

An Analysis of the Socio-political Factors Influencing Women's Participation in the National Parliamentary Election in Iran

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Abstract: *This study questions why this is so and analyses the factors that prevent women from participating in the parliamentary election in Iran. The purpose of this research is to study the An Analysis of the Factors Influencing Women's Participation in the Parliamentary election in Iran. It focuses on socio-political factors influencing the participation of women as electorate in the five General Elections between 1991 and 2008. This became necessary because fundamentally women's participation in politics begins with awareness as a part of the electorate. . The present study from the aim point of view is functional and it is descriptive-correlation from the method view of data collection due to the relation between research variables and one of its significant advantages is the capability of generalizing its results. In this study, the statistical population consists of all women who participated in five National parliamentary Elections in Masjedsoliman city in Iran during the period of 1991-2008. The statistical sample of this research includes 495 women who participated in five National parliamentary Elections in Masjedsoliman city in Iran. For each period 99 women will form the sample. This method ensures adequate allocation of the available sample. In order to gather data has used two questionnaires which as: Demographic information, participation of women in politics. For analyzing the data, descriptive statistics (Mean, Standard Deviation...) and inferential statistics (Khidu and Creamer Correlation Coefficient, Krukal-Wallis Test and Mann-Whitney U Test) were applied. Fundamentally, more women were available as sample population for statistical testing so essential to make this a cross-sectional data analysis thesis which was also longitudinal. There is comparative study to show that all over the world women have entered the socio-political ranks and face high political organizational duties. In Iran, women do participate in the middle and micromanagement but their progress in parliamentary election, decision making and policy making has not been immense. The formal statistics show that half of the populations of Iran are women. So, it is necessary that they participate in social, cultural and economic domain to bring about change and sustain new development in the society.*

Keywords: *Female participation, political participation, electoral process, election, women..*

Introduction

The development of human societies has seen the growth of governments and the development of men and women as participants in the society. Some societies are protective of their women and do not allow them to participate in the political arena. The development of human societies has seen the growth of governments and the development of men and women as participants in the society. Some societies are protective of their women and do not allow them to participate in the political arena. At the present, the Iranian society is stable, so women must enter the political arena to get themselves rights and regulation to improve their status. But in Iran they seem to be content to remain as less active citizens. There must be a reason for their less participation to enter the political arena and political decision making. From this point of view it becomes obvious that women have not been good citizens and have not played their part with sincerity. The United Nations statistics show that women in legislation are only 16 percent of the population though Iranian women have good potential and good scientific technical and specialized knowledge and skills. It is evident that these skills could be used in the political arena for the betterment of society.

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Obviously, there are social, political, legal and cultural barriers that prevent women from entering the political arena. It was found that out of 290 members in the Iranian parliament only 8 members were women. The main reason for this figure is ascribed to people and society being unwilling to accept women as candidate in parliament. This does not deny the fact that the constitution grants the women the right to vote and the right to participate in parliamentary elections. In addition to the socio-political factors that prevent women from indulging in parliamentary affairs there are social attitudes like patriarchal view point in society and social malaises like ignorance, poverty, and lack of institution to guide women, low level of employment of women etc which also compound the situation in Iran. The problem as stated in the hypothesis assumes that there are certain obstructions that prevent the entry of Iranian women into the political arena. Though women participate actively in other spheres as teachers, doctors, mass media assistant yet their presence in the political arena is almost insignificant. So, this social problem needs analysis of factors that prevent their entry into active politics. There are social factors like, patriarchal view point which are said to be the culprits that prevent women's entry into politics. There are several socio-political constraints that marginalize women. The number of women leaders at the local level, village level and national level are not commensurate with the number of women in the society. Though Iran has had adult franchise since 1963 and women have participated as voters there are deliberate impediments to women entering high level parliament. Voting is the basic activity for assimilation of women in the political process. The participation of women in formal election depends upon how political parties mobilize their efforts. It also depends on general awareness in the community about existing franchise and the overall political culture. Obviously the problem is social-political and needs a good look at the problems to find solutions that are amicable and efficient. In 2000 United Nation-Secretary –General Kofi Annan said ‘peace is inextricably linked into inequality between woman and man and also maintaining and promoting peace and security requires equal participation in decision making of both men and women. This is a significant fact so, the study is significant as it tries to make women in Iranian society realize that some old laws and values need to change. The earlier societies were dictatorial and monarchical. In such societies women had no role in the political pyramid. The first step for change in the status of women in society will come with an understanding of the socio-political factors that prevent their entry into the political arena. Unless women take up cudgels to safe guard their rights, they will continue to be in subordinated by the men. The old norms and patriarchal view point have not changed with times therefore women need to move out into the political arena for formal representation in politics in Iran.

