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## Policy Paper: Enhancing Women's Political Participation in Sindh, Pakistan

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**Policy Paper: Enhancing Women’s Political Participation in Sindh, Pakistan**

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**Abstract**

Women's political participation in Sindh is influenced by structural obstacles, social perceptions and institutional challenges. Despite the constitutional provisions that ensure gender equality, women keep on facing systemic obstacles that limit their engagement in politics. This policy paper presents intensive analysis of obstacles for the political representation of women, drawing from qualitative research and expert interview to provide policy-powered solutions. Evidence highlights the fact that increasing women participation in politics leads to more inclusive and representative rule. However, frequent socio-cultural obstacles, economic dependencies, and gender bias prevents women from being fully engaged in electoral processes (Bilal and Ahmed, 2018; Khattak and Higden, 2020). Women are reduced to major decision making positions, and political parties often fail to implement inclusive policies that promote gender balance (Hussain, 2022). Awareness and lack of institutional support carried forward women's ability to actively participate in politics, making gender equality a distant goal. This Paper focuses on education, leadership training, and legislative reforms in enhancing women's political engagement. It examines best practices from around the globe and comparative case studies to determine methods that are consistent with Sindh's socio-political environment. It also determines significant policy recommendations for enhancing women in politics, increasing gender quotas, offering financial and institutional assistance, and providing legal protection against gender discrimination (Allau Din and Rind, 2018; Chema et al., 2021).

## **INTRODUCTION**

Political engagement of women is not only a representation issue, but also a key policy determinant that has an impact on society as a whole (Syed and Tabsum, 2014). It is a key determinant of how democratic institutions are strengthened to ensure that policies respond to the various needs of all citizens. Studies have established that increased female involvement results in more representative decision-making, better governance, and better social welfare policy (Rubb et al., 2020). If women enter politics, the chances of policies to deal with such fundamental issues as education, healthcare, and gender violence are greater. Women's participation ensures greater levels of transparency and accountability within the regime.

But gender equality through political leadership needs a flexible strategy when it comes to education, legal reform, social awareness and institutional support (Awan, 2016). Women tend to be structurally constrained by cultural stereotypes, resource constraints, and limited access to mentorship. Patriarchal cultures saw patriarchal norms deeply ingrained evading women from asking for leadership, blaming them again for supporting roles rather than making decisions. Besides, party organizations also hinder women's advancement because leadership and membership processes in parties favor men compared to women.

Challenges to women engaging in politics entirely range from domestic duties to fewer economic independencies, hence hindering them from advancing effectively. Most of the women cannot manage their work life and private life, and instead opt to prioritize childcare duties more than politics. Financial limitations also present a major obstacle, given the fact that political campaigns have to spend significant sums on voter contact, advertisement, and transportation. Without sufficient funds, female candidates are less competitive compared to their male rivals.

Additionally, political violence threats and repression discourage most women from entering politics. According to reports, female politicians are often targeted by threats, intimidation, and attempts at discrediting, which break their confidence and discourage them from running for political seats. All these issues can be addressed through a concerted effort by the government agencies, political parties, and civil society organizations in ensuring a safe and more suitable political environment for women.

It is not merely a matter of getting more women into parliament but, importantly, of making them efficient decision-makers and actors. Gender quota legislations, leadership development courses, and money-backing programs have the potential to narrow the gender gap in political representation. Besides, promoting the culture of gender equality in childhood, breaking down social stereotypes, and impacting young girls to seek political leadership through education and activism are determining actions.

Studies indicate that increased female representation results in more thoughtful decision-making, better governance, and better social welfare policies (Rubb et al., 2020). Yet, gender equality in political leadership can be achieved through a multi-faceted approach encompassing education, law reforms, social consciousness, and institutional support (Awan,

2016). Domestic chores and financial constraints remain obstacles for women's active engagement in politics, and thus it becomes challenging for them to have successful campaigns.

#### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

International Framework like Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and The Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (Cedaw) has given guidelines so that gender-specific political participation can be ensured (Bano, 2009). These structures focus on structural reforms, legal security and proactive policy interventions so that the gap between genders is filled in politics. The effects of such structure have been realized in the majority of countries where robust gender-specific policies have created dramatic changes in female political representation. Research in high female political participation nations like Rwanda and Sweden, shows the significance gender quota and positive action policies play in breaking gender imbalance in politics (Khan and Naqvi, 2018). Rwanda is a prime example, having introduced a gender quota system with 61% of their parliament seats occupied by women and sets an example to countries struggling towards gender balance in the government. Was used to be. Sweden's gender mainstreaming policy in every sphere from politics has produced the outcome of equal representation of women in its political sphere. These instances prove how intervention in an organized manner can produce revolutionary outcomes.

