

Received: 27 February 2024, Accepted: 25 March 2024

State of Women Political Empowerment in Pakistan and Role of PPP (1988-2013)

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the state of women political empowerment in Pakistan and the role played by the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) during the period 1988-2013. The research explores the initiatives, policies, and legislative measures undertaken to enhance women's participation in politics, with a focus on the PPP's contributions. It analyzes the impact of reserved seats for women in legislative bodies, prominent female PPP leaders like Benazir Bhutto, and key policy interventions aimed at promoting women political empowerment. By assessing the PPP's efforts and the broader landscape of women's political engagement, this research provides insights into the progress made and the persisting obstacles to women's political empowerment in Pakistan during the specified period. The study was concluded that PPP significantly contributed for enhancing the women representation in power corridors and decision making and fulfill all the international indicators of women political empowerment during different tenures.

Keywords: Political empowerment, Legislative measures, Patriarchal norms, Political sphere, Engagement, International indicators

Introduction of the Study

Pakistan was facing serious concerns about the women empowerment particularly in regard to political participation and political representation in the last decade of 20th century and first decade 21st century. Former Prime Minister and chairperson PPP, Benazir Bhutto was emerged as significant political figure in late 1980s and she as well as her companions, particularly females, have to face serious allegations and character assassination campaigns by the right-wing opponents. PPP's efforts for enhancing the women participation in politics and political representation have also been opposed by the various corners. Later the women political representation was enhanced and measures were taken to strengthen the females' participation in politics. This study was initiated with the aim to explore the state of women political empowerment in the country during 1988 to 2013 and to reconnoiter PPP's stance as well as efforts in this regard. The study was done by using the qualitative content analysis technique and in-depth interview method.

Despite the persistence of gender disparities in Pakistan, as evident from various indicators, the country had made significant strides in women's political participation during 1988 to 2013. A notable achievement was the increased in representation of women in legislative bodies, marking substantial shift in country's political landscape. This progress was testament to efforts made to address historical gender imbalance in Pakistan's political sphere (Rai, Shah, & Ayaz, 2007).

Pakistan's journey towards women's political empowerment was marked by significant milestones, particularly between 1988 and 2013. During this period, the country witnessed notable progress in women's participation in politics. One of the key factors contributing to this advancement was the increased representation of women in legislative bodies. The implementation of reserved seats for women in national and provincial assemblies played a crucial role in enhancing their presence in these forums. This mechanism helped ensure a certain level of female representation, providing women with opportunities to engage in policymaking and legislative processes (Rai, Shah, & Ayaz, 2007). The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) was prominent political force advocating for

women's rights and empowerment. Leaders like Benazir Bhutto, who served as Pakistan's Prime Minister, broke significant barriers and paved the way for future generations of female politicians. Bhutto's leadership not only showcased women's capability in holding high political office but also inspired many women to participate in politics. Other female politicians, such as Ashraf Abbasi, Nusrat Bhutto, Sharmila Faruqui, Hina Rabbani Khar, Fehmida Mirza, Shazia Marri, Sherin Rehman and Faryal Talpur held important positions, contributing to advocacy and policymaking efforts aimed at promoting women's empowerment (Nisa, 2023).

Despite these advancements, women's political empowerment in Pakistan faced challenges rooted in socio-cultural norms and patriarchal structures prevalent in the society. Deep-seated traditional beliefs often limited women's roles and their participation in public and political spheres. Additionally, factors like limited access to education and economic opportunities further constrained women's ability to engage fully in political processes. Addressing these underlying issues was crucial for sustaining and furthering the progress made in women's political empowerment in Pakistan. The interplay of political will, societal attitudes, and supportive legislative frameworks shaped the landscape for women's political participation in Pakistan. Efforts to create a more enabling environment, including policy initiatives and advocacy, were vital for enhancing women's roles in politics. Understanding the complexities and nuances of these factors provided valuable insights into strategies for promoting greater political empowerment of women in the country.

