Factors Behind Low Political Participation of Females in Pakistan.

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Abstract

Background: Since women constitute approximately half of the population in Pakistan, it is essential for the country's economic growth and social development for women to be actively involved in the political system. Despite the large percentage of the population, women in Pakistan have historically encountered discrimination in both the economic and political spheres. This research examines the significant factors of low female political participation in Pakistan.

Methodology: This study has used a qualitative research method using a desk-based study, which included articles, research papers, and other official websites as secondary sources.

Results: It has been found that there are several factors, such as political, religious, economic, gender discrimination, ideological, and cultural, that restrict female participation in the political process.

Conclusion: The role of women should be more concentrated via normative practices at the local and societal level, as well as the promotion of education and awareness, to increase female participation in politics.

Keywords

Female Empowerment, Pakistan, Political participation.

Introduction

Women's political participation is also seen as a turning point in their empowerment. It also refers to women's ability to pursue their goals and freedom and their right to vote and run for office. Women's political empowerment refers to their ability and freedom to vote, run for office, engage in political demonstrations, and make decisions[1,2]. Females will make up around 48 percent of the country's population by 2020, but it is clear that their influence in politics, regardless of size, will be minimal. The truth reveals that gender equality has not yet been achieved, even though many women have reached positions of power in public life, which may be seen as a clear picture of the years to come. Due to gender inequality and the prevalence of patriarchal values in Pakistan's society, the country's political system treats women like they belong to a minority. Even though the quota system has increased the number of women participating in the House of Representatives, appropriate policies and procedures still need to be implemented to empower women and enhance their involvement in the political process in Pakistan. Participation from women would make laws and regulations that discriminate against women in various domains, such as education, health, the workplace, and society, more effective[3].

Due to the idea that the nature of politics demands masculine attributes such as confidence and energy rather than feminine characteristics such as lethargy and submission, women are discouraged from engaging in politics. They are typically kept out of the field completely. This is done to keep women from entering politics altogether. Participation of women in politics, both passively and actively, will define not just their standing in society but also their influence on decision-making, which may eventually lead to political representation if it is encouraged[4].

Female quotas are becoming more widely recognized as an essential policy tool for improving women's access to decision-making bodies. Women's engagement in Pakistan has historically increased at the provincial and national levels. However, several hurdles impede women's engagement in mainstream political rules, and women's political responsibilities in Pakistan have traditionally been relegated to supporting roles within their political families[5,6]. The main objective of this study is to identify the significant factors of low female participation in politics in Pakistan. The study will identify important factors that hinder female participation in politics.
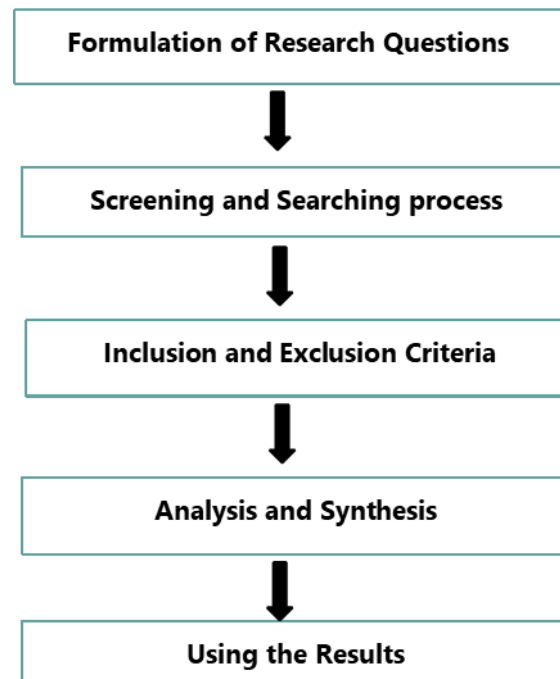
Methodology

