



RESEARCH PAPER

Revisiting the Question of Women Representation in Politics: The Case of Electoral Reengineering and Malpractices in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

The population and housing census of Pakistan 2023, reveals that half of the ratio of Pakistani population consists on women but unfortunately they are kept out of every important decision and policy making forums. The major reason of this is electoral design of women representation. Since Introduction of Indian Act 1935 in Indo-Pak Sub-continent till date, no clear formula is implemented as a clear road map of women representation in Pakistan. This paper highlights the incompatibility of electoral system of Pakistan under Majoritarian system to handle growing gender based issues in Pakistan. Methodologically, this paper is based on secondary resources and observes current and upcoming structure of national parliament in Pakistan. The paper concludes that many core reforms are needed to enhance effective women representation in state structure of Pakistan i.e. paradigm shift in the formula of electoral system on technical grounds and socio-political reforms on state and societal level to enhance civic sense.

KEYWORDS Electoral Mechanism, Gender Study, Majoritarian Model, Women Representation, State Structure

Introduction

In comparison to their percentage of the population, women are underrepresented globally at all levels of government (IDEA, 2006). Consequently, presence of considerable number of women in politics is a dire need of hour. Therefore, participation of women on political forums has become one of the prime demand of women's movements internationally. Affirmative action has been demanded by a number of international organizations and groups to boost the women's political engagement. The global community, under the flag of the United Nations highlighted the role of the women in The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1954), in its Article 25, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (1979) in its Article 7, and Women's Aid International (2011). The political malpractices against women were finally discussed in 1995 by the fourth conference of Beijing Platform for Action. The platform proposed affirmative action for potential strategy enabling women to achieve women's equal representation and requested a minimum threshold for participation on equal basis (Sawer 2000; Dahlerup 2006a). Two of the biggest influences on the institutionalization of gender equality principles have been the Beijing conference and CEDAW. According to Krook and True (2010), the strategy which the Beijing Platform for Action's shared as a partner of the gender mainstreaming policy of the UN has a great impact on its member states to enact the women quota for better representation in politics. In 1990, the Economic and Social Council of UN supported the presence of at least 30% of females in policy and decision-making positions. Furthermore, the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995 reinforced this standard which bolstered the need of gender based quotas in politics (UNDP 2014b; 2000). It can enhance number of women representation in decision-making bodies to formulate and defend the rights and opportunities for themselves. In order to attain a

critical mass and meaningful policy changes, UN World Conference advocated for a 30% membership and demand special measures that allow them to be elected or appointed to high-level decision-making positions. It has supported that proper political and electoral reengineering can ensure female representation in politics by fixing gender quota. The term "electoral reengineering" describes changes made to the electoral system with the intention of achieving particular goals, including more representation for marginalized groups. Electoral reengineering has tendency to through consolidated measures like voluntary party stipulations or (party quotas) and amendments election legislation (legal quotas).

Women are notably underrepresented in politics in Pakistan; reengineering the voting process may be essential to resolving this problem. This electoral re-engineering can be harbinger of true political presentation of women in Pakistan. To initiate an order to build a more fair and inclusive electoral system that promotes women's involvement in politics, this approach entails revamping the current one. For political wellbeing of female citizens, their political representation is very vital. However, as per criteria to play a meaningful part in legislation, women as group needs a minimum of 30% of presentation (UN, 2005). Unfortunately, Pakistani politics lacks in having an effective number of women presentation which could initiate structural changes (ABD, 2000).

Conversely, civil society particularly women activists in Pakistan are also vocal against the current electoral system which is underrating women for political representation (Grofman, 2016). Moreover, the prestige of women in Pakistan is badly marred by the feminization of poverty whereas only strong candidates can succeed to get tickets for contesting election (Ballington, 2003).

Historically, the women representation in politics was introduced by the Indian Act for first time in colonial India and initially, 3% seats were earmarked for women. First constituent Assembly of Pakistan retained only two seats for women while no single seat was allocated in second constituent assembly (Cheema, 2019; Karamat, Muzaffar & Shah, 2019). In Constitution of Pakistan 1956, the motto of 'one vote, one value' or cumulative vote was adopted and women were allocated 3% quota in political presentation however 10% increase was demanded. Contrarily, the second Constitution of Pakistan 1962 formed a presidential system with unicameral legislation where women were allocated only six seats. The Constitution of 1973, has bicameral legislature initially reserved ten seats to female candidates in lower house only. Ironically, the entire political history of Pakistan is witnessed that the ratio of women who were directly elected in general elections remained also very low (Dutoya, 2013, 18). For instance, in general election of 1977, only 1 woman was elected in direct voting, never took oath because Martial Law was imposed before formation of parliament (Roofi, 2016; Muzaffar, Khan & Karamat, 2017). Furthermore, till the end of Martial Law government, women were kept excluded from politics. The general elections of 1997 barely included women in political representation. It remained 07 seats out of 217 seats in National Assembly (4% seats), 02 seats out of 460 seats in provincial assemblies (0.4% seats) and 02 out of total 87 seats in Senate (02% seats) (Legislative Watch, 2001).

