



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Infusing Pragmatism to Exploring Rationale behind Social  
Subjugation and Political Marginalization of Women in Pakistan**

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**ABSTRACT**

The entrenched patriarchal attitudes within political parties and social fabric of Pakistan continue to view women as secondary political actors which fact is also reflected in the reluctance of political parties to nominate women for general seats or leadership roles within party hierarchies. Moreover, women are often seen as less viable candidates for competitive elections, and their political careers are frequently constrained by societal expectations that prioritize their domestic roles over their public and political ambitions. Although a substantial amount of scholarly work is devoted to political quotas and women representation across the world, research focusing on the qualitative analysis of these women in legislative positions, and the nature, scope and difficulties they experience within a male-dominated political system is rather scarce. In that perspective, the current study endeavors to focus on enhancing governance and strengthening the functional democracy in Pakistan particularly with reference to women's representation in the National Assembly. This study seeks to fill the research gap in that dimension by adopting a qualitative research approach that enables one to understand the various aspects of transformation of gender based numerical representation of female politicians into substantive political power. The recommendations of the current study would help in future policy formulation and devising interventionist strategies for attaining gender equity as a foundation of political development.

**Keywords:** Female Representation, Intersectionality in Political Participation, Political Marginalization

**Introduction**

International development agendas and the feminist movements worldwide have at their forefront the problem of gender inequality in the political representation, provoking the idea that the demand for democracy and fair governance is a global concern. Various regulations have been designed and formulated to achieve the desired results in that regard, however, having the principles, international conventions, and legislation to promote the participation of females in the political processes has not yet been proved sufficient since it is not an easy task of getting the women into the political positions, especially when political cultures are patriarchal and societies are operating in traditional gender roles. The ongoing low portrayal of women at political level especially in the context of patriarchal societies, and indeed in Pakistan, is raising pertinent questions over the quality of gender sensitive policies and the potential social costs of continuing gender imbalance in leadership. Pakistan is also a good example of such a context because of its diverse but rather a tumultuous political culture. The pageant of leadership in the political empire of Pakistan has been rarely accented by women folk, reflecting the inherent mindset of the patriarchal society that continues to color the performance arena of Pakistan. Constitutional representation of women in Pakistan over the history has particularly been weak, in terms of number and also in terms of the influence they have been able to exercise in the legislation making process.

Gender parts have continuously been marginal, limited to so-called 'woman issues', including family law, health, and education, which are rarely mainstreamed into the general legislation initiated by men (Begum, 2023). This marginalization has again averted the chances of Pakistani women parliamentarians from effectively participating in policy making within key sectors of the nation as well as enhancing the empowerment of women in political decision making processes.

It is worth-noting here that the findings of any gender specific study can be of extraordinary value not only in the academic field but also concern vital social and developmental issues. The finding of this study is embedded in the global drive for attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) especially SDG 5 which seeks to promote gender equality and empower all women and girls. Greater women involvement in political processes is not just a social justice issue but that of development of societies in general. The extant literature points to the fact that female political representation has positive policy consequences for wider society. Such advantages circle around better and finer tuned governance, improved coordination between the parties of different political fraternities, and better, long lasting solutions to public matters including health, education and social concerns (Ardic, 2012).

### **Literature Review**

A case study on the political Participation of women in Pakistan was conducted by Afridi in 2023. The methodological approach and the findings of the study are quite relevant to the instant study and mainstreaming it to the existing literature will contribute to the understanding of gender relations in Pakistani politics based on the analysis of the opportunities and the hurdles faced by women engaged in the field of politics (Afridi, 2023).

The paper of Ali and Mufti comprehensively examines the intricacies of decentralization and its perception by various Pakistani political parties which is one of the most important but less discussed dimensions of political system in Pakistan. The said study aimed at exploring the topic of political parties' roles in decentralization processes, paying special attention to the effects of those parties on the governance systems and its involvement in the decision making at the local level. The value of their qualitative work therefore becomes in how useful it is for understanding the factors that regulate decentralization mechanisms in a largely centralized Pakistani context. The findings of Ali & Mufti are very helpful to understand the problem of political marginalization of female segments in Pakistan (Ali & Mufti, 2022).

Kunaraj, *et al.*, used covariance structure analysis in their observation in health related aspects in individuals residing in nursing homes. Although, the present study does not address it head on but provides some information regarding the analytical methods that maybe employed to analyze the effects of women's political participation on health and wellbeing and other social processes (Kunaraj, *et al.*, 2023).

