

Factors Influencing Women Political Participation: A Case Study of Chakdara Lower Dir, KP

Umara Bibi¹, Dr Hina Rehman², Naila BiBi³, Muhammad Basir Khalid⁴, Asad Ullah⁵

¹ BS (Split-Program) Political Science, University of Malakand, Chakdara Lower Dir KP, Pakistan

² Assistant Professor in Pakistan Studies, Government Girls Degree College Timergara Lower Dir.

³ MA Political Science, (2021-23), University of Malakand Chakdara Lower Dir.

⁴ MA International Relations, (2021-23), University of Malakand, Chakdara Lower Dir.

⁵ Lecturer of International Relations, Al-Qadir University Project Trust, Jehlum.

Corresponding Author. Email: kasad1657@gmail.com.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70670/sra.v3i3.1006>

Abstract

Women's participation in politics is crucial for a balanced and inclusive democracy. However, in Pakistan, gender disparities remain a significant challenge, particularly in areas such as education, healthcare, literacy, and political representation. Despite making up almost half of the population, women continue to face obstacles that limit their role in political decision-making. In regions like Chakdara, cultural norms, institutional restrictions, and limited political awareness further hinder women's involvement in governance. Their participation is essential for addressing key social issues, yet various socio-cultural constraints prevent them from engaging fully. Although Pakistan has seen progress in women's political engagement over recent years, traditional barriers, lack of education, and societal attitudes still pose significant challenges. This research aims to investigate the social, structural and cultural elements that influence women's political participation in Chakdara, Lower Dir. The study identifies key obstacles that enabled the researchers to provide insights and recommendations that can help and improve women's representation in the political processes.

Key Words: Election Commission, Women Representation, Politics, Lower Dir, Rights

Introduction

Political participation refers to various voluntary activities undertaken by individuals to influence public policy or decision-making. This can be done directly or by affecting the selection of policymakers. While often linked with voting in elections, political participation also includes actions such as campaigning, donating to candidates or causes, engaging with public officials, signing petitions, protesting, and collaborating with others on political or social issues. (Longley, R. 2021, September 20). Women's political participation refers to their involvement in formal political structures and decision-making processes, where societal resources are allocated and policies are formulated. Despite their significant contribution to social and economic development, women remain underrepresented in political institutions worldwide. Their participation is essential for achieving gender equality and ensuring inclusive governance. (Bari, F. 2005) In pre-Islamic Arabia, women held a very low status and were excluded from public and political life. They were treated as property, denied inheritance, and often forced into marriages without consent. Cultural norms limited their role to domestic duties, while female infanticide was disturbingly common. Women had no right to divorce or participate in decision-making. The tribal system viewed them as liabilities, unfit for leadership or public influence. Their voice in society was almost nonexistent until reforms

introduced by Islam. (Siddique, H. M.). Women political participation from an Islamic perspective, it is important to understand it in light of historical example. Khadija bint Khuwaylid (RA) stands as a remarkable example of women's leadership and influence in Islamic history. As a prosperous businesswoman in Mecca, she demonstrated financial independence, which is a crucial factor in women's empowerment and participation in public affairs. Her unwavering support for Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) played a vital role in the early development of Islam, showcasing the significance of women's contributions to social and political change. Respected for her wisdom and strong decision-making abilities, she actively influenced key matters in her community. By managing a thriving trade network and making independent choices, she challenged societal norms, proving that Islam encourages women's active participation in leadership. Her legacy remains relevant today, particularly in Pakistan, where women continue to strive for greater political representation. Khadija (RA)'s life serves as a guiding example for empowering women in governance, leadership, and societal progress. (Aminudin,R 2023). Women played a significant role in statecraft and participated in the political affairs of the empire during the Middle Ages, especially during the Mughal and Delhi Sultanates As the first and only female monarch of the Delhi Sultanate, Razia Sultan bravely and wisely led the empire in defiance of patriarchal conventions (Chaudhury, 2003). Similarly, in the Mughal Empire, empresses like Nur Jahan, the wife of Emperor Jahangir, wielded significant political power, often acting as de facto rulers in certain periods. Nur Jahan's ability to influence imperial policy, control the imperial court, and act as an advisor to her husband showcases the active political role women played behind the throne (Sharma, 2007). Additionally, Mumtaz Mahal, though not directly involved in governance, had a profound impact on Mughal culture and politics through her relationship with Emperor Shah Jahan, influencing royal decisions. These women from the Mughmal and Sultanate periods show that women were able to exert authority and affect political results even in civilizations that were very patriarchal. This helped pave the way for women's changing political positions in subsequent ages (Mujtaba, 1998).

