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## Barriers to Women's Political Leadership in Pakistan: Analyzing Cultural, Institutional, and Religious Challenges in Achieving Gender Equality in the Political Sphere

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### Abstract

Women's involvement in politics promotes social growth, democratic advancement, and gender equality. This article's goal is to shed light on Pakistan's political culture in order to comprehend the obstacles that stand in the way of women's advancement in political leadership, including institutional impediments, religious influences, cultural norms, values, and beliefs. The history of Pakistan, where female political figures served the country and introduced laws pertaining to women, demonstrates the value of female leadership. Women's roles were disregarded and undervalued in Pakistani politics' gloomy democratic history. The papers do, however, draw attention to past patterns, mistakes, and achievements. In order to better understand the potential and problems involved, the secondary sources are analyzed using an analytical research methodology with a qualitative approach. Thus, the study offers a detailed analysis of Pakistani political culture and concludes that the primary cause of women's underrepresentation is the country's political system. The report makes suggestions and exhorts governments, the public sector, and other interested parties to collaborate in order to give gender equality top priority and enable women to have a greater say in how the nation is shaped in the future.

**Keywords:** Political culture, gender equality, Pakistan, female leadership, and political participation

**Introduction:**

Women's participation in politics is essential for advancing gender equality, democratic progress, and socioeconomic development. Increased female participation in political leadership has been associated with more responsive and inclusive governance, as well as the adoption of policies that address the issues faced by marginalized groups, especially women and children (Krook & Restrepo Sanín, 2019). However, there have been several obstacles in Pakistan's way of achieving gender parity in political representation. Pakistan's female leadership trends in politics provide an insightful analysis of continuity and difference. Pakistan has gone through three periods of authoritarianism since 1947. Pakistani democracy has always been plagued by setbacks. Pakistan acquired a feudal culture through inheritance, in which the landlords own all the land and authority. Feudal norms and the military mindset continue to be major obstacles to women entering politics. Historical sexism and a military mindset formed the intricacies that determined the chances and difficulties encountered by Pakistani women in leadership roles. Another aspect is religion. The biggest barrier to women entering politics was the misinterpretation of religion by autocrats and religious political professors in order to obtain power and control.

Women in Pakistan have always been underrepresented and frequently ignored in the political sphere, despite the noteworthy achievements of female leaders like Benazir Bhutto, who became the first woman to lead a democratic government in a country with a mainly Muslim population. The country's institutional frameworks, religious influences, cultural norms, values, and beliefs all play a significant role in shaping Pakistan's political culture, and this underrepresentation is not only a result of political processes (Khan, 2021). Since Pakistan's founding, women have always been underrepresented in politics and have had to contend with obstacles from feudal lords, religious leaders, and the country's cultural and traditional beliefs. Pakistani women faced several challenges in gaining political representation. In Pakistan's four decades since its founding, only one woman has held the position of prime minister.

Women in politics received extremely little or no representation prior to that ruler. The variables driving women's climb to power are examined through the prism of political and cultural theory. According to this idea, the cultural context of a society has a major impact on political behavior and views, which in turn affects the representation and efficacy of female leadership. While there has been some success in raising the number of women in parliament, there are still considerable impediments, according to recent studies. Patriarchal systems, a lack of political will, and restricted access to resources necessary for meaningful political engagement are some of these obstacles (Jafar & Klasen, 2020). Furthermore, a tendency of undervaluing women's contributions, ignoring their potential for leadership, and disregarding women's responsibilities is evident in Pakistan's political history (Niazi, 2019).

By using a qualitative approach to analyze Pakistan's political culture, this research seeks to investigate these issues in further detail. This study looks at secondary sources in an effort to identify the institutional and cultural barriers that prevent women from taking on leadership

roles in politics. The results highlight the pressing need for a revolutionary strategy to solve these problems, stressing that in order to guarantee that women have a bigger say in determining the future of the country, gender equality must be given top priority by the public sector, the government, and other stakeholders.

The history of Pakistan is steeped with feudal systems, marshal laws, and misinterpretations of religion. The political journey of women is a monument to their fortitude against patriarchy and the marshal mindset, as well as a reflection of the times they live in. Women still face several obstacles in today's world, including cultural expectations, religious beliefs, patriarchy, a lack of education and economic reliance, gender discrimination, and harassment concerns. In order to preserve liberal ideals and democratic norms, Pakistan must confront gender imbalance in the political sphere. Pakistan may take a number of actions to address the problem of gender inequality, including offering educational and financial resources, addressing harassment and discrimination, implementing mentorship programs and raising awareness, altering cultural norms, and dispelling the "Marshal" mentality.

