

## Role of Women in Politics of Pakistan

Tahira Shabbir<sup>1</sup> Hussan Ara<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Political Science, University of Balochistan Quetta

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Corresponding Author: Hussan Ara Email: [hussanara.uob@gmail.com](mailto:hussanara.uob@gmail.com)

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### Abstract

*Participation of women in politics has always been one of the topics for discussion in Pakistan, where women make up a significant portion of the population. Despite constitutional and legal safeguards, their political participation has been limited. This article examines that how women play their role in politics of Pakistan, also observe participation, and how they represent politics in different political arenas, and the challenges they face. The study highlights that how women participation in politics is important to achieve gender equality, democracy, and social justice. Pakistan has a long history of patriarchal social norms and cultural practices that limit women's participation in public life. These norms and practices have often discouraged women from pursuing careers in politics, as they are viewed as the domain of men. As a result, women's political participation in Pakistan has been historically low, with women occupying only a small number of political positions. However, in recent years, there have been some positive developments in politics of Pakistan regarding women participation. The country has implemented legal and policy measures to enhance the representation of women in political institutions. In 2017, for example, the Election Act was amended to ensure that political parties would have to field at least 5% women candidates in general elections. Furthermore, the National Assembly of Pakistan passed the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Bill in 2013, which is a critical step in addressing gender-based violence and protecting women's rights. Despite these positive developments, women still face significant challenges in participating in politics in Pakistan. Women's access to education and training is limited, which affects their ability to engage in political activities effectively. Furthermore, women often face discrimination and harassment in the political arena, which can discourage them from entering politics.*

**Keywords:** Women, Politics, Pakistan, Participation, Representation, Challenges.

### Introduction

The role of women in politics of Pakistan has been a topic of significant interest and debate in recent years. While women have made some progress in the political arena, they continue to face significant challenges and barriers to full and equal participation. Pakistan has a long history of male-dominated

politics, and cultural, social, and economic factors have limited women's access to political power. However, despite these challenges, women in Pakistan have increasingly become active in politics, with some even reaching high-level positions. This article will explore the historical and current role of women in Pakistani politics, the challenges they face, and the opportunities for increasing women's representation and influence in the positions of decision-making. (UNDP)

Certainly! Women participation in politics has been recognized as crucial for achieving gender equality, human rights, and social justice. Women bring a unique perspective to the decision-making process, and their inclusion in political institutions is a necessary step towards a more representative and inclusive democracy. However, despite progress in some areas, in Pakistan women must face significant barriers to their full and equal participation in politics. Pakistan's patriarchal society and cultural practices have traditionally limited women's participation in public life. Women are often seen as belonging to the private sphere, with their role being primarily that of caretakers and homemakers. This view has led to a lack of women representation in political institutions and in processes of decision-making. The cultural and social norms have further taken part to marginalization of women in political activities, particularly in rural areas. Moreover, some economic obstacles that hinder participation of women in politics. Women in Pakistan have limited access to education, employment, and resources. This lack of access makes it challenging for women to engage in political activities and compete in the male-dominated political arena. Nighat Khan. (2012)

In addition to cultural, social, and economic barriers, women in Pakistan face gender-based violence, harassment, and discrimination when participating in politics. Women are subjected to verbal abuse, threats, and physical violence during election campaigns and rallies. In many cases, women are excluded from decision-making positions in political parties and are denied the opportunity to contest elections. Moreover, women's political activities are often met with hostility and backlash from conservative segments of society.

Despite these challenges, there have been some positive developments in recent years. Pakistan has implemented legal and policy measures to enhance participation of women in political institutions. For example, in 2018, the Election Commission of Pakistan mandated that political parties must give five percent of their party tickets to the women candidates. Similarly, the National Assembly of Pakistan passed the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Bill in 2013, which criminalizes that all sort of violence against women. ((UNDP), February 2019).

Participation of women in politics of Pakistan remains limited, also it is necessary to figure out the importance of increasing representation of women in political institutions to achieve gender equality, democracy, and social justice. The cultural, social, and economic barriers, as well as gender-based violence and discrimination, must be addressed to ensure that women can participate



fully and equally in politics. Therefore, it is crucial to raise public awareness of the importance of gender equality and women's rights, and provide women with access to education, resources, and support to facilitate their participation in politics.

