

Socio-Political Sources of the Gender Gap in Voter Turnout: An Analysis of General Elections-2024 in Gujranwala Division, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT: A large body of literature has documented the gender gap in voter turnout both in developing and established democracies. However, there has been little consensus among scholars on the causes of the voter turnout gap between men and women. This study examines variability in voting among women and the impact of socio-political sources of the gender gap in Gujranwala Division, Pakistan. Building on survey evidence that employs purposive sampling (N = 300), this study finds that more than one-third of women do not vote in general elections often. The one-way ANOVA test is performed to determine the inequality in voting among certain groups of women based on age, residence, profession, and education. The results indicate that women of different age groups ($F = 1.904$; $P > .151$) residing in urban or rural areas ($F = .726$; $P > .395$) do not exhibit statistically significant differences in opinion. However, the groups based on education ($F = 24.344$; $P > .001$) and profession ($F = 5.729$; $P > .004$) display statistically significant variation in responses. In addition, this study examines the impact of socio-political factors on the gender gap in voter turnout. Using Pearson correlation, it finds a significant positive relationship between “frequency of voting in elections” (FVE) and both political sources of the gender gap (PSGP; $r = 0.551$, $p < .001$) and socio-cultural sources (SSGP; $r = 0.307$, $p < .001$). The results imply that social and political obstacles significantly contribute to the gender gap in voter turnout. However, purposive sampling may limit the generalizability of these findings.

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Introduction

In participatory democracies, voters elect their representatives through free, fair, and transparent elections. Hence, voting is an indispensable feature of representative democratic systems that not only ensures active political participation of citizens but also enables them to influence policy decisions and legislative business. It is argued that voting in elections safeguards democratic values and fosters a system in which power remains vested in the people (Mari et al., 2026). Voting is a sine qua non of democracy; however, this right was previously limited to elite classes and men for a long period in history. Women were not provided the right to vote until the first quarter of the twentieth century in many Western countries. However, with the success of the “women's suffrage movements” in

many countries, women won voting rights (Catt & Shuler, 2020; O'Connor, 1996). Nonetheless, the role of women in the political process remained limited as they faced several structural and functional constraints shaped by the social and political environments throughout the ages (Shastri, 2014). Gradually, women's political participation has improved in Western democracies. Equally, in developing democracies, women have acquired voting rights and are actively participating in the electoral process (Jaquette, 2001; Tremblay, 2007). However, certain socio-political barriers limit women's political participation and foster the gender gap in voter turnout (Bari, 2005; Shvedova, 2005).

A considerable amount of literature has been published on the gender gap in voter turnout. However, there has been little consensus among scholars on whether men are more likely to vote than women or vice versa. Several studies, which primarily cover liberal democracies, demonstrate that men are more likely to cast a vote than women (Coffé & Bolzendahl, 2010; Kittilson & Schwindt-Bayer, 2012; Kostelka et al., 2019). On the other hand, many studies show that women have tended to vote at higher rates than men since the latter part of the twentieth century (Murshed, 2025; Norris, 2001). While some studies have shown that the gender gap is shrinking gradually (Koo, 2019; Morgan-Collins, 2024), others suggest that the gender gap in voter turnout persists (Dassonneville & Kostelka, 2021). Overall, the literature on the gender gap in turnout provides mixed evidence, and it is not yet fully understood. Hence, the varying results of prevailing studies suggest the need for new investigations. The primary aim of this paper is to explore the gender gap in voter turnout and identify the most important factors influencing disparity in political participation in Punjab, taking Gujranwala division as a case study.

Contrary to Western established democracies, women are much underrepresented and politically excluded in most developing countries of the Global South. Women of these developing societies of Asia and Africa are in dire need of political accommodation. It is a widely held view that women's political participation is essential for the success of the democratic process, as women account for more than half of the population in these countries. There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that, since its inception in 1947, Pakistan has witnessed a wide disparity between men and women in political participation. This disparity is partly responsible for political instability and democratic flux (Qaiser et al., 2023). While some research has been carried out on gender disparity in political participation in Pakistan, no single study exists that investigated the reasons for low turnout among female voters of Gujranwala Division by employing survey evidence. This study focuses on social and political sources of the gender gap and highlights the challenges that women face in both urban and rural areas of Gujranwala Division as they take part in the political process.