No study is complete unless it raises some pertinent questions. In this research too there are several questions that are asked but the prime question is ‘what are the socio-political factors that obstruct women from participating in political affairs?’ The research question then looks at demographic factors such as age, marital status, educational qualification, employment factors and pits them against the obstacles like A) patriarchal view point B) low level of education, lack of awareness about their rights C) existence of the different local traditions, customs and norms D) lack of specific political, social and cultural institutions for women E) low average of employed women with regard to men. By looking at the dichotomous variables the research tries to question the absence of women in politics though the Iranian constitution accepted adults franchise in 1963 and the constitution guaranties equality to women.

Theoretical Framework

This article studies the socio-political behavior of women in Iran. It looks at normative implication and conclusion on studies of socio-political participation of women. This requires a continuous study of the responses between women political parties, pressure groups and election. The study is based on the political theory of participation where the participation depends upon the a) historical development of the society b) economic and social conditions of the society c) political structures and institutions d) the consensus on democratic values e) level of education of the female participants.

Female Participation- An Elitist Concept

Abbereley, P (1997) has stated that “The debate on female participation has groups that consider such participation as an elitist concept without understanding of the subtleties and ambiguities that exist in the Iranian society. But it can't be denied that there is intrinsic merit in the demand for political participation of women for their self-realization and self-development. Their participation will lead to protection of their interest and give them autonomy to improve their socio-political wisdom. Thus the citizen theory believes that female citizens would become better participants who with the largest spirit will become responsible public minded people of a rational society. This theory considers participation as an end to be perused though there may be defects in public opinion. Socio-Political participation of women will bring the values addition to elections”.

Attitudes of Women

In socio-political participation the orientations of the women have to be considered. Almond and Verba and Inkeles (2004) have shown that “higher social class is associated with higher level of political information interest and commitment which are resource that provoke people to be active in politics, so in most societies there is a socio economic pattern to political participation”.

The Pyramid of Political Participation

Abu-Habib, L. (1997) has stated that “The pyramid for political participation can be classified in the following way. a) voting b) election campaign c) liaising with government officials d) taking part in manifestations e) solving community problems f) getting elected to local bodies g) contributing to political cause. This pyramid would work only if the freedom of choice vests with the people especially women. The choice of being an effective participant in politics rests with the individual women however the opinions can be brought out by signature on petitions to the government”. Political participation is outcome of the thought of the people who believe they have responsibility to build a society where they can express their views without fear or favor. This sincere participation of women the government and the state have the moral duty to ensure that fertile ground for such circumstances are developed to allow the women come out and participate in politics. To look at participation of women in politics one needs to understand the concepts laid out by Arnstein's participation ladder: (1971 - A ladder of citizen participation in US a). In this ladder the first level takes the position of power which will teach the values of delegation and partnership. Here the individual capacity to rationalize and comprehend the complexities of the citizen and decision making is very essential. At the second level of participation can be the involvement in an organization or community where information and consultation where are utilized to formulate new policies or activities for the betterment of the society. The last or third level is the one in which the involvement is very passive the women citizen may get manipulated by male citizens because of their passivity and lack of discernment to influence decision. To talk about political socialization without reference to political socialization would be reckless (Acker, J. 1973).