#### **Literature Review:**

Women's participation in politics is essential to social justice and democratic government. The literature on women's political engagement across the world emphasizes the major obstacles that women must overcome, which include institutional prejudices, cultural and religious restrictions, and financial limits. This study summarizes the body of literature on women's political participation with a particular emphasis on Pakistan's particular dynamics and obstacles. Research from throughout the globe emphasizes the benefits of women participating in politics and connects it to more responsive and inclusive governance. In order to preserve women's involvement and guarantee that their perspectives are heard throughout political decision-making processes, Krook and Restrepo Sanín. (2019) emphasize the significance of tackling violence against women in politics. In addition to being physical, this violence also has psychological and structural effects, which severely limits women's capacity to engage fully in politics.

#### **Pakistan's Historical Background and Cultural Difficulties**

Pakistan's political history presents a complicated environment in which patriarchal ideals and cultural norms have historically restricted the roles that women may play in public life. In his investigation of the relationships between gendered spaces, political culture, and governmental laws in Pakistan, Khan (2021) observes that all of these elements work together to limit women's access to political office. Women are frequently left out of decision-making processes, both inside political parties and in larger governing organizations, as a result of deeply ingrained patriarchal beliefs. In their analysis of Pakistan's gendered political institutions, Jafar and Klasen (2020) note that while attempts have been made to boost the proportion of women in politics, these initiatives have frequently been ineffective in addressing the underlying reasons of gender disparity in the field. For example, although the quota system has increased the number of women in parliament, it has not always given these women the ability to act freely or have a considerable impact on policy.

Even with prominent female leaders like Benazir Bhutto, men still hold most of the power in Pakistani politics. In her criticism of the underrepresentation of women in Pakistani politics, Niazi (2019) emphasizes how the political system's ingrained power structures serve as a major impediment to women's leadership. The cyclical nature of women's marginalization—in which their lack of representation feeds into their continued exclusion from power—is highlighted by Niazi's work.

### **The Role of Religion and Gender Standards**

Gender norms in Pakistan are heavily influenced by religion, and this has an impact on women's political engagement. The interaction of religion and politics frequently upholds gender norms, which restricts the opportunities available to women to participate in public life.

On the other hand, some academics contend that progressive interpretations of Islamic ideas may promote gender equality and give women more influence in politics. The debate over women's political rights in Pakistan is still influenced by this conflict between orthodox and progressive interpretations of Islam.

### **New Developments and Prospects**

Positive developments are also being highlighted by recent literature, such as the growing prominence of women in civic society activities and municipal government. These successes are frequently dependent on more extensive political and social reforms, but they are still brittle. Scholars underline that maintaining and increasing women's political engagement requires a more conducive environment in both political institutions and society at large.

Weinbaum looks at how elite interests, institutional frameworks, and popular opinion all affect public policy in Pakistan. Understanding the basic impacts of political culture is also crucial. He highlights how important it is to comprehend competing subcultures in order to comprehend the difficulties in forging a national identity consensus, the ambivalence surrounding democratic institutions, and the difficulties in implementing social and economic reforms.

He also argued that political culture is crucial to understanding a country's attitude toward national leadership, tolerance for corruption, and openness to conspiracy theories. This showed that basic political society principles are partly to blame for the frequent challenges in formulating strategic foreign policy decisions.

The historical perspective of Pakistani women's political engagement is emphasized by (Awan, 2016). Examine the historical evolution and contemporary circumstances also draws attention to the cultural restrictions that have made it difficult for women to partake in the democratic system. It is not necessary to be elected to the legislative assembly in order to participate in politics. addresses more aspects of women's involvement in the political process and system, including their roles as party members and voters. Research along these lines can provide some helpful recommendations for women's wider political engagement in the future.

Women make up more than half of the population, however they vote less frequently and participate in disputed elections, according to Mushtaq and Adnan's (2022) analysis of women's political engagement in Pakistan. Economic progress and the operation of a democratic political system depend on the participation of women. Participation is a developmental method that emphasizes how important it is to include excluded groups in the creation and implementation of laws that affect their well-being. Therefore, economic success cannot be completely achieved without women actively engaging in all aspects of society's decision-making. They contend that women do not receive enough resources or support to participate in politics. Women are still not given enough opportunities, even in particular professions where they are significantly more skilled than males.

