

Identifying and Addressing the Barriers to Women Leadership in Pakistani Politics



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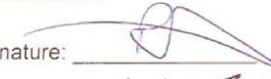

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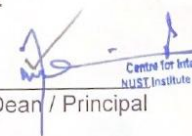


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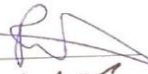
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my Late Father, who always wanted me to do higher studies. To my parents, whose sacrifices and encouragement have guided me through every challenge, and to my siblings, for their endless belief in my potential.

To all the women of Pakistan, particularly those striving for leadership in the face of adversity, may this work serve as a reminder that your voice matters and that true progress lies in equality and representation.

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List of Abbreviations

PPP= Pakistan People's Party

PTI= Pakistan Tehreek e Insaaf

PML-N= Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz

CII= Council of Islamic Ideology

ECP= Election Commission of Pakistan

UN= United Nations

Abstract

The prevailing perception of equitable female political representation in Pakistan, this research investigates the sobering reality of the significant cultural and structural impediments women encounter in Pakistan's political arena. Despite the measure of reserved legislative seats, the stark truth emerges that it is the women hailing from wealthy, well-connected backgrounds who wield the ability to access and exercise political influence. The women currently occupying positions of political power in Pakistan overwhelmingly originate from esteemed families, boasting formidable political networks and resources. These advantages confer upon them a distinct edge in contesting both general elections and reserved seats. Unfortunately, this poses a daunting challenge for the common women of Pakistani society, who lack the privilege of such influential origins and access to the levers of power.

Keywords: women; impediments; cultural; structural; reserved seats; political influence; power, election

Chapter 15

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Gender inclusivity in every walk of life has gotten a core role, with progress being made in areas like health and education. However, significant gender inequality persists in politics, where women's representation at the highest levels remains limited. In democratic societies, the pursuit of gender inclusivity is guided by principles of equality that ensure every citizen has equal rights and duties in governance regardless of gender, yet women in politics experience violence and intimidation. According to the UN Women fact and figure, as of 1 June 2024, there are 27 countries where 28 women serve as Heads of State or Government. At the current rate, gender equality in the highest positions of power will not be reached for another 130 years (UN Women 2024).

The position is equally true for Pakistan which came on the world map as a new country in 1947. At that time, the population of Pakistan was 76 million, out of which about 38 million women were there. However, the political culture of Pakistan was shaped on the patriarchal foundation which is why women were allowed to get less chance than men in the political structure. This could be observed in the early period of the formation of the Pakistani state (1947-1977) when the feudal lords managed to seize political power and expose women to the gradual shrinking of their rights. Although there were many, women had restricted access to the political realm and faced severe restrictions in this domain. The issue of the gender gap can still be seen in Pakistan's politics and continues to be a reminder of the need for women to fight for equal representation and participation in the decision-making process.

Gender roles partition women into reproductive work in the domestic sphere, while men are supposed to assume the provider role in the outside world. In the first few years of Pakistan although there were some changes at a political level with Women pioneers in this process now the dream of women's equality in Pakistan is far from reality. Now to the present day, Pakistan continues to struggle to close the gender disparity, and according to the Global Gender Gap Report of 2023, Pakistan occupies the 95th place among 146 countries. This study explores the

challenges that have occasioned low women political leadership and recommends ways to increase the women's and enhance gender parity in Pakistani politics.

In this study, the chronicles of gender bias in Pakistani politics shall be explored with a special focus on the impacts of civilizations and partisan regressive policies. This research will also give an extent to which factors have led to poor women's political leadership in offices and persistent gender inequalities in political participation. This study aims to identify the causes of this phenomenon through the assessment of generally applicable studies and the overview of concrete cases of female leaders like Benazir Bhutto and through an assessment of the effects of the patriarchy, inverse policies, and oppressive culture of the particular state, enroll an understanding of potential measures which may help to enhance women's representation in politics.

Therefore, the following are general research questions that this thesis seeks to address about the topic of gender in politics: How significantly does the political dominance of Pakistan's elite class inhibit the participation of non-elite citizens in the country's political processes? What are the underlying reasons or societal factors that contribute to the lower participation of women in politics in Pakistan? How to counter the challenges faced by Pakistani women to constructively participate in the politics of Pakistan? This research, therefore, poses a question that seeks to understand how cultural and historical context, especially that of Pakistan, organized and structured politics, to make room for woman leaders with the view of advancing qualitative research to ensure women's parity and participation in politics.

1.2 Problem Statement

People often comment that Pakistan has fair representation in the political arena of Pakistan. However, statistics tell a different story. Make up half of the population of Pakistan yet, they hold 20% of the seats in the National Assembly of Pakistan. Despite the claims of fair representation, the data shows a clear gap between men's and women's representation. Research has indeed been conducted in Pakistan discussing how patriarchy and socio-economic factors impede women's participation in politics. My research investigates the nexus between elitism and socioeconomic factors along with various normative constraints that pose challenges to women's meaningful participation in the politics of Pakistan. This research unveils how in Pakistan the dominance of elite or dynastic political parties has excessively contributed to the social exclusion of marginalized groups, especially women from politics. The political

dynasties their deeply entrenched supremacy and authority of decision-making within the party leadership have posed significant challenges for common people, especially women to participate in the political process of Pakistan. Moreover, the research will investigate how elites exploit the reserved seat quota that was made to ensure fair female representation on the floor of Parliament.

1.3 Research Question

Q1. How significantly does the political dominance of Pakistan's elite class inhibit the participation of non-elite citizens in the country's political processes?

Q2. What are the underlying reasons or societal factors that contribute to the lower participation of women in politics in Pakistan?

Q3. How to counter the challenges faced by Pakistani women to constructively participate in the politics of Pakistan?

1.4 Research Objectives

1. To investigate the extent to which the political dominance of Pakistan's elite class undermines the participation of non-elites.
2. To identify the reasons that hinder women from reaching leadership positions in the politics of Pakistan.
3. To identify effective strategies that can promote women's empowerment.

1.5 Literature Review

In this process of feminine political denaturalization and power exchange, in terms of political change, the idea of liberal feminism shines brighter. As it can be seen, similar to the change from passive bystanders into direct participant-animators of multi-aspect conflicts, this attitude calls for a radical social metamorphosis concerning politics and women. It aims to erase deeply structural and sediment masculinities and masculinization, as adaptation does in media of grand challenges.

1.6 Theoretical Framework and Review of Literature

1.6.1 Liberalist Feminist Perspective

Liberal feminism, rooted in the 17th and 18th centuries, aligns with the political and economic transformations brought about by the French and American revolutions. As society shifted from feudalism to industrialization and monarchy to democracy, liberal politics emphasizing individual liberties, democratic governance, and equal rights emerged. Liberal feminism, a reformist ideology, advocates for gender equality in marriage, education, work, and politics. Historically focused on legal equality, liberal feminism has achieved milestones in certain Western nations by prohibiting gender-based discrimination. Despite progress, legal gender equality doesn't guarantee comprehensive equality, necessitating the continued relevance of liberal feminism. Since the 1970s, increased labor force participation for women has challenged traditional roles, but sexual segregation in occupations persists, influencing wage disparities.

While women's representation in politics has improved, gender gaps persist in various leadership roles. Advocates argue that more women in positions of power could bring positive changes aligned with progressive values. Liberal feminism, with its foundation in liberalism, prioritizes individual autonomy, equal opportunities, and democratic governance, making it a more populist ideology. Recognizing contemporary complexities, liberal feminism remains crucial in the ongoing pursuit of legal and comprehensive gender equality (Lorber 1997, 9).

1.6.2 Gender Inclusivity in Politics

Diversity plays a role, in fostering democracies and is closely intertwined with achieving gender equality. Democratic political parties actively promote a political environment where every citizen has the freedom to express their thoughts, where no individual or group is left out from policy discussions, and where diverse interests and needs are acknowledged and respected. However political parties often face challenges in fulfilling their responsibilities to establish democracies. Their internal structures and financial operations may lack transparency. Their party cultures might be influenced by elitism, male dominance, or discriminatory practices. Many scholars and activists argue that incorporating women into politics through measures aimed at increasing their participation and representation would contribute to the development of institutions and promote social justice (Phillips 1995, 42).

While Europe, Latin America, and Africa rank highest with over 30 percent representation of women in parliament according to UN Women (2014) other regions like the Middle East and the Pacific trail behind. Although there has been progress in increasing the number of women

representatives, in parliaments achieving gender parity in representation remains a process. The Scandinavian nations are, at the forefront with 41 percent of their parliamentarians being female while certain countries, in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa, also show progress. Several initiatives promoting action have yielded outcomes and numerous political parties have implemented reforms accordingly.

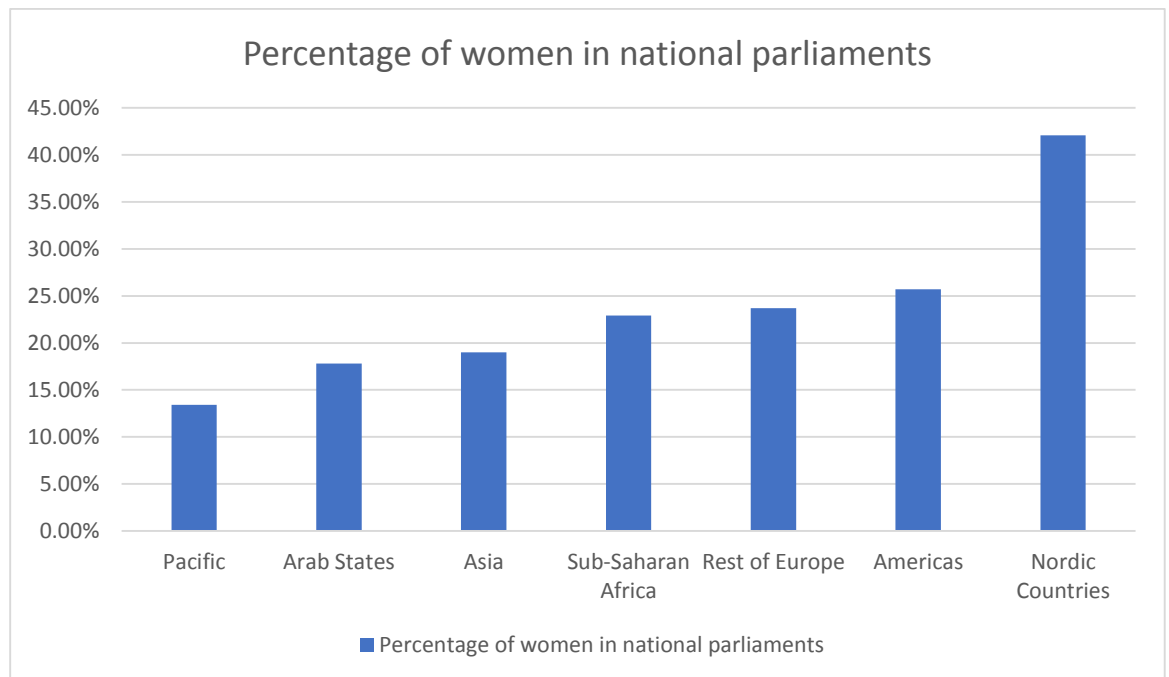


Figure 1.1: Percentage of Women in National Parliaments

Source: (National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, 2015)

The participation of women, in spaces brings about changes in how society perceives their presence in the arena. It also creates role models that other women can look up to ultimately reducing prejudice against women’s leadership and promoting their inclusion in politics over time (Bierema 2016). Research conducted on government and community forums in developing countries reveals that when women have voice public resources are allocated to address important issues such as child health, access to water, and employment opportunities for women (UN Women 2014). However, it is important to note that simply enabling access for women to office does not automatically guarantee the promotion of a gender equity agenda in policymaking. Women are not a group; factors such as class, caste, ethnicity, and racial interests play a role in shaping the actions of female representatives. Similar to their male counterparts they. May not prioritize gender equity concerns depending on factors like the

context they operate within available opportunities for advocacy the existence of a gender mandate within their party's framework or connections, with women's movement actors. Additionally, they also consider the consequences associated with promoting gender equity concerns (Lwamba et al. 2022,).