This study employed a systematic literature-based methodology based on the five steps outlined by (7). The five processes of performing a systematic review of the literature are depicted in Figure 1. In doing the analysis for the literature review, studies that were related to the investigation regarding significant causes and challenges were taken into consideration. Studies have also been conducted on the subject of gender idealism in political participation. These studies revealed the major restrictions and obstacles that are the fundamental reason for the small percentage of female participants. Those studies that considered the need to were conducted in the context of developed nations due to the significant cultural and socio-economic contrasts between developed and developing countries, particularly Pakistan. In addition, all studies published after the year 2000 were considered; the screening process and the search for papers were restricted to scientific publications that are peer-reviewed in English.
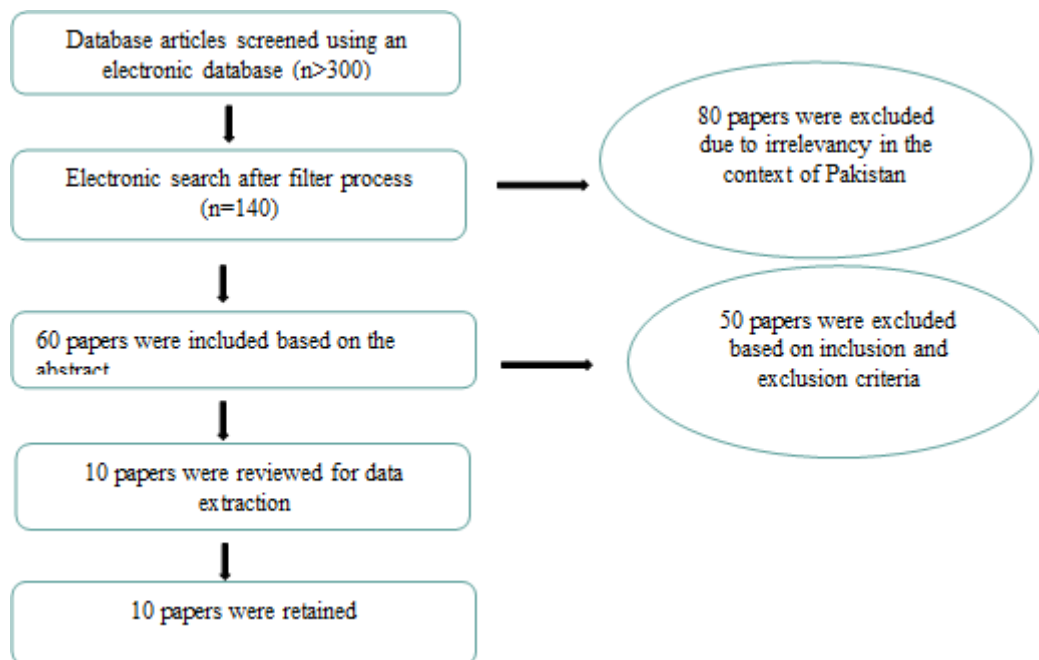
The literature review analysis also included several studies examining crucial factors and difficulties. Gender idealists in political engagement have also been studied, showing the primary hurdles and issues that underpin the lack of female participation. Because there are significant cultural and socio-economic differences between developed and impoverished countries, such as Pakistan, this study did not analyze studies related to developed countries. In addition, all research published after 2000 was included, albeit article screening and search were limited to scientific, peer-reviewed publications written in English. Finally, all selected works were studied and appraised critically concerning the project's topic and principal purpose. In the last phase, all selected

papers were critically analyzed and reviewed regarding the study's topic and primary research; the literature was investigated, processed, and reported using thematic analysis developed inductively from selected research themes.

Figure 1: Systematic Literature Review, Adapted from (7)

Figure 2: Screening Process.

Results

Years of Publication

It can be seen from Table 1 that two articles were published in 2009, 2016, and 2020, respectively, while one paper was published in 2014, 2017, 2018, and 2019. In the context of female participation in politics in underdeveloped countries like Pakistan, publications are expected to grow. With time, the publication will explore the significant factors related to female political participation in Pakistan.

Overview of the Selected Studies

A systematic literature review was performed on 10 papers for this research. Table 1 provides a concise summary of these papers, including information about the authors, the purpose of the study, the research methodology, and the procedures for collecting and analyzing data.

Table 1: Years of Publication.

Years of Journal Publication	Number of selected papers
2009	2
2014	1
2016	2
2017	1
2018	1
2019	1
2020	2
Total=	10

Table 2: Overview of the Selected Studies.

