



RESEARCH PAPER

Modernizing the Body Politic of Orthodox Societies: An Insight into the Construct and Impact of Gender-Specific Political Behaviors in Pakistan

¹Rifat Rafeeq * and ²Dr. Abdul Basit Khan

1. PhD Scholar, Department of Political Science, Government College University, Faisalabad , Punjab, Pakistan
2. Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Government College University, Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan

*Corresponding Author: abdulbasit@gcuf.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

Even in the very recent history of the modernized communities of the world, women had been kept out of practical politics. The promotion of ideologies like liberalism, individualism, feminism helped women to actively participate in social and political order in their respective communities. It has now been established that feminization of politics increases the capacity of women in determining and devising policies and at the same time it ensures that the interests of rather marginalized segments of the society will be protected and promoted properly during the course of legislation. It is a common fact that longitudinal studies that track the career trajectories of female politicians over time provide valuable insights into the long-term challenges and enablers of women's political advancement. Accordingly, the instant study qualitatively follows different cohorts of female politicians to examine how women's political careers evolve, including their ability to move from local to national politics, the impact of mentorship and political networks, and the role of political parties in supporting or hindering their advancement while particularly focusing on the case of Pakistan. The incorporation of the policy recommendations offered by this study would help improving the knowledge and practice of what fosters female leadership and participation in politics and governance which in turn would create fair society where women's political contributions would be respected across the chamber and hall.

KEYWORDS Feminism in Pakistan, Gender-Based Political Activism, Political Mobilization of Women

Introduction

There is no doubt that raising level of political education of women especially the grassroots women is crucial in promoting their political role. Civic education programs and activities must particularly explain the importance of women in politics and process involved in participation in government. It's also possible for such organizations to provide information on how to contest for an election, how the various political parties are structured, and how to engage for the support to address certain issues within the community. In this way, such initiatives can give women the chance to engage themselves more actively into political life as well. Also preparing women with the necessary materials and informing them about how politics work can assist them considerably in political context. Such an empowerment through education and awareness does not only expand the politically active voters, especially women, but also enhances their competence in policy-making and leadership.

Perhaps the most fundamental complaint launched at feminist political theory is the structural domination of patriarchal patterns in politics and public sphere. In Pakistan, gender quotas have acted as a tool to enhance the seats of women in the National Assembly as expected, but it has not decimated the culture that already exists around male superiority. Power differentials continue to characterize gender relations: women are still inadequately represented in decision-making roles and are seldom consulted on critical decisions. This phenomenon can be attributed to the fact that many political institutions are still a man's

world and therefore female parliamentarians will not be able to bring about transformative change in the House.

Literature Review

Rehman, *et al.* (2023), investigated the position of women in decision-making in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly during 2023. The research objectives were as follows: to determine the extent of women's engagement in assembly committee affairs; to determine the challenges faced by women; and to offer recommendations on how to increase the representation of women. To these end, the researchers used both quantitative and qualitative research methods which allowed the study to have a broader understanding of the subject. The quantitative measure focused on the extent of women's participation in legislative processes including assembly sessions, input to debates and discussions and involvement in key legislative committees. In this way, the researchers could compare these variables with the similar variables of male members and establish the difference in the representation and participation. Even though at the time this study was conducted women held around 22% of the total seats in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly, the study revealed that women's 'voice' in decision making is lagging far behind their numerical presence. This involved interviews and focus group discussions with the female legislators, assembly staff as well as other stakeholders; certainly it had given a truly qualitative insight into some of the challenges women in the legislative process encounter. These barriers could encompass, gender bias, systematically lower rates of engagement, and consequently limited promotions to executive positions. The research papers' qualitative results would complement quantitative explanation of the facts, providing deeper insight of the male and female factors that determine women's participation in governance.

The study revealed several core obstacles that female lawmakers experience in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. For example, it pointed out that patriarchy, non-recognition of female voices, and the long-standing discrimination of women remained the chief causes for problems faced by female legislatures when trying to be heard in the assembly. Some of these effects can immobilize women and bar them from exercising decisions that are required in decision making processes of States and organizations and tasks related to gender issues that are paramount in an efficient governance system. Based on the aforementioned challenges, the study recommends suggestion on how to increase the participation and productivity of females in the houses of parliament. Such suggestions involve attempts at bringing more gender-sensitive leadership and key committee and more changes that would enhance gender equity within the assembly (Rehman, *et al.*, 2023).

The works of Zotova & Cohen (2016) and Khattak & Arshad (2023) presented a detailed understanding of the intertwined processes of women's empowerments and their political activities in developing states. Although Pakistan is moving towards increased gender-based representation in the National Assembly, major obstacles are still there in terms of gender equality where women's full participation and contributions in the political affairs of the country are concerned. Any future investment in the gender equality and women's empowerments programs, will contribute to the improvement of Pakistan's democracy and give women stronger voice within the society. The findings of these studies remained very much helpful while framing the research design of the instant study which in turn would speed up the future course for global campaigns for women's rights and gender equality.