Gujranwala Division is an administrative division situated in central Punjab. Its political leanings not only shape the outcome of provincial elections but also potentially impact national politics. This division comprises four districts, namely Gujranwala, Sialkot, Narowal, and Wazirabad. This analysis maps the gender gap at the constituency level, using election results data from the General Elections 2024, as notified by the Election Commission of Pakistan for 12 National Assembly constituencies. The turnout gap is calculated as the difference in turnout between women and men for each constituency. Subsequently, a survey of women voters (N = 300) was conducted to elucidate the role of social and political sources of the gender gap in this region. The ANOVA (one-way) shows that the tendency to vote and take part in the political process among female voters is not consistent among different age groups, urban and rural residents, and voters of different educational levels. The findings indicate a moderate correlation between political participation and socio-political sources of the gender gap.

The remaining part of the paper proceeds as follows: The next section gives a brief review of the literature on the gender gap in turnout, and the role of social and political sources that influence the tendency of more or less likely voting. The third section summarizes and presents the gender gap in turnout in Gujranwala Division. The fourth

section spells out the methodology employed for this study. The fifth section presents findings of research, analysis, and discussion. Finally, the paper is concluded in the sixth section.

Socio-Political Sources of the Gender Gap in Voter Turnout

Stauffer and Fraga (2022) claim that the voter turnout gap fluctuates dramatically over time and across areas. Their research shows that the turnout difference narrows in the most competitive regions. They compared female turnout at polling stations designated for female voters to polling stations where both male and female voters voted, and discovered that female turnout was lower at gender-specific polling stations. This study provides evidence on the subject, adding to a growing body of research demonstrating the challenges of using gender-specific approaches to promote gender equality in underdeveloped countries.

Dassonneville and Kostelka (2021) opined that gender disparities in political interest are central to political participation and voter turnout. They have identified several factors that contribute to gender differences in political participation and voting. Similarly, Lopian et al. (2022) argue that in the developing world, patriarchal culture in traditional societies produces prejudiced attitudes and limits women's mobility and access to political networks. In addition, this culture underpins traditional beliefs that primarily restrict women to domestic roles. Therefore, as patriarchal culture continues to pose significant barriers to women's political participation, it also contributes to the gender gap in voter turnout.

Sartori et al. (2017) have found that there is a significant gap between males and females in traditional time-consuming political activities. It is observed that women suffer from situational constraints that reduce women's political participation and contribute to their relatively lower voter turnout in the case of Italy. The gender gap in political participation and voter turnout is more pronounced in developing societies. The relative socio-economic underdevelopment, traditional and tribal societal value systems, and weak political institutions all contribute to this disparity in political participation in the developing world. Nevertheless, in established democracies, women face gender discrimination, inadequate access to resources, and the burden of traditional gender roles that hamper their political participation. It is argued that factors such as the prevalence of the masculine model of political life, lack of party support, limited access to political networks, and the more stringent standards and qualifications applied to women affect women's political participation and generate discrepancies in voter turnout (Shvedova, 2005, p. 35).