Reference No.	Objective	Research method	Data collection
(6)	This research investigates the elements that lead to a rise in female political involvement in Pakistan.	Qualitative	Secondary source through literature review
(8)	The study aims to investigate males' perceptions and opinions about female Political participation.	Qualitative	Primary source Purposive sampling Sample size=20 for in-depth interviews Two focus group discussions Thematic analysis
(9)	The study's goal is to uncover the primary root reason for Pakistan's poor growth in Female empowerment in political involvement and suggest measures to promote female empowerment for democratic Government.	Quantitative	Convenience sampling technique from 88 respondents Descriptive statistics
(10)	The article's primary goal is to look at female representation in politics Through the lens of history. This research	Qualitative	Secondary sources through literature review and reports

	investigates the development and current condition, as well as the societal hurdles that have hampered female involvement in the p olitical system		
(11)	**The study's primary purpose is to examine the numerous obstacles that prohibit women from fully participating in national politics and give political elites options to improve national integration without ensuring female participation in politics.**	Qualitative	Secondary sources through literature review.
(12)	**This paper aims to look at the factors that contributed to poor female participation in Pakistan's election process, which was ascribed to people's beliefs that it went against the country's prevalent customs and values.**	Qualitative	Secondary data using literature review
(13)	**This study examines the several challenges to female political empowerment in Dir Lower, identifying a variety of explanations and barriers, such as social, economic, political, religious, and cultural restrictions that prohibit women from engaging in political activities.**	Qualitative	Primary source Structured interview and focus group
(14)	**The inconsistent degree of female participation at various periods is examined in this study.**	Qualitative	Secondary source using literature review
(15)	**This research investigated the socio-cultural barriers prohibiting women from participating in politics in Balochistan province.**	Qualitative	Primary source Snowball sampling for interviews of 10 participant Content analysis
(16)	**The principal purpose of this study is to look at the role of women in Azad Jammu and Kashmir's political agenda.**	Qualitative	Primary source through in-depth interviews with 20 participants Thematic analysis

Thematic Analysis

Females can achieve long-term well-being in culture, society, and economy with political influence adequately represented in decision-making. Based on the findings, five themes were formed, which grouped the various aspects into the following categories: "political factors," "religious, ideological, and "psychological factors," "gender discrimination and security challenges," "socioeconomic factors," and "cultural factors."

Theme 1: Political Factors

Several aspects within mechanisms and processes have been highlighted, including party preferences and discrimination against women, a "less institutionalized set-up," "a quota system," "elite groupings," "managerial concerns," and "networking issues." An area's social and political structure impacts the attitude and conduct of political parties toward their aims. Hence, this

region's social and political backdrop directly impacts all parties' functions[11].

As a result, political parties favor male members since conventional values and attitudes impact them. Furthermore, political parties have a poor functional democracy, which has a detrimental impact on female representation since political parties have an "extremely authoritative," "male-dominated," and "dynastic national discourse" that has limited female participation in the political process[13,16]. Matloob et al.[16] also said that a "less institutionalized party system", gives persons closest to the political group's core leadership more significant influence and possibilities, which might be challenging for women in Pakistan. The less formalized set-up at the party level is a substantial factor in the need for more female representation at various levels within and at the national level 16.

According to Awan[10], political parties have boosted female involvement in politics while increasing quota seats, although the success of this strategy still needs to be determined. In the form of "constituency services", "party funding", "direct vote-buying" and other specific favoritisms, such personal networking provides extra vital advantages to the party. As a result, those from personal networking or dynastic elites have more significant opportunities to obtain advantages over non-dynastic elites in the candidate selection process[14]. Several additional problems, "such as "lack of national identity cards", "lack of access to polling stations", and "confusing polling procedure", have also posed challenges for females living in remote and rural regions, according to[13]. Furthermore, failing to ensure security for female candidates and voters has limited female participation in the political process[12]."