### **Role of Women in Legislative Process**

Women's ways of knowing stem from their experiences as citizens and gender in the community and it is therefore important for the development of feminist theory that women bring these experiences to the processes of governance and policy making. In general, female representation in the legislative processes will result in better policies for the sake of the several strata of society. Women focus on issues that might not be of interest to the male-dominated legislative bodies e.g. social welfare, education, healthcare and gender issues. Their appointment in the legislative process assists in achieving a proportionate balance for the legislation mainly because it indicates that the various groups in the society that are often ignored are regarded. Pakistani female legislators have played a vital role to present the interest of women, children and families in different laws and policies of the

country and strengthen the legislative processes. With women seated in the parliament, laws are developed to reflect the needs of all people and not just the rulers hence creating a just society.

**Child and Family Welfare Policies:** The Pakistani women legislators have been quite active to establish policies in the areas of child welfare and family health out of understanding the fact that these areas form the core of the society's health. They have been able to lobby for the enactment of laws on maternal and child welfare as well as day-care centers and general family affairs. For example, women legislators have been able to lobby for the enhancement of funding on maternal health services, thus, meaning more funds are channeled towards delivery of quality health services for mothers and their young ones. These showed improvements on the aspect of maternal and child health as this approach has many effects aiming at improvement of health standards, boost up of low rates of infant mortality and maternal mortality, and stability of families. Also, the female lawmakers have been keen on funding early childhood feeding programs because of the significance of the nutritional wellbeing in the early ages. Sexual and reproductive health and rights initiatives are not only important to women but also have multiverse effects in promoting the healthier population. Women as active players in pushing for these policies show how they ascribe to the knowledge that health, family status, and national development go hand in hand.

**Educational Reforms:** Pakistan's women parliamentarians have been very instrumental in lobbying for educational changes that will promote gender equality as well as women and girl's education. The two have been instrumental in the promotion of agendas that seek to guarantee equal education for girls and boys which goes a long way in the general fight of gender prowess. The women lawmakers have for instance been instrumental in advocating for scholarships for girls to ensure that the financial hurdles that may lead to early drop out from school by the female child are overcome. More especially these programs are essential in a country where lack of funds as well as cultural beliefs cut short the academic journey of the girls. Further, female parliamentarians have ensured the construction of better facilities in school with an aim of ensuring that girls have safe environment to learn in. These have included; availability of separate washrooms, elaborate measures of security for women students among others. Thus, concentrating on these aspects, women in parliament have contributed to the mitigation of gender-sensitive discrimination in the educational experience of children and the provision of conditions for the further enhancement of women's social and economic status in the future.

### **Representation and Impact**

Female members of the National Assembly have been very insightful in passing a bill which seeks to have crucial docket like health, education and women's rights. Besides, drawing attention to certain causes that otherwise could and perhaps should remain in the periphery of the health policy discussion, they have also succeeded in getting laws enacted for the express purpose of protecting those who are on the periphery of society and have little political influence. That the policies ailed by these women had a disproportionate impact is hence a call for more women in the formulation of policies which would adequately responds to the needs of society.

### **Challenges to Maximizing Contributions**

Nevertheless, the women who enter the Pakistani parliament do experience and encounter a number of barriers that in one way or another hinder them from operating to the fullest extent of their potential. Male traditions, small political assets, and sexism within the political organizations hinder their ability to change legislations. More effort should be employed to persuade women within political sphere and other spheres of society in order to unlock their capacities.

The concept of women in governance and policymaking in Pakistan plays a vital role for legislative process women can produce the policies which cater the needs of the society the broad spectrum of human needs. The presence of such changes as positive and suggesting that continued support and reforming of condition for women would allow them to contribute more to the legislation sphere. This has an implication that even today, there is a need to press on for gender parity in the political arena; not only as a matter of right, but as a necessity in the formulation of social policies which give solutions to as many people as are affected in societies.

### **Political Representation Theory**

Political Representation Theory is crucial when analyzing the conduct of elected representatives; particularly female representatives, and how they conduct themselves and articulate for their constituencies within legislative assemblies. This theory offers a nuanced analysis by differentiating between two key forms of representation: structural and nominalist. Descriptive representation covers the situation whereby the representatives are in some way similar to the people they represent in terms of color, gender, age or ethnicity. This form of representation is very important for the purposes of interest representation in the legislative assemblies to address the diversity. But substantive representation takes this one step further to examine the extent to which these representatives further particularistic concerns and claims of their constituencies. As relates to women in politics, substantive representation is crucial since it looks at how female representatives support policies within the gender sphere, social justice, and other policies extending to women and social minorities. Through integrating these ideas, PTR gives a full spectrum of analysis of the representational performance in legislative procedures (Kucharzewska, 2022).

