

## **Women Political Participation in Pakistan: Steps towards Reshaping the Political Environment**

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### **Abstract**

*The purpose of this research article is to comprehend the political participation of women in Pakistan and historical steps for reshaping the political environment. The functional, structural and institutional barriers have restricted women participation in politics. Women in Pakistan are discouraged to become the part of a male dominating political system. Legislation and constitutional agendas can assure the existing situation. The descriptive and explanatory approach with primary and secondary available data used to assess the women representation in Pakistani politics. The world democracies have ensured the equal political representation without discrimination of male and female. The electoral system should be redesign and restructure to guarantee the women involvement in a political structure according female population ratio. Equality based society would help Pakistan to strengthen and stable the political institutions.*

**Key Words:** Women Rights, Political Culture, Women Empowerment

### **Introduction**

Women represent approximately more than half of the world's population. Their role in social educational and economic fields is significant other than their prescribed role in the society. But their political participation in

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important institutions remained problematic and based on inequality (Bano, 2003). Women have only 15% representation in political institutions and few countries provided 33% seats to the female candidates (UNDP report, 2005). Participation by 15% and 33% also has obstacles in developed and developing states. In a male dominating society it is very hard to fight for political rights. Women in east and west have more or less same challenges in participation in governmental affairs and institutional representation. Pakistan came into inception in 1947 and in first constituent assembly with two female represented was formulated (Bano, 2003). The political environment in the country was not flexible to adjust female participants because of the” Ajaratdari” of the feudal lords and religious parties’ presence in legislative assemblies. The significant change in the restricted environment brought by Pervaiz Musharraf in 2002, he increased the women seats in Parliament and nominated many female ministers and officials on high-level posts across the country (Weiss, 1999).

This research article describes the history of women fight for participation in politics and major steps taken by the different democratic and non-democratic governments to increase the sets in parliament both house. At the end of the research paper, I will suggest policy-based recommendations for the women political participation at national and international level.

### **Objectives of the Study**

- To find out how equality based political environment can help in shaping the political structure

## Women Political Participation in Pakistan: Historical Steps towards Reshaping the Political Environment

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- To highlight the factors affecting the women political participation in Pakistan
- To suggest policy based measures for gender equality based political environment that can help minimize the discriminations

### **Research Questions**

1. How gender equality based system would help in reshaping the favorable political environment for women in Pakistan?
2. To what extent the major historical steps would be successful to set up an encouraging political environment for women I Pakistan?

### **A History of Reserved Seats for Women in Pakistan: An Overview**

Women across the world are facing troubles due to gender inequality and discrimination. Women were deprived of equal rights for job, education and adult suffrage in the past and still have a continuous fight for it. The discriminations and disparities have created the lack of confidence among women. They started movements for their social and political rights in the 18th century and finally after a long historical struggle got a right to vote in 1901. The movements against political, social and fiscal rights started by the women and more right, and equality they gained. Now women are Ministers, Presidents, and Prime Ministers in different countries. It did not happen in a day or month but it took a century fight to won and still I continued. Now the prominent increase of women can be calculated in the legislative assemblies in the globe (Weiss, 1999).

In the sub-continent, the women participation in politics remained problematic. Women started a movement for their rights in the 1920s but the nationalists opposed the adult universal franchise right of women (Bano, 2003). It was considered shameful act for men to contest with a woman. As it was the matter of his gender. The Muslim League allowed women to participate in the freedom movement. Many organizations were established in India to join men for separation from British India, like All India Women Conference (AIWC), Women's Indian Association (WIA), and National Council of Women (NCW) in India. These organizations worked on two tasks; firstly they stand for political rights and secondly fight against colonialism (Hakim, 1998). Women in India in 1932 sent a memorandum to the round table conference for women universal right to adult franchise. These women organizations also endorsed the basic rights declaration of the rights to citizenship (equality in sex, cast, and creed) in British India passed by the Congress in 1931. The demand was rejected by the British government and women remained restricted to cast their vote in urban areas. In 1935 Act introduced by the British in India allowed women to only vote for Muslim women candidates against reserved seats by the government. They got the increase of only 3 percent quota in parliament seats reserved for female later to their demand presented in roundtable conference (Weiss, 1999).

