PATRIARCHY IN POLITICS AND POLITICAL PARTIES IN PAKISTAN

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Foreword

Patriarchy is a system of relationships, associations, beliefs, and values or ethics embedded in political, social, and economic systems that lead to gender-based discrimination between men and women in all walks of life. This publication is particularly dealing in patriarchy at the level of politics in the context of Pakistan.

The Pakistani female politicians inspite of many hurdles and challenges in a typical male dominated setup, have been not less than their male counterparts when it comes to delivering at work including legislations, running political campaigns and their bold presence in public spheres. However, the integrated patriarchal norms pose serious issues and challenges to their work. Looking into the factor of patriarchy at political level is therefore the focus of this paper as well.

FES hopes that this paper will provide a first step in the direction of understanding the dynamics of patriarchy at different tiers of government and thoughtfulness on why such patterns exist and how they can be dealt in solving manner. We wish it might contribute to a further development and strengthening of the idea of necessity of enabling environment for women to be in politics so that they can play their roles the best of themselves.

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Executive Summary

After partition, Pakistan experienced a transfer of power from the colonial rulers to the local elite, who enjoyed a distinguished status due to their access to education, resources and their ties of kinship and patronage within the state apparatus and among functionaries, including the bureaucracy and the military. They redefined the social landscape as well as the foundational and doctrinal fabric of the society to reiterate and maintain the public–private dichotomy, gender roles and unequal gender relations to sustain their hegemony and benefit from the status quo. As a result, patriarchy and sexism were deployed as tools, often shrouded in religion, culture or honour, to reinforce the imbalanced gender relations—with both hostile and benevolent undertones. These notions became internalized throughout society, including among women.

Pakistan's Parliament is a bicameral structure consisting of the National Assembly and the Senate. Even before partition, women had struggled for representation and for political space as equal citizens. Their efforts gradually opened more room for them in politics, and what started out as two women in the first constituent assembly, led to a 3 per cent quota for women in the National Assembly. Thus, today, 17.5 per cent of the National Assembly, or 60 of the 342 seats, are reserved for women, with an additional opportunity to compete within the election process for general seats.

The Senate consists of 100 members. Seats are allocated to each province in accordance with the system of proportional representation determined through the elections. The Senate is not subject to dissolution, but the term of its members is six years. Half of the Senate members retire every three years, and new ones are elected to replace them. For the March 2018–2024 tenure, only 10 of the 100 members are women.

The reserved seat quota system was expected to mainstream women into policymaking in a way that would eventually lead them to compete equally and successfully for general seats without the need for affirmative action. The 2018 general election results, nevertheless,

reflect a worrying trend of diminishing success among women for the general seats. Despite the fruitful efforts by women to secure the quota in law that compels political parties to give 5 per cent of their respective tickets to female candidates to contest elections for the general seats, in addition to the reserved seats, women's access and advancement in politics is dependent upon men deciding to support them. Even the reserved seats are filled on the basis of a priority list submitted by parties—led by men—to the Election Commission, in proportion to their victory with the general seats. These lists mainly consist of the kin of the male leadership. A party's ticket for the general seats are distributed to the people who are considered "electable".

Female candidates are not equitably featured in election campaigns and posters largely due to the patriarchal notions of honour. The few women who make it to either a reserved or a general seat are subject to greater scrutiny over their legislative performance, their appearance and their "presentability". They also often face sexist remarks and abuse in the media and by male politicians, while their participation in local governance is hampered often due to the scheduling of meetings informally in private spaces, which are subject to social rules on the segregation of the genders and constraints on mobility. And yet, despite these constraints, women continue coming forward to fight for more political space.

The deeply entrenched social, economic and other barriers originating from the patriarchal distinctions cannot be addressed through legislation alone and require more transformative, multisectoral and multidimensional approaches from civil society organizations and other stakeholders. It will require engagement with top leadership, more affirmative action within political parties to increase women's participation in elections, more structure for appointments to reserved seats, women's economic empowerment and their increased access to education and networking opportunities. In addition, media and male politicians and other actors within the political sphere would benefit from sensitivity training as well as training on the importance of inclusive policymaking.

Introduction

Pakistan is signatory to several international human rights conventions, including those that render it subject to obligations for promoting women's human rights, non-discrimination and gender equality. They encompass the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966,[1] the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 1996,[2] the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women 1979,[3] the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 1995[4] and the Sustainable Development Goals.[5] These conventions and forums require that State Parties end discrimination against women to ensure their equal access to public life—a right that is also recognized under articles 25 and 34 of the country's Constitution.[6] Pakistan has passed numerous laws to ensure fair representation of women and has included provisions for affirmative action to ensure the representation of women, particularly in its governing assemblies and local governments.[7]

Despite the national and international commitments, Pakistan ranks second worst, better only than Afghanistan, on the Gender Gap Index in the 2022 World Economic Forum's *Global Gender Gap Report*.[8] Even though Pakistan ranks 95th in that same Index in terms of women's political empowerment, which also acknowledges the country has

1. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted 16 December 1966 UNGA Res 2200A (XXI), articles 2, 3, 25, 26.
2. International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, adopted 16 December 1966 UNGA Res 2200 A (XXI), articles 2, 3.
3. Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, adopted 18 December 1979 UNGA Res 34/180, articles 1, 2, 3, 7, 8.
4. Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted 15 September 1995 Plenary Meeting of the Fourth World Conference on Women.
5. Sustainable Development Goals, adopted 1 January 2016.
6. Constitution of Pakistan 1973, articles 25 and 34.
7. See for instance, Local Government Ordinance 2001, Local Government Act 2013, Local Government Act 2019, Local Government Act 2022 and the Punjab Fair Representation of Women Act 2014.
8. World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report (Geneva, 2022).

closed 56.4 per cent of the gender gaps,[9] it remains a country in which women have the smallest share of senior, managerial and legislative roles, at 4.5 per cent.[10]

This is telling, given that Pakistani women have been striving for rights and representation since before partition. In the Roundtable Conferences of the 1930s, women had called for a 10 per cent quota in the assemblies.[11] In 1954, after partition and at the final meeting of the first constituent assembly of Pakistan, the quota conceded was only 3 per cent, with five seats reserved for East and West Pakistan each, bringing the membership of the National Assembly at that time to 310 members.[12]

Pakistan's Parliament is a bicameral structure consisting of the National Assembly and the Senate. Even before partition, women had struggled for representation and to claim political space as equal citizens.

Today, women constitute nearly half of the population of Pakistan,[13] but they comprise only 20 per cent of the total membership of the National Assembly. Of them, 17 per cent (60 women) are in the seats reserved for women and religious minorities (by appointment), while only about 3 per cent (10 women) have been elected to a general seat.[14] Table 1 highlights the state of representation of women in the National Assembly and the provincial assemblies.

9. Ibid., p. 29.
10. Ibid., p. 12.
11. Rubina Saigol, "The struggle for women's rights legislation", blog, LawyHER.pk, 2 December 2020.
12. World Bank, "Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments", data.worldbank.org/indicator, accessed 5 August 2022.
13. Percentage of female population in Pakistan stands at 48.5 per cent, according to World Bank data, accessed 5 August 2022.
14. National Assembly of Pakistan, "Complete list of female MNAs", accessed 5 August 2022.

Table 1. State of representation of women in the National Assembly and provincial assemblies

Assembly	Total membership	Women	Reserved seats	General seats
National[a]	342	70 (20%)	60 (17%)	10 (3%)
Punjab[b]	368	74 (20%)	67 (18%)	7 (2%)
Sindh[c]	166	30 (18%)	29 (17.4)	1 (0.6%)
Balochistan[d]	65	11 (16.9%)	11 (100%)	0 (0%)
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa[e]	143	27 (19%)	26 (18%)	1 (0.6%)
Total	1,084	212 (30%)	193 (19%)	19 (2%)
Total (women only)	212	20%	91%	9%

Note: The data show that 91 per cent of representation of women in the assemblies is due to affirmative action among the reserved seats. Only 9 per cent of women members have elected to a general seat, which is a negligible percentage, given that women constitute roughly half of the population in Pakistan.
Source: a=National Assembly of Pakistan, "Complete list of female MNAs", accessed 5 August 2022; b=Punjab Assembly, "Members directory", accessed 5 August 2022; c=Sindh Assembly, "Members directory", accessed 5 August 2022; d=Balochistan Assembly, "Members directory", accessed 7 August 2022; e=Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly, "Members directory", accessed 7 August 2022.

The Senate consists of 100 members. Seats are allocated to each province in accordance with the system of proportional representation determined through elections. The Senate is not subject to dissolution, but the term of its members is six years.[15] Half of the Senate members retire every three years, and new ones are elected to replace them. For the March 2018–2024 tenure, only 10 of the 100 members are women.

The state of representation of women within political parties, at the national and provincial levels, is also dismal. A close look reveals that without affirmative action, there would be little to no representation of women within the political parties or in the assemblies—only 9 per

15. See Current Members, Senate of Pakistan by Tenure and Gender.

cent of women are members of the assemblies on a general seat.[16]

Similar trends are observed in the appointments for constitutional roles, such as speaker or deputy speakers, and in the distribution of ministry portfolios and advisory roles. The majority of members of the Cabinet of the Prime Minister and the chief ministers are male. Currently, only the deputy speaker of the Sindh Assembly is a woman.[17] The federal Cabinet, for instance, comprises 33 persons, of whom only three are women ministers. And 10 women of the 36 persons (28 per cent) serve as a parliamentary secretary at the national level.[18] Table 2 breaks down the provincial cabinet membership.

