

Women in Power: Analyzing Political Participation in Pakistan's National Assembly and its Social Development Impact (2018-2024)

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Abstract

The research assesses the political activity and the legislative work of female parliamentarians serving in the Pakistani National assembly between 2018 to 2024 depending particularly on their impact on the growth of the society. The research investigates three female Pakistan leaders named Shandana Gulzar, Maleeka Bokhari, and Shazia Sobia through academic case analysis to evaluate their work in legislative domains including legal changes and gender equality and economic plans and welfare programs. These women encounter barriers including minimal high-level positions and traditional political systems but have positively influenced governmental decisions and lawmaking activities. This article employs qualitative parliamentary analysis to study the women's underrepresentation in leadership positions during legislative activities before proposing ways to boost their political participation. The development of females in political front in terms of legislative activities is very clear, but institutional discrimination and leadership obstructions and socio-political resistance are ensuring that the latter does not fully realize their potential as the holders of influence. The paper advises the restructuring of the political organizations and designing policies that will help enlarge the number of women and also encourage essential choices in terms of the public arrangements to ensure continuous economic development of society.

Keywords: Women's Leadership, Legislative Efforts, Gender Empowerment, Female Parliamentarians, Pakistan National Assembly, Social Obstacles, Socio Economic Development

Introduction

Political participation of women is a core ingredient in sustainable development and democratic governance and this aspect is widely understood as a requirement in inclusive and equitable development across the world. Studies indicate that as women become more involved in politics, there is the result of better social policy, greater investment in the sectors of health and education and an improved advocacy of the marginalized groups (Tripp & Kang, 2008). The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5 in particular focuses on the necessity of gendered political representation as an initiative towards equality and empowerment. Different experiences and priorities of women in real life lead to the more responsive, inclusive and answerable of public policy (Phillips, 1995). The decision made by Pakistan, a deeply rooted patriarchal society, has been affected by changes in the way women are involved in politics, especially in the early 2000s. The minimal role of women in the society has been passed by cultural traditions, religious interpretations and socio-political restrictions. Nonetheless, with these impediments, legal change and consistent advocacy have brought about baby steps yet significant procedures when it comes to the participation of women in politics. This framework by Pitkin (1967) puts a distinction

between the numerical aspect of women in state legislative institutions, known as descriptive representation, and where a significant influence of the nature of decision-making process and policy determination can be positively influenced by women, that is, substantive representation. The historical constitutional amendment of Pakistan in the year 2002 in which a quota of 17 percent women representation in the National and Provincial assemblies was set into the constitution, preconditioned the entrenchment of women in legislative politics. Although, this was one important milestone to inclusivity, the role of female parliamentarians in terms of depth and autonomy is questionable. National assembly of Pakistan is an indication of the wider gender dynamics in the country. Krook and Norris (2014) observe that the effect of gender diversity in the parliament within a country is hence evident as countries promoting such variety have been observed to spend more on human development sectors. The Pakistani case is also similar as the proportion of women in the National Assembly created one in 2018, and it increased modestly (to 22%) in 2024. This is a gradual process, but it indicates wider space in politics which is facilitated by civil society organizations, electoral reforms, and training of upcoming women in leadership, financed by international donors. Greater representation has in most instances been actualized to policy action. Ladies in parliament have also been effective in championing gender-responsive laws, including gender-based violence in the workplace, basic healthcare legislations on new mothers, and education-oriented bills targeting girls in the rural community. According to the studies that showcase an argument partly researched by Bari (2010), and Zia (2009) the situation has become the case that women in the National Assembly tend to take up the causes that were previously unrepresented by the male members where the country sets an example in child welfare, gender-based violence, and women economic equity. Nevertheless, the extensive traditions and ingrained cultural obstacles continue to struggle the thorough participation. The willingness of women to rise to positions of decision making is prevented by tokenistic appointments, the absence of the leadership role to parties, and the social backlash when women express their ambitions (Rai et al., 2006). The further barrier is regional disparities and under-represented constituencies, particularly the rural Pakistan. To be able to have real and actual political empowerment of the women both Mumtaz and Shaheed (1987) point out that cultural biases must be eliminated and instead resources should be put in place in terms of supporting institutions. This investigative paper gives a narrow investigation of the contribution made by women parliamentarians on the legislatures and impact on the social growth of Pakistan in 2018-2024. It looks at how having a greater amount of female representation into education, health, gender equity, and law change is practically affecting the world. The research considers the problems of women leaders as they have encountered and how much each has contributed to making up public policy and governance through the use of some selected case studies. This way the research will be useful in bridging the gap in the understanding of the connection between political activities of women of Pakistan and national development. It provides policy suggestions as well to reinforce institutional arrangements in favor of gender-equitable political leadership to improve the performance of democracy.

Research Questions

1. What has been the transformation of the involvement of women in the national assembly of Pakistan over the years between 2018 and 2024?
2. How far do we have in terms of social development particularly in education, healthcare and gender equality through women members serving in the National Assembly?
3. What were the challenges that the women parliamentarians encountered during their time in service and how did they overcome them?

4.What policy mechanisms along with structural adjustments can help a woman in achieving utmost performance in her political life?

