



Graduate Institute of Development Studies
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Women's Participation in Politics in Pakistan

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Preface

The political representation of women is central in all measures of development and inequality. In the domain of politics, significant developments in terms of women's participation have taken place in Pakistan. Most significantly, the political participation of women has increased in legislative bodies. This change in political participation can be attributed to a number of factors, such as Pakistan's legal commitments to the international community which include: the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination (CEDAW), the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

At the same time, women's participation in politics is constrained due to social and cultural factors. This is reflected in the overall situation of women's low visibility in the public sphere in general as can be seen from data on female labour force participation rates and low literacy levels of women especially as compared to men.

This research paper makes a valuable contribution to the literature on women's empowerment by identifying the barriers and the enabling factors to women's political participation in general and in Pakistan.

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Abstract

While the exclusion of women from the political arena results from several structural, functional and individual factors that vary in different social contexts across countries, the common underlying dynamic is that of patriarchy. The Global Gender Index has brought women's interests and their representation in the political process to the forefront by identifying political empowerment of women as a key development indicator. Political representation, however, is a complex and nuanced process. This research paper argues that while the extent and content of women's representation is fundamentally dependent on gender and electoral process partisanship of political parties, the precise effect and interaction of gender and partisanship are shaped and conditioned by contextual factors, specifically a political environment of receptiveness to women in positions of political power. It also aims to identify the major socio-cultural, religious and other challenges which women face as well as the role of state actors (government, civil society and NGOs) in promoting or restricting women's participation. Finally the research aims to highlight the contribution of women politicians as members of provincial and national assemblies. This research has implications both for researchers trying to understand women's political representation as well as for citizens and political elites engaging in the process of representation.

Acronyms/Abbreviations

ANP	Awami National Party
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
ECP	Election Commission of Pakistan
FAFEN	Free and Fair Election Network
GRAP	Gender Reform Action Plan
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
IJI	Islami Jamhoori Ittehad
JUI-F	Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam Fazlur Rahman
KPK	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
LGO	Local Government Ordinance
MMA	Muttahida-e-Majlis-e-Amal
MNA	Member of National Assembly
MPA	Member of Provincial Assembly
MQM	Muttahida Qaumi Mahaz
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NIC	National Identity Card
PILDAT	Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency
PML-N	Pakistan Muslim League- Nawaz
PPP	Pakistan People's Party
PTI	Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf
SDPI	Sustainable Development Policy Institute
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
USAID	United States Aid for International Development

Women's Participation in Politics in Pakistan

1. Introduction

Women's full and effective political participation is a matter of human rights, inclusive growth and sustainable development (OECD, 2018a). The active participation of women, on equal terms with men, at all levels of decision-making and political involvement is essential to the achievement of equality, sustainable development, peace and democracy and the inclusion of their perspectives and experiences into the decision-making processes. Despite this, even in the twenty-first century, women are facing obstacles in their political participation worldwide. They are under-represented in parliament and excluded from decision-making levels. Women's equal participation with men in power and decision-making is part of their fundamental right to participate in political life, and is at the core of gender equality and women's empowerment.

The political representation of women is central in all measures of development and inequality. Across the globe, the restricted participation of women in politics is a consequence of various structural and personal factors that differ in diverse social settings across countries with patriarchy as the common denominator. The global gender index (GGI) 2019 shows that political representation of women still remains the worst performing dimension. In terms of parliamentary representation, globally women have secured just 25 percent of available positions, a figure that slips to 21 percent at a ministerial level, with nine countries where they have no representation at all.

In the case of Pakistan, the overall political and social environment has not been supportive of women. The criterion of selecting and nominating women is biased towards women with strong economic and political connections. While quotas have ensured representation of women it has not allowed them to build their own constituencies. Moreover, patriarchy and the concept of *purdah*¹ has further restricted

¹ The word *purdah* literally means curtain, that is the seclusion of women from men

women and confined them to their homes and domestic space. They thus lack confidence, public speaking skills and are unable to handle pressure and rivalry in the political domain. Intimidation by their male counterparts who have more power in a male dominated society and have greater political experience creates a sense of inferiority among women and a lack of belief in their political abilities. Harassment of women politicians and being targeted and degraded on the basis of their sex by male politicians, religious parties and the media by the use of sexist language and innuendo are equally prohibiting factors. Lastly, financial constraints, lack of access to networks and sponsors for political campaigns, contribute to the low participation levels of women in politics.

This paper looks into the factors that determine the participation and lack of inclusion in the political process of women in Pakistan and specifically in the Punjab province.

2. Literature Review

Paradoxically, South Asia is the second region in the world after Scandinavia to have the highest number of women as the head of state. Richter (1990) suggests that women leaders do not generally have “an institutional base, a regional constituency, an administrative track record or a military niche”. Women have been able to gain top positions in politics as a result of dramatic circumstances such as coups, assassinations, or sudden death of the previous leader. Power has been held by families and inherited by women in the family from their male family members as in the case of India where the Gandhi family ruled for many years, in Pakistan in the case of the Bhutto and Sharif families, and also in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. This gave women the chance to take part in politics without having to deal with traditional barriers such as lack of experience, social contacts and *purdah*. Also, once in power, they were successfully able to make their own place and position in politics (Jahan, 1987).

Yet the overall number of women contesting elections remains low as only five to ten percent of women hold leadership positions. The ICRW-UN Women study (2012) highlights the similarities between women’s political participation in south Asian countries due to their patriarchal

social structures in which women have been restricted to the domestic sphere while men are expected to engage in public and political activities. These factors have been further enhanced by the perception of women as being incapable of performing public and political roles, which leads to a neglect of developing their capabilities and empowering them. The notion of segregation and *purdah* in South Asia especially in Pakistan also confines and limits participation of women in politics.

One of the main factors in creating differences in women's political participation is the caste system. While it explicitly excludes persons of certain castes from participation in India, in the case of Pakistan it functions in a similar manner with reference to class, *biradari* or kinship as well as types of work considered inferior. Caste not only works in conjunction with patriarchy it often itself becomes patriarchal (Mathur, 2014).

Violence is another common and recurring element in South Asian politics. Violence against women, outside and within the home effect their mobility and confidence to take part in political activities. Women are at risk and often subjected to harassment and physical violence during election time (UN Women, 2014). In Bangladesh and Pakistan intimidation by religious groups restricts women participation at all levels of the electoral process.

Among the factors enabling women's political participation Mathur (2014) has highlighted how some women elected representatives have used their power to help women in their communities by addressing basic issues such as health and child care in Bangladesh. Nazneen, Ehsan and Hasan (2014) provide interesting insights into the importance of social networks created on the basis of voluntary work, welfare activities and political activism as students by women in Bangladesh. At the same time, the authors highlight the difficulties faced by women councilors, despite their community service, in moving beyond local politics due to their inability to build relationships with the top political party leadership as opportunities for social networking for women are limited to party meetings (Ahikire, 2003). Thus, politics in informal arenas is highly exclusionary for women minimizing which their influence. Support for likely winners - usually male – also tends to discriminate against women's nomination as contestants (Agbalajobi, 2010).

Rai (2005) suggests that having reserved seats for women or quotas has helped in increasing women participation and representation in the legislative assemblies in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. Women politicians are also seen as more approachable by various women organizations for help in addressing issues faced by women in their society. They are seen as being less corrupt as compared to their male counterparts and this helps in establishing a more positive and credible image of women at the level of local government.

3. Research Methodology

This paper relies primarily on secondary data sources including documents, reports and publications of national and international non-governmental organizations and those of the government of Pakistan. Secondary research also includes a gender analysis of manifestos of political parties, a review of legal frameworks such as the Pakistan Constitution, Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and other laws and policies relating to women that have influenced participation of women in politics. An analysis of newspapers and reports on parliamentary sessions has been carried out to determine the level of participation of women politicians and to highlight the issues being raised by them.

Primary research has been conducted in the form of interviews of 23 women parliamentarians including 21 MPA's from Punjab and 2 MNA's who have been elected in the two elections of 2008 and 2013.² An attempt was made to interview women who were married and unmarried and those with previous political careers and new comers. Case study method has been used to document their life histories and experiences by conducting semi structured interviews to elicit data on:

- i. Personal and family related information (age, marital status, number of children, educational/professional qualification, work experience (formal work, community work etc., family background political/non-political, family support, political affiliation or as an independent candidate, membership of any organization)
- ii. Reason / motivation behind entering politics

² The interviews were conducted by Anum Sami as part of her MPhil thesis research.

- iii. Contribution of family, female role models, and social networks to women's participation in politics
- iv. Contribution of educational experience in creating interest in politics
- v. Political experience (struggles/challenges)
- vi. Access to resources (personal property/family resources/party resources)
- vii. Issues raised by women politicians in the assemblies and autonomy to raise particular issues
- viii. Support of male colleagues and attitudes of male members towards women in general (party/other-party)
- ix. Experience of sexist behaviour or any form of harassment and coping measures taken
- x. Perception of change in the political arena

The case studies have been analysed to identify the constraints and determinants or supporting elements that play a role in women's political participation.

