Women in Pakistani Politics: A Study of Economic and Psychological Determinants

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ABSTRACT

The role of women in Pakistani politics has been a subject of significant interest and debate, reflecting broader issues of gender equality and societal development. Despite legal frameworks supporting women's political participation, numerous economic and psychological barriers persist, limiting their effective involvement. This study explores the economic and psychological determinants influencing women's participation in Pakistani politics, employing a qualitative methodology to gain in-depth insights through relevant literature. By analyzing the narratives and experiences of these women, the research highlights the interplay between economic constraints, such as financial dependency and limited access to resources, and psychological factors, including self-efficacy, societal expectations, and identity formation. The findings aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex factors that influence women's political roles in Pakistan, offering recommendations to foster greater gender equality and empowerment in the political domain.

Keywords: Women, First Female Prime Minister of Pakistan – Benazir Bhutto 1988, Establishment of First Women Bank, First Female Chief Minister of Punjab Pakistan 2024, Politics, Women's participation in governance, Psychology, Economy, legislation, gender, International Perspective Women Representation, Women in Pakistani Politics at National and International Perspective, etc.

Introduction:

The role of women in Pakistani politics has evolved significantly over the years, reflecting broader societal changes and the persistent efforts of female leaders and activists. Historically, the political landscape in Pakistan has been predominantly male-dominated, with women facing considerable barriers to entry, including cultural norms, limited educational opportunities, and restrictive gender roles. Despite these challenges, women have made remarkable strides, with a number of pioneering figures breaking through the political glass ceiling and inspiring future generations. Zakar et al, (2018)

One of the most notable milestones in Pakistani politics was the election of Benazir Bhutto as Prime Minister in 1988, making her the first woman to lead a Muslim-majority country. Benazir Bhutto's tenure as Prime Minister marked significant steps towards women's economic empowerment in Pakistan. Bhutto implemented various policies aimed at increasing women's

participation in the workforce and improving their economic status. She established the First Women Bank, which provided financial services specifically tailored to women, promoting their entrepreneurial ventures. Her government also initiated the Lady Health Workers program, creating employment opportunities for women in the healthcare sector and improving healthcare access in rural areas. Additionally, Bhutto's administration emphasized the importance of education for women, investing in female literacy programs and vocational training. These initiatives collectively aimed to address economic disparities and empower women by enhancing their financial independence and professional skills.

Source: https://profit.pakistantoday.com.pk/2019/06/27/still-relevant-benazir-bhutto-explains-taxation-loopholes-in-pakistan/

Bhutto's leadership symbolized a significant breakthrough for women's political participation in Pakistan. Her tenure, though marked by political turbulence and controversy, demonstrated women's capability to hold the highest political offices. Bhutto's legacy continues to influence Pakistani politics, encouraging more women to enter the political arena and aspire to leadership roles.

In recent years, the representation of women in Pakistani politics has seen gradual improvement. The constitution reserves a percentage of seats for women in the National Assembly and provincial assemblies, which has ensured a minimum level of female participation. This affirmative action has enabled many women to engage in politics who might otherwise have been excluded due to societal barriers. Women politicians in these reserved seats have played crucial roles in advocating for women's rights, social justice, and legislation aimed at improving the status of women in Pakistani society. Yusuf (2013)

Maryam Nawaz rise to Chief Minister of Punjab is a powerful symbol of women's empowerment and political inclusion in Pakistan. As a prominent female leader in a male-dominated political landscape, her achievement challenges traditional gender roles and represents progress toward gender equality in leadership. Her position serves as an inspiration to women across the country,

illustrating that woman can lead in influential roles and make impactful decisions at the highest levels of governance. Maryam's leadership demonstrates the growing acceptance and support for women in politics, reinforcing the importance of female representation in shaping Pakistan's future.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2495865/latest-imf-deal-will-be-pakistans-final-programme-punjab-chief-minister-maryam-nawaz

According to news reported, in the 2024 general elections in Pakistan, 11 women were directly elected to the National Assembly out of 265 general seats. Additionally, 60 reserved seats for women are distributed proportionally among political parties based on their general seat wins. This quota system aims to improve women's representation in parliament. At the provincial level, 132 seats are also reserved for women across Pakistan's four assemblies, reflecting a structured approach to ensure women's participation in governance despite challenges in achieving gender balance in directly contested seats.

Furthermore, women's involvement in politics in Pakistan is not limited to legislative roles. They are increasingly visible in various capacities, including as ministers, advisors, and leaders of political parties. Women's political activism at the grassroots level is also notable, with many female activists and local leaders working tirelessly to address community issues and promote gender equality. These efforts have been instrumental in raising awareness about women's issues and pushing for legislative reforms, such as laws against domestic violence and honor killings.