Azeema Begum (2023) examines the opportunities and challenges facing women who want to participate in Pakistani politics. Her focus is on economic dependency, lack of education, gender segregation, male dominance, traditional beliefs, political parties, financial issues, limited awareness of political rights, social and cultural norms, and religious interpretation. highlights the necessity of coordinating efforts to handle intricate societal dynamics, enhance decision-making regarding laws and regulations based on gender, and look at the necessity of practical strategies and policies to empower women and increase their participation in politics.

According to Naich (2023), empowering women and providing them with equal opportunities are essential for bringing about changes in gender perspectives and democratic decision-making. Raising awareness through campaigns is essential to enabling women to understand and take use of their rights. The position of women is important in Pakistani society since the Prophet Muhammad advocated for women's fundamental rights and prohibited abuse and murder. A careful examination of women's empowerment in Pakistan reveals that gender stereotypes need to be modified, negative societal expectations need to be removed, and women's involvement in decision-making processes has to be promoted. National policies and initiatives should facilitate women's access to healthcare, education, and financial resources.

### **Methodology:**

This study uses a qualitative research approach to investigate the obstacles and difficulties that women in Pakistani politics encounter. The approach is designed to give a thorough grasp of the variables impacting women's political engagement as well as practical advice for advancing gender equality in politics. The study's qualitative methodology enables a thorough investigation of the intricate and varied elements influencing women's participation in politics. This method works well for comprehending the issue's institutional, cultural, and personal aspects.

The study mostly uses secondary data sources. Among them are: To acquire current information and viewpoints on women's political engagement, gender norms, and institutional hurdles in Pakistan, academic books and articles from the last few years are examined (Ahmed, 2022; Jafar & Klasen, 2021). To comprehend the current political environment and institutional frameworks impacting women's participation, government and non-governmental organization (NGO) reports, policy briefs, and legislative documents

are examined (Khan, 2021). Documents pertaining to women's political participation in Pakistani history offer background information, highlighting both past successes and current difficulties (Niazi, 2024). Thematic analysis is used to examine the data, and it entails. The literature and secondary sources provide important topics pertaining to institutional hurdles, cultural norms, and gender-based difficulties. To systematically arrange the findings, data is coded and categorized in accordance with emergent themes. To detect patterns, disparities, and trends regarding women's political engagement in Pakistan, the results are compared across various sources. The frameworks of political science and gender studies are used to frame the analysis. Analyzing the effects of institutional frameworks and conventional gender norms on women's political engagement (Ahmed, 2022; Jafar & Klasen, 2021). Examining problems with political representation and the impact of underrepresentation on decisions made about governance and policy (Khan, 2021).

### **Results and Discussion**

Concern about female leadership in Pakistan is rising, posing a threat to the country's current political and social order. Pakistani women may now demand gender equality and inclusion in politics and play an active role in society thanks to social activists and feminist organizations. Compared to earlier times, Pakistani women have become considerably stronger, and they freely query why they are underrepresented in society and culture. Asian women have been inspired by global feminist movements, and they effectively use social media to disseminate their message. Women are clearly influencing the destiny of the nation, from activists to political officials. In light of Pakistan's political culture, female leadership has a number of significant obstacles that must be overcome.

The political culture idea places emphasis on the collective attitudes, values, beliefs, and points of view that a people has with respect to the political system of their nation. Viewpoints from people or individuals cover the system as a whole and its effectiveness in addressing issues, in addition to political figures such as presidents, governors, or governors. It acts as a conduit between the populace and the political system. The political scientists Sidney Verba and Gabriel Almond divided the political culture theory into three categories based on the degree of awareness and participation. When people in a nation are not aware of and do not actively engage with their central government, a sort of political culture is present. Developing or poor nations frequently have parochial political cultures. This can be the result of a lack of public awareness and political will. Additionally, it may result in underrepresentation. Among them might be nations in Asia and Africa.

A country's political system, such as that of Germany, is considered to exist when its population are generally aware of it and actively participate in it. As in the United States of America, it is defined as a condition in which the populace is highly engaged and knowledgeable about their political system (Voinea & Neumann, 2020). According to American political scientist Louis Hartz's "fragment theory," long-term political history, colonization, and other historical events in a nation's construction also have an impact on the political culture. People anticipate their legal system to be in charge of improving society and the state when they think about their political system. A democratic system that is effective

for the people and does not provide room for unethical behavior. The government has a critical influence in influencing individuals' perceptions of their political culture. According to political scientist Daniel Elazar, they believe that politics is a moralistic culture. His moralistic perspective on political culture also places a strong emphasis on the government's obligation to uphold the law and its role in improving society.