4. Electoral history and women's representation

The Representation of the People Act passed by the UK government in 1918 and applicable to the colonies, granted the vote to women over the age of 30 who met a property qualification; however, it gave the vote to all men over the age of 21. In the Indian subcontinent two women were nominated as members of the Constituent Assembly formed under the 1935 Government of India Act that served as the provisional constitution of Pakistan in 1947.³ Both belonged to political families having had the opportunity to gain political experience under the Muslim League and as members of the 1946 Legislative Assembly in undivided India. (NCSW, 2018).

Under the constitution of 1956 the number of reserved seats for women was increased to fifteen. Women had the right to vote for general

³ The two women were Shaista Ikramullah and Jahanara Shahnawaz who belonged to influential political families of Pakistan.

representatives and also for women on reserved seats. However, following imposition of martial law in 1958, a new constitution was promulgated by the military regime of general Ayub Khan that led to women being appointed by elected members of the assemblies who were all male, instead of through open voting.⁴ This weakened the political position of women who remained token representatives beholden to the president. The military establishment was challenged by Fatima Jinnah, the sister of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, as a joint candidate representing all opposition parties including religious parties in the 1965 presidential elections. Though she lacked political experience, the popularity and respect she earned was based on her family history. The controlled Basic Democracies system put in place by Ayub Khan however led to her defeat.

In the first general elections in Pakistan (1970) under the military regime of Yahya Khan the newly formed Pakistan People's Party (PPP) won the support of large numbers of women whom it addressed as equal citizens. Many women voted for the PPP against the wishes of their male family members. But, in terms of women's representation, no woman was directly elected from the east or the west wing of Pakistan. However, six women were elected on reserved seats in West Pakistan.

Following the separation of Bangladesh in the 1973 constitution five seats were allocated for women in every provincial assembly and ten seats in the national assembly. The constitution encouraged gender equality stating every citizen to be equal and ensured that there would be no discrimination on the basis of gender; this led to increased participation of women in all areas of national life. The two female members of the constitution drafting committee⁵ were successful in pushing forward several declarations to ensure that there would be no discrimination on the basis of gender, race or religion including the demand for women's representation in local bodies. However, women could still not vote for seats reserved for women (Central Asia Institute, 2016).

Although one woman was finally directly elected to the national assembly in 1977, the reserved seats for women could not be filled as the assemblies were dissolved following allegations of rigging. The

⁴ The first general elections in Pakistan were held in 1962

⁵ Begum Nasim Jahan and Begum Ashraf Abbasi

chaos resulted in the third military takeover by General Mohammad Ziaul Haq whose promise of new elections within three months never materialized. For women this was a period of retrogression and draconian legislation in the name of Islamization.⁶ The military regime held non-party based elections in 1985.⁷ Paradoxically, women's political participation at this time showed an increase with 40 women contesting seats in the national and provincial assembly.

Issue of woman as head of state

Following the death of General Ziaul Haq the partyless elections were challenged by Benazir Bhutto, representing the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) along with other opposition parties. The main opposition party, the Pakistan Muslim League under the leadership of Nawaz Sharif teamed up with the other parties to establish the Islami Jamhoori Ittehad (IJI). The 1988 elections were revolutionary in terms of political empowerment of women as for the first time Benazir Bhutto was elected as the first female prime minister of Pakistan. This did not happen without controversy as to whether a woman could be the head of state in an Islamic country. Eventually it was declared that the president was to be considered as the head of state rather than the prime minister (Ansari Commission Report 1883). Participation of women during the elections of 1988 experienced a slight decrease, and out of the 38 national and provincial seats that they contested, only six were won. After the arbitrary dismissal of Benazir's government by President Ghulam Ishaq Khan elections were held in 1990. In terms of women's participation, the number of women who contested the elections went down from 38 in the previous elections to 35 and only four were winners.

In terms of representation of women in the assembly, the 1993 elections saw a minor rise in the number of general seats being contested and won by women. Women contested 41 national and provincial assembly seats and were able to win only seven seats. Early dismissal of the government led to elections in 1997 in which the overall number of

⁶ See the report of the Ansari Commission (1983). This is discussed later in this paper.

⁷ Political parties were barred and the country was still under military rule. Zia ul Haq made changes to the constitution by adopting the Eighth Amendment to the constitution of Pakistan. An important and controversial feature was the inclusion of article 58-2(b). The article gave the president the power to dissolve the assemblies with or without the advice of the prime minister.

women who contested the elections increased to 56 however, the number of seats actually won increased by only one.

Three years after the military takeover by General Pervez Musharraf in 1999, elections were held in which reserved seats for women were brought back. The electoral reforms of 2002 set the qualification condition of graduation for contestants, which barred many male candidates. Educated women from notable political families were able to enter politics on behalf of their male relatives as is evident from the fact that 13 women out of a total of 58 who were contestants to the national assembly won. Likewise, 12 women out of 119 contesting the provincial assembly seats were successful.

Increased visibility of women

Since 2002 women's seats in the national and provincial assemblies have increased substantially (NCSW, 2018). With the return of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) to power in the 2008 elections, 16 women contestants out of 73 were elected at the national level and 10 women out of 122 at the provincial level. Women were appointed to key parliamentary positions, such as the ministry for foreign affairs, information and broadcasting, as ambassador to the United States and speaker of the national assembly. In addition to this, the top position in the federal cabinet was also given to a woman.

Although the majority of women who had been given party tickets for reserved seats had little political experience - as their qualification was based on being graduates and belonging to elite political families - the formation of the Women's Parliamentary Caucus (WPC) for the first time in 2008 helped to create greater sensitivity to women's issues and gave women greater visibility in parliament. It enabled women politicians to work together irrespective of party affiliations.

The 2013 elections were considered to be a major breakthrough in the history of Pakistan as for the first time a civilian government completed its full term and smoothly transitioned to hand over power to the next civilian government without any military intervention. More than 15 million women participated as voters and candidates (UN Women). The PML-N emerged as the most powerful party. In terms of women

representation, 419 women contested the general seats compared to 192 in 2008, that is, an increase of 130 percent (PILDAT, 2013). Although, there were many more women contestants, the number of women actually winning national assembly seats declined from 16 in 2008 to 6 in 2013 (Aurat Foundation, 2013). The highest number of winners belonged to PML-N. The elections also saw the rise of Pakistan Tehreef-e-Insaaf (PTI), which emerged as the strongest political party in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and the second largest in Punjab after the PML-N. Women won only 3.4 percent of all general seats and no woman was able to win a seat in KPK.

The 2018 elections brought in 89 women parliamentarians, of whom 69 were members of the national assembly. There were also 20 women senators. Though the number of women who were able to win elections on general seats decreased as compared to General Elections in 2008 and 2013, the number of women contestants increased. The 464 women candidates constituted 5.2 per cent of the total contestants. Of them, 289 had been awarded tickets by political parties, while 175 women contested as independents. There were 5 transgender contestants. Only seven women were included in the 157 non-Muslim candidates nominated by the parties for the various assemblies.

In the case of general seats for women, in majority of cases women were given tickets on unwinnable seats and there was no support or training extended towards them by the political parties. Six political parties did not allocate the required five per cent tickets to women candidates. Photographs of women candidates were missing from election campaigns; thus the "majority of women candidates were silent and unseen" (NCSW, 2018).

Table 1: Women's political representation 1951-2018

Year/Event	Women's Representation	Gain/Loss
1951	2 members of Constituent Assembly	Demand -5% women's quota, given 3%
1956	10 reserved seats in both E and W Pakistan	Women had double franchise
1962	6 reserved seats in NA out of 156 5 reserved seats in each PA out of 155 ⁸	Indirect election mode
1965 elections	Woman contestant for President (lost)	Women's candidature for political positions endorsed
1970 elections under LFO ⁹	Reserved seats increased (13 /313) NA (7 for EP, 6 for WP) PA (10 for EP, 11 for WP)	
1972	NA voted in 7 women on reserved seats	Provincial assembly after separation of East Pakistan in 1971
1973	Reserved seats: 10 out of 210	Right to contest general seats
1977	First woman contesting on a general seat for NA wins Women winning on general seats: 2 from Baluchistan PA 5 from NWFP PA, 6 from Sindh PA 12 from Punjab PA	Ten years quota for 10 reserved seats in NA, and 5% in each PA for ten years or two elections (whichever is later) Martial Law 1977 ended assemblies
1981	20 women nominated to the Federal Advisory Council	Nominations of women under martial law
1985	13 women contested on open seats 2 women won in general elections 1 woman won on minority seat 2 women won in Punjab PA	Women reserved seats increased to 20 in NA in non-party elections Period of reserved seats extended for 10 years or 3 rd general elections No women appointed to the Senate.
1988	First Women Prime Minister 17 women contested for NA on general seats – 4 won	Woman appointed as Minister of State