There is a body of research that indicates differences, in the legislative styles and strategies of male and female lawmakers. We have limited knowledge about how these differences impact the legislative effectiveness of each group. It has been found that women tend to be legislators compared to their male counterparts. Academic studies exploring this topic have suggested that gender plays a role in explaining behavior and interactions within legislative contexts. Several studies conducted by Bratton and Haynie (1999), Burrell (1996), Reingold (1992), Saint-Germain (1989), Thomas (1991), Swers (2002), Volden et al. (2018) have demonstrated that female legislators are more inclined than male legislators to introduce bills related to "women issues" such as education, child care, and family health legislation. The Beijing Declaration seeks gender equality in decision-making, yet global parity remains unrealized. However, quotas have boosted progress: countries with legislated quotas witnessed a 5% rise in parliamentary and 7% in governmental female representation (UN Women 2024). Evidence strongly supports women's leadership, enhancing decision-making outcomes. So, the concept of gender inclusion in politics goes beyond the simple tally of women holding elected office. Equality, justice, and fairness are their guiding ideals, and they aim to rectify the structural and historical injustices that have kept women out of political arenas. Studies reveal that inclusive political structures result in more inclusive and representative policymaking, which promotes the welfare of the whole populace (UN Women 2019).

When talking about Pakistan, gender inequality endures in Pakistan, restricting the involvement of women in political affairs. Cultural norms, discriminatory practices, and limited access to resources and knowledge have exacerbated this mismatch. Realizing that something has to change, advocates and decision-makers have stepped up their efforts to improve gender parity in the political sphere in an attempt to establish a setting where women may actively participate in determining the course of the country. Pakistani women need more political representation for several reasons. For starters, it ensures that more perspectives and experiences are considered during decision-making. Our diversity allows us to create inclusive policies that fulfill the needs of all residents, regardless of gender. A gender-balanced legislature is more likely to prioritize social welfare, healthcare, and education (Rana 2022; Gul, Taj, and Zaman 2023).

More women in politics challenge gender norms and promote equality. By challenging gender conventions, women in politics inspire younger women to enter politics. This cascade could change society's perspective of women's leadership and ability. Having more women in politics helps ensure that laws and policies address gender-specific issues (George 2019). Reproductive rights, economic empowerment, and women's violence are covered. Without enough representation, these important topics may go unnoticed, perpetuating gender prejudice. Gender inclusion is crucial, but Pakistani politics presents challenges. Patriarchal structures, cultural beliefs, and change resistance are obstacles. Recently implemented gender quotas and awareness efforts reflect a greater commitment to eliminating these challenges (George 2019).

1.6.3 Historical and Cultural Context of Gender

Given the historical and cultural narratives that have sustained a patriarchal political culture, gender inequality in Pakistani politics is a deeply ingrained issue. Before partition, when patriarchal social institutions predominated, gender inequality in Pakistani politics first emerged. Further entrenching gender roles and restricting women to the home was the effect of British colonialism. Long-lasting cultural traditions continued to influence political dynamics after independence, preventing women from actively participating in politics, even despite early promises of equal rights (FES Asia Editorial 2023). British colonial rule had an impact on gender norms and cultural institutions in the early 20th century, ahead of the partition.

The pre-1947 colonial government in British India established a legal system mirroring and often reinforcing prevailing patriarchal norms. Women's social status was negatively impacted by the Act, which also strengthened discrimination against them based only on their gender. Educational practices were imposed by the British colonial authorities, who, although they offered certain educational possibilities, frequently upheld gendered roles. Women's exposure to a wider range of educational and professional prospects was restricted by this segregation, which upheld the stereotype that women belonged in the home (Tiphagne 2015). Academic establishment-maintained gender-based segregation, and curricula occasionally perpetuated stereotypical ideas about male and female roles.

Deeply ingrained cultural traditions persisted in influencing political dynamics even after independence, even after Pakistan was established and democratic principles implemented. A society shaped by centuries of patriarchal dominance was passed down to the nation. Laws about equal rights developed over time, but they were not always upheld by society or enforced

effectively. Economic inequities between men and women have been sustained in Pakistan through the historical preference for male heirs under inheritance rules. More limiting women's participation in politics was the cultural expectation that they should put family responsibilities ahead of public service. In many instances, women were restricted to the private sphere and did not influence governmental decision-making or the creation of public policy. Further solidifying the patriarchal system in families and communities was the patrilineal nature of property and wealth inheritance. Women's financial independence and autonomy were further eroded by this reliance on male family members, which affected their capacity to participate in politics (Snellinger 2019).

In Pakistan's early years, political power was concentrated among elite men, setting a precedent of exclusion for women in politics. Cultural norms and limited educational opportunities hindered their participation in constitutional discussions and legislative bodies (Asian Development Bank 2000; Farzana Shaikh 2009). Women's marginalization in decision-making persisted due to their absence in crucial constitutional drafting and limited representation in early legislatures, exacerbated by societal perceptions of women's roles. Additionally, their restricted educational prospects hampered women's access to political arenas. Notwithstanding the establishment of educational institutions, women's access to formal education was impeded by social and cultural hurdles. Because of the widespread perception that a woman's place was in the home, not in academia or politics, few women possessed the educational background required to engage in politics actively.

1.6.4 Patriarchal Political Culture

The patriarchal political culture in Pakistan hinders women's political engagement. Male leadership has dominated political institutions and parties, resulting in masculine decision-making and policy development. The informal networks and power structures that control Pakistani politics reflect its patriarchal nature. Women have trouble entering decision-making circles because these networks reject them. Informal hurdles and blatant gender biases make political roles difficult for women. Throughout the 20th century, major Pakistani political parties like the PPP and Pakistan Muslim League (N) lacked female leaders, relegating women to symbolic roles within male-dominated leadership systems (Wu and Ali 2020). In a patriarchal political landscape, male leaders made decisions, limiting women's influence on party agendas. Informal networks historically disadvantaged women, reinforcing gender biases and restricting their entry into decision-making circles during regimes like those of Generals

Ayub Khan and Zia-ul-Haq (Shah 2021). Despite efforts like the 2000 devolution plan's reserved seats for women in local administration, patriarchal norms persisted, sidelining women in decision-making and reflecting institutional gender biases (Zamurrad Awan 2022).

1.6.5 Women's Limited Representation in Pakistani Politics

Pakistan's limited female political representation reflects patriarchal norms. In a male-dominated political environment, patriarchal standards hinder women's political engagement. Women were further disenfranchised from politics under General Zia-ul-Haq's severe regulations from 1977 to 1988. By restricting women's rights and public involvement, Zia's regime encouraged fundamentalist Islam. The Hudood Ordinances of 1979 curtailed women's legal rights and promoted victim-blaming in sexual assault cases. The Zina Ordinance forbade extramarital affairs and disproportionately harmed women because they were more likely to be wrongly charged. Zia also reduced women's public visibility. Conventional attire rules and a more conventional role for women reinforced the perception that women ruled the home. These restrictions created social and institutional hurdles to women's political participation that persisted after Zia's presidency (Shabir and Mahmood 2020). This restricted women's freedom and created a culture of fear that hindered political participation. Due to these laws' legal and social effects, which maintained patriarchal standards, women could not participate in politics without fear of legal and social retaliation.

1.6.6 Analysis of Women Leaders in Pakistani Politics

In such a patriarchal-dominated political arena, Benazir Bhutto made history for Pakistan and the globe as the first Muslim-majority woman leader. Benazir Bhutto started politics with lofty hopes and a legacy as the daughter of former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. In the 1980s, she bucked patriarchal Pakistani politics to rise to prominence. Despite her advantages, Bhutto faced obstacles in a gender-biased political environment. She courageously led the fight against patriarchal policies that oppressed women (Harnsamut 2020). Her legacy continues to inspire generations of women globally to break barriers and advocate for gender equality in political arenas.

Pakistan's misogyny plagued Bhutto's political career. Her gender was condemned more than her policies or actions as a strong woman. Her attractiveness and personal life were often covered more than her political skills, reinforcing the idea that women's worth was based on their appearance and choices. Political opponents and critics utilized gender stereotypes to

portray her as emotionally unstable or unfit for leadership. Gender bias overshadowed Bhutto's politics. Unfortunately, patriarchal political customs dampened her successes and prevented her from embracing her change-making leadership. Sensationalized media coverage eclipsed Bhutto's policy proposals and political triumphs. Media biases hampered women's political leadership (The Express Tribune 2021). These attacks reinforced the belief that women cannot lead nations.

Despite challenges, Benazir Bhutto's legacy proves women can alter politics. Her overcoming of gender-based obstacles inspired Pakistani and international women leaders. Bhutto expanded women's rights by allowing public participation. Bhutto's gender-inclusive policies increased women's rights. To address gender-specific law enforcement, she created women's police stations. This initiative addressed criminal justice gender concerns and women's protection. Gender-inclusive initiatives under Bhutto undermined male-centric government. She advocated for women's economic empowerment, education, and decision-making in office. In Pakistan, female equality was her foundation for confronting systemic inequity.

Not only Bhutto, but other prominent figures, like Fatima Jinnah and Kulsoom Nawaz have played a role in paving the way for the acceptance of leaders in Pakistan. However, despite their efforts women still face obstacles when it comes to participating in politics as reported by Tribune in 2022. In her article titled "Gendered Politics Prevail," investigative journalist Shahzia Mehboob sheds light on the gender imbalance in parliament (Tanoli 2022). Despite these challenges, Pakistani women continue to demonstrate resilience in politics going head-to-head with counterparts in areas where patriarchal norms hold sway.

1.6.7 Gendered Perspectives in Pakistani Politics: Contemporary Times

If we talk in the context of contemporary times, then a recent example from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa showcases both progress and the need for advancements towards achieving representation. During the government elections held in 17 districts of KPK history was made as women from conservative constituencies not only participated but also secured general seats alongside reserved ones. According to data from the Election Committee of Pakistan, a record-breaking number of women took part in these elections. Then 35,700 candidates contested at tehsil (sub-district) village and neighborhood council levels, among them were 3,900 women. In the phase, 4,214 female candidates competed for 2,383 seats with an additional 591 women running for positions, across three tribal districts (Khan 2022)

However, despite this progress, women faced limitations during public campaigns in these elections. For instance, Zainab Bibi and Kulsoom Bibi, successful candidates from Plodhir Village Council 1 in Mardan, had their campaign affairs managed by their husbands (Tanoli 2022). Intriguingly, election materials focused more on their husbands' details than featuring information about the two women. Farzana Ali recognizes that despite some of the progress made in increasing women's participation in politics throughout Pakistan's history, she also warns that these victories should not be seen as the elimination of obstacles for women. Factors such as family politics, political backgrounds, and ideologies greatly influence the careers of politicians. Records indicate connections between female parliamentarians and leadership roles within prominent political parties like the Pakistan Muslim League (PLM N). While nepotism is not exclusive to women in politics it worsens the imbalanced gender ratio in parliament due to opportunities, for women and the various constraints they face (Tribune 2022).

Pakistani women encounter numerous obstacles hindering their political participation and representation, stemming from ingrained sexism, limited opportunities, cultural norms, and financial reliance. Sexism and misogyny persist in politics, reinforcing gender roles and sidelining women from leadership positions (Begum 2023, 45-46). Media scrutiny often fixates on women politicians' appearances rather than their achievements, as seen in Benazir Bhutto's case, highlighting the challenges women face due to biased coverage. Historical male-dominated structures and tokenistic measures further restrict women's influence in politics, despite affirmative action initiatives (Tiphagne 2015, 465). Educational disparities further exacerbate the challenges for women in Pakistani politics. Limited access to quality education and training hampers their ability to compete on an equal footing with men. Inadequate education perpetuates prejudices about women's leadership and hinders their grasp of political processes (Naheed et al. 2021; Chauhan 2014, 57-87).