The women presentation in local government during 1993 indicates that women were elected as low as total 10% of the total membership (8246/75,552) and filled reserved seats for women through indirect vote of council members (Aurat, 2001, 7). The era of General Musharraf (1999-2007) brought major reforms in women political participation which increased their number in provincial and national assembly to great extent. His reforms increased women quota to 33% in local government (union and

district) and hundreds of women took interest in campaigning. Unfortunately, this system generated uneven results when it was reinforced through the Act 2013. The Act under section 206, bounds political parties of Pakistan to issue 5% of their seat tickets to female candidates. However, number of female contestants were noticeably high during general election, but contrarily, only 2% female candidates (8 out of 183) won (Batool, 2019).

However, Women were selected on reserved seats but there is no career persistency and political glass ceiling prevails in Pakistan as most women won only one time on these seats (Noreen, 2019). Women representation depends on societal pattern of society (Bano, 2009, 19). In Pakistan this representation is 20% of Parliamentarians (UN, 2017). Only 3% entered in general assembly through general election and 17% through reserved seats (See table 1) (Zardari, 2018) and all major parties are male dominated (Ali, 2012).

Table 1
Post-Partition Political Representation of Women in Pakistan on Reserved and General Seats of Lower House (1947-2021)

General Election year	Total Number of Women elected	Through direct election (General Election)	Through indirect election (Reserved seats)
1947-54	2	0	2
1962-65	8	2	6
1965-69	6	6	0
1972-77	6	6	0
1977-85	10	10	0
1985-1988	22	2	20
1988-90	23	3	20
1990-1993	2	2	0
1993-97	6	6	0
2002-07	73	13	60
2008-13	76	16	60
2013-2017	69	9	60

Source: information gathered from Noreen, 2019 and tabulated by author (For reserved seats in Provincial assemblies, see Reyes also, 2002, 2-3).

But the data above shows that the absence of an effective number of women politics is a hindrance of mainstreaming of women which are almost half of Pakistan's total population (ADB, 2000).

Literature Review

The electoral system of a state plays a very pivotal role in shaping a rightful representation for smooth political sailing of government affairs based on just and equality. In Pakistan, though promises were made for more women inclusion in politics but various structural, institutional and socio-cultural hindrances always derailed the system (Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1987; Zia, 2018). This study explores various streams found on technical, Institutional, and socio-political grounds as mentioned under while theoretical grounds have been discussed earlier in last section.

Structural Implications of electoral system on Women Inclusion: The descriptive inclusion based on quota system or reserved seats of women is a hindrance in the way of substantive representation of women in decision making process (FAFEN, 2018, Nadeem and Laghari, 2004). As mentioned before, Pakistan is using a combination of FPTP system (directly elected) with Proportional System (reserved seats for women) (ECP, 2023). The

mere nomination of women on reserved seats rather than their direct election in general election is refraining them to play an effective role in policy making (Hughes, 2019).

The era of General Musharraf Pervez brought more women empowerment under enlightened moderation program. But reserving more seats for women even could not guaranteed women participation and their nomination could not help women with the promised empowerment (Ahmed, 2022; Ali, Ali, Rashid, & Naz, 2025). The major reason according to (Zia, 2018) was male dominated environment of the legislature and the society as well. The malpractices based on social and political hindrances gave a setback to the female voters' turnover in particular and general turnover in general. According to the ECP and Policy research Journal (2024) the voters' turnover decreased from 46% of 2018 to 41% in 2024 while only 313 women candidate contested out of over 17,000 candidates registered for general election for 2024.

Along with institutional setbacks as noted above, there are various administrative, operational socio-cultural barriers count in the way to smooth inclusion of women in the state legislatures. The study of Hamida BiBi (2020, 608-618) of socio-cultural patriarchal system of Swabi depicted the limited movement of women during election caused in low turnover of female voters. While ECP has many times pointed the administrative limitation for women, i.e. voter registration or access to polling booth etc.

Least but not last, the theoretical debate as have been demonstrated in previous discussion, the comparative ground of the theoretical framework can depict the different outcomes while having the same quota system for women varies on difference in social and local gender norms and structure of political parties.