Table 2. Sex-disaggregated data for provincial cabinets

Assembly	Total ministers	No. of female ministers	No. of female parliamentary secretaries	No. of female advisers and special assistants
Punjab	37	1	0	0
Sindh	18	2	3	2
Balochistan[a]	12	0	0	0
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa[b]	16	0	2	0

This data are based on the review of provincial cabinets and ministries as of September 2022. Although Sindh has the largest representation of women when it comes to ministries and other high-level positions in the government and in ministries, women's representation is still extremely low: Only one minister of 37 minsters in Punjab Province is a woman, and only two ministers of 18 in Sindh are women, while Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan have no women ministers.
Source: a=Balochistan does not even have a Women's Development Ministry or Department. See: Balochistan Assembly, "Cabinet", accessed 4 August 2022; b=Khyber Pakhtunkhwa also does not have a Women Development Ministry or Department: See: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly, "Ministers", accessed 4 August 2022.

All provinces fare poorly on an inclusion and representation index, with Punjab, the largest province in terms of population, having only one female minister in its cabinet. Sindh leads with two female ministers, while Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have none. These numbers are grossly underwhelming and do not reflect fair representation of women in politics.

16. Senate of Pakistan, "Current members", accessed 8 October 2022.
17. Sindh Assembly, "Members profile", accessed 26 September 2022.
18. National Assembly of Pakistan, "Parliamentary secretaries", accessed 26 September 2022.

Women's representation in local government

In Pakistan's system of governance, power is devolved to local governments (below the provincial tier). The head of the local government, known as Zilla Nazim, is an elected position. The local structure includes a Zilla Nazim's cabinet, comprising councillors and professionals or technocrats. There is no restriction on women running as a candidate for the Zilla Nazim position, but few women actually do. Under the local government structure, seats are reserved for female members to ensure their representation in the structure of governance at the metropolitan, municipal and *tehsil* levels.

According to the first schedule of the Punjab Local Government Act, 2022, the number of female members is to be at least one for local governments having a population of less than a million and two for local governments having a population of 10 million or more.[19] According to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Local Government Act, 2013, each district council must consist of general seats and seats reserved for women, farmers, workers, youth and non-Muslims.[20] In the Province of Balochistan, a local council must have elected women members amounting to 33 per cent.[21] What is also interesting, in Balochistan, there is a caveat in its Local Government Act, 2010 (section 10) under which the composition of the local council is to comply with the quota for women mentioned in section 12 of the Act only as far as "is possible". Thus, there is no guarantee that the reserved seats for women will be filled at their maximum. In Sindh Province, the union council, town committees and union committees are to each have one woman member, whereas the district municipal corporation, metropolitan corporation, district council, municipal corporations and municipal committees are to have reserved seats to the extent of 22 per cent for women members.[22]

A union councillor is the head of a small village or rural population and is an elected position, for which women are free to compete. Few seldom did. Thus, the reserved seats for women at this tier of

19. First Schedule, Punjab Local Government Act, 2022, accessed 3 October 2022.
20. Part A, Second Schedule, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Local Government Act, 2013 accessed 3 December 2022.
21. Section 12, Balochistan Local Government Act, 2010.
22. Chapter III, Constitution and Composition of Councils, Sindh Local Government Act, 2013.

governance proved successful in getting more women to participate in local politics, if not at the Zilla Nazim level, then at least at the level of union councillor. Nearly 40,000 women entered union councils through the 33 per cent quota in local government bodies under the regime of General Pervez Musharraf in 2000–2001.[23] The unprecedented success of this measure, however, was rolled back in 2004, after Musharraf reduced the number of these seats by half, a measure that directly impacted the representation of women. Ayesha Khan and Sana Naqvi explored the reasons for the reduction in their 2018 paper, in which they reported that the rollback was possibly due to the unexpected but successful participation of women at the local level that shook the vested interests of the generals and the men in politics. One activist they spoke to stated: "They [men in politics] had never expected such a strong turnout of women to occupy those seats."[24]

Ayesha Khan and Sana Naqvi further explained that if women had indeed taken a third of the seats in each of the legislative assemblies (at 33 per cent reservation), they would have been able to demand funds and move bills even without the support of male politicians, another unacceptable outcome. In short, there was an immediate backlash to the affirmative action measure.[25]

This suggests that women's effective, let alone equal, representation in politics is inevitably threatened with challenges that originate from the imbalance in the core gendered power dynamics prevalent in the society and the desire of the dominant gender to maintain the status quo of imbalance in power relations, which favours their interests. Legal reforms and legislative interventions appear to be employed to show just enough commitment for inclusion and progress but yet not sufficient enough to overturn or even equalize the scales of balance in the gendered power relations within society and in the political arena.

This paper explores how patriarchy impacts gender equality in politics in Pakistan. It focuses on the social and cultural norms, including historical inequities and gender discriminatory practices,

23. Ayesha Khan and Sana Naqvi, "Dilemmas of representation: women in Pakistan's assemblies", Asian Affairs, vol. LI, No. II (2020), p. 298.

24. Ayesha Khan and Sana Naqvi, "Women in Politics: gaining ground for progressive outcomes in Pakistan", IDS Working Paper, vol 2018, 519, p. 15

25. Ibid., p. 15.

that contribute to the imbalance. A driving question for the research was to assess whether there is any correlation between sexism and underrepresentation of women in politics and, if so, what measures can be taken to address it.

The analysis here is based on primary and secondary research. The research involved a survey with a group of six respondents representing different tiers of governance and policymaking in Pakistan: a woman councillor and her husband at the local level, two women from provincial assemblies, two women from the National Assembly and one woman senator. Interviews were also conducted with four former female parliamentarians. Then discussions followed with five key informants who are members of civil society and one of them also works for a political party as their provincial deputy secretary of information. Activists from the women's movement in Pakistan and persons who work closely with parliamentarians were also interviewed for third-party insights, based on their work and experiences in the field.

The secondary research entailed looking at the data from the official websites of the assemblies and the member profiles to study how many of them are women. This enabled an accounting of the number of female members in Parliament per party (see the annex). Reports from the Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development, the Transparency and the Free and Fair Election Network and other civil society organizations were also reviewed for understanding the indicators of performance of female parliamentarians in relation to their male counterparts. The literature review entailed the work of Ayesha Khan and Sana Naqvi along with economists, political commentators and constitutional historians to understand the politics of "electables" in Pakistan. Several podcasts were included in the review of secondary resources. News articles and reports were also reviewed to substantiate misogyny and sexism in the political discourse. The sources have been cited in footnotes and in the bibliography.

In addition to the policy issues, the paper looks at the subjective and perceived experiences of women in politics to understand how they are impacted at the personal level by the discriminatory attitudes, behaviours and norms.

To assess sexism, relevant indicators from the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory, including both the "hostile" and "benevolent" scale, were considered.[26] Relevant indicators from the Modern Sexism Scale were adopted.[27] More targeted and localized indicators, such as the distribution of the number of ministries, constitutional positions, offices in parties, election to a general seat, equality in election campaigning, voting, holding office, adjusting behaviour or appearance and instances of sexist abuse and/or discourse via the media were also considered. These indicators were analysed in juxtaposition with women's perceptions and feelings towards these experiences and their responses in navigating through them, noting whether and to what extent they have contributed to holding them back from equal participation in politics.

The objective was to identify the areas where an intervention could be made to mitigate the inequalities and how women can be supported at the grass-roots level to strengthen their role and representation in all tiers of policymaking and governance. These are included as recommendations in the conclusion.

26. Peter Glick and Susan T. Fiske, "The ambivalent sexism inventory: differentiating hostile and benevolent sexism", Journal of Personality and Social Psychology (1996).

27. Janet. K. Swim, Kathryn. J. Aikin, Wayne. S. Hall and Barbara. A. Hunter, "Sexism and racism: old-fashioned and modern prejudices", Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, vol. 68 (1995), pp. 199–214.

Patriarchy and politics in context

To fully understand the implications of patriarchy for women in politics and political parties in Pakistan, it is imperative to understand the historical context and contestations in the immediate aftermath of the realization of the idea of Pakistan in 1947. Even though the territory had been claimed, the ethos on which to build this new State was yet to be settled. Fundamental questions as to whether the new State was to be democratic or authoritarian, parliamentary or presidential and unitary or federal consumed the early discourse among those to whom power seemed to have transitioned on a de facto basis.[28] Since its inception, Pakistan has been caught in a contradiction between religious nationalism and its secular ethos.[29] For a country that was supposedly premised as a separate homeland for Muslims, it appears that it may not have been difficult for the religious right of its time to manoeuvre the discourse in their favour on this point.

As Hamza Alavi, an academic, sociologist and activist, eloquently explained:

> "The moment that Pakistan was established, Muslim nationalism in India had fulfilled itself and outlived its purpose. Now there was a fresh equation of privilege and deprivation to be reckoned with in the new State. Virtually overnight, there were ethnic redefinitions. Punjabis who were the most numerous, *in the West Pakistan*, [author's italics] could boast of a greater percentage of people with higher education and were most firmly entrenched in both the army (being 85 per cent of the armed forces) and the bureaucracy. They were the new bearers of privilege, the true 'Muslim' for whom Pakistan was created."[30]

28. Rubina Saigol, "The Pakistan Project: feminist perspectives on nation and identity", Women Unlimited (2013), pp. 9–30.
29. Ibid., 10.
30. Hamza Alavi, "Politics of ethnicity in Pakistan", in Regional Imbalances and the National Question in Pakistan, S. Akbar Zaidi, ed. (Lahore, Vanguard, 1992), p. 270.