Furthermore, despite constitutional and legal safeguards in place, participation of women in politics of Pakistan has been limited. Patriarchal social norms and cultural practices have contributed to this limitation, with women being discouraged from pursuing careers in politics, as they are often seen as the domain of men. This has resulted in women holding only a small number of political positions in Pakistan. (Alam-e-Niswan, 23(2), 107-118.)

Despite these positive developments, women still face significant challenges in participating in politics in Pakistan. Women's access to education and training is limited, which affects their ability to engage in political activities effectively. Additionally, women often face discrimination and harassment in the political arena, which can discourage them from entering politics. These challenges must be addressed to ensure that women's political rights and opportunities are fully realized, and that gender equality, democracy, and social justice can be achieved in Pakistan.

### **Objectives:**

The objective behind this study is to examine the role of women in politics in Pakistan, their participation, and representation in different political arenas, and the challenges they face. The study aims to highlight the key features of increasing participation of women in politics to achieve gender equality, democracy, and social justice. This study also seeks to analyze the impact of legal and policy measures implemented to increase participation of women in politics of Pakistan. It will assess the effectiveness of these measures and identify any gaps in their implementation. The study will also examine the experiences of women who have participated in politics in Pakistan, including the barriers they have faced and the strategies they have used to overcome them. Moreover, the study will explore the role of civil society organizations and other stakeholders in increasing the awareness of women participation in politics of Pakistan and identifying ways to support women's political activities. The result of this study can give angle into the current status of participation of women in politics of Pakistan and inform the upgradation of policies and programs that aim to promote gender equality and empowerment of women in the political sphere. (UNDP, Women in Politics: 2019).

### **Research Questions:**

Following are the research questions for this article:

1. What is the current state of participation of women in politics of Pakistan?
2. What are the issues which women face when they participate in politics of Pakistan?
3. What steps can be taken to increase participation of women in politics of Pakistan?



4. What is the impact of cultural and societal norms on participation of women in politics of Pakistan?
5. How does gender-based violence and discrimination affect participation of women in politics of Pakistan?
6. What role political parties play in promoting and supporting participation of women in politics of Pakistan?
7. What is the perception of participation of women in politics among the general public in Pakistan, and how can it be changed?
8. How can women's participation in local governance structures be increased to promote grassroots democracy and participation?

### **Research Methodology:**

This study observes from Literature Review of articles, reports, and studies related to participation of women in politics of Pakistan. The research methodology includes a qualitative analysis of the available data to identify patterns and trends related to women's political participation.

This study will also consider primary data sources, such as interviews with women politicians, activists, and experts in Pakistan. These interviews will provide valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities for women's political participation in Pakistan and allow for a more nuanced understanding of the issues at hand. The study will also consider the historical and cultural context of Pakistan, and how this context has influenced participation of women in politics of Pakistan. Overall, research methodology will aim to provide a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the current state of participation of women in politics of Pakistan and the challenges, also opportunities for increasing their representation.

### **Literature Review:**

The literature on participation of women in politics of Pakistan highlights that women's political participation has been limited due to cultural, social, and economic barriers. Women face challenges such as lack of education, social norms, and cultural practices that discourage them from participating in politics. Additionally, women face discrimination and harassment in the political arena, which discourages them from entering politics. (Mumtaz, K. (2013))

- Studies have found that representation of women in parliament and other political offices in Pakistan is significantly lower than men. Women hold only 23% of the seats in the National Assembly of Pakistan, 20% seats in the Senate of Pakistan, and 8% of the seats in the provincial assemblies. (By Rubeena Zakar and Muhammad Zakria Zakar).