Political culture is the prism through which people and citizens construct their attitudes, ideas, and beliefs about their political system. The public looks to its government to be accountable and to work with them to address their problems. In Pakistan, women have also developed myths and ideas about their status, such as the idea that they face social, cultural, and religious obstacles and are only trying to advance in society. That is the true situation, though, and women in Pakistan have made significant progress and are now in positions of power.

### **Pakistan's Political Culture**

Pakistan's political culture is multifaceted and has been around for a long time. The nation's political culture has been severely damaged by military dictatorship, unstable political systems, unscrupulous politicians, and the legacy of colonialism. Nobody carried on the legacy of Pakistan's great historical leaders; instead, they all labored for their own personal gain. The idea that underpinned the creation of Pakistan obstructed many advantages for oneself. There is no question that Pakistan's culture and history have brought up concerns about the participation of women in politics. They are meant to be frail and unfit to hold positions of authority. Pakistan's political culture needs to incorporate democratic principles because it is still unstable at the moment. Pakistan's political culture is multifaceted and has been around for a long time. The nation's political culture has been severely damaged by military dictatorship, unstable political systems, unscrupulous politicians, and the legacy of colonialism. Nobody carried on the legacy of Pakistan's great historical leaders; instead, they all labored for their own personal gain. The idea that underpinned the creation of Pakistan obstructed many advantages for oneself. There is no question that Pakistan's culture and history have brought up concerns about the participation of women in politics. They are meant to be frail and unfit to hold positions of authority. Pakistan's political culture needs to incorporate democratic principles because it is still unstable at the moment.

### **Islamic Tradition**

Pakistan's political culture is significantly influenced by Islamic culture, which has an impact on several aspects of legislation, government, and social norms. Pakistan's political landscape has been shaped by the founding fathers' vision of an Islamic state ever since the nation gained independence in 1947. There are several Islamic political parties in the political culture of Islam that push for the application of Islamic rules and values. Even though these Islamic parties discuss the same Islam that Pakistan was established on, they are nonetheless referred to as conservative and radical. Divergent opinions exist among Pakistani residents on their Islamic political culture. While some view the incorporation of Islamic law as essential, others view it as a conservative stance that may restrict access to rights. Afghanistan, being our neighbor, has restricted women's access to school and other possibilities. Pakistanis have this view due of the presence of several historically hardline

Islamic regimes. For example, the Zia period and his Hudood decree was the source of the first wave of feminism in Pakistan. His idea of islamization gave rise to feminist movements in Pakistan and had an impact on a large number of social and feminist activists. As a result, several female residents perceived Islamic political culture as being unfair and constrained. Some politicians appeal to Muslim nationalism and utilize Islamic names and slogans to win political points. Thus, it is said that the government plays a crucial role in forming Pakistan's political culture. Islam has guaranteed equality and all rights, but social and cultural norms still stand in the way, seeing women as inferior and unfit. (Mujahid, 2014)

A lot of middle-class and lower-class individuals are having their voices suppressed by Pakistan's feudal society. Political candidates with a solid elite background are given advantages and visibility. Only in the case of men; discrimination against women on the basis of class is also prevalent. Women from the affluent class are more prevalent and are assigned to leadership roles. Candidates with a political experience and a family are prioritized in addition to those from the elite class. It compromises the status of the worthy and competent women. It doesn't leave room for the influx of brand-new socioeconomic classes. It also has an impact on a country's democratic principles as the populace looks to the political system in place to uphold a liberal and moralistic culture. The people demand individual rights and see their government through the prism of political culture. When the government is unable to do this, people's attitudes, beliefs, and opinions shift, which leads to a breakdown in a country's political culture. Pakistan's political culture is perceived as being weak and non-democratic because of the country's history of military dictatorship and political system instability. The military sees itself as the nation's rescuer and superior. It is believed to be the defining characteristic of the nation and to be important to Pakistan's defense and foreign policy. Both internally and internationally, Pakistan's undemocratic reality has drawn criticism. In the past, military dictators have made poor choices that have served their own interests. Pakistan's history has been tarnished by these military dictators. As a result, the general consensus now holds that military rule is not productive or appropriate for a nation's development.

