



Women Issues in Pakistan’s Politics: A Case of Psychological and Economic Challenges

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Abstract

Women's issues in Pakistani politics continue to be a pressing concern, reflecting the complex challenges faced by women in the country's political landscape. Women in Pakistan face a range of psychological and economic issues within the realm of politics, which can significantly hinder their full participation in the political arena. Psychologically, many women grapple with the pervasive gender bias and discrimination present in the political landscape. The deeply entrenched patriarchal culture often leads to a lack of recognition and respect for women's contributions, affecting their self-esteem and self-confidence. Women in politics frequently endure derogatory comments, harassment, and even threats, resulting in anxiety and fear that can deter them from active political engagement. While, economically women in Pakistan's politics often struggle due to limited access to resources and funding. Running for office and maintaining a political career can be financially demanding, and many women lack the financial means to compete effectively. Traditional gender roles and societal norms often place economic restrictions on women, making it difficult for them to access campaign resources, hire staff, or travel for political activities. This economic disadvantage hampers their ability to build a strong political presence and may limit their career prospects. However, to address these psychological and economic issues, Pakistan must implement policies and programs that empower women in politics. This study examines the challenges face by women psychologically and economically in Pakistan’s politics and suggests suitable measures to strengthen the role of women in politics.

Keywords: Women, Politics, Psychology, Economy, Pakistan, Issues and Challenges, Govt monitor ‘Gender Based Discrimination’, Effective Implementation of policies related to women’s political participation, Administrative bodies of provincial and federal level including election commissions and legislation should strengthen women on economic and psychological level, Govt and all political parties should prioritize equal access for funding and training opportunities for women in politics, etc.

1. Introduction:

Women continue to confront a myriad of issues in the political arena, both globally and within specific countries like Pakistan. One prominent challenge is the persistent underrepresentation of women in political offices. Despite significant strides in recent decades, women remain disproportionately fewer in political leadership roles, often facing barriers such as gender stereotypes and biased electoral systems that hinder their progress. Bushra (2007)

Below chart by UN-Women presenting women empowerment.



Source: <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/countries/pakistan/wee>

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Moreover, women in politics frequently encounter gender-based discrimination and harassment, creating a hostile environment that can impede their political activities. Threats, derogatory remarks, and even physical violence against women politicians are not uncommon, contributing to a chilling effect that discourages many from entering or remaining in politics. Addressing this issue requires not only legal frameworks against harassment but also a broader societal shift in attitudes towards women in leadership roles.

Economic challenges further compound women's issues in politics. Unequal access to financial resources for campaigning, limited fundraising opportunities and a lack of financial support networks disproportionately affect women, making it harder for them to compete on a level playing field. This economic disadvantage not only restricts their ability to run successful campaigns but also limits their overall political influence. Asobayire & Barley (2015).

To mitigate these challenges, concerted efforts are needed to implement and enforce policies that promote gender equality in politics. This includes affirmative action measures, targeted programs to address gender-based violence and harassment, and initiatives to enhance women's economic empowerment in the political sphere. Creating a more inclusive political environment that values and supports women's participation is essential for fostering a truly representative democracy and addressing the systemic issues that have long hindered women in politics.

2. Women Challenges in Pakistan's Politics

In the perspective of Pakistan women face a multi of challenges within the realm of politics, stemming from deeply ingrained cultural and societal norms. One prominent issue is the underrepresentation of women in political offices. Despite constitutional and legislative measures, women remain significantly outnumbered in elected positions, reflecting persistent gender disparities. Barriers such as patriarchal norms, traditional gender roles, and biased electoral systems contribute to this disparity, limiting women's access to political decision-making processes. Qaisrani et al, (2016)

Gender-based discrimination and harassment represent another formidable challenge. Women politicians often encounter hostility, derogatory comments, and even physical threats, creating a hostile environment that deters many from actively participating in politics. The prevalence of such behavior not only stifles women's voices but also perpetuates a culture of silence and fear, impeding the growth of a diverse and inclusive political landscape.