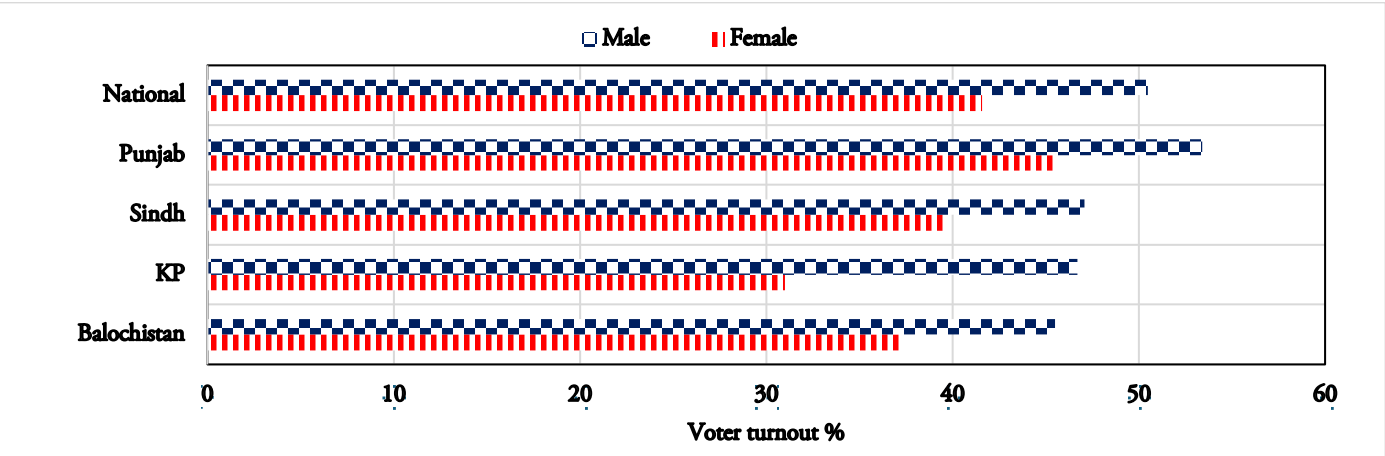
Women face several socio-political and economic obstacles that prevent them from actively participating in electoral politics. Pakistani women are confronting these challenges, and because of their household responsibilities, they remain unable to spare time for political activities. Besides, male dominance within political parties and political structures hampers their active participation. Patriarchal-dominated political parties usually have a male viewpoint on important national issues, which depresses women because their viewpoint is regularly ignored and neglected in the party's politics. It is argued that in such party systems, women are typically not elected to positions of authority due to gender bias in male leadership. Council and parliamentary meetings are scheduled at unusual times that clash with women's household duties (Bari, 2005). Concerning political activities, Pakistani women lack family support owing to traditional beliefs, customs, and male dominance. This is a major obstacle for women to actively participate in politics, especially in rural and tribal areas. Female candidates for office receive little support from other women. They face several challenges, including inadequate resource distribution and a lack of confidence among the female constituency (Bano, 2009). It has been contended that multiple kinds of intimidation and harassment experienced by female candidates and voters throughout the election process are key factors contributing to the lower participation of women (Khan, 2009). As patriarchal values are the foundation of Pakistani society, there is a growing imbalance against women in every aspect of life. For political rights and equal opportunities, Pakistani women fight hard. Pakistani society still paints a dark picture of women due to the brutality of honor killings and rape. Rural

women are especially at a disadvantage in this regard (Kayser, 2013). Many socio-political factors discourage women's participation in voting, for instance, the agreements between religious leaders and political parties. These pose significant obstacles to women's political engagement in certain Pakistani rural areas. For instance, women in Shangla were prohibited from voting in the 2018 general elections, despite the new law and the necessity for ten per cent of women to vote in each constituency. Women were denied the right to vote in numerous other regions of the country (Khan & Naqvi, 2018). Pakistani women encounter numerous hurdles during the voting process in rural areas because of accessibility and mobilization issues, making it impossible for them to go outside the polling stations on Election Day. Also, women in developing nations encounter numerous challenges when it comes to expressing their political beliefs and exercising their right to vote. Pakistani women confront several challenges, including domestic tasks, abuse, and security concerns, which deter them from participating in society (Giné & Mansuri, 2018). The literature highlights the wide-ranging barriers to women's political participation but does not identify the reasons behind the gender gap in voter turnout. Hence, there is a research gap on the challenges women face in the process of voting and contesting elections. No research study was conducted on the Gujranwala division. This research study is a useful addition to the literature by investigating the causes behind low levels of female engagement with politics. It also provides a comparative analysis of the elements that lead to women's low levels of participation in politics.

Mapping the Gender Gap in Voter Turnout in Gujranwala Division

The data on the gender gap in voter turnout for the General Elections 2024 demonstrate that this imbalance occurs in all four provinces, but is more pronounced in KP than in the other provinces. Punjab is the most populous and prosperous province of Pakistan. Although voter turnout in Punjab is higher than the national average and the gender gap narrower, it remains a concern: while male turnout stands at 53.4%, female turnout lags at 45.6%.