Moreover, socio-cultural taboos discourage women from entering politics by emphasizing their domestic roles, isolating and tarnishing their reputations when engaged in public life (Michael 2019). Modesty and societal norms restrict women from freely expressing themselves in politics without fear of repercussions, further limiting their political participation. The contemporary landscape of Pakistani politics reflects both strides towards gender-inclusive representation and persistent challenges, requiring concerted efforts to dismantle barriers and foster a more equitable and inclusive political environment for women.

1.6.8 Unexplored Terrain: Gender Dynamics and Political Evolution in Pakistan

Despite advances, Pakistani politics' role of gender, particularly women, is understudied, preventing gender inclusion. Patriarchal norms, discriminatory regulations, and cultural barriers have prevented women from participating in politics, according to the literature assessment. Liberal feminist views and gender inclusion measures have improved, but women's political engagement remains limited. Founded on freedom, democracy, equality, and rights, liberal feminism promotes gender equality in marriage, education, employment, and politics. Despite legal gender equality, political gender equality is difficult to achieve (Arat 2015). Despite Pakistan's 1970s workforce feminization, women still confront sexual segregation in employment and pay, demonstrating persistent gender norms that deny gender inclusion. Limited confidence in political parties, exclusionary nomination procedures, violence, and hypermasculine party cultures hinder female inclusiveness in politics worldwide (Hubbard and Hubbard 2020). Women are underrepresented in politics in Pakistan due to historical and cultural issues, cultural norms, discrimination, low resources, and educational possibilities (FES Asia Editorial 2023).

Despite the detailed examination of patriarchal norms, historical and cultural influences, discriminatory practices, and the multifaceted challenges faced by women in Pakistani politics, there remains a notable dearth of comprehensive studies addressing the nuances and complexities within this domain. Additionally, while the literature highlights the presence of challenges like sexism, misogyny, educational constraints, and patriarchal structures, there is a dearth of empirical studies providing effective strategies or interventions to address these issues comprehensively. Therefore, the identified research gap emphasizes the need for empirical studies that delve deeper into the intersectional complexities of gender dynamics, explore the experiences of both male and female politicians, and offer concrete recommendations to address the multifaceted challenges hindering women's political participation and representation in Pakistan. Closing this gap through comprehensive research efforts would pave the way for more informed policies and interventions fostering gender equality and inclusive political governance in Pakistan

1.7 Research Gap

This study addresses the research gap that the social structure of elite nepotism in political parties has undermined common women's representation by exploiting the quota system in politics.

Chapter 2

LIBERAL FEMINISM IN THE CONTEXT OF PAKISTAN

2.1 Definition of Gender and Women's Representation in Politics

2.1.1 Gender and Its Significance in Society

Gender, which is a multi-dimensional concept, is the basis of the dominant notions of societal norms, roles, and expectations. When highlighting the aspects of gender, it is essential to emphasize that women are at the center of the discussion due to their historical background of being marginalized and underrepresented. Simone de Beauvoir's touching description of women as the "silent half of humanity" still strikes a deep chord today, reminding individuals of the significance of capturing women's voices and experiences within all debates on gender issues (Beauvoir 1949, 49). In most contexts, the approach of gender typically centers on women because they continue to face oppression and social boundaries. For the emergence of a more inclusive discourse that places diverse voices, experiences, and perceptions at the center of the entire gender equality process, equality of both men and women becomes unavoidable. Through acknowledging the historical injustices and complexities of women, a path for reform comes to light where gender biases become dismantled, and an inclusive environment is created where every person, regardless of their gender identity, can flourish. Language is a powerful instrument that reflects and shapes societal realities. Hierarchies in different areas of life have been traditionally expressed through gendered terms in many cases, with dominant individuals being presented in masculine terms and dependent ones in feminine terms (Budgeon 2014, 323). These linguistic means reflect the intrinsic power of gender norms over the social order and social relations.

2.1.2 Current Status of Women in Politics

Women's political participation still lags globally, which points to continuing gender gaps in leadership positions. However, even though women make up 50% of the world's population, they hold only around 20% of seats in the world's national parliaments (UN Women 2024). This underrepresentation goes all the way to the top leadership positions; 13 countries have a female head of state. What is more, women make up only 15% of ambassadors to the United Nations and only 17% of cabinet ministers worldwide (United Nations 2024). According to the

Global Gender Gap Index, if we increase women's presence in politics, gender inequality could be reduced, as determined by the Global Gender Gap Index (World Economic Forum 2021). Women in these areas of the public sector are the major players in the cause of gender equality. Policies allowing women to have seats in parliaments, as heads of state, in ministerial positions, and in public management are the key measures of gender gap reduction (Mastracci 2017, 4). Countries like Ghana, where women's leadership in politics and public life is on the decrease, may have to review affirmative action policies to ensure women's public engagement becomes more active (Bawa and Sanyare 2013, 283). Similarly, researchers claim that female voices in legislatures tend to increase the support for gender-related components in trade agreements. This implies the role of descriptive representation of women in affecting policy outcomes (Park and Shin 2023).

One hundred years ago, women won the right to vote in all countries, which symbolizes the progress made, but obstacles remain to attaining equality in political representation based on gender (Jackson 2010). The fact that change happens slowly reflects the fact that the systemic barriers and biases that prevent women from full participation and leadership in political spheres are indeed a problem. Many efforts are geared towards dealing with such disparities by dismantling the already deeply rooted gender norms and crafting inclusive policies that bolster women's emancipation. However, the data reflects the fact that women still encounter the problem of power and influence getting in the way of their political structures. Women's underrepresentation not only reduces the number of unique perspectives and different experiences but also feeds the existing injustices that oppose the progress toward gender equality (Laursen and Austin 2020). This review aims to analyze the interconnectedness between feminist theories, gender, and politics with particular emphasis on Pakistan and wider international contexts. We will review the theoretical frameworks, empirical studies, and modern discussions associated with these fields. Advocacy for greater women's representation in politics is crucial to achieving inclusive and equitable societies in which every citizen has an equal chance to participate in the decision-making processes.

2.2 Historical Perspective: Women's Role in Pakistani Politics from a Liberal Feminist Perspective

2.2.1 Overview of Pakistan's History

The past experiences women have had in the political sphere of Pakistan make up part of the political history of the country, and the narration of the political experience of women in

Pakistan reiterates the struggles women face in a patriarchal society. Femininity in politics historic obstetrics and contemporary opportunities and threats show that there were certain positive shifts in women's role in politics, but there were negative ones as well. The women in Pakistan have fought a long way to gain political power even though gender biases in the background of the country's politics have disempowered them.

2.2.2 Early Women's Activism

Temporary and permanent political activists in Pakistan women have continued to fight for women's rights, such freedoms as voting and education, among others. Despite lacking support from male-dominated structures of education and governance, these early female activists provided a clue to the fundamental tenets of female participation in politics (Thompson 2002). Such achievements were used as a key to navigating through the social barriers and battle for women's rights to participate in political life equally.

2.2.3 Post-Independence Period

After the partition in 1947, Pakistani women had a raised standard of exercising their right to political activity, but this was limited. Females were more active in political events, but their participation was restricted to junior management capacities for the most part (Muhammad, Abbas, and Waris 2022). It is in this light that external forces such as military coups continued to support the reinforcement of Patriarchal structures that locked out women from the political spheres and key executive decisions. This period showed the limitations that women's hormones experienced in transforming their standard gender assignments and norms in their society.

2.2.4 Military Coups and Exclusion of Women

Military coups in Pakistan left little room for preferable patriarchal systems, and women were excluded from political processes even more. The likes of banning women from engaging in politics during these turbulent periods only served to cement further gender inequalities and the exclusion of women from participation and decision-making forums (Tabassum 2011; B. Asif 2017). The use of the military regarding the political rights of women brought out the bolts that restricted women in their quest to achieve equal political status in the political system of the country.

2.2.5 Women's Activism for Liberation

Women's activism embraced liberation and critical stances to challenge and transform or overthrow the patriarchal structures that upheld Pakistan's gender inequality (I. Asif 2018). Nevertheless, empowered women activists did not sit idle; they only had barriers to press for change and gender-sensitive political systems. They were able to stand up for equality and ensure that oppressive structures were removed, paving the way for positive change in equality rights within the political context.

2.2.6 Women in Political Parties

Pakistan has been a center of politics boat regarding women's role in political parties and their participation; some of them are trying to give women a chance, while others are completely against women. The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) can be identified as making efforts to promote the status of women in the capacity of its members, which is more effective than other parties that had a hard time accepting the idea of gender diversity (Bano 2009). The struggle among women to be allowed to be included in political parties is what contributes to the problems that women may encounter when it comes to partaking in leadership and policymaking.

2.3 Theoretical Framework: Liberal Feminism in the Context of Pakistan

2.3.1 Introduction to Liberal Feminism

The development of liberal feminism can be determined during the Enlightenment of the late 18th and early 19th centuries which was based upon the principles of the liberal political theory of the time that stressed such principles as individual rights, liberties, and equality. Thus one of the most significant early texts used is Mary Wollstonecraft's "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman" published in 1792 to detail the education and rights of women (Wollstonecraft 2016). Suffragism as a political movement developed in the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with suffragists struggling for women's right to vote, major triumphs of which include the ratification of the nineteenth amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America in 1920. It implies the struggle for women's rights and legal recognition of these rights, equal rights for women in education, work, and political life while keeping the existing social hierarchy intact. This has transformed, encompassing all types of discrimination and even demanding changes in policies to do away with gender inequality. One of the important opinions that should be used to increase the status of women and their presentation in Pakistan is liberal feminism. It supports women's rights in employment, pay gaps, and

education; it focuses on women's injustices in social and legal settings within the paradigm of present frameworks of society (Shakeel 2021; Zia 2010). This is a good stance for women in politics in Pakistan because it creates an occasion to extend gender-neutral practice and women's legislative power. This explains the adherences of equity and fairness to women in the Public and private realms, this is key in transforming hegemonic powers towards a transformative political culture.

Nevertheless, it has to be pointed out that liberal feminism is particularly relevant to the country of Pakistan, in which women have been treated as the second sex and where female parliamentary electorate has been non-existent. It can be stated beyond question that the demand for equal rights and opportunities is crucial to breaking through the frames of patriarchal and gendered thinking and hatred that limit women politically (Saigol and Chaudhary 2020). Thus, liberal feminism in terms of gender equality and its promotion of women as political leaders is helpful providing equal success of every citizen regardless of his gender. This movement is based on three practices; equality, individualism, as well as voting rights for women. These principles are especially important in order to address the structural factors which still linger on which are a barrier to women being involved in the active participation in determining the political future of the country. Recognizing equal opportunities and rights for women, liberal feminism can help to increase opportunities for the representation of women in politics and therefore it could be claimed that leading to the decrease of gender inequality the capacity of the Global Gender Gap Index will rise (Russell, Oswald, and Cotter 2024).

2.3.2 Significance for Women in Politics

Analyzing the role of women in politics in Pakistan, liberal feminism is important for reasons as it presents an essential model for the advancement of women's rights and their representation in politics. From this standpoint, it is stressed that women should have the same chances and the same rights as men in the workplace and beyond (Azizah and Fitri 2020; Malik et al. 2021). Due to its emphasis on the concepts of gender equality and voting rights for women, liberal feminism plays a crucial role in combating the structures of power that prevented Pakistani women from being active participants in political decision-making processes in the past. Even today, women in Pakistan have been locked out of the political process more than any time in the past because the society remains highly patriarchal, and prejudices against women are deeply embedded (Khayyam and Tahir 2019). Thus, liberal feminism offers practical ways to

achieve the goal of equal rights and opportunities for women in the political sphere to ensure the institution of women in the decision-making processes.

In addition, liberal feminism advocates for equality reforms of women from the existing structures via legal and social changes (Arat 2015). This is especially important for Pakistan, where certain actions like reserved seats in Parliament to allow women representation have been taken. Another challenge, however, has been the weak implementation of these measures and the continued existence of normative frameworks that do not support women's exercise of political power. Liberal feminism has therefore advocated for affirmative action to be vigorously applied in organizations and for an environment to be fostered for women to engage fully in political activities and policy making.