Interpretative Framework & Social Life

Hall, S. (1990) has mentioned that “socialization and reflection of all theories require the ability to use empirical knowledge and concepts. It is also to realize a “hermeneutic” connection between interpretative framework and social life. It shows the visible potential of the indissoluble tie between micro and macro social level. So gender socialization is a relative's process where transformation is complex and cannot be rigidly formulated or patterned. Gender socialization is multi-dimensional process where there is intersection of dimensions. So, to identify challenge it is necessary to look at the group of factors that work as resources to shape an opportunity. Then the resource can circumscribe a network of elements that defines the strategic challenges in a given situation”.

The Participation in Electoral Process

Goffe, R. and Scase, R. (1985) has stated that “political participation and political development from the context of female participation requires a look at the effective participation of women in the electoral process and also the comprehension of the duties and rights of the women as participant in the election and as candidate in the election. In a view of such dynamics it is necessary that women at lower political institution get elected by universal adult suffrage than by electoral colleges because electoral colleges can be manipulated to favor or disfavor the incumbent women. Women in political participation will give rise to many questions. All are aware that the possibility of transformation of state politics will only take place when women seized opportunity for a proactive and autonomous struggle to establish equal gender relation in estate politics. The men or the society cannot be solely responsible for transformation of gender relations informal politics. Women have to come over special status and envisage their organization and abilities to consolidate and act on behalf of the state”.

The Approach to Elections

Hall, L. (2000) has mentioned that “There are several approaches to elections. They are a) structural approach b) ecological approach c) rational approach d) the sociological approach and c) socio psychological approach. The women participation in politics need to look at the sociological approach to political behavior. The research survey in this field used demographic control like, sex, age class, income and education for the analysis of reposes of women to their political behavior. The merit of this factor is that they are in variable and can be measured with

sophisticated techniques for a tree analysis where the relative influence of different factors on dependent variable can be studied.”

An Index of National Electorate Behavior

The authors of Elmira study (1948) spoke of (I.P.P) index of political predisposition which outlined three factors which revealed political preference they called these factors as social characteristics that disposed a person to vote in a particular manner. So the psychological states of mind of the women and her social background becomes sociological determinants of her behavior which could be applied to an index on national electorate behavior. Atypical citizen of social class will possess attributes that compel him to vote for someone typical this is true of both men and women. Women in political participation have to understand the concept of party identification where the outcome of the election depends upon how much the citizens identify with the policies of the candidate. They have to understand in an election, there is an interplay between stabilizing forces and patrician forces and the identification between their forces play an important role in the outcome of electoral results where the process of identification can be the result of childhood socialization. The rational choice approach is based on assumption to make deductions about the cost effective instrumental behavior of voters. Women must become a rational voter after consideration of policies.(31)This theory can explain the behavior as voters who used rational choices in place of irrational loyalties. This helps to put voting patterns into an analytical framework to establish correlation between the female voter and her choice. It can also explain the operative nature of the female voter. Female voter from huge segment of the political reality and can singly model change in society (Goddard, Spear, M 1989).

The Educated Voter

J.S.Mill believed that anyone who could not read write or do arithmetic's should not be allowed to participate in suffrage. He believed on that prior theory that community could be controlled by those without the basic education was wrong. Mill was of the opinion that education can make a better candidate and a better voter but Definer says that instruction helped in making choices but men and women voted out of passion for a cause then out of intellectual rationale. J.S.Mill argued that men have a natural, equal and inalienable right to vote and the same right had to be given to women without any discrimination and all considerations which are applicable to men was also applicable to women as long as they conducted themselves as free intelligent and moral human beings, capable of understanding the rights and interest of the society and capable of protecting and showing a vital stake in all regulation law of the society.

Research Method

The present research from the aim point of view is functional and it is descriptive-correlation from the method view of data collection due to the relation between research variables and one of its significant advantages is the capability of generalizing its results. In this research, the statistical population consists of all women who participated in five National parliamentary Elections in Masjedsoliman city in Iran during the period of 1991-2008. The statistical sample of this research includes 495 women who participated in five National parliamentary Elections in Masjedsoliman city in Iran. For each period 99 women will form the sample. This method ensures adequate allocation of the available sample.

The Measurement Instruments

In order to gather data has used two questionnaires which as: Demographic information and participation of women in politics were applied. Demographic questionnaire include information about, age, marital status, educational qualification and status of employment. **The research questionnaire** includes 40 questions regarding the socio-political obstacles. That prevents the participation of women in politics.