Figure 1
Gender Gap in Voter Turnout – 2024 General Elections



Source: Gallup Pakistan Election 2024 Dashboard (based on ECP data)

The constituency-wise data for the General Elections 2024 in Gujranwala Division show a significant gender gap in political participation, particularly in voter turnout and candidate representation. This gender gap comes from a complex interplay of institutional, cultural, and social restrictions that continue to prevent women from actively participating in the political process.

Gujranwala Division comprises twelve National Assembly constituencies: Sialkot I-V, Narowal I-II, and Gujranwala I-V. Table 1 shows that the voter turnout gap in National Assembly constituencies of Gujranwala Division ranges between 2.4% and 13.9%. Within the Gujranwala Division, it is more pronounced in the Gujranwala district as compared to Sialkot and Narowal. Three constituencies of Gujranwala Division with the lowest voter turnout (NA-80 Gujranwala-IV, NA-78 Gujranwala-II, and NA-71 Sialkot-II) are among the four constituencies that exhibit the most significant gender disparity in voter turnout. This implies that female political participation is significant for more representative governance.

Table 1

Gender Gap in Voter Turnout (Constituency-wise results)

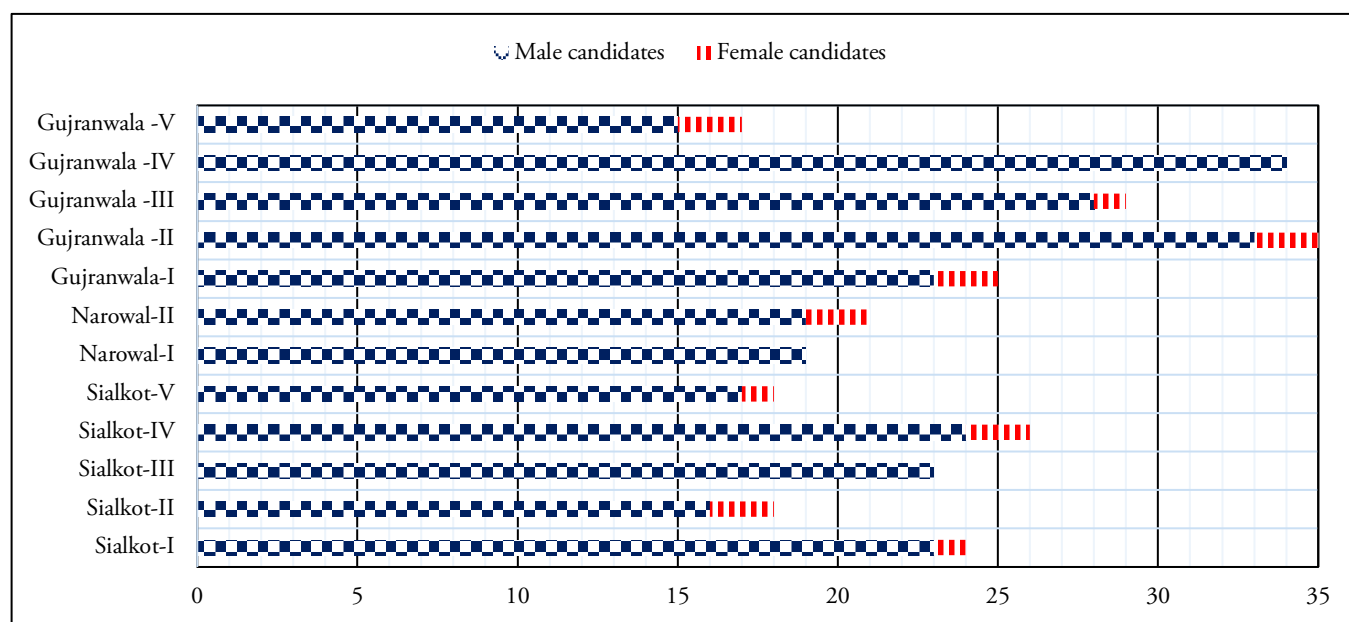
Constituency	Overall Turnout (%)	Male voters' turnout (%)	Female voters' turnout (%)	Gender gap (%)
NA-70 Sialkot-I	52.6	53.7	51.3	2.4
NA-71 Sialkot-II	43.7	48.7	38.1	10.6
NA-72 Sialkot-III	50.5	52.6	48.1	4.5
NA-73 Sialkot-IV	48.4	51.7	44.6	7.1
NA-74 Sialkot-V	50.7	52.0	49.1	2.9
NA-75 Narowal-I	51.6	52.3	50.7	1.6
NA-76 Narowal-II	50.3	52.8	47.3	5.5
NA-77 Gujranwala -I	51.6	56.5	45.7	10.8
NA-78 Gujranwala -II	41.8	47.6	35.1	12.5
NA-79 Gujranwala-III	50.6	54.7	45.7	9.0
NA-80 Gujranwala-IV	39.9	46.1	32.4	13.9
NA-81 Gujranwala -V	52.0	56.0	49.1	6.9