### **Descriptive versus Substantive Representation**

The Descriptive raised the argument that women must be present in legislative organizations to show that women are capable of representing them; therefore, women must be represented in legislative organizations. However, the means through which change is made is known as substantive representation, which concern the policy response and enactment that favor the choice, values and interests of women, this is where women parliamentarians count.

### **Empirical Evidence**

**Global Context:** The proportion of Women in the national parliaments across the globe as per the Inter-Parliamentary Union in 2021 is approximately 25%. But some of the countries have achieved this average to a greater extent and 3 have become role models in gender balance in governance. For example, Rwanda stands at 61.3%, Bolivia 53% and Sweden's women's representation is at 47%. Such nations present themselves as highly progressive in terms of gender mainstreaming in policy formulation, with women effectively involved in formulation of laws and policies that seek to promote gender equality and social justice as well as enhance inclusive development. This proves the significance of women representation which is sufficient enough in the society to attain equitable and responsive governance globally.

**Pakistan's Scenario:** Unfortunately, women are occupying only 7% of the National Assembly sitting which shows constant decline in women's political rights in the past years. At the same time, this score has been higher than in previous decades, although still below the level that most researchers believe women need to impact legislative program. The current percentage though a positive sign of improvement indicates that there is a lot more that can be done to empower women to participate effectively in politics or decision making processes that would cater for women's interest. This could make governance in Pakistan to be more gender sensitive resulting to higher representation.

## Impact of Female Representation on Policy-Making

Research shows that the extent to which women are elected to legislatures is associated with more attention paid to health, education, and social policy the concerns that primarily influence females. Since most of the female legislators know the complications involved with women's rights, they will ensure that legislation related to these complications is passed (Nazneen, 2023).

### Legislative Impact

**Women's Health:** Female members of the parliament, particularly from Pakistan, are helpful in making exhaustive maternal health policies. Female parliamentarians' support for the Maternal and Child Welfare Bill has promoted funding and support of women's health clinics all over the country.

**Education Reforms:** Laws such as the Girls Education Bill, which women in the assembly supported, has gone a long way in improving on the gender equity on education, as it sought to provide education to girls especially in the rural areas (Sultan & Mohamed, 2023).

### Theoretical Implications

Political Representation Theory emphasizes the descriptivist as well as the transformative nature of demographic reforms in the parliaments. Having women in the parliament is not sufficient in and of itself what matters most is their capacity to change the law and policy in order to meet the needs of women and indeed the society. All the same, as this theory implies, institutional factors and organizational culture that enable more efficient representation should be the focus of reforms to increase capability and impact of female parliamentarians (Ullah, 2023).

Portrayed by the Political Representation Theory, the subject of women's participation in the legislative processes is much more than simply gaining the right to vote. Analyzing Pakistani women's engagements in National Assembly through descriptive and substantive representation this research speaks about possible correlations and ongoing limitations that outline their legislative experiences. They, therefore, support the ongoing lobbying not only for the expansion of the women representation in the political arena but also for the improvement of women's capacity to perform as well as legislate on crucial matters of concern to women and the wellbeing of society.

### Intersectionality in Political Participation

Intersectionality pioneered by Kimberlé Crenshaw can be used in explaining plurality of effects of various signifiers of social vulnerability in political participation that not only include gender and ethnicity, but also class, religion, and geographical location. It looks at how more than one social category or the interaction between them affects delivery systems or structures of discrimination. In the case of political participation, especially concerning female parliamentarians in Pakistan, intersectionality brings to the limelight the multifaceted nature of the obstacles and realities that form their legislator responsibilities and efficiency (Saeed *et al.*, 2023).

### Defining Intersectionality in the Political Sphere

Intersectionality in political participation focuses on how various dimensions of minority status shape that person or that group of persons' capacity to vote, organize, lobby, access politics as politics, and benefit from it. In Pakistan's National Assembly, these layers

can strongly affect women's legislative efficiency and the nature of problems they address (Asri & Muhamad, 2023).

### **Empirical Evidence and Contextual Application**

**Demographic Representation:** As revealed by the Pakistan Election Commission and the records of the National Parliament, the National Assembly has women belonging to the Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashtun, Baloch communities and many others. The rural women in particular encounter different odds than the urban women where they live in cultures that tend to be more conservative and this reduces their political activism.

**Economic Disparities:** Economic status also emerges as an important determinant as women from affluent, influential families may assemble more capital and connections to unlock success in their political career unlike their less-fortunate counterparts which are right from the start maybe without similar influence or exposure.

### **Impact of Intersectionality on Legislative Outcomes**

The convergence of these social classifications does not only influence the political involvement of females but also determines their capacity to bring desired change as well as representing a wide range of groups.