Theme 2: Religious, Psychological, and Ideological factors Factors

According to Latif et al.[8], religion and political affiliation significantly exclude women from politics. Because it is thought that ladies are not permitted to be visibly present in public areas

owing to religious obligations, it suggests that the absence of female political engagement is primarily attributable to religious considerations since those who are more religious tend to limit and reject female political participation[10,13]. Another difficulty is misunderstanding "Islamic" edicts, a significant barrier to female political engagement. Even though Islam promotes complete equality between men and women, certain religious parties and pseudo-religious persons who pretend to be religious are likely to place limitations on women's ability to participate in political life, and religious fundamentalists continue to construct roadblocks in this regard.9 Some ideological and psychological elements also significantly contribute to women's underrepresentation in the democratic process. Females can achieve high levels in the political process if they have confidence and drive; nevertheless, females who lack confidence do not believe in themselves[9,10]. They must alter the idea that males only have the right to lead or make decisions. Furthermore, Bano[6] stated that females lack the motivation to participate enthusiastically in politics. Moreover, the impression that "politics is a filthy game" is incorrect since it might be a challenging game riddled with perils; it does not exclude females from participating in it.

Theme 3: Gender Discrimination and Security Issues

At every level of society, including the family, the community, and the state, discrimination against women is the root cause of their lack of legitimacy and participation in decision-making processes. This is especially true at the state level. Excluding women from positions of power in politics and administration presents a substantial barrier to achieving national unity and societal progress. The instrumental argument has been utilized to justify the presence of females in the institutional system. According to Naseer and Kalsoom[11], gender discrimination in the election process is another significant barrier for female candidates, which explains why political parties are reluctant to nominate female candidates9. At the party level, gender differences exist, which influences how political parties portray female involvement as that of an "individual" rather than a party member. On

the other hand, sexual harassment in "gender non-segregated" settings is a significant impediment to the political participation of women; despite this, there is still no structure in place to secure females within or outside of political organizations. Additionally, security issues such as rape cases, bombings, and terrorism have made it more difficult for women to participate in politics. Additionally, security issues such as "religious zealotry", "lack of resources", "education" and "political experience" have also made it more difficult for women to participate in politics[8].

Theme 4: Socio-Economic Factors

The socio-economic conditions present a formidable obstacle for women seeking to engage in political participation. Female participation has remained low at both the provincial and national levels. Socio-economic factors contribute significant challenges that impede women's engagement in mainstream political activities. According to Awan[10], the incidence of female issues in Pakistan, such as insufficient literacy or education, unequal resource allocation, and the disadvantaged social status of women, have been highlighted as significant obstacles. Women's political engagement is limited due to the increased demand for economic resources and control over productive resources that politics requires from women aged 16 and above. In Pakistan, it is observed that women tend to rely on their husbands for financial support. Consequently, their eligibility to pursue political candidature is contingent upon obtaining the consent of their respective families. Moreover, as stated by Khan[13], women face a significant barrier to their participation in the election and voting process due to their reliance on financial support from their families.

Theme 5: Cultural Factors

The participation of women in political life has also been restricted owing to various cultural factors. Beliefs, views, local traditions, cultural norms, and practices of patriarchy, together with a society that males control, acted as barriers to the political empowerment of women. It is a common misconception that women should care for their children and domestic responsibilities while remaining at home rather than participating in extracurricular activities. In many different cultures, tradition places considerable emphasis on and defines the primary function of the female as that of a mother and housewife[13]. While the stereotypical nations connected with females are significant factors for females, there is still a prevalent belief in society that females are not supposed to lead the group. This is one of the prevailing cultural notions around the leadership qualities of females. Even more than that, traditions emphasized and prescribed the primary role of the female as that of a mother and homemaker[6]. Naseer and Kalsoom[11] highlighted that the key factors behind the low percentage of female engagement in politics are a male-dominated culture and a patriarchal system. According to Hussain et al.[12] and Tabassum et al.[14], the patriarchal system is more resilient in Pakistan's tribal areas, which are places where local norms have established male control and dominance over the lives of women. This is the case in areas where local norms have found male control and domination over the lives of women. According to Bano[6] and Awan[10], social norms and cultural values affect Pakistani society.

Furthermore, the predominant cultural beliefs and skewed social structure significantly impact their social lives, status, and roles. It has also been demonstrated that several cultural conventions, such as the practice of marrying off girls at a young age, placing limitations on travel, making extensive family obligations, and isolating women, have all contributed to a reduction in the engagement of women in politics. A key obstacle for women to actively participate in politics in rural and tribal communities is the absence of family support. This lack of support is a result of traditional beliefs and practices as well as male domination in these communities. Candidates for political office also require additional support from their female peers. As a direct consequence, women do not benefit from the support of female networks, which negatively impacts their standing in long-term political processes[16, 17].