Economic challenges further compound the difficulties faced by women in Pakistani politics. Limited access to financial resources for campaigning, fundraising obstacles and a lack of financial support networks disproportionately affect women candidates. This economic disadvantage hampers their ability to run competitive campaigns and diminishes their overall political influence. Ali (2006)

Cultural and societal expectations also contribute to the challenges women face. Women often grapple with balancing familial responsibilities with political careers, and those who defy traditional gender roles may face social stigma and resistance. Breaking through these deeply entrenched norms requires a broader societal shift in attitudes towards women in leadership roles. Kiamba (2009)

The role of women in Pakistan's politics is both crucial and challenging, reflecting the complex interplay of societal norms, cultural expectations, and systemic barriers. While there have been significant strides in recent years, women continue to navigate a political landscape marked by gender disparities. Many women actively participate in politics, holding positions in national and provincial assemblies, local governments, and even key ministerial roles. Their presence contributes to a more diverse and representative decision-making process, bringing attention to issues that disproportionately affect women, such as healthcare, education, and gender-based violence. Hussain (2022)

However, the psychological and economic challenges faced by women in Pakistani politics remain substantial. Psychologically, women often contend with deeply ingrained gender biases and stereotypes that undermine their credibility and influence. The pervasive patriarchal culture can lead to a lack of recognition for women's contributions, affecting their self-esteem and confidence. Additionally, women in politics frequently face harassment, threats, and intimidation, creating a psychologically taxing environment that may deter many from pursuing or sustaining a political career.

Economically, women encounter obstacles in accessing resources necessary for effective political participation. Campaigning in Pakistan can be financially demanding, and women often lack the financial means to compete on an equal footing. Traditional gender roles and societal norms limit women's access to funding; hindering their ability to run competitive campaigns and diminishes their overall economic empowerment within the political sphere.

To address these issues, there is a pressing need for comprehensive reforms. Initiatives promoting gender equality, affirmative action measures, and campaigns challenging gender stereotypes can contribute to a more inclusive political environment. Creating financial mechanisms to support women in politics, such as equal access to campaign funding and resources, is essential for enhancing their economic empowerment within the political arena. By actively addressing both psychological and economic challenges, Pakistan can foster a political landscape that is truly representative and equitable for all.

3. Role of Administration and Institutions

The role of administration and institutions is paramount in overcoming women's issues in Pakistan's politics. Administrative bodies, including election commissions and legislative bodies, play a crucial role in implementing and enforcing policies that promote gender equality. This involves ensuring the effective implementation of existing laws related to women's political participation, such as those concerning reserved seats and anti-harassment measures. Electoral processes should be

transparent and inclusive, fostering an environment where women can actively participate without fear of discrimination or intimidation. Zakar et al, (2012)

Institutions, including political parties, have a responsibility to create internal mechanisms that encourage and support women's participation. This entails adopting policies that promote women's representation, both in decision-making roles within the party structure and on electoral tickets. Institutional reforms should prioritize equal access to party resources, mentorship programs, and training opportunities for women, fostering an environment that nurtures their political growth and leadership skills.

Moreover, administrative and institutional bodies should work collaboratively to monitor and address gender-based discrimination and harassment within political spheres. This involves establishing complaint mechanisms, conducting investigations, and implementing sanctions against those found guilty of discriminatory practices. By actively addressing these issues at the administrative and institutional levels, Pakistan can pave the way for a more inclusive, supportive, and equitable political landscape, allowing women to participate fully and effectively in the country's political processes.

4. Significance

Research on women's issues in Pakistan's politics, particularly focusing on psychological and economic challenges, holds paramount significance for fostering gender equality and ensuring a more inclusive political landscape. Understanding the psychological challenges women face in politics is crucial for dismantling deeply entrenched gender biases and stereotypes. By delving into the psychological aspects, research can shed light on the impact of societal norms, cultural expectations, and discriminatory practices, offering insights that can inform awareness campaigns and policy changes aimed at creating a more supportive and empowering environment for women in politics.

Economic challenges represent another critical facet of women's participation in politics. Research examining the economic barriers, such as limited access to funding and resources, can highlight disparities that hinder women's ability to run competitive campaigns and sustain political careers. Such research provides the evidence base needed for crafting targeted interventions, including financial support mechanisms, affirmative action policies, and reforms that address the economic constraints preventing women from fully engaging in the political sphere.

Moreover, research on women's issues in Pakistani politics contributes to the broader discourse on democracy and governance. It underscores the importance of representative and diverse voices in decision-making processes, fostering a more robust democracy. Understanding the challenges women face in both psychological and economic dimensions provides a comprehensive view of the obstacles hindering their participation and allows for the formulation of evidence-based strategies to overcome these challenges.

The significance of this research extends beyond academic circles; it directly influences policymaking and advocacy efforts. Findings can inform the design of policies that promote gender equality, address psychological barriers, and enhance economic opportunities for women in politics. By amplifying the voices and experiences of women in political spaces, research plays a pivotal role in dismantling systemic inequalities and building a more equitable and inclusive political landscape in Pakistan.