Theoretical Debate on Gender Parity

It is commonly acknowledged that majoritarian democracies pose unique challenges for ethnically divided nations, and that democracy is intrinsically challenging in divided cultures (Lijphart 2004; Sisk 2002). Some contend that power-sharing methods are necessary for the successful development of democratic government in split societies in order to guarantee to represent all important segments of society on policy and decision making plate forums (Sisk 2002; Papagianni 2007). In multiethnic nations, the concepts of self-determination and democracy can be reconciled through power sharing, which is described as practices and institutions a broad-based inclusive network of every considerable group of society (Sisk 2002, p. vii). It is also widely acknowledged that electoral reform has the potential to significantly advance both democracy and effective conflict resolution (Reilly 2002).

The equal representation of women has long been a focus of discussion world widely. Formalist, symbolic, descriptive, and substantive are the four primary aspects from which scholars typically approach administrative depiction (Schwindt-Bayer & Mishler, 2005; Pitkin, 1967). Descriptive and substantive representation are frequently the subject of feminist studies (Mansbridge, 1999; Phillips, 1998). In descriptive representation, the represented and the representatives are implied to share a compositional resemblance. For example, farmers represent farmers, Christians represent Christians, and women represent women. Conversely, substantive representation describes how the interests of the represented and the representatives' activities align (Schwindt-Bayer & Mishler, 2005).

In the above discussed discourse, the main questions are whether and why it matters those women represent women and whether electing more women to positions of leadership will result in increased representation for the group. Descriptive representation's detractors, in particular normative democratic theorists, contend that emphasizing a representative's identity excessively could obscure their actions. According to Hanna Pitkin (1967), it is more important to focus on the actions and results than the traits of the representatives.

Descriptive representation is often criticized for encouraging essentialism, the view that people who belong to a particular group have a common identity. This point of view implies that all members of a descriptive group share certain innate characteristics, which could cause one to ignore important distinctions between them. Furthermore, some activists think that under male-dominated politics, women's wants and concerns which come from their experiences are not sufficiently taken care of (Phillips, 1998).

However, some voices contend that since some women are less fortunate than others, it is incorrect to think of women as a homogenous group. Minority interests may become assimilated into dominant ones without their awareness as a result of essentialist thinking. According to feminist research, essentialist reasoning misses significant distinctions between women and the opportunity for men to engage as advocates for women.

Technological developments are changing society and having an effect on electoral procedures and political engagement. Voter turnout in well-established democracies is declining, which has led to research of alternate voting methods such mail-in and online balloting. While adding more voting methods may make elections more complicated and expensive, it also presents chances to reconsider and improve current processes. In order to embrace best democratic practices and improve governance, rebranding the electoral process entails altering its character, structure, and stakeholder perceptions. In order to boost public trust and involvement, this entails implementing optimal democratic practices and changing the perspectives of stakeholders (Schneider 2004; Mensah 2011). Elections must represent the choices of the electorate in order for democratic governance to function (Reynolds et al. 2005). By guaranteeing accuracy and openness in vote counting and representation, a long-lasting election system fosters confidence (Elekwa 2008).

Descriptive representation has also been criticized for weakening unity and limiting accountability. Based only on a representative's descriptive qualities, it could deceive the public into thinking their substantive interests are represented. However, if more descriptive representations are chosen, performance comparison will be possible, reducing the risk.

Many proponents of gender parity in political representation, however, maintain that descriptive representation is a good notion despite these criticisms. They contend that a similar makeup of the represented and the representatives guarantees the representation of the interests of the represented by the representatives. According to the critical mass theory, a minority group cannot significantly impact politics unless it possesses a minimal level of representation, such as thirty percent (Dahlerup, 2006a). It is thought that reaching this critical mass is necessary to ensure that women are substantially represented, especially when it comes to policy matters that impact them.

Material and Methods

The methodology for this study combines a case study approach, content analysis, and qualitative data to explore the research topic comprehensively. A case study approach was employed to provide in-depth insights into a specific phenomenon or context, allowing for a detailed examination of real-world examples. Content analysis was used to systematically analyze textual, visual, or audio materials, identifying patterns, themes, and trends that are relevant to the research question. By applying content analysis, we were able to objectively quantify and interpret the content within various sources. Finally, qualitative data was collected through interviews, observations, or document reviews, emphasizing rich, non-numerical information to uncover deeper meanings and perspectives. This mixed-method approach provided a robust framework for understanding complex issues and generating meaningful conclusions from multiple sources of evidence.

Results and Discussion

Women Political Representation and Electoral System in Pakistan

The Indian Act, 1935 welcomed with a broader right to vote and competitive participation of women on reserved and regular seats. In India, as per study of Mhatre (2009) the number of registered voters has increased with ratio of six million women and twenty-nine million males voters (a ratio of 1:5) and the Act's extension has been reserved in every house more seats for women (Mhatre 2009). It was a first attempt to include women in assemblies. The 156 seats in the Council of State included six seats set aside for women, and comprised an electoral college on these male and female representatives on provincial level. However, these designated seats were few in number less than 4% of the total and they did not include all provinces (Afzal 1999; Everett 1979).

