



# FACTORS INFLUENCING POLITICAL ORIENTATION: MEDIATING ROLE OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

**Dr. Sarfraz Ahmed Dakhan**

Department of Business Administration, Sukkur IBA University, Pakistan

**Jan Muhammad Sohu\***

School of Management, Jiangsu University, Zhenjiang, China

**Saba Mustafa**

Department of Management Sciences, SZABIST Hyderabad Campus, Pakistan

**Dr. Asadullah**

Department of Business Management, Karakoram International University Gilgit, Pakistan

**Sajjad Ali Sohu**

Department of Management Sciences, Bahria University Karachi, Pakistan

Corresponding Author\*

## ABSTRACT

*This study aims to investigate the factors influencing political orientation of rural women of Pakistan. The focus of the study is to check the effect of internal motivation, political family support and awareness level on political orientation. The mediating effect of women empowerment has been examined. PLS-SEM was used for data analysis and evaluating the mediating effect. Respondents were working females and graduate and post graduate students in Higher Education Institutions. Questionnaire was distributed using social media platforms. Out of 500 responses, 460 responses were considered valid and used for analysis. A special consideration has been taken that the respondents must be females from rural areas of Pakistan so that in future, another comparative study will be conducted based on demographic differences. Findings shows the positive and significant relation of internal motivation and awareness level with political orientation where political family support has negative but significant relation with political environment. Women empowerment positively mediates the relationship between internal motivation, awareness level and political orientation.*

**Key words:** Women Empowerment, Political Influence, Higher Education Institutions, Political Environment

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Achieving equality between women and men and eliminating all forms of discrimination are fundamental human rights and values of the United Nations. However, most women around the globe encounter human rights violations throughout their lives. Because of the lack of these basic human rights and their continuous violations, women in different countries face mental and physical health problems all over the world [1]. In Pakistan, socio-cultural values and norms strongly influence the position of women in society. Although the patriarchal structure is not uniform in whole country, in short, society is male dominated. The gap between gender is deep rooted and a violation of constitutional laws is pervasive. Men are more likely to take power positions, whereas women are negatively impacted in all areas of life. In South Asia, Pakistan is the country with the largest gender gap and discrimination against women continues in all areas of life [2]. Political environment and political orientation are used interchangeably.

In Pakistan, many factors affect women. For the most part of their lives is governed by customs and traditions. At early age, their parents make decisions for them in all important matters, while husbands and in-laws assume power after marriage and decide things on their behalf. Most of the decisions related to the woman's life such as, decisions about their education and career, who they marry, in some cases even how many children a woman should have taken by male members in family [3]. [4], claims that one of the reasons for the marginalized status of women in all areas of Pakistan is their omission from decision making process. The traditional structures are the biggest obstacles to the equal status of women in Pakistan [5]. Women's lack of awareness of the rights granted to them under Pakistani law is a fundamental problem. Hence, a survey conducted by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan in 2002 stated that in a female population sample from all sectors of society, almost 90% of women surveyed did not realize either they had rights. This is due to lack of education and awareness that women do not care about such things [6]. Empowerment is a state of mind. To empower a mind, it is essential to build an environment that facilitates emotional release, fosters intellectual development and encourages tolerance, a sense of justice and humanity. It is not easy to give a concise definition of women's empowerment. Empowerment is not essentially politics merely; it is a process that has personal, economic, social and political dimensions with personal empowerment at the core of empowerment process. In fact, political empowerment will not succeed without economic empowerment [3].

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

About half of the world's population are women. Their contribution in the social and economic sphere is also very important by virtue of dual roles in the productive and reproductive fields. While their involvement in politics remains neglected that is the most important institution in the society which is associated with power and decision - making processes. The worldwide representation of women is only 15% and only 12 countries in the world have 33% seats for women in parliaments. Women face problems to their political participation in the world. Socio - economic factors and existing structures are considered to be obstacles to their advancement [7,8].

In a patriarchal society like Pakistan, the participation of women in the political field is closely related to men and their perception of their participation. The constitution of Pakistan allows the full participation of women in politics; however, their participation in politics at all levels remains paltry due to cultural and structural barriers. At various times in history, the political participation of women in Pakistan has been very low, but with growing awareness of their rights now most representation of women can be seen in politics. [9,10].