In Pakistan, women's political participation is limited due to historically structural obstacles, cultural norms and patriarchal obstacles (Mushtaq and Adnan, 2022). In-depth underlying gender roles in social traditions discourage women from actively engaging in politics, often limiting them to supporting roles rather than leadership status. The United Nations Women, National Women's Status (NCSW), and Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) emphasizes the role of policy intervention in promoting reports, education, social movements and gender-related regime (Alijai et al., 2020). However, women face challenges, such as restricted mobility, political threats and lack of mentorship opportunities.

In addition, political parties in Pakistan have slowed women to integrate in leadership, often accused for symbolic roles rather than providing decision making power. Studies show that when women are included in electoral lists, they face obstacles such as financial obstacles, lack of access to political networks and minimum media representation. Compared to men, women candidates receive much less money and support from their parties, affecting their ability to run competitive campaigns.

Additionally, educational research suggests that there is a direct connection between a country's education system and women political engagement. Countries with high literacy rates among women have more female participation in politics, as education promotes awareness, confidence and ability to navigate political scenario. In Pakistan, despite efforts to improve female literacy, there is a lack of access to quality education, especially in rural areas, especially in rural areas.

Which limited his political aspirations (Memon and Idris, 2018). To address this issue requires targeted educational programs aimed at empowering women with the knowledge and skills required for political participation.

Comparing Pakistan to other South Asian countries, Bangladesh has made adequate progress by increasing female representation through reserved parliamentary seats and political training programs. Through its Panchayati Raj system, India has also empowered women at the ground level, which has increased women leadership. These models indicate that systematic policy measures and social reforms can lead to tangible improvement in women's political participation.

Thus, strengthening institutional structure, introducing positive action policies, and increasing women's political training programs are essential steps towards overcoming structural obstacles that obstruct the political participation of women in Pakistan. (195) and Convention on the Examples of All forms with Women (Cedaw) have provided guidelines to ensure gender-contemporary political participation (Bano, 2009). Studies of high women political participation countries such as Sweden and Rwanda, highlight the importance of gender quota and positive action policies in reducing gender inequalities in politics (Khan and Naqvi, 2018). In these countries, strong institutional support and legal measures ensure that women are given a proper opportunity to contest elections and hold public offices.

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### **RESEARCH METHODS**

This policy paper adopts a qualitative research method that integrates intensive interviews to analyze factors affecting women's political participation in Sindh (Memon and Idris, 2018). The research design is based on a mixed-method approach that combines primary and secondary data sources to ensure a wide understanding of the issue.

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

This study appoints a discovery research design, which is well suited to understand the underlying causes of low female political participation. Research utilizes qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews with women politicians, civil society members, and policy analysts. These interviews provide valuable insights into women's experiences in politics, shedding light on both systemic challenges and progress.

### **DATA COLLECTION METHOD**

Data collection process comprises two broad categories, i.e., primary data collected through interview and secondary data collected using reports, literature, and policy documents.

- Interviews: 25 semi-structured interviews were carried out with female politicians, grassroots activists, policymakers, and representatives who are women's rights advocates. The interviews uncover the personal difficulties and institutional challenges that women experience in politics.

- Document Analysis: Reports of the agency like that of UN Women, National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW), and the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) were analyzed to analyze policy structures and gender reforms. Newspaper reports and election history were also consulted in order to confirm women's participation in politics

#### **SAMPLE TECHNIQUE**

A purposeful sampling approach was used to select participants from different regions, ensuring a variety of approaches. Samples focus on:

- Women are contesting elections at local, provincial and national levels.
- Representatives of civil society working on gender and political inclusion.
- Government officials are responsible for electoral policies.
- Political analysts and academics specialize in gender studies.

#### **DATA ANALYSIS**

The thematic analysis was implemented to identify recurring patterns in qualitative data. This method enabled the classification of obstacles for political participation in structural, cultural, economic and institutional obstacles.

Major topics emerging from interview are:

- The role of family and social expectations in limiting the political ambitions of women.
- Lack of access to financial obstacles and funding of campaigns.
- Political party structures and gender bias in candidate selection.
- Female candidates commonly encounter security threats and political violence, which are major impediments to their participation in elections.

#### **ETHICAL ISSUES**

To ensure that they maintain ethical integrity, the following was done:

- Informed Consent: The participants were properly informed of the study goals, and consent was first obtained before interviews were carried out.
- Confidentiality: Interview responses were anonymized in order to hide the identities of the participants, particularly when they involved sensitive political topics.
- Neutral Approach: Both data analysis and collection were maintained with objectivity and neutrality. Triangulation was applied in cross-verifying information from diverse sources
- Using a systematic approach, this study gives an inclusive image of the social and structural determinants of political participation by women in Sindh, Pakistan.
- The information collected are the basis of the policy suggestions presented in this research. In-depth interviews were utilized to examine significant concerns that influence women's engagement in politics. The research is informed by a review of current policies, legal environment analysis, and thematic analysis of the feedback of women politicians, activists, and community leaders.

