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Women's Political Participation in South Asia: A Case Study of Pakistan

Abstract

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Keywords: Gender Representation, Political Employment, Reserved Seats, Patriarchy, Electoral Participation, Political Parties, Gender Equality

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Abstract

Pakistan serves as a key case study in understanding women's political participation in South Asia, where progress coexists with persistent challenges. This study examines how institutional mechanisms, historical developments, and community norms influence women's political engagement in Pakistan. The implementation of constitutional protections and legislative quotas for special seats has enabled women's legal entry into politics, yet structural obstacles such as sexism, religious orthodoxy, educational constraints, and financial limitations still hinder their full participation. The political inclusion of women in Pakistan demonstrates the dual effect of social oppression and public empowerment, as the country witnesses growing female representation but often confines their political activity to gender-specific issues and relegates them to ceremonial positions. This study reviews election data alongside policy programs and political party functions to assess women's influence in policymaking and political decisions. The research emphasizes the need for comprehensive political empowerment for women in Pakistan and South Asia.

Keywords:

[Gender Representation](#), [Political Employment](#), [Reserved Seats](#), [Patriarchy](#), [Electoral Participation](#), [Political Parties](#), [Gender Equality](#)

Introduction

Approximately half of every human population is women. The social and economic value women create stems from their capabilities to participate in both reproductive and productive work roles. The involvement of women in political processes remains ignored despite politics being the central institutional authority managing both authority and decision-making functions. The United Nations Development Program reports that just 15% of

countries worldwide are represented by women in parliament, along with 12 nations attaining 33% female parliamentary member representation (UNDP research, 2005).

Women confront multiple challenges when trying to take part in political processes across the globe. The current socioeconomic situation and structural elements hinder their progress toward advancement. Women's political participation in Pakistan shows a strong relationship to male



attitudes about their involvement. Pakistan's constitution grants all women complete political rights, yet institutional along cultural obstacles limit their engagement in political positions. The most significant number of women participated in Pakistan's 2002 parliamentary elections during the historic time of greatest female political engagement in the nation (Latif, Usman, & Abdullah, 2015).

The promotion of political power for women constitutes a worldwide problem. The problem continues to persist as an unresolved matter throughout developing parts of the world. Gender discrimination against female politicians represents a major problem in Pakistan, which functions as a developing nation. Under Pakistani law, the constitution safeguards all fundamental rights of women, with political rights included. The Pakistani constitution starts with an announcement of human rights declaration in its preamble. Pakistan's constitution maintains women's equality through Article 25, which belongs to its fundamental rights section. Muslim women actively participated in All India Muslim League-organized demonstrations and parades when Pakistan was seeking independence. National political involvement of women finds support through provisions in the Pakistani constitution. As an incentive for female political engagement, the country's political parties created separate women's departments. The representation numbers of female officials remain significantly lower than those of their male counterparts. For the last twenty years, Pakistan has worked under successive governments to improve the number of female representatives in legislative bodies. During the past decades, national political involvement among women demonstrated steady growth. The governing party requires additional targeted efforts in particular aspects (Allauddin & Rind, 2020).

The Political presence of women shapes every element that measures social development as well as inequality levels. Various factors at both individual and institutional levels, which differ across different countries, explain why women have limited political participation even though patriarchy remains the universal connection. Political representation of women occupies the bottom position in the 2019 Global Gender Index (GGI). The global parliament does not exceed 25% women in its seats, yet the ministerial positions have just 21% female

representation, while nine nations completely lack female representatives. The political and social climate of Pakistan has failed to fully endorse the rights of women. The candidate selection process prioritized women who established economic relations as well as political associations.

The implementation of quotas has brought women to representative positions, although it has not built their broader political support network. The combination of sex discrimination practices and traditional practices known as purdah exists to force women into staying confined at home and within domestic spaces. A lack of public speaking competence and political competency, alongside deficient confidence, makes women unable to succeed in the political competition. The male-dominated workplace environment, combined with more experience of male colleagues, makes women believe they are inferior and undermines their capacity for political work. Sexist language and underlying suggestions from political men, along with religious institutions and media outlets, impede female politicians through sexual harassment and derogatory treatment based on their sex. Women continue to face funding limitations, which prevent their access to networking opportunities and campaign sponsorships that can boost their political participation rates (Sami, 2021).