2.3.2 Comparison with Islamic Feminism

Though Islamic feminism tries to balance women's status with Islamic teachings, it does not always emphasize the social and legal changes required on the political level in Pakistan to empower women. While Islamic feminism may advocate for gender equality within the framework of Islamic law and teachings, it may not always focus on the institutional reforms that will enable women to overcome the challenges they encounter in leadership positions. On the other hand, liberal feminism is more relevant to women's politics in Pakistan since it focuses on women's liberties and equal opportunities for women in the workplace and the family domain (Shakeel 2021; Malik et al. 2021). This view is particularly important for strengthening women's political participation and their rights because it emphasizes the pursuit of progressive changes and justice for women in the framework of current legal and cultural contexts. According to this view, liberal feminism is the lens through which change in Pakistan's current power relations and political culture can be initiated (Hirudayaraj and Shields 2019). Hence, liberal feminism, with its focus on equality, individuality, and the political enfranchisement of women, provides a roadmap to women's political mobilization that is not always consistent with that of Islamic feminists. Hence, it can be seen that even though Islamic feminism and liberal feminism may have different focal points, the two are not mutually exclusive. A few of these scholars have called for legal reforms and social changes similar to those supported by liberal feminists. However, in the context of Pakistan, where women have limited access to politics because of highly pervasive cultural prejudices and biases, liberal feminism offers a more straightforward and efficient way of navigating these issues.

2.3.4 *Historical Context*

Pakistani Parliament The quota for women who reserved seats was raised from 10 to 20 in 1985. This was a crucial development towards pushing for women's political rights in the country. However, only in 2002, under the rule of General Pervez Musharraf, did the reserved seats for women increase to 60 more (Hussain 2022). This increase in reserved seats was a significant breakthrough in the efforts for women's political enfranchisement in Pakistan. The increase in the number of reserved seats for women in the Pakistan parliament in 2002 was a significant step that sought to increase women's voice and influence in the nation's political leadership (Hussain 2022; Jabeen 2021). This policy change was a major positive development towards the recognition of women's rights, empowering women, and changing the structure of politics in Pakistan to make it fairer and equal for women.

2.4 *Feminist Perspective*

2.4.1 *Present-Day Political Landscape*

Using the lens of liberal feminism, it is possible to identify both advancements and ongoing issues with women's current position in the Pakistani political landscape. Over the years, women have emerged as active players in the political systems through the establishment of reserved parliamentary seats. The improved representation of women in elected positions has enabled women to speak out and play an active role in policymaking. Nevertheless, it must be remembered that women in Pakistani politics remain constrained by structural barriers that hinder them from participating in political activities. The lack of equality in the measures that seek to empower women in politics, for instance, through seat reservation, has been a problem (Hussain 2022). The women who occupy these reserved seats often lack the real power to make decisions and are met with lots of opposition from male personnel. It is also important to note that the male-dominated culture and conventional gender roles limit women's access to public space. Women operate in a patriarchal political context, with, more often than not, marginalizing and rejecting the call to amplify their voices and make decisions on matters affecting their societies (Hussain 2022). These are some of the reasons that can inhibit women from fully participating in politics and campaigning for their rights. To overcome these challenges, liberal feminism adopts strategies that include legal reform, policy activism, and social change. These policies should include legislation measures to protect women from violence and discrimination and create opportunities for political careers for women. At the

same time, more attention should be paid to changing people's perceptions of the roles of gender through public campaigns, informative programs, and movements against gender stereotypes.

2.4.2 Legislative Measures and Reserved Seats

Women's quota in the lower house of the Parliament has been another executed step towards empowering women politically in Pakistan (Hussain 2022). This policy, also significantly extended in 2002, has contributed greatly to the elevation of the percentage of women in parliaments and to their ability to raise awareness of female issues and participate in the decision-making process. Significant steps have been taken to increase women's voices in Pakistani politics and allow women to sit in Parliament through the allocation of reserved seats. With reserved seats, the policy seeks to ensure that women can participate in legislative processes since they will have a chance to address legislative concerns that are most important to them as women and to their society. However, as mentioned previously, the measures of reserved seats have been found to have some positive effects, which, in this case, have been observed to be compromised by the variation in the rate of implementation as well as the prevalence of traditional prejudice that endorses male domination in Pakistan. Women occupying these reserved seats usually lack the power and authority to make actual decisions and to impact, resulting from resistance by male officials and from a political culture that remains dominated by gender biases (Begum 2023). The social-cultural factors in politics that strive to uphold male supremacy and an inequitable share of power/fair representation remain a challenge to women in realizing the full potential of their reserved seats. Thus, if the system of reserved seats is to be inclusive and ensure women play an active role in politics, then systematically restricting women's political agency within legislative organs needs to be eliminated.

2.5 Reasons Why Women Do Not Make It to Leadership Positions in Politics: A Liberal Feminist Perspective

From a liberal feminist standpoint, the reasons why women in Pakistan face challenges in attaining leadership positions in politics are deeply rooted in the patriarchal structure of society and the uneven distribution of power and resources. Let us examine these barriers through the lens of liberal feminism:

2.5.1 Patriarchal Norms and Gender Stereotypes

The official sponsorship of women and politics revived; nevertheless, women are still faced

with some challenges and barriers in their interactions that limit their political activism in Pakistan. These challenges are rooted in the existing culture, which is highly influenced by the patriarchal system and unequal relations between men and women in terms of power and opportunities. Women in ethnic politics are often deterred by the perceived threat of violence, harassment, or intimidation when they enter the political arena. This, coupled with physical violence, verbal abuse, and stalking, has been at the forefront of discouraging women from presenting their candidature for political seats and attending political activities and forums (CPDI 2023; Jejeebhoy and Bott 2003). This hostile environment leads to the demotivation of women from embracing political engagements by fostering a culture of intimidation.

However, it is cognizant that education and resources are also unevenly distributed in society, which amplifies the disparity in political consciousness as well. It is rather worrisome to observe that the majority of the women in Pakistan are illiterate or are educationally disadvantaged, a factor that hinders their potential to acquire quality knowledge and skills that are crucial for political participation (Awan 2016). This situation demonstrates the lack of resources that can be given to women, including funds to support them and provide them with valuable mentorship to encourage them in their initiative and fight for their rights in political processes.

Many Pakistani women still face restrictions because of their gender as well as due to the prevailing culture, which does not allow them to compete on equal ground in politics. A culture of patriarchal values and gender prejudices that regard political activity as the sphere exclusively for men remains strong, which hinders women's striving for political careers (I. Asif 2018; Hussain 2022). With the availability of phrases such as 'the political wife,' political leadership is viewed as a domain that women should not consider, let alone venture into. The following main challenges are a result of the issue of low representation of women in decision-making posts. Studies found that the continued appointment of women in decision-making positions affecting political parties and government structures means that the view that women cannot lead is still predominant (Mufti and Jalalzai 2021). It means that having no obvious examples of female politicians or limited access to female political mentors might put other women off from actively seeking political positions themselves.

It is now necessary to take a broad treaty to address the above-mentioned ongoing challenges and barriers. This entails affirmative action, with legal frameworks governing the rights of women and their protection as provided by the constitution, women's representation in the

formulation of laws and policies, and systematic and effective implementation of affirmative action policies (Chauhan 2014; Zia 2010). Similarly, appropriate attempts should be made to transform social practices of patriarchy and gender stereotyping by using media as well as launching awareness and educational programs and advocacy for gender equity (Chauhan 2014). They are providing women with relevant training and orientations, supporting them in finding suitable mentors, and connecting them to potential supporters in politics, business, and the media to increase women's presence and give them the tools to contribute actively to the political decision-making processes. It is also important to acknowledge the need to establish structures that fit women and allow them to focus on political power in equal measure so they can attend to their family responsibilities.

2.5.2 Lack of Support from Political Parties

Liberal feminism also reveals that most of the parties in Pakistan avoid giving women the senior positions that they deserve because of their prejudices and also because they give preference to male candidates. This lack of support from within the political system poses challenges that frustrate women's chances of occupying leadership positions (Haeri 2002). Much as women participate in politics actively, they struggle to get senior positions within the parties and, hence, have minimal influence over leadership decisions. Thus, Liberal feminism has urged political parties to support and provide women with opportunities to lead and participate in organizational and decision-making structures. The idea of liberal feminism seeks to dismantle patriarchy's influence within political parties and increase the number of women in leadership roles in politics so that they can involve themselves in policymaking processes.

2.5.3 Uneven Implementation of Affirmative Action

Although measures like reserved seats in the Parliament have been incorporated to increase women's political representation in Pakistan, these have not yielded the desired results, mainly due to a lack of smooth implementation accompanied by the culture of the society, which does not support women's political independence. Most of those women who are fortunate to be sitting in these reserved seats often do not have decision-making powers, and their male counterparts resist them. This differential utilization of affirmative action measures denies women the full opportunity to exercise their political potential and shape policies. As one of its main tenets, liberal feminism insists on the strict compliance of affirmative action measures and the development of conditions favorable to Women's suffrage and their impact on policy

(Zia 2017). Liberal feminism, therefore, works to support affirmative action measures and eliminate the barriers that hinder women's political subjectivity to prepare a political environment in which women can participate and engage in politics on an equitable basis with their male counterparts.

2.5.4 Gendered Division of Labor

In this case, women are forced between two stools, working both as housewives and politicians. By the time they have accomplished the former, time for the latter is usually over. This traditional division of labor is entrenched in patriarchal structures, which impose unreasonable demands on women and limit their ability to participate actively in politics and leadership. According to liberal feminism, there should be a fair sharing of tasks within households, and the adoption of social arrangements that will let women wishing to be politicians do so while fully caring for their families (Hussain 2022; Trask 2013). As the body of feminism that disputes the gender roles that suggest that women are to be seen as homemakers and caregivers while ignoring their potential as political leaders, liberal feminism recognizes the reality and need for women to maintain their careers and family responsibilities at the same time. One way of accomplishing this is through the provision of additional structures, including childcare facilities as well as flexible working arrangements, to ensure that women can freely pursue their political ambitions without being held back by the responsibility of caring for a family. It can lighten the workload of these female human beings, and they can effectively engage themselves in political activities and leadership to the extent that they encounter some level of difficulty.

2.5.5 Lack of Mentorship and Networking Opportunities

Pakistani women do not have the informal contacts and role models that male politicians obtain to advance in their careers. This may reduce their capacity to navigate the political arena and establish the key connections for promotion. Liberal feminism has called for the establishment of mentorship and networking of female candidates in politics, as well as opportunities for women in politics (Ali and Rasheed 2021). These programs can help a woman get the necessary information and recommendations from experienced politicians and activists. Mentorship can assist women in achieving their goals, overcoming barriers to entry into politics, and becoming strong leaders. Also, social interaction gives female politicians a platform through which they can exchange ideas, strategies, and goals concerning women's participation in politics. These

platforms empower women to create the networks and contacts needed to excel in the political arena.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

The method that was used in this research to respond to the main research question on how patriarchal discourses unfolded in the transformation of the power regime in Pakistan, the suffering of women in politics, and the sort of efforts that should be mobilized to make alterations in the Pakistani state for improving gender parity was the qualitative research method. The first important area noticed in the literature was the lack of literature with broad data searches for politically tracing gender in Pakistan and the approach taken in the current study is empirical-ar Bowen. To obtain comprehensive and specific information for HR on the socio-cultural, legal, and institutional barriers that confine women to political activities and representation, this research work employed the interview method with some male and female politicians and gender ambassadors. Consequently, the present study was planned to fill this void and therefore this investigation has quantifiable recommendations to tackle the malaise and devise practical solutions for enhancing political culture in Pakistan.

3.1 Research Design

To analyze the research questions posed in this study, this research work embraced a liberal feminist perspective and a qualitative research design to understand the dynamic gender relationships in Pakistani politics and the political power shifts. This is because the quality approach that was adopted was likely to give an elaborate understanding of participants' experiences, beliefs, and perceptions that are richly described (Creswell and Poth 2016). The study employed targeted interviews with both male and female politicians and academics who specialize in gender issues to ensure a broad pool of voices and experiences were captured.