### **2.1. Women Empowerment & Political Environment**

Women's political empowerment means women's freedom to vote and barrier-free election contest. Similarly, political participation means the extent to which people participate in political activities. This means all activities related to politics, mainly voting rights, campaigns, attending meetings, protests and competitive elections are part of the political participation. Despite the important part of society women have been ignored in the social, cultural, economic and political domains of life. Women face a variety of problems and challenges in their own way of political participation [11,12]. Pakistan's political sphere is generally seen as masculine and politicians as male and men still hold important political positions, however, women are limited to soft profiles, which ultimately jeopardize their empowerment in Pakistan [13,14]. The political participation ensures the representation of women in different fields and areas. Therefore, when a woman is given opportunities to enter the political arena it gives a way of empowerment to women. Political participation enables women to work for the social change that is essential for the upbringing of society [11,15].

### **2.2. Information / Awareness & Political Environment**

The level of awareness and up-to-date information is strongly associated with educational background, which greatly influences the ideology and beliefs of political leaders [16]. According to [17], education is necessary for existing political systems and social as well as economic structures. Women's political knowledge and views serve as pillars for active participation in the democratic environment and act as a catalyst for change in the political process. Updated information on the whole situation keeps women informed and enhances their participation in the decision-making process in the political and governance sphere [18].

### **2.3. Family Support & Political Environment**

The availability of institutional support and sustainable social and economic resources significantly emphasize the ability of women participation that control and document formation of empowered networking. The Patriarchal norms and practices mislead the development of self-ideology and prevent women's political participation, which affects the strengthening of ultimate awareness of women leading to their empowerment [19]. Political interest lessens from civil society organizations, family backgrounds, religious practices and social patterns of life. Family environment plays a vital role in women empowerment. Women's ability to express their views in the family environment, involvement in the family decisions and their access to socialization strengthen their decision-making concerning to political catalogues. Women's inheritance, control of property and self-sufficiency reinforce a healthy environment for the pursuit of general and individual purposes [20].

### **2.4. Internal Motivation & Political Environment**

The personal qualities of individual leaders, their external affiliations, ideas, beliefs and attitudes help to encourage and reshape institutional change, as well as political liberalization to create a flexible environment for others. Various decisions made by politicians have a significant and direct impact on the ideology of individuals and deter others [21]. [22] revealed

that the continuous incorporation of women cultural practice and autonomy to participate in the electoral and influence of women and the enthusiasm to exercise choice across a wide range of domains acts as a driving force to enable them to raise their voices for women’s empowerment and the nation’s development [23].

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Sampling and Data Collection

In this study, we have used PLS-SEM for data analysis and evaluating the mediating effect of women empowerment on political orientation. Respondents were chosen who are the working females (faculty and non-faculty) and graduate and post graduate female students in Higher Education Institutions and Government and private schools. To ensure non-response bias, an independent sample t test has been run [24]. The data has been collected from the 4 states of Pakistan which include Punjab, Sindh, Baluchistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa [25], [26]. A special consideration has been taken while collecting the response, the respondents must be female from rural areas of Pakistan so that in future, an other comparative study will be conducted based on demographic differences. To measure the women empowerment, questionnaire was adopted from [27], and for family support, awareness level, internal motivation, and political environment scale was adapted from [21]. Questionnaire was created on Google Docs and link was distributed online using social media platform and E-mail [13], [28], [29]. Out of 500 responses, 460 responses were considered valid and used for analysis.

### 4. RESULTS

#### 4.1. Assessment of the Measurement Model

It is propositioned to analyse the measurement model based on convergent validity, individual item reliability, discriminant validity and individual item reliability [29], [30]. Table 2 explains individual item reliability, the acceptable standard is between 0.4 and 0.7 [23,24], [33] whereas all the values of this study in the table are greater than 0.5 which show that the individual items are reliable [33]. Cronbach’s alpha value should be greater than 0.7 [35] and all the values are greater than 0.7 which show the internal consistency between the items. Internal consistency is explained by composite reliability values, the values of variables CR are greater than 0.7 [36], [37]. AVE explains the convergent validity of the study [38], AVE should be greater or equal to 0.5 [38] whereas the AVE of our study is between 0.731 and 0.857 which are satisfactory to proceed.