The Constitution (adopted in 1973) provides for a parliamentary form of government in which the executive authority rests with the prime minister as head of government while the president is the Head of State, representing the unity of the Republic. The Constitution affirms that the legitimate process of forming the government is through the people's vote.

Despite the subsequent military interventions, the political parties that emerged needed the votes of the people to come into legitimate power. As a result, the electorate became a site for clientelism, creating opportunity for the new bearers of privilege in a post-colonial State to organize and capitalize on their influence. As Hassan Javaid, an assistant professor of political science and associate professor of sociology, explained in a podcast,[31] the new, post-partition bearers of privilege included the religious elite and the bourgeoise—the resource-rich elite (who were also entrenched in the armed forces and the bureaucracy). They became pockets of power within the state machinery and functioned by virtue of their resources and influence over (a) voters due to the relatively weak institutions not geared towards public service delivery commitments and over (b) the political parties due to their ties of kinship through marriage or other networks. These ties among the ruling elite made them influential figures in their communities, who started seeing them as intermediaries between themselves, their everyday matters and the government or bureaucracy.[32] In essence, they became brokers through which votes came to be mobilized for political candidates. A transactional clientelism emerged, placing considerable de facto power in the hands of a few elites, particularly in the rural constituencies.[33] To this day, voters and the political candidates and their parties remain dependent on this elite for their respective gains. From this has emerged the conditions for dynastic politics in Pakistan and those who are colloquially referred to as "the electables".

I take this analysis further to suggest that the vested interests of this elite include not just control over the policies related to economics, industry and subsidies but also over laws and the policies that seek

31. Hassan Javid, Assistant Professor of Political Science and Associate Professor of sociology at Lahore University of Management Sciences, "The role of dynasties and caste in politics", online discussion, 24 October 2020.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

social justice and gender equality. If marginalized people gain access to those networks and spaces as a result of progressive movements, legal reforms and gender equality or quotas, the electables may lose the social capital that makes them an electable in the first place.

This may explain why legal reforms pertaining to quotas, affirmative action and other measures for social justice and equality have been rolled back, met with a glass ceiling or denied implementation, such as when Musharraf reduced the quota for women in local government by half in 2004. This may also explain why patriarchy is employed as a tool to suppress competition and safeguard the electables' status and their ability to remain electable so they can continue to retain influence and negotiate economic and other benefits for themselves through governance, policy and legislation. It appears that in maintaining the imbalance in gender relations, the electables look to sustain and prolong their appeal and thus, their space in the political and decision-making realms.

It is in this context that we explore patriarchy in politics and political parties in Pakistan.

How has patriarchy impacted gender equality in politics in Pakistan?

The word "patriarchy" refers to the rule of the father, or the patriarch.[34] It was originally used to describe households that were dominated by a male figurehead[35] and where decision-making about everyday facets of life, such as education and marriage, were made by the men in positions of authority over the women. The control of men over decision-making and their access to resources did not remain within the private sphere alone, however; rather, the control in the private sphere led to their advancement and control of resources and positions in the public sphere as well. Access to better nutrition at home, to better schooling and education as well as more freedom of mobility in the society enabled men to work in various fields outside the home and capture senior leadership positions in diverse sectors, including the justice and policy sectors. This included the political arena as well as the executive, legislative and judicial organs of the State. Consequently, the social, legal, economic and political structures that emerged were "male-centred", "male-identified", "male-dominated" and other valorised qualities narrowly defined as masculine.[36]

As a system, patriarchy configures social relations and equations between men and women in a society in terms of power dynamics, wherein men yield power and control and women are expected to be subservient and submissive. These dynamics are reinforced through culture, norms, religion, education and even laws to maintain the status quo. Thus, any challenge to or disruption of these configurations in society receive vehement backlash and are hotly contested. They are often shrouded in religious, cultural and other sensitivities of the social fabric, as well as notions of honour, all of which were created by the same patriarchy that has an interest in sustaining itself. For instance, the religious right-wing backlash to the Aurat (Women's)

34. Kamla Bhasin, "What is patriarchy", in Learning Brief (PRIA, 2021), p. 2.
35. Ibid, p. 2.
36. Mary Becker, "Patriarchy and inequality: towards a substantive feminism", University of Chicago Legal Forum, No. 1 (1999).

March each year is triggered by the chanted slogans challenging the patriarchal notions within the private sphere. In their backlash, the voices of the patriarchy raise their concern over the "erosion of the moral fabric and religious and cultural values" that they perceive are under attack from the liberal Western-styled Pakistani feminists. The backlash can be intense and can include rape and death threats.[37]

As authors Alison Jagger and Paula Rothenberg argued, patriarchy is not just a set of social relations between men and women, but in a self-serving way, it also creates solidarity among men that enables them to dominate women and perpetuate the inequalities in the system that works for them.[38] In other words, the patriarchal system is characterized by power, dominance, hierarchy[39] and the collective desire of men to maintain the status quo of gendered and unequal power relations to continue benefiting from this system.

The opposite of patriarchy, as Kamla Bhasin popularly explained in her interview with Bollywood actor Amir Khan on his show, "Satyamev Jayate", is not matriarchy but equality.[40] According to UNICEF, gender equality entails that men and women, boys and girls have equal access to the conditions, treatment and opportunities for realizing their full potential, human rights and dignity and for contributing to (and benefiting from) economic, social, cultural and political development.[41] This means that men and women, girls and boys enjoy the same rights, resources, opportunities and protections. This includes the right to equal participation in the political arena and other decision-making and leadership positions. But as the United Nations Population Fund points out:

37. "Attacks on Aurat March, minorities and critics highlight shrinking space for dissent in Pakistan", Monitor Civicus, 2 April 2021. See also Amir Yasin, "Aurat March organizers demand judicial probe into Islamabad stone pelting incident", Dawn, 11 March 2020; and Rubina Saigol and Nida Usman Chaudhary, Contradictions and Ambiguities of Feminism in Pakistan (FES, 2020).
38. Alison Jagger and Paula Rothenberg, Feminist Frameworks (New York: McGraw Hill, 1984), cited in Abeda Sultana, "Patriarchy and women's subordination: a theoretical analysis", The Arts Faculty Journal, July 2010-June 2011, p. 3.
39. Ibid., p. 3.
40. Kamla Bhasin, "Domestic violence, the male birth right", Satyamev Jayate Season 1, Episode 7, 17 June 2012.
41. UNICEF, "Glossary of terms and concepts" (2017), p. 3.

> "Where gender inequality exists, it is generally women who are excluded or disadvantaged in relation to decision-making and access to economic and social resources. Therefore, a critical aspect of promoting gender equality is the empowerment of women, with a focus on identifying and redressing power imbalances and giving women more autonomy to manage their own lives. Achieving gender equality requires women's empowerment to ensure that decision-making at private and public levels and access to resources are no longer weighted in men's favour, so that both women and men can fully participate as equal partners in productive and reproductive life."[42]

The notion of gender equality appears to mount a direct counternarrative to the patriarchal values and norms that place men in a position of authority over women. Thus, it receives such a lacklustre response for its realization in practice, particularly from men sitting in those positions of authority and power who enjoy their status. Understanding this notion helps to understand why patriarchy hits back at the concept of gender equality and resists it so zealously at times by using religion, honour or culture as the shield.

Politics and political parties in Pakistan are no exception to the preservation of the status quo of the gendered power relations. In fact, it may be one of the more pronounced sectors in which patriarchy manifests itself boldly, where historically held patriarchal views pertaining to women and their role, honour, demeanour, appearance and place in society tend to hold them back from equal participation in politics. The majority of the respondents to the survey and interviews I conducted for this paper believe that patriarchal culture in society and within political parties dissuades women from entering politics. They also believe that women's very entry into politics remains dependent on male politicians.

To assess how patriarchy adversely impacts gender equality in politics and political parties, I looked at (i) the dependency of women on male politicians for entry into politics and political parties, (ii) the extent of equality in election campaigns, (iii) the number of ministerial,

42. UNFPA, "Frequently asked questions about gender equality" (2005).

constitutional and cabinet positions and offices held by women in the mainstream political parties, (iv) the correlation between sexism and underrepresentation of women in politics and political parties, (v) how much appearance matters for entry and advancement in politics and political parties, (vi) the sexist behaviour by the media and the sexism in political discourse and (vii) the venue of meetings. I also sought out the views of female parliamentarians and former local government members through the survey, interviews and discussions.

Dependency on male politicians for entry into politics and political parties

There are two ways in which women can enter a legislative assembly or the local government. One is through direct election based on constituency politics, for which they can either stand as an independent candidate or be given a "ticket" by a party for contesting that seat as their candidate in a given constituency. The other is by appointment to a reserved seat for women. Both are dependent upon party leadership, which is characteristically male-dominated. In fact, the appointment to a reserved seat is subjected to a further caveat: Reserved seats are allotted to political parties on the basis of proportional representation, based on the number of general seats they win in a given election for a given assembly, which makes the role of "electables", (who primarily are considered to be influential men of a constituency or their kith and kin), even more prominent.[43] The election ticket allotment, the appointments to reserved seats and constituency politics in general in the male-dominated society and therefore, leads to several complexities rooted in patriarchy, kinship and family ties that hinder women's entry into and advancement within politics.