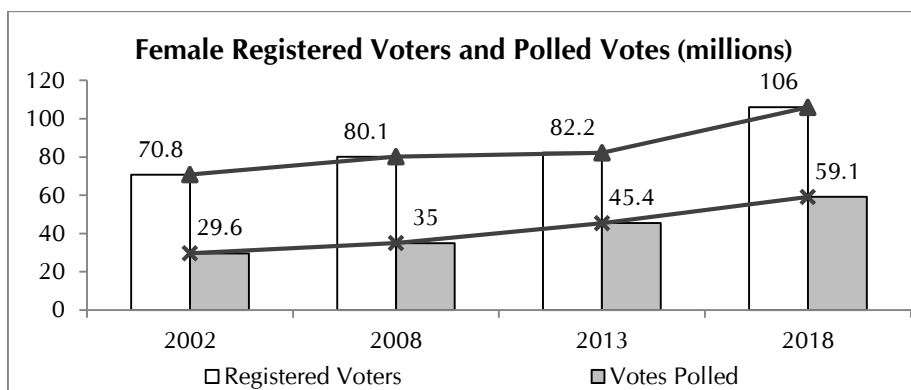
⁸ 1962 Constitution Article 71(2) provides for 5 seats reserved for women in each provincial assembly

⁹ Legal Framework Order (LFO) instituted during Martial Law in place of the constitution which is suspended

Year/Event	Women's Representation	Gain/Loss
1990	2 women won NA general seats 2 won PA seats	Bill on reserved seats rejected Less representation of women
1993	Woman Prime Minister 4 women won NA general seats 3 women won PA general seats and 1 minority seat	No reserved seats
1997	7 women won NA general seats 1 women won PA general seat in NWFP 1 women won minority seat in Punjab	No reserved seats Martial Law in 1999
2001	33% seats allocated for women at all tiers of government	Thousands of women at local, union council and district level
2002 LFO	Total women legislators -132 13 women on general seats in NA 18 women in Senate 11 women in PAs	Demand for women's representation was 33% however, %age of women legislatures rose to 19.8% (1.4%) in 1997 Increase in number of voters with lowering of voting age from 21 to 18 Increased quota to 17% in NA and PAs First time representation of women in the Senate
2005-2009	Reduction in number of UCs corresponding reduction in number of women councilors	Followed by suspension of LG System
2008	16 women on general seats in NA 10 women on general seats in PAs	Many women as independent candidates, most lost elections
2013	9 women on general seats in NA 12 women on general seats in PAs	As above
2018	Total: 69 women MNAs 20 women senators 8 women on general seats in NA 8 women on general seats in PAs	As above Woman speaker of the NA

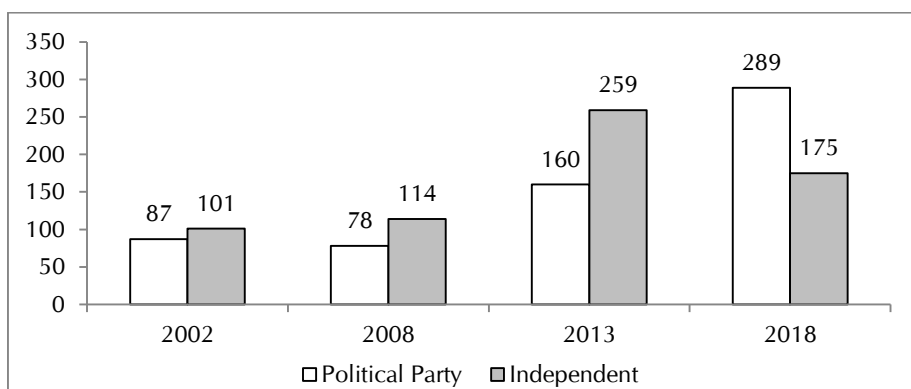
Source: Compiled by authors

Although the constitution gives women the right to vote, tradition and customs restrict their ability to fully exercise their right. However, total votes polled as a percentage of registered voters show a substantive increase from 42 percent in 2002 to 59 percent in 2018. Similarly, the number of women contestants increased from 188 to 464 over the same period (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Rising Trend in Female Candidates 2002-18

Source: Compiled by authors

Women have contested elections as representatives of political parties as well as independents. Over the years few women have managed to win on general seats. Those who have and those on reserved seats are highly educated and professional women often with development and activism experience (NCSW, 2018). Till the 2018 elections, more women contested on general seats as independent candidates as political parties are reluctant to nominate women candidates (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Women contestants on General Seats

Source: Compiled by authors

Women contesting as independent candidates for general seats have little chance of winning unless they have access to resources, influential family support, or effective party backing. Yet an increasing number of women from middle and low income families, some from remote areas and even the scheduled caste have competed reflecting a growing political awareness and motivation for participation in legislative decision making to promote the concerns of their communities or regions (Aurat Foundation, 2015).¹⁰

5. Role of the state

The state is central to the inclusion or exclusion of women from the political process. Representation of women in elections including rules and regulations for participation in elections by them, are legislated through a broad legal framework which derives its legitimacy from the constitution, laws enacted by parliament, as well as those promulgated under military regimes in the form of Legal Framework Orders (LFOs). In addition, the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII), a constitutional body of Pakistan is responsible for giving legal advice on Islamic issues to the government and the Parliament.¹¹ The Election Commission plays a key role in ensuring that election rules and regulations are implemented. The role of the state in Pakistan has been both positive and negative.

Constitutional provisions

The Constitution of Pakistan clearly highlights women rights. Article 25 of the constitution states that:

- i. *"All citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law.*
- ii. *There shall be no discrimination on the basis of sex.*
- iii. *Nothing in this article shall prevent the state from making any special provision for the protection of women and children."*

Article 25 has clearly shown that the Pakistan's constitution has granted equality, freedom and dignity to all of its citizens and that there is no

¹⁰ Country Gender Assessment Report 2014-15, Aurat Foundation 2015

¹¹ The CII was founded in 1962 under the government of Ayub Khan

discrimination on the basis of gender. However, the current and previous governments have actually failed to fully implement the clause. Women are side lined from mainstream politics because of the socio-cultural and religious values that dominate our culture and restrict their participation in the political processes, while confining them to traditional roles.

Islamic interpretations and women's political participation

Islamic principles in Pakistan derive their origin from the following two clauses of the Objectives Resolution¹² a part of the Constitution since 1951:

"Wherein the principles of Democracy, freedom, equality, tolerance and social justice as enunciated by Islam will be fully observed."

"Wherein the Muslims will be able to organize their lives in accordance with the teachings and requirements of Islam as set out in the Quran and the Sunnah."

However, interpretation of the above clauses for formulating laws especially in the context of women's status and political participation is based largely on the differing ideological and socio-cultural beliefs held by the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII), political parties and women's rights groups. Furthermore, political expediency has more often than not given in to the highhandedness of the religious lobby especially in the case of discrimination against women.

During the military regime of Zia ul Haq in addition to the several discriminatory laws promulgated under the garb of Islamization,¹³ that systematically reduced the status of women, the Ansari Commission was created in 1982 to inform the president which aspects of contemporary Pakistani society were repugnant to Islam. The measures it recommended included disqualifying women from ever being a head of

¹² The Objectives Resolution was passed by the first Constituent Assembly on 12th March 1949. It served as preamble for the constitution of 1956, 1962 and 1973 and ultimately became the part of the Constitution when the Eighth Amendment in the Constitution of 1973 was passed in 1985.

¹³ Such as the Hadood Ordinances, the Law of Evidence, etc.

state; requiring women to be at least fifty years of age and to secure her husband's permission before becoming a member of the Majlis-e-Shura;¹⁴ reserving five percent quota for women in the Majlis-e-Shura to be appointed by the President; prohibiting women from leaving the country without a male escort; and refusing to allow an unmarried, unaccompanied woman to serve abroad in the foreign service. This was a blatant attempt at curtailing the participation of women in politics.

Quotas and reserved seats for women

The state can also ensure participation of women in electoral politics through affirmative action by fixing quotas, a practice that is prevalent throughout south Asia and is not limited to Pakistan. Popularly known as "reservations", in Pakistan the 1956, 1962, 1970, 1973 and 1985 constitutions all allocated reserved seats for women in both the national and provincial assemblies. Under the Devolution of Power Plan (DPP) in 2000, a 33 percent quota was assigned for women at all three levels of local government, that is, at the district, *tehsil* and union council level in all the provinces enabling women to participate in large numbers. Women were also given 17 percent quota in senate, national and provincial assemblies. These political reforms gave women opportunities to have their own political presence in the political arena. Table 2 shows the large number of women who submitted nomination papers against the reserved seats allocated to them in 2013.

Table 2: Seats Reserved for Women – General Elections 2013

Province	National Assembly		Provincial Assembly	
	Seats	Nomination Papers	Seats	Nomination Papers
Punjab	35	261	66	640
Sindh	14	99	29	247
KPK	8	78	22	229
Balochistan	3	50	11	114
Total	60	488	128	1230

Source: SDPI Election Cell, 2013

The quota system has helped women participate in politics on reserved seats however it has the drawback of women not having their own

¹⁴ Refers to the parliament under an Islamic system.

constituencies (Aurat Foundation, 2012). This results in their continued dependence on their male counterparts. It also takes more time and hard work for women nominated under this system to prove themselves. Although the quota system has helped in increasing women representation in the assemblies, women are still struggling to find resources and opportunities that could allow them to contest for the general seats.