Constitutional Guarantees and International Commitments

The Constitution of Pakistan has also been instrumental in promoting women's political development. By enshrining fundamental rights and principles of equality, the Constitution has provided a foundation for women's empowerment. Article 25 of Constitution guaranteed equality before law for all citizens, regardless of gender, while Article 34 ensures that women have equal opportunities to participate in national life (NCSW, 2010). These provisions have enabled women to contest elections, hold public office, and participate in the political process. The

increased representation of women in legislative bodies can be attributed to several key factors. Firstly, Pakistan's commitment to international agreements, including the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), has played crucial role. These commitments were reinforced following the 4th World Conference on Women in 1995, which served as a catalyst for gender equality initiatives in Pakistan. The conference's Beijing Platform for Action emphasized the importance of women's participation in decision-making processes, prompting Pakistan to re-examine its policies and laws (Nisa, 2023).

Furthermore, series of legislative measures have been enacted to ensure women's participation in the political process. The Election Commission Order of 2002, for instance, reserved 33 percent of seats for women in local government bodies (ECP, 2002). The Political Parties Order required political parties to allocate five percent of their tickets to women candidates in general elections (GoP, 2002). Additionally, the National Assembly and Provincial Assemblies Allocation of Reserved Seats for Women and Non-Muslims Rules ensured that women would have minimum level of representation in legislative bodies. These measures have collectively contributed to a more inclusive and representative political structure, paving the way for greater gender equality in Pakistan. Overall, the progress made in women's political participation in Pakistan is a result of a combination of international commitments, constitutional provisions, and legislative measures. While challenges persist, these developments demonstrate a positive trajectory towards greater gender equality in the country's political sphere (Rai, Shah, & Ayaz, 2007).

Indicators of Women Political Empowerment

The UN Women and Inter-parliamentary Union has set the indicators for women political empowerment and time to time announced ranks of the countries in this regard. Only 10 of the world's nations currently have female presidents, and 13 of those have female heads of state. However, the global average of women serving in legislatures hit an all-time high of 25.4% in 2021, indicating that much

work needs to be done before there is gender parity in politics worldwide (UNWomen, Report of Inter-parliamentary Union , 2020). The UN Women's map indicates that there is still a long way to go for women's equally representation in politics (Iftikhar, 2023).

Studies in the past have shown that greater representation of women in parliament correlates with increased focus on women's issues. Gender equality and true democracy are fundamentally dependent on women's political participation, according to a United Nations Women study. Since the UN Women believes that increasing the number of women in positions of decision-making is the first step towards ensuring better accountability to women, they also think that including women in political activities could help to facilitate women's direct engagement in public decision-making. Real-world examples demonstrate that women continue to participate in politics to a lesser extent than men. For example, most people holding state and federal political office in the United States are still men. 53 19.2% of seats in the US Congress (104 out of 535 seats), 24.2% of seats in state legislatures (just 1,786 out of 7,383 seats), and 24.6% of seats in state-level elective executive offices (78 out of 317 seats) were held by women in the US (UNWomen, Report of Inter-parliamentary Union , 2020).

The average percentage of female members in parliaments across the Arab States is less than 10 percent and these parliaments have been observed to be more accommodating to women's participation. The Pacific has seen a slow pace of progress, particularly in the Pacific Island States where women's participation in legislatures is more of an anomaly than the norm. There aren't any female lawmakers in a few states. Twenty countries have at least 30% of lower or single chamber seats held by women, with four of those having at least 40% female members. Rwanda remains at the top of the rankings, with nearly 49% of its members being female. Sweden, Finland, Argentina, and Sweden are next with 47%, 41.5 percent, and 41%, respectively. Of the nations with percentages above thirty percent, half are developing nations, and over three-quarters have implemented an electoral quota for women. On the other end of the spectrum,

less than 10% of parliaments are made up of female members; this includes 17 parliaments with less than 3% of female members and seven with none at all.