However, significant challenges remain. Women in politics often face harassment, discrimination, and threats, both online and offline. The patriarchal nature of Pakistani society continues to pose obstacles to their full and equal participation in political processes. Despite these hurdles, the resilience and determination of Pakistani women in politics persist, driven by a vision of a more inclusive and equitable political landscape. Their continued advocacy and participation are crucial for the progressive transformation of Pakistan's political system,

ensuring that women's voices are heard and their contributions valued at all levels of governance. Whalen (2016)

Women in Pakistani politics face significant psychological challenges that stem from deeply ingrained societal norms and cultural attitudes. The patriarchal structure of Pakistani society often subjects women politicians to scrutiny and criticism that their male counterparts rarely encounter. This environment can foster a sense of isolation and heightened stress, as women are frequently questioned about their competence and legitimacy. The psychological burden of constantly having to prove oneself in a male-dominated field can lead to feelings of inadequacy and imposter syndrome. Furthermore, women in politics are often targets of personal attacks, harassment, and character assassination, both in traditional media and on social media platforms. These challenges can undermine their confidence and deter potential female candidates from entering the political arena. Shakil et al, (2023)

The economic challenges faced by women in Pakistani politics are equally daunting. Economic disparity and limited access to resources hinder many women from participating in politics, which often requires substantial financial investment. Campaigning, building a political network, and gaining visibility demand financial resources that many women lack. Additionally, women frequently have less access to the economic power structures and patronage networks that are crucial for political success in Pakistan. The economic dependency on male family members can also restrict their political ambitions. For those who do manage to enter politics, securing funding and sponsorship remains a constant struggle, often affecting their ability to sustain long-term political careers. This economic inequity reinforces the gender gap in political participation and leadership. (Khan 2018)

Moreover, the dual burden of balancing professional responsibilities with traditional domestic roles places additional economic and psychological strain on women politicians. The expectation to manage household duties and care giving alongside political responsibilities can limit their effectiveness and hinder their political advancement. These dual pressures highlight the need for systemic changes, such as more supportive family policies and economic initiatives aimed at empowering women, to create an environment where women can participate in politics on an equal footing with men. Javed et al, (2020)

Despite these formidable challenges, many women in Pakistan continue to navigate the political landscape with resilience and determination. Their efforts to overcome psychological and economic barriers not only pave the way for future generations of women leaders but also contribute to the broader struggle for gender equality and social justice in Pakistani society.

Significance of the Study:

The study on "Women in Pakistani Politics: A Study of Economic and Psychological Determinants" is significant as it sheds light on the multifaceted barriers that women face in political participation, particularly in a socio-cultural context where gender disparities are pronounced. By exploring the economic and psychological challenges uniquely affecting women politicians in Pakistan, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the structural and individual obstacles hindering their political involvement and success. This research can inform policymakers, activists, and scholars on the necessary interventions and support systems needed to promote gender equity in politics. Ultimately, the study seeks to contribute to the empowerment of women, fostering a more inclusive and representative political landscape in Pakistan.

Methodology:

The study includes an extensive literature review of relevant sources, encompassing scholarly articles, books, research studies, and reports. This will involve analyzing academic papers on gender and politics, economic barriers to women's political participation, and psychological impacts of political engagement. Key texts and seminal works on feminist political theory and socio-economic challenges faced by women in Pakistan be reviewed to provide theoretical grounding. Additionally, reports from international organizations, such as the United Nations and the World Bank, as well as local NGOs focusing on women's rights and political empowerment in Pakistan, will be examined to incorporate empirical data and policy analyses. This comprehensive literature review help in identifying gaps in existing research, framing the study's hypotheses, and situating the findings within the broader discourse on women in politics.

Literature Review:

Ghafoor and Haider (2018) explore the economic challenges facing women's empowerment in Pakistan. They identify several key obstacles, including gender-based discrimination in the labor market, limited access to education and vocational training, and restrictive cultural norms that hinder women's economic participation. The authors also highlight the significant wage gap between men and women and the lack of supportive policies for working women, such as maternity leave and childcare facilities. Additionally, they discuss the impact of women's limited access to financial resources and credit, which restricts their ability to start and sustain businesses. The study emphasizes the need for targeted interventions and policy reforms to create an enabling environment for women's economic empowerment in Pakistan.

Akram et al, (2021) discussed women rights in Pakistan in context of international treaties. Researcher revealed the findings that woman empowerment is possible when women have equal chances to participate in political activities under the protection of country's law. They should have freedom to participate in politics as per international laws. When women have equal opportunities there will be less discrimination and chances to eliminate violence.

Shakil et al, (2023) conducted research on women political issues in Pakistan. He discussed with many other issues there are psychological and economic challenges in Pakistan. Women with leadership skills and political understanding might not have financial resources that may lead to less motivation and low women participation in politics. Women have psychological issues that are in a result of gender based violence and discrimination.