3.2 Data Collection Methods

3.2.1 In-Depth, Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi structured interview is a part of qualitative research which uses a general guide that contains set of questions but allows change in the topic depending on the answer given. This approach involves the use of an interview schedule that is semi structured in the sense that it contains list topics and sub topics against which the participant is interviewed and the

interviewer can ask other related questions based on the responses given by the participant. This method makes it a must to cover the general areas of interest then flexibility allows one to explore other areas that may come up during the discussion, hence getting as much detail as possible.

Semi-structured interviews were used in this study which helped in capturing the. Multiply and gendered perspectives of the politicians and gender studies scholars about the gender dynamics of political power in Pakistan. Using semi-structured interviews was particularly appropriate for this study because it allowed participants to respond to questions freely to capture any other theme that could emerge during the study. This method enabled the identification of socio-cultural, legal, and institutional challenges that women face within the political leadership arena, and therefore, analyzed the options that could be used to enhance political women's leadership.

- **Participants:** The participants were selected from independent male and female politicians and Officials from various political parties as well as authors specializing in Gender studies. This ensured a comprehensive representation of perspectives (Guest, Namey, and Mitchell 2013).
- **Interview Guide:** The following open-ended questions were prepared and used in a semi-structured interview manner during the study. This approach created openings for the participants to share their experiences and information and at the same time ensured that critical themes about the dynamics of gender, political challenges, and matters related to gender equity and power were addressed (Bryman 2016).
- **Audio Recording:** Where possible, participants were asked if they could allow the interviews to be tape-recorded to improve the accuracy of the Information gathered to help in analysis (Patton 2002:308).

3.2.2 Participant Selection

Sampling Techniques: This study utilized both, snowball and purposeful sampling. The first contacts nominated other eligible participants especially the difficult to reach, thus guaranteeing sample diverseness and importance. Subsampling or purposive sampling further narrowed down the process with regard to the participants' experience, knowledge and relation to the goals of the study (Palinkas et al. 2015).

Criteria: Only politically active individuals or those involved in gender-related studies were chosen, as such, the chosen participants were expected to have a wealth of information to solve the research questions.

3.3 Data Analysis

3.3.1 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was one of the forms of qualitative data analysis technique that helped to derive, code, analyze, and report findings in the form of patterns in the collected data. It entailed going through the interview tapes and other textual data methodically, to identify key themes and concepts about the research questions. Through coding of the data and sorting the codes into categories, analysts would be in a position to analyze the results efficiently due to the categorization of data into evident themes. The approach of the thematic analysis gives a lot of flexibility in analyzing qualitative data in a way that can enable the researcher to consider both the manifest and latent content of the data. The approach therefore helped develop a rich and detailed understanding of the research topic.

- **Coding:** The interview transcripts were analyzed thematically to discover the patterns, themes, and meaning of gender and politics of political participation. This process incorporated the use of templates to analyze the data to identify emerging patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
- **Triangulation:** In light of this, data were cross-checked using an agreed format for participants from the different categories to make the results more credible. This enabled the confirmation of emerging themes and obtained credibility for the interpretations made in this study (Denzin 2017).

3.3.2 Interpretation

Liberal Feminist Framework: In line with the research questions, the data were analyzed using liberal feminism where the discursive focus was placed on gendered understandings of power transfer and abrasive experiences of women in the political sphere. This framework helped identify socio-cultural, legal, and institutional enablers and barriers to gender equality and in the generation of strategies as recommended by Tong (2018) in her work.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Informed Consent: Participants were fully informed about the research objectives,

procedures, potential risks, and benefits. Written consent was obtained before conducting interviews (Israel and Hay 2006).

Confidentiality and Anonymity: The identities of participants were kept confidential, and their responses were anonymized to protect their privacy. Data was securely stored and only accessible to the research team (Wiles et al. 2007).

Cultural Sensitivity: The research was conducted with respect for cultural norms and sensitivities, ensuring that interactions with participants were conducted ethically and respectfully (Liamputtong 2010, 15).

By employing this qualitative research design, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the gendered dynamics in Pakistani politics, uncover the root causes of gender inequality and offer actionable recommendations for fostering a more inclusive and equitable political environment.

3.5 Limitations

Several meaningful limitations of this research were experienced as follows. Thirdly, it was relatively challenging to identify the participants who were willing to give the interviews on the topic of maintaining the barriers for women in Pakistan politics. Among the responses that several potential participants provided include reluctance to be part of the research project, or a flat-out refusal to participate. This made the task somewhat challenging as it cut a swathe through subjects and sources that could be used during research. Second, when trying to get consent from the participants, even if some agreed to participate in the study, some number of people never picked up the phone calls, never responded to the emails, or later on withdrew their consent to participate in the study. However, such inequality of participation brings another question, since it restrained the number of participants and may have excluded more trivial reports, delivering data from people who remained interested only till the end of the process. Finally, all the interviews that were conducted were mostly in Urdu which inevitably called for transcription by the researcher. This process was extremely slow and also caused chances of having incorrect transcriptions. Further, the actual responses collected from the participants might have been lost in translation from Urdu to English because some meanings might be lost while translating into English which may have an impact on the overall understanding and analysis of the collected data. Nonetheless, all effort was prioritized in ensuring the credibility and dependability of the transcriptions and the analysis that followed.

Chapter 4

FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

The results of this study respond to the following research questions. How significantly does the political dominance of Pakistan's elite class inhibit the participation of non-elite citizens, both men and women, in the country's political processes? What are the underlying reasons or societal factors that contribute to the lower participation of women in politics in Pakistan? How can gender equality be promoted in the politics of Pakistan? Also, the chapter synthesizes the existing literature on the research gap, the social structure of elite nepotism in political parties has undermined common women's representation by exploiting the quota system in politics.

In this paper, the overall experience from the interviews conducted is used to define and further explain the major issues that all centered on the political status of women and the factors that contributed to the continued prevalence of gender inequalities. Furthermore, the assessment acknowledges that the struggle exists for men in Pakistani politically too although differently from women. Moreover, a comparison of this situation to the developed countries also helps in encompassing these issues.

4.1 How significantly does the Political dominance of Pakistan's Elite class inhibit the participation of non-elite citizens in the country's Political Processes?

The following chapter explains how people from elite backgrounds get access to privileges like financial resources and how it poses challenges to people from Apolitical backgrounds. Moreover, it looks at how cultural practices along with institutional biases exacerbate the participation of people from a common background.

4.1.1 Elite Dominance & Hereditary politics: A Challenge for Non-Elite

The dominance of elite and specifically Hereditary politics in Pakistan where the political position is conferred by inheritance from a parent or grandparent contributes to a larger extent to creating barriers for common people to get involved in politics. *“Elite group in Pakistan holds a disproportionate amount of wealth, privilege, and political power, and all leading political parties are very much elite and hereditary in their very nature”* (GE 1, Interview Transcript 1). Majorly a two-party system had been developed between the Pakistan People's

Party and the Muslim League in Pakistan and it surely provided them the advantage of having financial resources and connections not only in Pakistan but overseas as well to run for office. It does include campaign funding, investment networks, and substantial media access. Bureaucratic Influences leverage their connections within the bureaucracy to expedite development projects or other initiatives that can showcase their ability to deliver tangible benefits to their constituencies. In many areas, traditional power structures and cultural capital are highly influential. *“Elite candidates mostly hail from families with historical prominence and can leverage this cultural capital to attract voters who value traditional hierarchies”* (GE 1, Interview Transcript1). Common people do not have political literacy at all. *“Elite candidates generally have access to better education and professional opportunities, equipping them with the skills and knowledge needed for effective political engagement”* (GE 2, Interview Transcript 2). Non-elite candidates often lack these advantages, making it harder for them to develop the expertise and credibility required for a successful political career. Moreover, decades of fragmented education systems have added to this difference.

4.1.2 Pakistani Political Elite: Financial Resources, Influential Networks and Unequal Opportunities

Finance is the biggest constraint for non-elites. Politics in Pakistan often require substantial financial resources for campaigns, networking, and maintaining a public presence. Access to networks is another big constraint. *“The elite class has well-established connections in all of the sectors like media, business, and political structures that impact their performance”* (GE 2, Interview Transcript 2) The Elites are privileged because they have education from good universities mostly from abroad that enhance their profiles whereas education and exposure are constraints for people from middle-class families. Lack of access to similar opportunities makes it harder for them to be taken seriously. Elites have more support and freedom to participate in politics while the non-elites have to face family resistance and social, cultural, and social construct they have to face it all.

4.1.3 Culture & Institutions: Hindering the Participation of Non-Elites in the Politics

The cultural and institutional biases within Pakistan's political landscape excessively disadvantage people from working-class or middle-class families compared to their elite peers of the same gender. Traditional values and social norms mostly favor politicians from established families. These biases can undermine the reliability and credibility of non-elite

candidates. *Non-elite candidates may face skepticism and distrust, which can hinder their ability to mobilize support and garner votes (GE 1, Interview Transcript, 01).* Similarly, being a patriarchal society, gender roles limit opportunities for both working-class men and women. *Women specifically face compound vulnerabilities and fall resulting in restricting their participation in public life and politics (GE 1. Interview Transcript,01).* Elites take advantage of social capital and voter base which they have developed over a while.

Patriarchal norms impact all genders men or women. The women of the middle class have more hurdles because they have issues of mobility within the public and domestic life while the elite women do not have such issues. *Both elite and non-elite women face challenges, but the struggles of non-elite women are compounded as they must contend with biases as well as cultural and societal barriers. The burden faced by common women is therefore twofold (GE 2, Interview Transcript 02).*

While institutionally, the political parties favor the elites because they contribute financially, and bring in influential networks with vast outreach and visibility. The candidates are chosen based on their backgrounds. While the non-elites face issues and being not from influential families and finances they face these issues. Pakistan has very little presence of trans in politics the ones who got into politics are from elite families

4.2 What Are the Challenges Faced by Women in Politics in Pakistan?

This chapter focuses on the description of the problems related to the political participation of women in the case country Pakistan. It entails education, economic aspects, characters of political parties, gender discrimination, and security aspects.

4.2.1 Societal and Cultural Norms

From the various findings highlighted in the paper, the research established that cultural and traditional practices restrain women in their struggle for political positions. These norms put women in what is expected of them as citizens by ordering them to stay at home and do house chores hence denying them political careers. But traditional upbringing drains a woman of the potential to undertake major challenges, they are usually advised not to take up challenging roles mainly because those entail decision power. This is so especially where women are subjected to patriarchal norms and religious teachings that give men leverage over them. One of the participants of the research who belongs to Baluchistan said

In Baluchistan, it is extremely rare for women to win seats through general elections on their merit. The few women who have managed to secure electoral victories are typically the wives of influential tribal leaders or nawabs, who were allowed to contest the elections due to their husbands' inability to do so, often because of legal issues. In such cases, these women tend to rely heavily on the tribal votes of their husbands' constituencies (FP 3, Interview Transcript, 3).

The primary factor hindering women's political participation in Baluchistan is the pervasive social norms and cultural biases. Such norms are prevalent in society, and women experience great pressure to adhere to such standards and hence get viewed as unfit for leadership positions.