There has also been inconsistent progress at the executive level. In 2008, women held 16 percent of all ministerial portfolios. Three countries (Finland, Grenada, and Norway) had more than 50 percent of their ministerial positions held by women. Twenty-two countries have at least thirty percent of their ministerial positions held by women. Both Europe and America are home to these. The Nordic and American regions have seen greatest advancements, which was consistent with the trend of women's increased access to parliaments over previous ten years. At other end of spectrum, 13 countries have no women in cabinet positions and eight have fewer than five percent of their ministers be women. A minority of women held highest positions in State. Just seven (4.7%) of the 150 Heads of State at the beginning of 2008 were female. Out of the 192 governments worldwide, only eight (4.2%) had a female leader (Ballington, 2008).

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs proposed that political parity won't be attained until 2080, given the pace at which women are participating in politics; as a result, equality in politics becomes the greatest obstacle facing women. However, only a few nations—Rwanda, where there are more than 61% of women in the parliament, and Bolivia, where there are more than 53% of women—are attempting to elect women to be the heads of state and government. Studies have demonstrated that women participate in politics at a rate of about 20% worldwide, despite the fact that patriarchy is still a prominent theme in the media. However, it is thought that a government run by women actively involved in politics is preferable to a government run by men alone; in other words, women's representation in local governments can have an impact.

State of Women Political Empowerment in Pakistan

Three interrelated categories in Pakistani society impede women's political empowerment: socioeconomic, societal structure, and religious argumentation (Shaheed, 2009). Additionally, none of these allow women to gain political knowledge or experience. Physically speaking, having children and raising them

is a major barrier to women entering the political sphere? Their inability to make decisions has a detrimental impact on their ability to make decisions in the family and the community (Aderinwale, 1997). Pakistani society's cultural norms encourage women to be segregated and alone, and they frequently use religion as justification. For instance, religiously motivated stances that support female isolation and gender segregation (Purdah) restrict women's access to resources generally and prohibit them from participating in voting or running for office (Shaheed, 2009).

Due to patriarchal social structures in which men are expected to participate in public and political activities and women are confined to the home, the studies emphasizes similarities between women's political participation in south Asian countries. The belief that women are incapable of fulfilling public and political roles has contributed to these factors even more by undermining efforts to empower and develop women's abilities. Women's participation in politics is further restricted by the South Asian concepts of purdah and segregation, particularly in Pakistan.

In Pakistan, women have historically been underrepresented in positions of leadership in the public and political spheres, but things are gradually changing. In accordance with Beijing Platform of Action and Article 7 of CEDAW, the government has implemented a number of initiatives to increase women's political and electoral participation. A female speaker of the National Assembly (2008–2013) and female prime minister (1988–1990 and 1993–1995) are two notable examples of the significant advancements in women's political participation. Women's rights to vote, run for office, and participate actively in politics are protected by the Elections Act of 2017 and its implementing regulations. Women's representation in parliament rose to 17% in 2002, above the global average of roughly 15% at the time. This was a significant improvement that created numerous opportunities to strengthen women's leadership, voice, and participation.

Through a combination of direct and indirect elections, provincial governments allocate up to 33 percent of seats for women at the local level. Pakistan,

however, has a low ranking in terms of women's representation in parliament, coming in at 115 out of 190 countries, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union. This underscores the structural and sociocultural barriers that prevent women from participating in politics. Low levels of literacy, patriarchal mindsets, limited mobility and decision-making, financial constraints, structural barriers against participation in political/leadership activities, violence and harassment in the public and private spheres, and a disproportionate share of responsibilities for the family and home are the main obstacles preventing women from participating in politics, whether as members of parliament, candidates, political workers, or voters.

