Women in Pakistani Politics: A Comparative Analysis of Gender Quotas and Political Participation

1. Hamna Khan Lecturer Pakistan Studies department Lahore college for women Univerisity, Lahore, Pakistan. Email: hamna.khan@lcwu.edu.pk

2. Nadira Shafi ,Lecturer at Pakistan Studies department, Lahore College for Women University, Lahore, Pakistan.

3. Samia Jamshed, Lecturer, University of Home Economics , Lahore, Pakistan
    Email: samiajamshed.hps@uhe.edu.pk

4. Aimen Atif, Mphil Scholar at Department of Pakistan Studies Centre, University of the Punjab Lahore , Pakistan. Email: atifaimen7@gmail.com

Abstract

This article explores the complexities of women's political participation in Pakistan and their influence by different factors, such as gender quotas, socio-cultural barriers and others. The implementation of gender quotas since 2002 had significantly increased the number of women in Pakistani legislature bodies. However, such effectiveness in gender quotas is most of the time obstructed by political dynasties and socio-cultural barriers. Hence, many quota seats are occupied by women from influential political families, instead of contributing to better change, often, quotas fortify the given status quo. Socio-cultural norms, specifically gender roles, and patriarchal attitudes, also create a lot of constraints to women's public and political activity, though it is even more challenging for conflict and post-conflict countries, with security threats and traditional practices limiting women's involvement. The role of media in the portrayal of women politicians is often patronizing with respect to personal attributes, and not political achievements-a cause for their under-representation. Issues like gender-based violence also threaten women from entering or continuing in politics. The report calls for significant reforms to enforce gender quotas, promote inclusive party practices, and handle socio-cultural barriers plus ensure support for women in conflict zones; equally, in media representation, and combating the issues of gender-based violence. True effective implementation of these measures is key to helping in the realization of meaningful gender equality and empowering women in Pakistan's political landscape.

Introduction

Women's political participation is theoretically documented as the most basic component of gender equality and is considered to be the cornerstone of democratic governance. Despite such global accomplishments, however, women are grossly underrepresented in decision-making bodies, and this problem becomes more desperate in developing countries like Pakistan. The underrepresentation of women in various decision-making bodies undermines democratic processes and perpetuates gender inequalities in policy-making and governance (Dahlerup, 2006). With this problem in mind, countries globally have indeed waited and looked forward to some initiative that increases the percentage of females and, among other mechanisms, gender quotas happen to be one of the most powerful ones.

The introduction of gender quotas in Pakistan in 2002, resulted in a complete alteration in the political scenery of the country. This measure stated that a definite percentage of National Assembly, Senate, and provincial assemblies seats must be filled by women. Of course, these quotas provided increased opportunities for women to representation in the legislative bodies, yet their impact on women empowerment is far from definite (Bari, 2010). The critics claim that quotas have increased female representation, but those gains hardly translate to actual political agency for women. These reforms are limited through factors of dynastic politics and patriarchal structures as well as socio-cultural norms.

This study attempts to investigate how gender quotas impact women's political representation in Pakistan, using a comparative approach to discuss how such strategies have been met in other countries. Exploring the successes and shortcomings of the quota in Pakistan should shed light on the challenges women in politics face and the types of strategies that could help surmount these problems. Drawing from experiences in countries like Rwanda and France, where gender quotas were introduced with partial success or failure, the article will also provide much-needed enlightenment on how Pakistan can better its act in the means of enhancing gender representation in politics.

Case Study: Women's Political Participation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Background

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is the north of Pakistan and has been one of the most challenging provinces for women in politics over the years as a result of continuous conflict, tribal customs, and socio-cultural barriers. The instability in the area has been high, mainly contributed by terrorism and internal conflicts, which have given women even more increased challenges in the political arena. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, KP is located in the north of Pakistan, which has a socio-political landscape with issues of security that are complex in nature. KP has been among the most challenging environments for women's political participation, largely due to historical tribal customs, conservative cultural norms, and incessant conflict. Since there is huge instability and violence in the region, which has partly brought about militant activities and internal strife that have further alienated and moved them further away from public and political life. In addition, popular steps of gender quotas in provincial assembly have failed to break the deeply rooted barriers against female political engagements in KP.