The 1956 adoption of Pakistan's first Constitution included a provision reserving 3% of seats for women (for a period of ten years) under a direct election system founded on the idea of women's suffrage. There are now allocated seats for women in addition to the current ones. Begum (2002) and Afzal (1999) said that two additional seats in the upper house and fourteen additional seats in the lower house were set aside for women with the current membership of fifty.

Later, the 1962 new constitution superseded the previous one, which had been abrogated by General Ayub's military regime. The new constitution substituted indirect election for direct election and limited the number of women's reserved seats to six. But in 1967, when the number of general seats increased, the number of reserved seats was raised to eight (Begum 2000; Afzal 1999). General Yahiya Khan announced the Legal Framework Order later in 1970, allocating 13 of the 313 National Assembly seats to women. The reserved seats were allotted to the provinces based on their respective share of the national population.

The All-Pakistan Women's Association (APWA) advocated 10% reserved seats for women in the national and provincial assemblies for a period of ten years during the process of drafting the 1955 constitution (Shaheed, Zia and Warraich 2009; Afzal 1999). In 1972, Zulfikur Ali Bhutto and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) established a new constitution and a government in Pakistan. The 1973 Constitution kept the indirect election method in place while allocating 10 seats (5% of the total seats) for women in the National Assembly for a term of 10 years or two general elections. The 200 seats were

increased by 10 allocated seats for women (Jabeen and Jadon 2010; Bari 2009; Afzal 1999; Mumtaz 1998).

Pakistani politics was complicated and tense due to the shifts in the political landscape and General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq's declaration of martial law in July 1977 (Basu 2005; UNDP 2005). Zia suspended the Constitution and outlawed all political parties. He initiated Pakistan's Islamization process by forging an alliance with the extremist religious organization Jamat-e-Islami (JI) (Basu 2005; UNDP 2005). Perhaps ironically, he doubled the number of women's reserved seats in the National Assembly in 1984 despite the Ansari Commission's recommendations to limit women's participation. He also inducted 20 women into the Majlis-e-Shoora, a nominated federal assembly that replaces elected assemblies.³¹ As a result, 20 women were indirectly elected to the 1985 and 1988 parliaments through indirect elections for reserved seats (Bari 2009; Bilal 2006).

In 1988, a national election was conducted with the same reserved seats following Zia's passing. Under Benazir Bhutto's leadership, the PPP gained a slim majority and became the government. In 1988, the time-bound reserved seat provision also expired, and there was no longer a provision for reserved seats for women. The lack of designated seats in Pakistan caused the proportion of female lawmakers to fall to less than 1% in 1990. Between 1990 and 1997, three governments were established under the PPP and PML-N, but none were able to finish out their full five-year terms or bring back the reserved seat system. The President removed the parliaments, and thereafter the armed forces assumed control of the state. Because to the elected administrations' brief terms in office, a lack of interest, and a lack of consensus, the subject of women's reserved seats remained unresolved. (Kazi 2011; UNDP 2005; Zia and Bari 1999). From the perspective of women's representation in the assemblies, the years 1990–1999 were therefore referred to be "barren" (Mumtaz 2005, p. 15).

With the passage of the Legal Framework Order (LFO) in 2002, Musharraf restored the reserved seats for women following his accession to the state in 1999. In an expanded 342-member National Assembly, the number of seats was increased to 60 (17.5%) (Bilal 2006; Reyes 2002). Women were elected to these reserved seats in the national parliament based on the proportional representation system that divided the seats among the parties. Musharraf was able to legitimize the democracy process both domestically and internationally by granting reserved seats to women. It is important to note that the LFO 2002 significantly expanded the presidential powers and the number of seats allotted in national and local legislatures for women, ulema, and technocrats. Furthermore, in light of the mounting threat posed by the Taliban movement, this military leader exploited reserved seats as a political tactic to draw a wedge between his administration and political opponents and win over women to his military-backed political party (Khan 2007).

To improve political representation of women, the most important is the electoral law (UN, 2005, 12). "The electoral system directly effects female legislative representation because it shapes the recruitment strategies of party gatekeepers at the nomination phase" (Matland and Montgomery, 2001, 31-2). Electoral system is an intermediary variable between the political parties and the legislative representation of women (Farrell, 2001, 167). "A number of electoral processes must be considered. This paper will discuss two major electoral systems, i.e., PR and Majoritarian. Within Europe, Simple majority voting is practiced in UK only. While in 1889, PR first time was used in Belgium. It needed Party list voting (closed/open or preferential).