There was a significant difference in voter turnout between male and female voters in the electoral rolls: 68 million male voters and 56.7 million female voters. Balochistan has the largest gender gap, while Islamabad Capital Territory has the smallest. In the 2018 National Assembly elections, women made up 40% of the voter base, compared to 60% for men. Furthermore, women participate in politics at a rate of 8.5%, which is lower in large cities than it is in rural areas. One of the main causes of women's low participation in political processes generally and elections specifically is under-registration. According to a recent report by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), women's lack of Computerized National Identity Cards (CNICs) can be attributed to a number of factors, such as limited access to NADAR centers and lack of mobility, financial constraints, and low household interest in registering women for civic documents. Other than registering to vote, women have fewer options to increase their influence in public life due to the lack of CNICs.

In Pakistan, women's political participation is still low, despite the Constitution's guarantees and the legislative framework's goals. In the male-dominated power dynamics of national politics, gender biases and prejudices against female candidates persist in preventing women from actively participating in public life. Accelerating the implementation of laws and policies and changing unfavorable social norms are crucial for bringing about significant change in electoral systems. Women involved in politics at all levels must be empowered to take an

active part in the political process by strengthening their leadership roles and creating a safer political environment so they can participate effectively in public life and decision-making.

Females in Parliament of Pakistan

There were only two women in the first constituent assembly (1947) out of 79 members: Shaista Ikram Ullah and Jahanara Shah Nawaz. Despite this, there was a demand for women to have at least 3% of the seats in both the national and provincial assemblies reserved for them. Following the devastation of the first constitutional assembly in 1954, the second assembly was indirectly elected with no female representation; as a result, no female member could take part in the 1956 constitution's deliberations (Anis, 1977). However, only six women were elected to the assemblies after General Ayub Khan imposed the first martial law in 1958 and stated in his 1962 constitution that women could only be elected indirectly. In contrast, the 1964 presidential election is recognized as the most important moment in the history of women's empowerment in Pakistan because Miss Fatima Jinnah, the sister of the Quaid-e-Azam, challenged the powerful army general Muhammad Ayub Khan for the presidency (Ali P. S., 1986).

1956 saw the performances of "Begum Jahan Ara Shahnawaz" and "Begum Shaista Ikram Ullah." The number of reserved seats for women was established at 10 in the national assembly and 5 in each provincial assembly, primarily as a result of the efforts of these women. Women had more opportunities to advocate for progressive policies during the tenure of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. For example, "Miss. Kaneez Yousaf" was appointed as Vice Chancellor of Quaid-e-Azam University, and "Begum Rana Liaquat Ali Khan" became the Governor of Sindh (Safdar, 1990). In 1977, the first election conducted under the 1973 constitution took place, and Mrs. Nasim Wali Khan became the first female general candidate to win from two N.W.F.P. constituencies (now Khyber Pushtoon Khawa). The women's reserved seats were not filled, despite the fact that it was a tremendous accomplishment for women.

The first time women actively participated in politics was in 1970, when General Agha Muhammad Yahya Khan held elections for national and provincial assemblies based on adult suffrage. Nine women ran as independent candidates, but all of them lost. This was the first election held after martial law was imposed in 1969 (Patel, 1979). Only 24 of the 107 women who ran for general seats since the 1970 elections were successful. In addition to taking part, they demonstrated their faith in the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) as a result of Mr. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's vocal support for women's political empowerment, especially for the underprivileged women in Punjab and Sindh. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto assumed leadership as chief Martial law administrator on December 20, 1971, following the division of East Pakistan. His catchphrase, Roti, Kapra aur Makan, encouraged women to believe that they could become decent human beings under Bhutto's guidance (Burki, 1988). He made drafting new constitution and returning to parliamentary government his top priorities. The new constitution was ratified on August 14, 1973. It is noteworthy to mention that three female members, namely Mrs. Nasim Jahan, Mrs. Qazi and Mrs. Ashraf Abbasi played significant role in drafting of the Constitution of 1973.