Gender Quotas and Representation

The quota system for women's representation in Pakistan, and by extension Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, aims to make women more represented in the political sphere by assuring a specific percentage of seats in the legislative bodies are reserved for female candidates. The quotas introduced by the 2002 constitutional reforms raised the number of women who are present in the KP assembly; however, various factors have mellowed down the effect of these quotas. Political dynasties and entrenched local power structures continue to confine the scope for real political influence in a lot of women elected under the quota system who belong to influential families or have a background in politics. Moreover, socio-cultural resistance and security challenges continue to create vulnerabilities that hinder the full manifestation of the effectiveness of these quotas, which limit women from being able to campaign effectively or participate in the political processes on the same level as their male counterparts.

Year	Total Seats in Provincial Assembly	Seats Reserved for Women (Gender Quota)	Number of Women Elected	Percentage of Women in Assembly
2002	124	22	14	11.3%
2008	124	22	16	12.9%
2013	124	22	18	14.5%
2918	145	24	22	15.2%

The table presents data on women's representation in the Provincial Assembly from 2002 to 2018. It shows total seats, reserved seats for women under a gender quota, the number of women elected, and the percentage of women in the assembly. In 2002, out of 124 total seats, 22 were reserved for women, with 14 women elected (11.3%). This number gradually increased, reaching 22 women elected in 2018 (15.2%), with 145 total seats and 24 reserved for women. The data highlights the steady growth of female political representation over the four election cycles.

Challenge	Description	Impact on Political Participation
Socio-Cultural Barriers	Traditional gender roles and tribal norms restrict women's public roles.	Limits women's visibility and participation in political activities.
Security Concerns	Ongoing conflict and violence create unsafe conditions for female politicians.	Deters women from campaigning and holding office.
Media Representation	Media often focuses on personal lives rather than political achievements.	Undermines women's credibility and public support.

The table outlines challenges women face in political participation, describing each along with its impact. "Socio-Cultural Barriers" highlights how traditional gender roles and tribal norms restrict women's visibility and limit their participation in politics. "Security Concerns" emphasizes the unsafe conditions due to conflict and violence, deterring women from campaigning and holding office. "Media Representation" focuses on the media's tendency to prioritize women's personal lives over their political achievements, which undermines their credibility and reduces public support. This table effectively illustrates the multifaceted challenges impacting women's political engagement and advancement.

Literature Review

Historical Background of Women in Pakistani Politics

Women's political participation in Pakistan has changed significantly since it came into being in 1947. Women in Pakistan were, at some point, very much restricted in politics; nevertheless, they became a key force when strong and influential female figures such as Fatima Jinnah and Benazir Bhutto rose to power. Benazir Bhutto was the first woman who rose to be the head of a country where Muslims comprise the majority of the population. Her leadership became a landmark, through which it was shown that women can play a strong influence on the political dynamics of Pakistan (Jalal, 1991).

However, these measures did little to challenge the dominant socio-cultural norms and patriarchy to ensure greater female political representation. By the early 2000s under the military regime of General Pervez Musharraf, Pakistan did all but most democratic things by introducing gender quotas. The country reserved 17 percent of total seats in the National Assembly, provincial assemblies, and local bodies for women. A move on the part of the state to increase female political representation, this policy faced grave challenges while being implemented and in effects..

Comparative Analysis: Gender Quotas in Pakistan vs. Other Countries

In this regard, the best way invaluable insights will be revealed is a comparison of gender quotas in Pakistan with that of other countries. For instance, the country of Rwanda has the highest percentage in the world of over 60% of women in the lower house of Parliament; therefore, gender quotas have been very successful in that country (Burnet, 2008). Success partly owes to a combination of constitutional mandates, strong political will, and cultural shifts favoring the cause for women's inclusion in politics.