However, despite the presence of these challenges, this fact is identified with respect to Pakistani society that women still stand amidst lot of challenges in the political process in Pakistan. Among them one of the most massive is gender inequalities which are reflected in restriction of women's rights and opportunities to vote. All these are compounded by political structures that do not offer adequate resources, poor chances of occupying leadership positions in a party, and male-dominated networks. For instance, in the year

2021, only 5 percent of the party leaders in Pakistan were women which has been stated by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA). It corroborates the fact that most women have not been appointed into higher political posts and the barriers that women encounter in embracing higher offices in politics.

In their detailed synthesis of the published work from the corresponding perspective, Zotova and Cohen turned to the discussion of the three-level consequences of personal monetary transfers concerning various aspects of social and economic advancement. While their research did not directly examine political activism in women, it paints a picture of the overall economic environment in which women exercise political power, especially in the developing nations of the third world – Pakistan in this case. Migrants' transfers, or 'remittances,' are the money that migrants send to relatives in their home countries; the money is very important for households and in fighting poverty. In many other developing countries of the world including Pakistan it has been documented that such flows increase the household income, standard of living and availability of social services like education and health. Despite this, remittances produce an empowering effect on the economic status of women and also the economic liberty they have, which should have an influence on the involvement of women in political activities (Zotova & Cohen, 2016).

A review paper in 2024 offered useful information on the trends, challenges and political parties in the context of the Pakistan's electoral system. In this extensive review, the authors referred to the prior studies and nomothetic evidence to analyze an array of issues related to the voters and elections, such as the voters' behavior, electoral system, and roles of the political parties in an election. The conclusions that were highlighted in the course of the review marginalized several significant problems that have not ceased to threaten the electoral process in the course of Pakistan: fraud with the voters and manipulation, and powerful positions of the stable political parties. They have all pointed to the need for dramatic changes aimed at strengthening the electoral processes and, consequently, democracy in the country (Review, 2024).

Tam examined the parliamentary supervision as the accountability mechanism in achieving sustainable development goals. The goal of the paper was to compare the different effective legislative procedures with a view of establishing that such procedures are important for governments to meet their development goals. Despite the fact that the gender dynamics did not form the basis of the study, more emphasis was placed on the role of legislative process in the enhancement of gender parity and equity, responsibility, and, transparency. Fighting for the transparency of governments' activities, as well as to increase the chances of further successful implementation of development measures, parliamentary monitoring plays a crucial role. The authors of the study pointed out that there is need to enhance legislative oversight of sustainable development policy and actions. This involves such things as: tracking the achievement of development goals, monitoring and evaluation of policies, and monitoring and evaluation of budgets (Tam, 2022).

The Intersection of Gender, Religion, Ethnicity, and Class:

In addition to regional and religious differences, the intersection of gender with ethnicity and class adds another layer of complexity to female political participation in Pakistan. Ethnic identity is a powerful determinant of political opportunities in Pakistan, and ethnic minority women often face double marginalization due to both their gender and their ethnicity. For example, women from the Baloch and Pashtun ethnic groups, who face additional barriers due to the strict patriarchal norms prevalent in their communities, are often excluded from decision-making processes within their communities hence had more limited opportunities to participate in national politics. Moreover, women from wealthier, urban, and politically connected families are more likely to succeed in politics as compared to women from lower strata of socio-economic development. For example, ex-Prime

Minister of Pakistan Benazir Bhutto and the current Chief Minister of Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif come from politically established elite families that provided them necessary social capital to navigate the male-dominated political sphere. The case of women from lower socio-economic strata is altogether different since these women lack the resources and political connections needed to launch successful political careers.

A significant legislative amendment was achieved by the female politicians of Pakistan that was related to the Child Marriage Restraint Act in 2019, wherein the age for marriage of girls was raised from 16 to 18 years. It addressed the persistent issue of child marriage in Pakistan. By increasing the legal age of marriage, the amendments aimed to protect girls from the adverse consequences of early marriages, such as dropping out of school, early pregnancies, and domestic violence. It might be noted that the female lawmakers led the call for the change, although this amendment faced resistance from conservative elements in society and certain political factions, but female lawmakers were instrumental in garnering support across party lines, illustrating their capacity to lead on sensitive and culturally entrenched issues (Ullah, 2023).

Role of Media

To elaborate the gendered dynamics of these relations, one should examine the representations of gender in media coverage. Media has the potential to significantly influence the portrayal of political candidates and in the case of female politician's media can either support or contest gender stereotyping. The current study observed that female Members of Parliament in Pakistan, as political figures are not provided a similar media attention as compared to that given to male politicians; when they are covered they are mostly featured on issues concerning their marital status and appearance, rather than their professional endeavors (Kucharzewska, 2022). The news coverage of this type supports gender stereotyping and reduces the presence of women in the political sphere. The way that intervenes personal life distorts women as being of less competence or not serious while working in public domain, thus hindering their success in political process. It informs the society and particularly the voters regarding the candidates, which may deter other women from vying for political posts. It is indicative of wider social cultures that position politics as a male-specific sphere into which women do not fit and, where they do, they are only barely acceptable, which sustains patriarchal processes.