## **ANALYSIS**

### **WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN POLITICS**

Empowering women in politics is essential in the interest of gender equality and stronger democratic governance. Having more women in positions of authority makes policy more inclusive and social welfare programs better. Experience confirms that nations with higher women representation in politics implement policies favoring the marginalized, most specifically in education, health, and workers' rights (Zafar and Sami, 2021).

Even with such benefits, women still experience institutional, cultural, and economic hurdles that prevent their inclusion in leadership positions (Syed and Dar, 2017). Capacity-building initiatives like training in leadership, mentorship programs, and courses in public speaking are needed to empower women to acquire competencies to excel in politics (Khan and Naqvi, 2018). Secondly, economic support packages that are able to empower women contestants can help in remitting economic destitution that disenfranchises women to participate in politics (Memon and Idris, 2018). For this purpose, through a motivating political culture where there is active empowerment of women, the societies will evolve towards more democratic and egalitarian rule.

### **CHALLENGES CONFRONTED BY WOMEN POLITICIANS**

Even with the progress, women politicians still face numerous challenges such as gender-based discrimination, economic pressures, and political violence. According to research, women leaders face greater scrutiny and have to do more to demonstrate their capabilities than men (Avan, 2016). Political party organization in Pakistan continues to be male-dominated, resulting in a lack of gender-sensitive policy-making and an exclusionary politics, contributing to women's marginalization (Ali, 2020).

### **WOMEN'S SUBORDINATION IN THE ELECTION PROCESS IS THE SECOND BIGGEST CHALLENGE.**

Women politicians find it hard to get party nominations because of deeply ingrained biases against female candidates (Bilal and Ahmed, 2018). Also, whether women are selected or not, they are usually under limitations exercising their rights because of social as well as institutional limitations. It requires a strong legal system in order to meet these challenges such as gender quota and target policies so that equal opportunities can be provided to women for political leadership (Mushtaq and Adnan, 2022).

### **FAMILY AND SOCIAL EFFECTS ON POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**

Family and social theories have an effect on women's political ambition. In conservative societies, cultural criteria and traditional gender roles often discourage women from chasing political careers (Bano, 2009). Family support may be a determined factor whether a woman decides to enter politics, as patriarchal values can either encourage or limit her political ambitions (Memon and Idris, 2018). In addition, women who engage in politics often face public backlash and character investigation, which prevent many from actively participating in the political field (Khan and Naqvi, 2018). The purpose of social advocacy campaign and educational initiative can help to compete with these negative impacts to re-prepare the social perceptions of women in

politics. Positive role encouraging models and public awareness programs can further promote gender inclusion in political leadership.

#### **PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND POLITICAL AWAKENING**

The engagement in politics promotes personal development and confidence among women, making them capable of claiming their rights and making a meaningful contribution to governance. Women who enter politics often experience an increase in self-efficiency and leadership capabilities, which further encourage other women to participate (Ruba et al., 2020). Coming into contact with political processes enhances their decision-making skills and allow them to advocate gender-sensitive policies that promote widespread social changes. In addition, the opportunities for mentorship and networking play an important role in empowering women in politics. The establishment of women -led political network and training programs can help women politicians effectively navigate political structures (Syed and Tabasum, 2014). By promoting an auxiliary environment Society can encourage more women participation in politics and ensure their long -term retention in leadership positions.

#### **SECURITY THREATS AND ELECTION VIOLENCE**

Another major barrier to women's participation in politics is electoral violence. It has been established that women politicians and activists are threatened, harassed, and intimidated most often, political participation being a dangerous undertaking for them (Ali, 2020). All this creates a threatening atmosphere that dissuades women from contesting seats and restricts the freedom of movement for campaigning during elections. For that purpose, political parties and law enforcement agencies need to impose stringent security arrangements to safeguard women during elections and political processes (Hussain, 2022).

Security issues also affect the virtual sphere, as women politicians are perpetually harassed on social media and bullied online (Mushtaq and Adnan, 2022). Proper enforcement of laws against both political harassment and online harassment must be present in order to solve these. The installation of grievance mechanisms and response teams will establish a safe and congenial climate for women in politics.

#### **GLOBAL BEST PRACTICES FOR POLITICAL INCLUSION OF WOMEN**

An examination of successful global models offers important information on steps that can facilitate the political engagement of women in relationships in Pakistan. Sweden, Rwanda, and Bangladesh are a few of the nations in which they have adopted pragmatically gender-based representation policies (Zafar & Sami, 2021). Gender quotas were enforced by Rwanda, and the result was more than 60% women in Parliament. Likewise, Sweden's focus on gender-responsive policymaking has led to an inclusive government system.