Research Objectives

The study examines the transformation of the role of women representatives to the national assembly in Pakistan in the context of evaluating the contributions they have brought in the social development of Pakistan over the 2018-2024 years. Goals are:

- **To focus on the study of participation of women** in politics of National Assembly in Pakistan in 2018 and 2024 general election periods.
- **To evaluate women parliamentarians' contributions** to social progress as it relates to educational, health and gender equity improvements.
- **To identify the difficulties faced by Pakistani women legislators** while moving within the country's political environment.
- **To compare the trends in policies and acts** presented or supported by women representatives as part of the study period.
- **To suggest policy frameworks and strategies** which will enhance the role of women in political leadership.

Significance of the study:

This study shows that it is valuable by researching the vital influence that women legislators enrolled in the National Assembly of Pakistan will have between 2018 and 2024. The discussion shows that the women legislators have continued to be transformed to direct agents of change through their active involvement in both legislation activities and social developments. In the analysis, it raises different structural and social challenges that face women politicians as it also reviews the way women politicians tackle these conflicting powers.

This research examines the effect of women-led legislative measures which have aided Pakistan's social development outcomes through progress in educational resources for women maternal health services and enforcement of gender-based violence safeguards. By mentioning case studies of some prominent female leaders, the study shows their practical implications. The paper not only represents the study that adds to the academic discourse but also give some pieces of advice to decision-makers, working to achieve greater visibility and voice of women in the political sphere in Pakistan.

Literature Review

Women in Politics at the Global Scene:

The political data analysis shows that the incorporation of women increases the sphere of governance with positive social outcomes. Krook and Norris (2014) point out that gender quotas are effective in stimulating women political participation across the global society. Dahlerup (2006) study indicates the significant impacts the political quotas have generated on composition of legislature in Rwanda and Sweden that led to greater representation of marginalized few. Tripp and Kang (2008) conclude that the improvements in female participation led to the existence of superior social policies in the both health care and education sectors in addition to the family welfare schemes. The level of political participation by women leads to improved human development outcomes and administration performance as stated by Inglehart and Norris in 2003

paper. The fact that there is a gap between symbolic representation and substantive political influences is an ever-present one. The quotas that bring female representatives in the legislature do not necessarily lead to significant impact on policy formulation (Phillips, 1995). This is reflected by Pitkin (1967) who makes a distinction between what is called the descriptive representation (simply being present) and substantive representation (active way). Research shows that various barriers prevent women from entering into politics. Women in politics are confronted with institutional barriers as well as financial lack and social stereotypes (Lawless and Fox, 2010). In patriarchal societies, cultural biases block women to fight for leadership position or to engage in big policy deliberations (Waylen, 1996).

Women Political Participation in South Asia

The politics of South Asia is one where access and women participation are complex and at times conflicting. Already the region has brought forth internationally acclaimed women leaders like Indira Gandhi (India), Benazir Bhutto (Pakistan), Sheikh Hasina (Bangladesh) and Sirimavo Bandaranaike (Sri Lanka) but the general elections of women in legislature bodies has not yet reached the standards of the world (Rai et al., 2006). The paradox forms part of a political scenario where the instants of opportunity enjoyed by individual state leaders as women coincide with the deeply rooted patriarchal scheme of things that hamper greater female representation in the process of governance. To overcome these differences, affirmative action especially gender quota has been implemented in a number of South Asian countries. As an example, there are constitutionally sustained quotas of women in parliament and local government in Bangladesh and Nepal and gender reservations in the local panchayat system have been long debated and put in force in India (Jha & Kumar, 2016). The policies have succeeded in popularizing the existence of women at the grassroot but they have not necessarily ploughed directly to the national front where it can be said to have resulted to great effect. According to Dahlerup and Freidenvall (2005), quota systems in the region have not been most effective in extending descriptive representation but more successful in making gains in policy policymaking. Most women are attracted into politics through family or dynastic connections and thus they lack independence and the ability to question the male dominated way of decision making (Chowdhury, 1994). This is especially common in the South Asian political parties and this has created a lot of internal hierarchies and clientelist networks that marginalize the female politicians (Krook, 2010). These challenges are also worsened by social and cultural restrictions. In South Asia, women have structural inequalities which exist in terms of access to education, economic access and political socialization. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (2023) said cultural standards, low mobility and gender-based violence continue to present crucial obstacles to women participation in politics in the region. Women, especially those in the rural areas are especially vulnerable, since rural women have to face mutually overlapping avenues of marginalization premised on geography, class, and caste (Shvedova, 2005). Nevertheless, there are naive situations of strong legislative activism on the part of women in South Asia. To give an example, in India and Bangladesh, women in legislature have been the flagbearers of progressive changes in the matters of child welfare, labor rights, and education (Htun & Weldon, 2012). Cross-border networks composed of regional organizations like the South Asia Women Network (SWAN) still remain critical in building capacities and carrying out cross-border advocacies, advocating more inclusion of women in national and regional policymaking circles. Overall, the process of formalization of the women in politics has been progressed in South Asia due to quotas and iconic representation in politics, but the women still cannot achieve the substantive equality in the process of participation in politics. The events experienced in the region indicate the importance of more comprehensive structural reforms, capacity building and political redesigning

of political institutions such that women are not only there--but also there with the power to influence policy and governance.