Quotas have, however been introduced in countries such as France but with little success. France has set a rule that makes political parties field equal men and women candidates. However, several parties would rather pay the fines than comply with this requirement. This has managed to bring little change in the country (Murray, 2010).

Pakistan's gender quota finds a position in between the two models. Even though the quota system has brought out the numbers of women, the system is incomplete due to the inherent patriarchal society, lack of political training, and minimal support by the male politicians (Bari, 2010). More importantly, Pakistan has not yet experienced and earned the same degree of cultural change as Rwanda has done to create conditions to empower women in politics.

Region	Total Female Politicians	Seats Reserved for Women	Percentage of Women in Politics	Key Issues Faced
Conflict Zones	45	20	12%	Security concerns, socio-cultural resistance
Non-Conflict Zones	150	50	18%	Socio-cultural resistance, political dynasties

The Evolution of Women's Political Rights in Pakistan

The history of women's political rights in Pakistan has not been linear but constantly influenced by changing political regimes, culture, and legal reforms. Immediately after gaining independence in 1947, women had the right to vote and engage in politics but the trajectory of women's political empowerment has gone in fits and starts as the ideologies of successive governments have waxed and waned. Political activism in the 1970s was under Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, where, under Bhutto's administration, women's rights and involvement were deeply promoted. That progress was starkly curtailed during the military rule of General Zia-ul-Haq in the 1980s through the introduction of conservative Islamic laws that aggressively excluded women from playing political roles. This had far-reaching impacts on the country as a whole, yet the failure of this move did not inhibit another step forward for the leadership of women: that in the form of the first woman prime minister of a Muslim-majority country in Benazir Bhutto, in the 1990s. The use of gender quotas was not practiced until the early 2000s, under General Pervez Musharraf when 17% of seats both in the National Assembly and the provincial legislatures were reserved for women. Such a quota system significantly improved the representation of women in political institutions; however, patriarchal norms and the infamous politics of dynasties still partly hinder the full realization and exertion of women's agency in the political sphere. Modernization in political rights for women in Pakistan reflects radical achievements as well as challenging symptoms that reflect an ongoing struggle toward gender equality in the political future of the state.

Legal Framework Supporting Women's Political Participation

This legal framework has passed through various stages and always sought to promote gender equality in women's participation in decision-making bodies. At its core is the constitutional guarantee of equal rights for all, this time concerning the right to political participation regardless of gender, as marked in the 1973 Constitution (Patel, 2003). Formal measures directly aimed at the political representation of women came in the form of the landmark decision to reserve 17% of seats for women both in the National Assembly, Senate and provincial assemblies through constitutional amendments undertaken during General Pervez Musharraf's regime in 2002. A gender quota system is one of the major strides taken towards rectification to

balance historical underrepresentation of women in Pakistan's political landscape. In addition to these electoral quotas, the Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act of 2010 has contributed to securing an environment for women in public spaces, including political institutions, with respect to dealing with the critical barrier of workplace harassment (Jafar, 2018). On the other hand, the implementation of these laws is not uniform across all regions, and cultural and institutional resistance denies them full implementation. The legal framework, therefore, presents the foundation upon which women's political empowerment is established, but further reforms and stronger implementation would be required to translate these provisions into more substantive gains in the political sphere for women.