According to the Ministry for Culture and Heritage (n.d) In 1893, New Zealand became the first self-governing country to grant women the right to vote in national elections. This historic achievement, led by suffragist Kate Sheppard, marked the beginning of women's political participation and inspired global suffrage movements. The women's rights movement began in the mid-19th century with the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention, advocating gender equality and women's suffrage. Early figures like Victoria Woodhull and Jeannette Rankin paved the way for women in politics. The ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920 granted women the right to vote, encouraging political participation. Women like Soledad Chacon and Cora Belle Reynolds Anderson achieved early political milestones. In recent years, leaders like Hillary Clinton and Kamala Harris have broken major barriers. Despite progress, women still face challenges in achieving full representation due to societal and political biases. (McNamara,M. 2023). Women have been actively involved in parliamentary politics since August 14, 1947, when Pakistan gained its independence. They were still underrepresented in both the first and second Constituent Assemblies, nevertheless. Later, Pakistan's Constitution was amended to allow for more parliamentary participation. Furthermore, over time, progressive legislation has helped to increase the number of women in executive and legislative roles. The substantial involvement of women in Pakistan's legislative institutions has been made possible in large part by successive governments and parliamentary representatives. In order to do this, the government has incorporated a number of clauses into Pakistan's Constitution and legal system, actively promoting women's political engagement. For instance, the 1956 Constitution of Pakistan allocated 10 seats for women in the undemocratic parliament, with five seats each designated for East and West Pakistan. Under the 1962 Constitution, the National Assembly reserved six seats for women, equally divided between East and West Pakistan. The 1973 Constitution initially reserved 10 seats for women in the National Assembly for a period of 10 years or until the completion of three

general elections. In 1985, the number of reserved seats was increased to 20, and later, during General Pervez Musharraf's tenure in 2002, the number of women's reserved seats was further expanded to 60. This increase in representation aimed to empower women in politics, under the 2017 Election Act many regions particularly in KPK, continued to face cultural and social barriers that limited women's political participation. In KPK, especially in Lower Dir, it is generally considered inappropriate for women to step outside their homes, in Pashtun society. Working alongside men and participating in public activities (political) are seen as challenges that are not as easy to overcome as they may seem. In District Dir Lower, traditional customs have long restricted women from casting their votes in elections. Dir Lower and there women have historically been excluded from the electoral process under the pretext of local traditions or decisions made by tribal councils (Jirgas). It is not only religious groups that have played a role in this restriction; even major political parties have remained silent on the issue. In some cases, these parties have even agreed to local agreements that prevent women from freely exercising their right to vote. In the 2015 local government elections in Dir, women participated in the electoral process for the first time in areas where they had previously been denied the right to vote. However, due to the efforts of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working for women's rights, the voter turnout among women in these regions has gradually increased. Women's political participation in Chakdara faces numerous social, cultural, economic, political, and religious challenges that hinder their empowerment. (Noor, S & Yaseen ,Z.2023)

The Elections Act, 2017 marked a significant development in promoting women's political participation in Pakistan. One of its key provisions required political parties to nominate at least 5% women candidates on general seats, encouraging their inclusion in mainstream politics beyond reserved quotas. Furthermore, the Act authorized the Election Commission of Pakistan to nullify election results in constituencies where women's voter turnout was less than 10%, a move aimed at combating gender-based electoral suppression. It also introduced the collection of gender-disaggregated voter data, helping to identify and address gaps in women's registration and participation. While the legislation represented a progressive shift, practical challenges such as limited party support, cultural resistance, and symbolic candidacies still restrict the full realization of women's political rights (Government of Pakistan, 2017).

Literature REVIEW

The involvement of women in politics is essential for democratic governance and sustainable development. However, in Pakistan, multiple social, cultural, economic, and institutional challenges limit their political participation. Despite legal and policy measures aimed at enhancing female representation, the engagement in politics remains low, particularly in rural regions like Chakdara. While several studies have examined the barriers to women's political involvement, there is still a need for a deeper understanding of the specific local factors that influence their participation. This literature review explores existing research on women's political engagement, emphasizing both global and Pakistan-specific contexts. It examines key aspects such as societal restrictions, financial limitations, institutional challenges, and the effectiveness of policy measures. By analyzing previous studies, this section will highlight the progress made, ongoing challenges, and research gaps that require further investigation. The insights gained from this review will provide a theoretical framework for this study and offer a better understanding of the factors shaping women's political participation in Chakdara. Women's low political participation in Pakistan is shaped by multiple challenges, including political, religious, social, and economic constraints. The dominance of men in political parties limits women's involvement in decision-making processes, often reducing their role to symbolic representation. Additionally, cultural and religious interpretations sometimes discourage female participation, reinforcing the perception that politics is not a suitable domain for women. Economic dependency further hinders their engagement, as financial limitations and restricted access to resources make it difficult for women to compete in

elections or pursue political careers. Overcoming these barriers requires structural reforms, awareness initiatives, and policies that actively support gender-inclusive political representation, (Begum, A 2023). Women's political participation in Pakistan is shaped by various social, economic, and cultural factors that either facilitate or hinder their involvement in governance. Despite constitutional provisions ensuring gender equality, women continue to face significant barriers, including gender discrimination, societal norms, financial constraints, and security concerns. Traditional beliefs and patriarchal structures often discourage women from pursuing leadership roles, while limited financial resources and political violence further restrict their participation. Additionally, media representation tends to reinforce stereotypes rather than promote women's leadership. However, progress has been made through reserved seats in Parliament and local governments, along with increasing awareness of women's rights. To achieve true political equality, Pakistan must implement comprehensive reforms, provide financial and security support, and promote positive media portrayals of women in politics. Encouraging greater female participation will contribute to a more inclusive and democratic society. (Ahmed, S. 2023)