General Zia-ul-Haq dissolved the assemblies on July 5, 1977, and imposed third martial law in Pakistan, which lasted until 1985. However, because of the so-called Shariah laws that were implemented during his administration, women's political empowerment reversed course, making his period reflect the most complex era for women (Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1987). About forty women ran in the elections: fifteen for the National Assembly, ten for the Punjab provincial assembly, thirteen for Sindh, and two for the N.W.F.P. (now Khyber Pukhtunkhawa). Of these, only one made it to the National Assembly and two were elected to the Punjab Assembly, but one more succeeded in winning a seat in the National Assembly in a by-election.

The political parties had to fight hard during this time in 1988 to bring back the representative government. It wasn't until 1988 that "Benazir Bhutto" became Pakistan's first female prime minister, and it was expected of her to uphold liberal values and women's rights in her new role. Being Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's daughter,

the women also anticipated that she would repeal laws that discriminated against them, including those that had been in conflict with them under Zia's rule, and amend policies that would drastically improve the status of women (Syed, 1995). There were no women's representatives in the elective bodies from 1990 to 1997 because no seats were allotted for them in the provincial or national assemblies in 1990, 1993, or 1997. As a result, women's representation dropped to the minimum, or 0.9% in 1990 and 1.8% in 1993, and then slightly increased to 2.8% in 1997. In its party manifesto, the PPP had pledged to protect women's rights, their education, the return of reserved seats during the 1997 elections, and a special quota for women in all institutions and organizations.

From 1999 to 2008, General Musharraf's military regime promoted women's political empowerment. His administration proved to be a political boom for women since, in contrast to the previous administrations, it implemented a few significant policies encouraging women's active participation in all spheres of society, including sociocultural and political ones. By presidential ordinance, he established a National Commission in July 2000 to promote women's empowerment. The commission's goal was to examine all laws, rules, and regulations that impacted the status and rights of women (Zafar & Sami, 2021).

In the general elections 2008, 34 female candidates were nominated to contest the election by their respective political parties. On the other hand, the selection of Shahla Raza as the deputy speaker of the Sindh Assembly and Dr. Fehmida Mirza as first female speaker of the National Assembly represent significant advancement in women political empowerment in Pakistan. Following the 2008 general election, political activism was seen in the country which provided space for women to progress (Zafar & Sami, 2021).

The general elections 2013 were seen as significant turning point in the history of Pakistan as it was first time in Pakistan that parliament completed its term under the civilian rule and civilian government had handed over the next charge to the next civilian government without any military intervention. (Khan, 2023) In the general election 2013, 15 million female voters casted their votes, while 419 were in contest of National and Provincial Assemblies constituencies as compared to

192 female candidates in the general elections 2008. The number of females elected as Member National Assembly was down from sixteen in 2008 but only six in 2013. Only 3.4 percent of general seats were won by women in the country, none in KPK (Zafar & Sami, 2021).

Females within Party Leadership Role

In political parties, women are given inadequate authority and pastoral positions. Despite this, they are often biased to hold key positions, support political parties at the level of common laborers, or uphold male leadership initiative. A political party's growing prominence can often be informal, bolstered by entrenched ties and weight systems that are closed off to outsiders and, more often than not, to women (NDI, 2012). Political parties frequently composed party statements while ignoring and dismissing their female workers who held positions of authority. Examining the political party manifestos from the 1988, 1990, 1993, and 1997 elections revealed that the issue of reserved seats—which guarantee women's participation in politics—was largely discussed, with a focus on the 1988 party manifestos.

In view of Begum Syeda Abida Hussain, Muslim League and PPP had quite different political cultures. During PML-N and PML-Q parliamentary boards, where the candidates were consistently courteous and supportive of the leadership despite having conflicting interests. Benazir maintained her friendliness and demonstrated great patience, especially with her former workers, in the PPP, which was more of rough and tumble (Hussain, 2015). Begum Syeda's response suggests that PPP is generally more accepting of and supportive of women's involvement in politics and party affairs. The gap between party inclinations and selected lawmakers is a result of women using formative funds on reserved seats. The resources are put to use without affecting them or devaluing their grades in any way. There are instances where female lawmakers show signs of anxiety during party gatherings because they are unable to use resources and experience that differ between parties to provide funding to various electorates (Iftikhar, 2023).