After the inception in 1947, the new constituent assemblies worked under the previous laws by the central legislative of British India. Only two female was the part of the new assembly in Pakistan Begum Jahan Ara Shah Nawaz and Begum Shaista Ikram Ullah. The assembly adopted adult franchise

Women Political Participation in Pakistan:  
Historical Steps towards Reshaping the Political Environment

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system in the country in 1951. In 1955 after the dissolution of the previous assembly; the new assemblies were constituted with no female representation.

**Women Reserved Seats (1956 to 1988): An Over View**

The newly constituted assembly adopted the first constitution that allocated 10 reserved seats for women equally divided into two wings of East and West. The women were given the dual right to vote under the “Principle of Female Suffrage and Women’s Reserved Seats”, they can cast vote for women reserved seats and general seat candidates as well. But the constitution abrogated in 1958 and women did not enjoy their dual vote right because of no elections were held under this constitution (Minault, 1981).

In 1962, the second constitution was introduced by General Ayub Khan. This constitution reserved 6 seats 3 seats for each part. Women were to be elected through assemblies in indirect elections.

In 1962 constitution abrogated and new elections announced on 7th December 1970 in the country by Yahiya Khan under the Legal Framework Order (LFO) (Jalalzai, 2004). The LFO fixed 13 seats for women 6 from West part and 7 from the west part of the country. The new elections conducted in the country but the East Pakistan separation could not allow the circumstances to call the assembly session.

After East Pakistan separation in 1970, the western part constituted the new assembly in the remaining country. The very first session held in 14th April 1972 and six women attended the session on reserved seats. The new

constitution, 1973 was adopted by this assembly on 14th August 1973(Jalalzai, 2004).

The new constitution introduced bicameral legislature with 10 reserved seats for women in the lower chamber (National Assembly) elected by the members of the National Assembly. No seat was reserved in the upper house of the parliament for women.

In 1977 General Zia imposed martial law and dismissed all kind of political activities. No political activity was allowed in the country from 1977 to 1988 by the military government. After General Zia regime many significant changes were introduced in the country regarding women political representation in various political institutes. Women quota rose up to 10% and they occupied 22 seats in National Assembly where 21 as elected members on reserved seats and 01 on general seat through indirect election. At the provincial level, women got 5% seats (Jalalzai, 2004).

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**Women Contesting General Seats in 2013 & 2008 Elections - A Comparison**

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Assemblies	Political Parties		Independent Candidates		Total	
	2008	2013	2008	2013	2008	2013
<b>National Assembly</b>	41	61	31	74	72	135
<b>Provincial Assemblies</b>	37	99	83	185	120	284

**Source:** Aourat Foundation <https://www.af.org.pk>

**Political Participation and Reserved Seats for Women from 1989 to 2013**

From the period of 1990 up to 1997 women participation on reserved seats were questionable. Women won elections on general seats and reserved

## Women Political Participation in Pakistan: Historical Steps towards Reshaping the Political Environment

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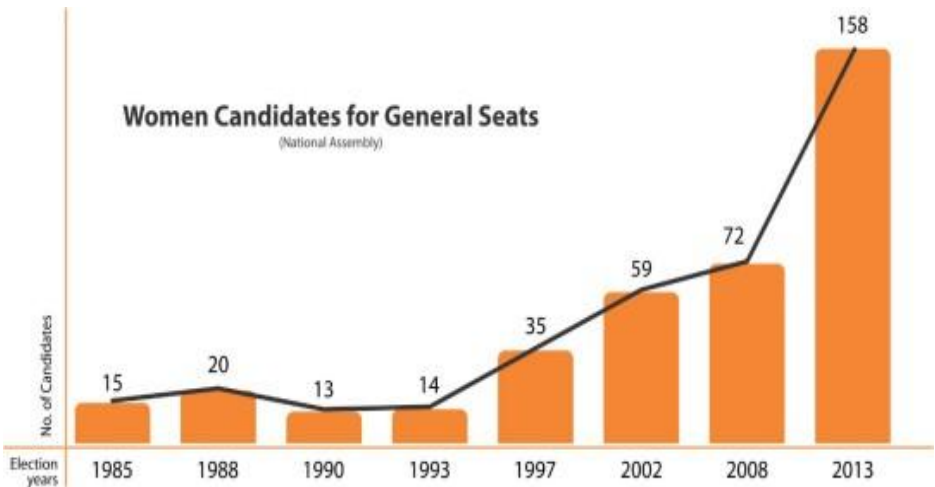
seats quota was not allotted to them. Male dominating political parties with religious extremist mind did not allow women representation from their party platform (Bari, 2005). In general elections in 1990 women were deprived by the reserve seats at national and provincial level.