Chakdara, located in the Lower Dir district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, is a significant town known for its deep-rooted tribal and cultural traditions, which heavily influence women's political participation. Like many rural areas in Pakistan, women in Chakdara face numerous challenges in engaging politically, with social and cultural norms playing a pivotal role in restricting their involvement. Key barriers include a lack of education, male dominance, and tribal and religious norms that often limit women's access to political spaces (Bibi, R., Ahmad, N., & Shah, L. 2020). Despite many women gaining positions through reserved seats having limited political backgrounds—often selected due to their educational qualifications and affiliations with influential political families—the creation of the Women's Parliamentary Caucus (WPC) in 2008 was a pivotal moment. It provided a platform that amplified women's concerns in the legislature and fostered unity among female politicians across party lines. The 2013 general elections marked a historic milestone, as it was the first time in Pakistan's history that a civilian government completed its term and handed over power to another civilian government without military interference. Over 15 million women took part as both voters and candidates. The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) emerged as the dominant political force. Notably, 419 women contested general seats in 2013 compared to 192 in 2008, reflecting a 130% increase. However, despite the increase in female contestants, the number of women who actually won National Assembly seats declined from 16 in 2008 to only 6 in 2013 (Aurat Foundation, 2013), with the majority of winners representing PML-N. These elections also witnessed the rise of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), which became the leading party in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and the second-largest in Punjab. Still, women secured only 3.4% of the general seats, and no woman won a seat from KPK. In the 2018 general elections, 89 women entered parliament, including 69 in the National Assembly and 20 in the Senate. Although the number of women winning general seats decreased compared to 2008 and 2013, the total number of women contesting elections rose. Out of 464 female candidates, 289 were nominated by political parties and 175 contested independently. Additionally, five transgender individuals also participated. Among the 157 non-Muslim candidates fielded by various parties, only seven were women. Most female candidates contesting general seats in 2018 were given tickets for constituencies where their chances of winning were low, and political parties provided minimal support or training. Furthermore, six political parties did not meet the mandatory requirement of allocating 5% of their tickets to women. In many cases, women candidates' photographs were absent from election campaigns, resulting in their visibility and engagement being minimal—leaving most of them politically “silent and unseen.” (Zafar, F., & Sami, A. 2021) In the Pukhtun-dominated areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, women's involvement in political processes is significantly hindered by a deeply rooted feudal structure and prevailing male dominance. In many regions, women are denied the fundamental right to vote. This issue is particularly prominent in districts such as

Swat, and Dir, where social pressures and cultural traditions create substantial barriers to female political engagement. Patriarchy is deeply embedded in the social fabric of the region, especially in areas like the Malakand division, where women are often restricted to domestic roles and discouraged from participating in public life. In many instances, women are either prevented or discouraged from casting their votes. Additionally, religious justifications are frequently used to reinforce these restrictions. Women who attempt to engage in political activities, whether by running for office or voting, may face social ostracism, including public shaming by religious figures. Moreover, traditional feudal attitudes further marginalize women. The Pukhtun phrase "Zar, Zan, Zameen" (Wealth, Women, and Land) reflects the societal mindset where women are viewed as possessions, reinforcing male authority and contributing to systemic gender inequality. Due to these cultural and societal pressures, women are discouraged from stepping out of their homes, fearing criticism or social backlash. Since political participation is inherently a public act, these restrictions make it almost impossible for women to be active in political life. Conservative customs, rigid traditions, and male-centric social norms collectively discourage women from entering decision-making roles. Any attempt by a woman to break these boundaries is often seen as damaging to the family's honor. Consequently, women continue to be confined to private spaces, with public and political spheres remaining largely inaccessible. The customary code of Pukhtunwali further reinforces these limitations, strongly opposing female participation in politics across Pukhtun society. (Ullah, R. 2018)