Standing as an independent candidate and early dependency in the home

Of the current total of 212 female members in all assemblies, only one woman ran for election in the 2018 Punjab Assembly and won as an independent candidate: Syeda Maimanat Mohsin, known more fondly as Jugnu Mohsin. In 2022 however, she aligned herself with the

43. Tahir Malik and Irfan Ghauri, "How reserved seats for women are reserved for privilege", The Express Tribune, 12 July 2018.

Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) party and announced her support for Hamza Shehbaz, then the candidate for Chief Minister and now leader of the opposition in the Punjab Assembly.[44] The majority of the women in all of the assemblies (193 of them, or 19 per cent) are on the reserved seats, while only 19 (2 per cent) of them were elected to a general seat with a party affiliation in the 2018 election.

One of the primary reasons why such few women campaign for an elected seat, according to the study participants, is the historical capture of influence of male electables over resources as well as over the imagination of the electorate. A journalist covering electoral politics explained that Jugnu Mohsin did much work in her constituency, which enabled her to break through the glass ceiling and earn her the general seat, but she is an exception rather than the norm because most women in many constituencies are not similarly placed in terms of access to education, mobility and agency to freely and committedly take on the work that goes behind standing and winning as an independent candidate.[45] Due to the perceived perception of the subordination of women that derives from the patriarchal notions, women are less able to come across as "influential brokers" or intermediaries who can form the messianic bridge between the electorate and the bureaucracy or the government.

The study participants additionally highlighted that the elections and the run-up to them entail considerable financial expense and because women tend to lack equal access to funds and resources as well as the agency to spend those resources independently, their chances of competing as an independent candidate against men backed by party affiliations or with an influential family name remain bleak. A large part of this discrepancy in access to resources and tools comes from the patriarchal notions that manifest early in the lives of boys and girls. The gender discrimination in access to education and mobility, which are requisites for equal competition and participation later in life, places men ahead by creating different starting lines. Thus, the patriarchal structure within the home determines future opportunities for women, impacting their chances for equal participation in politics and other careers.

44. "Jugnu Mohsin announces support to PMLN", The News International, 31 July 2018.

45. Telephone interview with Punjab-based female journalist, 4 August 2022.

Ticket for election as a party candidate for a general seat

"Democracy is all about numbers," explained a senior female National Assembly member in an interview for this paper.[46] She seems to have embraced the practical functioning of politics, grounded in a realism that she has not shied away from challenging. Her expectations are rooted in her reality as a woman in Pakistani society, although she believes the historical imbalance in the power relations can be addressed, albeit incrementally.

Based on this politician's experience, a women's entry into politics and her success therein depend on her performance in her work or service outside of politics. She believes a woman's work outside of politics, especially in social or development sectors, is likely to enable her to make her presence felt, which in turn is more likely to enable her to be "picked up" for politics on the basis of what she brings to the table, other than her gender. This particular politician does not think that this is discriminatory and believes that men also must bring power, influence or money to the table if they want a political party to give them a ticket. She does not agree that their being male entitles them to this privilege. She also insists that not every man is similarly placed: There are those who have more social currency than others, and this, she said, explains why it is not gender that drives the selection decisions, rather, it is the practical calculation to ensure that the candidates most likely to win an election are fielded because the objective of winning the election generally overrides other considerations.

When asked about the practice of parties to give tickets to women from weak constituencies (areas not likely to vote for a party's candidates) only to comply with the legal requirement, another National Assembly member questioned why a party would allot a ticket based on gender alone.[47] For political parties, she argued, it is ultimately about the number of seats required to form a government. Whether that success comes by fielding a candidate that comes with an influential family name or by fielding the appropriate electable is the only calculation that matters to them. Hence, idealistic and principled notions like gender equality and how it would be good for

46. Interview with senior female member of the National Assembly, in Lahore, 6 September 2022.

47. Interview with senior female member of the National Assembly, in Lahore, 7 September 2022.

society are unlikely to factor into their considerations when allotting tickets for constituencies.

According to another woman parliamentarian, women with family influence are actually fielded not for the weakest but for the strongest of the constituencies (areas highly likely to vote for a party's candidate), where families traditionally have a hold and influence over the voters. In such case, it is the family name and not the gender that wins the seat for the party. Where women do not come with such a background, they are more likely to be fielded for constituencies that the party perceives as the weakest in terms of its support among the voters. She explained this avoids the embarrassment of losing that seat and to hide behind gender in the event of a loss. Patriarchy is therefore, both a shield for justifying defeat when it comes to fielding candidates to the general seats in weaker constituencies as well as a basis to promote patriarchal lineage by awarding tickets to women from their own kin for the stronger seats or where there is dynastic hold and influence of the family on voters. In both cases, the decision to award tickets is in the hands of the party leadership, which, as noted, is predominantly male. Women party members have little or nothing to do with these decisions, which are often made without transparency or wide consultation within the party. Therefore, women remain dependent on male colleagues, relatives and party heads for a party ticket to a general seat.

The younger women parliamentarians I interviewed had more idealistic expectations for the allotment of party tickets. They hold strongly to the belief that it is in a political party's interest to realize that women are a huge asset due to the empathy they bring to politics and to the progressive image their presence and advancement projects for the party as well as parliamentary progress. The young women parliamentarians also highlighted that there is an increasing trend within political parties to appoint more women to the parliamentary committees, even to the extent of appointing some as chair of different committees. The younger women also highlighted that the Women's Parliamentary Caucus provides opportunity for women across party lines to work together on collective issues, through which they have successfully managed to push for legislation on many women's and children's rights issues, among others. They also believe that because women represent nearly half of the population, they must be given

their due share in politics. "Ignoring them will not lead to good results," said one of them.[48]

Women's collective advocacy led to the electoral reforms in 2017. Due to these amendments, an election in a constituency will now be rendered null and void if female turnout amounts to less than 10 per cent of voters. Women also rallied for 15 per cent of party tickets for general seats to be allotted to women as an affirmative action in 2017 but ended up securing only the 5 per cent provision.[49] The majority of the research participants for this paper agreed that were they not mandated by law, the political parties would be unlikely to field female politicians for general seats unless they were related to male politicians.[50]

Curiously however, even with the 5 per cent quota, fewer women are elected to the general seats.[51] It is unclear whether this is due to lack of acknowledgement, visibility or realization of the contributions that women make by men in the positions of authority and power (wilful blindness) that women continue to be marginalized when it comes to party tickets or whether the marginalization of women politicians is due to the patriarchy's reaction to the rise of strong women's voices within politics. The general consensus among the parliamentarians I interviewed and surveyed suggests that it is the inability of men to accept women as equals, which society reinforces. The patriarchal mindset and the need to promote dynastic interests and lineage do not see women with a prominent role in the public space. For those in leadership positions in political parties, winning elections is the goal, not idealistic notions of equality or representation.

Moreover, the research participants also highlighted that some political parties do not comply with the 5 per cent quota requirement, and there is no accountability for it. Even if there was greater enforcement, the younger women parliamentarians who come with a technical background and subject expertise seem disgruntled at the practice within parties of allotting tickets to female relatives as opposed to those who deserve it on merit— the merit being the professional

48. Interview with a former Punjab Assembly member in a reserved seat, 1 September 2022.

49. Section 206, Election Act 2017.

50. These respondents included three members of the provincial assembly, two members of the national assembly and all five key informants.

51. Khan and Naqvi, "Dilemmas of representation: women in Pakistan's assemblies", p. 287.

qualification and subject expertise as opposed to lineage and familial ties.

Appointment to a reserved seat

Women's dependency on men for appointment to the assemblies to the reserved seats is even more pronounced than for the general seats. It is compounded by the fact that the number of reserved seats per party depends upon that party winning the general seats in the first place (a political party gets one reserved seat for women for every 3.5 general seats it wins). Political parties tend to see men as the more winnable candidates. Currently, there is no mechanism to have elections for the reserved seats between women, as many women have been demanding, except in local government elections.[52] The perception is that the reserved seats are employed as tools to accommodate female party members from a certain class and background (privilege) who have influence due to family, kinship or patronage, as opposed to a genuine attempt to ensure representation of women in politics.

Although, men generally say they would accept an increase in the number of reserved seats for women in the assemblies, currently at 60 seats for women in the National Assembly, they have been less willing to accept the allotment of such seats via direct elections between women. They are more inclined to retain their role and control in allocating the reserved seats on the basis of a "priority list" categorized by serial number in chronological order that they draft and provide to the Election Commission.

The law empowers the heads of political parties to nominate anyone to the reserved seats. This discretion, however, as already noted, has been misused to nominate family and friends to the reserved seats.[53] In many cases, several members of the same family are accommodated, and the representation in assemblies remains within ruling classes. In this way, the seats are utilized to extend and consolidate a party head's position within the assembly, as opposed to any real effort to ensure intersectional representation by means of the affirmative action. It thus leaves people working at the grass-roots level for political parties that are ignored and even disenfranchised from power politics.

52. Ibid., p. 293.

53. Tahir Malik and Irfan Ghauri, "How reserved seats for women are reserved for privilege".

Given that women's reserved seats are dependent on party heads and on the success of mostly male candidates in the general election, women appointed to these seats are often considered as without a constituency and thus having lesser status. Even if there is representation via the reserved seats, it is likely to remain ineffective because women appointed to them have no real power, influence, stakes or constituencies to be in a position to demand much from their political party.