Research Questions

1. What role does society, together with cultural background, play in affecting Pakistani women's involvement in politics?
2. What policies or programs have contributed to higher Pakistani women's involvement in political activities?

Research Methodology

The researcher investigates South Asian female political participation through a qualitative investigation that focuses on Pakistan as its case study. The researcher draws from both initial and supplemental information sources. Female politicians and civil society activists and representatives of political parties, and election commissions receive semi-structured interviews as the main data collection method.

Literature Review

Latif, Usman, Kataria, and Abdullah (2015) explore in their paper "Female Political Participation in South Asia: A Case Study of Pakistan" how Pakistani males view their country's female political involvement. Researchers conducted twenty in-depth interviews and two focus groups to understand female political participation factors through their qualitative method. Research reveals that religion-based beliefs, together with economic dependency and old traditional views, serve as the primary factors that block women from becoming active political participants. The research information stresses that public education and national political strategies are essential to building women's political action. The authors state that Pakistan needs to eliminate sociocultural obstacles to develop a friendly political environment (Latif, Usman, & Abdullah, 2015).

The 2022 publication by Dr. Asia SaifAlvi in Harf-o-Sukhan details the political empowerment status of women in Pakistan through her work "Women's Political Empowerment in South Asia: A Study of Pakistan." The political systems of Pakistan continue to show women's underrepresentation according to her findings. Alvi identifies social constraints, together with economic dependence and deep patriarchal norms, as the main obstacles that prevent women from taking part in politics. She analyzes the Election Act of 2017, which attempts to improve female representation through ticket quotas of at least 5% for political parties and forceful 10% female voting rate for each constituency to validate elections. Alvi maintains that powerfully empowered women need both legal reforms alongside a complete social transformation that unlocks political participation for women (Alvi & Sajanka, 2022).

The 2020 article "Role of Women in Politics: An Article of Political Participation in Pakistan" by Dr. Allauddin and his co-authors, Dr. Shahida Habib Alizai and Zareen Khan Rind, appears in the Pakistan Journal of International Affairs to analyze women's political activity in Pakistan through time. The authors note that even though females form nearly fifty percent of the population, they have maintained a negligible presence in legislative assemblies throughout history. Over the last twenty years, reserved seats regulations appeared as a method to increase female political representation.

The percentage of female voters remains lower than male voters in all general elections. The authors explain that restricted funding opportunities, together with traditional patriarchal norms, prevent women from actively participating politically. The authors emphasize that political engagement includes various activities beyond parliamentary membership by recommending solutions to overcome obstacles that prevent women from actively participating in politics (Allauddin & Rind, 2020).

Saba Noor and Zahid Yaseen present research about female political participation in the Sialkot district of Punjab province in their 2023 article "Women's Participation in Pakistani Politics: A Contextual Study of District Sialkot," published in Pakistan Social Sciences Review. Through the use of qualitative methods, the research demonstrates low female political involvement in Sialkot, yet specific female politicians remain active at the regional, national, and local levels of governance. Women face restricted participation in politics because patriarchal elements combined with societal norms restrict them to traditional domains, thus reducing their visibility in politics. The authors maintain that breaking traditional political standards alongside building spaces that motivate female involvement represents vital steps to boost women's political action (Noor, 2023).

The book "Political Participation of Females in Pakistan: Prospects and Challenges" by Azeema Begum in 2023 explores the various barriers that prevent Pakistani women from participating in political processes. Through qualitative research, this study presents Financial dependence, a lack of education, gender segregation, male dominance and conventional beliefs and financial constraints, and a lack of political rights understanding and cultural and societal norms as significant barriers to female political participation in Pakistan. The report shows that women are blocked from taking part in political activity because they appear rarely within political parties and male-dominated social structures. Despite the quota system increasing women's parliamentary representation, the research argues that strategies are needed for complete empowerment and stronger political involvement by women (Begum, 2023).

