



RESEARCH PAPER

Challenges to Women's Political Participation in Makran Division of The Balochistan Province of Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

The paper aims to explore the relation between religion, economy, culture, and the political status of women in Makran. Makran, being a division of the Province of Balochistan located at the southwest of the province, is rich in intellect and history. The region is a conflict-ridden zone at present badly hit by the waves of Baloch insurgency. Even though the participation of women in the field of education is quite encouraging, yet they have a very meagre share in politics. Religious considerations, economic dependence on males and cultural values contribute to create problems for women to engage in political affairs. Appropriate literature is reviewed to identify the issues that act as stumbling blocks to prevent women of Makran from the exercise of their constitutional right to make their presence felt in legislation and policy making. The kind of purposive sampling is used by conducting a survey to collect data and analyze it to arrive at a workable solution of the challenges that women of the area face. However, the results of the study suggest that women of Makran have very poor performance in politics, since the entire division has only three representatives in assemblies. Women cannot make decisions independently in the presence of male dominance. Until females are economically independent their political autonomy remains an unachievable dream. Civil society, being an integral part of the triangle of the modern state needs to be vigilant in the propagation of gender equality. Policies like creation of women party caucuses and networks, more reserved seats in assemblies and affirmative actions will serve well to ensure proportional representation of women in the political process promoting democracy and sustainability.

KEYWORDS Balochistan, Economic and Religious Challenges, Makran, Political Participation, Women Empowerment

Introduction

Women political participation is an issue that has gained increasing attention in recent years, both within the academia and in public discourse. Despite progress in women's rights and gender equality, women continue to face significant challenges when it comes to their participation in politics. As emphasized by researchers like Norris and Inglehart (2019) women in most of the important forums including public and political offices remain underrepresented around the globe (Inglehart, 2019). However, the paper aims to highlight the pinching challenges that women of Makram division of Balochistan face while making any choice for participation in the political process. It further investigates the numerous difficulties and issues that women encounter on different fronts including religious and economic sectors in the mentioned region of Balochistan through a critical analysis of already available literature and case studies.

One of the key challenges that women face is related to legal frameworks. Despite the existence of international agreements, for example, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), many countries' laws and policies continue to discriminate against women or fail to protect their rights. For example, in some countries, women have no right to cast their votes or run for public offices, while in some

others, they face discriminatory policies and actions that make it difficult for them to succeed in in the electoral process or reach important political positions.

By highlighting the following challenges, this research study aims to add and contribute to the persistent struggle of promoting gender equality and enhance female political participation. By examining the case study of Makran, it is intended to identify workable strategies and best possible practices that can help overcome these barriers and promote a more inclusive and participatory political environment.

Literature Review

In recent years, scholars have conducted an abundance of research and analysis on women's political involvement, examining the different obstacles and difficulties that women have faced in their struggle to access their due share in political power and make their respective contribution in the policy making processes. This focused review of the literature concentrates on some of the key developments made to the discipline and it identifies the major themes and trends that have emerged augmenting unprecedented limelight.

Religious Barriers

Religion plays its role in the political sphere of women's life in numerous countries. Religious intervention in the political participation process by women has been a much debated and contested theme treatment by the pen of scholars and researchers. Religion can be seen as both a source of inspiration and a barrier for women's political activism in various regions and faiths. This literature review summarizes, compares, and analyses the main arguments and findings of three relevant sources on this issue. In this regard, an article by Masum Momaya explores how women from different religious traditions, such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Judaism, have used their faith as a motivation and a resource for their political involvement. The article also discusses how religious institutions and interpretations can limit or challenge women's political rights and roles. The author argues that religion is not a monolithic or static factor, but rather a dynamic and diverse one that can have both positive and negative effects on women's political participation depending on the context and the agency of women (Momaya, 2008). Similarly, another research paper by Elizabeth A. Oldmixon, Geoffrey C. Layman, and Michael Heaney examines how religious beliefs shape women's gender consciousness and political engagement in the United States. It argues that religion in this connotation can have both positive and negative impact depending on the type and intensity of religious commitment. The article uses survey data to show that women who hold traditional or conservative religious beliefs tend to have lower levels of gender consciousness and political participation than women who have progressive or liberal religious leanings. However, the article also finds that women who are highly committed to their religion tend to have higher levels of gender consciousness and political participation compared to women who are less committed to their religion (Muzaffar, Khan, & Yaseen, 2021; Elizabeth, 2016). Not only religion, but economy is also a crucial factor to determine the status of women in a society as the character and distribution of wealth is a determining element in this regard. Political empowerment of women go hand in hand with their economic empowerment. This phenomenon is discussed in the succeeding paragraphs.