Global Benchmarks: Comparisons with Similar Legislative Bodies

Sweden has a long history of promoting gender equality, underpinned by progressive social policies and a strong cultural commitment to equal rights. The country's nearly equal representation of women and men in parliament is a testament to its comprehensive approach to gender inclusivity. Sweden's gender-equal political system has been institutionalized over decades, with political parties voluntarily adopting gender quotas and committing to gender-balanced candidate lists in elections. As a result, Swedish women have been able to take on leadership roles in various sectors, including traditionally male-dominated fields like defense, finance, and national security (Ashfaq & Roofi, 2023).

In contrast, the representation of women in Pakistan's political system is far more limited. Although gender quotas have secured a degree of female participation in the National Assembly, women continue to face significant barriers in gaining representation through general seats. The cap of 33% parliamentary seat for women, set by gender quotas, has not been fully realized, and cultural and political obstacles prevent many women from contesting elections for general seats. Furthermore, the historical dominance of male political elites, along with deep-rooted patriarchal attitudes, have hindered women's ability to move beyond reserved seats and take on more prominent roles in Pakistan's political landscape.

Policy and Legislative Contributions

In countries with higher female representation, women have been able to make substantial contributions to policy and legislative processes across a wide range of sectors. As discussed above, Swedish women hold 50% of ministerial positions, which enables them to shape policy on critical issues such as finance, defense, and national security. This gender balance ensures that policies are inclusive and reflective of the needs and perspectives of all citizens, regardless of gender. The integration of gender perspectives into policymaking in Sweden prevents the marginalization of any group and ensures that women's voices are heard at all levels of government (Rehman, *et al.*, 2023). Rwanda's impressive female representation has also translated into tangible policy achievements. Women parliamentarians in Rwanda have played a leading role in drafting legislation related to gender-based violence, health, and education. Moreover, women's leadership in Rwanda has had a profound impact on the country's post-genocide recovery, as women have been at the forefront of rebuilding communities and advancing social cohesion. Rwanda's political commitment to gender equality has resulted in more comprehensive and inclusive policies that take into account the diverse needs of the population (Ashfaq & Roofi, 2023).

In other countries, attempts are also being made at implementing gender sensitive laws depend on the underlying structural frameworks and monitoring regarding the abuses of the legal frameworks. Canada and Germany are some of the countries that have implemented good practice on this. In Canada, the promotion of gender-sensitive policies has a strong institutional framework that lit in May 2018 in Ministry for Women and Gender Equality and Youth of Canada, which is responsible for the coordination of such policies and for considering gender issues in government, projects (Khushik, 2021). Germany, too, has strong legislations on gender-mainstreaming backed by public responsibility and civil activism. These frameworks help affirm that while such policies are passed, they equally are implemented, promoted and enforced. Also, both countries have effective civil society organizations dealing with women issues in that they monitor the implementation of such policies to ensure that women as well as the public benefit from their application.

In contrast, female parliamentarians in Pakistan are often relegated to "soft" policy areas, such as education, health, and social welfare, while their male counterparts dominate policy discussions in finance, defense, and national security. This division of labor reinforces gender stereotypes and limits women's influence on the most critical national issues. Despite their demonstrated competence and ability to advocate for meaningful social change, women in Pakistan continue to face structural barriers that prevent them from exercising full legislative power. For example, during the 2018-2023 legislative period, only 9% of women parliamentarians were involved in committees dealing with finance and defense, while 37% of male parliamentarians held similar roles (Khan & Ara, 2023). This imbalance highlights the need for broader reforms that enable women to take on leadership roles in all sectors, particularly those that are traditionally male-dominated. It also underscores the importance of breaking down the cultural and structural barriers (as pointed out in the preceding paragraph) that prevent women from fully participating in the legislative process.

Conclusion

Examining women in political leadership positions as presented in this research study, can be said to have influence in a way that more females would come forward and occupy leadership positions including politics. This research can also revise stereotypically gendered perceptions by demonstrating practical involvement of female parliamentarians into law-making, thereby encouraging more comprehensive perception of women's competence in the sphere of management. Moreover, the study would help to expand the gender equality advocacy by presenting data that indicates a need for constant work to eradicate women's oppression and the exclusion of women from spheres of life that concern

everyone. This societal impact is not going to be restricted to the Pakistani context only; comparable gender norms existing in other societies would mean that the findings add to the global debate on women in leadership and politics.

The knowledge gap regarding the subject in hand will be filled not only by the understanding of female representation in the National Assembly of Pakistan in the present day, but the phenomenon will also explicate realizable approaches to increasing the efficiency of gender mainstreaming in political institutions of the country. This research would definitely serve a positive social purpose of the growth of an appropriate political culture in Pakistan for which innocent and talented female Parliamentarians should have a real and meaningful stint in the Parliament and in the Law making process. Finally, the study suggests that political parties should be required to nominate a certain number of women for general seats in open elections. This would help address the underrepresentation of women in contested constituencies and ensure that women have equal opportunities to compete for leadership positions within their parties and the National Assembly.

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