Arshad et al, (2023) in research on quest of Women for Selfhood in Politics with respect to stakeholder's role. Women have barriers to their freedom and identity. There are barriers in kind of social and cultural values, biased approach in opportunities and lack of opportunities for equal participation. There are myths and stereotypes associated with educational and professional opportunities for women.

Shafiq et al, (2024) conducted a study to see the role of women's participation in electoral and democracy in Pakistan. Study reveals that there is a psychological and social influence on women political empowerment subjected to the facilities provided to them. Quota based participation and reserved seats seem to enhance women political empowerment but in actual women true participation is challenged, women are considered a political representative just to complete the number of seats. They are not facilitated with equal opportunities and societal norms to end barriers and challenges.

Ghafoor & Haider (2018) conducted study to explore the economic challenges of Pakistani women to participate in politics. According to study, financial barriers are major constraint to have political liberty and equal chances of participation. Political campaigns are skewed to the

favor of male candidates and female campaigns are often gets humorous response. Even election commission of Pakistan issues symbols that generate funny slogans and discussion in society. Women have to generate funds to participate in political activities and equal participation. This barrier limits many women politician with potential to equally participate in political activities.

Begum (2023) examines the psychological impacts of gender based discrimination on Pakistani women particularly for their socio-political empowerment. Women politicians face very strict criticism and biased criteria to get opportunities and access services. This discrimination leads to stress and anxiety in women, which results in discouraging women to participate in political activities. All these factors contribute to have less confident women politicians.

Jabeen & Jadoon (2009) provides an analysis of how cultural norms and traditional gender roles influence women's participation in politics in Pakistan. The research shows that women role in public debates, society and home is very crucial as a lot of efforts are unrewarded and never acknowledged.

Khattak & Higdon (2020) discusses the institutional barriers that impede women's political participation in Pakistan, including the lack of support from political parties and the male-dominated structure of political institutions. The research highlights that even when women do gain political office, they often face marginalization and are assigned less influential roles. This institutional discrimination reinforces the broader patterns of gender inequality and limits the impact women can have on policy and decision-making processes.

Bano (2009) evaluates the effectiveness of reserved seats for women in Pakistan's legislative bodies. The study finds that while reserved seats have increased the numerical presence of women in politics, they have not necessarily translated into greater influence or power. Women occupying these seats often lack the same resources and support as their male counterparts, and their roles can be perceived as tokenistic. Nevertheless, the presence of women in legislative bodies has brought some attention to women's issues and has the potential to catalyze further change.

Imran & Munir (2018) explores the role of civil society organizations and women's movements in promoting women's political participation in Pakistan. The research indicates that these groups have been instrumental in advocating for legal and policy reforms that support women's rights and political engagement. Initiatives by civil society have helped to raise awareness, provide training and resources, and create networks of support for women candidates. However, the effectiveness of these efforts is often limited by the broader socio-political context.

Cheema et al, (2021) provide a comparative analysis of women's political participation globally, including insights relevant to Pakistan. Their study shows that higher levels of female political participation are associated with broader gender equality in education, employment, and social rights. Countries with supportive legal frameworks and proactive policies tend to have higher rates of women's political involvement. These findings suggest that addressing economic and psychological determinants in Pakistan requires comprehensive policy interventions and a commitment to gender equality.

Psychological Resilience and Coping Mechanisms

Haeri (2007) investigate the psychological resilience and coping mechanisms of women politicians in Pakistan. The study finds that despite the significant stressors, many women develop strong resilience through social support networks, mentorship, and personal determination. These coping strategies enable them to navigate the challenging political

landscape and continue their participation. The research underscores the importance of mental health resources and support systems in enhancing women's political engagement.

Deininger et al, (2020) examines the link between economic empowerment and women's political participation, arguing that economic independence is crucial for effective political engagement. The study shows that women who have access to economic resources are better able to fund their campaigns, assert their autonomy, and challenge traditional power structures. Economic empowerment initiatives, such as microfinance programs and vocational training, can thus play a key role in increasing women's political participation in Pakistan.

Bari (2010) analyzes the role of media in shaping public perceptions of women politicians in Pakistan. The study finds that media often reinforce gender stereotypes and portray women politicians in a negative light, focusing on their personal lives rather than their professional capabilities. This biased representation can affect women's self-esteem and public image, making it harder for them to gain the respect and support needed for successful political careers. The research calls for more balanced and positive media portrayals of women in politics to foster a more supportive environment for their participation.

Kucharzewska (2022) studies underscore the importance of this framework for promoting women's voices in political decision-making at global and national levels. The resolution has served as a foundation for many subsequent policies that prioritize gender perspectives in peacekeeping and conflict resolution, signifying a shift toward greater gender sensitivity in international diplomacy.