Economic issues

Women's economic empowerment is widely recognized as a driving force for their political participation and leadership qualities. Economic empowerment can enhance women's voice and agency in their households and communities, as well as their access and influence in public decision-making. This literature reviews and compares the main arguments and findings of three relevant sources on this issue. An article by Joanne Lu

explains how economic empowerment programs, such as savings, child-care provision, and land rights, can help women gain confidence, autonomy, and bargaining power in their domestic and social spheres of life. The article also showcases some examples of how Global Washington members are supporting women's economic empowerment and political participation around the world, such as in Kenya, Uganda, India, and Nepal (Lu, 2019). Another source in this regard is a webpage by UN Women. The webpage provides statistics and data on the current situation of women's representation and leadership in executive governments, national parliaments, and local governments. It also highlights the benefits and challenges of women political participation for achieving gender equality and sustainable development. The webpage indicates that despite some progress, women are still underrepresented in most levels and sectors of political power, especially in conflict-ridden countries (UN Women). Furthermore, an article by Victoria Mallinckrodt discusses the causes and consequences of the gender finance gap, which limits women's purchasing power and their access to services, and education. The article argues that the gender finance gap not only hinders women's economic opportunities, but also their political participation and leadership. It also suggests some solutions to bridge the gap, such as improving financial literacy, promoting financial inclusion, supporting women entrepreneurs, and investing in women-led businesses (Mallinckrodt, 2021).

The relationship between religion and women's political participation and leadership, as well as between women's economic empowerment and political participation and leadership, is complex and varied. Religion and economic empowerment are not simple or uniform variables, but rather multifaceted and contextual ones that can influence women's political behavior in different ways. Women are not passive or homogeneous actors, but rather active and diverse ones who can use their agency and creativity to challenge or transform the religious and economic norms and structures that affect their political opportunities and aspirations. The corpus of research on women's involvement in politics emphasises the persistent obstacles and limitations that women face when trying to obtain political authority and take part in decision-making. These issues have a tangible impact on human rights, democracy, and governance. As a result, it is critical to remove these obstacles and advance inclusive political settings and gender equality. The purpose of this study is to address the difficulties faced by women in Makran division by drawing attention to these issues.

Material and Methods

Sample Size: Collecting samples from a whole division which consists of three districts is a time-consuming, and costly task. To avoid obstacles and maintain feasibility, sampling is done in the three districts of Makran division and the views of people from the three districts of Kech, Gwadar and Panjgur are included.

Self-Reporting Bias: Participants in the study may not always report their experiences accurately.

Time Constraints: Conducting a thorough study on challenges to women's political participation may need a significant chunk of resources and time, which is always a difficultly managing task. Hence, the study was completed within a limited time frame.

Cultural and religious Sensitivity: Different cultures have different norms and values related to gender and politics, and it may be challenging to accurately capture these nuances in the study. Keeping in view the culture of the Makran division, the researchers have followed all possible ethics not to hurt the sentiments of the people living in the region which may have become a limitation to mention the challenges in Makran in this regard.

Research Design

A good research design is essential for any study to reach valid conclusions. This study uses quantitative methods to collect large-scale data on how women participate in politics, such as voting and holding offices. The data was gathered from questionnaires given to 310 participants in three districts of Makran which include, Gwadar, Panjgur and Kech. The social science data analysis tool, SPSS, was used to analyze questionnaires to find patterns and frequencies of variables. The respondents were selected by purposive sampling, based on their education and age (above 20 years).

Results and Discussion

Many studies demonstrate that religious and economically dependent women cannot make important political decisions. This dependency handicaps their ability for proper participation in the political system. Following are some research results that merit mention in this connection:

A study, 'The Impact of Religion on Women's Leadership Roles in Politics and Public Life' by IKNOW Politics. This study explores how religion influences women's leadership roles in politics and public life. It examines how religious participation and beliefs affect women's access to political opportunities and resources, as well as their empowerment and agency. It also discusses the challenges and opportunities for women leaders from different religious backgrounds and contexts (iKNOW Politics, 2009). Another research work, 'Religion Holds Women Back. Or Does It?' by Brian Grim and Jo-Ann Lyon also merits mention here. This article argues that religious freedom is a key element for gender parity and economic stability. It shows how religious intolerance and extremism undermine women's rights and contributions to society (Muzaffar, et. al. 2018). It also highlights how religious freedom can enable women to participate in and benefit from the economy (Lyon, 2015). Another study, 'Women's Political Participation: Issues and Challenges by Shirin M. Rai, investigates the causes and consequences of women's historic exclusion from the formal arena of politics. It analyzes strategies adopted around the world to promote women's political participation, such as quotas, electoral systems, political parties, civil society, and international norms. It also identifies some of the challenges and dilemmas that women face in their political engagements (Rai, 2005).