Source: Authors' calculations.

It is also pertinent to note that in certain constituencies, no female candidates were available to contest the election, which highlights the severity of the disparity in women's representation.

Figure 2

Gender Gap in Contesting Candidates in Gujranwala Division (General Elections-2024)



Methods

Sampling and Questionnaire

This study employs a stratified purposive sample to gather survey evidence from female voters to examine the effects of socio-political factors that contribute to the gender gap in voter turnout in the selected region. As presented in Table 2, the sample of 300 women is stratified by age group, residential area, educational level, and occupation. Most of the survey participants are young, below 46 years of age (74%), self-employed (66.3%), with medium-to-higher levels of education (72.3%), and live in urban areas (55%).

This study has employed a self-administered questionnaire survey. At the outset, the questionnaire collected demographic information from the survey participants. Then, it determined the frequency of respondents' voting in elections by a statement, "How often do you cast a vote in general elections?" (Dependent variable). Subsequently, the survey obtained opinions on two independent variables, which are comprised of 11 items on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree): political sources of the gender gap (five items) and socio-economic sources of the gender gap in voter turnout (six items). The variables and survey statements are presented in Table 3.

Data Collection

The Primary data for this study were acquired from urban and rural areas of Gujranwala Division. Using a simple random sampling technique, three National Assembly constituencies (two from Gujranwala District and one from Sialkot District) were selected. Subsequently, from each constituency, two union councils (one urban and one rural) were randomly selected. Finally, 50 survey participants were selected from each of the randomly selected union councils. The survey was conducted in September-October 2024. Before administering the actual survey, a pilot study was conducted in August 2024. Minor revisions were adopted in the questionnaire after the pilot survey, and it was translated into the Urdu language to facilitate respondents with lower levels of education. As shown in Table 4, Cronbach's alpha value for both independent variables is greater than the desired value of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2010).

Table 2

Socio-demographic Features of the Sample

Details of respondents (N = 300)	n	%
Age		
18–35	142	47.3
36–45	80	26.7
46+	78	26.0
Residence		
Rural	135	45
Urban	165	55
Education level		
Lower level (0-5 Years)	83	27.7
Medium level (6-10 Years)	109	36.3
Higher level (11+ Years)	108	36.0
Occupation		
Household/Self-employed	199	66.3
Government Employed	26	8.7
Students	75	25

Table 3*Survey Statements*

Construct		Items
Frequency of Voting in Elections	FVE	How often do you cast your vote in general elections?
Political sources of gender gap (PSGG)	PSGG1	Do you agree that women take sufficient interest in politics?
	PSGG2	Do you agree that women have sufficient information about the political process?
	PSGG3	Do you agree that women cast a vote on their own choices?
	PSGG4	Do you agree that women can reach polling stations without much difficulty?
	PSGG5	Do you think women can participate in political campaigns without much difficulty?
Social sources of gender gap (SSGG)	SSGG1	Do you agree that women have sufficient resources to participate in an electoral process?
	SSGG2	Do you agree that women's political participation is acceptable in your area?
	SSGG3	Do you agree that women's domestic responsibilities restrict their political participation?
	SSGG4	Do you agree that women face gender discrimination in political participation?
	SSGG5	Do you agree that religion restricts women's political participation?
	SSGG6	Do you agree that the lack of education restricts women's political participation?