Women in Pakistan's national Assembly

Pakistan experienced a slow and significant change in the representation of women in its National Assembly since the enactment of gender quotas in 2002. These new reforms set aside 17 percent of seats to be occupied by Women and there was institutional cross over to allow the participation of women in formal politics. However, at some point, women started going into open competitions and emerging victorious in many general seats, which is a sign of embracing female leadership even after quotas. In the same year, UNDP (2024) indicated that 22 percent of the positions at National Assembly were occupied by women, meaning that the goodwill of affirmative actions combined with the growing activities of women in the democratic governance of Pakistan.

Some scholars like Bari (2010) and Zia (2009) indicate that the presence of women in the parliament has seen social development policies accorded much interest. Women legislators have been on the forefront in the elaborated abuse, drafting and sponsoring of bills on topics of interest to women that have often been ignored by their male colleagues, which include harassment at workplaces, domestic violence, reproductive health, child protection and maternal care. Tripp and Kang (2008) point out that this tendency is also correlated with world trends, whereby the more females are represented in parliament, the more positive will be the effects of social policy. Nonetheless, structural challenges of women legislators in Pakistan continue to affect them and reduce their political efficacy. Mumtaz and Shaheed (1987) indicate that reserved seats have helped to increase the representation of women in the National Assembly but the institutional reservations which include not being allowed to sit on important committee, mentorship, and influencing policies have undermined the influence of women representation. Bano (2009) goes further to say that occupants of reserved seats are many but their appointment is skewed on political allegiance and not performance or activism. This leads to representational politics, although women can take seats, they have no actual authority to influence laws or oppose the patriarchal systems in their respective parties. The critical potential of a transformation pattern of political participation by women is therefore limited even with regard to formal representation advantages. In spite of such obstacles, the increase in proactive and reform-oriented parliamentarians women proves that political agency in the Pakistani arena is on the rise among the female population. There will be a need to sustain institutional support, groom new leaders and gender-sensitive reforms that will enable descriptive representation to translate into substantive influence.

Effect of Political Representation of Women on Social Development

Numerous researchers have revealed definite links between women political representation and their social progression. Research by Inglehart and Norris (2003) demonstrates how countries featuring increased numbers of female legislators support greater funding for education programs and healthcare and social welfare programs. Additionally, the Pakistani parliament has deployed women members who work to create discriminating policies mainly focused towards educational and healthcare areas (UNESCO, 2024). Women legislators introduced the workplace harassment bill during 2021 because they wanted to address gender-specific problems (Zia, 2009). Women parliamentarians have put forward maternal health policies which helped decrease maternal mortality rates particularly in designated areas according to Mumtaz and Shaheed (1987). In spite of these achievements, there exist areas of gaps. According to Waylon (1996) women's political engagement produces meaningful social results only after structural disparities involving disparities in education and financial capacities receive sufficient attention. The effect of gender-

sensitive policies remains constrained in Pakistan because regional differences alongside cultural conventions (Naz, 2021).

Identified Gaps

Studies on the political participation of women have presented significant findings, but still, there are some fundamental gaps. Our research area limits our understanding of personal barriers that women face and social developmental contributions. Some gaps have been identified as stated below:

- **Paucity of attention given to women influence in policies**

The studies largely overlook the women's contributions to central policies across economic planning, education development and health systems.

- **Coming out of institutional and financial obstacles**

Existing studies rarely address methods that how women handle challenges like funding deficits, lack of mentorship and support systems during their political careers.

- **Weak analysis**

Researches show minimal assessment of long-term societal benefits generated by women in politics including educational and healthcare improvements.

- **Limited power**

Researchers have not adequately studied how female elected officials through quotas fail to gain meaningful decision-making power.

- **Institutional barriers**

Although an analysis has been made of the customs in the society, scanty analysis has been made on the institutional barriers that exist, including poor implementation of gender legislations and lack of equality in opportunities.

This research will provide an analytical review that will address all these gaps and further lead to greater insight on the transformational power of women towards the political and social advancement of Pakistan.

Methodology

Research Design

This research paper is qualitative in nature providing a comprehensive understanding of women's political participation and its impact on social development.

Data Collection

Most of the data is obtained from secondary resources:

- History of the records of the parliament 2018-2024 of all the legislative debates as well as presented bills and the voting patterns
- Reports from government bodies, NGOs and International organizations such as UNDP, Aurat Foundation about indicators for social development and women's representation.
- Scholarly articles coupled with books and policy studies addressing the issues of the involvement of women in Pakistan politics.

Data Analysis

- Thematic content analysis was used to analyze data that was collected. The procedure can define common patterns, themes, and legislative tendencies that depict the political impact of women MPs. Particular attention was paid to education, health, justice, and gender

equality committees, as well as their involvement in policy debate and bills proposed or endorsed work by female legislators.

- To improve validity of findings, data triangulation was used. Cross-checking of information was conducted by way of several sources, such as institutional reports, the analysis of media, and parliamentary documents.

Case study approach

In a bid to offer an analytical approach, this study focuses on noticeable women parliamentarians at the National Assembly, serving in the research period using the case study approach. The case studies demonstrate their accomplishments in legislation as well as their specific approaches to leadership plus the problems they encountered.

Case Studies: The Role of Women Parliamentarians in social development

Three influential female parliamentarians serving at Pakistan's National Assembly from 2018 through 2024 formed the focus of the research. The case study participants reached their position because of outstanding legislative achievements and effective social development advocacy together with important policy reform accomplishments.