In Pakistan, multiple social, cultural, economic, and religious barriers continue to limit women's involvement in politics. Gender-based discrimination is still a persistent issue, curbing women's ability to contribute meaningfully to political life. The prevailing societal structure, which often favors men, discourages women's political roles. Women in the country face constraints rooted in cultural, spiritual, racial, ideological, and financial systems that collectively hinder their participation. Despite some progress, Pakistan continues to exhibit a stark gender gap in various sectors such as education, healthcare, and financial services. The patriarchal mindset embedded in the society amplifies this divide. Women across Pakistan are striving for equal opportunities, but practices like honor killings and sexual violence still present a grim reality. Furthermore, women in rural communities face even greater limitations, often being excluded from political activities altogether. Only a limited number of women, particularly those with family backgrounds in politics, are able to secure positions in the national or provincial legislatures. This restricted access further reflects the systemic barriers that prevent women from active political representation. In many Pakistani households, women have minimal engagement in political decisions, which are mostly controlled by male members. Key contributors to this include failures in law enforcement and judicial processes, along with economic challenges that obstruct women's political empowerment. Deep-rooted socio-cultural norms and financial dependence on male family members further limit women's political roles. Low female literacy rates also act as a major obstacle in their political participation. Structural issues like patriarchy and restricted mobility remain unresolved, which discourages comprehensive female involvement in politics. Though the 5% quota for women in political parties exists, it is often treated as a formality. Women are frequently nominated in losing constituencies without genuine support or resources. While urban women may have more educational and social opportunities, the overall social status difference between urban and rural women is not significant. Traditional practices like gender bias, feudalism, domestic abuse, and cultural norms suppress women's political engagement. Although various organizations advocate for women's rights, their efforts are only partially effective in promoting true equality. (Allauddin, Alizai, & Rind, 2020). Women's political participation in conservative regions like Chakdara, part of Dir Lower, remains significantly limited due to a mix of socio-cultural, religious, and institutional barriers. According to the study by Shah and Khan (2023), traditional patriarchal norms and low levels of female education and awareness contribute to the lack of women's representation in local and national

politics. Additionally, the control of male family members over women's mobility and decision-making further restricts their ability to engage in political processes. The findings highlight that even though legal frameworks exist to support women's inclusion, actual participation remains symbolic in many cases, reflecting deeper systemic inequalities. (Shah,R & Khan, A 2023)

Women in Lower Dir face significantly more rigid and conservative social norms compared to other regions of Pakistan. Cultural traditions in the area severely restrict their mobility, thereby limiting their ability to participate in political processes, including voting and contesting elections. Moreover, the prevailing patriarchal environment curtails their access to education and hinders their visibility in political spheres, further marginalizing their role in governance and public decision-making (Naz, 2011). Although the implementation of quotas has increased women's numerical representation, their actual political participation remains limited due to various barriers. Women encounter significant socio-cultural, religious, and educational challenges. Even after being elected, they often do not receive adequate institutional support and are frequently discouraged from performing their roles. Additionally, the absence of a conducive working environment and the lack of a clearly defined role further hinder their effective participation (Islam & Islam, 2012) Women's political participation is widely regarded as a critical indicator of democratic governance and gender equality. Globally, despite progress in women's rights, women's representation in political institutions remains disproportionately low, especially in developing countries. Cultural and social barriers are among the most significant factors hindering women's political participation. Patriarchal norms, gender stereotypes, and restrictions on women's mobility contribute to their political marginalization (Krook, 2010). In particularly in rural areas like Chakdara, women face social taboos, lack of education, and male-dominated decision-making structures, which inhibit their political engagement. Akhlaq Ahmad and Dr. Haq Nawaz Anwar (2017) examined the role of femininity in shaping women's political representation and involvement in Pakistan, tracing developments from independence up to the 2013 general elections. Their study highlights the persistent gender gap in political participation, emphasizing that comparatively few women have been actively engaged in Pakistan's political processes.

Kiran (2013) highlights that when women attempt to participate in politics, they often face significant criticism and opposition from their family members. Many women experience negative reactions and lack of support from their relatives, making it difficult for them to pursue their careers or political aspirations. This is due to the patriarchal nature of Pakistani society, where women are expected to comply with the authority of male figures such as fathers, brothers, sons, or husbands. However, some prominent female leaders have managed to enter politics, either due to their family background or the support they received from their families. Political parties in Pakistan have played a significant role in encouraging women's participation by allocating reserved seats and recognizing the value of women's vote banks. The 2013 elections saw an increase in the number of women securing seats in the Parliament, marking an important step forward. This progress reflects women's growing involvement in the political and state affairs of Pakistan. In Pakistan, women's right to vote is legally protected under the Constitution and international agreements. Despite this, in some areas like PK-95 in Lower Dir, women still face barriers when trying to participate in elections. Before the 2013 general elections, political parties in this region agreed, due to local pressures, that women would not vote. This practice continued during the 2015 bye-elections, where many women were absent from polling stations. Although the Election Commission tried to stop this by canceling the election, the court later overturned their decision. Interviews and surveys from the area show that, while political leaders often denied stopping women from voting, social traditions, tribal customs, and fears of backlash strongly influenced women's inability to vote. Even though many women understand their right to vote and are politically aware, deep-rooted cultural restrictions still prevent them from fully taking part in the political process.(Jamil, M., & Aftab, S.2015, October 15) Family influence plays a crucial role in