Shehzadi Zamurrad Awan investigated Women's Political Participation in the Socio-Cultural

Environment of Pakistan: A Critical Review of Mainstream Political Parties (2018-2022) through her 2023 publication in *Simulacra*. The research exposes how women, as half of the population, face impediments in their political activities from patriarchal elements joined by Islamic traditionalist interpretations and gender-tinged social interactions. Election statistics, along with party manifestos, suggest that political parties choose female candidates who have prior political experience, but their support for women's advancement depends on their ideological alignment. Significant progress has been accomplished, but further efforts must be made to cut down the political gender inequality gap (Awan S. Z., 2023).

The 2021 research document "Women's Participation in Politics and Decision-Making Process of Pakistan: Challenges and Barriers" appeared. The research conducted by Kishwar Naheed and Nosheen Zaheer, together with Masooda Shah and Asiya Durrani, examines all obstacles preventing Pakistani women from becoming involved in political activities. Through a combination of historical, sociological, institutional, and literature evaluations, the authors reveal existing challenges that emerge from institutional prejudices and patriarchal norms, and religious conservativeness. This research reveals how several limiting elements unite to block women from political participation while diminishing their ability to shape decisions, which puts democracy at risk in Pakistan. These barriers require substantial efforts, according to the authors, who stress the need to establish an equal and representative political environment in Pakistan (Naheed, Zaheer, & Durran, 2021).

Tara Kumari Karki analyzes South Asian political participation levels for women in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, India, and Nepal through her 2023 "Women's Representation in Politics: An Analysis of South Asian Countries" essay published in the *Journal of Human Rights Law and Practice*. Although particular policies have enhanced female politician representation, the research shows women still have a minimal presence within national political entities in these countries. Women face multiple major constraints to political engagement because of societal traditions and intraparty prejudices, and insufficient government

funding for women candidates, according to Karki. The analysis investigates methods for enhancing female political representation by detailing gender quota implementation and specifically designed campaigns to drive increased participation from women. The paper presents a detailed assessment of modern-day obstacles with effective methods to establish gender parity in the political sphere (Karki, 2023).

Women in Southeast Asia employ various political routes to gain office, based on a study by Nankyung Choi, which appeared in the *International Feminist Journal of Politics* in 2018. The research specifically focuses on Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. The research by Choi distinguishes between three main paths in women's political advancement: elite exploitation of familial or elite connections and grassroots political movements, and medium paths that unite these approaches. The research proved that elite women can achieve electoral success more readily than their grassroots movement counterparts. The author stresses that researchers need to grasp these different experiences because this knowledge helps create better public policies for the political representation of women in Asia (Choi, 2018).

Through their 2020 *Pakistan Social Sciences Review* publication "Conundrum of Women Political Participation in Pakistan: Impediments and Opportunities," Musharaf Rubab, along with Dr. Ghulam Mustafa and Adnan Nawaz, analyze present-day obstacles in addition to historical elements preventing Pakistani women from participating in politics. According to the authors, women make up a major segment of the population but continue to stay absent from political institutions. Multiple factors stand as main obstacles for women to actively participate in politics, including sociocultural barriers as well as institutional prejudice and patriarchal cultural practices. The study demonstrates that a reduced number of women in office hurts women's crucial work in shaping legislative decisions. Authors propose extensive frameworks to develop an enabling political domain that gives power to females and builds their status in Pakistani politics to circumvent existing obstacles (Rubab & Nawaz, 2020).

Literature Gap

Although many studies examine gender and politics in South Asia, little information is available on the obstacles that stop women in Pakistan from taking part in political life. Descriptive representation by way of reserved seats receives much attention in research, but seldom do studies look at women's impact on parties' leadership or held policies. Also, regional comparisons that summarize South Asia typically leave out Pakistan's special religious, political, and tribal characteristics. Researchers have paid little attention to the impact of local institutions on women's participation at the local level. Women's political actions are not well understood about new forms of media, internet activity, or informal networks. Few studies have tracked the success of quota regimes over a long period. As a result, researchers should use more inclusive, practice-oriented, and participative methods to address known gaps in knowledge.