Women won election on general seats with 02 seats out of 217 total seats in National Assembly. In 1997 General Elections they hardly won 06 seats out of 217 with an increase of 28% seats at national level (Election Commission of Pakistan, 2018).

General Pervaiz Musharraf when came to power he announced an increase of 33% seats of women at local level in district, tehsil and union councils. This was considered a mega increase in the political history of women participation. This increased praised by the international forums and women activists highly appreciated these steps by a military person. In 2002 General Elections women from various communities participated in the election and won 61 seats from total 342 at national and provincial level. It was 17% increase participation of women in politics (Election Commission of Pakistan, 2018).

In 2008 and 2013 General Elections women participation fluctuated and in 2008 election they occupied 70 seats out of 342 in National Assembly while in senate they were nominated against 17 seats .in 2013 elections the participation got higher and women were given a remarkable position .The strength of women candidates at all level was highly welcomed by the various political parties. , Mutahida Quami Movement gave highest number of tickets

to female, 25 for National Assembly and Provincial Assemblies, while PPPP which allotted 24 tickets to women. PML (N) gave 20 tickets; 16 tickets by APML; 12 tickets by PTI; 11 tickets by PML (Q,) PML-F and PP (SB) awarded 05, PNML and MWMP only 4 tickets; several other small parties gave tickets to the women at different level.



### **Women Participation in Local Government: A Current Scenario in Pakistan**

The local governments across the world are considered as political training nurseries for future political parties'. The third tier of a federal Pakistan also remained unfocused with the political presence of women. The national and provincial scenario also can be observed at local system. Local government system till 2000 in Pakistan was totally male dominated with



Women Political Participation in Pakistan:  
Historical Steps towards Reshaping the Political Environment

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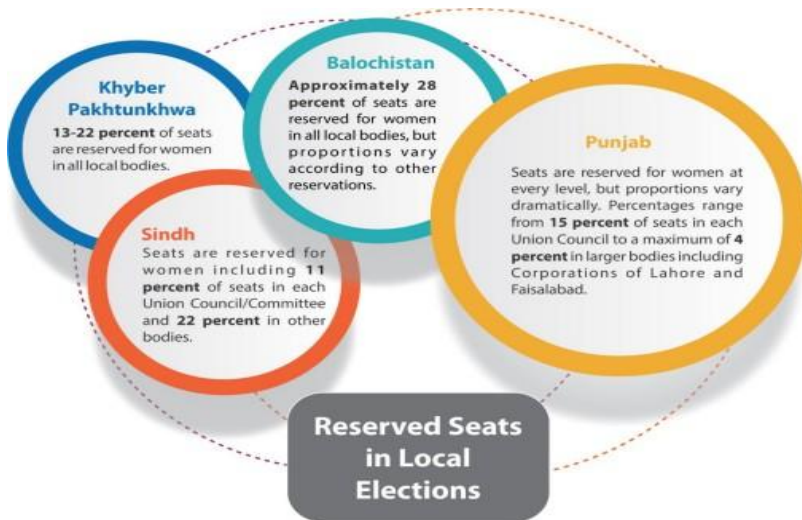
feudal lords and business class. General Musharraf government introduced a “*Devolution of Power Plan*” in March 2000 based on few ground rules;

- Decentralization of political power
- Delegation of administrative authority
- De-concentration of management function
- Distribution of the power nexus sharing of resources at the district level.