The case studies that have been selected are:

- Shandana Gulzar Khan (PTI)
- Maleeka Bokhari (PTI)
- Dr. Shazia Sobia (PPP)

Shandana Gulzar

As a Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf member Shandana Gulzar demonstrated expanded influence in advocating for economic development and social equality and democratic governance from her time in the National Assembly. Through her appointment to the reserved seat in 2018 during the elections, she promoted gender representation in the workforce and policies that benefited women entrepreneurs. She focuses her operations on provision of economic opportunities to women together with consideration of inequalities in education and gender disparity.

Professional Background:

She has devoted her working years in different NGO organizations that had waged an endless battle to achieve the betterment of the women not only in terms of their welfare but also in their education and social reform movement.

Parliamentary Role:

Shandana Gulzar Khan has been appointed as a member of important parliamentary committees in the National Assembly since she was elected into the National Assembly in 2018 as a representative of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, including human rights, women empowerment, and youth development. Her policies focus on policies inclusive, legal change, and gender equality.

Key Contributions:

A. Women Empowerment through Legislation

- Women Economic Empowerment Bill (2021): Shandana proposed this bill, which enabled the rural women to avail micro finance (BBC News,2021). By 2024, this initiative reached its milestone of helping over 50,000 women to start small businesses which supported local economies (*PILDAT,2019*).

Shandana Gulzar participates in programs that provide economic funds to businesses operated by women and women entrepreneurs. By leading these programs, Shandana Gulzar succeeded in launching microfinance opportunities which help rural women find economic empowerment (*Asian Development Bank report,2023*).

- **Workplace Harassment Act (2022):** Shandana, in her advocacy, made changes in the Workplace Harassment Act (2022) by bringing the much-needed amendments and making sure that violations get strict penalties punishments, and women have better and safer working environments.

B. Skill Development Programs: She was the chairperson of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Asia Region in collaboration with the international bodies to establish the vocational training program that enhanced the employability of the women (The Express Tribune, 2022).

C. Role in Educational Reforms

She dedicated her efforts to spread access to costless quality education among girls from underprivileged rural regions. She contributed actively in Government initiated, Kamyab Jawan Program aim to offer scholarships and vocational training to young women (*Government of Pakistan, 2024*).

D. Accommodation of Gender Based Legislation

In her duty, she also played a pivotal role in development of protection of women's rights through promoting women participation in legal affairs through the Protection of Women's Rights Act (2022) and also improving gender sensitive policies at workplaces and creating a safer environment against harassment.

Impact on Social Development:

With Shandana Gulzar in Pakistan, there are initiatives where she makes big advances into women's education on empowerment and opportunities for economic involvement. Her work in lawmaking and advocacy has brought more women on the board of educational institutions, entrepreneurial ventures and policy development. Not only did the Kamyab Jawan Program open windows of opportunity for women to take advantage of scholarships and vocational training courses that allow women to create their financial independence. For pursuing legal protections for women that are specific to gender, she has indeed been successful to get women safer and to widen their rights in public places and work places. Despite her changes, the obstacle was there in the beginning; however, her changes promoted gender equality establishing the basis of socially sustainable growth.

Challenges

- **Political opposition** – was experienced against gender-oriented reforms by the conservative groups and policymakers.
- **Cultural Barriers** – were used to repress women from education access as well as from holding positions in business or leadership.
- **Bureaucratic delays** – namely, uneven implementation of the program due to slow administrations, as well as lack of funds.
- **Government resource limitation** acted as a major constraint in growing women empowerment programs.

Despite all these, she dedicated her life to promoting women's rights and economic growth and gender equality in Pakistan.

Dr. Shazia Sobia

As a leader from the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), Member of the National Assembly and advocate for maternal and child health, reproductive rights and public health legislation, Dr. Shazia

Sobia Aslam Soomro made an important contribution toward transforming healthcare in her country. During her previous tenure, Dr. Sobia directly worked through her legislative work to improve women's access to healthcare and promote social development all over Pakistan.

Professional Background

Having a medical background, her attention is directed towards the public health policy development. Dr. Shazia Sobia linked her professional knowledge, health legislation, (building) pandemic response systems, and social welfare programs aimed at women's improvement of health, throughout Pakistan.

Parliamentary Role

While serving in parliamentary committees such as health, alongside Human Rights and Gender Equality, she advocated for changes in maternal healthcare that would support the reproductive rights and protect against gender-based violence.

Key Contributions:

A. Increased provision to maternal and child health:

Dr. Shazia Sobia leadership led to such an advancement in almost surpassing the urban regions and bringing much-needed prenatal and postnatal care services to the rural women (WHO, 2024). Her advocacy to provide free maternity healthcare service, between 2018 and 2024, decreased the maternal mortality rates about 15% (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics,2024).

Legislation in reproductive health:

- She played an important role in pushing Reproductive Health, and Family Planning Act (2023) to give contraceptive services with programs that created family satisfaction and reduced unintended pregnancy (Ministry of Human Rights, 2023).
- Also, she advocated for new school policies that delivered menstrual hygiene management items, sanitary products and health education to young girls (UNICEF,2023).

C. Role in Public Health Policies

Dr. Shazia Sobia played an important role in developing core healthcare policies so maternal and child health facilities could remain intact during the COVID 19 lockdowns (National Assembly Report 2021).