Data Collection Method

For analyzing the data, descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were used. To determine relationship between age and with socio-political hindrance factors that prevent women's participation (patriarchal view point, low level of education, awareness of women about their rights, lack of political, social and cultural institutions, existence of different local traditions, customs and norms, relative low average between employed men and women used also the Pearson Correlation Coefficient. To determine relationship between marital status, educational qualification and employment with hindered socio-political factors that prevent women's participation (patriarchal view point, low level of education, awareness of women about their rights, lack of political, social and cultural institutions,

existence of different local traditions, customs and norms, relative low average between employed men and women Khido and Creamer Correlation Coefficient was used.

For comparison of hindered socio-political factors of women participation ((patriarchal view point, low level of education, awareness of women about their rights, lack of political, social and cultural institutions, existence of different local traditions customs, and norms, relative low average between employed men and women) Kruskal-Wallis test and for comparing of groups Mann-Whitney U test was used.

Level of reliance 95% has considered and quantity of P in level 0.05 and less than that has significant. These entire tests are performed with the use of the version 19 of S.P.S.S statistical pack.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

In this study, description of age among the women of Masjedsoliman city during five National Elections is as in the following table:

Table (1): Description of Age among the Women of Masjedsoliman City during five National Elections

Duration	Year	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Eighth Period	2008	22.72	2.70	22	27
Seventh Period	2004	31.14	2.55	28	37
Sixth Period	2000	40.79	2.33	38	47
Fifth Period	1996	52.11	3.11	48	57
Fourth Period	1992	63.64	4.50	58	78

Data in table.1, indicates that Mean and Standard Deviation of women of Masjedsoliman city during five National Elections for Eighth Period is M= 22.72, SD= 2.70, Seventh Period is M= 31.14, SD=2.55, Sixth Period is M= 40.79, SD= 2.33, Fifth Period is M= 52.11, SD= 3.11, and Fourth Period is M= 63.64, SD= 4.50, respectively, this result indicates that lowest Mean and Standard Deviation in age at the Seventh Election and the highest Mean and Standard Deviation in age in the Fourth Election.

Statistical Description of Data in Factors Hindering Women Participation among the women of Masjedsoliman city during five National Elections.

Table (2): Statistical Description of Data in Factors Hindering Women Participation among the women of Masjedsoliman city during five National Elections

Factors Hindering Women Participation	Year	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Eighth Period	2008	155.14	12.01	117	167
Seventh Period	2004	162.22	5.95	139	169
Sixth Period	2000	157.49	11.12	123	167
Fifth Period	1996	158.96	10.55	113	170
Fourth Period	1992	160.29	9.33	117	169

Data in table 2, Indicates that mean and standard deviation of women of Masjedsoliman during five National Elections, for Eighth period an M=155.14, SD=12.01, Seventh period an M= 162.22 SD=5.95, Sixth period an M=157.49, SD=11.12, Fifth period an M= 158.96, SD=10.55, Fourth period an M=160.29, SD=9.33, respectively. These results indicate that the lowest mean Factors Hindering Women Participation among the women of Masjedsoliman city during five National Elections is in Eighth period and the highest in this category is in Seventh period. In table 3, shows the comparison of the Factors Hindering Women Participation among the women of Masjedsoliman city during five National Elections. The comparison of factors hindering women socio-political participation among women of Masjedsoliman city during five National Elections there is no significant differences among variables.

Table (3): Comparison of the Factors Hindering Women Participation among the women of Masjedsoliman city during five National Elections

Variable	Duration	Year	N	Mean (SD)	Mean rank	Chi-Square	P-Value
Factors Hindering Women Participation	Eighth Period	2008	99	155.14 (12.01)	190.78	33.644	.000**
	Seventh Period	2004	99	162.22 (5.95)	299.01		
	Sixth Period	2000	99	157.49 (11.12)	227.99		
	Fifth Period	1996	99	158.96 (10.55)	249.57		
	Fourth Period	1992	99	160.29 (9.33)	272.65		

The data in table 3, indicated that with attention to level of **P** obtained from Kruskal-Wallis test observed that among means level of the factors hindering women participation in socio-political activities among women= (X²=33.644 ,P=.000) of Masjedsoliman city during five National Elections there is significant differences among variables. For determination of differences of between two groups the Man-Whitney U test was used. In table 3, result of Man-Whitney U test for determination of differences of two by two groups in concerning level of different means of the Factors hindering Women Participation in socio-political activities among the women of Masjedsoliman city during five National Elections.