5. Research Methodology

The research methodology for investigating Women Issues in Pakistan's Politics, specifically focusing on psychological and economic challenges, through secondary sources involves a comprehensive review and synthesis of existing literature, scholarly articles, reports, and relevant publications. The research will begin with a systematic search of academic databases, governmental reports, and reputable international organizations, gathering a diverse range of perspectives on the subject. The selected secondary sources will be critically assessed for their credibility, relevance, and methodological rigor. By synthesizing and critically evaluating existing knowledge, this research aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the complexities surrounding women's political participation, contributing valuable insights for policy development and further empirical investigations.

6. Literature Review

Gilardi (2015) discusses the importance of women's role in politics, author described that women cannot be overstated as it is fundamental to achieving a truly inclusive and representative democracy. Women bring diverse perspectives, experiences, and priorities to the decision-making process, enriching political discourse and fostering policies that address the needs of entire populations. By ensuring equal participation in political leadership, societies can break free from entrenched gender biases and promote social and economic equity. Women's involvement in politics not only enhances the legitimacy of democratic institutions but also serves as a catalyst for positive social change, challenging stereotypes and inspiring future generations. Recognizing and valuing women's roles in politics is not just a matter of justice and equality; it is an essential step toward building resilient, vibrant, and fair societies that benefit everyone.

Leghari et al, (2019) highlights the importance of women's role in the electoral process. Authors mentioned that women role in electoral politics is pivotal for the vitality and legitimacy of any democracy. Women's participation as voters, candidates, and election officials contributes to the diversity of perspectives and experiences that shape political decision-making. Ensuring equal representation in the electoral process is not only a matter of fairness but also a reflection of a society's commitment to democratic principles. Women's active engagement enhances the credibility of election outcomes and

reinforces the democratic values of inclusivity and representation. Recognizing and supporting women's role in the electoral process is crucial for fostering a democracy that truly represents the interests and aspirations of the entire population. Nation's vital wealth is their people. States exist to provide environment that is supportive for prosperity of their people and attain their basic rights. Women are most important part of household, society and country, their satisfaction and empowerment contribute to the empowerment of nation. Women are part of domestic and income generating activities but are less paid at every level.

Hasin et al, (2018) quality of life and society is dependent on women empowerment and it is most challenging to enhance women empowerment. A multidimensional framework is needed to establish to enhance women's social empowerment and quality of life. Systematic literature review of women empowerment provides challenges, issues and opportunities for women empowerment.

Azmat (2013) highlights the barriers faced by women in politics. Author stated that women in politics face multifaceted challenges that encompass both systemic and societal barriers. Despite advancements, gender-based discrimination remains pervasive, hindering women's entry into political spheres. Stereotypes and preconceived notions about women's leadership capabilities often limit their opportunities and undermine their credibility. Harassment, both verbal and physical, continues to be a significant deterrent, creating a hostile environment that hampers women's active participation. Structural issues, such as unequal access to resources and political networks, further impede their progress. Balancing familial responsibilities with political careers is an additional challenge, as societal expectations often place disproportionate burdens on women. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive reforms, including legislative changes, cultural shifts, and affirmative actions, to ensure a more inclusive and equitable political landscape for women.

Taib (2014) described that women in Pakistan face profound psychological challenges in politics, stemming from deeply entrenched cultural and societal norms. The pervasive patriarchal structure often results in the internalization of gender biases, fostering self-doubt and undermining the confidence of women in political roles. The cultural expectations placed upon women, including predefined gender roles and traditional notions of femininity; contribute to a constant struggle to assert their legitimacy and capabilities in a male-dominated political arena. Moreover, the prevalence of gender-based discrimination and harassment, both online and offline, creates a psychologically taxing environment, where women politicians may grapple with fear, anxiety, and stress. Overcoming these challenges necessitates not only policy changes but also a transformative shift in societal attitudes and the creation of a supportive and empowering environment that validates and amplifies the voices of women in Pakistani politics.

Gilligan (2013) discusses that women in politics often face profound psychological barriers rooted in societal norms and deeply ingrained gender biases. The patriarchal culture prevalent in many political spheres contributes to self-doubt, limiting the confidence of women as they navigate the male-dominated landscape. Gender stereotypes and expectations often cast doubt on their leadership capabilities, fostering imposter syndrome and creating internalized doubts about their legitimacy in political roles. The prevalence of gender-based discrimination, harassment, and threats further exacerbates psychological distress, creating a hostile environment that impedes women from expressing their opinions freely and actively participating in political discourse. Overcoming these psychological barriers requires not only legislative and institutional changes but also a transformative shift in societal attitudes towards recognizing and valuing the contributions of women in politics, fostering an environment that empowers rather than diminishes their confidence and agency.