Each electoral system may pose significant challenges for women but if properly managed then may provide and facilitate women's involvement (UN, 2000, 11). But neither electoral system is gendered neutral nor does electoral quota which translates seats on the basis of votes a party bags (Norris, 2016, 201). Therefore, electoral systems affect number of elected women to office. Regardless of which electoral system is chosen, it will have a number of different implications. Here three things are important to be noticed i.e., constituency/district magnitude (SMDs and MMDs) and party Magnitude (big or small party), the formula (Majoritarian, PR or mixed) and the ballot structure (vote to party or personality, STV, Preferential) etc. (Larserud and Taphorn, 2007, 3 and Menocal, N.D, 3, Norris, 2016, 204). Ballot system are of two types i.e., party centered (PR list) and candidate-centered (FPTP). In party-centered ballot system quota is easily implemented as candidate's position is determined in list. In candidate-centered system use FPTP with open-list PR system if that constituency is in favor of women (Tremblay, 2007, 10-11).

Before going into the detail of the best possible electoral formula of inclusive female representation in politics in Pakistan, a brief discussion on few important electoral systems is required as following: s

Types of Electoral Systems

For the National Assembly, Pakistan uses a hybrid electoral system that combines components of FPTP and PR systems. The majority of seats are decided by the FPTP system, which frequently marginalizes women and other minority groups in favor of bigger, more established parties. On the other hand, because PR systems permit party lists with the possibility of incorporating quota, typically more favorable for women's representation. Studies have indicated that proportions of women in parliament are higher under PR systems (Norris, 2004).

A group of scholars are talking about futility of FPTP for Pakistan. But no proper scholarly debate on this issue is found within Pakistan particularly its ineffectiveness for women representation in Pakistani politics. The 7th national census exposes existence of 11 million women in Pakistan covers 48.76% of population (Neo News, 2017). The Constitution of Pakistan 1973 (Article 25) guarantees rights of all citizens without discrimination and puts no barrier to political process but structural, social and cultural barriers put hurdles on this status of women while the most serious are political hurdles. (ADB, 2007, 18). However, the Constitution of Pakistan 1973 (Article 51) claims direct elections based on Majoritarian (FPTP), while semi-Proportional Representation (PR) system is used to elect women on reserved seats on quota system. The procedure of election is on PR list. The whole province is a district and FPTP is used in Single Member Districts (SMDs) (PILDAT, 2004, 19). Nevertheless, Supreme Court set forth in its verdict in June 2012 that *"FPTP 'violates the principle of majority rules' as 40% of seats in 2008 elections were won through plurality under 50% votes. The Court did not recommend any system but advised the ECP to use run-off/AV or PR Mixed Member districts"* (Batool, 2018, 48).

FPTP is anything but representative electoral system however it is simple and decisive in case of two-party systems and homogeneous population. It is second widely used electoral system after party-list PR system. It is often used in ex-British colonies. However, FPTP once used worldwide is getting obsolete now and most of countries are shifting to other inclusive voting system which can meet the needs of their social and political diversity. The same FPTP under Majoritarian system is a principal cause of Pakistan's underrepresentation of Women in Politics.

FPTP and PR and Mixed Electoral Systems

It has been noticed and discussed previously that in Pakistan female candidates are included in politics through PR party system rather than voting systems under Majoritarian model. Since 1980s, various studies also endorse this claim not only in established democracies but also across developing countries as well (See Norris, 2016, 201, Norris 1985, Matland 1998, Kenworthy and Malami 1999, UN, 2000, 24).

Around the globe the data demonstrates that PR system elects' women roughly twice as (19.6%) as to the majority system (10.5%) and a combined/mixed system falls in between these both (see table 2). The adoption of PR system in Europe brought the number of women exceeding 20% in political representation and mixed system of weak PR is a cause of low level of women political presentation, for instance in Italy, Greece, UK, and France (EU Parliament, N.D).

It is proven that Majoritarian system cannot introduce women presentation in politics on considerable ground. As shown in the table that the European countries which adopted Majoritarian system have 10% or even less ratio of women in any legislative bodies. Ironically, approximately 90% of countries have chosen majority system ended with very low number of women in policy and decision making. Now it is beyond any doubt that the electoral malpractice under the Majoritarian system where a political party heavily relies to form a government on every single candidate it elects (EU Parliament, N. D). The winner-take-all character of the FPTP system, which is widely used in Pakistan, disadvantages women by default and benefits established parties with a male majority. Research shows that women perform better in PR systems, where gender quotas can be included in party lists to increase the likelihood that women will be elected. (Norris, 2004) The efficacy of reserved seats in Pakistan is restricted by the mixed electoral system's inadequate resolution of these systemic hindrances.