Table (4) : Comparison of the variety in factors between & corresponding Elections during five National Elections in Iran

Duration	Year	N	Mean (SD)	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mann-Whitney U	P-Value
Eighth Period	2008	99	155.14(12.01)	78.06	7728.00	2778.00	.000**
Seventh Period	2004	99	162.22(5.95)	120.94	11973.00		
Eighth Period	2008	99	155.14(12.01)	91.89	9097.50	4147.500	.061
Sixth Period	2000	99	157.49(11.12)	107.11	10603.50		
Eighth Period	2008	99	155.14(12.01)	87.67	8679.00	3729.000	.004*
Fifth Period	1996	99	158.96(10.55)	111.33	11022.00		
Eighth Period	2008	99	155.14(12.01)	83.16	8232.50	3282.500	.000**
Fourth Period	1992	99	160.29(9.33)	115.84	11468.50		
Seventh Period	2004	99	162.22(5.95)	113.77	11263.00	3488.00	.000**
Sixth Period	2000	99	157.49(11.12)	85.23	8438.00		
Seventh Period	2004	99	162.22(5.95)	109.41	10831.50	3919.500	.014*
Fifth Period	1996	99	158.96(10.55)	89.59	8869.50		
Seventh Period	2004	99	162.22(5.95)	104.89	10384.00	4367.000	.182
Fourth Period	1992	99	160.29(9.33)	94.11	9317.00		
Sixth Period	2000	99	157.49(11.12)	95.18	9422.50	4472.500	.286
Fifth Period	1996	99	158.96(10.55)	103.82	10278.50		
Sixth Period	2000	99	157.49(11.12)	90.48	8957.50	4007.500	.026*
Fourth Period	1992	99	160.29(9.33)	108.52	10743.50		
Fifth Period	1996	99	158.96(10.55)	94.82	9387.50	4437.500	.247
Fourth Period	1992	99	160.29(9.33)	104.18	10313.50		

In table 4, compared the last of the hindrance factor of women participation in socio-political among women during five National Elections. The consecutive periods are compared. It shows which 2 groups shows difference with other 2 groups .According to this the comparison of all groups is done. Where the level of significance (P) is and difference between 2 periods is less than 0.05, there is considerable difference, if (P) is more than 0.05 then there is no significant differences between groups. The Eighth period in comparison to Seventh period (U=2778.00, P=.000),(respectively 155.14 vis-à-vis 162.22 (5.95),Fifth period (U=3729.000, P=.004) ,(respectively 155.14(12.01)vis-à-vis 158.96(10.55) and Fourth period (U=3282.000 ,P=.000) , (respectively 155.14(12.01) vis-à-vis 160.29(9.33) is significantly less and in Seventh period compare with Sixth period (U=363488.00 ,P=000) ,(respectively 162.22(5.95) vis-à-vis 157.49(11.12) and Fifth period (U=3919.500 ,P=.014) ,(respectively

162.22(5.95) vis-à-vis 158.96(10.55) is significantly more and Sixth period compare with Fourth period ($U=4007.500$, $p=.026$), (respectively 158.96(10.55) vis-à-vis 160.29(9.33) is significantly less.