**Table 2** Measurement Model.

Construct	Item code	Loading	Outer weight	p-value	CA	CR	AVE
<b>Family Support</b>	FS1	0.921	0.260	0.000	0.902	0.93	0.769
	FS2	0.860	0.373	0.000			
	FS3	0.809	0.198	0.000			
	FS4	0.913	0.307	0.000			
<b>Information and Awareness Level</b>	IAL1	0.917	0.269	0.000	0.91	0.933	0.737
	IAL2	0.797	0.230	0.000			
	IAL3	0.802	0.187	0.000			
	IAL4	0.887	0.248	0.000			
	IAL5	0.882	0.226	0.000			
<b>Internal Motivation</b>	IM1	0.879	0.290	0.000	0.876	0.915	0.731
	IM2	0.829	0.273	0.000			

	IM3	0.812	0.293	0.000			
	IM4	0.897	0.313	0.000			
<b>Political Environment</b>	PE1	0.928	0.322	0.000	0.916	0.941	0.799
	PE2	0.900	0.296	0.000			
	PE3	0.894	0.258	0.000			
	PE4	0.852	0.240	0.000			
<b>Women Empowerment</b>	WE1	0.929	0.365	0.000	0.916	0.947	0.857
	WE2	0.896	0.343	0.000			
	WE3	0.951	0.372	0.000			

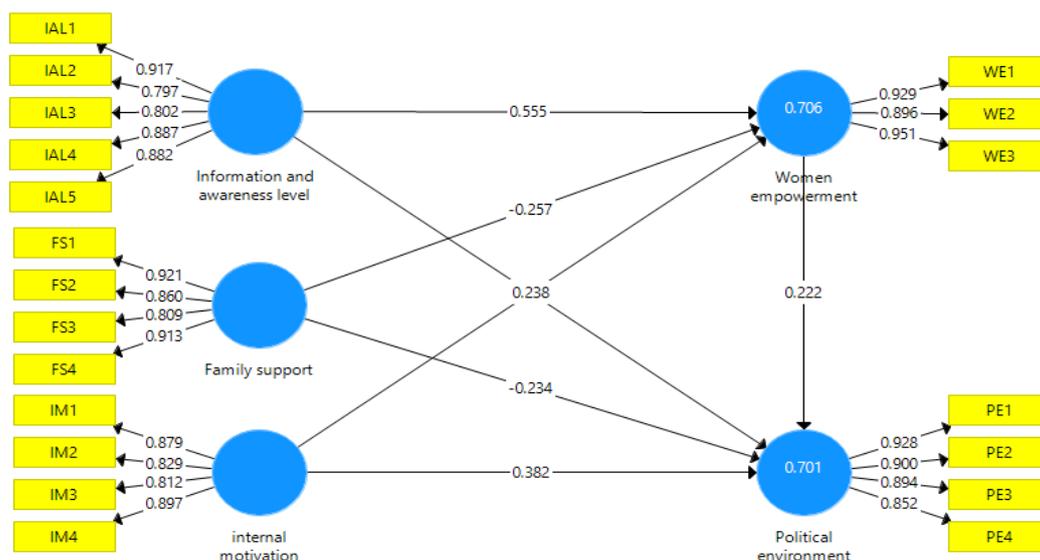
In analyzing the results of discriminant validity we consider that the square root of the AVE [40] of each construct should be greater than the inter-correlations of the constructs and the results of the model support this standard which shows the discriminant validity of our results.

**Table 3** Discriminant validity

	Family support	Information and awareness level	Political environment	Women empowerment
Information and awareness level	0.155			
Political environment	0.492	0.733		
Women empowerment	0.426	0.835	0.805	
internal motivation	0.301	0.829	0.838	0.814

#### 4.2. Assessment of the Structural Model

In this paper, PLS bootstrapping utilized with 5000 bootstraps and path coefficient and their significance revealed 460 cases [41]. In figure 1, there is comprehensive picture of structural model to be evaluated. To assess the linear regression of variables, structural model should be used [23]. PLS assessment model uses path co-efficient, p-value and coefficient of determinatrion (R Square) [43], [44].



**Figure 1** Structural Model

Figure 1 indicates that there 70.6% explained variation in Women Empowerment caused be combine effect of internal motivation, family support and awareness level. Whereas, 70.1% variation in political environment is due to internal motivation, family support, awareness level, and women empowerment.