Currently, there are a total of 342 seats in the National Assembly. Of these, 272 are filled by direct elections. In addition, the Pakistani Constitution reserves 10 seats for religious minorities and 60 seats for women, to be filled by proportional representation among parties with more than five percent of the vote. In the 2018 elections, of the 60 women on reserved seats to the national assembly 33 were from Punjab, 14 from Sindh, 9 from KPK, and 4 from Balochistan. Of the 128 seats reserved for women in the provincial assemblies 66 were from Punjab, 29 from Sindh, 22 from KPK, and 11 from Balochistan.

The Elections Act 2017

The run-up to Pakistan's 2018 general elections witnessed an increased focus on women's political participation with higher female voter turnout in much of the country. In particular, the Elections Act of 2017 recognized the need to increase representation of women in politics (as voters and candidates) and imposed three key measures to promote their participation. First, the Act mandated that returns from any constituency where women's turnout was less than or equal to 10 percent be nullified. Second, it criminalized the practice of preventing a woman from voting in or contesting an election. Third, it required all political parties to list female candidates in at least five percent of their non-reserved national and provincial assembly seats. The Electoral Commission of Pakistan (ECP) also promoted women-only polling stations with female staff to encourage voter turnout in more conservative parts of the country.

Local government and women

The importance of women's participation in local government cannot be underrated. Local government helps in addressing issues and concerns

of people at the local level. It allows candidates to build their skills and abilities and trains them to take on future political roles. Lacking democratic legitimacy the three local government systems have been introduced by military regimes. During the military regime of General Ayub Khan the first local government system or "Basic Democracies" was introduced. The next local governance system was established in 1979 during the military regime of General Zia-ul-Haq. The new governance system was similar to that introduced during General Ayub's regime and it was implemented for almost a decade till General Pervez Musharraf came into power and introduced the Local Government Ordinance (LGO) 2001.

For the first time, the 2001 LGO established 33 percent quota for women seats in all three levels of local government. Against all expectations, 90 percent of the seats were filled and around 3600 women were able to enter local government. During the local government elections of 2005 a similar pattern was observed when 156,925 women took part in the elections and 98.3 percent of the seats were filled in the union councils that is at the lowest level of local government. The introduction of local government system works well for women without any political family background, enabling them to take part in elections on the basis of the work they had done for the improvement of their communities. Many of these women have gone on to becoming members of the national and provincial assemblies as well.¹⁵ In most countries, local government provides a pathway and a training ground for women to progress in politics. In Pakistan, the participation of women contesting the local government elections has varied across different regions. In areas like Balochistan and KPK where the culture is heavily influenced by tribal and feudal systems, the participation of women has been very low. However, in Punjab and Sindh the more developed provinces, the level of women's participation has consistently been high.

The 18th amendment of the constitution in 2010 led to the devolution of central power from the federal government to the provincial governments. Since then, provinces have more power to formulate

¹⁵ Nafisa Shah is one such example. She has a political family background, and first entered into the local government system as a Nazim of Khairpur district. Eventually during the election of 2013, she became an MNA.

policies and legislation. For women this also means that a significant representation in national and provincial assemblies would allow them to have a strong presence and active voice at all tiers of government.

However, in the local elections held in Cantonment areas in 2015, not a single woman was nominated. Moreover, during the by-election held in Lower Dir in May 2015, not a single woman came forward to vote for the provincial assembly elections. It has been reported that women were discouraged from casting their vote by the community. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) took notice of this and directed the KPK government to monitor the situation closely and make sure that a safe environment was created for women to take part in the voting process. According to the ECP, banning women from voting would be considered an offence. In Lower Dir, an extremely conservative district in KPK, very few women contested for the elections therefore the seat-candidate ratio was very low, suggesting that women seats would be filled unopposed. However, regardless of such constraints, two former women councilors in Lower Dir filed nomination papers to contest general seats.¹⁶

International commitments

Pakistan ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and formally endorsed the Platform of Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference for Women in Beijing in 1995. The National Plan of Action (NPA) launched in 1999 by the Ministry of Women Development reflected the government's efforts to promote women's political empowerment. It focused on giving women more power and authority in the decision making process within the household and the community. Moreover, it also intended to create social awareness and commitment by the society as a whole to increase the level of women participation in decision-making processes at all other levels. Additional measures were taken that aimed at achieving 40 percent representation of women in all public sector institutions. Training and awareness programs were also planned to ensure effective participation by women members. One of the initiatives under the national plan was to establish a National

¹⁶ One of the councilors was a member of the Women Councilors' Network.

Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) to examine existing laws and policies for women and propose changes and remedies. This was implemented in 2000. Since then provincial commissions have also been set up.

It had been highlighted that women's social status is considered to be lower in comparison to men, and the measures taken by the respective departments have not been sufficient to bridge the gender gaps that exist in our society. Therefore, the focus of the Gender Reform Action Plan (GRAP) 2005 funded by international development agencies was to improve the status of women by modifying policies and bringing structural reforms in the public sector, and improving participation of women in the political sphere, that could lead to increased women's empowerment.

6. Social institutions and women

The case studies of women parliamentarians show the vital role played by various social institutions. Of particular importance as highlighted by the women interviewed are the family, education, culture, law and media.¹⁷

The family

The role of the family emerges as crucial to women's success in politics. Most of the women who take part in politics come from political family backgrounds. Pakistan's electoral politics is based on kinship, in which women have to pander to the clan vote, as do the men. However, family support has its benefits for women politicians as families can also help provide financial support for election campaigns. Need for the family's moral, emotional and financial support, is recognized by all women parliamentarians. In the case of women who come from non-political family setups such support is extended once the immediate and extended family recognize the benefits in terms of prestige and status that they can derive. However, women who have entered politics on their own accord have done so on the basis of their educational and professional abilities.

¹⁷ The interviews are conducted by Anum Sami for her MPhil thesis

The term political apprenticeship was conceived by Cornwall and Goetz (2005), which “refers to the arenas in which political skills are learnt and constituencies built”. The case studies of women politicians point to the strong influence of their families over them through which they learnt and polished their political skills. Most of the women who came into politics came from political family backgrounds. Their fathers, mothers, brothers and extended family members have been formally involved in politics.

Undoubtedly, many women enter politics by chance and are nominated on reserved seats even though they have no prior experience, knowledge, political skills or capabilities. Most of these seats are given to the wives and daughters of political leaders to strengthen their position in parliament. At times they are compelled to run for elections on the insistence of their families who do not want to lose the hold they have over their constituency. Thus women are used as proxies to maintain the patriarchal power base. Such women have little decision making power and most of the work is done by the male family members. Their voters are those who have previously voted for their fathers, husbands or brothers and they are only looked as representatives of their male family members.¹⁸

Moreover, women on reserved seats are perceived to be homemakers who have no interest in politics and who become proxy candidates without having any prior experience in formal politics. They are considered puppets in the hands of their families and political parties as they lack the necessary training required for engaging in politics. Furthermore, lack of opportunities to build their own constituencies is a deterrent to their political development. Women who are directly elected have a different status and position and more bargaining power in the assembly that creates a sense of superiority on their part.

Having a political family background is one of the most common factors behind women’s entry into the political arena. More often, women also have family members who influence and inspire them to take up politics.¹⁹ However, it has been observed that in some instances,

¹⁸ MPA Samina Noor PML-N who contested the seat previously held by her father.

¹⁹ For MPA Raheela Khadim, her mother’s contribution to politics inspired her to continue to take her mother’s legacy forward after her death. Another MPA Mehwish Sultana was

husbands or fathers who are themselves politically active but cannot contest the seats due to legal matters would nominate their wives, daughters as their representatives.²⁰ There have been incidences where the male family member was behind bars forcing the family to nominate a female member of the family.

Women belonging to political families have greater awareness and exposure to political issues.²¹ They are able to sharpen their political skills during the time of elections as the whole family works collectively in managing and organizing their election campaigns. Through the political support provided by the family, they are able to understand the dynamics of politics and the importance of diplomacy to maintain relations. Moreover, they do not have to work as hard as the other female contestants as they already have a strong support from their communities because of their families' strong political hold in the area. The voters are often uneducated and just come forward to vote to show their loyalty to the family. This form of support often helps them in moving up in their careers. Their families play a crucial role in developing and forming their pathways for them in their political career. Moreover, the financial support required to contest elections is also forthcoming from the family.

In a country like Pakistan, women cannot work in the political arena without support from their family especially without the approval of male family members. Having some form of emotional and psychological support is one of the most important forms of support that women need in order to survive and take on the pressures of politics. Competing with male colleagues is difficult as they often look down upon them. The presence of husbands, fathers and brothers is helpful in undertaking tasks traditionally reserved for men in a patriarchal society. Surprisingly, in some cases it has been seen that it does not matter which party the family member belonged to as women politicians began to receive support from family members who belonged to a different

inspired by her father's hard work and efforts to serve their community. Her mother was also an MPA in the Punjab assembly.

²⁰ MPA Khadija Umar belonging to PML-Q formally entered into politics after her father could not contest elections due to some legal issues.

²¹ MPA Khadija Umar's family was very active in politics. Since she was a child she was fully aware of the issues and problems of her community as political discussions in the family were very common.

party.²² Apart from support the immediate family, women MPA's also mentioned receiving support from their extended families. They were cognizant of the fact that from being negative and unsupportive initially, once the woman had political power, their attitudes changed.