The above knowledge and insights were from foreign research studies, now it is appropriate to examine the case of Makra through the empirical data collected from the samples of this study.

Table 1
Challenges to Women Political Participation in Makran Division of Balochistan

Valid	Frequency	Valid Percent
Strongly disagree	3	1.0
Disagree	25	8.1
Agree	181	58.4
Strongly agree	101	32.6
Total	310	100.0

The frequency and percentage distribution of survey statement responses are shown in the table above. The first column gives the following response options for "Challenges to women political participation in Makran": "Strongly disagree," "Disagree," "Agree," and "Strongly agree." Out of the 310 valid responses in this survey, just a tiny percentage (25 or 8.1%) indicated they "strongly disagreed," but most respondents (i.e., fewer than half) indicated they "disagreed." Nearly one-third of respondents answered, "Strongly agree," while over half selected "Agree".

In summary, the findings indicate that a noteworthy proportion of participants (91%) concur or strongly concur that women have obstacles when it comes to engaging in politics in Makran. This suggests that a common belief regarding the severity of challenges faced by the women of Makran in the process of political participation prevails among the participants. This statement is only highly disagreed or disagreed with by a small proportion of responses.

Table 2
The Position of Women in Politics in Makran Division of Balochistan

Valid	Frequency	Valid Percent
Strongly disagree	2	.6
Disagree	41	13.2
Agree	176	56.8
Strongly agree	91	29.4
Total	310	100.0

The data concluded that a clear majority of more than two-third of the participants affirm or strongly affirm that the females in Makran have a weak position in politics. Only a very few respondents disagree or strongly disagree with this view. Hence, it can be inferred that many of the people (respondents of the study) believe that women in Makran have no prominent position in politics.

Causes of Weak Position of Women in Politics in Makran

There are many examinations and research which have studied the causes of the weak position of females in politics. Here are a few examples:

'Gendered Political Institutions and the Persistence of Male Dominance: A Theory of Path Dependence', by Torben Iversen and Frances Rosenbluth argues that gendered political institutions can create "path dependencies" that make it difficult for women to achieve parity with men in political representation and leadership (Rosenbluth, 2008) .

'The Political Empowerment of Women: The Role of Tradition, Custom, and Religion' by Ellen A. Denny evaluates the role of cultural and religious factors in limiting women's political empowerment. The study argues that traditional gender roles and patriarchal norms can create challenging hurdles to females in their political participation and leadership processes (Denny, 2014).

'Gender and Political Recruitment: Theorizing Institutional Change' by Pär Zetterberg and Drude Dahlerup examines the role of political recruitment processes in perpetuating gender inequality. The study argues that the informal networks and selection processes used to identify political candidates often favor men and exclude women (Dahlerup, 2013).

Overall, these studies suggest women's political underachievement is the result of multiple factors, including gender stereotypes, cultural and religious norms, institutional barriers, and discrimination against women on certain grounds.

Table 3
Causes of Weak Position of Women in Politics in Makran

Valid	Frequency	Valid Percent
Cultural causes	25	8.1
Social causes	17	5.5
Religious causes	22	7.1
Economic causes	11	3.5

Male-dominancy	44	14.2
Harassment	35	11.3
All of the above	118	38.1
Other	38	12.3
Total	310	100.0

The above data shows that the causes of the weak position of women in politics in Makran can be attributed to a labyrinth of elements. More than one-third of the respondents believe that "all of the above" factors contribute to the weak position of women in politics in Makran, indicating a complex web of cultural, social, religious, and economic indicators. More importantly, significant causes reported include "cultural causes" 8.1%, "religious causes" 7.1%, and "male-dominancy" 14.2%. "Harassment" was also noted as a cause at 11.3%.

Hence, in its entirety, the data suggests that the feeble position of women in politics in Makran is due to a combination of factors, with cultural, harassment and male-dominant attitudes being the most significant contributors.