- The lack of participation of women in politics of Pakistan has resulted in policies that do not fully address women's needs and concerns, including issues related to health, education, and employment. (By Huma Sohail, published in Pakistan Journal of Gender Studies on July 1, 2015)
- Women's political participation in Pakistan has also been affected using religious and conservative narratives that are used to undermine their political rights and marginalize them. (Nadeem, U., & Hassan, S. (2021))
- Political parties in Pakistan often do not prioritize women's issues, nor do they provide equal opportunities for women to contest elections. (Ali, S. R., & Rehman, S. (2020))
- The implementation on seats which are reserved for women in local governments has increased participation of women in politics that leads to enhance the representation of women on local level. However, this has not beerulen fully implemented in all provinces, and it has not translated into an increase in women's participation in higher political offices. (Haque, M. M., & Chohan, U. W. (2019))

### **Main Body:**

Despite the challenges, women have made progress in politics in Pakistan. In the last few decades, representation of women in parliament level but also other political institutions have increased. Women have played a vital role in advocating rights for women, social justice, gender equality etc. Women's participation in politics has resulted in the passage of laws to protect women's rights, increase women's access to education, and address gender-based violence.

However, participation of women in politics of Pakistan remains limited. Women are underrepresented in parliament and other political institutions. Additionally, women face discrimination and harassment in the political arena, which discourages them from entering politics. Women who do enter politics face additional challenges, such as lack of support from political parties and limited access to resources.

Certainly! In last few years, participation women in politics of Pakistan have been encouraged by several initiatives. In 2000 The National Commission which is on the Status of Women was established to address issues of women, also promote gender equality. The work of commission is to increase women participation in politics and has advocated for the policies that support rights of women and welfare. Additionally, the Parliamentary Caucus for women was formed in 2008 to provide a platform for women parliamentarians to discuss issues related to women and to work towards gender equality. (Heinrich Boll Stiftung, 2020)



There is a lot of efforts have also been done to increase participation of women in politics through affirmative action. In 2017, the Sindh Assembly passed a law requiring that political parties give at least 5% of their tickets to women candidates. The law was aimed at increasing women's representation in the provincial assembly and local governments. Similarly, in the 2018 general elections, the Election Commission of Pakistan directed to political parties that they give at least 5% of their tickets to women candidates for national and provincial assembly seats. (Dawn, 2017)

While such initiatives are a step in the right direction, much more needs to be done to increase participation of women in politics of Pakistan. Efforts are needed to address the cultural and social obstacles that prevent participation of women in politics, including traditional gender roles, patriarchal norms, and societal stereotypes. Additionally, more support is needed for women who do enter politics, including better access to resources, mentorship, and training programs.

Finally, it is important to check the issue of harassment and discrimination against participation of women in politics. Women who enter politics must be protected from harassment and abuse, and measures should be taken to ensure that women's political rights are upheld. These steps will help to ensure that women can participate fully in politics in Pakistan, resulting in a more inclusive and equitable political system. (By Asia Ashraf and Sabiha K. Asghar)

In recent years, there have been some positive developments in participation of women in politics of Pakistan. In the 2018 general elections, a record figures of women contested seats in the National Assembly, and a total of 20 women were elected to the assembly, the highest number in the country's history. Additionally, participation of women in the Senate and provincial assemblies also increased slightly.

However, despite these gains, participation of women in politics of Pakistan remains limited, there are still significant barriers to their full participation. Women continue to face cultural, social, and economic barriers, including patriarchal attitudes and practices, lack of access to education and resources, and limited mobility. (Heinrich Böll Stiftung Pakistan, February 22, 2021)

Moreover, women who do enter politics often face harassment, discrimination, and violence. There have been reports of female politicians receiving threats and being subjected to physical attacks. In recent years, some high-profile cases of violence against women in politics have garnered attention, including the murder of a female member of the provincial assembly in Sindh in 2018. (Human Rights Watch, June 27, 2018)

Despite these challenges, there are ongoing efforts to increase participation of women in politics of Pakistan. Some political parties have introduced policies to encourage women's participation and provide support to female candidates. Civil society organizations are also working

to raise awareness of women's political rights and provide training and resources to women who want to enter politics.

In 2019, the Election Commission of Pakistan introduced a new online system for women to register as voters, to increase participation of women in the electoral process. The system allows women to register to vote online, without having to visit a government office. Additionally, a new law was introduced in 2019 which required political parties to give at least 5% of their tickets for general seats to women candidates in national and provincial elections. (Voice of America, March 3, 2019)

Despite these efforts, participation of women in politics of Pakistan remains low. The 2018 general elections saw only a slight enhancement in the number that woman elected to parliament, with women holding just 20% of the seats in the National Assembly. In Senate women representation also remained low, only 20% of the seats which are just women hold.