The Gender Quota

In an effort to introduce more women in practical politics, Pakistan has reallocated women with more reserved seats in both houses and also on provincial level. Although these quotas have guaranteed a minimum degree of representation. Furthermore, quota-assisted women are occasionally perceived as less respectable or capable, which feeds into gender stereotypes and lessens their political influence (Dahlerup, 2006). Although the women participation has substantially increased in design and policy making because of reserved seats. According to Krook (2009), designated seats might result in tokenism, in which women are included more for show than as a true source of empowerment. Furthermore, women with reserved seats frequently lack the resources and political power needed to have a meaningful impact on legislation.

Quota System in Majoritarian Model

In Majoritarian system, quota (reserved seats) is used as a tool to improve women representation. But usually, discrimination is practiced as compared to directly elected portion of women, gender discrimination has been noted against them on allocation of reserved seats. This is a problem area because the system introduces provisional special procedures to attain gender equilibrium in parliament, but it does not assist the actual administrative authorization and democratic sharing of women (PILDAT, 2004, 21). Female deputies are considered as only 'fillers' for data devoid of actual political and

economic power. This system delivers only symbolic representation to women. Therefore, women cannot contribute in policy-making independently because they are obliged to the political parties for their nomination as compared to constituency based elected candidates who exercise their political weight. The absence of real political input of women, patriarchal culture is prevailing in political parties. Furthermore, elites of political parties are strengthening the web of dynastic politics by treating these reserved seats as fiefdom. These women legislators look towards the male politicians for policy direction. However, this practice can be improved with time as it is not seen in those countries around the globe which has a longer history to exercise PR voting system.

In many cases, quota system may be effective and helpful for viable female participation in legislatures. But on reserved seats women cannot legislate independently as they do not represent any real constituency. This is a reason that in many developed countries i.e, France and Italy have put an end to quota system because it is against prime right of women to have equal access to be elected for public offices (PILDAT, 2004, 22).

However, Pakistan is not an exceptional case as quota system has been adopted by 128 countries. But despite reserved seats, Pakistan has 20% in National Assembly and 18.3% in upper House. In fact, women representation is not proportional to their numerical strength and women quota is not enough to increase women representation in Pakistan (Roofi, 2016, 261).

District Magnitude: SMDs vs MMDs

District Magnitude is a very important factor to judge the performance and working pattern of an electoral system. Women are likely to be candidates among others if MMDs are set forth for elections. But if it is a SMDs then most probably political parties will nominate a male candidate. The party magnitude also has the same importance as bigger parties can have more chance for nomination of female candidates and party magnitude is directly affected by the district magnitude (Tremblay, 2007, 10). Using of 'list PR with large districts' is most favorable condition for the election of women but SMDs will provide impediments for women nomination and election as well. Here PR system has the advantage to use MMDs.

The electoral system using SMDs makes quota system more difficult to be implemented (FPTP + small districts) which makes low party magnitude (Larserud and Taphorn, 2007, 15). This is another problem for proper women representation in parliament. It is important that PR system, the large MMD is becoming one of a big factors for women victory in election (EU Parliament, N.D).

Another aspect of PR system is that in case of SMDs, PR party list is more effective to bring more number of women i.e., in Italy and Germany. (EU Parliament, N.D). Moreover, women in MMDs were likely elected more than through the SMDs (8.8% in SMDs and 18.5% in MMDs). SMDs and MMDs are two important points to be discussed the data also demonstrates same that even in case of changing system from SMDs to MMDs also got higher number of women elected for parliament i.e., New Zealand which changed its electoral system in 1993. In 1990 it got 16.5% and immediate after change in electoral system in 1993 got 21.2% and in 1999, it jumped to 29.5% with alleviated proportion (See Norris, 2016, 202, HRC 2004,).

Role of Political Parties in Pakistan

Performance of electoral system varies in features and structures and factors i.e., vote and seat proportionality, can foster vote turnover and in return improve elected women candidates on general seats. Here political parties can play a vital role as they can voluntarily assign them positions on party list where female candidates are generally enlisted at the end (Tremblay, 2007, 536-37). But Pakistan like countries have preferential system which is a potential barrier to female political presentation therefore role of political parties is vital here to generate a closed party list (European Parliament, n.d). Electoral law in PR system requires every political party to allocate candidacy for election to a specific number of female members on party list. Political parties use their internal quota for women in legislative candidates. But women quota ends-up being a way to appease and ultimately sideline women or to privilege the female relatives/friends. Being elected does not mean being given substantive decision-making power, especially women elected on reserved seats. They are marginalized from real decision-making responsibilities (Rubbani, A & Alkaf, SNH, 2025)

Political parties nominate women candidates from those constituencies from where they usually not win just to fill the quota and 25% of parties even did not nominate a single female candidate. While government and constitution force at least 5% female nomination while 60 reserved seats are filled with favorite/relative or friends (Batoool, 2019). The majoritarian system is seen to be unfair to women because with such an electoral practice the success of the party heavily depends on the single candidates it selects. But only PR system is not enough but the position in party list also matters where women candidate is placed.