determining women's political engagement in rural parts of Pakistan. In many traditional households, decisions related to politics are largely dominated by male elders, who either impose their own choices on women or prevent them from participating altogether. Even when women are educated or politically conscious, the prevailing family norms often suppress their voices. This issue is especially visible in areas like Chakdara, where joint family systems are common and cultural values stress female obedience to male authority (Iqbal & Faheem, 2021). Political awareness campaigns have proven to be an effective tool in increasing women's participation in the electoral process, particularly when they are designed to address local needs. Efforts led by NGOs and university-based programs have shown significant success in motivating young women to engage in voting. These initiatives are especially impactful when delivered in native languages and carried out by female outreach workers, making the message more relatable and culturally acceptable. Such models offer valuable insights for regions like Chakdara, where similar strategies could help mobilize younger women and strengthen their political involvement. (Shah and Gul 2023) Over the past ten years, the performance of female parliamentarians has been studied in detail, revealing that deep-rooted socio-cultural norms and political exclusion significantly hinder women's ability to participate effectively in politics. These factors create substantial obstacles for women, especially in traditional and conservative regions such as Chakdara. The study emphasizes the importance of tackling these social and political barriers to enhance women's engagement and influence in political processes (Rafeeq & Khan, 2024).

Research Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative approach, commonly employed in social sciences for exploring real-life contexts. The study focuses on women's political participation and is particularly suited for qualitative inquiry due to its emphasis on participants' perspectives and lived experiences. The qualitative method allows for in-depth exploration of participants' views in their own words (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). It provides the flexibility to address diverse questions and adjust the research direction when necessary. This approach is beneficial for understanding intricate social dynamics and is supported by the case study strategy to deeply examine the issue of women's political engagement in a specific local context.

Data Analysis

The following data is of those ten respondents which the researchers interviewed during the research.

Respondent 1. Politics is the process through which people, organizations, and groups compete and work together to make decisions that have an impact on a society's trajectory, according to the interview research. Public policy, legislation, governance, and resource allocation are some of the topics it covers. The political process, which includes elections, lobbying, discussions, and debates, attempts to determine and mold a society's governance and resource distribution. Women's rights laws need to be modified, and women's political participation in Pakistan has to be promoted through increased knowledge and education. The distribution of seats for women in the assembly and their heightened representation in political parties have also contributed to their growing political participation.

Respondent 2. The political evolution of a country is greatly aided by educated women, who contribute a variety of perspectives, advocate for equality for everyone, have an impact on policy decisions, and support a more representative and inclusive democracy. Women in Pakistan face a number of barriers to political participation, including as limited representation in political parties, social norms, traditional gender roles, and discriminatory laws. To encourage women's political empowerment, the respondent suggested the following strategies: implementing affirmative action, creating environments that support women in

politics, removing social and cultural barriers, encouraging women to pursue leadership roles and higher education, and empowering women to take part in decision-making at all governmental levels.

Respondent 3. Politics, as defined by the respondent, is the process of governing a country or region, including the creation of laws and policies. It involves persons who are elected to make decisions on behalf of the public; these people are frequently connected to political parties. The respondent underlined how crucial women's participation in politics is to Pakistan's growth and advancement. Awareness, economic security, gender equality, literacy, and social support are some of the elements that favor women's political engagement. The respondent also discussed their own political involvement, emphasizing how they keep informed, form opinions, and participate in decision-making processes that impact their daily lives. They pointed out that the electorate must actively participate in order to choose capable candidates. Given that women comprise about half of the population, their involvement is essential to the advancement of the country. Because educated women are more politically informed, able to influence policy, and able to contribute to political progress, they are more inclined to participate in politics. However, obstacles like cultural norms, reliance on money, discrimination based on gender, low levels of education, and ignorance still prevent women in Pakistan from participating in politics.

Respondent 4. Based on the interview, the respondent defined politics as a calculated endeavor to acquire and use power in the government. Regarding Pakistan, the respondent noted a number of important elements that can improve women's political participation, with political awareness and consciousness being considered the most important. She cited her personal experience participating in the electoral process as a voter and recognized the significance of women's political participation as essential to the advancement of national politics. Women are as essential to the country as men are, and when given the chance, they frequently contribute even more, she said. The answer stressed that no state can genuinely advance without include women's views in political leadership and that educated women significantly influence political outcomes. She did, however, also highlight a number of cultural obstacles that still prevent women from entering the political arena. These include ingrained notions of female inferiority, a conservative and narrow-minded social milieu, and a lack of unity among women. She was an ardent proponent of women's participation in politics at all levels, not just as voters but also as candidates, campaigners, and allies of other women. According to her, women's active and ongoing participation in national development depends on raising their political consciousness.