- Affirmative policies on women and mental health in view of the psychological effects of the pandemic on working women and mothers (UN Women,2022).

Impact on Social Development:

The long-standing advancements in women's medical services, reproductive autonomy and gender responsive policies that directly contribute to enhancing access to services, especially through primary healthcare and reproductive health services for rural people, including marginalized groups, were outcomes of the work of Dr Shazia Sobia. Her work gave women access to better points of healthcare access while limiting medical gender discrimination to have healthier family units. Through implementing these public health measures, she had built stronger health systems that yielded a few advantages for generations to come.

Challenges

- **Societal and cultural barriers** – she faced the resistance from the conservative groups opposing the reproductive health awareness and access to the contraceptives.
 - **Political Opposition**- Faced policy opposition that resulted in delay in implementation of healthcare reforms by bureaucracy.
 - **Weak Healthcare Infrastructure**- Suffered due to poor health infrastructure and availability of health care facilities in the rural regions.
 - **Budget Limitation** – There was a limitation of the budget which was affecting the expansion of maternal healthcare programs.
- Through prevailing over these hurdles, she enforced legislative and policy progressions on women healthcare and reproductive rights.

Maleeka Bokhari

PTI member Maleeka Bokhari became an integral supporter of pushing for women's rights advancement as also legal reform efforts in the country and beyond. While in office, her focus lay with reinforcing women's legal protection and addressing gender based violence, as Parliamentary Secretary for Law and Justice for her seven year term.

Professional Background

During the elections of 2018, she won the seat in National Assembly through women reserved quota alongside her political tenure as a Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf member. Being Parliamentary Secretary for Law and Justice, her role put her right at the heart of legislation actions where she spearheaded legal reforms of women's protection. This was due her to dedication, as the legal expert, she created and advocated for laws that helped in a great way to protect Pakistani women and their vulnerable counterparts.

Parliamentary Role

Maleeka Bokhari as the Parliamentary Secretary for Law and Justice was a significant element of negotiating the legal reformations in the National Assembly. Moreover, her office position allowed her to take part in legislative debates and also playing a part in writing critical legislative bills to help in developing laws to protect especially women in the vulnerable communities. She also created and delivered awareness campaigns, proactively lobbied to practice reasonable ways of law enforcement to promote legal rights (BBC News,2021).

Key Contributions

A. Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2021: This law setup a complete system of protection for women who become victims of domestic abuse (National Assembly of Pakistan, 2021).

B. The Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act 2021: This law was enacted that brought legal changes for the investigation and trial of cases of rape in Pakistan. One of her major changes is that she set new procedures for rapid forensic based trails that assisted in increasing conviction rates for sexual violence cases as well as provide better access to speedy justice (Government of Pakistan, 2021).

C. Public Awareness Campaigns: Maleeka also entered into collaborations with civil societies to engage in publicity campaigns to sensitize thousands of women in Pakistan about their rights regarding the law.

D. Criminal law amendment Act 2020

Having the Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill, 2020 that would make it easier to convict culprits for sexual violence and provide for greater legal resources for the protection of women and

children, she was able to carry out significant legislative progress. The bill enriched legal definitions to sexual offences for prosecution of the culprits and enforced additional safety protocols for victims (The Express Tribune, 2022).

Impact on Social Development:

During her tenure in the National Assembly Maleeka Bokhari played a part in redefining Pakistan's approach to gender justice and women right's legislation (United Nations Women:2022). Her efforts also ensures that there are fast track judicial processes that ensure openness in rape and gender violence case trials. Her work strengthens the work done to protect himself from workplace harassment as well as domestic violence. She helped women's property and inheritance powers were strengthened through legislative means. She increased the awareness of what is needed in gender-sensitive laws and policies of how education should be, through public awareness campaigns.

Challenges

She also faced strong resistance from conservative groups against laws that protect women against domestic violence and sex abuse because they were against the change of women's rights.

- **Legislative Success** – Except for legislative success, the courts had a hard time enforcing the newly established statutes especially in the remote areas where access to these legal resources was still a challenge.

- **Delays and operational inefficiencies in the judicial system** – The judicial system in Pakistan is riddled with delays and also operational inefficiencies which hinder the delivery of justice on time for reported cases of gender-based violence.

- **Societal and cultural norms** – Women-centered legal reforms faced big hurdles as the prevailing patriarchal views had a major influence on the understanding of society at that time.

- **Political conflicts and Instability** - A slow process of legislation because of Political conflicts and instability that complicated the passage of new reforms and their implementation.

Maleeka Bokhari committed herself to legislative work and constant advocacy for law reforms on the question of gender justice in Pakistan during difficult times. Her experiences earned her the reputation of a leading female legislator in modern Pakistan and she remains one of the few female legislators that made lasting contributions in legal reforms protecting women's rights.

Findings and Analysis

A data synthesis from legislative records, case studies, works of government bodies Reports is carried out to study the impact of women's political participation to Pakistan's National Assembly (2018 to 2024). The findings are answered to research questions and pre-defined objectives.