Women in politics in Pakistan continue to face significant challenges, including discrimination and harassment, lack of support from political parties, and limited access to resources. However, there are also success stories of women who have overcome these challenges and made significant contributions to the political process in Pakistan. (By Fahad Chaudhry, Dawn, July 28, 2018)

In 2020, Pakistan's government passed the Zainab Alert, Response and Recovery Bill, which aims to create a nationwide alert system for missing and abducted children and establish special courts for the speedy trial of child sexual abuse cases. The bill was named after a 7-year-old girl, Zainab, who was raped and murdered in 2018, and was widely seen as a victory for rights of women advocates in Pakistan. In 2020, the Parliamentary Caucus of women of Pakistan, which consists of women parliamentarians from across the political spectrum, launched a campaign to increase the representation of women in parliament. The campaign, called "50/50 by 2030," aims to achieve equal representation of men and women in parliament by 2030. (Reuters, September 22, 2020)

In 2021, the government of Pakistan introduced a new law aimed at protecting women from workplace harassment. The law, called the Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, makes it mandatory for all organizations to establish harassment complaint committees, and provides for severe penalties for employers who fail to comply with the law. In 2021, the government of Pakistan appointed the country's first-ever female lieutenant general in the army. Major General Nigar Johar was promoted to the rank of lieutenant general, making her the highest-ranking woman in the history of the Pakistani military. Her promotion was seen as a significant milestone for women's rights in the country, where women have traditionally been excluded from many fields, including the military. (Dawn, June 30, 2020)



**Recommendations:**

- To increase participation of women in politics of Pakistan, the following recommendations can be made:
- Motivate political parties to increase the representation of women in decision-making positions.
- Provide women with access to education and training to increase their political skills and knowledge.
- Implement legal and policy measures to protect women from discrimination and harassment in the political arena.
- Public awareness should be enhanced to the importance of women's political participation and the benefits of gender equality.
- Provide financial and other support to female candidates: Political campaigns can be expensive, and women often have less access to financial resources than men. Providing financial support to female candidates can help level the playing field and increase their chances of success. Other forms of support, such as mentorship and networking opportunities, can also be beneficial.
- Encourage women to vote: Increase the number of women, running for office, it's important to encourage women to exercise their right to vote. This can be done through voter education campaigns, as well as by ensuring that polling places are accessible and safe for women.
- Address cultural and social barriers: In many parts of Pakistan, there are cultural and social obstacles that discourage participation of women in politics. These can include traditional gender roles and stereotypes, as well as societal expectations around women's behavior and dress. Addressing these barriers will require a concerted effort to change cultural norms and attitudes and may involve working with community leaders and influencers.
- Increase representation of women in the media: The media plays an important role in shaping public perceptions of politics and politicians. By increasing the representation of women in the media, and by promoting positive and diverse portrayals of women in politics, it may be possible to increase public support for women's political participation.
- Implement quota systems: Some countries have implemented quota systems that require a certain percentage of political positions to be held by women. While controversial, these systems have been shown to be effective in increasing women's representation in politics. In

Pakistan, where women are severely underrepresented in politics, such a system could be worth considering.

- Create safe spaces for women in politics: Women in politics often face harassment, threats, and violence. Creating safe spaces for women in politics, such as women-only events and meetings, can help to protect them and encourage their participation. This can be done through collaboration between political parties, civil society organizations, and government bodies.

### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, women's political participation is very important for the progress and growth of a society. In Pakistan women face significant challenges in participating in politics due to cultural, social, and economic barriers. However, women have made progress in politics in Pakistan, and their participation has prompted the adoption of laws to protect rights of women and address violence against women. The participation of women in politics is crucial for building a more inclusive and equitable society. Women in Pakistan face many obstacles to participating in politics, but progress has been made over the years. Participation of women in politics is increased has resulted in the motion of laws to protect their rights and address gender-based violence. However, more needs to be done to address the systemic obstacles that prevent participation of women in politics fully.

To achieve gender equality and create a more just and prosperous society, it is essential to enhance representation of women in decision-making areas, provide access to education and training, and implement legal and policy measures to secure women from biases and harassment. The public's recognition of the importance of participation of women in politics needs to be raised, and efforts need to be made to challenge gender norms and stereotypes that hinder women's participation in politics.

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