Most women parliamentarians are of the view that they do not get a fair or equal chance to experience politics and grow as a politician because they lack constituency or equal access to development funds. This impairs their ability to develop their vote bank independently as potential electable candidates. Regardless of this limitation, when it comes to legislation or policy, many female parliamentarians have consistently shown excellent performance in legislative business by sponsoring resolutions in the Senate and introducing bills in the National Assembly and have outperformed their male counterparts in terms of attendance, among other indicators.[54]

Female parliamentarians stated that they are more likely to experience condescending and demeaning attitudes for being in the National Assembly on a reserved seat—from male counterparts as well as from women elected to a general seat. The respondents see this attitude from the men and the women elected to general seats as one that is rooted in stereotypical notions about a woman's success based on her (loose) character, especially a successful woman without a family name or dynastic lineage. One woman I talked with explained that the women on the general seats prefer to stay aloof and do not mingle with the women on the reserved seats or with women from a different (lower) income strata. Another woman, a member of a provincial assembly, said the treatment meted out to women on the reserved seats is akin to that of an outcast. She also questioned the agency of women on the general seats, given that their constituency is not so much theirs but that of their dynastic family background. She also questioned the state of representation of women in politics and how truly effective and inclusive it is.[55]

54. "A tribute to women legislators: National Assembly and Senate of Pakistan 2017–2018", FAFEN, 2018.

55. Interview with a former member of the Punjab Assembly, 2 September 2022.

The younger parliamentarians in particular are not pleased with the stereotypical notions that have come to be associated with a woman's success in politics and within political hierarchies. They cited the character assassinations and the insinuations that "women only get to the top via a man" as demeaning and demotivating for younger female members of the provincial assemblies, who want to be viewed for their expertise. As one of the former female provincial parliamentarian explained:

> "Your presence is always questionable. People always think that if [a woman] has made it, it must be because of her link or sexual relationship with a man. There are murmurs everywhere regardless of how hard a woman may have struggled to be where she is. Her work is invisible, but her gender and stereotypical notions associated with it are not. The assembly of the period 2013–2018 had one of the most diverse participation and representation of extremely competent and professional women and yet bad things were said about them. Very few can survive this onslaught, whether it is covert or overt."[56]

Another issue with the current process of distribution of reserved seats is that it gives party leadership—rather than voters—the power to appoint. The young women parliamentarians thus regard their seat as a "trust" they hold on behalf of the party, as opposed to that of the voters because they do not have any real constituency to be accountable to. The presence of reserved seats for women also undermines their representation among the general seats. Political parties see that because women can be appointed to a reserved seat, they can prefer men for the general seats. Journalists Tahir Malik and Irfan Ghauri further attributed this to the patriarchal mindset, in which women cannot run campaigns (because they have no resources) and thus it is best for them to be represented through reserved seats.[57]

56. Ibid.

57. Tahir Malik and Irfan Ghauri, "How reserved seats for women are reserved for privilege".

These trends indicate that women politicians aspiring for a reserved seat, particularly those who may come from less privileged backgrounds or have additional vulnerabilities such as being from a minority faith, are at a greater disadvantage in terms of their fair representation in politics, if they are not related to a male parliamentarian.[58]

Extent of equality in election campaigns

Election campaigns are designed, financed and carried out mostly by candidates and seldom by political parties. The campaigns include corner meetings[59] and public gatherings, with much focus on banners and posters of candidates displayed throughout a constituency in prominent locations and they prominently feature male candidates. For example, when National Assembly member Pervaiz Malik passed away in 2021, his widow, Shaista Pervaiz Malik, who was previously also a member of the National Assembly in a reserved seat, was allotted the ticket to contest the election for her late husband's seat. Her campaign posters featured the male and female leadership of her political party, which seemed to trace the hierarchy of its dynasty for voters to see who stands behind the candidate, given that it is perceived that the vote is either for the party or the electable as opposed to the female or other individual candidate. Although, Shaista Pervaiz Malik was prominent in the foreground of the poster, so too was the image of her deceased husband, in what seemed like a bid to reiterate and transfer the favourable feeling he enjoyed in his constituency.[60] By making the link with her husband, the voters were in a sense reminded to vote not for who she is in her person but for whom she reflected: a certain man's wife who is now his widow but who will carry on his vision. This came across as telling the public that they would be actually voting for the legacy of the man, that this female candidate, his widow was now expected to continue in his shoes.

58. Ibid.

59. These are small meetings during the election campaign period in different areas of a constituency. Participants are mostly important people of that area, and they meet for to plan and present reports. In other words, they are more intimate, smaller meetings for political strategizing and stock-taking within a constituency.

60. "Campaign poster by-eElection N-133" (2021). See also https://dunyanews.tv/en/Pakistan/631506-Time-for-election-campaign-for-NA-133-by-election-ends.

It is not uncommon for female candidates to be positioned in relation to their husband or other male relatives. At the local government level, there have been instances of women competing in elections whose husbands did not "allow" them to print their name on the campaign posters.[61] One such instance is Zakira Bibi, who contested the local election as an independent candidate for a reserved seat in the Drowra Union Council in the Upper Dir District of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province—an area where women traditionally are not supposed to print their name on election posters and are instead introduced in relation to their husbands, such as "wife of Badshah Muhammad" on posters and pamphlets.[62] Zakira Bibi attributes her freedom to run for the position to the fact that her husband is educated.

A similar response was given by a man I interviewed who is the husband of a woman appointed as a councillor to the reserved seat in the Punjab local government in 2021.[63] "The men here are uneducated and do not realize the need for women to be given their rights," he said. He supported his wife and explained this was because he is educated. However, he added, his wife could not take an active role because the chairman of the union council was from the rival political party who was not as receptive to women's participation in politics.

This is not a phenomenon restricted to the far-flung areas. In the campaigning period for local government elections in Islamabad in 2015, nearly every neighbourhood was plastered with posters of all major candidates. However, as journalist Sanam Zeb reported, while nearly every party list of candidates for local elections had a woman councillor, not all of them were featured as prominently on the banners as their male counterparts.[64]

61. The word "allowed" reflects the state of agency that women have in relation to their candidacy, which in turn reflects the state of patriarchy in politics in Pakistan.

62. Ahmadul Haq, "Zakira Bibi challenges patriarchy in LG polls", The Express Tribune, 28 March 2022. Note also that in most local government elections, the seats may be reserved for women, but it is not always that women get appointed to them. At the local level, there are elections inter se among women to seats reserved for women so they must compete to get appointed. This is different from how the reserved seats work in the provincial assemblies, the National Assembly and the Senate.

63. Telephone interview with the husband of a former female councilor, District Sargodha, Tehsil Kot Momin UC Wan Miana, 30 September 2022.

64. Sanam Zeb, "Women don't find centre stage on election posters", Dawn, 29 November 2015.

Sanam Zeb recalled a female candidate attributing the absence of women in campaign posters to the inherent patriarchy, the double standards and the practice of fielding female candidates who are related to prominent male politicians who do not want to see pictures of their female family members plastered around town. Although, the men see sense in allotting seats to their female relatives, they do not want their pictures or names publicized because they believe the vote is actually for the men and the family name behind the women and not actually for the women. This underscores that there is a perception that it is the husband's social and political capital that female candidates radiate even when they are contesting elections for a seat for themselves. The vote bank is essentially of the man and not of the female candidate, who may never leave the house even once for campaigning.

In some cases, women themselves are not comfortable putting their picture on posters. For them, it is sufficient that they are running for election. One candidate who spoke to journalist Sanam Zeb admitted, "It is not a good thing to have your pictures plastered around the city, which is why I don't have mine on any of my posters."[65] It appears there are deep-rooted patriarchal notions seeped in religious or cultural undertones that have been internalized by men and women, the result of which is a woman's visibility in the public domain is not considered appropriate.

In another instance, Geo TV reported that posters in support of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf female candidate Syeda Zahra Basit Bokhari in 2018 did not have her picture but her husband's photograph. Bokhari's campaign manager defended the move and argued that the candidate was a "Syed" and "Syed women do not publicize their pictures".[66]

While religion or culture may be one means to justify sexism, it is not the only factor. Sexism can come from deeply held views reflecting the unequal status of women due to cultural realities stemming from the historical discrimination against women that leave them less educated and less confident than men, even though legally, constitutionally and theoretically they are equal.

65. Ibid.

66. "Pakistan elections 2018: women candidates go 'faceless' in Pak poll campaign", Times Now News, 23 July 2018.

A female candidate's belief that it is not good to have her picture plastered around the city confirms that patriarchy guides a woman's thoughts and actions just as much as it does those of men. It testifies that women have internalized certain stereotypes associated with their gender that may restrict them from realizing their full potential. This belief can be categorized as an example of "benevolent sexism", which authors Peter Glick and Susan T. Fiske defined as a set of interrelated attitudes towards women that are sexist in terms of viewing them stereotypically and in restricted roles but that are subjectively positive in feeling and tone.[67] "Women should be cherished and protected by men" is one example, or that "a good woman should be set on a pedestal" or that "the man is the provider and the women is his dependant".[68]

While addressing this question, a former female member of a provincial assembly shared a different perspective and linked representation to resources.[69] She pointed out that women often do not have the resources to contest elections or engage in constituency politics. She believes that if women have access and agency over financial resources, they likely will push for representation in their posters and in all campaigns as well. She explained that women from prominent political families and socially affluent classes are more likely to be included in posters for national or provincial assembly campaigns than women from less influential and smaller or rural constituencies or local body elections. She added that women coming from a political family are more likely to be prominent in campaign posters and run as candidates because they do not have to pay for them from their own pocket. It is their families who bear the cost of their campaigns because the families understand that the vote is for the family name and not the women they may be foregrounding.