Additionally, the chosen women occupying reserved and general seats collaborate less. Due to the strong dynamic within the administration, they are in favor of either surpassing the level or putting themselves to the test in voter exchanges and arrangements. One of the most important issues is the lack of information and capacity regarding women's participation in lawmaking. Socioeconomic illuminating perception states that female lawmakers have driven desires because it is not surprising that they would communicate in the same way as their male partner. Despite all obstacles, female lawmakers are working hard to establish the strongest defense possible for the decisions they make, which consistently jeopardize their successful partial (Nisa, 2023).

If women were to have strong political backing, political parties would likely need to address the nomination, selection, and criteria procedures the most. Parties maintain firm control over the designation of possibility for preferred office, making them the essential link for achieving equality and comprehensive cooperation. When it comes to the nomination process, the number of women chosen, the position of women in the party hierarchy, and the proportion of women who choose to run for office, political parties are known for their generosity. Parties also vary in terms of how widely they support each other and how decentralized they are (NDI, 2012).

PPP and Women Political Empowerment in Pakistan

Since its founding in 1967, the Pakistan Peoples Party showed an unwavering dedication to the cause of gender equality. Furthermore, it is the only party led by a woman in Pakistan. The first elected female head of state in the Muslim world was Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto.

1.10.1 PPP's Program on Women Political Empowerment

The election manifesto showed the policy and program of every political party. It also showed the promises made with masses by the parties on which parties have to implement if they got power. PPP presented its manifesto before every

election during 1988 to 2013 and it had chance to implement on them after general elections of 1988, 1993 and 2008.

PPP's Policy of Women Empowerment in 1988

In the manifesto presented before the general elections 1988, PPP had no particular policy regarding women political empowerment or other social phenomena but just focused the restoration of the democracy, political stability, curb the autocracy and military regime and economic constancy in the country. Although the policy on women political empowerment was not particularly presented but policy to ensure Human Rights and Freedom of Masses was particularized in the PPP's manifesto. PPP had clear stance on equal social status for all and safeguard human rights in all its dimensions.

PPP did not present any policy or agenda for women empowerment before general elections 1988 but as party came in power it took practical initiatives for that. The Party announced a national employment policy that would support women's participation in the economy and the creation of jobs. The government of Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto raised the 10 percent affirmative action job quota for women in public service to 20 percent.

- Appropriate laws allowing women to legally own resources and assets will be passed in order to support their financial independence.
- To guarantee that gender priorities are represented in all policy initiatives, the Ministry of Women Development will participate in significant policy-making bodies.

Since Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's first PPP government, and particularly during Benazir Bhutto's tenure, the Party has upheld the rights of marginalized and vulnerable groups in society and advanced a clear agenda. As we move this agenda forward, we commit to:

- PPP Parliamentarians support women's seats and technocrats in closed party systems. In a nation with low literacy rates, the Open Party List System is unworkable.

- Additionally, ballot papers will turn into books because each party will nominate a large number of candidates, which voters will need to scan and mark with various symbols.
- Establish quotas in political parties to boost female involvement. We will put forth legislation requiring political parties to pledge to a further ten percent quota for women when choosing nominees for general seats.
- Create progressive laws and see to it that they are applied everywhere to protect women's rights to life, dignity, inheritance, work, and resources.
- Encourage women to pursue careers in all sectors of the economy, and offer them the tools and resources they need to make this happen.
- Women have a proven track record of being appointed by the Party to positions of high decision-making authority. It will keep doing this and present chances for women in the workforce at all levels.