In some cases the political journey of a woman begins after she is married into a political family when she can make use of the connections that the family has in building her political career.²³ Various reasons have emerged for support extended by the husband and in laws. In some instances, husbands are actually encouraging and supportive of their wife's interest in politics and want her to pursue her dream of serving the community and bringing change. They often provide financial support by giving funds to the charity and welfare work their wives do for the community. This financial help from the families allows women to maintain their good will in the community and families often consider this as a form of investment in their political careers. Having a strong political position also brings prestige to the immediate and extended family and in laws, which is another reason why they are supportive. Therefore, both emotional and material gains are reasons for support from the family.

An overview of the life histories of women parliamentarians in the Punjab assembly reflects the supportive role that family members such as mothers, fathers, husbands and in laws play in encouraging and motivating women to continue their journey to attain their political goals. Family members also advocate with and mobilize the community to support these women. Therefore, it is clear that for women the key obstacles in their careers are not their husbands and fathers in fact eventually their family members become their biggest supporters.

Educational and professional status

Not all women have entered into politics because they had a political family background. Before 2002 the then military government of General Musharraf had introduced the condition of graduation or

²² Nausheen Hamid (PTI) receiving support from father in law who was from the opposing party PML-N)

²³ MPA Shameela Aslam PML-N was always interested in politics, but formally entered into it after getting married as her husband was very encouraging.

equivalent qualification for anyone who wanted to contest elections. Although this pre-condition was overturned by the Supreme Court of Pakistan lawmakers continue to be effected by it. This has prompted families to put up female candidates where no graduate male was available. Higher education including professional education is seen as positive factor in women's formal political participation. Additionally, women who have already established a name for themselves in society by working and serving their communities, such as doctors, teachers, entrepreneurs or are involved in welfare work are often encouraged to take up politics as this can give them more power and authority to address issues that they were already dealing with.²⁴

Often women take up the responsibility to serve people by getting work done in their areas such as fixing the sewage system, improving the water system, setting up private schools and vocational training institutions. They aim to fill the gaps ignored by government.²⁵ Professional women are well aware about the problems regarding their profession; therefore they are in a more suitable position to address and highlight these issues and then work to resolve them.²⁶ This allows them to build their own power base and is an important pathway to a life in politics.

Culture and the law

Women in Pakistan face the triple burden of the sexual division of labour. The life histories of women politicians show that many entered politics formally after their children had grown up. According to the patriarchal mindset in Pakistan, the primary responsibility of a woman is to look after her children, husband and family. The fundamental

²⁴ The women interviewed included three doctors, two advocates, and two educationists one of whom had done her doctorate. There were also two women with MBA degrees while eleven were graduates.

²⁵ MPA PTI Nabeela Hakim.

²⁶ The case of MPA Dr. Najma Afzal Khan is an example. She was residing in Saudi Arabia and decided to move to Pakistan as her husband wanted to join politics. After moving back they set up a hospital in their hometown Faisalabad along with running her dispensary. It took them ten years to establish themselves. By serving their communities they were automatically able to develop a support base for themselves. They were encouraged by others to take up politics because of their credibility and hard work which they had put in to serve people in their hometown. People from the community would come to them with their problems and expected them to resolve them.

assumption is that men can have both a successful professional life and a fulfilling personal life, but that for women trying to do both is difficult if not impossible. Thus women tend to prioritise their domestic responsibilities at the expense of their political work; consequently, their political performance suffers, affecting their political career.

Domestic and childcare support, therefore, becomes essential if a woman wants to pursue a political career. The life histories of women politicians show that support from their family was extremely important to enable them to meet with their constituencies, attend meetings and sessions of parliament. This support was often provided by their mothers, siblings, husband, and in laws. Some also had domestic workers to help them with childcare responsibilities. Also most of the women who have been party workers for many years formally enter politics once their children are grown up as this gives them the leverage to be fully focused on their political duties.²⁷ In some cases, grown up children were also seen as playing their part to support their mothers in their political endeavors.

Single women face other issues and have to be particularly careful in the way they conduct themselves. They are easy targets of character assassination by their competitors and their community. Therefore, single women have to be very firm in the way they deal with people in their everyday political life.²⁸ At times, opponents take advantage of the fact that a woman is single and discourage others from supporting single women. In such cases, support and trust from the family becomes instrumental for women to move ahead in their careers. Apart from financial and emotional support, social networks also help in dealing with political and social issues. In a patriarchal society, social capital becomes essential for women parliamentarians to move up the political ladder.

However, at times the family can also play a disabling role. It may show resistance to a woman's decision to enter politics. The reasons for not supporting their decision to enter politics can vary. In some instances, women have been told that the political arena is not a safe place for women and that it is more suitable for men who are strong enough to

²⁷ MPA Sadia Sohail Rana PTI entered politics only after her children had grown up and were independent.

²⁸ Nabila Hakim Ali Khan, MPA

deal with the political environment. They are constantly made aware of their vulnerability and weaknesses.

The dependency of women is nowhere more articulated than by the statement that, "generally, when money dominates politics, women lose out" (Shames, 2015). The cultural stereotypes of women have confined them to their homes restricting access to work. Women own few resources such as land or property. The common practice of denying women the right to own land or to inherit it limits their capability to act of their own free will. Therefore, women lack the financial sources and means that they would need to take part in politics.

Furthermore, in states with a religious ideology such as Pakistan, religion along with patriarchy, restrict women's participation in the public sphere. Women can be easily targeted and restricted from participation in politics. People respond passionately to perceived assaults on their faith, and opponents often label women as enemies of Islam.

The law as experienced by women is neither gender-neutral nor value free. It is a contested terrain as formal law of equal treatment is held hostage to informal law as determined by custom and tradition. Participation of women in politics is constrained by formal laws such as the laws of inheritance, which limit women's access to resources and land, and a number of laws that reduce her status in society. These include for example, the law of evidence, laws of Qisas and Diyat, Citizenship Law and laws related to marriage. Informal or social laws such as Karo Kari, Walwar, Haq Bakshwana, Swarah/Vani which involve economic exchange and transactions and have their base in an ideology of honour whereby the honour of the family is seen as resting in the body of a woman. These laws deter women from playing a political role.

The media

The image of women as unsuitable for politics is maintained by the media, which shows them as fashion figures and as a form of entertainment instead of taking them as serious representative of their constituencies. When women enter politics, they become public figures. While men are not affected by rumors but false news or rumors can greatly hurt a woman's political career. Character assassination is one of

the most common ways to degrade women especially in Pakistan. A study found that women politicians are often invited to talk shows when male guests are unavailable (Muneer, Shehzad and Sahi, 2013). A woman anchor stated that she took special care and effort to invite women politicians to her talk shows to give them an equal chance of representation in the media. She also ensured that they get the chance to participate in debates on domestic issues, international affairs and legislation. However, in general, the media has failed to change the image of women, a change that would encourage other women to come forward and take part in politics. Many women politicians are of the view that media personnel only invite a few popular women to their shows at prime time repeatedly taking away the chance of other women to come to the forefront to present their views.²⁹

Lastly, women are portrayed as fashion representatives rather than political representatives. They are often asked about the brand of clothes, shoes and bag they are wearing which the women politicians find very offensive as they feel it takes the attention away from the real work they are doing. Single women MPs are also frequently questioned on why they are not married. Thus women continue to be treated as objects instead of being respected and appreciated for the work they do.

7. Political institutions and women

Political parties are allocated reserved seats on the basis of the number of general seats won by the party rather than votes polled by the party in the general election in Pakistan. This system results in a number of problems. To start with, members who enter the assemblies by directly winning the contesting seat during the elections think of themselves as superior as compared to those who enter the assembly on reserved seats. Moreover, more commonly women members are not given any funds as compared to those who are directly elected. One argument for this is that those members who are directly elected have much more responsibility and are answerable to their voters for their work in their constituencies. Additionally, members on reserved seats, instead of having their own constituency are dependent, on the party leadership by

²⁹ Samina Khawar Hayat, a prominent politician was accused of hosting fancy dinners in top hotels for media persons to get more coverage from them.

virtue of being appointed by them. This restricts them from reaching out to the people directly.

Another political barrier for women is lack of support within the party. Generally it has been observed that women are actively involved in campaigning and gathering support for their party, however, very few women rise to decision making positions in the political structures. Political parties have sufficient resources and funds for running their various campaigns, yet female MPA's seldom benefit from them. In most cases, parties do not provide financial and economic support to their women members. The priority is given to the male members of the party. In addition to this, the criterion of selecting and nominating women is also biased and preference is given to members who have strong connections within the party.

The political environment in Pakistan can be extremely competitive and tough for women as it is predominantly male oriented. Entering a place which consists of highly experienced and seasoned politicians who have been in politics for a long time and especially those who come from strong political family backgrounds can be an intimidating place to be in for women politicians who are still very new in their roles. Often the experienced politicians are not very welcoming and look down upon new women politicians as they feel that they have no knowledge, experience and know how about the world of politics and how the political system operates. The women wings of political parties are thus expected to play a subservient role.

Women and political party manifestos

The positions taken by political parties in the context of gender in general and women's participation in politics in particular are reflected in the party manifestos. Over the years political parties have incorporated many of the demands articulated by women's organizations. The manifestos of six major political parties at three time periods – before the 2008 and at the time of the 2013 and 2018 national elections – are discussed in order to analyze the position taken by them on women.