Women in politics are not a homogenized class, and women from less-affluent or working-class backgrounds see the women from affluent political families as an extension of their own affluent social class. They therefore, do not consider their inclusion as "real" grass-roots representation. Fielding female candidates from their own

67. Glick and Fiske, "The ambivalent sexism inventory: differentiating hostile and benevolent sexism", p. 491.

68. Ibid., p. 492.

69. Interview with a former member of the Punjab Assembly, 2 September 2022.

families appears to have become a means to get around the quotas introduced by the law, which actually neutralizes the impact of the quotas because the appointed women remain within a certain social and politically affluent class.

Number of ministries, positions and offices held by women

Even though Pakistan elected the first female prime minister in the Muslim world—Benazir Bhutto— in the 1980s and has had women speakers in the National Assembly and in the provincial assemblies, they have been extremely few and far between. The coalition government that formed in the aftermath of the vote of no confidence in April 2022 is faring poorly in its proportion and percentage of female ministers. As noted, only three of the 35 federal ministers in the cabinet are female (9 per cent). The same is true for women in other leadership and prominent roles within party offices. However, women are increasingly being appointed as members of parliamentary committees, and in some they are also serving in a leadership role. For instance, ten women are working as parliamentary secretaries at the federal level, which corresponds with the finding that there is an increasing tendency to appoint women at the secretarial or committee level. These committees look at proposed bills and work collectively with the parliamentary caucus to promote progressive legislation. According to assembly members I interviewed, this gives them unique opportunity to do better parliamentary business and contribute positively to the legislature. It helps them at a personal level as well to groom their skills as effective legislators. They argue that having more women in leadership and decision-making roles within politics, political parties and assemblies could make a difference in the perceptions and attitude towards women in politics. Thus, more affirmative action is needed to counter the obstacles created by patriarchy.

The provincial cabinets have a similar ratio. In the Province of Sindh, two of the 12 ministers are women (17 per cent) and three women work as a parliamentary secretary. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, there are no female ministers but two parliamentary secretaries are women. Of the 21 ministers in Punjab, only one is a woman, while in Balochistan, no woman leads any ministry.

The structure of most of the mainstream parties are not democratic, with no intraparty elections taking place for leadership positions. Jamaat-e-Islami appears to be an exception, albeit still within a discriminating environment.[70] According to a 2005 report by the United Nations Development Programme in Pakistan and the Aurat Foundation, the "women's wing" of Jamaat-e-Islami is a separate entity because women have no representation in the main body, other than the general secretary of the women's wing, who is an ex-officio member of the central consultative committee. The report noted that using the terms men's and women's wings suggests a parallel system of governance, which is inaccurate because such a separation is not an indication of equality of governance but simply *purdah,* or the religion-mandated gender segregation.[71] The women members advance the party's beliefs and policies that are rooted in theocratic Islamist traditions and often reinforce beliefs that may be deeply patriarchal.[72] This suggests that as long as representation remains among likeminded persons, whether male or female, it is unlikely to lead to any change in the status quo within social structures and in how power is distributed in the society. For representation to be effective, it must be diverse and inclusive in terms of beliefs and across intersectionality.

Other mainstream political parties operate more like privately owned conglomerates in which dynastic hierarchies or the top leadership controls the decision-making, even though under the Elections Act, 2017, all political parties are required to conduct elections at no more than five-year intervals.[73]

Around 60 per cent of the survey respondents regarded the few appointments of women to prominent roles, whether as a speaker, a minister or a parliamentary secretary, as encouraging—"at least some

70. Election Commission of Pakistan, "Intra-party elections results Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan", 10 June 2019.

71. Niloufer Siddiqui, "Gender ideology and the Jamaat e Islami", Hudson Institute, 17 August 2010.

72. Sadaf Ahmad, Transforming Faith: The Story of Al-Huda and Islamic Revivalism Among Urban Pakistani Women (Syracuse University Press, 2009). In Afiya Shehrbano Zia, "Faith and feminism in Pakistan: religious agency or secular autonomy?", PhD thesis, submitted to University of Toronto (2017), p. 63.

73. Section 208, Elections Act, 2017. See also, Abdul Razak Sheikh, "Intra party election in Pakistan is need of time", Daily Times, 1 January 2020.

opening has been created and if those women can do it, then perhaps so can others" one person wrote into her survey response. However, the respondents also highlighted the great responsibility and pressure it places on those women who are appointed to such roles because they must do an exemplary job and be a good example and thus not hold other women back. For men, this is likely not a consideration at all.

Correlation between sexism and underrepresentation of women in politics

The term "sexism" emerged during the feminism of the 1960s to highlight the discrimination against women and girls based on their gender and to give a name to the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that largely support the unequal status of women. It functions to maintain patriarchy, or male domination, through ideological and material practices of individuals, collectives and institutions that oppress women and girls on the basis of sex or gender.[74] In other words, patriarchy manifests and reinforces itself through sexist behaviours and beliefs. In addition to benevolent sexism, authors Peter Glick and Susan T. Fiske also talked about "hostile sexism".[75] The more modern iterations of sexism posture that women may be asking for too much from policy-makers and thus, results in unsympathetic responses or resistance to women's demands. Janet K. Swim and her co-authors called it "modern sexism".[76]

The following table reflects the responses of the ten research participants when asked to cite sexist beliefs and attitudes that they regard as factors contributing to women's underrepresentation in politics and political parties.

74. Gina Masequesmay, "Sexism", Britannica.

75. Glick and Fiske, "The ambivalent sexism inventory: differentiating hostile and benevolent sexism".

76. Swim and others, "Sexism and racism: old-fashioned and modern prejudices".

Table 3. Factors rooted in sexism that may impair women's participation in politics

	% of research participants
Belief that women should be at home raising families and doing domestic chores	100
Belief that women should observe purdah and not be seen with men	100
Belief that women won't have the understanding and ability to hold public office	100
Belief that women are too easily offended	50
Belief that women exaggerate problems at work	75
Belief that women should be protected by men	75
Belief that women seek favours under the guise of equality	50
Insecurity towards women in leadership roles that threaten existing power dynamics between men and women in society	100
Belief that women don't give in to political give-and-take with as much ease as men and go more by the book when compared with men	50
Lack of resources and support from political parties towards mainstreaming female candidates	75
Social norms in constituencies that don't imagine a woman in a commanding position	75
Culture of voting for "electables" and influential heads in constituencies, districts and tehsils	100
Lack of faith and trust in a woman's ability to represent men and their interests in political forums	75
Lack of confidence within women that stems from other discriminatory practices at home, such as lack of education	75

The leading beliefs that emerged as factors that may contribute to the underrepresentation of women in politics centred around the traditional home-bound role of women, the compulsion to control their bodily autonomy by enforcing *purdah* or the perception of women as incapable of discharging a public role and function. All the respondents agreed that these factors link to underrepresentation of women in politics because they are the very factors employed to discourage women from public office. The survey respondents also

agreed that the culture of voting for electables significantly impairs women's participation in politics.

Around 75 per cent of the survey respondents also thought that the "inability to see women in a commanding position" or that "women ought to be protected by men and kept away from politics" and that "women exaggerate problems at work and therefore intrude into a man's space" contribute to the underrepresentation of women in politics. They also believe that men lack faith and trust in a woman's ability to represent men and their interests in political forums—a concern that women share in reverse. Many respondents agreed that the lack of financial resources to fund a party and political campaigns is another obstacle. All the respondents agreed that women are largely sidelined within political parties. The consistent discriminatory practices and patriarchal culture that shape boys and girls in the early stages of their lives help cultivate women's lack of confidence, such as lack of equal access to education and other opportunities.

The survey respondents unanimously agreed that there is a correlation between sexism and underrepresentation of women in politics. For some, it is a frustrating situation because there are no quick fixes to this historical imbalance. Legislative and constitutional amendments alone are not sufficient to achieve the degree of equality that is desired. These women believe that more intraparty democracy, more transparency, more direct elections and more equality in children's lives in the home are needed to achieve gender equality for women in politics and political parties in Pakistan.

Some of the women who had been an assembly member in the past said they would not want to re-join if offered a reserved seat, including those women who remain committed to contributing to a political party without such an appointment. Their reluctance is partly attributed to the discouraging and demeaning attitudes they faced when they held office, but they also believe they could do more for their party from outside the assembly.

This sentiment is not shared by women whose families have traditionally been in politics and who identify with their family's political heritage. They prefer to be reappointed to a reserved seat as opposed to contesting an election for a general seat. This is because their familial connections have ensured they remain on the priority

list for women appointed to the reserved seats from their party, thus guaranteeing, in a sense, a tenure or a second run to them without having to contest an election. The families look at this from the perspective of opportunity cost as well, given that if a woman can be accommodated with a reserved seat, then spending money to get her elected to a general seat makes no sense, except up to 5 per cent of the seats that are mandated by law on which they must field a female candidate. They believe that it is better to field (and spend money on) candidates who have no such entry route but who may have more clout within a constituency over a female candidate.