Respondent 5. "Politics is a collection of activities related to group decision-making," the respondent said. In Pakistan, political training, capital availability, and education are the factors that can promote women's political engagement. In a municipal election, the respondent has participated in the political process as a candidate. Participation in politics is the foundation of gender equality in democracies. Women's participation can be extremely beneficial to Pakistan's political development. It is possible for women politicians to be very successful social change agents by challenging traditional norms, advocating for gender equality, and influencing shifts in public mindset. Educated women made a substantial contribution to the political development of the country. A significant number of female lawmakers are represented in both the federal and provincial assemblies. They enacted several laws and drafted several more in parliament. Educated women were important contributors to awareness campaigns. Higher educated women typically possess greater knowledge, skills, and political awareness. Pakistani women face several barriers to political participation, including cultural norms, personal safety hazards, and a lack of work-life balance. The removal of social and cultural barriers, employment opportunities for women, affirmative

action laws, and creating an environment that encourages women in politics are some proposals for women's political empowerment.

Respondent 6. According to the response, politics is the study of governments and states. Almost every aspect of governance is included in politics. Promoting women's political engagement involves educating them about the importance of female empowerment, urging them to engage in all political endeavors, and counseling them to defy familial pressure. As someone who has participated in elections as an agent, helped women cast their ballots, and participated in a general election campaign, the respondent is in favor of women's political participation. Women are vital parts of families and communities. They are important to the progress of politics, the taking of leadership roles, and community organizing, in addition to being loyal to and supportive of their families. The value of women to a country rises with education. Higher educated women have a greater understanding of the problems and are better able to come up with solutions. Genuine democracy and gender equality depend on educated women. In the process, the reaction runs across a number of challenges, such as gender discrimination, societal hostility, and other social, religious, and cultural limitations. As per the respondent, women ought to have equal opportunities in every aspect of life, including enjoyment, good education, assistance, and protection.

Respondent 7. Over the course of the interview, the subject makes the case that politics is the activity involved in managing a country or other entity. Women in particular are able to participate in politics on an equal basis with males. Because they can speak for other women and are fully aware of their rights, women must be involved in politics. Women's political participation is essential, in my opinion. As equal members of this state, they should be involved in politics. The interviewee cast a ballot, so participating in the political process. Voting allows women to choose the finest candidate to govern the nation and is a personal right. Women's political participation is essential, in my opinion. Due to their superior situational skills, women can make greater contributions to politics than men. It is possible for women to hold political position while hiding their identities. Educated women have long played an important role in politics. Many laws were passed by the female lawmakers. Research shows that female legislators are more involved than their male counterparts. There are higher barriers for women than for men. Most people are still living in Stone Age circumstances. They have kept their women apart and restricted their responsibilities to the home. Another factor that contributes is their dread of living in a primitive and insecure culture. They are also unable to actively participate in politics due to financial troubles within the family. According to the interviewee, laws permitting women to engage in politics ought to be approved through the proper procedures. Strict implementation is required to protect women. The equal people of the state must be considered. They should provide a place that is appropriate for them to express their views.

Respondent 8. During the data collection procedure, the respondent stated that politics is simply the struggle of different social groups for control of enough power to affect decisions in a way that is advantageous to their own group. Participating in the national political process, the interviewee is a voter. Women's political engagement in the national political process was a point of contention for the respondent. The interviewee stated that encouraging male citizens to become involved in politics, holding seminars on the topic, conducting door-to-door awareness campaigns, and enacting laws like the Representation Act of 2017 that mandate women's voting and representation are some of the ways that women's political participation in Pakistan can be boosted. The 2017 Act requires women to participate in voting and representation. In addition, her father explained that women's full participation can hold the government accountable and drastically change Pakistani politics. They pick the side that has a history of keeping its promises. The parliament of Pakistan is influenced by their opinions. The reply argues that women with education played a critical role in the political

development of the country. Moral principles are to be ingrained in Pakistani politics. In Pakistan, societal stigmas, character assassination, patriarchal society, clerics' misrepresentations of religious beliefs, traditional social structures, and women's low self-esteem and lack of interest are all factors that hinder women's participation in politics, the interview continues. Finally, the interviewee offered these suggestions: since politics is all about money, a woman who aspires to political leadership must first become economically independent. In addition, she needs to be well-known and have a wide circle of friends and family to support her.

Respondent 9. The answer asserted that politics is the process through which a group makes decisions together. Local, state, federal, and global politics and government are discussed in this group. Power in politics is employed to achieve specific goals. Despite not being an active participant in national politics, the interviewee does participate in some political activities, such as endorsing female candidates and assisting them in elections. Given the significant impact that family, tribe, and local customs have on women's political behavior, factors such as education, social standing, and economic independence can boost women's political participation in Pakistan. Additionally, women can trust party leaders to allow other women to hold positions within the party. They can boost Pakistan's effective leaders and decision-makers. Educated women have the information and abilities necessary to create laws and regulations. The nation's political progress depends on its educated female population. Well-educated women politicians are better at formulating policies, have more positive relationships with the opposition, and perform better than their male counterparts. Social, cultural, economic, religious, and political obstacles prevent women from participating in Pakistan's political process. Proposals for women's political empowerment include placing them in leadership roles, providing them with political education, and allowing them to participate in politics everywhere.