Historical Background

Pakistan functioned without a president for nine years, from 1947 to 1956. According to statistics, women did not own any of the 80 available seats in the second parliament (1955–58). In 1956, after the post was established, Iskander Mirza was elected president. In those 13 years, the military was the main authority in the country. As a result of Zia's term, women now had one in ten seats in the National Assembly, where they were 22 in number. Even so, after quotas ended in 1990 and 1997, women's representation in parliament fell sharply from 0.9% to 2.8%, before a 33% quota for local government was enforced in 2000 and women were awarded 17% of all seats in 2002. Out of all women who attempted to win, 39 triumphed, but 56 had managed to do so in 1997. Women were elected to 70 of the 342 National Assembly seats (about 20.5%), and more ran this year than four years earlier. The number of women put forward by the PML-N and MQM rose, but it went down for the PPP and PML-Q (Awan M. A., 2016).

Here's a remarkable increase: over 2008–2018, the number of women in parliament increased in Pakistan because of steady efforts to include women, even though many social and political challenges remain. Many women in politics tried to shape laws, even though social, cultural, and political institutions at the time were not favorable to some.

They kept going, which motivated others and brought a little progress in empowerment (Khan D. M., 2024). Pakistan followed a pattern where discrimination and few women in politics were the case from 1947–2000, but from 2000 to–present, both were more common. At this time, women were more likely to vote, quotas were enforced, laws improved their rights, and seven major acts were added to help women. There are more efforts needed over time for legislating gender equality.

We must pay attention to who is put forward on party lists, the makeup of legislative bodies, and those elected to serve in general offices when we consider women's political activities. During the national election in 2008, only 3.5% of the individuals nominated were women, making it clear that women were not very well represented. Because they did not strongly affect political parties' decisions, their involvement there was mostly symbolic. Women participated more in the 2013 elections, even from minority groups, yet their involvement in politics is limited by gender and cultural rules. Thanks to Benazir Bhutto and Fahmida Mirza, Pakistan has made important firsts among Muslim countries. At the time, the National Assembly had roughly 100 women among its members. Women won eight general seats and sixty seats reserved just for them in the 2018 elections. The requirement in the Election Act of 2017 that parties nominate 5% female candidates was a good move. Among all provinces, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had the weakest turnout of women, with only 46.89% of female voters, versus 56.07% worldwide, even as the total number of voters increased to 55%. Even though there have been improvements, greater effort is needed to create equal participation of women in the political sector (Allauddin & Rind, 2020).

Women in the Politics of Pakistan

Many of Pakistan's 75 years as a nation have seen progress in democracy hindered by coups and inaccurate elections. Women were drawn to take part in the first direct election in 1970, largely as a result of what the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) did to help minority communities. By the 1970s, PPP, PML, and JI introduced women's wings in their parties to encourage more women to vote, even though it did not lead to bigger roles for women in the legislature. Women were not able to advance

under Zia-ul-Haq's leadership because he eliminated political participation, and in the democratic period following him (1988–1999), reserved seats for women remained unused. After Musharraf became head of state in 1999, laws were set to ensure women got 17% of all seats in the national/provincial assemblies and 33% in local government. However, there were protests against the limits set by Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and others (Awan S. Z., [2023](#)).

Decision Making and Manifestos of Political Parties in Pakistan

Though Pakistani women are often active at the foundation of political parties, they usually do not participate much in key leadership and governance positions. A host of social drawbacks, the absence of relevant knowledge, underground networks, and not enough guidance all stop them from growing. Even though most parties have a special women's organization, very few have focused on promoting women within their ranks. Pro-women efforts, such as requiring a minimum number of women and making organizational changes, are available, but they are seldom applied competently and are often only for show.

It is standard for women to be kept out of the development of political parties' agendas and key policy meetings. Major party manifestos from these years never made genuine commitments to supporting women's causes. Although the PPP, PML-N, MQM, ANP, and PTI have mentioned women's rights, very few of these promises are ever put into practice. The ANP and some other groups have formed women's wings to support women's participation. Advocates for including more diverse views, such as Seemi Kemal and Zahra Khattak, argue that, despite claiming to be liberal, parties mostly do not meet those expectations. For true equality in politics, more women need to get involved in political organizations (Naseer, [2024](#)).