Khayyam and Tahir (2019) find out the psychological issues faced by women in Pakistani politics necessitates a multifaceted approach. Initiatives to challenge entrenched gender biases and stereotypes through public awareness campaigns, education, and media engagement are essential. Creating supportive environments within political institutions that actively discourage gender-based discrimination and harassment is crucial. Implementing and enforcing anti-harassment mechanisms, along with providing mental health resources and counseling, can help mitigate the psychological toll of navigating a male-dominated political landscape. Mentorship programs and the promotion of positive role models can inspire confidence and resilience among women politicians. A comprehensive strategy that combines legal reforms, cultural shifts, and institutional changes is vital to fostering a political environment where women can participate confidently and without fear of psychological distress. A study is conducted to find out the male perceive about women participation in politics. Women political empowerment may be strengthened by promoting their participation in political activities at grass root level. Awareness and participation at local level politics is the key to promote their political empowerment and productive way for women empowerment at national level. There is needed to make appropriate policies and ensure implementation on those policies to ensure women empowerment. (Latif et al, (2020)

Study conducted on women empowerment and domestic violence from their spouse to find out coping strategies for victims in Lahore and Sialkot (Pakistan). It was find out that women tried to seek support from family and from institutions for prevent from domestic violence. In less educated communities women seek for spiritual therapies and their support to control unavoidable factors. There is need to spend cost on utilization of resources including time and human resources. Some women also followed problem-focused strategies they seek help from formal institutions, families and social groups. Women with awareness experience less domestic violence and set limitations for their matters. Zakar et al, (2012).

Adil et al, (2021) mentioned that women in Pakistan encounter significant economic challenges in the realm of politics, often rooted in structural inequalities and deeply ingrained gender biases. Limited access to financial resources, funding, and

campaign support creates a substantial barrier for women seeking to engage in politics. Traditional gender roles and societal expectations can restrict women's economic independence, making it difficult for them to compete on an equal footing with their male counterparts. The financial constraints often impede their ability to run robust and competitive campaigns, diminishing their overall political influence. Overcoming these economic challenges requires not only targeted policies and initiatives to address funding disparities but also a broader societal shift towards recognizing and valuing the economic contributions of women in politics, fostering a more inclusive and equitable political environment in Pakistan.

Jalal (1991) Women in Pakistan face notable economic challenges in the realm of politics, stemming from systemic barriers that impede their active participation. Despite legal provisions advocating for gender equality, women often confront financial constraints that hinder their entry into politics. Limited access to economic resources for campaigning, coupled with traditional gender roles and societal expectations, acts as a deterrent for women aspiring to take on leadership roles. Additionally, cultural norms and the threat of violence or harassment further exacerbate the economic challenges women encounter in the political sphere. Efforts to address these issues require not only legal reforms but also a broader societal shift to create an environment that encourages and supports women's meaningful participation in politics, ensuring their voices are heard and their perspectives are reflected in decision-making processes.

Gilmartin (1998) Economic challenges in the realm of politics persist in Pakistan, affecting the political landscape and representation. Financial constraints often hinder individuals from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, limiting their ability to engage actively in politics. Campaigning expenses, which include advertising, travel, and outreach, can be prohibitively high, creating a barrier for aspiring politicians with limited resources. Moreover, the intersection of economic disparities, corruption, and political patronage in Pakistan can contribute to a system where financial considerations play a significant role in political access and influence. These challenges can undermine the democratic principles of equal representation and fair competition, emphasizing the need for comprehensive reforms to address economic barriers within the political sphere.

Women in Pakistan confront substantial economic challenges, reflecting broader societal norms and structural impediments. Gender disparities in access to education and employment opportunities contribute to a gender wage gap, limiting women's financial independence. Traditional gender roles often confine women to domestic spheres, restricting their ability to participate fully in the workforce. Additionally, discriminatory practices in inheritance and property rights further exacerbate economic inequalities. Limited access to credit and financial services for women entrepreneurs, along with prevailing cultural norms that may discourage women from pursuing certain professions, collectively contribute to their economic challenges. Addressing these issues requires not only policy changes to promote gender equality but also a cultural shift that recognizes and values the economic contributions of women in various sectors of society. Qaisrani et al, (2016),

Weiss (1999) highlighted that institutions play a pivotal role in overcoming women's challenges in Pakistani politics by shaping and enforcing policies that promote gender equality. Legislative bodies, for instance, can advocate for and implement affirmative action measures, such as gender quotas and reserved seats, to ensure increased representation of women. Furthermore, institutions responsible for law enforcement and judiciary can actively enforce anti-harassment mechanisms, creating a safer political environment for women. Educational institutions play a crucial role in challenging traditional gender norms and fostering an environment that encourages women to pursue political careers. Additionally, financial institutions can contribute by offering equal access to funding and resources for women candidates. A coordinated effort from various institutions is essential to create an enabling environment that empowers women in Pakistani politics and dismantles systemic barriers that impede their full participation.