Any attempts by civilian leaders to subvert the army, either by taking over or making it cede control, have ended in utter failure. Muhammad Khan Junejo's attempt to exercise autonomous powers resulted in his expulsion from office, while Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's attempt to circumvent the army with his own Federal Security Force was unsuccessful. All of the military commanders want to replace the parliamentary system with a presidential one, and they did so by threatening elected governments with 58-2b. Through the 17th Amendment, Pervez Musharraf, the military dictator of the twenty-first century, also altered the system to a presidential one. The portrayal of women in public and in social life has been severely damaged by all of these military decrees and the unsteady political culture. Women have encountered difficulties under this type of political culture because of male-dominated culture, poor education, and restrictive social norms and policies under military governments. The society that is controlled by men also gives preference to men in negotiations and peacemaking procedures.



### **Participation of Women in Politics Pakistan**

Beyond simply casting a ballot, political engagement can take several forms, such as organizing, speaking out, and engaging in public affairs. It enables people to register as candidates, win elections, run for office, and assume positions of authority at all governmental levels. The ability for women to use their right to vote, run for office, and take part in political rallies is a major step toward their empowerment. In addition, it is essential for maintaining accountability, promoting direct female participation in public decision-making, peace, sustainable development, and gender equality. The degree to which women participate in and have access to decision-making processes is a crucial marker of gender equality since women's rights to equality are inviolable in the absence of equal treatment in the political process.

Pakistan's population is 50% female, however despite this, women still participate in politics at a low rate due to patriarchy and gender inequity. Even with the increased participation of males under the quota system, gender equality has not been reached. To increase women's political engagement and provide them more influence, appropriate techniques and policies are needed. Gender quotas are necessary to enhance the representation of women in decision making bodies, particularly in the areas of health, education, and the workplace. However, increasing the female quota does not guarantee that barriers would disappear. Women's influence over social and economic policy is restricted, and their lack of representation in decision-making bodies does not increase their feeling of agency or political engagement. Pakistani politics continue to have low

Women have historically been underrepresented in politics in Pakistan, but this has started to change as a result of the government implementing various initiatives to increase women's political and electoral involvement and the legal commitments made to the international community, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). A few other laws that have encouraged women's political participation in the political system are the Election Commission (EC) Order of 2002, the Political Parties Order of 2002, and the National Assembly and Provincial Assemblies Allocation of Reserved Seats for Women and Non-Muslims Rules of 2002. Additionally, the Pakistani Constitution of 1973 also had a significant impact on women's political advancement. Presently, women hold 17 Senate seats and 70 National Assembly members, making up around 20% of the parliament. In reality, the "Elections Act 2017" mandates that political parties give a certain percentage of female representation in municipal elections. "Ensure at least five percent representation of women nominees" was a requirement imposed by the Act on political parties when selecting the top candidates for general assembly seats at the state, local, and federal levels. (Mushtaq, 2022).

Despite the safeguards provided by the Constitution and the upgraded legislative framework. Pakistani women have historically had limited access to national and provincial politics. Socioeconomic constraints have prevented women from participating in mainstream politics, relegating them to supporting roles within their political family in Pakistani politics. Gender biases and prejudices against female candidates persist in the male-dominated power

dynamics of American politics, preventing women from actively engaging in public life. Important changes to electoral systems must come from better enforcing rules and regulations as well as from altering negative societal practices. To successfully participate in public life and decision-making, women in politics at all levels must be given the tools they need to play an active role in the political process. This includes enhancing their leadership positions and fostering a safer political atmosphere.

### **The value of women in leadership roles**

Because of societal, religious, and cultural restrictions as well as the male-dominated political system, it is extremely difficult for Pakistani women to achieve leadership and decision-making authority. In order to lessen prejudice based on gender in all spheres—social, political,

Women are more aware of the problems and difficulties faced by women, and when they have positions of leadership and decision-making, they may make decisions on behalf of other women and have the power to enforce these decisions. This makes women leaders crucial in the cultural, economic, domestic, and equality domains. Bhutto Benazir Benazir became the first elected female leader in a patriarchal, male-dominated Muslim country, shattering barriers between genders and providing an example for women to engage in politics in the country. This accomplishment in and of itself motivated women all throughout Pakistan and the world. She served as prime minister of Pakistan twice, in 1988–1990 and 1993–1996. The prime minister prioritized women's empowerment and legal rights in 1988. Among other things, she improved the legal system by establishing rules against domestic violence and distinct family courts. Maternity and child health facilities were also constructed in isolated places to supply basic needs. She also emphasized family planning and reproductive health services as ways to improve access and reduce maternal mortality. In addition, she founds The First Women Bank with the goal of empowering and funding Pakistani women. With an emphasis on underserved areas and rural populations, it provided financial products, microcredit, and small business loans. The bank also offered training in business and financial literacy. In 1993, Pakistan's first women's police station was inaugurated by Prime Minister Benazir. These stations aimed to provide a safe environment for reporting crimes while also attending to the concerns of women. By encouraging women to disclose cases, the initiative gave them the confidence to pursue justice and advanced a gender-sensitive approach to law enforcement. In addition, she advocates for gender equality, takes decisions that empower women in several other areas, and sets an example for other Pakistani women (Weiss, 1990).