Political Culture of Political Parties Regarding Women's

When dealing with the older leaders of her party, Benazir Bhutto was very patient and polite, and as a result, the PPP was much more open and friendly than the PML. It was believed that the PPP encouraged more women to join politics. Technologically, Thirteen members went to the

National Assembly, and some entered provincial assemblies once women were given seats in general elections for the first time in 2002. In most cases, most women nominated to restricted seats were chosen indirectly, often because they came from political families, not because they were party workers.

Women knew about the party programs, but they were nearly always denied participation in deciding what the party should stand for and how. Because they often lacked assistance from others, female politicians often had to act on their own. Typically, women were not considered in significant talks, and only a small number in the PPP, PML-N, and ANP were ever notified directly (Begum, [2023](#)). Reserved seats in the House of Commons sometimes experienced discrimination from men and were often seen as less than their male counterparts, due to not having a constituency. There was very little contact between them and both citizens and members of their party, as they concentrated on being reelected. It was hard for women MPs and party members to cooperate on things that mattered to them all. Although they realized there was a lack of women in leadership, parties generally persuaded women not to pursue roles of authority independently. Some leaders hesitated to approve universal seat quotas for women, saying it would cause problems in politics and the economy. It was thought that using direct elections and quota systems based on merit would lead to real representation.

Constitutional and Legal Framework:

Constitutional provisions

The constitution of Pakistan devotes much attention to women's rights.

- According to Article 25, everyone in the country has an equal right to be protected by the law.
- Discrimination against someone because of their sex is illegal.
- Even so, the state has the power to take special actions to secure women and children.

According to Article 25, in Pakistan no one experiences gender-based discrimination and all citizens are guaranteed equality, freedom and dignity by law. Yet, both the government now and those before it have not carried out the clause as it should. The main social and religious traditions in

our society limit women's presence in politics by making sure they remain confined to traditional tasks and rarely enter mainstream politics (Sami, 2023).

Islamic Interpretations and Women's Political Participation

In Pakistan, the Objectives Resolution forms the basis of Islamic values, giving strong importance to democracy, justice, and arranging Muslim lives in line with the Quran and Sunnah. But the Council of Islamic Ideology, along with women's rights organizations and political parties, all interpret Islam differently. Often, religious forces shape political decisions, especially when protecting women's rights is concerned. During his era, the government introduced unfair laws pretending they were based on Islamic ideals. The Ansari Commission of 1982 supported limiting how much women could take part in politics. Some proposals were to keep women from becoming heads of state, require their husbands' consent for a seat in parliament, and not allow them to travel without men by their side. One proposal sets the level for female Majlis-e-Shura members at only 5% of the total. The purpose of each action was to keep women from getting involved in politics. Due to conservative religious views, democracy did not always serve to give women places in leadership.

Quotas and Reserved Seats for Women

Pakistan is one of several South Asian nations that guarantees women's participation in politics using seats and quotas. Each of the 1956, 1962, 1970, 1973, and 1985 constitutions included reservations for women in the makeup of the national and provincial legislatures. In 2000, the Devolution of Power Plan set a target of 33% for women in every province's municipal governments. Women were assigned a 17% quota in the National, Provincial, and Senate Assemblies as well. Thanks to these changes, women became much more present in political life.

The Elections Act 2017

The aim of the Elections Act of 2017 was to help more women participate in politics in Pakistan. Women were not allowed to be restricted from voting or candidacy for office, poor areas had to nominate women to 5% of general seats and voting places where only a small percentage of women voted were

excluded from votes. To raise voter numbers in conservative areas, the Election Commission set up female-only polling stations with female staff (Khan D. M., 2024).

Challenges and Barriers: Socio-Economic, Cultural, Religious, and Political Challenges

Several studies point out the social, cultural, religious, and institutional issues that keep women from joining politics in Pakistan. Such boundaries include having less say, parties run by men, facing sexual harassment, getting married early, and being brought up with the main family obligations. Eligibility for reserved seats usually goes to outstanding women, meaning ordinary people may be ignored. Women's issues are understandably ignored by political parties, which seldom challenge the patriarchy. Religious engagement is often limited by things people do not understand about religion in rural regions. Because they cannot afford big campaigns and often aren't associated with strong political parties, women are seldom found in politics. Despite the concepts of fairness in their laws and Islam, women in Afghanistan are still largely excluded from political life (Begum, 2023).

