and rights related to abortion (Carpini&Keeter, 1996).

Literature from Pakistan highlighted the significance of women's participation in politics and the process of campaigning. They usually possess more convincing power than men and can convince more women. Women are considered idle vote banks. However, parties nominate women for public meetings during election campaigns (Zakar et al., 2018). Additionally, women party wings nominate women party workers for a political campaign (Bano, 2009). This trend of political parties points out the critical fact that they are active/ serious in addressing women's issues (Yusuf, 2013). During election campaigns, women, as voters are "discovered" by campaign leaders, unique gifts for women, are produced and heads of campaign exhaust themselves in mentioning that "women decide" (Yusuf, 2013).

By focusing on the previous studies in different regions and particularly in Pakistan, the literature regarding the challenges of women campaigners is less addressed. Many studies emphasized the significance of women's participation in campaigns and gender-based differences between men and women regarding the voters' attitudes and convincing during electoral campaigns. Hence, this study aimed to find out the role of women as a campaigner in mobilizing voters as a party worker. Moreover, this study highlighted their different experiences during campaigns and perceptions about political campaigning. Also, emphasized various challenges, including party level, personal, and other-regarding family and colleagues. In Pakistan, very few studies have been conducted in this area; however, this study will be a meaningful addition to existing broader literature regarding women's participation in political campaigns.

Material and Methods

The survey research design was adopted for this study. Data were collected from a total of 140 women party workers, selected randomly across the different constituencies of Lahore. Respondents belonged to three mainstream political parties including; Pakistan Tehrek e Insaf (PTI), Muslim League -N (PML-N), and Pakistan People's Party (PPP). A self-developed questionnaire was used to collect the data. A questionnaire was developed based on indicators identified in previous literature. It comprised of a total of 20 items and measured on the dichotomous measuring scale yes and no. Furthermore, it was divided into five different sections; the first section consisted of the demographic profile of the women party workers, including their age, education, party affiliation, and experience of campaigning. The second section comprised six items related to general perceptions of women party workers regarding their experiences of political campaigning. The third section encompassed five items associated with the different challenges at the party level. The fourth section included five items linked to the personal challenges women party workers had to face during campaigning. The final section of the questionnaire involved the

four items dealing with other challenges regarding their family, colleagues, and friends during the political campaigns.

We followed the ethical considerations and took permission from respondents to fill out the questionnaire, and ensured the confidentiality of their given responses. We went to many political offices located in different areas to get questionnaires filled, but some people refused us for personal reasons. However, we distributed a total of 155 questionnaires, and 140 were received back.

Results and Discussion

Table 1
Demographic profile of Respondents (n=140)

Age (years)	<i>f</i>	%
≤40	50	36%
>40	90	64%
Education		
Undergraduate	95	67%
Graduate	38	27%
Postgraduate	7	6%
Party Affiliation		
PTI	65	46%
PML-N	50	36%
PPP	25	18%
Experience of Campaigning (Years)		
≤10 years	51	36%
>10 years	89	64%

Table 1 depicted the demographic information of women campaigners. The majority of the respondents (64%) had more than 40 years of age. Moreover, most of the respondents (67%) were under-graduate and (64%) had more than ten years of political campaigns as party workers. However, most of the respondents (46%) were affiliated with Pakistan Tehreek e Insaf (PTI) and (36%) with Muslim League -N (PML-N).