Table 4*Reliability Test*

Construct	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Interpretation
Political sources of gender gap (PSGP)	PSGG1-PSGP5	.911	Excellent
Social sources of gender gap (PSGP)	SSGG1-SSGP6	.770	Acceptable

Table 5*Factor Loading and Descriptive Analysis*

Variables	Items	λ	Mean	SD
Political sources of the gender gap	PSGG1	.869	2.97	1.298
	PSGG2	.865	2.88	1.293
	PSGG3	.859	2.89	1.415
	PSGG4	.852	2.83	1.246
	PSGG5	.850	2.54	1.369
Social sources of the gender gap	SSGG1	.783	2.57	1.300
	SSGG2	.689	3.23	1.243
	SSGG3	.740	3.81	1.130
	SSGG4	.664	4.09	1.015
	SSGG5	.516	3.33	1.278
	SSGG6	.549	3.62	1.236

Notes: λ = Factor loading, SD = Standard deviation

The factor loading (λ) values indicate how strongly an item is related to a factor/variable. Table 5 shows that all items (for respective variables) display acceptable factor loadings ($\lambda > 0.50$).

Research Findings and Analysis

Women's Participation in Voting (Dependent Variable)

To determine women's participation in the voting process, the survey assessed the frequency of voting in general elections. More than one-third (34%) of respondents reported that they do not vote in general elections often.

Table 6

How Often Do You Cast Your Vote in General Elections?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Never	20	6.7	6.7	6.7
	Rarely	82	27.3	27.3	34.0
	Often	147	49.0	49.0	83.0
	Very often	51	17.0	17.0	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

To examine the variability in voting among groups based on age, residence, profession, and education, the one-way ANOVA test is performed (Table 7). The results indicate that women of different age groups ($F = 1.904$; $P > .151$) residing in urban or rural areas ($F = .726$; $P > .395$) do not exhibit statistically significant differences in opinion. However, the groups based on Education ($F = 24.344$; $P > .001$) and Profession ($F = 5.729$; $P > .004$) display statistically significant variation in responses. Therefore, the post hoc tests were calculated to identify pairs of groups that exhibit more dissimilar opinions. Tukey HSD post hoc comparisons show that women with a "lower level" of education reported lower levels of political participation than survey participants with "middle level" ($p = .001$) and "high level" ($p = .001$) education, which is statistically significant. Similarly, the government-employed women had higher political participation levels than students ($p = .008$) and women with a household profession ($p = .003$). This difference in opinion is also statistically significant.

Table 7

Variation in Political Participation among Different Groups (ANOVA)