Jabeen et al, (2009) discusses the role of stakeholders, including civil society organizations, political parties, media, and international entities. The study finds out that institutions play a crucial role in overcoming women's challenges in Pakistani politics. Civil society organizations can advocate for policy reforms, raise awareness about gender issues, and provide support networks for women politicians. Political parties have the power to foster inclusivity by adopting internal mechanisms that promote women's participation, ensuring equitable representation on party tickets. Media, through responsible reporting and portrayal, can influence public perceptions and challenge gender stereotypes. International entities can provide support, resources, and advocacy for gender equality initiatives. By actively engaging these stakeholders, Pakistan can leverage a collective and concerted effort to dismantle systemic barriers, create a more supportive political culture, and empower women to participate fully in shaping the nation's political landscape.

Hassan and Kiyani (2015) addressing economic challenges faced by women in Pakistani politics requires concerted efforts across multiple fronts. Implementing policies that ensure equal access to campaign funding, resources, and opportunities is essential. Financial institutions can play a role by facilitating transparent and fair processes for women candidates to secure funding. Political parties should actively encourage women's participation by removing financial barriers and promoting equal representation on party tickets. Moreover, initiatives focused on women's economic empowerment, such as training programs and mentorship opportunities, can enhance their ability to navigate the economic landscape of politics. A commitment to dismantling gender-based economic disparities in politics, coupled with strategic policy interventions, will be key to creating a more equitable and inclusive political environment in Pakistan.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, women in Pakistan face formidable challenges in the realm of politics, particularly psychological and economic barriers that impede their full and equal participation. Psychologically, the deeply ingrained patriarchal culture

contributes to self-doubt, limited self-confidence, and the internalization of gender biases, hindering women from actively pursuing political careers. The prevalence of gender-based discrimination, harassment, and threats further exacerbates psychological distress, creating a hostile environment that discourages women from engaging in the political sphere. Economically, women encounter significant obstacles, ranging from unequal access to campaign funding to limited financial resources for competitive campaigns. Traditional gender roles and societal expectations often restrict women's economic independence, exacerbating the challenges they face in navigating the economic landscape of politics. This economic disadvantage not only limits women's ability to run successful campaigns but also diminishes their overall political influence. To overcome these challenges, a comprehensive and collaborative approach is imperative. Legislative reforms, such as affirmative action measures and anti-harassment mechanisms, are crucial for creating an enabling environment. Moreover, economic empowerment initiatives, including equal access to funding and resources, mentorship programs, and training opportunities, can significantly enhance women's participation in politics. Societal awareness campaigns challenging gender stereotypes and fostering a more inclusive political culture are equally pivotal. By addressing these psychological and economic challenges collectively, Pakistan can strive towards building a political landscape that is truly representative, equitable, and empowering for all.

8. Suggestion

Mitigating and overcoming women's issues in Pakistan's politics, particularly psychological and economic challenges, require a multifaceted and concerted effort across various domains.

To address psychological challenges, there needs to be a comprehensive approach to challenge gender stereotypes and biases. This includes implementing awareness campaigns at the national level to shift societal perceptions about women's roles in politics. Educational reforms should promote gender equality and inclusivity, fostering an environment that encourages women to pursue political careers. Establishing and enforcing strict anti-harassment policies within political institutions, along with sensitization programs for all stakeholders, are crucial to creating a safe and respectful political space for women. Economically, initiatives should focus on ensuring equal access to resources and opportunities for women in politics. This involves reforming campaign financing to make it transparent and equitable, allowing women to compete on an equal footing. Political parties can play a pivotal role by adopting internal policies that promote women's economic participation, such as providing equal access to party resources and encouraging women's representation on party tickets. Economic empowerment programs, including training and mentorship opportunities, can equip women with the skills and resources needed to navigate the economic challenges associated with political participation.

Moreover, a commitment from governmental and non-governmental entities to provide support networks, counseling services, and mental health resources can address the psychological toll of political engagement. Establishing transparent and accountable financial mechanisms, along with affirmative action policies, will be instrumental in dismantling economic disparities and ensuring women have equal opportunities to participate and thrive in the political arena.

In summary, a holistic and collaborative strategy involving legal reforms, cultural shifts, educational initiatives, and targeted economic empowerment programs is essential. By addressing both psychological and economic challenges simultaneously, Pakistan can pave the way for a more inclusive, equitable, and empowering political environment for women.

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