Manifestos for the 2008 elections

Manifestos presented in 2008 lacked a clear plan or policies that could lead to effective empowerment of women (Aurat Foundation 2008). The parties adopted old strategies that had failed to uplift the status of women and provide them with equal rights in every area of life. A rights-based approach that would have ensured that laws were in accordance with international human rights standards would have benefitted the overall situation of women in the country.

The Awami National Party's (ANP) manifesto was considered to be the most gender-sensitive in comparison to other parties. ANP was the only party that openly rejected the existing discriminatory laws and policies against women. It also aimed to empower women financially and technically. It also aimed to simplify the process involved in getting a National Identity Card (NIC) for women and for eliminating the requirement for it to be changed with a change in the marital status.

The Pakistan Muslim League – Nawaz (PML-N) ensured that it would protect and give respect to women in accordance with Islam. It aimed to empower women socially, politically and economically by giving them small loans. It emphasized the importance of female education and appointing women teachers at the primary level. It also aimed at a more effective representation of women in key decision-making bodies.

The manifesto of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) called for laws and policies to be initiated to protect women against forced marriages and being killed for honor. It stated that women judges were more suitable for handling family issues and that child custody should be addressed in accordance with the law. This would also improve their status. Furthermore, the Ministry of Women Development would be included in key decision-making bodies.

The Mutahidda Qaumi Movement (MQM) manifesto stated that all the laws and policies that worked against the interests of women such as the Law of Evidence and the Law of Qisas and Diyat should be annulled. It also highlighted a number of social issues such as *Karo Kari* (honor killing), child marriage, sexual and physical abuse against women and children and stated that there should be public awareness campaigns

involving civil society and taking strict legislative measures. It also focused on hiring women teachers at primary level and employing women health visitors and nurses.

The Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F) mentioned employing only women staff for women hospitals and to give women opportunities for employment in some sectors in accordance with Islamic sharia. JUI-F does not give an in depth action plan for women development neither does it address core issues being faced by women.

Manifestos for the 2013 elections

Prior to the 2013 elections it was evident from the manifestos that most political parties had paid only lip service to issues raised by women rights activists (Aurat Foundation 2013). Though the importance given to women's issues varied from party to party all parties did focus on providing justice, protection from violence, education and basic health facilities for women.

The manifestos presented a clear picture of what the parties were putting forward for women development. For instance, the Awami National Party (ANP) not only suggested important steps for the welfare of women but also addressed issues at a local level by ensuring that local tribes did not enter into deals with political parties that would restrict women from taking part in politics. The ANP aimed to support women by giving them financial and technical support. It promised to implement the 10 percent quota for women. It also intended to strengthen the existing women ministries by giving them more authority and power. In addition, the Provincial Commission on the Status of Women in KPK was to be made an autonomous body. It also called for women to be elected directly for all elected positions.

The PML-N manifesto used religious rhetoric to state that Islam has given respect and importance to women and they deserve equal rights. It highlighted women's important role in bringing change and contributing to national development for which they needed to be empowered financially, socially and politically. It called for improving laws and policies to protect women against violence and to abolish systems that discriminate against women including women's inheritance

rights and harassment. The PML-N planned to take measures to increase the participation of women at management levels in the judiciary, education, health and law enforcement agencies. It aimed to give more opportunities to women entrepreneurs by setting up financing schemes. It aimed to establish an equality commission to ensure provision of fair salaries for women and minorities. It also called for increasing the job quota for women to 20 percent. Moreover, it aimed to involve the National Commission for Human Development to establish literacy programs that would eventually help one million women. However, the fact that all these plans were in place without the support of any actual action plan cannot be overlooked.

The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) stated that all citizens must be empowered especially those who are more vulnerable such as women, minorities and youth. It promised to bring women to the forefront and to improve their overall status by securing their legal constitutional rights. The manifesto assured that a number of initiatives would be taken for the welfare of women. It suggested increasing political empowerment of women by increasing their numbers in political parties. They suggested that a law will be proposed for the political parties to allocate additional 10 percent quota for women for choosing contestants contesting the general seats.

The PTI's manifesto gave high importance to equal rights for women. It aimed to follow a proactive gender policy to ensure that their abilities are utilized to their full potential. It aimed to disregard any such laws that did not favor women and to increase the political participation of women by ensuring that they are included at every level. It also planned to provide incentives for families to educate their girls. In addition, giving women the opportunity to enhance their monetary situation by making them self-sufficient and offering them training programs, and financial incentives for self-employment. PTI also aimed to form centers or "Insaf-gah" for women where they are given legal, medical and economic help. A detailed strategy was outlined for empowering women in various ways.

The manifesto of JUI-F for the development of women stood on two basic points. Firstly to ensure that women citizens get equal status as their male counterparts at all levels. And secondly, protection of women

rights in accordance with Islamic values and ideologies. The manifesto talked about basic rights however, it did not identify any action plan for improving the status of women.

The MQM's manifesto focused on various social issues faced by women and called for strict laws and implementation of these laws to fight against issues such as violence against women, rape, honor killing and child abuse. In addition it aimed to establish women shelter centers to protect vulnerable women. It also called for increasing representation of women in the parliament to 50 percent.

Manifestos of 2018 elections

Manifestos for the 2018 elections read more in sync with the economic survey of Pakistan. The PML-N manifesto focused in the field of social protection on the planned reforms consisting of the establishment of an Anti-Harassment cell, the eradication of gender-based wage gaps, the protection of minorities and the distribution of state-owned land to poor farmers with the total elimination of poverty by 2030.

The PTI manifesto promised the establishment of women police stations and women desks at all police stations, and creation of new separate juvenile and female prison centers. It also promised an extensive audit of all women-related legislation to rectify legal loopholes and establishment of gender based violence courts to provide speedy resolution and additional legal protection to women. Furthermore, the party also promised that protective services for women, like Dar-ul-Aman, would be significantly upgraded and affirmative action policies would be guaranteed in public employment. The Sehat Insaaf Program would be upscaled to all of Pakistan. The Lady Health Worker Program would be doubled to ensure that each woman has access to complete package of LHW services (including family planning, pregnancy management, neonatal care). Establishment and upgradation of girls' schools along with cash incentives for female education would be prioritized.

The PPP manifesto focused on a Family Health Service that would link and integrate the different levels of healthcare to ensure a coherent system and Family Health Cards entitling individuals to free of-cost or subsidized health care at public sector facilities. Furthermore, the

Mother and Child Support Program would target pregnant women and provide cash incentives to make pro-family planning, pro-nutrition, and pro-gender equality choices from the time of conception till 5 years. The program would be part of the PPP's effort to ensure information dissemination regarding reproductive health and family planning. Development of affirmative action policies for women in public sector employment and police, and incentivizing girls and their families to complete secondary education through cash transfers to remedy low female enrolment rates.

The manifesto of the MQM promised to increase women's employment by upscaling the cottage industry sector and establishing women-only industrial homes. It aims to carry out a complete ban on all human rights violations across Pakistan (honor killings, revenge rape etc.) to ensure no harm befalls couples that marry out of freewill in rural areas. Forming Old Age Homes in districts, increasing employment and educational opportunities for differently abled people and rehabilitation of juveniles, women prisoners and street children are part of the party's agenda.

The ANP manifesto is more political and general. There is only one clause that specifies women. It states that ANP is committed to equal rights and opportunities for all citizens, nationalities and groups irrespective of gender, religion, race, class and creed. All discriminatory laws shall be repealed. The essence of security will be guaranteed among women, elderly and people with disabilities, transgender, religious and ethnic minorities.

It is evident that political parties manifestos reflect the demands of women however, implementation or follow up on election promises is far from satisfactory. Moreover, the actions, attitudes and behavior of politicians are contrary to what is professed.

Political and sexual harassment

Targeting women politicians to degrade them is not a new concept. In 1977, when Begum Wali Khan faced opposition from male colleagues when she took over the leadership of the Awami National Party (ANP)

after her husband Abdul Wali Khan was imprisoned.³⁰ Begum Nusrat Bhutto the wife of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and leader of the women's wing of the Pakistan Peoples Party was targeted by activists of the Pakistan National Alliance who printed posters of her sitting next to President Richard Nixon which read "Mother of PPP workers with American President Richard Nixon". During the 1980's, Begum Nusrat Bhutto had to face indecent remarks and comments over her picture with US president Gerald Ford. In fact the opposition went to the extent of distributing and dropping her pictures from a private helicopter (Abbas, 2017).

After the death of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Begum Nusrat Bhutto and Benazir Bhutto had to face many sexist remarks. A religious leader targeted Nusrat Bhutto by referring to PPP's party slogan of '*Roti, Kapra, Makan*'³¹ and said that Nusrat Bhutto says she will give you *roti* (bread), ask her, will she give you *boti* (flesh) as well?" (Khan, 2017). When Benazir Bhutto returned to Pakistan in 1988 to fight against Zia-ul-Haq photographs of her partying during university days were circulated everywhere. At one point Benazir was labeled as a non-Muslim and not a suitable candidate for running the country. Maulana Abdul Sattar Niazi was recorded as saying that women were unsuitable for such a huge responsibility, as they cannot think logically while they are on their menstrual cycle. Before Benazir married Asif Ali Zardari, the anti-PPP slogans involved remarks that would ask for PPP to marry her off instead of bringing her forward in politics. The slogan '*Piplio haya karo, bhen da wiyah karo*' (People's party workers shame on you, marry your sister) became very popular in Punjab. However, neither marriage nor becoming the first female prime minister of Pakistan made any difference to the use of sexist language against her by the opposition. Failure to condemn such acts has led to their having become a common feature in Pakistani politics.