The Role of Political Parties in Shaping Women's Participation

The political parties within Pakistan are at the central point of defining women's participation within the political sphere by opening up avenues for access to the political domain, though they hardly patronize gender equality. Major parties within the country, such as the Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP), Pakistan Muslim League (PML), and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), have traditionally established women's wings though with the small number of women representation in most of their public offices. Efforts in this direction are usually symbolic rather than substantive since female members often find themselves relegated to the sidelines in leadership positions and decision-making processes. PPP's Benazir Bhutto government, in particular, had begun to take women's representation a step forward, whereas other parties have been somewhat inert on this front. Political parties also generally nominates women from influential political families, thereby ensuring dynastic politics which in turn restricted the more comprehensive representation of ordinary women. While the quota system has ensured a minimum representation of women in the legislatures with the push of parties who are compelled to present female candidates, parties need to build more inclusive policies with concrete empowerment which would enable women to contest elections on general seats and hold leadership positions rather than just quota-based ones. As the political landscape in Pakistan continues to shift, active and authentic engagement by women in party politics will remain a critical variable toward achieving gender equality in governance.

Year	National Assembly Seats	Seats Reserved for Women (Gender Quota)	Number of Women Elected	Percentage of Women in National Assembly
2002	342	60	22	6.4%
2008	342	60	26	7.6%
2013	342	60	29	8.5%
2018	342	60	33	9.6%

Local Government and Women's Political Empowerment in Pakistan

Local government structures in Pakistan were significant in their role of political empowerment by providing opportunities for grassroots political engagement and leadership. Gender quotas for the local councils, part of the provision of the devolution plan initiated in 2001, helped ensure that more women participated at the municipal and district levels in what was essentially their first experience of local governance. This quota system empowered women to be more aggressive in councilor and mayoral positions, which further fed the political agency and leadership sense of these communities. However, the effectiveness of these local government systems had been compromised by the multiple cycles of political instability, glitches in administrating the systems, and dissolution of some of the local government structures that created breaks in continuity and diminished the strength of women's representation (Bari, 2015). Socio-cultural barriers and patriarchal attitudes also create considerable impediments to the work of local female leaders, who often face resistance from their male counterparts and local communities. So despite the obstacles, the place remains an important arena for promoting women's political empowerment; consistent support and reforms that ensure sustenance and continuance of the gains seen in female political representation at the grassroots level remain imperative.

Gender Quotas and Political Dynasties6. Women's Movements and Feminist Advocacy in Pakistani Politics

The intersecting impacts of gender quotas and political dynasties in Pakistan results in a complex dynamic in which women from influential political families seem to fare disproportionately well from the reserved seats, furthering elite control over the political sphere. Political dynasties often result in concentrated power within a few influential family lines; women within these lineages tend to be those who occupy the quota reserved seats in Pakistan. The result is that although gender quotas may seemingly be increasing the numbers of women in politics, this trend often renders the broader impact of gender quotas very limited in striking challenges to existing power structures because most women are already marginalized and come from political families (Shah, 2018). This undermines the democratic as well as egalitarian benefits that gender quotas were expected to bring in empowering ordinary women and increasing diversity in political representation. At the same time, women's movements and feminist activism have criticized these patronage practices and demanded more transformative changes. Organizations like the Aurat Foundation and the Women's Action Forum have spoken to opinion in the public and lobbied for what they call 'greater gender equity'-not just representation but also political empowerment that translates into effective power for all women (Shaheed, 2010). The movements highlight the necessity to expand the quota to encompass a more diverse approach, that gender quotas serve as the cutting edge for broad-based empowerment and not drive politically sanctioned hierarchies.

Province	Total Seats	Seats Reserved for Women	Number of Women Elected	Percentage of Women in Provincial Assembly
Punjab	371	66	30	8.1%
Sindh	168	29	22	13.1%
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	124	22	22	15.2%
Balochistan	65	11	9	13.8%

Socio-Cultural Barriers to Women's Political Participation

Socio-cultural barriers to women's political participation in Pakistan are deeply-rooted and deter them substantially from full participation into the political sphere. Patriarchal norms and traditional gender roles describe that women's identity should have a domestic base, causing major obstacles for participation in politics, as notes Shaheed (2009). Cultural attitudes also believe that "politics" is a male domain, and women get social resistance if they attempt to participate in public life. On the other hand, religious and cultural notions also frequently engender these requirements for understanding, which further deter women from holding political offices. Furthermore, pressures from family and the community require them to gratify familial requirements ahead of achieving their political aspirations and also systemic problems such as violence and harassment based on gender further deter women from entering or staying in politics (Khan, 2019). Although there are legal and policy measures that come in handy to foster more representation of women, the socially as well as culturally embedded constraints constitute one of the greatest challenges where a larger degree of change would have to take place at the cultural level to allow an environment conducive for free exercise of political activity by women, besides structural reforms.