Table 2
Women in the decision-making bodies of major political parties in Pakistan

Political Party Name	Percent of women membership
Pakistan People's Party (PPP)	5.4
Pakistan Muslim League (PML N)	5
Pakistan Tehriki Insaf (PTI)	12.5
Awami National Party (ANP)	11.1
Muttihida Qaumi Movement (MQM)	8.3
Jamat- e-Islami (JI)	0
Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP)	0
Balochistan Awami Party (BAP)	0
Awami Workers Party (AWP)	4

Source: General information tabulated by author

Dynamics of Political Parties

The main political parties in Pakistan have a centrist, rightist, or center-right ideological stance; very few have a center-left one. This suggests that gender equality rules are probably nonexistent in the majority of party structures and activities. Although these parties have accrued a sizable portion of legislative seats over time, none of them actually support gender equality. Furthermore, most parties lack democratic values and procedures and are dynastic in nature. These parties continue to be predominately male in terms of number, positions, and presence, and their internal procedures are inadequately defined with rules that are largely disregarded (DAW 2005). These entrenched parties are unlikely to embrace equality measures, take chances with women, or challenge the existing quo. To guarantee and promote women's participation in elections, none of the parties have implemented any proactive measures (such as training, financing, and candidate encouragement) or soft quotas (party quotas) (Mahtab 2014; Majumdar 2012). Political parties are very important for choosing candidates and

providing campaign support. Party patriarchal attitudes frequently prevent women from running for public office. As compared to male legislators, women legislators are given low assistance or assigned towards less winnable districts. The majority of party leaders are men, and women in politics frequently encounter considerable hurdles to rising in the party hierarchy (Hughes, 2011). Due to institutionalized prejudice within political parties, women are unable to obtain the exposure and expertise needed to effectively campaign in general elections. The internal dynamics within parties have a substantial effect on women's chances of winning political office. Women's political careers are substantially hampered by internal party politics.

Socio-Cultural Divides

The strategic decisions taken by the male political actors in this region of South Asian have determined the presentation of women in political institutions. Women were pushed back into the house as soon as the battle ended, although being permitted to participate in various movements during crucial and transitional times (Mumtaz and Shaheed 1987). Furthermore, when women are assigned headship and power, it is usually under the influence of a male relative, especially when there are no male heirs (Jahan 1987, page 850). While women are permitted to participate in politics, they are excluded from the center of power politics and integrated into the parties in a way that preserves their patriarchal structure (Kazi 2011; Samarasinghe 2000). Their political underrepresentation is further compounded by socio-cultural factors in Pakistan, such as strongly ingrained patriarchal standards, religious conservatism, and restricted educational possibilities for women. These elements affect both the demand for and supply of female candidates for political office. Due to prevalent gender biases, voters may be less likely to support female politicians, and women sometimes encounter pushback from family and community members when pursuing political careers. Deeply ingrained patriarchal beliefs deter women from entering politics and prejudice voters against female politicians (Jalalzai and Krook, 2010). Socio-cultural norms have a significant impact on voter preferences as well as the availability of female candidates. These conventions contribute to the cycle of underrepresentation by discouraging women from running for office and making those who do confront difficult electoral setting. In Pakistan's political system, equal representation for women is essential for a number of reasons:

Increased Involvement in Democracy

Making sure that women's voices are heard in politics is ensured by proportional representation. This approach promotes a more representative and inclusive democracy by giving women a voice in decision-making, addressing challenges unique to women, and fostering a more equitable political discourse. (Naqvi, 2021).

Taking Gender Inequality Seriously

Women have always been underrepresented in Pakistani politics. A specific number of seats are reserved for women under proportional representation, which helps close the gender gap. This is important in a nation where social and cultural conventions frequently prevent women from actively participating in politics (Bari, 2010).

Encouraging Justice for All

A step toward social fairness is ensuring that women are represented proportionately. It gives women from all walks of life—including those from

underrepresented communities – the ability to have a participation in the policy-making process, supporting policies that serve a wider range of demographic needs (Zia, 2009).

Better Policy Results

Women's distinct viewpoints and life experiences in the political sphere contribute to more inclusive and thorough policy decisions. Research indicates that the involvement of women in politics can result in more efficacious policies concerning social welfare, health, and education (Naz, 2015).