In Pakistan, women are assumed not to be able to handle even the household decisions because they are rendered incapable and that kills their desire to strive for larger roles such as in leadership like politics. *All over the four provinces, women are not encouraged to work (FP 1, Interview Transcript 1).* Furthermore, If the family of a female candidate supports her, she may face opposition from society and the patriarchal culture prevalent in society. One of the participants narrated an incident that happened in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) general elections 2024,

We provided a seat to a woman from a common background who used to earn money by packing and selling dry fruits. Her opponent was a very influential Khan, who threatened that if she won the elections, he would take his own life by jumping into a river. The next day, he sent me a note stating that he had seen this woman going for her political campaign on a motorcycle with her uncle and brother and that he would kill all three of them with a single bullet. He also instructed me to leave the town, as I was managing her election campaign. I left the town the following day. He did not even allow her family members, including herself, to cast their votes in the elections (FP 2, Interview Transcripts 2)

This example depicts how vulnerable women can be and how easily they can be blackmailed and threatened. It demonstrates the deeply entrenched patriarchal system that needs to be challenged. Due to the continued cultural stereotype that sees women as inferior to men, or the domination of politics by male chauvinists, women's participation in politics is still wanting. These societal norms make women feel unwelcome in the political sector and consolidate the idea that politics is a man's domain, thus considering women unfit for leadership. Moreover. In our culture, Language is often used as a tool to undermine and diminish women's roles and

agency in Pakistani society. Derogatory phrases, such as "Maine choriyan tu nahi penni" (I have not worn bangles), or the practice of referring to a daughter's marriage as "giving away" the daughter, serve to objectify and strip women of their autonomy. This pervasive use of sexist language in the public discourse, including in Pakistani politics, represents an uphill battle that women must constantly confront.

4.2.2 Education and Awareness

Women do not participate in politics as much as men do, because education for women is not a priority in some cultures. Measures such as the educational reform that focuses on the equality between sexes and political consciousness that is developed at the school level are vital to reconsider the general perception of women in politics. Education was singled out as one of the key areas that need to be changed, as one of the participants said, *Lack of education is the main problem. Our education curriculum still depicts women as being of the house and involved in domestic work (FP 3, Interview Transcript 3)*. Moreover, *“Academia has been complicit in the political and social project of rendering women's experiences and struggles invisible. This is because academic institutions have tended to align themselves with the dominant narratives propagated by the state, which systematically erase and marginalize the voices and resistance efforts of women” (FP 2, Interview Transcript 02)*.

It is the need of the hour that we undertake a comprehensive review and overhaul of the existing curriculum being taught across our educational sectors. Currently, the prevalent curricular content often reinforces outdated gender stereotypes, depicting women as individuals confined within the boundaries of the home, while boys are shown freely playing outside. Furthermore, these materials frequently portray men as the sole breadwinners for their families. It is high time we take decisive action to address these problematic representations. We must instill in the minds of our children the understanding that girls and boys can - and should - equally participate in household chores and responsibilities. Additionally, it is essential to convey the message that mothers can also venture outside the domestic sphere to contribute to the family's economic stability and well-being.

By making deliberate changes to the curriculum, we have the opportunity to challenge and dismantle the deeply entrenched gender biases that have long permeated our educational systems. This transformation will empower young minds to envision a more equitable future, where gender norms and expectations are not rigidly prescribed, but rather, open to individual

choice and expression. The media, in particular, plays a critical role in perpetuating these detrimental stereotypes, frequently depicting women as inherently weak or "bad" if they choose to work outside the home or pursue political aspirations. This deeply ingrained bias in media representation contributes to the perpetuation of gender disparity, undermining women's contributions and reinforcing outdated, patriarchal norms. The media must recognize its powerful influence and take proactive steps to challenge these harmful narratives.

During a seminar at Quaid-e-Azam University titled "Breaking Cultures and Structural Barriers: Women's Quest for Political Emancipation," the speaker, Bushra Gohar, shared a pertinent example. She recounted that a crucial parliamentary committee on constitutional reforms was formed, but regrettably, no women were initially included as members. Disturbed by this lack of representation, Gohar questioned the committee head, asking why women were not represented. The response she received was that women lacked the necessary experience for such a role. Undeterred, Gohar vehemently opposed this rationale, arguing that many men on the committee also lacked prior experience, yet they were still appointed. Determined to ensure women's voices were heard, Gohar persistently advocated with her party leadership, demanding that she at least be included as an observer. Through her unwavering efforts, the party leadership acquiesced, and Gohar's participation ultimately paved the way for several other women to join the committee as well. It is important to actively fight for one's rights, rather than merely sitting back and complaining. Awareness about rights and the willingness to challenge the status quo are crucial in overcoming the barriers that often impede women's equal representation and participation in decision-making processes.

4.2.3 Economic Barriers

Economic constraints and subjection to men limit women's participation in politics. In addition to this, the financial requirements of political campaigns, which remained a preserve of many women, are beyond their pockets. Party ticket criteria are very pathetic, tickets are given to the closed ones and to give losing seats to the women. One of the participants said "*Politics is also about money*" (MP 1, Interview Transcript, 1). In Pakistan, the financial dependence of most women on the male members of their households poses a significant obstacle to their political engagement. The high costs associated with acquiring party tickets to contest elections create an additional barrier to women's political participation. Furthermore, one participant said that

“The male representatives in our party have objected that when women contest elections on reserved seats, they do not spend any of their own money, unlike the male candidates who spend a significant amount to run for office” (FP 03, Interview Transcript 3).

Due to the prohibitively expensive nature of these party tickets, many women are unable to muster the necessary funds to secure a spot on the ballot. This financial constraint restricts women's ability to actively participate in the political process, effectively limiting their representation and voice in the public sphere. The lack of financial autonomy and resources among Pakistani women serves as a major constraint on their political aspirations.

4.2.4 Political Party Dynamics

Some of the challenges include support for male-dominated political parties and poor support for women candidates. Employers assign quotas and reserved seats to women, but women remain limited in leadership roles significantly.

“Rather than using the reserved seats as a genuine mechanism to empower women and promote their participation in politics, many parties simply allocate these losing seats to female candidates” (FP,3 Interview Transcript 3).

The political parties deliberately deploy or allocate certain seats in a way that women cannot win and perpetuate their exclusion. Another participant added,

“Political parties in Pakistan are mandated to reserve 5% of seats for women who are party workers. However, the seats allocated to women are frequently those that the party anticipates losing, merely fulfilling the percentage quota rather than meaningfully investing in women's political representation” (FP 2, Interview Transcript 2).

4.3 How to counter the challenges faced by Pakistani women to constructively participate in the politics of Pakistan?

This chapter looks at the possibilities that can constructively counter the challenges faced by Pakistani women enter politics. It also talks about political advocacy and agenda, self-organization, and the need for social endorsement in enabling political transformation. This analysis of the findings along with the comparison of the findings with developed countries forms the basis of the multilateral solutions to the grey area discussed in the chapter.

4.3.1 Policy and Legal Framework

Legal structures and matrices developed in this regard already exist but the efficiency of these structures and the implemented quotas are not equivalent. Both are the case, which calls for the enhancement of the gender-sensitive policies' implementation and enforcement. 'As per the constitution of Pakistan, seats for women are reserved in the elected bodies Political parties also have Women's wing' stated one of the participants. It is evident that improving these measures and guaranteeing their precise implementation can help to 'hammer in' women's political representation.

4.3.2 Empowerment and Capacity Building

Leadership training and capacity building with orientation on political education for women are important. Supporting women to be active at the base and government structures fosters the growth of future female leaders. One of the comments made by the participants was: "Educating women on civics and training them on leadership can enable them to stand for political positions." Allaying women with relevant instruments and conditions that will help them build their political careers is the key to gender parity.

4.3.3 Societal Support and Media Representation

The mass media acts as a catalyst and powerful tool in changing the perception of the people in as much as promoting gender equity. Media activism and portrayals of females in decision-making positions must be encouraged to solve the problem. That is why media can contribute a lot to gender equality Although stereotypes can be often seen in media, documentaries and campaigns can enlighten people's awareness. Further, there is the most important area of promoting understanding within families and other human collectives. "For a woman, she requires the backing of her close relatives to venture into politics and this may be a difficult thing," observed Female Political Journalist.

Furthermore, during a seminar at Quaid-e-Azam University titled "Breaking culture and structural barriers: Women's quest for political emancipation Samar Haroon Bilour, amplified the discussed themes in her political term. She effectively embraced her political career while also being a mother then had to deal with major key political issues that revolved around prejudice of women and their role in society. She said that she is a woman, a politician, and a mother adding that she manages her political and family responsibilities both. From experience

and through Samar's election campaign the female figure is erased specifically suppressed by her husband's name emphasizing the traditional culture that erases the subject identity of women in favor of a male figure. I contested elections with my name on the ballot paper as Samar Haroon Bilour, however, on the pamphlets, flyers as well as billboards, I was Mrs. Haroon, it was so unconventional for Peshawar to write someone's name or paste someone's pictures on the billboards or the flyers I was a nameless faceless candidate in those elections, Samar said.

Samar experienced self-organizational antagonisms within her political party where some encouraged her to contest for a reserved seat rather than the general seat, this shows that system antagonisms are a daily experience for women when trying to reclaim their space from men. She said having personally experienced this when she went looking for an election ticket after her first election, party members would say "Why do you not go for a reserved seat; why are you looking for a general seat?" This she said is the prejudice that is always deep within people. However, in Samar's case, she had to overcome these difficulties and gradually started gaining more support and votes for herself and challenging the practices that limited her political roles.

4.3.4 Challenges Faced by Men in Politics

Although this study primarily revolves around the adversities women undergo, it is crucial to note that men are also not immune to it, especially the resource inequality hurdles. The political dynamics of Pakistan are unabated and quite intense, and any man who doesn't have adequate capital or influence is often stifled right from the beginning. For example, one participant noted that "Men from the lower class are also subjected to an unprecedented ordeal in politics because organizing a campaign or gaining party support is not easy if one does not have financial might." This hurts the political parties and the citizens in general, especially the women since members are expected to have some amount of influence or be related to someone wealthy. "In political parties, elitism is not only seen in women only, but men also suffer a lot if they do not have any single connection to the elites economically or otherwise", said one of the participants.

4.3.5 Comparison with the Developed World

In most of the developed nations, gender parity has gained a lot of ground in political seats mainly because of proper legal frameworks supportive sociopolitical environment, and effective policies put in place to support the gender goal. For instance, Sweden and Norway

have many female politicians partly due to successful gender quotas and due to the cultures of the countries. Another interviewee elaborated and gave a probable reason for higher representation of women in politics in developed countries by stating that, 'there are more enforceable institutions in developed countries pulling for women and ensuring that the policies in the political system embrace the women'. While the developed world has been approving of women's glamour in media and supporting their participation in politics, the situation in Pakistan is entirely different. Cultural influence in many Western countries is relatively fair with increased support for women vying for political positions in their societies. "As for other countries, specifically the developed ones, the reception of media campaigns and the public opinion towards women seems to be more accepting, and therefore, these women are not viewed as strange for holding such positions," explained one of the participants.

4.4 Analysis of Findings

According to the latest projections of the United Nations (UN), (World Population Prospects 2022), the population of Pakistan is expected to reach approximately 245.21 million, up from 240.49 million in 2023. This makes Pakistan the fourth-most populous country in Asia and the fifth-most populous country globally. The latest data indicates that the gender distribution in Pakistan's population is approximately 49.6% female and 50.4% male. Despite making up approximately 50% of the population women in Pakistan do not have fair representation in the politics of Pakistan. Despite constitutional commitments to gender equality and initiatives to boost women's political participation, such as reserved seats, the current level of female representation in Pakistan's government falls well below parity. The claim is frequently made that women do not have genuine equal representation in politics. However, the statistical data confirms that women's political representation is indeed unequal. Even though it is sometimes argued that no group achieves perfect parity, the evidence shows that women's presence in political positions falls significantly short of equal representation.

According to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), nearly 22,711 candidates competed for National Assembly seats and Provisional seats including 1,027 women. The National Assembly has a total of 336 members, which includes 60 seats reserved for women and 10 seats allocated for non-Muslim minority representatives. The Assembly has 259 male members. Additionally, 11 women were elected through the general seats and 39 were elected on the reserved seats. Women make up only 16.2% of the members of the National Assembly, which depicts the lack of equal representation for women in politics.

Women being 50% of Pakistan's population, their voices and concerns need adequate representation in the legislative process. Many issues that disproportionately impact women, such as women's rights, healthcare, education, and social welfare, are more likely to be addressed when women have a stronger voice in policymaking. Women lawmakers often prioritize legislation that addresses gender-specific challenges and empowers women in society. Their presence in parliament can lead to the passing of progressive laws and policies that promote women's rights and equality.