Cultural Norms and Patriarchy

In Pakistan, strict ideas about gender roles confine women to working at home, so they aren't often seen in politics. Perceiving women as unworthy of respect keeps many from being interested in political work. In addition, the separation of men and women, travel restrictions, and educational barriers make it harder for women to enter politics. Because men are given greater value in such societies, women are usually not permitted to use important resources or to lead. Women are often unfairly judged by stereotypes, the news media, and misinformation. On top of this, women who participate in politics often deal with harassment and abuse, which makes it difficult for them to become involved in public life and work against existing rules (Naheed, Zaheer, & Durran, 2021).

Decision-Making Impact

If a woman is not educated well, doesn't think highly of herself or lacks political awareness, she is less likely to join in decision-making. If they lack education, women often have minimal financial

resources, continue to be in poverty and rarely get involved in politics. Because women aren't given the same opportunities in school, they remain underrepresented in political jobs.

Violence and Harassment

For many Pakistani women, the difficulty in participating in politics happens mainly because of violence and harassment. Those who work in politics usually experience physical violence, threats, and intimidation. Violence causes them so much anxiety and worry that it makes talking with others less pleasant. Because there is so much gender violence, women are not allowed to lead in decision-making roles.

Types of Harassment and Violence Faced by Women in Politics

- Women in political roles or seeking them are often harmed mentally and physically by threats, attacks, and violent actions.
- Trying to keep women out of politics, people can insult and threaten them with words.
- The reason political women may refrain from joining online is due to harassment. Cyberbullying, trolling, and hate speech are all different kinds of harassment.
- Fear often results from stalking and intimidation, which stop many women from taking part in politics.

Stereotyping and Media Bias

Misrepresentation of women in the media might influence the public's view of women in political roles. Because they create false beliefs and unequal treatment toward women, stereotyping and media bias are the main reasons that discourage women from taking part in politics and making decisions in Pakistan. Here, you will find a description of the ways media bias and stereotypes shape Pakistani women's choices (Bano, [2009](#)).

Stereotyping

- Most people link women who want to lead or make decisions in public to typical household roles, which hinders their ability to do so.
- Women's credibility in politics may be reduced when stereotypes suggest they are less suited for political work than men.

- Stereotypes say that men think logically, while women act on feelings and emotions. It could make women look less able to do the job of a leader.
- Stereotypes that rate physical appearance above a person's schooling or achievements might reduce women's chances in politics.
- Family Priorities: Because of cultural beliefs, many women are told that family matters come first and might not be interested in politics.

Media Slant

- Women are commonly left out of political reporting, which makes them less visible and limits the number of women potential leaders can admire.
- By overemphasizing small details about female politicians, the media often blinds people to their important talents.
- Men's statements tend to get more media attention than women's suggestions about public policy.
- If female politicians are depicted in a negative light or watched more closely than men (Anwar, [2018](#)).

Comparative Perspectives: South Asia

Women's Participation in Party Affairs

Women's role in political party affairs reflects gender equality in leadership and decision-making.

India

While the Congress and the BJP have advanced women into political leadership, women are still not well represented at the top in India. Outstanding cases are those of Sonia Gandhi and Sushma Swaraj. Participation by women drops as you move from local levels to state and federal party systems. Women's wings want to involve more women in political activities.

Pakistan

The fact that women are mainly absent from party leadership reflects the greater inequality that exists between genders. Benazir Bhutto was in charge of the PPP, yet women are often not in the most important decision-making positions in other parties, such as the PML-N and PPP. No matter the

efforts made, in some cases, established central party structures still keep women's influence down.

Bangladesh

The rise of women to the office of prime minister from parties including the BNP and the Awami League has led to women becoming major leaders in Bangladesh. Party organizations are often ranked, but women's wings and designated roles help increase the number of women in leadership. They are still not able to participate in every aspect of civic life.