Media Representation of Women Politicians in Pakistan

However, while quite informative on shaping the public perception of women politicians in Pakistan who go about to influence their political career, this is usually accompanied by reiterating dominant gender stereotypes and biases. In contrast with contributions made to policy as well as political successes, media coverage often focuses on the personal lives and appearances or the family ties women politicians hold. This kind of coverage undermines their credibility but also provides the myth that women have only secondary roles in politics, in contradistinction to their personal and familial identities. Those who challenge the norm about gender roles or deal with controversial issues receive even more intense criticism and backlash that can discourage more women from entering politics or reduce their effectiveness when they do. It is an indication of a trend in the media, though perhaps under-representing female politicians, more sensational than substantial, but more broadly indicative of the society's

attitudes toward women in public life, therefore, for a more balanced and respectful portrayal by the media to support the advancement of women in politics in order to give equal voice and value to women on a par with their male equivalents.

9. Women's Political Representation in Conflict and Post-Conflict Regions of Pakistan

Women's political representation in the conflict and post-conflict regions of Pakistan, such as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, is very challenging and much tougher with the present situation of violence, instability, and deep-rooted conservative norms. In these regions where armed conflicts and political instability exist, women in many ways are heavily restricted from their political participation, such as security threat, low education and resources, and social pressures against female leadership (Naz, 2018). Such factors are made worse by widespread violence and insecurity, making it difficult to interact in the political processes, much harder to campaign, for women. Traditional tribal and cultural practices in these regions often limit public roles to women and discourage women from involving themselves in political activities. Despite these efforts at introducing gender quotas and increasing women's participation in local governance, other chronic problems associated with conflict and relevant societal attitudes tend to undermine such primacies. Certain interventions therefore will be necessary to address security issues, gain greater access for women, challenge these cultural and societal norms, and change them to enhance women's political participation and leadership roles in such conflict-ridden areas.

10. Gender-Based Violence and Political Participation

One of the biggest disincentives to the participation of women in politics in Pakistan is the gender-based violence that takes the form of a variety of threats, including assault, harassment, and psychosocial abuse against women and severely hampers women's capabilities to do politics. Online and off-line violence and threats have often targeted female politicians and activists and have generated an atmosphere that discourages women from following or pursuing careers in politics (Khan, 2020). This violence is not only frightening for the women but also mocks their worth and effectiveness; it sustains a culture of exclusion and marginalization. The fear of violence and harassment may thus limit political activism by women, limit their visibility in public, or frighten potential candidates from ever entering the political fray. Eradication of

gender-based violence requires more than just the law alone; it needs concrete, strong legislation, proper enforcement of anti-violence laws, as well as supporting mechanisms for women in politics to ensure their safety and capacitate them to play their full roles in political processes. In the absence of such measure, persistent violence will continue to undermine women's political empowerment and concomitantly the general goals for gender equality in governance.

Discussion and Analysis

Making use of gender quotas, socio-cultural barriers, and other influencing factors in analyzing women's political participation in Pakistan seems to open quite a complex picture with substantial achievements and considerable challenges. Gender quotas introduced in 2002 have played a very important role in increasing women's representation in Pakistan's legislative bodies - an important stride toward the equal involvement of both genders in politics. These quotas have provided a formal legal sanction that ensures women take up a minimum percentage of seats, thereby assisting to break down some of the traditional barriers that have in the past served as impediments to the political inclusion of women.