Respondent 10. Politics is the activity related to a nation's governance. The respondent believed that women's political participation is crucial since women are better able to grasp and know about household issues, women's issues, and policymaking. In response to a question about political participation during the data collection process, the respondent stated that they cast their first-ever ballot in the 2018 general election. When asked about the factors that encourage women's political participation, the respondent argued that increasing quotas for women in both national and provincial assemblies, avoiding male dominance through family support, and interpreting Islam correctly in relation to politics are all factors that can encourage women's political participation in Pakistan. According to the interviewee, women have the potential to significantly impact the nation's political evolution. Moreover, clarify that women's political participation is unavoidable since their representation is essential in both the national and local legislatures. The respondent claimed that educated women were essential to the nation's political development because they ran political campaigns, improved political awareness in schools, worked to bridge the gap between candidates in political parties, and were instrumental in legislation. Studies reveal that half of all bills passed by female lawmakers were passed, despite their relatively low representation compared to male lawmakers. When questioned about the obstacles that women face in their political participation, the answer argues that these obstacles include cultural norms, misunderstandings of religion, the male dominance in society, and women's uneasiness. The interviewee recommended the following actions to ensure women's political empowerment: increasing the literacy rate, raising awareness of political education, educating people about their fundamental rights in the face of conservative norms, providing equal opportunities for women everywhere, and viewing women as vital members of society.

Findings

- The study finds that educated women in Chakdara are significantly more politically aware and confident in participating in political processes than uneducated women.
- Many women in Chakdara, especially the younger generation, have shown a growing interest in politics and understand their voting rights and roles in decision-making.
- Women are more vocal in raising concerns related to gender discrimination, education, healthcare, and social justice through political platforms.
- Women who received family support, especially from male members, were more likely to engage in political activities and attend political gatherings.
- Women participants expressed that female political representatives better understand and highlight the real problems faced by women in Chakdara, such as lack of education and health facilities.
- In Chakdara, some women have emerged as local leaders, educating other women about their political rights and encouraging participation in local governance.
- Traditional and patriarchal norms still restrict many women in Chakdara from fully participating in politics, especially in rural and conservative areas.
- Respondents emphasized the need for more political awareness programs, training workshops, and moral guidance to prepare women for active roles in politics.

Recommendations and Conclusion

To enhance women's participation in politics in the following recommendations are proposed:

- Women in Chakdara should be politically educated and made aware of their fundamental rights and civic responsibilities. This awareness can empower them to contribute effectively to society and advocate for other women as well.
- To improve women's representation in political spaces, gender quotas or reserved seats should be enforced within political parties, local legislatures, and government ministries.
- Women should be provided with training and capacity-building programs to develop their political skills, leadership abilities, and confidence.
- Establish mentorship initiatives and networking platforms where aspiring women leaders can connect with experienced politicians, policymakers, and activists.
- Implement supportive policies such as access to childcare services and flexible work arrangements to help women balance political careers with family responsibilities.
- Offer financial assistance and resources to women running for political office, enabling them to conduct effective and competitive campaigns.
- Encourage fair and balanced media coverage of women politicians in Chakdara, focusing on their achievements, leadership, and political perspectives.
- Promote women's involvement in grassroots politics, community decision-making, and local activism to foster political engagement from the ground up.
- Advocate for legal and policy reforms that advance gender equality, protect women's reproductive rights, and address issues like gender-based violence and discrimination.
- Celebrate and highlight the achievements of women leaders in Chakdara to inspire the younger generation and normalize women's leadership in political life.

With an emphasis on both the advancements and ongoing difficulties, this study examined the several elements affecting women's political engagement in Chakdara. Women's participation in politics is still in its infancy, but it is clear that they are progressively taking on the roles of political donors, voters, and campaigners. They are still underrepresented in positions of decision-making, nevertheless, especially at the Union Council level. Cultural limitations, lack of education, economic dependence, misreading of religion beliefs, and patriarchal standards are some of the major obstacles that have been highlighted. Together, these elements make it more difficult for women to fully engage in politics. Household duties and restricted access to political platforms also contribute to their decreased involvement. By

contributing varied viewpoints and tackling problems that are sometimes overlooked, women can be extremely important to Pakistan's political progress. Their involvement results in more inclusive decision-making and improved community needs representation. Women's participation can spur change and motivate others to get involved in politics in places like Chakdara, where their voices are suppressed by institutional and cultural constraints. Although women in Chakdara are involved in politics, their representation is still low. The study emphasizes that despite their limited numbers, women have demonstrated strong potential—as seen nationally when female parliamentarians introduced 85% of the bills during the 13th National Assembly—and that increasing women's participation can have a significant impact on political development at both the local and national levels. Educated women, in particular, contribute through informed policy suggestions and by promoting gender equality.