The intricate combination of religious beliefs, cultural traditions, and institutional impediments rooted in Pakistan's past hinders the participation of women in politics. Deeply ingrained cultural norms in Pakistani traditional beliefs sometimes restrict women's roles to that of housewives and forbid them from participating in public and professional spheres. These standards have been significantly formed by Pakistan's feudal structure, military attitude, and structural constraints. Gender roles and cultural standards are significantly shaped by religious views. Women face several structural obstacles, including economic dependence on males, ignorance, discrimination, segregation based on gender, and, most

significantly, patriarchy. The Marshall history of Pakistan and its male-dominated worldview greatly impede women's political involvement and leadership. The situation is made worse by social and cultural standards, a lack of knowledge about political and financial matters, and eight. Notwithstanding these obstacles, there are instances in which women surpass social barriers, particularly at public and academic universities where female leaders successfully navigate their way to leadership by overcoming obstacles in their personal lives and inside the system.

Many people mistakenly believe that Islam, not the West, is the religion that grants women equal rights first. Islam recognizes gender equality, but male academics have misinterpreted it out of bigotry and a desire for dominance. Islamic law interpretation has not received much theological instruction in a culture dominated by men. Obstacles to female representation in politics and society have historically come from military dictatorships and radical Islamic political groups. A woman's political engagement is significantly influenced by her religious commitment. Since most conservative minds tend to reject and limit women's involvement in politics and the public sphere, these obstacles are a primary reason for Pakistan's low female participation in these domains. Women sometimes lack the ability to vote due to feudal systems, religious organizations, and tribes in rural areas. They ingrained in women's minds the idea that they are inferior to men. Extremist groups hold rallies in Pakistan's rural and tribal areas where they persuade members of various political parties to sign a document preventing challenges to election results. Women are not permitted to file their candidacies in these locations. Women face considerable obstacles to participating in the leadership process because of these cultural and traditional conservative influences. Misunderstanding Islamic law is a major problem, especially when it comes to the phrase "Sharia Law." Religious extremists deliberately obstruct women from assuming leadership roles, while religious groups and people themselves erect substantial obstacles for women. While Islam does, in fact, support equality, some people put obstacles in the way of this equality's realization. Both the Qur'an and the Sunnah forbid gender-based inequity. Islam emphasizes treating women and men equally and without holding them to any standards. In Pakistan's patriarchal culture, where male academics perform the majority of interpretations, prejudice against women is tolerated and men are given preferential treatment.

#### **Discrimination and harassment directed at women:**

Pakistan is a member of the United Nations and upholds the organization's charter's commitment to protecting human rights. Pakistan has also accepted the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which aims to prevent gender-based violence against women and girls and grant them equal rights. Even though Pakistan has included its own constitutional provisions, women and girls continue to face discrimination based on their gender, which is the main barrier to their power and involvement in decision-making at all levels, including the home, community, and state. The main problems with Pakistan's bureaucratic system are discrimination and harassment.

A noted potential obstacle to national cohesion and societal advancement is the low representation of women in politics and bureaucracy. Because of their maternal nature,

males believe that women have a different political stance than men. Political parties are hesitant to select female candidates because of this prejudice, which is the main obstacle throughout the election process. Discrimination is also evident in bureaucracy and political parties, where female representatives are portrayed as persons who are not party members and are merely in charge of party operations rather than leadership or decision-making roles. However, the greatest barrier to women's involvement in political and administrative structures is sexual harassment. There is no system in place to shield women from harassment both inside and outside the government and political party. Begam (2023) reports that threats and harassment are among the complaints made by female voters, candidates, and administrators. The primary causes of women's poor representation in politics are sexual assault and harassment. Opposing parties make derogatory comments and behave abusively toward female politicians. They are subjected to dehumanizing remarks, invasions of privacy, and character assassination.

