



# Brief 3

## The World Bank - Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund *Research Partnerships on Participatory Development*

### FEMALE VOTER EMPOWERMENT THROUGH AN INFORMATION AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

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#### Context

Despite improvements in *de jure* rights to female political participation, women are less likely than men to stand for public office and to participate as voters. Even when they do vote, women are less likely to exercise independence in candidate choice. Instead, women report voting in accordance with the preferences of the caste, clan or household head in contrast to men of all ages.

Although many factors affect the decision to vote, women in emerging democracies may face in particular two distinct barriers. First, costs of participation may be too high. Traditions or cultural stereotypes may discourage the exercise of own preferences, mobility constraints may limit participation and, if there are expectations of voter intimidation or violence, personal security concerns may also loom larger among females. Second, women may have fewer or poorer sources of information about the significance of political participation or the balloting process, perhaps due in part to illiteracy and limited mobility. Lack of information may also reinforce stereotypes that further disengage women from public life. On a related note, because voting involves a civic duty, it is likely that voting behavior is influenced by the behavior of others, either because women obtain information from talking to other women or because voting is subject to peer pressure and social norms.

#### The Experiment

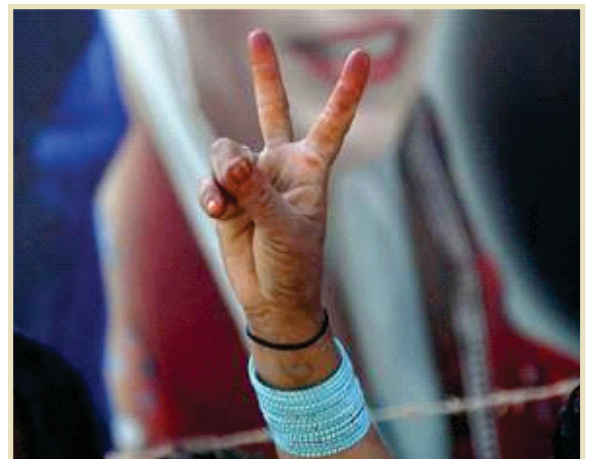
The Marvi Rural Development Organization (MRDO), with the help of PPAF, conducted a field experiment to test these ideas. The setting for the experiment was rural Pakistan, where women still face significant barriers to effective political participation. An awareness campaign was conducted just before the 2008 national elections, after the voter registration period had ended. Study villages were divided into geographical clusters, which were randomly assigned as treatment or control. Within treated clusters, only a *subset* of households was randomly assigned to receive a door-to-door awareness campaign.

The campaign was developed as a set of simple visual aids with two different messages: the importance of voting which focused on the relationship between the electoral process and policy, and the significance of secret balloting which explained the actual balloting process. Treated women received either the first message or both messages, allowing a test of whether knowledge about the voting process, including the fact that ballots are cast in an environment of secrecy, enhances female participation and independence in candidate choice.

#### Results

We find that turnout increases by about 12 percent for women in treated households compared to women in control clusters, with somewhat larger effects for women exposed to both messages. More importantly, we find comparable turnout rates for the untreated close neighbors of treated women, indicating large geographical spillovers.

Given that about three clusters are mapped on average to a



polling station, and that there are one to three polling stations per village, we complemented the sample data with administrative data from all polling stations that served the study villages. We found that for every 10 treated women, (roughly 4 households), female turnout increases by about 9 additional votes. Once we take this externality into account, the cost of the intervention drops from US \$16.7 to about US \$2.2 per additional vote. In contrast, using the same administrative data, we find no effect on male turnout, suggesting either that the provision of information on the electoral and balloting process is less salient for men or that men are simply not influenced by information provided to women.

In addition, treated women are significantly more likely to vote for the second most voted political party. Further, control women in treated clusters behave as if directly treated, confirming once more the importance of social interactions. Polling station data show that an increase of 10 percent in the share of treated women led to a decrease in the share of female votes for the winning party of 6 percent. These results suggest that the campaign could have influenced the share of votes at the constituency level and thus the policy agenda, had it been implemented on a larger scale.

### Policy Implications

The results show that the campaign was least effective among women who had not voted in the past. As a result, more intensive interventions may be required for such women, including assistance with voter registration.

More generally speaking, while attitudes and social mores change slowly, the results suggest that information provision can empower women and provide a relatively cost effective mechanism for enhancing the participation of rural women in the democratic process.