Religious Challenges

Following are findings of some relevant research work encompassing religious challenges to the female section of the society while making any decision for political participation:

'Women's political participation and Islamic Resurgence in Pakistan' by Saba Gul Khattak examines the religious hurdles to female participation in politics in Pakistan, including the influence of Islamic fundamentalism and the patriarchal interpretation of Islamic law.

The study demonstrates that accessibility of females to education network and resources and the adherence to gender-sensitive interpretation of principles of Islam are considerable factors in the context of promotion of participation of females in mainstream politics.(Khattak, 2013).

'Women's political participation in the Muslim world: Continuity and Change', by Amaney Jamal and Nadia Marzouki examines the religious hurdles to women's political participation in Muslim-majority countries, including the influence of conservative interpretations of Islam and the marginalization of women in religious institutions. The study recommends many workable modes to promote the participation of women in the legislative system which include reserved seats, concerned campaigns, and highlighting of gender-sensitive interpretations of respective Islamic laws(Marzouki, 2009).

Table 4
Religious Hurdles to Women Political Participation in Makran

Valid	Frequency	Valid Percent
Strongly disagree	8	2.6
Disagree	55	17.7
Agree	171	55.2
Strongly agree	76	24.5
Total	310	100.0

The responses for the survey addressing the religious barriers that encounter women of Makran in their choice to engage in politics had a very few responses who chose "Strongly disagree", while less than one-fifth of the respondents selected "Disagree". Most of the participants of the survey opted "Agree" whereas one-fourth of them went for the option of "Strongly agree".

The results portray that a smaller minority of the samples disagree while they either agree or strongly concede to the statement mentioned in the concerned question.

While the percentage of respondents who disagree is significantly higher, the percentage of the miniature who agree strongly is comparable to the second case.

In general, most participants agreed or strongly agreed that women in Makran confront religious barriers in political engagement.

Economic Dependency Causes Poor Political Participation

Several studies have been conducted to investigate the association between economic dependency and active engagement of women in politics. Some concerned illustrations are mentioned below:

‘Women's Political Participation and Economic Empowerment in Africa’ by Yemisi Akinbobola and Olawunmi Ogunrotimi investigates the relationship between women's political engagement and economic development in Africa. The study suggests that those women who are economically independent and empowered are more likely to participate in politics, and that economic factors such as access to credit and land ownership are important predictors of women's political participation (Ogunrotimi, 2019).

‘Gender, Economic Development, and Democracy: The Effect of Economic Development on Women's Political Participation’ by Anis Chowdhury and Iyanatul Islam examines the association between women's political engagement and economic development. According to the study, economic growth has a positive impact on females’ political engagement, but that this effect is mediated by a variety of variables, including education, access to resources, and cultural norms Islam, A. C. (2018).

The said studies combinedly concede that economic dependency is a considerable challenge to females’ political engagement.

Table 5
Women’s Economic Dependency Causes Poor Political Participation

Valid	Frequency	Valid Percent
Strongly disagree	4	1.3
Disagree	83	26.8
Agree	177	57.1
Strongly agree	46	14.8
Total	310	100.0

This data portrays that nearly two-third of the participants either agree or disagree strongly that economically dependent women cannot actively participate in politics in Makran resulting in their poor participation. Only about one-fourth of the respondents chose the option of disagreement or strong disagreement with the statement. Therefore, most of the participants believe that economic dependency is a dominant factor for women's poor political participation.

Women's Involvement in Politics Impacts the Growth of Economy

There is a growing body of research suggesting that women's political involvement leaves a positive impact on economic growth. Following are some cases to substantiate the statement:

‘Gender Equality and Economic Growth in Developing Countries’ by Stephan Klasen explores the correlation between economic growth and gender equality in developing

states. According to the study, nations with more gender equality have better rates of economic growth because women's political participation leads to better policies that promote economic growth (Klasen, 2016).

'Women's Empowerment and Economic Development' by Sajeda Amin, Naila Kabeer, and Agneta Stark analyses the association between females' empowerment and economic progress in Bangladesh. The study finds that political engagement of women has a positive influence on the growth of economy and that politically engaged women are more likely to engage in income-generating activities and to have better levels of economic well-being. (Sajeda Amin, 2018).

However, the aforesaid studies denote that female political involvement has a useful effect on economic growth, particularly in developing countries. By adopting policies that encourage gender equality, women's empowerment and participation in political decision-making, countries may be able to realize the economic benefits of women's political involvement more effectively.