Musharraf's government made way for more women to take part in politics by increasing the number of reserved seats for women. In these circumstances, the male politicians and party workers had no option but to work along with women politicians. PML-N and PPP have also involved women and included them in their political endeavors. Even

³⁰ She was also the representative of the Pakistan National Alliance (PNA) that was contesting against the PPP.

³¹ Food, clothing, shelter

PTI, being a newly established party has been successful in bringing and promoting women politicians and has actively taken steps to include them in every area. However, even though women from these parties are working in the political domain they are not excluded from being victims of harassment and abuse.

Additionally being associated with a political leader also makes women who are vocal vulnerable to insults and harassment. Even before her marriage to Imran Khan, Reham Khan was constantly under scrutiny for being close to him. The opposition parties took advantage of the whole situation by targeting her as indirectly it meant attacking Imran Khan. Moreover, Mariam Nawaz³² and other women politicians at some point in their lives have faced insults to damage their image and thus keep women out of the political arena and confined to their homes (Khan, 2017).

Women have been targeted during political rallies especially the recent rallies held by the PTI when several women reported being harassed by male members. In one instance, a TV anchor was sexually abused and harassed during one of PTI's rallies, but no action was seen being taken by the party itself. Moreover, the social media war between PTI and PML-N also saw how Mariam Nawaz was made the target of sexist remarks (Khan, 2017).

Verbal abuse and harassment of women is also not uncommon in assembly sessions. Men often use these tactics to intimidate and demean their female colleagues. Not only do men harass women they at times involve female members of their male colleagues in their tirades. During a dispute in the assembly between a member of the PML-N and PTI, the former did not miss the chance of harassing the latter's female family members by referring to their poor upbringing. Many female parliamentarians took a strong stand against this.

Another incident recorded earlier in 2017 was when the Minister of Works and Services belonging to the PPP, harassed a female colleague MPA of the PML-F by labeling her a "drama queen" seeking and looking for ways for cheap publicity and even went onto invite her to his chamber. Following this incident, the female MPA held a press

³² The daughter of Nawaz Sharif: leader of the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz Group) and prime minister of Pakistan.

conference outside the Sindh assembly and threatened to set an example by setting herself on fire if the minister was not sacked from his position. She took this opportunity to raise the issue of harassment of working women in general in which she was supported by other female parliamentarians including those from the ruling party as well as civil society organizations as reported in several newspapers. The minister was forced to apologize to retain his position in the assembly. Women politicians thus made it clear for all politicians that they would not sit quietly and watch male members of the assemblies harass women members irrespective of which party they belonged to. In another incident in parliament, the Minister of Water and Power, made a derogatory remark towards PTI's female MNA member by comparing her to 'tractor trolley'; an incident that was ignored by the leaders of the ruling PML-N.

Many women politicians have complained of harassment or abuse by their male colleagues in the assembly, while some have stated receiving threats from their rivals; even incidents of kidnapping and murder are not unknown.³³ Women who belong to political families are still in a better position as they have strong support. But women who have no political history are more vulnerable to such incidents.

Politics is undoubtedly a male dominated arena and women face several challenges. Women politicians in Pakistan feel that they are continuously criticized for what they say and how they look, instead of being appreciated for their efforts. They are of the view that men tend to get away with wrongdoings and if women were to do something similar, they would face much more serious consequences as society is much less forgiving of women.

The seclusion of women from the public and political domain by the use of sexual and verbal abuse and harassment has been in evidence ever since women began to enter politics in Pakistan. It reflects the general mindset of a male dominated society. Politics is thus considered to be an unsafe place for women and male members of the family often do not feel comfortable in allowing their female family members to take part in politics.

³³ The case of Uzma Bokhari can be cited who received life threats if she did not withdraw from contesting general elections.

8. Civil society and social networks

Overtime women representation in the parliament has risen. One of the major reasons has been the support that women gained from various women organizations such as Shirkatgah and Aurat Foundation to name a few. These organizations and others have closely worked with government institutions to make way for women politicians and to facilitate them in every way. Women parliamentarians have also been seen working with different NGOs for improving the status of women in Pakistan.

An important barrier to women's political participation is their lack of confidence and public speaking skills because of which they feel more intimidated by their male colleagues. Therefore, women tend to play a supportive role. While women based organizations can help women in training, facilitating and supporting them in their political journeys, contact between women politicians and such organizations suffers from lack of awareness of the potential benefits that can be gained from such networks in addition to lack of resources to maintain such contacts.

Not only do women lack financial resources, they also lack networks and contacts, which could help them in getting sponsors for their political campaigns. On average, the campaign for a provincial seat costs two million rupees and about four million rupees for a national seat. The costs include getting posters, pamphlets and banners printed, establishing an office and bearing its running cost, renting vehicles for rallies, holding meetings and large gatherings.

The role of civil society in the substantive representation of women is recognized worldwide (Chaney, 2016).³⁴ Overtime, women's representation in parliament has risen. One of the major reasons has been the support that women gained from various women organizations. These organizations and others have closely worked with government institutions to make way for women politicians and to facilitate them in every way. For women to be completely empowered they need be given access and power to take part in the decision making process and protection of their rights by continuously working on improving gender equality in Pakistan. Many NGOs have organized

³⁴ Chaney, Paul. 2016. "Gendered political space: civil society, contingency theory, and the substantive representation of women", *Journal of Civil Society*, Vol. 12, Issue 2.

workshops for women parliamentarians to discuss such issues and to come up with appropriate recommendations.³⁵

International and national NGO's have actively worked in Pakistan to increase female political participation from the perspective of contesting women candidates and also as voters. Programs have been launched to encourage women from varying social, economic and religious background to take part in politics and contest elections and for women to come and register themselves for voting in the election (The News, 2018). An example is that of Veeru Kohli a bonded labourer who fled slavery and became a human rights activist fighting against slavery in Pakistan. Her journey was supported by Oxfam's program "raising her voice" through which Oxfam aims to train, facilitate and enable women to become politically active. Despite receiving bribes and death threats she contested the elections of 2013 as an independent candidate and although she lost, she got 6000 votes (Repila, 2013).

Article 25 of the Constitution of Pakistan clearly highlights women rights by recognizing them as equal citizens before the law stipulating that there would be no discrimination on the basis of sex. However, despite the promulgation of several pro-women laws, lack of implementation of such legislation continues to be a hindrance. Although laws such as the Local Government Ordinance has allowed women to come forward in large numbers it has not given them enough authority and power. Civil society organizations have helped in training, facilitating and supporting women politicians in providing them with information and assistance in drafting pro-women legislation. Government support has come in the form of ratification of international commitments to women, the formulation of national plans for women and established bodies for overseeing women related issues. And finally, all political parties have recognized the need to address women in their manifestos.

9. Performance of Women Legislators

In May 2016, the performance statistics of the third parliamentary year of the national assembly showed that women parliamentarians who

³⁵ For example, Aurat Foundation and Westminster Foundation for Democracy organized a workshop titled, 'Role and Achievements of Women Caucus for Pro-women Legislative and Policy Reforms' which was attended by many women parliamentarians.

were not very popular had been very active participants in the national assembly's sessions and performed much better than their male counterparts in nearly all aspects of parliamentary performance. Surprisingly, it has been observed that performance of women in the national and provincial assemblies has been better than their male colleagues. A female JUI-F MNA had 99 percent attendance rate which was considered to be the highest at plenary sessions, she also asked the most number of questions (134) during the parliamentary year. She was acknowledged as having the all-round best performance in the national assembly as reported by PILDAT (2017). All in all, from the top 10 performers, nine were women MNA's who belonged to all major political parties including the PPP, PTI, PML-N, MQM, and JI.

A report by FAFEN (2017) has revealed that women parliamentarians have performed much better than their male colleagues in the Punjab assembly during June 2013 to February 2017. Regardless of the fact that women parliamentarians are a minority, they have outdone their male colleagues in terms of overall performance in the assembly. Women MPAs constitute only 20 percent of the total members in Punjab assembly and only 11 percent in the provincial cabinet. Nevertheless, they have outshone their male colleagues and are equally competing with them in terms of their overall performance in the parliament. By looking at their attendance, it is evident that they are more consistent and regular in attending assembly sessions and are also participating in presenting agendas in the assembly. In total, 81 percent of the women were seen to be taking part in debates and presenting agendas as compared to 80 percent of the male members. Attendance record of the assembly sessions has shown that 69 percent of the women tended to attend a session in contrast to 48 percent of men. The average percentage for attending assembly sessions stands at 111 sittings for female lawmakers as compared to 86 percent sittings being attended by each male legislator.