Schimtz & Gabel (2023) UN-Women has consistently emphasized and advocates for initiatives that provide women with equal access to resources, job opportunities, and political platforms, stressing that closing gender gaps in leadership and economic roles is essential for societal development. The organization's reports highlight that policies promoting fair labor practices, equal pay, and support for female entrepreneurship are critical to breaking cycles of poverty and enabling women's leadership. These reports also underscore that when women actively participate in politics and hold economic power, their communities experience significant social and economic benefits, aligning with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5, which promotes gender equality globally (UN-Women, 2021).

Stevano (2024) described that International Labor Organization (ILO) has published extensive research on women's empowerment, focusing particularly on decent work, fair wages, and safe working environments. In its Women at Work reports, the ILO emphasizes the importance of social policies that support women's employment rights, secure parental leave, and promote equal representation in management. According to the ILO, social empowerment for women is deeply connected to economic autonomy, and achieving this requires comprehensive anti-discrimination laws and support for work-life balance. The ILO argues that empowering women economically and socially fosters broader equality and enhances economic stability, benefiting both communities and the national economy.

Davidson-Schmich, L. K. (2011) research highlights the impact of women leaders within international forums on global policy-making and advocacy. Scholars have noted that women leaders bring unique perspectives to international dialogues, particularly on issues like human rights, environmental justice, and social development. Scholar argues that women participation leads to more holistic policy outcomes due to their focus on inclusive and sustainable approaches. Case studies of prominent leaders like Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Angela Merkel

illustrate the potential of female leadership to foster cooperation and drive social change, emphasizing the need for equitable representation in decision-making spaces.

Cohn (2008) literature suggests that while the UN and international forums have made strides, achieving true gender parity requires sustained commitment to policy reforms, mentorship programs, and cross-national alliances that support women in political roles globally.

Gillian (2013) discusses that woman political resistance, while empowering, can have significant psychological effects. Activism often places women in challenging, high-stress environments where they face harassment, threats, and sometimes violence, leading to increased risks of anxiety, depression, and trauma. The emotional toll of constantly confronting injustice can result in burnout and mental fatigue, especially for women in regions where their resistance meets harsh reprisals.

Hanek & Garcia (2022) engaging in political resistance often carries significant psychological burdens for women. Women activists, especially those in high-risk regions, face threats, harassment, and trauma that can impact their mental health and well-being. Studies have shown that the constant exposure to stress, fear of reprisal, and the emotional toll of confronting systemic injustice can lead to burnout and anxiety.

Conclusion:

The conclusion of the study underscores the critical interplay between economic constraints and psychological barriers that significantly impact women's political participation in Pakistan. The findings reveal that financial challenges, such as limited access to campaign funding and economic resources, coupled with socio-economic dependency, create substantial hurdles for women aspiring to political roles. Additionally, psychological factors, including the pervasive patriarchal norms, societal scrutiny, and harassment, exacerbate the difficulties faced by women, contributing to stress and diminished confidence. Despite these formidable obstacles, the resilience and determination of Pakistani women politicians highlight their capacity to overcome barriers and advocate for greater gender equity. The study emphasizes the need for targeted policy interventions, such as financial support mechanisms and mental health resources, along with broader societal changes to dismantle patriarchal structures. These measures are essential to fostering an inclusive political environment where women can participate equally and effectively, ensuring their voices contributes to the democratic process and societal advancement in Pakistan.

Suggestion

The Pakistan government should empower women according to international standards and UN guidelines by adopting comprehensive gender equality measures that foster women's full participation in social, economic, and political spheres. Implementing frameworks like the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality and the principles of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) would provide a strong foundation for progress. These measures include expanding educational and economic opportunities for women, ensuring equal representation in political and leadership positions, and enforcing policies that combat gender-based violence and discrimination. By aligning its policies with these global standards, Pakistan can not only improve women's rights and well-being but also strengthen the nation's overall development and resilience. Empowering women in this way would reflect Pakistan's commitment to the international community and its dedication to creating an inclusive, prosperous society.

To empower women politically and psychologically in our political sphere, it is essential to create inclusive policies and support structures that actively encourage their participation and resilience. Political parties should increase women's representation by promoting women leaders, establishing mentorship programs, and securing dedicated resources for female candidates. Gender-sensitive reforms, like safe and accessible public spaces, robust legal protections, and zero tolerance for harassment, will encourage women to participate confidently. Providing mental health resources tailored for women leaders is crucial, as it helps them cope with the unique stresses of public life. Community support, workshops, and networks of allies can further foster women's resilience and self-confidence, strengthening their role in decision-making and demonstrating that women's perspectives are essential to balanced and effective governance.

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