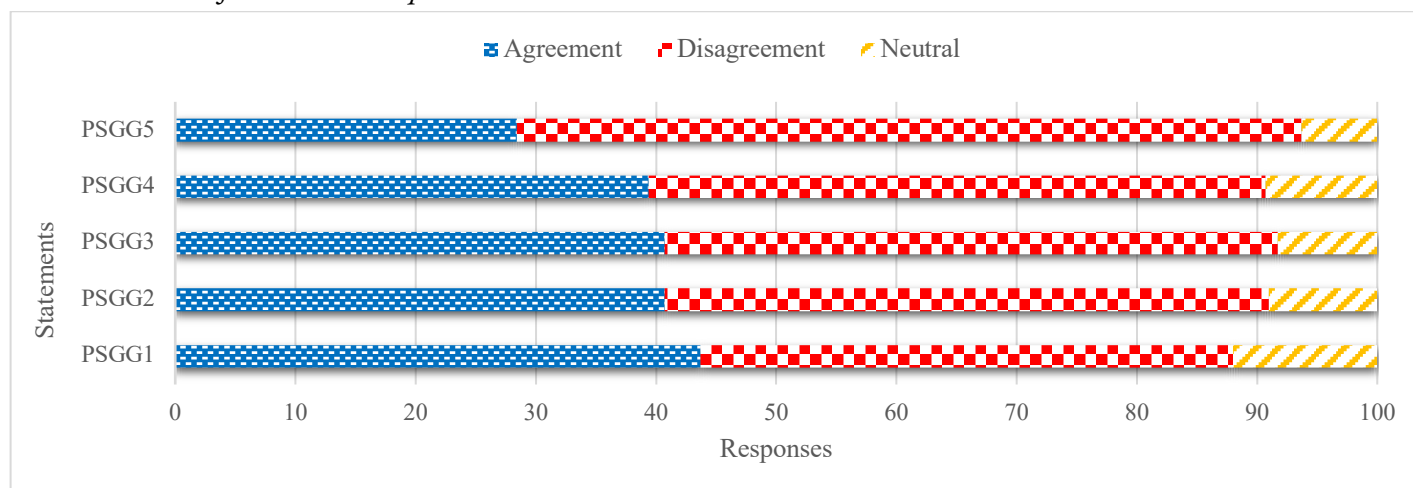
Variable		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Residence	Between Groups	.477	1	.477	.726	.395
	Within Groups	195.720	298	.657		
	Total	196.197	299			
Age	Between Groups	2.484	2	1.242	1.904	.151
	Within Groups	193.713	297	.652		
	Total	196.197	299			
Qualification	Between Groups	27.633	2	13.817	24.344	.000**
	Within Groups	168.563	297	.568		
	Total	196.197	299			
Profession	Between Groups	7.288	2	3.644	5.729	.004*
	Within Groups	188.909	297	.636		
	Total	196.197	299			

Socio-Political Sources of Gender Gap (Independent Variables)

The descriptive statistics show (Figure 3) that the respondents were undecided whether women take sufficient interest in politics (PSGG1). In the same vein, the majority of respondents did not agree that women had sufficient information about the political process (PSGG2). In addition, the majority of survey participants did not agree that women cast a vote on their own choices (PSGG3). The majority of respondents reported that women were not able to reach polling stations without much difficulty (PSGG4). Two-thirds of respondents did not believe that women can participate in political campaigns without much difficulty (PSGG5).

Figure 3

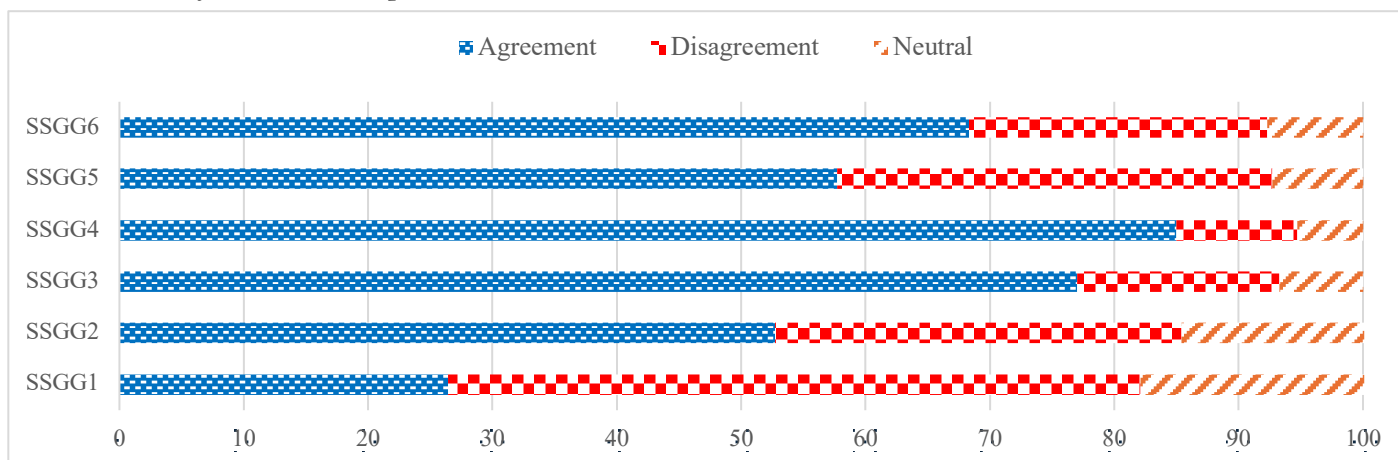
Political Sources of the Gender Gap in Voter Turnout