### **Economic dependence and illiteracy**

Low levels of education are challenges for women in politics. In Pakistan, women have limited access to education, particularly in rural regions. They don't know about the political system or their fundamental rights. Furthermore, the traditional social structure opposes girls' education. Women lack confidence as a result, making it difficult for them to socialize and find employment prospects. Women's economic empowerment is hampered by a lack of education, while political empowerment for women is impossible without economic empowerment. Without a career, a solid financial foundation, or both, they are dependent on their male counterparts. Politics is a business game. Socialization and financial resources are necessary for the political process. The ability to raise money for parties is necessary. Women who lack resources and confidence as a result of illiteracy are unable to compete for leadership roles. The ability of women to make decisions in the home and in society is impacted by a lack of resources and their financial reliance on men (Naich, 2023). They need the consent of their guys in order to engage in political processes.

The majority of women involved in politics come from rich and privileged backgrounds. Through inheritance, they rise to positions of authority. These ladies lack empathy for the difficulties and issues faced by rural and impoverished women. Compared to rural women, metropolitan women have more access to economic and educational resources. Compared to rural women, urban women have more access to healthcare facilities. Compared to rural women, urban women are less constrained by conventional ideas. Women from rural and urban areas enter the labor market under various circumstances and on varied terms. Cultural restrictions can restrict rural women's career options. Because the problems faced by rural and impoverished women differ greatly from those faced by affluent women, they are unable to create laws and policies that work for all women.

Cultural limitations and social standards are two of the main obstacles to Pakistani society's structure. Pakistani society is patriarchal by nature. Women in Pakistani culture are only meant to bear children for the sake of society and to take care of the family. Males predominate in our outside-the-house activities. Women who engage in public service and politics are seen negatively. They shouldn't be in politics or in charge of any organization or

company. From the very beginning of Pakistani history, women's mindsets have been profoundly influenced by this myth. Women who communicate with men and the public are sometimes viewed as whores in extreme circumstances, and they frequently struggle with their husbands divorcing them. The sole role of women is to procreate. Motherhood is traditionally the primary responsibility for women.

Men are the province of politics. The political system and procedure are patriarchal. A civilization in which males hold total authority and supremacy over women is known as patriarchy. It is a significant barrier to women's political engagement. Their inability to participate in family decision-making limits their ability to participate in public life. However, not all locations and classes experience oppression to the same extent or in the same way. The rural and tribal regions of Pakistan have a strong patriarchal system. Women's rights to positively impact their life are restricted. The advancement, assessment, and participation of women in politics are influenced by this strong traditional-based gender segregation in gender roles within the framework of purported traditional cultural norms. The notion of a feminine space, which holds that women should solely be housewives and mothers, rules traditional communities. Women from rural and tribal areas are more affected by these cultural and social standards. In tribal regions, these cultural, societal, and traditional norms forbid women from attending school, exercising their right to vote, moving about, and even leaving the house with female family members. Politics controlled by men frequently overlooks problems pertaining to women and concentrates on exploiting resources for individual benefit at the expense of women in the community. These cultural norms restrict women's ability to participate in decision-making. However, the dominance of men in the political system has also discouraged women via misogyny, misperceptions about women, and lack of support. Even if a woman decides to pursue politics, she will still need to overcome several obstacles in order to advance in the field.

#### **Limitations:**

The secondary data used for this study may not fully represent the range of obstacles and difficulties faced by Pakistani women in politics. Furthermore, depending too much on previously published works and reports might add biases from those sources. In order to address these constraints, the study makes sure that a variety of sources and viewpoints are taken into account.

#### **Ethical Considerations**

Even though secondary data is the main source for this study, ethical issues include verifying the reliability and correctness of sources and upholding intellectual property rights by properly attributing all references.

#### **Summary:**

The study offers a thorough examination of the variables affecting Pakistani women's participation in politics. It outlines the main obstacles preventing women from participating in politics and points out areas in which advancement is both necessary and feasible.

First, one of the biggest obstacles is institutional impediments. In Pakistan, political parties

and governmental establishments frequently lack policies that encourage women's participation. These organizations usually function under systems that make it difficult for women to take an active role in them. Examples of these systems include persistent discriminatory behaviors, a lack of support for female candidates, and restricted access to resources (Jafar & Klasen, 2020).