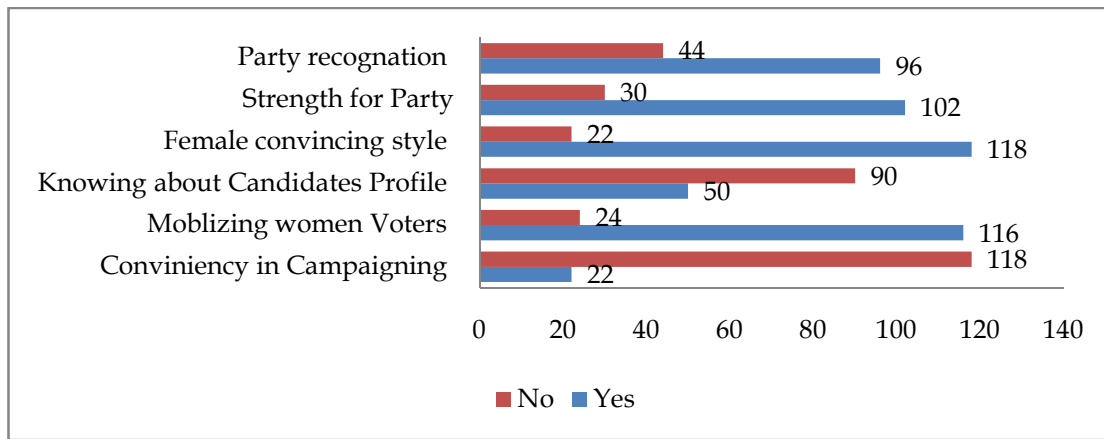


Figure 1: Perceptions of women party workers about Political Campaigning

Figure 1 showed the perceptions of women party workers regarding political campaigning. Results indicated that women campaigners have different experiences with the campaigning process. Majority of women considered (68%) that the party recognized their services for the campaign. However, (73%) women reported that that party considered women workers as strength of the party during elections. However, campaigning is a difficult task for them, but they are still considered influential in convincing the voters as (84%) political campaigners responded that the party nominates them to convince voters. Furthermore, (64%) of women responded that they were unfamiliar with the candidate's profile for whom they conduct campaigns. Additionally, most of the women (83%) said that they could better mobilize women voters.

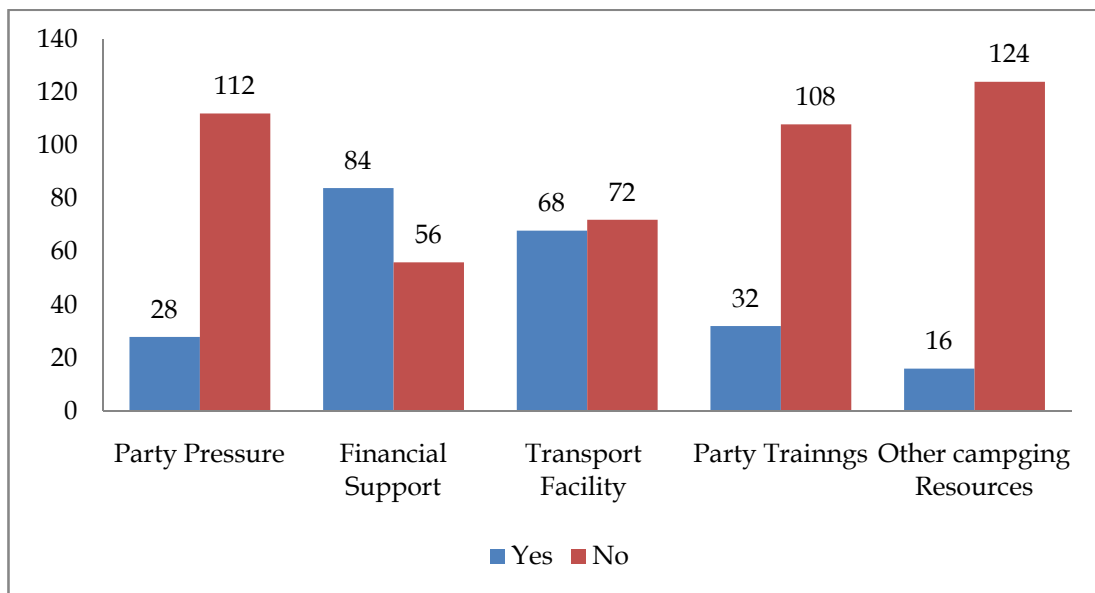


Figure 2: Party level challenges faced by women party workers during political campaigning

Figure 2 showed the party-level challenges faced by the women party workers during political campaigns. About (80%) of women campaigners responded that they never faced party pressures during political campaigns; they did as per their consent. Moreover, most of the women party workers (60%) highlighted that the parties were paying them for conducting campaigns. However, (77%) women responded that the political party never arranged the transport services for their political campaign. Additionally, (89%) women responded that the political party never arranged training campaigns. Besides, (51%) responded that the party never provides enough campaigning material, including brochures and pamphlets.

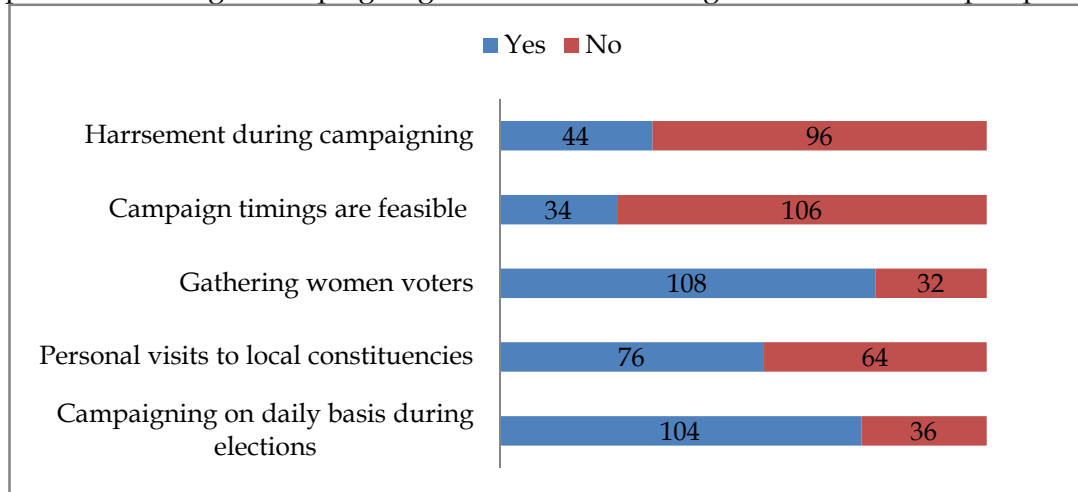


Figure 3: Personal challenges faced by women party workers during political campaigning