Discussion

The study has theoretical base and has compared cross-sectional data to improve and infer data on women as members of an electorate who do not participate in the public arena due to various obstacles. The hindrance factors were considered as dependent variables and ranged on five dimensions. The demographic factors were the independent variables and they were studied as part of null hypothesis. It was found that the null hypothesis did stand scrutiny and hence the alternative hypothesis was seen as not valid. The various hypothesis began with the question do you think there is significant difference between x and y? It was proved that the differences were positive though not significant. The study has a functional purpose and used descriptive correlation to construct relationship between research variables. The significant advantage of this method is that it can generate results that are valid if the research methodology has used reliable and valid questionnaire for data collection. The statistical population was the women electorate of Masjedsoliman city and question raised in the introduction are suitably answered taking into consideration the fact that Iranian society lacks stability and women face several obstacles while entering the parliamentary election. But each corresponding election has shown that more and more young women are becoming aware of their voting rights as citizens and pretty soon they will demand their rightful place in the . The second variable considered was marital status, there has been an increase in the number of unmarried women but they don't seem to aspire for action in political space. The numbers remained almost constant revealing that marriage as a social priority does prevent women from looking at the parliamentary election.

The three factors of illiteracy shows that it is one of the major factors for women's nonperformance in the parliamentary election. But even educated women did not seem to aspire for political responsibility. From this it is evident that hindrance factors are strong. This is an area in which further research is required. The patriarchal view point as strong obstruction to women's entry in the political arena gets top grade. This reveals that Iranian government still has prejudice against women coming into parliamentary election.

This has been affirmed up to 95 percent certainty. This is also an area where further research is necessary to corroborate the influence. To other factors like, Patriarchal point of view in society, Low level of education, and awareness of women about their rights, Lack of specific political, social and cultural institution for women, the existence of different local traditions, customs and norms, Low average of employed women in relation to men in the society shows that their impact on women's reluctance to enter the, parliamentary election. A look at tables and figures clearly indicate that Iranian society is not amenable for equal participation of women in the parliamentary election. There are several obstructions to their entry in the political arena. No doubt that electoral system and rules need to change.

Conclusion

In conclusion one could say that women are marginalized and disadvantaged in relation to their participation in public affairs they have importance only as an electorate. To draw women out of seclusion, it would be necessary to draw up viable strategy that can address the issues of women in general and election in parliament. This study has some limitations; it does not look at all aspect of political participation of women. It is limited because it considers women as electorate in five National Elections of Iran. Masjedsoliman city becomes a representative case for the large issue, so all aspects of women's participation and obstruction to their entry; need more study and more research. However a step in the right direction has been taken by this research to provoke both women and the government to recognize the need of women to participate in the election in parliament. There are prospects for a comprehensive judicial reform and identification of key measures and initiatives needed to ensure the protection and promotion of the rights of women and the elimination of violence against women. Inequality against women in Iran is rooted in gender inequality, which is upheld and perpetuated by two interrelated factors:

- a) Patriarchal norms and attitudes based on male-empowering, and
- b) Political culture of society that rooted in historical back ground of Iran

While the former is a universal and historically rooted phenomenon, the latter is specific to the gender politics in the contemporary Iran. Both factors represent male-empowering values, traditions, culture and practices, making it difficult for women to escape public and private inequality. In recent years, some positive steps have been taken to elevate women's status and eliminate violence against women. Additionally, the principle of equality is contained in the Constitution.

Iranian government is sincere about restoring women's dignity and has started re-interpretation of some norms including Islamic Principles in line with the current needs and societal contributions of women as well as with universal human rights standard. The traditions and society are major obstacles to the improvement of the status of women in Iran. The other problems are caused by culture and law. The gender relation is affected by state ideology and economic progress. Illiteracy and women consciousness also make it difficult for women to participate openly in the political arena. However in 2008 53.81% female candidates took part in parliamentary elections. The government of the Islamic Republic of Iran is making great efforts to promote women's participation but these efforts fall short by international standards. The Iranian statesmen must be serious about changing impeding laws, gender clichés and social obstacles that close the doors on Iranian women taking part in political decision making.

Suggestion

All over the world women are at work in parliaments and have shown foresight and mission to change the society. Iranian women too can with experience become good parliamentarian and good citizens with active interest to change policies that lack, gender sensitivity and create positive environment for women in the society.

Recommendation

There are several recommendation for encouraging women into the political arena. The chief recommendation is a quota system for women with social and political organization, working to empower them. The employment aspect of the society must give equal opportunity to men and women to become good participants for growth. It is only by entrusting responsibility that women will realize their true potential.

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