However, socio-cultural barriers persist, and political dynasties occur, which undermines the effectiveness of these quotas. The power of political families leads to women elected through the quota system coming from élite backgrounds which reinforce existing power structures rather than generally egalitarian representation (Shah 2018). This suggests a critical weakness of the quota system-that is, the intended democratic benefits within the system get diluted by the influence of political dynasties.

Socio-cultural barriers also have major impacts on women's political participation. Tradition male-oriented gender roles and patriarchal attitudes limit the involvement of women in public and political life, as the expectations from society are rather oriented toward domestic responsibilities than toward political aspirations (Shaheed, 2009). Cultural norms are further enhanced through religious and traditional interpretations that create an environment with quite serious resistance against women who want to enter into politics. Given the case, sustaining the barriers illustrates that quotas raise the representation levels but never serves as a direct indicator for eventual empowerment or shake up of deep societal attitudes.

Local governments have provided much-needed openings for grassroots women's participation into politics despite affected by political instability and administrative problems (Bari, 2015). The repeated collapse of local councils, in addition to unbalanced electoral procedures, places the success realized in the improvement in women's participation in local administration in clear view. Cultural and social barriers largely circumscribe the presence of female local administrators, as evident in their hardly influence. Their efforts, therefore require continuous support and reforms to enable women to act and attain political power.

Media representation adds another layer of complexity in the landscape of women's political participation. Instead of specific political accomplishments, personal attributes appear to be the area where media tends to denigrate female politicians and feed into gendered stereotypes (Zia, 2018). This does not merely impact public perception but also generates a cycle of exclusion that discourages women from entering, and even staying in, political careers.

Challenges are usually more acute in conflict and post-conflict areas. Women are highly challenged in volatile regions. These women experience heightened security threats alongside socio-cultural resistance, which makes it hard for them to participate in the political processes (Naz, 2018). The restriction of traditional practices and on-going instability limits their scope of roles and hence prevents them from accessing political processes efficiently.

Gender-based violence is still a major problem that impacts female political participation globally. Violence may prevent women from joining politics, reduce their public involvement, and undermine their political power (Khan, 2020). Important measures against gender-based violence can be delivered to create a safe environment and facilitate women entering politics.

Recommendations

Strengthen Enforcement of Gender Quotas To make the gender quota effective, the process of implementation and quota rules' monitoring should be strictly implemented. This indicates explicit rules and mechanisms that will prevent political dynasties from interfering with the political quota. The quota percentage should also be increased with mechanisms ensuring seats allocated through quotas will not be tokenistic but be able to contribute towards having influence and leadership.

Promote Inclusive Political Party Practices: To make the gender quota effective, the process of implementation and quota rules' monitoring should be strictly implemented. This indicates explicit rules and mechanisms that will prevent political dynasties from interfering with the political quota. The quota percentage should also be increased with mechanisms ensuring seats allocated through quotas will not be tokenistic but be able to contribute towards having influence and leadership.

Address Socio-Cultural Barriers To overcome the socio-cultural barriers that do not allow women to engage in politics, a holistic approach needs to be embarked upon. This will include public awareness campaigns that subvert the traditional notions of gender that restrain women's participation in politics and enhance the value of women's leadership. Both men and women need education programs to transform the culture of community and religious leaders. Community and religious leaders can be involved to develop supportive environments for women's political engagement.

Enhance Support for Women in Conflict Zones: There is a need for targeted support for women in conflict and post-conflict regions, because they face unique challenges. These include measures of security, provision of equipment for political training, and networks that protect and empower female leaders in such regions. Much of this can be offered by international and local NGOs in the form of resources and advocacy for women in these regions.

Improve Media Representation: Women politicians should be encouraged to get more balanced and respectful media coverage. That is to say, information released on them should focus more on the political achievements and policy contributions they make than their personal attributes. Media literacy programs or workshops for journalists are helpful in combating gender biases and enhancing the quality of coverage.