Enhancing Stability in Politics

Political stability may increase with a more inclusive political structure. According to Mumtaz (2018), there is less political discontent when women are fairly represented because it strengthens the validity of governance and encourages inclusiveness among various societal groups. The following justifies the necessity of reengineering of voting method to bring more effective women participation in politics:

Election-related Reforms

Changes like the adoption of proportional representation can facilitate women's advancement and guarantee a more equitable distribution of seats. It has been demonstrated that in comparison of PR system the majoritarian model is less favorable to women's representation (Krook, 2009).

Support for Dogmatic Politics

Women's presentation in politics can be greatly impacted by boosting more female nominations by the political parties. Party policy is important in to nominate female candidates for contesting general seats. They can increase the odds of women being elected by implementing internal quotas or policies that encourage female candidates (Bari, 2016).

Developing Capabilities and Training

Giving women access to training and capacity-building initiatives can provide them the know-how and abilities they need to engage in politics successfully. These initiatives can assist women in overcoming issues like insufficient political knowledge and experience (Naz, 2018).

Socio-Cultural Changes

It's also critical to address the socio-cultural complications that make women away from participating in politics. Measures to advance gender equality and dismantle prevailing conventions to limitize women's presentation in politics is example of electoral reengineering (Shami, 2017)

Election Laws and Regulations

Women's political engagement can be encouraged by changing election laws and policies to make them more gender-insensitive. This include steps to guarantee women's safety during elections, parity in media representation, and accessibility to funding for political campaigns (Raza, 2013).

Conclusion

However, electoral system and its impact on women representation has a broad range of available literature but Pakistan needs adoption of party-list PR system for a proper and vigilant women representation which is very unlikely topic to be discussed in Pakistani way of politics. The ratio of women parliamentarians elected through PR system is greater in number in comparison of voting under plurality system. PR does enhance number of women representation in more better way because it eliminates the hindrance paved in plurality voting system to include the most voted candidate (Norris, 2016). PR supports small parties; it also declines the maneuvering of constituencies known as 'gerrymandering' when parties rule in different regions of a country (Grofman, 2016, 572).

Nevertheless, choice and application of voting methods is a matter of politics and not technical (Menocal, N.D, 15). It should not be observed as a remedy of all problems but their impact on political and social sphere of life also cannot be neglected (Horowitz, 2003, 22). One should suppose any electoral system as 'perfect' but trade-offs are expected. The electoral rules and state structure should be in a harmony within a constitutional arrangement but can produce both merits and demerits together (Kunicova & Ackerman. 2005).

In case of political female representation in Pakistan, a strategic framework is needed to overcome structural and cultural barriers to gender balance in political representation.

Recommendations

The above detailed study of the electoral system currently practiced in Pakistan, a few recommendations can be drawn out to enhance a substantive female participation in decision making forums of the state, as following:

Review gender quota system on party level: Gender quota system has to be reviewed in general assembly in particular and on political party level in general. In assemblies, women are taken on reserved seats according to the proportion of the general seats which their respective political party wins and a very few seats in general assembly are filled by women through general election. Therefore more women are needed to be elected on general seats for empowering them in legislative process. Moreover, legally, political parties are bound to give 33% of tickets to female candidates in general election. This law should be implemented in true letter and spirit. The compliance can be ensured through various incentives i.e. public funding and can be figured out by reducing it or imposing financial penalties.

Reform and reconsider electoral system based on simple majority rule system: The current pseudo combination of majority vote system with -PR system should be replaced with PR system (STV) or mixed PR vote system successfully enhancing female political participation globally. Moreover, avoiding Gerrymandering can help further to redistricting area with more female voters and campaigners.

Reform the scheme of Reserved Seats for women in assembly: Only 17% (60) seats in general assembly is reserved for women not enough to take part in legislation independently. This system needs either to be extended to at least 25-30% of the total

seats or should be altered with direct election on all levels, i.e. local, provincial and national. This will bring more accountability and transparency.

Institutional Level Reforms: The Election Commission of Pakistan is the icon of engineering and implementation of the entire electoral policy. Hence the role of ECP is important in monitoring the implementation of gender based laws in practice. For instance, the Election Act, 2017 as discussed in detail in previous pages is required to implement strictly to eliminate gender parity.

Enhance civic sense for encouraging female participation nationwide: In civilized societies, voting right is a powerful tool in the hands of public to bring change in society and on state level in real sense. But in third world countries, like Pakistan it is not given its due respect. The major reason is public unawareness regarding their duty to perform which is considered their right as well.

Use of social media for general awareness: Media in any form can play a vital role in spreading general awareness regarding national issues and performance of political parties. Most of the population has access now to media and particularly social media platforms but the condition is positive use of these forums which is getting narrower day by day.

Empowering females through capacity-building: It is cry of the hour to arrange mentorship and training programs for women on all levels for their capacity-building. For this purpose, youth of the nation should be target of these programs based on funding, scholarships and other women empowerment initiatives.

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