Appearance matters for entry and advancement in politics

Pakistan is a conservative society in which appearance and acceptability apply to men as well as women. For instance, male politicians often wear elements from traditional or folk culture of the province they visit for their political rallies or *jalsas* (gatherings)—the Sindhi *ajrak* (cloth) and *topi* (cap) being prominent examples. Men tend to wear the traditional *shalwar kameez* with waist coat and *peshwari chappal* (traditional sandals for men) to look appropriate for mingling with rural constituencies. Often, they also wear the national dress for television interviews or other public appearances in a bid to appear more rooted to the motherland, as opposed to influenced by the West, which is a phenomenon that is looked down upon and treated with suspicion and resentment.

For women, looking a certain way for their political career stems from both public and party pressures. Depending upon where presence is required, a woman's appearance may need to be adjusted accordingly. The public element pertains to the appearance that is required when mobilizing voters and/or representing the party in a public domain. There is no code or law that dictates what women must wear, and yet, 60 per cent of the respondents agreed that given the general perceptions of acceptability among voters and their expectations of women in a conservative society, they dress more modestly for public engagements, including wearing a *dupatta* on the head, even though they don't typically dress like that in their private life. In urban centres, the practice is less stringent, depending on the area. Half of the survey respondents said that they adhere to a modest "dress code" because they feel comfortable following the socially and culturally acceptable

dress code in public. At least one in four women responding to a question in the interview said she is willing to adapt and adhere to a socially acceptable dress code if it will enhance her outreach among voters.

Internally—during party engagements, meetings or other deliberations, women are expected to be well dressed. A former provincial assembly member recalled how she had not conformed to the ideal standards of being "presentable" and thus was targeted with remarks from her party colleagues about her disinclination to "dress up" and how she didn't look like an assembly member because she didn't carry that persona or invest in that look.[77] Over time, she felt her identity as a woman rendered invisible; she was considered as one of the "brothers" because she was not into dressing as other female assembly members. She felt a "misfit" and even unworthy of the party's "soft face" (a gentle image) for her lack of glamour. Appearance, she explained, matters a great deal in politics, and the "right" appearance opens more doors of prominence as a party representative.

Women to the reserved seats for religious minorities face an added layer of misperception over their appearance from their colleagues. One woman from a minority community who had been a former parliamentarian, whom I interviewed, explained how she would often be questioned for wearing a *dupatta* because she was not Muslim. She said that people found it hard to understand that wearing a *dupatta* is not a matter of religion but of culture.[78]

Female politicians who are more seasoned exude more confidence and can remain true to their independent style without having to conform to any social expectation of how they should dress. Nevertheless, most women involved in politics appear to conform to acceptable standards of how a "good" woman should dress, especially in public. And this can be driven by the external pressures (how voters expect a woman to look) or by convictions originating with the patriarchal norms that may have been internalized or which some women regard as a battle not worth fighting over in the larger scheme of affairs. They may choose to conform to avoid unnecessary attention to what may be a non-issue for them, given the work they are focused on instead.

77. Interview with a former member of the Punjab Assembly, 2 September 2022.

78. Ibid.

Some younger women do not always wear the *dupatta* and are seen as dressing too stylishly, for which they often are trolled with abuse. This vitriol also appears to be directed towards them carrying expensive clothes, bags, shoes and other personal items in public spaces when the public in general is not able to afford such luxury. Nonetheless, the fact that women receive more of such abuse than their male counterparts makes it sexist.

In general, women politicians try to subscribe to the socially and culturally acceptable standards of modesty when engaging in public. But, paradoxically, they may be expected to look glamourous in other more hi-profile engagements. They remain susceptible to online abuse for their appearance and their outfits in either case and appear to be attacked more often because by virtue of their gender they are perceived as "easy" targets.

Sexist behaviour in the media and in political discourse

One of patriarchy's biggest successes has been to create the gender roles demarcating the public and private domains in accordance with gender. This has led to the construction of gender roles as productive or reproductive, for men and women, respectively. Men being the productive gender are to operate in the public domain, while women carry the reproductive role and thus are expected to stay within the home. When women dare to violate this social code on which patriarchy thrives and step out of the home and into an arena that is highly public, such as politics, they face resistance and hostility that can range from verbal abuse and sexist remarks to actual physical and sexual violence as well exclusion, silencing, discrimination and even indifference from their male counterparts. Their very presence and attendance can be perceived as an act of defiance, leading to all sorts of comments and remarks intended to either intimidate them or remind them that they may be intruding or encroaching in a space that the patriarchy reserves for men. Researchers Ayesha Khan, Zonia Yusuf and Sana Naqvi made excellent in-depth analysis of their findings from the Women Parliamentarian Survey that they conducted before the 2018 elections.[79] Their qualitative findings demonstrate

79. Ayesha Khan, Zonia Yusaf and Sana Naqvi, "Women politicians navigating the hostile environment in Pakistan", Institute of Development Studies, 2020.

that women's reported sexual harassment in the political workspace continues with impunity. The authors argued that because male politicians have little experience of working with women, they tend to rely on inappropriate and preconceived notions of gender roles within the assemblies.[80]

Sexist behaviour in the media, in political discourse and other public spaces is not a new or recent phenomenon. Conflict between women and religious leaders emerged as early as the first constituent assembly of Pakistan, which had several special committees. In the Zakat Committee, for instance, the only two female parliamentarians of that time, Jahanara Shanawaz and Begam Shaista Ikramullah, experienced misogyny and sexism when the *ulema* refused to sit with them, arguing that only burqa-clad women older than 50 should be allowed to sit in the assembly.[81] When a woman challenged him in the elections of 1965, Ayub Khan, who became the second president of Pakistan, tried to get the *ulema* to declare that a woman could not be the head of an Islamic State.

In the 1990s, the contestation between two successive civilian governments for political space resulted in character assassination of the then female head of one of the parties at the hands of her opponents. From the choice of clothes she wore before she entered politics to her character and personal life, Benazir Bhutto faced tremendous sexist backlash for claiming political space as a woman. The words used for her by large sections of the population have been described as the worst form of verbal abuse directed at a politician.[82]

More recently, male and female politicians have been subjected to sexist remarks from their opponents on the floor of assemblies as well as in rallies and in the media. The Pakistan Tehreek e Insaaf party's Shireen Mazari, the former Minister of Human Rights, was called a "tractor trolley" in the assembly by a fellow male parliamentarian.[83] A year later, another female politician, Firdous Ashiq Awan, was called a

80. Ibid

81. Ibid.

82. Naurah Khurshid, "Misogyny in politics", The News International, 9 May 2022.

83. "Khawaja Asif calls Shireen Mazari a tractor trolley", The News International, 8 June 2016.

"dumper" by the same parliamentarian.[84] The Former Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Chaudhary Fawad Hussain (a man), recently described the new Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Hina Rabbani Khar, as a "low-IQ woman" and as someone whose claim to fame lay in her personal accessories, including her handbags and sunglasses.[85] Former Prime Minister Imran Khan was also criticized for his sexist and controversial remarks about Maryam Nawaz, his political opponent and a woman, at a political rally in Multan earlier this year. He routinely addressed her as *nani* (grandmother) in a derogatory connotation, despite recently clocking his 70th birthday.[86]

There have been instances in which female parliamentarians have used derogatory and sexist remarks against their female opponents in the media as well. In 2009, for example, the then-Federal Minister for Population and Welfare, Firdous Ashiq Awan, suggested that Kashmala Tariq, a woman and the then-Secretary for Information, did not enter politics on merit but rather due to some derogatory nature within her character.[87]

The abuse is certainly not only directed towards women. The current Foreign Minister, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, has also been at the receiving end of sexist slurs. Former Prime Minister Imran Khan referred to him as *sahiba* (madam) in public rallies,[88] while his party's Chief Minister in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa referred to him as *darmiana wala* (transgender) during an address.[89]

Regardless of who is at the receiving end and who is the one hurling the sexist remark, the comments more often than not are feminine in nature and used to make fun of or put down an opponent. While masculinity is a badge of honour, feminine attributes are viewed derogatively in the political space and are often weaponized in what

84. "Khawaja Asif calls Firdous Ashiq Awan 'dumper' a year after his Shireen Mazari tractor trolley remarks", The Express Tribune, 13 June 2017.

85. "Politicians' misogyny", Dawn, 24 April 2022.

86. "Arrest, sexism, political victimization: keep women out of your politics", The Current.pk, 22 May 2022.

87. "Kashmala Tariq and Firdous Ashiq Awan exchange harsh words live in a local TV programme", Jazba Blog, 16 September 2009.

88. "Imran calls Bilawal 'sahiba'; Twitter slams sexist PM", ANI News, 24 April 2019.

89. "Khyber Pakhtunkhwa CM passed sexist remarks against FM Bilawal", Mashriq Vibe, 16 May 2022.

seems like a bid to insult an opponent. Sexism that values and rewards masculinity and looks down upon women is therefore, deployed to disarm, downplay or insult other politicians.

In addition to the sexist slurs in the political discourse, the women that I interviewed as well as those who responded to the survey also spoke of the sexist behaviour they experienced during talk shows or other media engagements. In sum, 60 per cent of them reported being cut short or interrupted by their male counterpart on the shows, and 40 per cent of them reported being cut short or talked over by anchor persons or hosts while 20 per cent of the respondents highlighted that media has a dismissive attitude towards women in general but certainly towards women in the political space in particular. When interviewed, a grass-roots political worker cited the example of the Aurat March manifesto (which revolves around *khud mukhtari*, or the independence and agency of women) press briefing launch, when reporters asked dismissively or sensationally about its slogans.[90]

> "The reporters being predominantly male and coming from the same social conditioning and the same patriarchy that feeds the rest of us in the society come with preconceived notions to question our demands and this happens more so when we demand gender equality and bodily autonomy, as these facets are seen as a direct threat to the established status quo that enables control over women, their mobility and access to rights and public spaces."[91]

The media is not only dismissive towards female parliamentarians but insulting. As a former provincial assembly member highlighted, the media professionals, advertently or inadvertently, can be insensitive towards women regarding any controversy that may emerge involving them as well as in how they handle such a situation or how they report it. The former assembly member suggested increased sensitivity training for media personnel and journalists.[92]

90. "Aurat March core body defends bodily rights, presents manifesto", Dawn, 6 March 2020.

