

Education Level and Political Awareness among First-Time Women Voters

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Abstract: *This paper evaluates the association between the first-time female voters and their education level and their political awareness. The political awareness is one of the major factors in the democratic participation in which the electoral participation process, identification of issues, as well as participation in the process of governance are influenced. As more initiatives are being made to involve women in the process of making political decisions, there is a need to know how education can influence political awareness among women of new voters in their voting patterns. Relying on the quantitative research results obtained in urban and semi-urban districts, the study substantiates with statistically significant data, findings on the relationships between higher education and a high level of political knowledge, issue engagement, and electoral confidence. The results highlight the contribution of formal education towards improving the ability of women to engage in the democratic processes in a meaningful way and suggest the policy and civic education intervention recommendations.*

Keywords: Education level, political awareness, first-time women voters, electoral participation, civic engagement, democratic participation

1. Introduction

Informed participation is the key to democracy; therefore, the legitimacy of the electoral results relies on voter awareness. Structural, cultural as well as educational factors have long limited the participation of women in politics. The first-time women voters can be considered as the important group of voters who cast their ballots the first time and contribute greatly to the formation of the tendencies in the participation and the priorities in the political life. It is generally accepted that education can trigger political awareness. It equips citizens with informational abilities, ability to think critically and to have the power to interact with civic institutions. Nonetheless, it has not been fully studied in a number of emerging democracies how much education contributes to political awareness of the first-time women voters. This gap is filled in this paper by examining how the education level is related to political awareness among first time female voters.

By improving cognitive abilities, critical thinking, and information access, education is essential in forming political consciousness. In general, educated people are better able to understand political communications, evaluate different policy options, and participate in political discourse. Education is a means of social and political inclusion for women as well as a tool for personal empowerment. Greater political consciousness is fostered by higher levels of education, which are linked to increasing exposure to political information through formal curriculum, media literacy, and social interaction.

Women's levels of political awareness and involvement are still impacted by differences in their educational attainment in many emerging and transitional societies.



2. Literature Review

Political Consciousness and Democratic turnout. Political awareness defines the knowledge about political systems, political awareness about the issues of the people, political awareness about the civic rights and duties and political awareness about the political discourse. Verba, Scholzman and Brady (1995), affirm that political knowledge is a good indicator of voting patterns and political turnout. On the same note, Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) noted that the more voters are politically aware the more they are predisposed to democratic participation as well as the issue orientation. Participation in Politics as a Determinant of Education. Political awareness depends greatly on the educational attainment. According to Almond and Verba (1963), education enlarged mental structures that are used to process political information and prompt deliberative action. Studies later undertaken by Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry (1996) proved the fact that education does not only enhance political knowledge but also provides strength to efficacy and participation in the election process. Women Voting and Political Participation. Research shows that the socio-cultural contexts affect women in regards to gender political awareness and participation. Norris (2002) noted that the gender difference in political participation reduces as more and more students get the opportunities to become

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educated. Chhibber and Singh (1995) in the Indian case stated women having secondary or higher education were more politically aware and turned out to vote as compared to less-educated women in the same context. Gaps and Research Need Although the literature has recognized the influences of education in political participation in a general sense, they have not given focus to first time women voters specifically in transitional democracies. The study contributes to empirical evidence regarding the complicated connection between education and political awareness of this population.

3. Research Methodology

Research Design The cross-sectional quantitative design was used. A survey comparing the political awareness and education levels that constitute a structured questionnaire, comprised of first-time women voters (between the age of 18 and 25). **Sample and Sampling Technique.** The sample consisted of 600 women who are first time and vote on urban and semi-urban constituencies through stratified random sampling. Stratification criteria were on education level:

Group A) primary education and less.

Group B: Secondary education

Group C: Undergrad and over. **Data Collection Instruments.**

The survey tool consisted of: Demographic (age, occupation, education level) Political Awareness Scale (PAS) - a composite measure consisting of items of political knowledge and issue awareness and behaviors of civic engagement.

Voting Confidence Index (VCI) - is a measure of confidence to learn the electoral process and confidence in voting choices. The rating of responses was according to a 5-point Likert scale. **Data Analysis** Statistical analysis was conducted on correlation of descriptive statistics and ANOVA tests using statistical data (SPSS v26) to measure the relationships involving the education level with political awareness score.

4. Empirical Analysis / Findings

The data revealed: Correlation coefficients of education level and political awareness are positive ($r = 0.68$, $p = 0.01$).

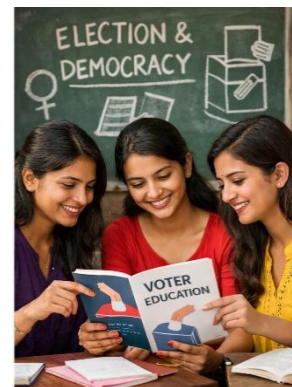
The best results were experienced in Group C (Undergraduate and above) with mean PAS scores of 4.2, then Group B ($M = 3.6$) and Group A ($M = 2.8$). The findings of ANOVA proved that there are important differences among groups ($F(2,597) = 45.9$, $p < 0.001$), which means that the level of education has a significant impact on political awareness.

Other lessons learned involve: The increased education level was associated with increased participation in political discourses, availability of various sources of political knowledge, and knowledge of civic rights. The less educated respondents said they were dependent on

informal sources of information about political activities (family, local community).

5. Discussion

Findings are consistent with available literature that highlights the importance of education in the development of political awareness. Educated new women voters had a higher chance to read the political issues carefully, gather information using a variety of sources, and showing trust in politics voting. This is an indication that formal education supplements cognitive resources needed to approach political material in a critical manner. Nevertheless, the low awareness levels among less educated voters are the indicator of the necessity to conduct specific civic education and outreach.



6. Conclusion

According to the study, there is a very strong positive correlation between the level of education and political awareness among first time women voters. Education does not due to informational competencies as women can be empowered but confidence and involvement in democratic plays is strengthened. Civil society and policymakers ought to come up with interventions that will widen accessibility to education and incorporate civic education curricula to entrench political awareness among all levels of education.

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