Table 6
Positive Impact of Women's Political Involvement on Economic Growth

Valid	Frequency	Valid Percent
Strongly disagree	11	3.5
Disagree	63	20.3
Agree	158	51.0
Strongly agree	78	25.2
Total	310	100.0

A majority of more than three-fourths of respondents agree and strongly agree that women's political involvement can impact the growth of the economy. Specifically, half of the participants agree while over a quarter of them strongly agree with the statement. While nearly one-fourth of them disagree and strongly disagree with the statement. Therefore, more than half of the respondents feel that the involvement of women in politics positively affects economic growth.

The Importance and Need of Women Political Empowerment

There are many research studies that focus on the need of and importance of women empowerment in politics. The subject matter has attracted the concentration of numerous scholars and gender-equality activists. 'Women's Political Empowerment: A Pathway to Development' by Amal Al-Saqqaf and Ibrahim A. Al-Badawi analyses the importance of women empowerment in politics for sustainable development. The study argues that empowering women politically can lead to greater gender equality, better governance, and more inclusive and sustainable development outcomes (Al-Badawi, 2018).

'The Impact of Women's Political Empowerment: Evidence from Africa' by Cheryl Hendricks and Amanda Gouws studies the influence of women empowerment in politics in Africa. According to the findings of the study, women's engagement, and decision-making in politics results in better bridging of gender gaps and more inclusive policies (Gouws, 2011).

'The Importance of Women's Political Empowerment for Gender Equality and Democracy' by Anne Marie Goetz and Rob Jenkins examines the relationship between political empowerment of women, gender equality, and democracy. The study argues that women's political empowerment is essential for promoting gender equality and advancing democratic governance (Jenkins, 2005).

However, the mentioned studies suggest that political empowerment of women is necessary for achieving gender equality, promoting inclusive and sustainable development, and advancing democracy and pluralism.

Table 7
The Need of Women Political Empowerment in Makran

Valid	Frequency	Valid Percent
Strongly disagree	4	1.3
Disagree	12	3.9
Agree	169	54.5
Strongly Agree	125	40.3
Total	310	100.0

Hence, an overwhelming majority, which is more than 90% of those polled agrees or strongly agrees that women's political empowerment is needed in Makran indicating a clear majority. Only a very small percentage disagrees with this statement, suggesting that there is a widespread acknowledgment of the importance of females' political engagement in the region.

Conclusion

The difficulties that prevent women from participating in politics in Makran have been emphasised in this research article, along with the importance of resolving these issues to create inclusive and a performing political system. The evidence unequivocally demonstrates that women in Makran encounter numerous obstacles, including economic and religious ones, and that they have a weak standing in politics. However, it is noted that there is consensus among the respondents that political involvement and empowerment is needed in Makran, and it can bring positive changes to the growth of economy if women are politically active to make their respective contribution for the wellbeing of the society and state. Their basic rights are being denied by a society where men enjoy a dominant position, and women are supposed to stay at home and having no other means of financial support. The results indicate that while there has been improvement recently, there are still a lot of obstacles in some areas, such as economic and religious aspects of life. To overcome these problems and encourage women political engagement, the report recommends quotas, affirmative action laws, and the formation of networks and caucuses for women. Additionally, the study highlights how critical it is to address the intersectional nature of these issues and acknowledges the need for customised solutions that take into consideration the variety of experiences and viewpoints held by women.

Recommendations

To improve the political lot of women of Makran, other aspects of life need improvement. The society is regulated by certain cultural and religious norms that prevent women from open participation in the political process resulting in deprivation of certain rights of female section of the society. It is time for women to rise against these chains and loud their vice for their due rights. Political mobilization campaigns can work well in this regard. Networks should be created to sensitize people about cruciality of women engagement in politics to make their respective contribution to the development and wellbeing of the society they live in.

Furthermore, creation of pro-active women party caucuses and networks will serve a good purpose in this regard. These groups are appropriate forums to debate, discuss and suggest the solutions of challenges confronting women. Their recommendations can be used by concerned policy institutions to protect and promote the cause of women. Besides these associations, efforts should be made to increase the number of reserved seats for women in national and provincial assemblies to provide them with the required opportunity to bring

their grievances to limelight for redressal. Women are an essential section of the society, and they can use their association and agency to not only contribute to the family income but also in the national wealth. To neglect the half of the population is equal to converting an asset into liability. Therefore, the above mentioned steps must be kept under serious consideration to address the weak performance of women of Makran in the mainstream political process.

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