Legislation supporting Women Political Empowerment

Following the 1988 elections, Benazir was elected as Pakistan's prime minister, with her party securing 93 seats out of 207 in the National Assembly, or 38.52 percent of the total vote. At the Center, PPP established a coalition government. Since the 1988 elections were seen as a turning point in Pakistan's political history, many believed that Benazir Bhutto, the country's first elected female prime minister, offered the country's female populace some hope. However, it is a false belief that when a woman assumes a leadership role, women as a whole will rise in status and become more powerful.

The fact is that women's empowerment cannot continue to be an exception if comprehensive policies are not put in place. Undoubtedly, Benazir attained the nation's highest executive position, but other factors did not support it. Initially, women's representation in the National Assembly was minimal, with only 24 members (four directly elected and twenty on reserved seats) able to represent women's interests. Similarly, the total number of female members of the largest Provincial Assembly was. Second, it has been noted that under Benazir's leadership, women's representatives in provincial assemblies made no conscious effort to pass laws promoting women's rights or to improve the depressingly low

rate of female literacy, inadequate access to healthcare, and high birth death rate. Third, it was anticipated that the Benazir government would overturn or at the very least modify the Zia-ul-Haq laws, which were thought to be detrimental to the growth of the female population in a number of ways. However, no real attempts were made in this regard. In addition, her government took a very different tack, much to the dismay of the pressure groups and associations representing women. Charles H. Kennedy, a specialist in South Asian politics, notes the following about the direction of her policies:

After Benazir came to power, her interests shifted from obtaining political advantage vis-à-vis the government with regard to the reforms to handling the difficulties of putting them into effect (i.e., from gaining to exercising power). Therefore, Benazir's administration hasn't done much to impede Zia's implementation of the Nizam-i-Mustapha. Neither the Federal Shariat Court nor the Supreme Court's Shariat Appellate Bench have been dismantled by her administration. It hasn't stopped the Council of Islamic Ideology's operations, reversed the Hudood Ordinance, or contested the Ramadan Ordinance's application (Kennedy, 1990). A confirmed fact gleaned from the aforementioned reference and other sources is that Prime Minister Benazir's obsession with the opposition, which had taken control of the Punjab provincial government, prevented her from carrying out her original plan of action. Conversely, Weiss's observation during Benazir's premiership highlights her lack of desire to see more women in leadership roles as lawmakers and administrators:

Few women received tickets to the provincial assembly, and only one other woman—her mother and herself—was granted PPP's ticket to contest for National Assembly seat. Ministerial portfolios were initially not awarded to any women; however, this was changed on March 23, 1989, when Benazir increased the number of federal cabinet members to 43, five of whom were women. Only her mother, a minister without a portfolio, is a woman among the 24 ministers. Four of the 19 ministers of state are female (Weiss, 1990).

She did, however, take a few insignificant steps to address issues pertaining to women, which were unable and ill-prepared to significantly improve the overall

status of women in society. One of these insignificant steps toward the betterment of women was the promotion of Zia's Women Division to the rank of Ministry of Women's Development, which served two crucial purposes. To start, list the laws under Zia's government that discriminate against women. The second step is to create a plan that offers improved employment prospects in the public and private sectors (Weiss, 1990). In the end, the Ministry wrote a report suggesting that laws that discriminated against women be immediately repealed; however, her government did not act on this recommendation. PPP won elections a second time in 1993–1996; Benazir was appointed prime minister for a second term. Even so, the PPP platform this time around included measures to empower women, such as restoring special seats for women in national and provincial assemblies and setting aside a 5% quota for women in all government and semi-government organizations.