The new local system offer a three level local government system where was a single authority in the each district and that district bureaucracy was responsible to the elected representatives at local level. More autonomy was promised to the district tier offices. Some Administrative and financial powers were delegated to government officials at the district level. The salient feature of the devolution plan was the increase of 33 percent reserved seats for female at district, tehsil and union level.

After 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment in 2010 the local government system went under the jurisdiction of the provinces and provinces allowed and welcomed he women to take part in local elections on offered reserved seats. The provinces made legal arrangements to accommodate all groups in local system like youth, peasants, business class and women. These arrangements encouraged women to come forward and use their potential in practical politics (Election Commission of Pakistan, 2018). The KPK province reserved 13-22 seats for women at all district levels, Sindh 11 percent seats in each union council and 22 percent seats at other levels of local bodies, Punjab

reserved 15 percent seats at union level and an increase of 4 percent in corporations like Lahore and Faisalabad and Balochistan allotted 28 percent seats for female but it can vary on the reservations by the other factors (Reyes, 2002).



## Barriers to Women Political Participation in Pakistan

Women in developed and developing countries are facing issues and hurdles in political activities. The women voter turnout, and compete in elections are less than men these hurdles can be social, psychological and fiscal etc.

### Structural Barriers to Women's Political Participation

Women across the world are facing challenges to take part in practical politics and freely cast their vote without a fear. Some structural barriers create a problematic situation for women to play their prescribed

Women Political Participation in Pakistan:  
Historical Steps towards Reshaping the Political Environment

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constitutional role. Economic conditions, education, exposure and lack of political capital have created unfavorable circumstances for women.

**Institutional Barriers to Women's Political Participation**

Political parties have multiple responsibilities in the modern world. Among these duties, the utmost duty is to create places for deprived communities and gender. Especially women should acknowledge at this platform by providing participation in the party.

Election Commission of Pakistan is a prominent institution responsible for political rights protection, but unfortunately, it has immense gender disparity in its labor force, it has neglected the gender concerns regardless of pressure from women for their rights. The Election Commission has ignored to keep gender discrimination data about voters' turnout, take actions to deal with the gender inequality in electoral rolls, or organize the awareness programmes to motivate the voters (Reyes, 2002). No serious policy based action in the past was taken to resolve the issues where women were restricted from voting or take sufficient actions to handle incidents of violence against women representatives and voters, by the candidates and male polling agents' pre and post elections. But the election 2013 held with some better improvements in ECP performance.

**Functional Barriers to Women's Political Participation**

Women having lack of education, less economic resources, low confidence, insufficient political awareness and unavailability of resources face hurdles in taking part in all sort of social and political activities. These

Psychological and personal reasons made women's capacity lessen and restricted to take participate in the governance system (Reyes, 2002).

### **Conclusion**

Social and religious norms have bounded women in Pakistan not to play a political role. The male dominating and religious restricted environment has limited women and their effective role in the past and still, they are fighting for their rights in all fields of life despite hurdles and bars. Institutional, functional and structural barriers have discouraged the women to stand for their political campaigns neglected and express their views for making the environment that protect them. Women in Pakistan post 2002 have a little bit more representative participation due to an increase in reserved seats at national, regional and local level. The past negligence destroyed the political environment but it's not too late to amend. Legislation and constitutional umbrella can only protect the political rights of women in Pakistan at national and provincial levels in all political and private sectors. A major restriction due to false explanation by the religious political parties to deny the women presence in the system is also a barrier. To make women strengthen government should protect the rights of women in all spheres of life. Economic well being and education are the key indicators that can strengthen and encourage women to take stand for their rights and face the challenges of the undemocratic forces. Quotas and the Electoral reforms in System can also help in changing the environment. Awareness based campaigns and capacity build programs can also helpful in changing scenario for women.

Women Political Participation in Pakistan:  
Historical Steps towards Reshaping the Political Environment

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Moreover, women are enjoying their right to vote more enthusiastically than they have had in the past. Women have also proved themselves through their effective contribution to the 13th and 14th elected National Assembly of Pakistan, which is point by their selection by political parties. In the same way, more women fight against seats in the 2013 election as in election held in 2008.

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Women Political Participation in Pakistan:  
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