**Policy Focus Variance:** For female Members of Parliament from ethnic or low-income background different priorities may be considered depending on some circumstances of their respective ethnic or low-income groups. For instance, female legislators from rural Sindh might therefore champion reforms to water and agriculture legislation, whereas female legislators from urban settings like Karachi might champion reforms to education and health legislation.

**Legislative Effectiveness:** Research shows that first-tier discriminations, such as being female and of a certain faith might in fact make it all the more difficult for such women to advance their causes within the assembly because of the multiple layers of oppression.

### **Challenges Highlighted by Intersectionality**

Intersectionality reveals specific barriers that are not always visible when considering gender alone:

**Cultural and Social Barriers:** Muslim or black women, which are likely to be minorities in Parliament, are likely to face extra cultural barriers within the political system and from the electorate, which slows down their participation in politics and policy-making.

**Institutional Barriers:** Even within internal party structures, gender may also be compounded by socio-economic class or ethnic origin to see these women access senior posts or wield power in their parties.

### **Theoretical and Practical Implications**

Intersectionality, therefore, requires a more particular way of engaging the challenges that female parliamentarians encounter. It calls for:

**Inclusive Policy-Making:** Any policies that are to be implemented in order to promote women's political representation have to take into account these multiple dimensions of identity. This may include focus on women's support programs to stimulate their participation rate and some of which may be out of school mothers, women of color or women with disabilities.

**Research and Data Collection:** There is a possibility of carrying out a new study to include the analysis of data using other variables such as gender so as to understand the effects of intersectionality on political participation. This can assist with targeting interventions in a means that's more beneficial and campaigning for policy improvements that are more suitable.

Analyzing intersectionality in the political behavior of women in the Pakistan's National Assembly also shed light on the diverse nature of women parliamentarians. This therefore makes a call for a more complex approach to policies and measures that will consider issues of gender discrimination but also other overlapping factors. Thus it becomes easier to understand that in order to provide for an efficient representatives of female Parliament members to push for necessary changes in law enhancing the importance of such areas as healthcare, education, and employment for the parliament, it is necessary to consider various intersecting barriers.

### **Legislative Output**

Legislative citation records suggest that female parliamentarians had introduced less bills than male parliamentarians. This difference is mainly explained by lower women's seat proportion in parliament and challenges encountered by female politicians within parties. But the swift and the quantity of bills introduced by women in spite of this are quite remarkable as is the quality of the bills. Women parliamentarians are interested in social problems that are health, education or women problems and therefore, support social justice policies than welfare policies. Interestingly (Khan, 2021), even the passage rate of bills that women sponsor is even higher at 65% while for those who were introduced by male legislators it is at 50%. This higher success rate might mean that women legislators are more strategic in their advocacy and in the alliances they work for their supported legislation.

### **Debate and Advocacy**

Due to traditional political prejudices, female members of parliament take most of the time initiating debates on matters concerning social justice and equity. By use of awareness, they focus on various commodities for example gender discrimination, children protection as well as health and seeking to address all the gaps of the current policies. Female parliamentarians are sometimes specifically excluded from activities, or lose their turn in talking, in a manner which male parliamentarians do not regularly experience. Besides eradicating their inputs, this phenomenon also dismisses women's input in public spaces and therefore mirrors societal beliefs that trivialize women's contributions. It also negates the rights and dignity of women in the parliamentary debates hence increasing the discrimination of women in the legislation process (Ette & Akpan-Obong, 2023).

### **Conclusion**

There is a major room for improvement in terms of mentorship and capacity building in political parties working in mainstream politics of Pakistan. The formal structured mentorship programs are also missing which would lead to an increased sense of sensitivity and marginalization by the female political activists working in the country. Women had to learn everything at their own including falling into pitfalls that could be easily avoided, had one been around to guide under some formal structured program of mentorship sponsored by the government. The study highlights the critical role that gender quotas have played in increasing the representation of women in Pakistan's political system, while also identifying the limitations of this approach in achieving true gender equality. To overcome these limitations, there must be a concerted effort to address the societal, institutional, and cultural barriers that continue to hinder female political participation. Only through comprehensive reforms and cultural shifts can Pakistan create a political

system that is truly inclusive, liberal, and representative of the diverse talents and capabilities of its women. International organizations and donor agencies can also help by advocating for gender-sensitive policies and providing technical assistance to political parties and government institutions in implementing these reforms. In addition, international partnerships can facilitate the exchange of best practices from other countries that have successfully integrated women into their political systems, providing valuable lessons for Pakistan's political leaders and policymakers.



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