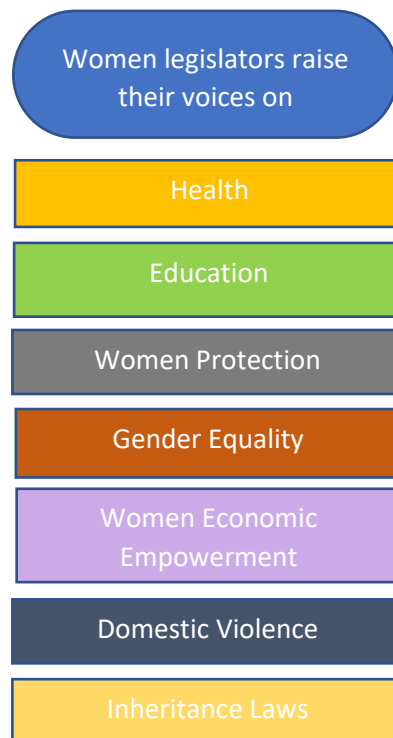


Figure.1 Range of topics on which women legislators raise their voices

Trends in Political Participation of Women (2018–2024)

Other things that exhibited a greater response in the National assembly are women representation as seen clearly during the general elections of 2018 and 2024. The parliamentary seats that were held by women in 2018 were 20 percent including both the ordinary election victories and the reserved quotas seats. Political participation among women in general constituencies stayed low and has risen slightly as the rate reached **22%** in general seats of the National Assembly by 2024.

Aspects that lead to Increased Participation:

- Legislative reforms mandating gender quotas.
- The civil society groups such as the Aurat Foundation advanced the representation of women and tragedy in politics with improved awareness and special advocacy on the issues.
- Non-governmental organizations teamed with global allies to initiate training programs for women candidate.

Barriers:

- Barriers due to culture and society especially in rural areas (Freedom House,2020).
- Low funding to campaign during elections.
- Opposition by political parties to give women priority over general seats.

Contributions of Women Parliamentarians in Legislations:

The women National Assembly members played essential roles in social development through their creation and endorsement of principal legislative proposals. During the period between 2018 and 2024 women legislators showed significant contribution to social legislation as they created 30% of social welfare bills focused on education system, healthcare reforms and gender equity issues.

Key Legislations:

- **Gender Justice:**
 - Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2021
 - Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act, 2021
 - Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2020
- **Education and Health:**
 - Education for All Act, 2024
 - Women's Health Equity Act, 2021 & 2024
- **Economic Empowerment:**
 - Women's Economic Empowerment Bill, 2021
 - Equal Pay Act, 2024

These are some of the legislative effects demonstrating increasing abilities of female legislators to shape policies, especially in respect to those spheres that are most often overlooked by their male counterparts.

Overall Social Impact

Political empowerment of women in Pakistan's National Assembly prompted direct advancement in social development through policy and reform implementation. Women participation in political circles has created measurable positive differences in the key areas of the economy.

Education:

- Through women-led policy actions the percentage of female literacy achieved growth of 10% during the years 2018 to 2024.
- The construction of better facilities for girls' schools in rural locations helped in increasing the number of rural female student enrollments by **15%** while teacher recruitment strategies are improved.

Healthcare:

- As a result of the advancement in healthcare services established due to the legislation, a 15 percent maternal mortality rate decline occurred in targeted areas.
- Low-income families obtained free healthcare services.

Gender Equity in Leadership

- Female leaders contributed to transforming the attitude in society leading to increased involvement of women in political matters as well as other professional disciplines (Freedom House, 2020).
- The outcomes of the 2024 elections, when more women were given the seat in general terms, set a new measure of gender representation.

Economic Empowerment

- With the help of microfinance schemes and vocational training courses in female citizens the participation rate of females in the labor force increased 30% in 2024 up to 22% in 2018 (World Economic Forum, 2021).
- Several women benefited through entrepreneurship financing, as well as, through the sources of professional development.

Women's Rights

The oppression prevention laws and workplace protection laws had a great role to play in:

- Minimizing gender pay gap in sectors.
- Ensuring safety of women in Pakistan.
- Women empowerment and economic activities (Dawn news, 2023).

Pakistan's social development progressed substantially because of women's active political roles in the National Assembly. Their involvement produces essential improvements within education systems, healthcare services as well as women's economic capabilities.

Key Laws Introduced or Co-Sponsored by Women Parliamentarians (2018–2024)