Figure 3 illustrates the personal challenges faced by women party workers during political campaigns. The majority of women (69%) responded that they had to face harassment during campaigning. Furthermore, (76%) women responded that they faced difficulty in managing the campaign timings. Though, (77%) women reported that they had the ability to gathered women for an election campaign. About (54%) women highlighted that they visited the local families to encourage them to vote. Whereas (74%) women workers went campaigning daily during elections.

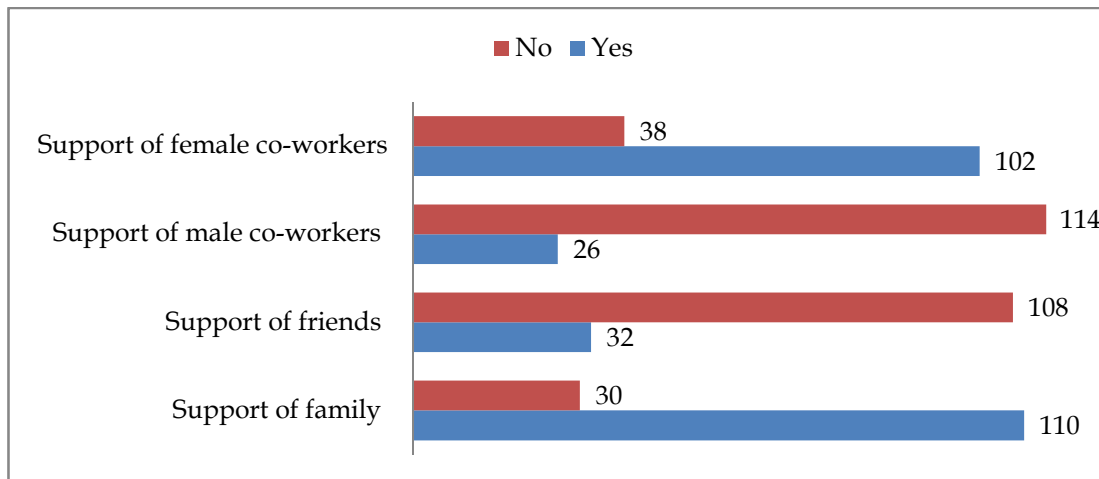


Figure 4: Other challenges faced by women party workers during political campaigning

Figure 4 showed the other challenges faced by women party workers during political campaigning. Most of the women (73%) responded that women co-workers supported them during the campaign. However, most women workers (81%) reported that their male co-workers never support them. Moreover, most of the women (77%) highlighted that their friends went with them for the campaign. Furthermore, (79%) women responded that their family members support the political campaign.

Conclusion

Although campaigning is a difficult task for women, significant findings showed that political parties recognized women's potential regarding their convincing power, social networking, and mobilizing the women voters. Previous literature also supported that political parties more confidently assign subsidiary roles during elections to engage in the community, conduct public meetings, and gatherings to mobilize voters (Zakaret al., 2018; Freeman, 2007; Kittilson&Schwindt-Bayer, 2012). Moreover, results showed that women have more convincing power than men during political campaigns and proved to be loyal supporters of the party exerts more effort than men. Similarly, a previous study highlighted that women are more politically active than men in their ideology, party attachment, and mobilizing voters across most democracies (Lipset,1960).

Additionally, this study highlighted the different challenges women campaigners had to face by the side of political parties during election campaigns. Women have less access to transportation, less exposure to training regarding election campaigning, and a lack of other supporting material of campaigning, including brochures and pamphlets. These factors could be the disablers for the effective participation of women party workers in election campaigns. Another finding showed that women faced some personal challenges during election

campaigns, including long working hours daily, difficulty managing the local visit in constituencies, and some other challenges lack support by the side of male colleagues in the party and their friends.

Recommendations

The study recommends that political parties should develop the mechanism for women campaigners on suggested parameters.

1. To arrange basic training for women party workers regarding the protocols of election campaigning in different constituencies.
2. To ensure the basic facilities including transportation; relax working hours and economic resources to women party workers.
3. To provide enough campaign material and potential information regarding the candidate's profile.
4. To adopt the gender-sensitive approach towards election campaigning and assign roles to both men and women party workers accordingly.

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