Second, gender norms and the limitations placed on women's political participation are greatly influenced by cultural and religious factors. Restrictive gender roles are frequently reinforced by traditional cultural attitudes and interpretations of religious scriptures, which might discourage women from pursuing political jobs or actively engaging in political processes (Ahmed, 2022). Cultural norms can be observed in social expectations that place a higher priority on women's household responsibilities than on their participation in public or political life. The study also identifies some encouraging advancements in spite of these difficulties. For example, female involvement in civil society action and municipal government has been steadily rising. These new patterns show that women's responsibilities in politics are becoming more widely acknowledged, even though this development is uneven and frequently restricted to particular areas or situations (Niazi, 2024). The ongoing problem of women's underrepresentation in Pakistani politics is also brought to light. Even with historical turning points like Benazir Bhutto's election as prime minister, women are still disproportionately underrepresented in positions of political leadership. Systemic political marginalization, gender-based violence, and cultural beliefs that restrict women's political agency are some of the factors causing this underrepresentation (Khan, 2021).

### **Conclusion:**

Pakistan's military culture, feudal structure, and male leaders' misreading of religion continue to hinder women's engagement in politics. First of all, a dictatorship prevents women from entering politics, and in the modern day, a mentality that instills a sense of inferiority in female brains and superiority in male minds hampers the rise of women leaders in Pakistan. Political culture theory offers a perspective through which to view the obstacles that women face in the direct and indirect political processes related to culture, religion, and patriarchy. Nonetheless, Pakistan has had a few female political representatives who have been instrumental in the country's growth. As the first female prime minister, Benazir Bhutto was also assassinated, which prevented her from serving out her full term. Notwithstanding advancements, societal obstacles and hurdles continue to exist, which has an effect on how well women do overall in politics.

The report emphasizes that despite attempts, there are still a lot of obstacles in the way of women's political engagement in Pakistan. Women's full participation in politics continues to be hampered by institutional, cultural, and religious barriers. A multidimensional strategy involving institutional changes, cultural shifts, and improved support systems for female legislators is needed to address these difficulties. Pakistan can attain more inclusive and efficient governance by placing a high priority on gender equality and actively working to remove current obstacles. Women will gain from this, and it will also help achieve the more general objective of building a democratic system that is more representative and equal. To ensure that women play a significant part in determining the future of the country, activism and research must continue.

The utilization of a qualitative technique yields a comprehensive comprehension of the obstacles impeding women's political engagement in Pakistan and identifies prospective avenues for enhancement. The study use thematic and comparative methodologies to analyze secondary sources with the goal of providing insightful analysis and actionable suggestions for improving gender equality in Pakistani politics.

### **Recommendations:**

To encourage the rise of female involvement in politics, Pakistan must implement significant reforms to its political, institutional, and social structures. It calls for a diversified strategy.

- Make institutional adjustments within political parties to facilitate and promote women's involvement.
- Create and implement regulations that tackle discriminatory behaviors and provide equal chances for female applicants.
- To level the playing field, provide financing and support to women seeking office. Start educational initiatives from an early age with the goal of questioning conventional gender standards and changing public perceptions.
- Encourage public awareness initiatives that debunk prejudices and emphasize the value of women participating in politics.
- Advocate for more progressive interpretations of cultural and religious standards on gender roles by interacting with community leaders and influencers.
- Provide strong support networks to shield women in politics from harassment and violence based on their gender.
- To guarantee the safety and efficacy of female politicians, offer them logistical, legal, and psychological assistance.
- Establish networks and safe spaces where women in politics may exchange stories and approaches to overcome obstacles.
- Make gender equality a top priority in governance and political policy by passing and upholding laws that encourage women to participate in politics.
- To make sure gender quotas are successful in raising the representation of women, they should be strengthened in terms of both implementation and oversight.
- Encourage the implementation of laws that will make politics more inclusive, especially those that will deal with the unique difficulties that women in politics experience.
- Increasing the influence of women's parliamentary caucuses to increase female involvement in politics.
- Increase the ability of female politicians by providing mentorship and training so that aspiring female politicians may gain knowledge from and be inspired by more seasoned female leaders.
- Improvements to gender-sensitive rules and procedures that shield women from harassment, discrimination, and other damage.
- Inclusive policies that assist the advancement of gender equality and the retention and empowerment of female leaders should be implemented in bureaucratic structures.
- Gender responsive budgeting is necessary to guarantee that all resources are distributed equally to both genders. Programs promoting women's leadership should get equal funding allocation.

- There is an urgent need to change societal norms and raise awareness of women's participation in leadership roles and public office.
- To increase the number of women who may pursue higher education and professional growth, educational facilities should also be upgraded.
- The correct understanding of Islam by academics and religious authorities is crucial to comprehending the rights granted to women in the Quran and Sunnah.

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