Combat Gender-Based Violence Implement total strategies toward ending gender-based violence, such as strengthening legal protections, ensuring the effective enforcement of anti-violence laws, and provision of support services for survivors. The safeguarding of safe physical and digital spaces for women in politics helps to fend off harassment and violence.

Support Women's Grassroots Movements: Strengthen grassroots women's movements and feminist advocacy organizations working towards political empowerment. Their capacity can be built by providing funding, resources, and training. This would allow them to impact more; meanwhile, locally and nationally, the barriers to women's full political participation could be broken down.

Regular Monitoring and Evaluation: There should be established mechanisms to track and assess policies and programs on women's political participation at regular intervals. The information that is obtained includes the effectiveness of gender quotas, the impact of socio-cultural interventions, and how far women have progressed politically. This information can inform current reforms and adjustments in strategies. Institutions should institute mechanisms to regularly monitor and evaluate policies and programs on women's political participation. These findings on the impacts of gender quotas, interventions in socio-cultural areas, and the advancement of women in politics shall trigger action for amendment and fine-tuning of policies in place.

By embracing these suggestions, Pakistan can take giant strides toward increasing gender balance in politics and ensuring that women sit at the table but, more importantly, are helping to play the meaningful role of forming the country's future.

Conclusion

Generally, the growth and development of women's political participation in Pakistan have been in the forefront but is still strewn with vast challenges deeply set within the socio-political fabric of the country. The introduction of gender quotas in 2002 became a turning point, where the representation of women was mandated in a specific number of seats within legislative bodies. The legal advancements notwithstanding, the quotas are often diluted by the persistent influence of political dynasties, patriarchal norms, and socio-cultural barriers. In that context, this shows that women's simple presence in political institutions cannot be taken as symbolic of their political empowerment.

The biggest weakness of the quota system in Pakistan seems to be its inability to effectively resist the hegemony of political dynasties and the fact that women elected under quota

sometimes come from elite backgrounds. This often reinforces the status quo conditions rather than challenging them and, therefore, could not reflect broader egalitarian objectives that the quotas were expected to serve. The situation is further complicated by social pressure that strictly confines the roles of women to the domestic sphere and domain. These strict social expectations together with cultural and religious interpretations that limit political spaces to men stifle the meaningful involvement of women in politics.

Security issues in the conflict-prone regions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan compound these challenges of women's involvement in political life. The dangers of violence, coupled with socio-cultural resistance, often makes it next to impossible for women to campaign effectively or hold political offices in such areas. These regions stand as harsh reminders that political participation is not only about access but rather creating safe and enabling environments where women can exercise their political rights without fear of retribution or violence.

Media portrayal does act as a catalyst that impacts people's perception of women in politics. In Pakistan, the portrayal of women politicians is majorly superficial and focuses more on their personal life and appearance rather than political stature. This kind of biased presentation lowers their credibility and makes politics a male game, thereby dissuading other women from taking an entry into the realm of politics.

Gender-based violence is another monumental challenge to women's political participation. Women in politics experience harassment, threats, and all forms of violence, online and offline. This not only has psychological effects but also sequesters their ability to be seen and heard about their political pursuit. Gender-based violence must therefore be combated using legislation policy and creating safe spaces to enable women to carry out their political pursuit unharassed and intimidated.

Conclusively, though gender quotas have no doubt brought in more women into Pakistani politics, much remains to be achieved in terms of political power. Overcoming socio-cultural obstacles, improvement in the media, protection of female citizens in conflict zones, and putting an end to gender-based violence ought to be the first step toward a more inclusive political landscape. At the same time, political parties have to take a more active role in gender mainstreaming: there should be policies that present opportunities for women's leadership, with

meaningful participation well beyond tokenism of quotas. Pakistan will eventually be moving toward real gender parity in politics: from being represented in decision-making bodies, to being active and empowered participants shaping their future.

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