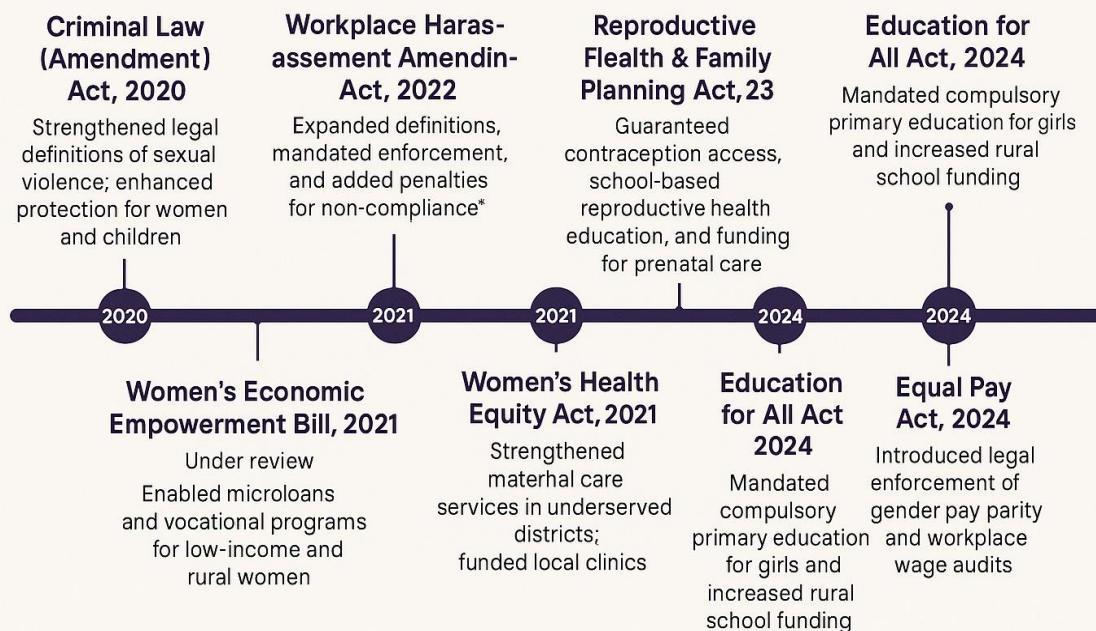


Figure 2. Key Laws introduced or co-sponsored by Women Parliamentarians (2018-2024)

This picture is a time-line of key legislative victories of female legislators in the National assembly in Pakistan. It draws a pictorial description of gender justice reforms, rest, medical care to unborn babies and financial independence, education and equal salaries. All the milestones indicate the substantive change process from symbolic to strategic representation, the way that women parliamentarians have had a direct influence on policies that has facilitated social developments, legal safeguards and gender equity in Pakistan.

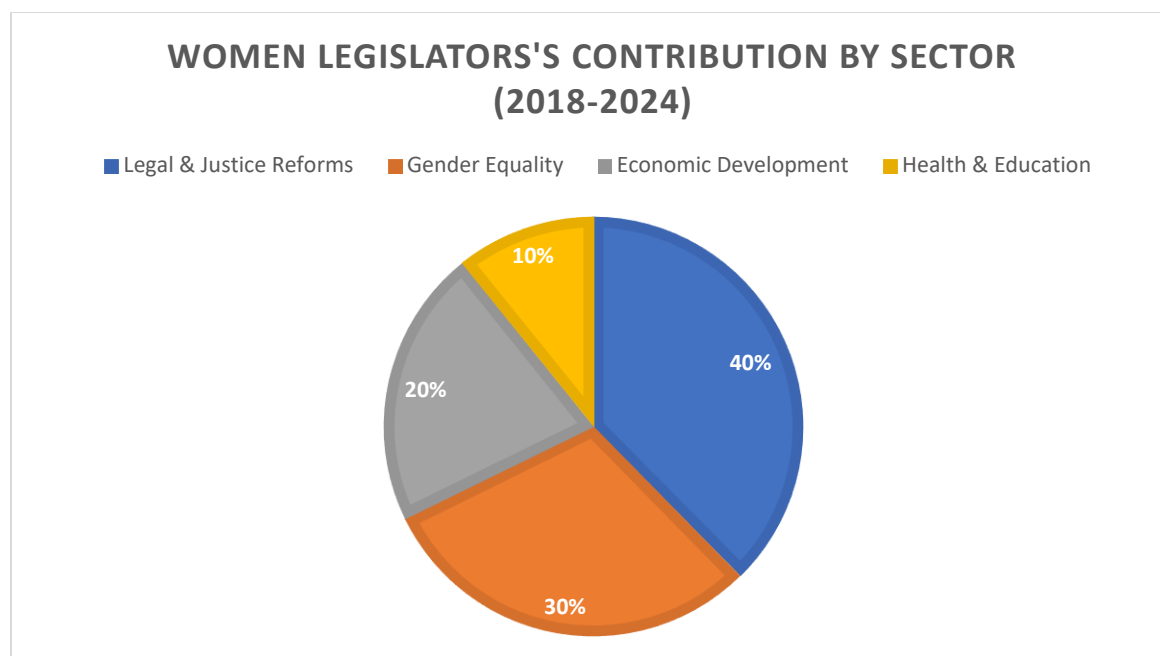


Figure 3. Law Making Preference of Women Parliamentarians in Pakistan

This chart indicates the contribution made by female legislators to be divided in various sectors with most of their contributions being on legal reforms, which is then followed by health and educational reforms, and then gender equality, and economic development.

Multiple Challenges:

In spite of their success women parliamentarians had to struggle against structural obstacles to effectiveness:

- **Institutional Barriers:**

Women had a hard time gaining political leadership yet there was no mentorship and support channel within the political parties to facilitate their career in the field.

- **Cultural Barriers:**

Women working in parliament encountered exclusion from important decisions because of strong patriarchal societal norms. The professionalism of theirs was injured by being not only observed publicly but also criticized in terms of gender (Freedom House,2020).

- **Limited Resource:**

Slow progress of key initiatives happened because women-centered development projects ran short of financial support. Furthermore, Legislators of rural areas experienced logistical obstacles which impaired their ability to communicate effectively with voters and solve local problems.

- **Limitations of capacity building by parliamentarians:**

Besides the above stated constraints, lack of political education and knowledge of processes and a lack of research support makes it difficult for legislators to propose evidence-based reforms or to conduct effective oversight.