These nations' experiences serve as a testimony to the need for inclusive legal structures, education reform, and mass campaigns for greater women's political participation (Khan and Naqvi, 2018). Pakistan can make great strides towards gender equality in politics and governance by adopting the same strategies.



### **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **TO STRENGTHEN EDUCATIONAL AND POLITICAL TRAINING**

Education plays an important role in shaping political awareness and engagement. To empower women in politics, structured educational programs should be developed at several levels, giving women the necessary skills and knowledge to participate effectively.

- Establish a mentorship program to aspire to female politicians, adding them with experienced political leaders who can provide guidance and assistance (Syed & Dar, 2017).
- Integrate political leadership training in higher education courses, provide courses on governance, law, public administration and campaign strategies (Zafar and Sami, 2021).
- Provide scholarships and financial assistance for women studying in political science, public policy and governance to encourage long-term engagement in leadership roles (Khan and Naqvi, 2018).
- To increase women's political skills, leadership abilities and electoral knowledge (Ali, 2020), organize workshops and training programs in collaboration with civil society organizations, political parties and educational institutions.
- Develop digital teaching platforms focusing on political education to reach women in remote and rural areas, allowing them to gain knowledge about electoral processes and governance structures (Memon and Idris, 2018) .

#### **LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL REFORMS**

To ensure representation of women in politics, legal and institutional reforms are required that create a competent environment for their participation.

- Apply quota in political parties, ensuring the minimum percentage of women candidates in the election at local, provincial and national levels (Alijai et al., 2020).
- To strengthen election laws to protect women from discrimination, forced and political violence, ensuring safe environment for women candidates and voters (Avan, 2016).
- Ensure similar access to the campaign by presenting state-provided financial assistance programs for women candidates to address financial inequalities in election campaigns (Mushtaq and Adnan, 2022).
- Make a monitoring body within the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to track compliance with political parties with gender representation policies (Bilal and Ahmed, 2018).
- Promoting gender-sensitive policies within governance structures, ensuring that women have a similar voice in decision-making processes at all levels of the government (Bano, 2009).

#### **ADDRESS GENDER DISCRIMINATION AND HARASSMENT**

Women in politics often face gender-based harassment and discrimination, discouraging them with active political participation. A multidimensional approach is required to address these challenges.

- Install the legal aid services dedicated to women facing discrimination and violence in political settings, ensure that they get legal aid and protection (Ali, 2020).

- Introduction to compulsory gender sensitivity training for political parties, government officials and law enforcement agencies to create a more inclusive and respectable political culture (Bano, 2009).
- Develop protective policies and safety measures to protect women candidates and workers from electoral violence and harassment (Rubin et al., 2020).
- To strengthen media rules to prevent the spread of sexist stories and character attacks against female politicians, ensure proper representation in media coverage (Mushtaq and Adnan, 2022).
- Apply a confidential complaint and redressal mechanism to provide women in politics with a safe platform for reporting harassment and discrimination (Syed and Tabassum, 2014).

#### **TO INCREASE FAMILY AND SOCIAL SUPPORT**

Encouraging family and social support is necessary to promote an environment where women feel motivated to participate in politics.

- Awareness campaigns and dialogues (Khan and Naqvi, 2018) attach community leaders in promoting gender-targeted political participation.
- Identify and support the dual roles of women in family and politics by advocating flexible political engagement policies that allow work-life balance (Memon and Idris, 2018).
- Encourage women's organizations to highlight positive stories of women political leaders, challenge stereotypes and promote public support (Zafar and Sami, 2021).
- Apply family support programs offering childcare facilities for women politicians that to reduce the burden of balanced family responsibilities with political career (Awan, 2016).

#### **CONCLUSION**

In order to achieve inclusive governance and justified policy making, women participation in politics is necessary. However, despite constitutional provisions and international structure advocating gender equality, women in Sindh continue to face systemic obstacles for political engagement. The structural, social and economic obstacles mentioned in this letter reflect that important efforts are required to ensure gender equality in politics.

This policy paper has highlighted important recommendations to resolve these challenges, including strengthening educational and training programs, implementing legal reforms, addressing gender discrimination and increasing social support. By investing under the political leadership of women, Pakistan can promote a more representative and democratic system that ensures that all voices are heard in governance processes.

Role of stakeholders - including government agencies, political parties, civil society organization Political parties, civil society organizations and media- will be important in implementing these recommendations. Permanent gender equality in politics will require long-term commitments for policy reform, education and cultural change.

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