Nevertheless, even when women manage to secure their seats in parliament, they encounter a lot of repression and challenge from the existing patriarchal system. The Council of Islamic Ideology, alongside other conservatives in the parliament and the party, prevent legislation, which would enhance women's rights and gender equality. The Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) has time and again delayed progressive legislation in Pakistan including: the Domestic Violence Bill, the Anti-Forced Conversions Bill and change in Transgender Act. Even these two bills have been criticised by the CII as being contrary to the Islamic shariah. Also, the CII has come up with its draft model legislation with provisions that could be regarded as anti-women or even barbaric such as the so called 'soft flogging' of wives, which has been criticised by human rights activists as well as legal luminaries for being unconstitutional and a violation of international human rights charters. These actions by the CII, assisted by the religious parties and scholars illuminates that despite determination and efforts, a fair treatment for women and protection of their rights, as well as, other minority groups in the country Pakistan remain a distant dream.

The Elite male led political Dynasties prevailing in our country have greatly exacerbated non rotation of political power; and the qualitatively inferior, exclusionary as well as hegemonic marginalization of political power by the political elite men; here, stands vividly explained the continued interest of the political elite in the sustenance of the prevailing anarchic system. Even married women hailing from elite families but who have assumed leadership roles have also been suppressed and excluded from the essentially patriarchal hierarchy of power in Pakistan While contesting fiercely during her presidential campaign, she received enormous support from the youth and women across Pakistan. But these were far from free elections and Ayyub Khan carried the day. Benazir was also born in a political family, and thus belonged to a political lineage. She was the only daughter of the former prime minister of Pakistan Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and Nusrat Bhutto. It would be noted that Nusrat Bhutto, the wife of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto soon faced lots of challenges after taking leadership of PPP. She was put under pressure

and later expelled during the time of Zia ul Haq military rule. She also spent several years detention and house arrest. Benazir became the first ever woman prime minister of the Pakistan. She was free born from a wealthy and powerful family but she never had the backing of powerful involotional bodies like those enjoyed by male politicians.

The most important aspect about the distribution of power in the political system of Pakistan is that the power is reserved in the hands of particular families with the dominance of the male leadership thus making the system out of reach for the commons who cannot fit into the elite circles. For common men it is very hard to enter this game, the political elites rule the roost, flow of resources, flow of decision making. Also, the absence of a level playing ground and worsen still the excessive use of nepotism and patronage networks means that it becomes really difficult for the common mento to establish a foothold in this sphere as it is well understood that connections, money, and social capital are essential to maneuver in the sphere. Still, women suffer from problems that are accompanied by intersecting systemic gender and racism discriminative practices. As much as women experience machinist problems as men, such as inadequate financial capital, social and political capital, women experience societal barriers arising from the prevailing culture, gender bias and unjust laws. These cultural and societal values are seen to have greatly hampered women's chances in the political sector. Patriarchal systems of gender norms and stereotyping that lock women into the domestic sphere and see men as the agents of the public sphere are some of the biggest challenges to women's political participation. These norms are further sustained by the religious dogmas, especially those that have been given by male dominated interpretations. For instance, one participant said, 'Women are supposed not to able to manage even household decisions because they are made incapacitated and this demeans their desire to actively compete for larger roles such as politics.' Such stereotyping erodes women's self-esteem to achieve higher positions within politics. Traditional organizations of culture and religion play a major role in the subjection of women and the hindrance of their entry into the politics which is dominated by males. This systemic discriminating shows up in the social norms that make it oppressive for women to seek leadership positions hence cementing the notion that politics is the preserves of men.

Absence of education as a major factor which denies women chance to get an education is magnified as making it near impossible for them to participate in political issues. Culture, media, and education are some of the areas that the SHGs found are still portraying women in a household perspective and are not encouraging women to look forward to being politically active. When elaborating on their perceptions about factors that hinder women in politics one

of the respondents said, “Our education curriculum still has it that women are of the house, domestic workers,” As much as there is need for political consciousness, there is equal need to encourage the curriculum to promote gender awareness from class. That is why, with the help of a new approach to teaching and new approaches to gender representation within the curriculum of schools, it is possible to help the up-and-coming generations of women participate in politics. Additionally, increasing the number of women embracing education can enable women get the knowledge they require in the political field.

This defeats their chances of asking for political positions as well as subjection to men and other economical implications are some of the reasons that hinder women from participating in politics. Another issue is the financial constraints, including expenses required to launch a campaign and economic dependence, for example, on one’s husband. Explaining the reason one of the participants said, “The weakness of women in politics is pegged on the fact that there is little educational and economic organic personnel of women, and this is what causes them to struggle in terms of cash when it comes to the various political processes. ” Many women lack the financial might to fund a single campaign and this puts them at a disadvantage in comparison to their male counterparts. This is coupled with provision of party list seats by the various political parties, which greatly reduces their chances of being elected, and thus continue to be a neglected lot in terms of actual political power.

The dynamic that exist in political parties can also be seen as another significant obstacle. Political parties particularly those with a male-dominated tendency still fail to adequately support women candidates even with features such as quotas and reserved seats for women. There was a common sentiment expressed when one participant said, ‘Political parties allocating reserved seats to women, this is wrong’. These reserved positions most of the time do not guarantee the women such powers or authority as they are merely figurative heads without powers. Even worse, the intentional negotiation of special seats for women locks them up in cyclical political insignificance. Moreover, the benefits and drawbacks of political families and dynastic politics also reveal the nature of women’s political career. As these connections can afford some women these platforms, they cultivating elitism and facilitate the exclusion of many more women.

Several examples do exist in Pakistan where politicians made sexist remarks and objectified women in the pursuit of political interests through their misogynistic behavior Former Pakistan Tehreek e Insaaf (PTI) described Minister of State for Foreign Affairs “Hina Rabbani Khar” as

a “low- IQ woman” and someone whose claim to fame lay in her accessories, including her sunglasses and handbags. From the character assassination of Pakistan’s twice-elected prime minister Benazir Bhutto by her political rivals to General Musharraf’s insulting statements regarding the women rape survivors, to the Party head of Pakistan Muslim League N (PML-N) derogatory remarks for the women supporters of PTI. Former Prime Minister of Pakistan Mr. Imran Khan has also made a misogynistic and derogatory reference to Maryam Nawaz as “Nani” (Grandmother). The use of the word Nani carries additional cultural baggage in our society, where older women are expected to take a backseat. All political entities in Pakistan seem, to have been guilty of denigrating the status of women in politics and society. Pakistan is a society where patriarchy and chauvinism run deep.

Safety and harassment are cardinal phenomena that help to explain why women are slow to participate in politics. Due to the threat of violence, harassment, and intimidation the ability to exercise the rights of political freedom is hindered for women. One participant summed up by saying, “They have been abused, harassed, mocked, blackmailed, and even threatened”, these barriers have made women to hide away. Women capable and self-organizing interventions are critical in pushing for female representation in politics. Some of them include third way training, leadership training, political awareness and capacity-building programs for women which will facilitate their access to political careers. As one of the participants put it, ‘civilizing women on civics and training them on leadership helps them get ready to vie for political posts’. Female representation at sub-ordinate levels and local assemblies is useful in fostering the growth of future female political leaders.

Social influences involving the media and the public have a tremendous impact on the culture that people embed in women participating in politics. The availability of full or part-time women in different capacities and media messages endorsing the rights of women can alter people’s attitudes and enhance perceptions. The role of the man and the woman has to be redefined. For ages, we have taught the young ones through the curriculum as well as through media that women are supposed to be confined to the home and that men bear the responsibility of earning bread for the families. Media activism and advocacy can just as well be used to educate the public and call for more gender-sensitive policies when it comes to women joining politics. A Political Journalist said, “Media can do much for gender equality, even though it is replete with stereotypes, documentaries, and campaigns can openly people’s minds. Therefore, the examination of the findings encourages an understanding of the cross-sectional character of the challenges women in Pakistani politics encounter. To overcome these challenges reform

measures that cover educational, economic, and institutional as well as changes in the cultural perception is called for. These strategies can help in ensuring that women have an equal opportunity and chances to be actively involved in politics.

4.5 Recommendations for Future Research

Despite the presence of insights into challenges that public spheres in Pakistan have posed to women in political practices and directions tendered as strategies to advance gender equity, further research is required to elicit more aspects of the topic.

- **Intersectional Analysis:** The extant literature should incorporate an intersectional perspective to analyze how multiple dimensions including ethnicity, class, and religion intersect with Gender to determine the women's ability to participate in politics as well as their representation. This can help to achieve a better view of the problems that women of different age face, and what barriers they bear.
- **Comparative Studies:** Exploratory comparative research on women's representation in politics by comparing gender-related policies within and across nation-states can help gain an understanding of what intervention is most efficient. This can help to ascertain models that can be applied in Pakistani organizations given that similar models have worked in other organizations in other contexts.
- **Longitudinal Studies:** Panel data that follow the changes in women's political careers offer useful information about the effects of policies and changes in society in the long run. This can also be useful in making comparisons and deciding on the efficacy of certain approaches which can then aid in future policy making.

CONCLUSION

Gender balance in political participation in Pakistan is a very sensitive and complicated issue and it is so sensitive that it needs joint efforts from all the government, political parties, civil society organizations, and even the media. When the challenges of education, economic, institutional, and societal have well been accomplished, women can exercise their political rights and participate in political activities to their maximum potential. This research thus offers a basis for formulating measures and solutions to catalyze change about the present plight of women in politics in Pakistan and in general the struggle for parity between women and men in all domains of life.

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APPENDIX A

PLAGIARISM REPORT

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APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM

I volunteered to participate in a research project conducted by Asra Noor under the supervision of Dr Humaira Shafi Awan from the National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST). I understand that the project is designed to gather information about the role of gender in politics, with a specific focus on the challenges and barriers that women face. I will be one of approximately 15 people being interviewed for this research.

1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If I decline to participate or withdraw from the study, no one on my campus will be told.
2. While most interviewees will find the discussion interesting and thought-provoking, if at any point during the interview session, I feel uncomfortable, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.
3. Participation involves being interviewed by researchers from NUST. The interview will last approximately 40-45 minutes. Notes will be written during the interview. An audio tape of the interview and subsequent dialogue will be made, unless otherwise. Audio tape will only be made after consent.
4. I understand that my confidentiality as a participant will be ensured, and the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from the interview. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies that protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.
5. The data collected during the study will be stored appropriately to ensure confidentiality. There will be no one present during the interview and only the researchers, their supervisor, and the participants (if they request access) will have access to the transcripts and data.

6. I have read and understood the information sheet provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

7. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

My Signature

Date

Asra Noor
My Printed Name

Signature of the Investigator

For further information, please contact:

Asra Noor

Email: Asranoor654@gmail.com

Contact no: 0321-5836414

Dr Humaira Shafi Awan (Supervisor NUST)

Email: Humaira.Shafi@cips.nust.edu.pk

Contact no: 0330-5325636

APPENDIX C

INFORMATION SHEET

Identifying and Addressing the Barriers to Women's Leadership in Pakistani Politics

Despite guarantees of equal rights, the representation of women in Pakistani politics remains strikingly low, challenging the principles of liberal feminism. This predicament is rooted in deep-seated cultural and societal norms that perpetuate the systematic exclusion of women from positions of leadership and decision-making. The male-dominated political landscape of Pakistan has relegated the voices and perspectives of women to the margins, undermining their political aspirations and denying them the opportunity to fully participate in the governance of their country. This imbalance directly contradicts the core tenets of liberal feminism, which advocates for the equal participation and leadership of women in all spheres of public life.

The underrepresentation of women in Pakistani politics is a complex issue with far-reaching implications. It not only deprives the country of the valuable contributions and insights that women can offer but also reinforces gender-based power structures that entrench patriarchal control over the political process. Moreover, the exclusion of women from positions of power perpetuates the marginalization of their interests and concerns within the political agenda. This lack of women's representation undermines the democratic principles of inclusion and equal representation, hindering the country's progress towards a more equitable and representative system of governance.