This trend has continued following the 2018 elections (FAFEN, 2019). Female lawmakers now constitute 20 percent of the Parliament – 69 out of 342 in the National Assembly and 20 out of 104 in the Senate. They sponsored 53 percent (39 out of 74) private members' bills, 27 percent (27 out of 100) resolutions, 47 percent (51 out of 108) Calling Attention Notices, and 32 percent (561 out of 1772) questions in both Houses of

the Parliament. Moreover, they also initiated 40 percent (four out of 10) proposals for amendments to the parliamentary rules of procedure and 39 percent (41 out of 104) motions for debate on public importance issues. They initiated around 30 percent of the parliamentary interventions singly or in partnership with other women while also partnered with their male colleagues for an additional 3 percent business.

Legislation for women

A Charter of Women's Rights specifying equality of status, equal opportunities, equal pay for equal work, and for Muslim women rights given under the *Shariah*³⁶ was presented to the first Constituent Assembly in 1951 by the two female members of the assembly. Since then women parliamentarians have struggled for gender equitable as well as special legislation for women together with instituting development initiatives.

It has been observed that women legislators have presented agendas related to a wide range of issues. They have raised issues regarding health of women and their employment and education, and their overall empowerment. They have also highlighted issues regarding violence against women. Their focus is not limited to women's issues only, as they are also highlighting problems in governance, overall education and health issues in the country, social welfare, child marriages, bonded labor, drug problems, and childcare. Legislative action has been taken on women related problems in the assembly. The assembly has legislated for improving the safety of women by working against violence against women and has also aimed to increased women representation in decision and policy making bodies as that can contribute to improve the status of women in Pakistan. The resolutions of the assembly have also made suggestions to the government to work on improving the health of women and to facilitate women working in government jobs. The national and provincial assemblies have developed laws for women that can help them in finding better employment opportunities and conditions, for curbing the problem of

³⁶ Islamic Law

child marriages and for making it obligatory for husbands to provide for their spouses and children (DAWN, 2017).

Beginning with the Family Laws Ordinance promulgated in 1965 on the demand of women against the second marriage of the then prime minister, women parliamentarians have continued to seek amendments to this law. Another area of concern is to get the Age of Marriage Act passed by all provincial legislatures. Women parliamentarians have been actively working in putting together bills that can help in fighting with violation of women's reproductive rights, domestic violence faced by them and trafficking women and their sexual exploitation. During the tenure of the previous government, a total of 93 Acts were promulgated, out of which six were specifically for women. More recently, a former PPP female senator introduced two very important pieces of legislation: the Anti-Rape and Anti-Honor Killing Laws (Criminal Amendment Bill). Other bills presented by women parliaments include the National Commission on Status of Women (Amendment) Bill to ensure timely appointment of the chairperson of the commission, and the Political Parties Order (Amendment) Bill 2013 with the aim of bringing women into the mainstream by giving women 10 percent representation for contesting elections on general seats.

Development initiatives

Among the several development initiatives taken by women parliamentarians, such as building hostels for working women, the most noteworthy is the Women Empowerment Package 2017.³⁷ Through it, the government aims to formulate an effective provincial gender policy and also aims to address legal reforms in the existing Christian and family inheritance laws. Mobile units equipped with basic facilities for screening breast cancer are to be placed in rural areas. The package also aims to empower women in daily activities by providing training for running businesses. In addition, the package also aims to give skill development training to 40,000 female students along with a stipend of 1000 rupees. Interest free loans are to be given to up to 300,000 females to facilitate them in setting up their own business. Women business incubation centers are also be set up in eight different cities. Through

³⁷ MPA Hameeda Waheed-ud-din, the Minister for Women Development, during her second term in 2013 in the Punjab assembly.

the package separate waiting space for women will also be designed at bus stops across the province in urban and rural areas.

A part of the package also involves allocating women sellers their own stalls at 'Sunday bazaars' across Punjab. Together with the Ministry for Women Development, members of women chambers of commerce and industry have actively worked for facilitating women entrepreneurs in Pakistan and have been involved in taking up this initiative. Through the project, the overall aim is to empower local women and to encourage them to come forward to use these opportunities to improve their own lives. In addition to this, the government is also giving interest-free loans to women for establishing their businesses and to be financially independent.

Moreover, the Punjab Minister for Women Development has also been active in launching skill and business management programs for women to help them train and become economically empowered in non-formal sector. Women politicians in Pakistan are working collectively and rigorously on such projects to ensure that government is taking measures to protect the legal rights of women and is helping them become economically empowered. In addition to this, they have also been responsible for setting up business facilitation centers to provide various forms of assistance including financial help to women.

Networking and organizing inside parliament

In 2008, the Women Parliamentary Caucus (WPC) was formed under the leadership of the first woman speaker of the national assembly.³⁸ This was a significant achievement for women parliamentarians who agreed to work together across party lines for the overall welfare of women in Pakistan. The caucus allowed the women to come together to address issues and problems faced by women. Since it was launched, the WPC has been actively involved in raising important issues and demanding laws and other legislation that could help women in overcoming the challenges they face and empowering them in all areas of life. For example, they took up the issue of low salaries, poor transport and housing facilities of women police stations, which were then addressed

³⁸ Dr. Fehmida Mirza.

by the interior ministry. By working closely with civil society organizations, women parliamentarians have been more effective.

In another instance, the WPC was actively involved in the case of a young female health worker who was a victim of acid attack and could not survive. This led to the acid control and acid prevention bill. In the latest development the 'Acid and Burn Crime Bill 2017' was moved by a former female federal minister and passed by parliament, which aims to assist burn victims by giving them free medical care and rehabilitation. As a member of the Acid Survivor Foundation (ACF) she had been actively involved with women parliamentarians. She also headed the Benazir Income Support Program and is a big supporter of women rights.

The caucus has also been involved in developing legislation and drafting resolutions regarding violence against women, promoting and encouraging women entrepreneurs, reforming the constitution to make it more gender sensitive, promoting girl's education and fights for women rights. They were also involved in flood relief efforts in the region. Women parliamentarians today have reached a stage where they can take credit for important legislations such as Protection against Harassment at Workplace Act (2010) and its amended version in 2014 and Protection of Women Against Violence Act 2016. Women parliamentarians have proved that they can work together beyond party lines for improving the status of women in Pakistan.

Non-governmental organizations have also been instrumental in advocating the setting up of the women's caucus. The convener of the Punjab assembly caucus actively worked to make the caucus effective.³⁹ She was vocal about involving women in the decision-making processes confirming that gender equality can only be achieved by protecting the rights of women.

Women parliamentarians are also looking at the opportunities for women that will be developed through the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). These would include opportunities for new jobs, developing skills and entrepreneurship (Tribune, 2016). A female member of the Sindh assembly⁴⁰ highlighted the importance of

³⁹ Kanwal Nauman.

⁴⁰ MPA Nusrat Abbasi

developing networks between women MPAs across the assemblies of Pakistan that could help in strengthening their position.

10. Conclusion

It is evident that institutions such as law making bodies, the family, the state and civil society all play a vital role in ensuring that women have meaningful if not equal access to the political arena. At the individual level education and access to jobs and professions are critical enabling factors for women's political participation. Article 25 of the Constitution of Pakistan clearly highlights women rights by recognizing them as equal citizens before the law stipulating that there would be no discrimination on the basis of sex. However, despite the promulgation of several pro-women laws, lack of implementation of such legislation continues to be a hindrance. Although laws such as the Local Government Ordinance has allowed women to come forward in large numbers it has not given them enough authority and power.

While many women candidates still come from political families, some have no political affiliation and many are first time contestants. Many prominent political parties such as PML-N, PTI, and PPP have given leadership positions to women, although male party leaders have nominated their wives, daughters, sisters or other female relatives to maintain their power in the assembly. Female candidates themselves accept the positive role of families and political dynasties in providing women with more opportunities. Changing such attitudes will require a combination of advocacy agendas including legislation that allows women to inherit property such as land and empowering women to stand up for their rights. A comparison of women contesting on party tickets and as independent candidates reveals that political parties are increasingly giving tickets to women. This indicates that women have found their place in electoral politics in Pakistan.

Women are breaking traditional barriers to take part in politics as is evidenced by the case of Sunita Parmar who set history by being the first Hindu woman and an untouchable to contest elections in 2018 on a PPP ticket from Tharparkar. Another case is that of 33 years old party worker Zartaj Gul, belonging to the PTI. She was given a ticket to contest the general elections of 2018. Despite not having any political

family connections or background she was able to win against a very seasoned mature feudal politician. She had support from her husband who was also contesting for the provincial seat in their constituency (The Nation, 2018).

The Election Commission of Pakistan can play a key role in increasing women's political participation. These include effective voter's education for women besides training, facilitation and funding for women contestants in order to prepare them for elections. Furthermore, release of gender disaggregated data results, remedial action for fool proof RTS system and increasing the number of women staff within ECP is required. It is suggested that implementation of certain new provisions of the Elections Act 2017 such as postal ballot facility, the mandatory five per cent general seat tickets for women, and the raised fee for filing the nomination papers by the candidates etc. is likely to have acted against the interests of women contestants. Furthermore, inadequate arrangements such as non-availability of fans and seating for elderly and pregnant women at many polling station venues kept women away from casting their vote.

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