With reference to social factors, the descriptive statistics show (Figure 4) that an overwhelming majority of survey participants (85%) agree that women face gender discrimination in political participation (SSGG4). Similarly, more than three-fourths of women believe that their domestic responsibilities limit their political participation (SSGG3). In addition, more than two-thirds of respondents reported that the lack of education restricts women's political participation (SSGG6). The majority of respondents agree that religious perspectives of society constrain their political participation (SSGG5). It is also worth noting that the majority of respondents believe they do not have sufficient resources to participate in the electoral process (SSGG1). Nevertheless, the majority of respondents agree that women's political participation is acceptable in this area.

Figure 4

Social Sources of the Gender Gap in Voter Turnout



Bivariate Correlation between Dependent and Independent Variables

After analyzing the descriptive statistics, a bivariate correlation is calculated using the Pearson correlation coefficient to examine the relationship between “frequency of voting in elections” (dependent variable, FVE) and the two independent variables, i.e., “political sources of the gender gap (PSGG)” and “social sources of the gender gap” (SSGG). The analysis indicates (Table 8) a significant positive correlation between gender gap and political sources of gender gap ($r: 0.551$; $p < .001$), as well as between gender gap and social sources of gender gap ($r: 0.307$; $p < .001$). The results suggest that social as well as political impediments have contributed significantly to the gender gap in voter turnout in Gujranwala Division.

Table 8
Pearson Correlation

		FVE	PSGG	SSGG
FVE	Pearson Correlation	1	.551**	.307**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	300	300	300

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Discussion and Conclusion

Women's political participation has remained restricted throughout the ages as they face numerous challenges shaped by the social and political environments. This phenomenon has caused a gap in voter turnout between men and women. This is imperative as voting in elections is essential for safeguarding democratic values and strengthening representative democracy. This study investigates the socio-political sources of the gender gap in voter turnout through the lens of the women's electorate of Gujranwala Division. This research contributes to the existing literature on the gender gap in certain ways. The findings do not conform to the argument Stauffer and Fraga, (2022) that the gender-specific polling stations necessarily lower female turnout. The findings are also inconsistent with the argument by Kayser (2013) that rural women lag behind urban female voters in relation to voting. The results indicate that the voting patterns are statistically similar across rural and urban areas.

The findings of this study reinforce the argument advanced by Lopian et al. (2022) that patriarchal culture in traditional societies contributes to the gender gap in voter turnout. An overwhelming majority of survey participants believe that women face gender discrimination, and their domestic responsibilities limit their political participation. The present study confirms previous findings that factors such as restricted access to political net-works and absence of party support undercut women’s political participation and turnout (Shvedova, 2005). The majority of survey participants believe that they do not have access to the required information about the political process and are not allowed to cast a vote for their own choices. They even reported their inability to reach polling stations without much difficulty. In addition, the findings of this study corroborate previous research on the gender gap in Pakistan that highlights neglect of women in party politics (Bari, 2005), lack of family support due to traditional belief systems and customs (Bano, 2009), intimidation and harassment experienced by female candidates and voters (Khan, 2009).

Building on survey evidence, this study presents valuable insights to comprehend the phenomenon of the gender gap in voter turnout. Contrary to conventional wisdom, the opinions of rural and urban female voters are consistent. This suggests that the socio-political milieu of the Gujranwala division is more or less alike in urban and rural constituencies. Similarly, women of different age groups exhibit similar opinions. However, women with different levels of education and belonging to different professions display statistically significant variation in responses. The

statistical analysis reveals that both political factors and social factors contribute to the gender gap in voter turnout. However, the relationship between the gender gap and political factors is stronger than the relationship between the gender gap and social factors. Hence, it is anticipated that greater political opportunities and a more conducive socio-cultural environment will reduce the gender gap in voting turnout in this region. However, since the evidence is derived from a purposive sample drawn exclusively from the Gujranwala Division, the findings should be interpreted with caution, as their generalizability beyond the geographical scope of the study remains limited.

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