Researching the underrepresentation of women in Pakistani politics is crucial, as it uncovers the systemic barriers and sociocultural norms hindering their full political participation. This understanding is necessary to develop effective strategies for change. Furthermore, research investigation can provide empirical evidence to inform policy reforms and advocate for targeted interventions, ultimately strengthening Pakistan's democratic foundations and promoting a more inclusive political system that reflects the diversity of its society

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

1. What are the underlying reasons or societal factors that contribute to the lower participation of women in politics in Pakistan?

FPJ 1 (Female political journalist)

The lower participation of women in politics in Pakistan can be attributed to several underlying societal factors:

Cultural Norms and Upbringing:

Traditional upbringing often discourages women from taking on significant challenges. They are frequently taught to avoid roles that involve substantial decision-making.

Perception of Women's Capabilities:

Women are often considered incapable of handling even household decisions, which undermines their confidence and ambition to pursue larger roles, such as in politics.

Family and Societal Pressure:

The confidence of women is frequently shattered by their family members, including fathers, brothers, and husbands. This lack of support can severely limit their aspirations and opportunities.

Need for Family Support:

For a woman to step into politics, she must have the trust and confidence of her family members. Gaining this support can be challenging in a society where traditional gender roles are deeply entrenched.

Lack of Role Models and Encouragement:

Women often lack role models in politics and receive minimal encouragement to pursue such careers. This can perpetuate the cycle of low participation.

In essence, just as a woman often supports a successful man, a man's support is equally crucial for a woman's success. Building a supportive environment where women are encouraged and empowered to participate in politics is essential for increasing their representation and involvement in this field.

MPJ 1 (Male Political Journalist)

Certain factors mainly affect the role of women including the entire society. Our society as a whole does not want women to come out. They believe women should not work side by side with men, they should not leave the home affairs at the mercy of someone else, and they should be available at home for cooking and for taking care of all the needs of the people residing in the house. So, the main focus is to confine women within the boundaries of the house.

On the other hand, there are certain disadvantages of women coming out to work. They have been abused, harassed, mocked, blackmailed, and even threatened.

Therefore, these societal hurdles have forced women not to come out.

MPJ 2

It is more of a Cultural issue than anything else. Developing countries such as South Asian Muslim countries have a bigger problem with women's participation in different domains of life specifically in Pakistan where this issue is not restricted to one specific domain but, to the larger spectrum. It has to do with Culture, Religion, Teachings, and Illiteracy. People not realizing that women are an integral part of society as the founding father of Pakistan, Quaid e Azam categorically stated, "If Pakistan wants to succeed then both, men and women will have to work side by side".

MPJ 3

Several factors hinder women's participation including culture and social norms. Women themselves sometimes prefer domestic responsibilities or sometimes our society forces them to prioritize domestic priorities over political engagement. Conservative Interpretations of Islam can be used to justify women's role in the public sector specifically politics. Along with these educational, economic, and institutional barriers attached to it. Pakistan's political party dynamic is male-oriented which is another flaw of our system. The electoral system and political framework can be challenging for women also for example political violence and lack of support structure affect the campaign of women in politics. These all issues make women's survival difficult in politics. Moreover, family pressure and social role is other challenges that women face.

MP 1 (Male politician)

The answer would be the basic underlying reason or societal factors that contribute towards low participation is the lack of education. The way cultural traditions are, where generally women are supposed to look after the families. But if you look overall and compare Pakistan to the other countries which are the first world countries, we are not that far away from them. For example, in the House of Lords, 29% are women, and in the House of Commons, 33% are women. In the USA, it's about 25% of women, whereas in Pakistan, it's around 20.21%, which are women. There are two ways I see it in politics: there are reserved seats for women, which is around 20%, and then women are also allowed to contest in the general seats, so that means they get an edge. So that's a bonus. So sometimes ten, sometimes 15, or something like that, women would win the seats. Overall, it will turn out to be 21-22%, or something like that as compared to India, which is the Lok Sabha, which is the House of Commons, has only 14%, and the Rajya Sabha, which is the Upper House or House of Lords compared to that, has only 10%. So, we are far better in many of compared to the rest of the world. So that's the answer to that. But generally, it's the social factors and education which are the main problem.

FP 1 (Female politician)

The general society's behavior towards women's participation is that they think that a woman's place is in the home, but I would like to quote the example of the Prophet (peace be upon Him). His wife Hazrat Khadija-tul-Kubra. She was a businesswoman. She was the owner of the business and He got married to her and she supported the entire Muslim community and she was the first Muslim in the world before Hazrat Ali as well. Here's the corrected transcription with punctuation and spelling errors resolved: Well, so we have examples where our Prophet himself, peace be upon him, set this example of women being businesswomen and participating. So, therefore, we need to encourage women. We need to encourage women. So the patriarchal thought, the way society runs, where women also support this entire narrative of women staying at home and tending to the kids. I mean, working women, like myself, also have kids. We tend to our kids. Our kids are more conscientious. They grow up better than women who don't work. Of course, it's nice for children to have their mother at home when they come back from school and work, but if you look at the other mothers, they're equally busy with their other activities, so I think that society needs to change with 50% women who are not given a chance to work. Pakistan especially. They, even when our people go abroad, the women are made to stay at home. Whereas when you compare to Indians. All over the four provinces, women are not encouraged to work. The women are always working, and they are helping the economic status of the family, so it's very important to have women participate in real life, it's just this mindset of the people of our society that prevents it.

MP 2

Women in Pakistan face several challenges that contribute to their lower participation in politics. One major reason is societal expectations. Traditional gender roles often dictate that women prioritize family responsibilities over political careers. Additionally, cultural norms sometimes discourage women from participating in public life. Economic factors also play a role; women may have limited access to education and economic resources, which affects their ability to enter politics. Furthermore, there are often social barriers, including discrimination and harassment, that deter women from engaging in political activities.

MP 3

The lower participation of women in politics in Pakistan can be attributed to several underlying reasons and societal factors. Firstly, cultural norms and traditional gender roles often dictate that women should prioritize family responsibilities over pursuing political careers. Additionally, limited access to education and economic opportunities further marginalizes women, making it difficult for them to enter the political arena. Furthermore, prevailing patriarchal attitudes and societal expectations may discourage women from engaging in political activities, as they may face discrimination and backlash for challenges.

FP 4

Political participation of women in Pakistan isn't lower. The women's quota in the provincial assemblies and National Assembly designated to women is among the highest around the world. Women participate in politics in various ways i.e.; grassroots level, UC level, and district level, women are the forefront force of election campaigns.

The issue is the lesser number of women in direct seats in general elections. According to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) parties are bound to allocate 5% of direct election seats to women during general elections. Political parties allocate losing seats to women which is unfair.

Traditionally parliamentary politics is dominantly attached to men. Women like Mohtarma Fatima Jinnah, Shaheed Benazir Bhutto, Mohtarma Nusrat Bhutto, Late Mohtarma Kulsoom Nawaz and now CM Punjab Maryam Nawaz have broken the shackles and surpassed the taboo attached to women in politics and outdoor lives.

These are the trendsetters but yes, we are yet to improve the participation of women in politics and decision-making positions both in general elections as well as women coming through a quota system. In today's time, things are changing and more and more women showing their interest in politics.

FP 2

Forget that women are not part of politics. When People say we are not part of politics they consider politics as power politics. Throughout the time women came out of their homes on the streets and protested over various domestic and international issues like shortage of gas, and inflation moreover they came out for peace and wars. People do not consider the participation of women in resistance they believe in power politics only. We only have the main narrative of elites and those in power they do not see all of this resistance as well as they outset the women. Very recognition of women's resistance is very important to be brought out. During India and Pakistan's independence women were not sitting in their homes they were part of the freedom struggle. During Bengal's independence, women were there. We do not have the facts part of our history all of the resistance movements were not made part of our curriculum. In 1948 when Pakistan was made congress's government was taken over later Dr. Khan became part of the government. He got arrested resistance started all over there were protests then the Babra incident took place women came out of their homes. Women have always stepped out of their homes and do all the house chores, in offices, and hospitals. There is a public and private divide. I would not only blame patriarchy but also blame the ruling class, military, and academia. Academia has been partnering in this invisibilizing women's project politically and socially also because they are following this state and dominant narrative that invisibilizes the women's struggle and the resistance movements. Women are being raped and killed everywhere even here in Islamabad. Women have no security even if they come into politics they are blackmailed by leaking their parent's videos. Our environment is very conservative, militarized, religiously radicalized, and patriarchally it is very extremist, all of this makes living an ordinary life here makes it extremely tough for women. When you come into politics you have a difference of opinion with religious clerks, state, or elites what do they do with women? Here only power politics prevails. Despite all of these difficulties, women are constantly fighting.

FP 3

During the first five years, we were sitting in parliament as dummies. We had no awareness. I belonged to Jamat e Islami and I noticed that our party used to listen to the women demands. When we used to come on reserved seats the male representatives in our party raised this objection that women do not spend a single penny while male spend money and come and contest elections. The election commission than introduced a new concept that women will be given be given seats within the party to contest for general elections. Women have been given this right not to ensure gender equality but just to fulfill the requirement of the Election Commission of Pakistan. I belong to Baluchistan there is no single woman who won seats

through general elections. If any women did so these women usually were the wives of sardar or nawab that so because their husbands had cases going on they couldn't contest the election they allowed their wives to contest elections. So these women used to get tribal votes. Social norms is the biggest factor that hinders women's participation. Baluchi people are against voting for women. If women get to vote that is because of tribalism. In Baluchistan parties focus on male candidates.

Party ticket criteria is very pathetic tickets are given to the closed ones and to give losing seats to the women.

FP 5

Historically we are a backward nation. Unfortunately, Patriarchy exists in backward nations. Pakistan has 4 provinces and diverse cultures. We still have a tribal culture here in Pakistan that promotes patriarchy. The tribal system doesn't exist anymore in any part of the world but it still exists in some areas of Pakistan. Religious extremism is the third reason for the lower participation of women in Pakistan with backward nations being the first and patriarchy being the second reason. Pakistan was made in the name of religion and religion has been misused by certain segments or actors of the society to serve their purpose. Another reason for the lower participation is that our government is not willing to ensure gender equality. Our education curriculum for grade 2 has still stories that depict women who belong to the house and are involved in household chores whereas men are narrated as the sole breadwinners of the home. Our syllabus needs to be revised both girl and boy can help out their mothers in the kitchen and both can go out of the house and play as well.

FJE 1 (Female gender expert)

1. To what extent do you believe the dominance of elite, privileged backgrounds among Pakistani politicians creates additional barriers for both common and non-elite men and women who want to get involved in politics?

The dominance of elite and specifically Hereditary politics in Pakistan where the political position is being conferred by inheritance from a parent or grandparent contributes to a larger extent in creating barriers both for common men and women in getting involved in politics. This elite group in Pakistan holds a disproportionate amount of wealth, privilege, and political power, and all leading political parties are very much elite and hereditary in their very nature. Common people do not have political literacy at all. Elite candidates generally have access to

better education and professional opportunities, equipping them with the skills and knowledge needed for effective political engagement. Non-elite candidates often lack these advantages, making it harder for them to develop the expertise and credibility required for a successful political career. Decades of fragmented education systems have added to this difference.

MJE 1 (Male gender expert)

1. To what extent do you believe the dominance of elite, privileged backgrounds among Pakistani politicians creates additional barriers for both common and non-elite men and women who want to get involved in politics?

Finance is the biggest constraint for non-elites. Politics in Pakistan often require substantial financial resources for campaigns, networking, and maintaining a public presence. Access to networks is another big constraint the elite class has well-established connections in all of the sectors like media, business, and political structures that impact. The non-elites lack access to access to networks. Education and exposure are also constraints The elites are privileged they have education from good universities mostly from abroad that enhance their profiles. The people of middle-class families do not have similar opportunities which makes it harder for them to be taken seriously. Patriarchy is the other biggest reason that has created gender disparity. Elites have more support and freedom to participate in politics while the non-elites have to face family resistance and social, cultural, and social construct they have to face it all. In addition, the perception of the people is also a barrier that people from the elite class being successful in politics. This thought process stops the common men and women from entering politics.