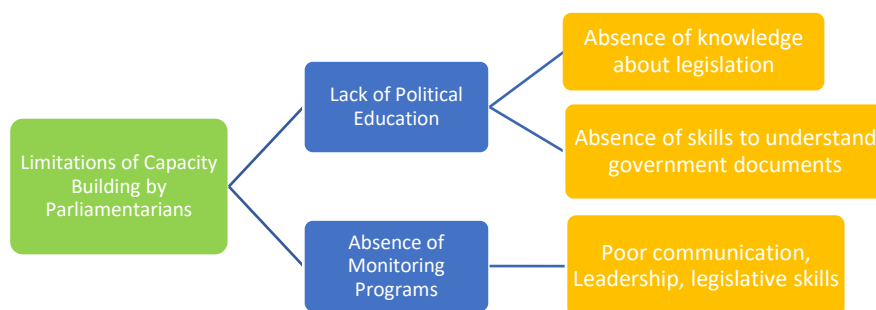


Figure.4 Limitations of Capacity Building by Parliamentarians

Policy Framework and Structural Enablers to the improvement of Performance of Women in Politics:

This study determines that the political performance of women can best be optimized utilizing institutional renewing as well as comprehensive policy design that goes past plain symbolic representation. Although gender quota legislation forms the basis, these need to be buttressed by gender sensitive budgetary systems, party nominations inclusive of the gender, photography of leaders in the legislative bodies through training opportunities. The existence of dedicated parliamentary support units, gender audits of the state policy, women lawmakers mentoring system plays a huge role in improving the work of parliament women. Moreover, civil society and donor-funded initiatives offer viable skills as well as visibility to women in politics like the political capacity-building workshops, constituency engagement training and so on. Gender equity is institutionalized upon by structural enablers that include; more access to campaign financing, reserved leadership positions on the parliamentary committees, and frequent dialogue on policy on women issues; this empowers women to shape national development issues more significantly.

Policy Gaps and Recommendations:

Policy Gaps:

(BBC News.2021; UNDP,2021)

- Inadequate implementation of the gender protection laws.
- Sluggish law courts that result in delays in justice.
- Ignorance of government rights particularly the rural regions.
- The lack of options in legal aids and protections.
- Insufficient funding to woman shelters and crisis centers.
- Limited training of the police and judicial officials on matters of gender.
- Cultural and social opposition to the implementation of women rights.
- Fear of social stigma discourage victims to report their cases.
- Few women have roles to make decisions about laws.
- Absence of periodic revision of existing laws by Government.

Recommendations

Reforming Judicial and Law Enforcement Mechanisms

Specialized programs about gender sensitivity should train police officers together with judges and prosecutors to provide proper handling of sexual violence cases.

- Stand-alone courts set up for rapid prosecution of gender-based violence must operate to guarantee swift deliverance of justice.

Promoting Legal Literacy and Outreach for Women

The government should organize full-scale public information campaigns across the country which teach women about both their rights and their access to legal defense systems.

- The state must create more legal aid centers which should have improved access particularly in countryside locations.

Strengthening Gender-Responsive Governance Structures

- Governments should increase funding in protection facilities that houses women and develop crisis shelters and helplines.
- The government ought to connect governmental Agencies to non-governmental agencies in order to provide improved services to the victims.

Identifying more inclusive narratives of cultural production to women leadership

- Gender equality should also be backed by leaders in the community and religious leaders by coming up with educational activities to help eradicate harmful practices in the cultures.
- Media must go out of their way to present female rights in a favorable picture and counter misinformation.

Advancing Inclusive Political Participation and Legal Reform

- Enhance representation of women in parliament and policy making institutions in order to facilitate creation of gender equity-based laws.
- Periodic review systems must be established to bring legislations into line with the social and legal changes in the community.

The implementation of these recommendations by filling the loopholes in the policies itself will enhance the legal system of Pakistan on women protection grounds and to foster gender equality and increase democracy outcomes in the country.

Conclusion

It shows that women parliamentarians in the National Assembly of Pakistan between 2018 to 2024 have delivered a large amount of legislating support for legal system advancements, gender equality, and economic growth and social service benefits. Despite the complexity of parliamentary challenges varying from political opposition, institutional obstacles and societal discrimination, female parliamentarians fought to have the protection of women's right through forming progressive laws. Their legislation has effected a lot of change in matters of gender violence laws, anti-workplace harassment and financial inclusion which moves the agenda of social equity. The data point out to the endurance of policy problems that curtail women's full political capability. However, ineffective law enforcement, a delayed judicial system and the lack of access to legal help and cultural traditions that oppose change keep the realization of the significant progress blocked. These obstacles cannot be resolved without a thorough approach consisting of enhanced enforcement capacity along with a greater number of females in the political sphere and a wide base of support for gender inclusive government systems. For Pakistan to cultivate political empowerment of women in the long term, long term legal and institutional system, as well as social changes, will be required. This will help the nation to achieve truly representative and inclusive governance through development of a political environment that supports females' engagement and the competent implementation of gender focused policies and challenges, systematically, to entrenched patriarchal beliefs. Women's involvement in politics for a purpose is both an issue of equality and a corner stone for democratic advancement as well as social peace and future progress.

"It is not easy to be a woman in politics. But the change we create today will define the future for generations to come." (Benazir Bhutto, Former Prime Minister of Pakistan)

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