References

- Ahmad, A., & Anwar, H. N. (2017). Femininity and women's political participation in Pakistan: A historical overview from independence to 2013.
- Ahmed, S. (n.d.). Violation of women rights in Pakistan: A comparative study of news reports of English and Urdu newspapers. School of Communication, Universiti Sains Malaysia.
- Allaiddin, A., Alizai, S. H., & Rind, Z. K. (2020). Role of women in politics: A study of political participation in Pakistan. *Pakistan Journal of International Affairs*, 3(2), 507–518.
- Aminudin, R. (2023, September 24). The Evolution Of Muslim Women Political Participation
- Bari, F. (2005). Women's Political Participation: Issues and Challenges. United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW).
- Begum, A. (2023). Political participation of female in Pakistan: Prospects and challenges. *Unisia*, 41(1), 39–76
- Bibi, R., Ahmad, N., & Shah, L. (2020). Traditional norms and women's participation in politics: A study of Dir region. *Pakistan Journal of Gender Studies*, 18(1), 55–70.
- Bibi, R., Ahmad, N., & Shah, L. (2020). Traditional norms and women's participation in politics: A study of Dir region. *Pakistan Journal of Gender Studies*, 18(1), 55–70.
- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods* (5th ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Chaudhury, M. (2003). Razia Sultan: The Woman Who Ruled Delhi. *South Asian History Journal*, 25(3), 225–240.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Dani, A. H. (1969). *Gandhara Art in Pakistan*. Department of Archaeology, Government of Pakistan
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2011). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Empire. Sharma, R. (2007). Nur Jahan and her Influence in the Mughal ResearchGate.
- Film, P. (2018). *Understanding social research: A practical introduction*. Routledge.
- Government of Pakistan. (2017). The Elections Act, 2017. Election Commission of Pakistan. Retrieved from <https://www.ecp.gov.pk/Documents/laws2017/The%20Elections%20Act,%202017.pdf> (<https://www.ecp.gov.pk/Documents/laws2017/The%20Elections%20Act,%202017.pdf>)
- Iqbal, S., & Faheem, M. (2021). Family dynamics and women's political participation in rural Pakistan. *Journal of Gender and Society Studies*, 9(2), 45–62.
- Islam, S. T., & Islam, E. (2012). Barriers and Scope of Political Participation of Women in Local Government of Bangladesh: Union Parishad Perspective. *Journal of International Social Iss* 1(1), 71–85.
- Israr, M., Naz, A., Gul, A., Khan, F., & Khan, W. (2018). Cultural injustice: The case of Pakhtun society, Pakistan. *Clinical Social Work and Health Intervention*, 9(4), 44–58.

- Jamil, M., & Aftab, S. (2015, October 15). Disenfranchisement of women in Lower Dir: Results of a fact finding exercise. Independent; Development Alternative Inc. Posted April 7, 2016.
- Kiran, N. (2013). Women's participation in Pakistani politics: A contextual study of Sialkot district. *Pakistan Social Sciences Review*, 7(2), 15–30
- Krook, M. L. (2010). *Quotas for Women in Politics: Gender and Candidate Selection Reform Worldwide*. Oxford University Press.
- Longly, R. (2021, September 20)
- McNamara, M. (2023, September 1). The history of women's political participation and power. *Power in Place*.
- Ministry for Culture and Heritage. (n.d.). Women's suffrage petition. *New Zealand History*. Retrieved May 15, 2025,
- Mujtaba, S. (1998). Mumtaz Mahal: Influence in Mughal Politics. *Academia.edu*
- Noor, S., & Yaseen, Z. (2023). Women's participation in Pakistani politics: A contextual study of District Sialkot. *Pakistan Social Sciences Review*, 7(2), 12–24. [https://doi.org/10.35484/pssr.2023\(7-II\)01](https://doi.org/10.35484/pssr.2023(7-II)01)
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Rafeeq, A., & Khan, M. (2024). Analyzing the factors influencing the legislative performance of female parliamentarians in Pakistan (2013–2023). *Journal of Political Science Studies*, 15(1), 45-62.
- Shah, R., & Khan, A. (2023). Political Participation of Women in Pakistan: A Case Study of District Dir Lower. *Journal of Political Studies and Public Policy*, 45(1), 34–50.
- Siddique, H. M. (n.d.). An appraisal to the status of woman in pre and post-Islamic Arabian Peninsula with specific reference to her marital rights. *Zia-e-Tahqeeq*, (13), 19–20. Department of Islamic Studies & Arabic, GCUF.
- Ullah, R. (2018). Socio-cultural and economic factors affecting women political participation in Dir District of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. *The Women - Annual Research Journal of Gender Studies*, 1 10
- Zafar, F., & Sami, A. (2021). Women's participation in politics in Pakistan (GIDS Working Paper No. 06-21). Graduate Institute of Development Studies, Lahore School of Economics.