Discussion

Several barriers are associated with the lack of political support for females in Pakistan[18, 19, 20]. However, all these barriers can be categorized into domestic and societal. It has also been found that effective female involvement at all levels of government, from the lowest to the highest, is a political activity that is inextricably linked to antecedents' heritage, as is the case with female members of legislatures from political families. Furthermore, increasing female political participation is merely a band-aid approach to achieving gender equality because it does not encourage actual political empowerment and democratic contribution of women while removing all barriers to political empowerment[21]. Morobane's study[20] stated that the lack of female party support has been identified as a hindrance to female involvement in Pakistan's current political system. Political parties are unwilling to adopt or implement any reforms or policies for fear of losing political support and power since traditional beliefs, religious norms, and cultural traditions affect their preferences for male members of their parties in contrast to females. The author also argued that patriarchal and dirty politics mainly influence these parties. On the other hand, females face certain inherent constraints, such as a patriarchal system or a male-dominated society in which the male is seen as the head of the household and has the authority to make all choices.

Male-dominated culture and strict family commitments are damaging to females' daily lives since parents are concerned about potential marriage troubles, and girls face more challenges in these areas 6, 12, 23. Shedova[14] has also examined the restrictions on females' participation in politics and divided them into three categories. According to[14], political factors such as the "masculine model of politics," "lack of party support," "cooperation with women's organizations," and "electoral system." The second factor is ideological, which is related to the traditional role of females in the household, lack of confidence in females, the "perception of politics as dirty", and the "role of mass media. Finally, socio-economic concerns such as poverty, unemployment, literacy, dual burden, education, and training are to be considered. Traditional duties and job allocation continue to be gendered, and cultural norms have made it difficult for women to participate in public roles outside the house. Female gender identity is still predominantly perceived as "domestic in nature," which hinders female political engagement. Furthermore, various issues are linked to election campaign organizational operations funding. It has also been found that how female members are nominated for party posts creates significant barriers to female participation in the political process. Even females have various limitations in moving forward in political procedures because of "biradari support," "patronage reference," and "fewer pecuniary means"[25].

Conclusion

The primary objective of this research is to investigate the important aspects of Pakistan's low percentage of female involvement in politics. This study adopted a qualitative research approach using various secondary resources such as research articles while conducting a systematic process. Based on analysis, it can be said that limited female participation in the political and governing systems is mostly a result of political, religious, and gender discrimination, socioeconomic, ideological, psychological, cultural, and spiritual perspectives. The underrepresentation of women in politics also reflects the complicated societal processes that reinforce one another, necessitating coordinated and cooperative activities and strategies to address problems. With more women in decision-making positions, laws and policies based on gender will be more effectively formulated in various fields, including society, business, health, and education. Through the development of education and awareness, the role of females should be more focused on local and societal normative practices to increase women's empowerment. Changes need to be made at the grassroots level, starting with the notion of society's male dominance and the conventional position of women and removing

mobility restrictions. Furthermore, women's underrepresentation in politics reflects complex, mutually reinforcing societal dynamics and needs intentional and collaborative actions and methods to address concerns.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and analyzing the selected studies, this study has recommended several aspects that are required to be considered by concerned authorities and relevant stakeholders.

- In order to encourage more women to get involved in politics, consistent and significant efforts need to be made to expand the number of women elected to legislative bodies and improve their representation within such bodies.
- It is necessary to effect change at the grassroots level by changing society's beliefs of male dominance, women's conventional roles, and mobility constraints. Raising female quotas at all levels should be supported by the Constitution.
- Female grassroots political engagement is crucial for introducing and training non-elite females to join formal politics. Female candidates for general seats must be offered reforms to mainstream their female members. The writers also suggested that rules and regulations be rewritten with a female perspective.
- To strengthen women's empowerment, the role of women should be more centered on local and social normative behavior, as well as education and awareness promotion.
- Furthermore, communication between female wings of government and opposition parties is required to develop legislative measures to reduce bias against women.
- Educational qualifications are required to allow people to analyze prospective uses and boost their possibilities of political empowerment.
- All significant stakeholders should evaluate discriminatory socio-cultural and religious practices against women.

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