But in her autobiography, the former prime minister offers the same defense of her second-term performance, noting that she made several efforts to elevate the status of women. Approved the United Nations' "Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women" as her first action. The creation of the Women's Development Ministry was the second endeavor, as she indicated. She also takes pride in having hosted the Muslim Women's Olympics in Pakistan. In addition to the establishment of family courts presided over by women judges, the fourth and fifth initiatives were the creation of special women's police stations and the appointment of female judges to the high court, which marked a first for Pakistan. She goes on to say that she established distinct police stations just for women. She stated it herself: We established family courts headed by women judges to hear issues related to child custody and family issues. Additionally, the government appointed women judges to the nation's highest courts and established special women's police stations to give women the confidence to report crimes committed against them (Bhutto, 2007).

Equal rights are guaranteed by democracy to all societal segments, including women. One of the greatest tragedies of democracy in the modern world is the gender gap and the underrepresentation of women in the political arena. Even

though women make up half of the voting public worldwide in modern politics, their average representation in parliament is only roughly 23.4%. There are regional variations in the proportion of women in leadership roles. America has the highest percentage (28.14%), while the Arab States has the lowest (17.5%). Since the partition in 1947, women's political participation in Pakistan has gone through many ups and downs. In the context of women political representation, the 1988 elections are of immense importance (Iftikhar, 2023).

Women's political participation in Pakistan has experienced numerous ups and downs since the country's 1947 partition. The 1988 elections bear significant weight in the context of women's political representation. The most female lawmakers were elected in these elections, among them Benazir Bhutto, the first female prime minister of the Muslim world. Following the enactment of the Legal Framework Order (LFO), which increased the number of women-reserved seats to 60 in the lower house of parliament (national assembly) and 17 in the upper house (senate), there was a noticeable increase in women's political representation during the 2002 elections. Nonetheless, with 22.5% of female lawmakers in the 13th national assembly (2008–2013), it was noted that the proportion of female seats was highest in the political history of Pakistan. Additionally, a greater number of victorious female candidates for general seats in Pakistan's national assembly are revealed by these elections (Khan & Ahmad, 2018).

Conclusion

PPP has a long and storied history of supporting women's rights and promoting female representation in government. One of the most notable examples of this commitment is the election of Benazir Bhutto as the country's first female Prime Minister in 1988. This achievement not only marked a significant milestone in Pakistan's history but also paved the way for future generations of women to pursue careers in politics. The PPP's efforts to promote women's rights and empowerment date back to the 1970s, when the party established its women's wing in 1972. This move was a groundbreaking step, as it marked the first time a political party in Pakistan had created a dedicated wing for women. The women's

wing provided a platform for women to participate in politics and advocate for their rights, and it played a crucial role in promoting women's issues and concerns within the party. The PPP has also been instrumental in promoting women's representation in key government positions. In 1977, the party nominated Begum Ashraf Abbas as the first female Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly, a position that marked a significant breakthrough for women in Pakistani politics. Later, in 2008, the PPP nominated Fehmida Mirza as the first female Speaker of the National Assembly, further cementing the party's commitment to women's empowerment. In addition to promoting women's representation in government, the PPP has also appointed women to key cabinet positions. In 2011, Hina Rabbani Khar was appointed as the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and later became the Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2012, becoming the first woman to hold the position of Foreign Minister. Similarly, Firdous Ashiq Awan was appointed as the Minister of Information in 2010, marking another first for women in Pakistani politics.

The PPP's commitment to women's empowerment is also reflected in its legislative efforts. The 18th Amendment to the Constitution, passed in 2010, devolved women's development to the provinces, enabling the formation of provincial commissions on the status of women and other legislation promoting women's empowerment. This move paved the way for the establishment of women's development departments in provinces, which have played a crucial role in addressing women's issues and promoting their rights. Overall, the PPP's efforts to promote women's rights and political empowerment have been significant and far-reaching. From establishing the first women's wing to promoting women's representation in government and appointing women to key cabinet positions, the party has consistently demonstrated its commitment to advancing women's issues and concerns. Through its legislative efforts and policy initiatives, the PPP has helped to create a more enabling environment for women in Pakistan, and its legacy continues to inspire future generations of women leaders.

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