**Table 5** Path coefficient and hypotheses testing.

<i>Direct Effect</i>							
		<i>Path coefficient</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t-value</i>	<i>P Value</i>	<i>Decision</i>
H1a	Family support -> Political environment	-0.234	-0.235	0.029	8.155	<b>0.000</b>	Supported
H1b	Family support -> Women empowerment	-0.257	-0.259	0.027	9.594	<b>0.000</b>	Supported
H2a	Information and awareness level -> Political environment	0.196	0.193	0.070	2.797	<b>0.000</b>	Supported
H2b	Information and awareness level -> Women empowerment	0.555	0.553	0.040	13.756	<b>0.000</b>	Supported
H3a	Women empowerment -> Political environment	0.222	0.221	0.066	3.386	<b>0.000</b>	Supported
H3b	internal motivation -> Political environment	0.382	0.385	0.056	6.847	<b>0.000</b>	Supported
H4	internal motivation -> Women empowerment	0.238	0.239	0.035	6.721	<b>0.000</b>	Supported
<i>Indirect Effect</i>							
H5a	Family support -> Women empowerment -> Political environment	-0.057	-0.058	0.02	2.876	<b>0.004</b>	Supported
H5b	Information and awareness level -> Women empowerment -> Political environment	0.123	0.122	0.036	3.410	<b>0.001</b>	Supported
H5c	internal motivation -> Women empowerment -> Political environment	0.053	0.053	0.019	2.720	<b>0.007</b>	Supported

All the hypotheses were supported whereas the study contains direct and indirect paths. The direct paths were from family support to political environment(beta=-0.234 & p-value=0.000), family support and women empowerment (beta=-0.257 & p-value=0.000),information and awareness level to political environment(beta=0.238 & p-value=0.000), information and awareness level to women empowerment (beta=0.555 & p-value=0.000), women empowerment to political environment (beta=0.222 & p-vallue=0.001), internal motivation to political environment (beta=0.382 & p-value=0.000) and internal motivation and women empowerment(beta=0.238 & p-value=0.000). All the direct Hypotheses (H1a, H1b, H2a, H2b, H3a, H3b, and H4) are supported. whereas H1a and H1b possess a negative relationship. Indirect paths were from family support to women empowerment to the political environment, information and awareness level to women empowerment to the political environment, and internal motivation to women empowerment to the political environment. All indirect hypothesis (H5a, H5b, and H5c were supported)

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The current study identifies the relationship between information and awareness level, family support, and internal motivation with the political environment by mediating the role of women empowerment. Most previous studies studied these relationships like... results shows significant relationship between information and awareness level and political environment (beta=0.238 & p-value=0.000), family support and political environment (beta=-0.234 & p-value=0.000), internal motivation and political environment (beta=0.382 & p-value=0.000) information and awareness level and women empowerment (beta=0.555 & p-value=0.000), family support and women empowerment (beta=-0.257 & p-value=0.000), internal motivation and women empowerment (beta=0.238 & p-value=0.000) and women empowerment and political environment (beta=0.222 & p-value=0.001) which explains that the more women have information and awareness related to politics the more they will take part into politics. Previous studies of [16] and [18] also show a positive association of information and awareness with political beliefs. whereas women families and not supportive to let them participate in politics. [19]. Also confirms in their study that family support drives women's political interest. Internal motivation also plays important role in women's political orientation. Motivated women tend to participate in politics. The study by [21] confirms this relationship. Good information and awareness level lead women towards empowerment studies by (Neil and Domingo, 2015) [1] also confirm that women education positively influences women empowerment. Women in Pakistan depends on their families, family support influences their decision to participate in politics. [3] also confirms that women's decisions are taken by male members of the household. Internally motivated women tend to have more empowerment. [23] also confirms this relationship. Whereas women empowerment positively influences the political environment. The study [14] also stated that women empowerment is at risk in Pakistan and confirms a positive relationship between political participation and women empowerment. Further results also reveal a significant and mediating relationship of women empowerment between information and awareness level and political environment, family support and political environment, and internal motivation and political environment.

This study concludes that there is positive and significant relation of internal motivation and awareness level with political orientation. Whereas, There is a significant impact of Family support on the Political environment and women empowerment. In addition, women empowerment negatively mediates the relationship between family support and the political orientation and it positively mediates the relationship between internal motivation, whereas positively mediates the relationship between awareness level and political orientation. All the direct and indirect hypothese are supported.

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