Sri Lanka

Although it is uncommon for women to lead in politics, Sri Lanka has had a leader like former President Chandrika Kumaratunga. While in many other South Asian countries, political parties give women greater chances to be involved, there are not many gender-equality efforts, such as women's wings and quotas, in Pakistan.

Nepal

Since federalization, Nepal has improved the number of women in political parties. Thanks to revisions in their party set-ups and the support of reserved seats, both the Nepali Congress and CPN-UML include women in leadership positions (Hanif, Ishfaq, & Naseem, 2024).

The level of women's political participation is not the same across South Asia. More women are now represented in legislatures thanks to affirmative action and reserved seats, but there are still hurdles at the system, culture and money levels. Party politics and traditional norms still hinder women in India and Pakistan, but Bangladesh and Nepal are moving ahead with women's political rights. Steps must be taken to reduce obstacles to women's complete political role and to increase their ability to influence decisions.

Policies and Recommendations:

Constitutional and Legal Framework

Changes in Pakistan's laws have been made to allow more women to take part in its politics. The Constitution under Article 25 prevents discrimination by gender and supports equal rights for all people. Some laws guarantee at least 60 out of 342 seats in the National Assembly for women.

The Election Act of 2017 requires political parties to give at least 5% of all general seats to women. While these rules are meant to include women, errors in action and not having any consequences for not complying usually reduce their effectiveness (Karki, 2023).

Quota System

This country uses the quota system as a main strategy to ensure women's participation. Because of this, more women are reaching political office and being noticed in official politics. Some say that since most of the women in reserved seats have political backgrounds, the seats are not filled by women from the grassroots or other disenfranchised groups. Suggestions for expanding the effect of quotas are replacing appointment by party officials with direct elections for reserved seats and updating the selection methods to attract more women.

Role of Political Parties

Some Pakistani political parties have created special women's divisions, and now and then, women are selected for top leadership roles. Yet, both party organizations and monthly meetings continue to be mainly run by men, and women are generally left out of decision-making roles. Including more women in political life can be done by choosing women for policymaking roles, using quotas in party leadership polls, and training women to take on responsibility. Having support groups and allowing women to be nominated by their peers is another way to advance them politically.

Education and Awareness

A lack of knowledge as well as the low ability to read and write make it much harder for rural women to become involved in politics. Women's rights and political responsibilities can be explained better through outreach, civic education and educational campaigns. In addition to government, non-profit groups and the media inform society and influence what people believe. Efforts to reform education should be especially aimed at women and girls in underdeveloped regions.

Capacity Building and Training Programs

Leadership courses, lessons on public speaking, and explanations about how elections work help strengthen women in government. Training

workshops have been offered by the NCSW, the ECP, and groups from civil society. Making these initiatives bigger, especially in the community and recruiting men to help women become leaders, can lead to better results in the future.

Regional Collaboration and Best Practice

The way sociopolitical structures work in South Asian nations is alike; thus, teaming up allows significant benefits. Pakistan could learn from Bangladesh and Nepal which have seen women elevated to important government careers and achieved better results in programs for women. In such places as SAARC, people should be granted opportunities to discuss and share knowledge that encourages gender equality in the region (Hina, [2018](#)).

Conclusion

In Pakistan, South Asian women's participation in politics is influenced by how rules, laws, and local customs interact. While Pakistan tries to improve

women's political status by setting up quotas and reservations in government, most women still do not participate as much as they should. But obstacles faced by women socially are patriarchy, violence against women, set gender roles, and lower education, which all prevent them from expressing their political rights. Because of a shortage of funds and a minimal influence for women in party leadership, these issues become more difficult.

The launch of gender quotas by the Devolution of Power Plan and the leadership of Benazir Bhutto improved Pakistani women's role in politics, but there is still an important void between having a seat at the table and true engagement. If participation by women in politics is to truly matter, policies that overcome structural problems should be applied, helping political parties develop gender-neutral rules, increasing women's schooling, and safeguarding women where they gather in public. This will happen only if women in Pakistan and the surrounding areas can participate equally in all aspects of democracy.

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