91. At Aurat March Lahore meeting with Lawyers, Lahore, Pakistan, 20 February 2022.

92. Interview with a former member of the Punjab Assembly, 1 September 2022.

Around 60 per cent of the survey respondents noted that leaders and political figures who make sexist remarks are those who invariably run out of any better argument in their defence, which is why they resort to this type of response. And 40 per cent of the respondents said they feel discouraged, disappointed, angry or offended when this happens, while 20 per cent said that they didn't care much for it at a personal level but acknowledge that sexist attitude and remarks in the media and in the political sphere could be a significant discouraging or disenfranchising factor for women in politics, especially those who may be new to it.

Venue of meetings

In the urban centres, particularly for assembly members, meetings typically take place at the political party's secretariat or at a minister's secretariat. These are official spaces, which all members, be they male, female or transgender, can equally access.

In rural constituencies, however, particularly at the local government tier, the venue of meetings may not always be an official space. One man I interviewed, whose wife had been a councillor, said sometimes meetings would be scheduled in the home, or *dera*, of the council head, which made it more inaccessible for the female members of the council due to the social norms that preach segregation. "In most rural settings, it is not acceptable for women to go to private homes for public meetings", he said.[93]

Other people who were interviewed highlighted that the women who run for public office at the local level on their own accord and not as a proxy for their husband or other male relative are, more often than not, strong women who are able to claim their space. They are seen, at least by the people who participated in my research, as asserting their agency and authority and endeavouring to participate fully in the process. Had it not been so, the women's quota would not have been reduced by Musharraf in 2004, they claimed.

93. Telephone interview with the husband of a former female councilor, 30 September 2022.

Conclusion

Patriarchy—as a belief that men are the breadwinners, the protectors and therefore, in a superior position of authority, control and dominance over women—is a relatively easy concept to impose on society, especially when dressed in a cultural, honour or religious cloak, which renders it somewhat sacred and immune from being challenged without inviting strong backlash and criticism. We have seen how it has been deployed in Pakistan in the context of women in politics so as to gatekeep the corridors of power and influence from the "intrusion" of women. Their very existence in this space is viewed as an act of defiance and a challenge to the status quo and thus is unacceptable. Genuine efforts to educate and empower women and girls from the early stage of their lives thus remain inadequate: 12 million girls are out of school in Pakistan and only 13 per cent of school-age girls reach grade nine.[94]

As a result of the historically unequal distribution of resources and access to fundamental rights between men and women, men have acquired greater and deeper social, economic, policy and regulatory capture, which has enabled them to acquire clout and influence among their communities that remain difficult for women to attain. This has placed men in a unique position to engage effectively in clientelism, brokering votes for parties that intend to contest elections and form governments. As the dominant faction in policy and the legislature, the men are able to block or roll back efforts to bring women at par with themselves. This explains why the men may have given in to certain legal reforms, such as the reserved seats for women: They retain the power of appointment. Similar bias occurs in the distribution of ministry portfolios and other prominent positions in a cabinet or within parties, which are distributed predominantly among the men.

The reserved seats typically are used as an excuse to field more men for the general seats because (a) the vote bank in constituencies is considered to be in favour of men, who have been longer in the business of governance and have a greater position of power and influence

94. Malala Fund, "Pakistan".

over voters than women candidates have and (b) women have the option of being included via the reserved seats and men do not. This impairs the chances of women from experiencing and enhancing their own space among voters in constituency politics and in turn keeps them dependent upon their male patrons for appointment. Their erasure and lack of equal presence and representation on campaign posters is both a cause and effect of patriarchy, whether internalized or systemic.

Female (as well as male) politicians often face sexist behaviour and abuse, which discourages young women from joining politics. So too does the choice of meeting venue in the smaller or rural constituencies.

The women who enter politics are scrutinized more than their male counterparts, particularly for how they dress as well as how they conduct any official role that they rarely are assigned. They live with an additional pressure to prove that women can and do perform at par, if not better, with men—and it is a pressure that men in similarly placed positions are less likely to experience. Some of the technocrats and professional women who are appointed to a reserved seat on the basis of their work appear to be questioned frequently, as if they must justify their place in the assembly on what is otherwise considered to be a "charity" seat in the absence of a constituency. They feel they must constantly explain that they were picked on their merit and for what they bring to the table in terms of their experience and expertise.

Some senior female politicians, acutely aware of the realities of dynasty as well as the politics of electability, understand that for political parties, securing seats in terms of numbers to win an election is more important than gender equality considerations. Yet, they remain adamant in demanding more representation of women in the assemblies as well as in political parties.

Younger parliamentarians acknowledge and accept that the terrain is much more challenging and demanding for women and that it can be discouraging, abusive and alienating at times. They also feel that class has a role in determining whether someone can find a fit in the hierarchy and in the access to opportunities: Women from affluent classes and influential families are better placed to benefit from the system of privilege that is controlled by the men in their families; they have more access to opportunities and more platforms are available to

them for grooming and networking, even though they may be more likely to represent their family's interests as opposed to their own. But they certainly have more access to opportunities than women from the less-affluent strata, for whom it may take longer to "make their presence felt" in their professional life and thus to be "picked" for politics. This reality takes its toll, leaving young women less inclined to consider a life in politics.

Patriarchy, therefore, significantly impacts gender equality in politics in Pakistan. Gender equality is conceptually the opposite of one gender's hegemony over the other to benefit from the status quo. The gender that has historically been better placed to influence policy and norms employs patriarchal and sexist notions, which in turn have been historically and conveniently available as social, religious and cultural tools to maintain those positions of dominance and relevance.

Recommendations

Patriarchy in politics and political parties in Pakistan comes from the historically entrenched and unequal power dynamics between men and women. This has resulted in the de facto and de jure capture of resources, influence and leadership positions by men at home as well as in the public sphere, through which they maintain the imbalances to sustain their privilege and dominance. This is experienced when women's access to fundamental rights, such as education, and their agency remain subordinate to that of men in their families. As a result, women have fewer opportunities than men to engage and participate in politics and political parties.

Women have consistently performed better than their male counterparts in the assemblies in terms of their attendance, the assembly business they generate and the progressive and inclusive laws they have worked on and lobbied to pass. They have also historically endeavoured for representation and inclusion in the assemblies and in the political parties through affirmative action and advocacy.

There is no shortage of will among women to claim their space in the political arena. The historical, structural, social, economic and other systemic barriers hold them back from achieving their full potential in the political spectrum. For instance:

- the perception among voters of men from influential families as effective brokers of clientelism with government and bureaucracy for their interests;
- the dependency on men or a strong family name for entry and advancement in politics to the general and reserved seats;
- the historical inequalities in terms of access to education and other fundamental rights that have created vast disparities in real and practical terms between the experiences, education, finances and capacity of women to engage in politics at par with men;
- the lack of active participation in constituency politics that keep women from developing the necessary ties, links, networks, relationships and credibility with voters to stand on their own;

- the overshadowing, the unequal positioning or the exclusion from campaign posters of women on the basis of honour, benevolent sexism or because they are considered proxies for their husbands, which reflects compliance with the affirmative action law but no real intention to empower or mainstream female candidates;
- the lack of transparency in the process of appointment to cabinets, constitutional roles and party positions;
- sexist beliefs about women, gender roles and appearances;
- sexist remarks, abuse and slurs in the media and in political discourse;
- patronizing attitudes towards technocratic and professional women in reserved seats;
- the practice of prioritizing the nomination of women from influential political families to a reserved or general seat; and
- the objective of winning elections as opposed to achieving ideals of gender equality.

These remain issues that cannot be addressed through legislation alone and may require more transformative, multisector and multidimensional approaches from civil society organizations and other stakeholders. The following are approaches suggested by the women and men who participated in the research for this paper.

1. Engage with political party leadership to educate, train and build up the capacity at the top tier because ownership and progression of bills in the Parliament does not happen until and unless there is support from party leadership. The research participants believe there is a need to broaden the understanding among civil society organizations on how political parties work. Individual legislators who are invited to attend trainings and capacity-building sessions on gender sensitivity, legislative drafting, laws, the Constitution, parliamentary affairs and social and other issues related to gender-based violence, climate change, child sexual abuse, child marriage and child conversion of faith do not always have the voice or the ability to go against the party line or to challenge or lobby for changes in laws. They cited the Domestic Violence Law and the Christian Marriage Act as examples that support the notion that the push for such legislation must come from top-tier leadership to be successful.

2. Develop an accountability or a monitoring and evaluation mechanism that traces the impact and application of the learning acquired by parliamentarians who participate in a gender-equality training or capacity-building initiative of a civil society organization and publish the findings.
3. Channel a more structured method proposal for filling the reserved seats into the discourse, with support from civil society organizations and other stakeholders. This can include direct elections or an adjustment to the ratio of reserved seats between technocratic and professional women on one hand and party members on the other hand, so that reserved seats are not dominated by the relatives of the men who do the appointing. A proposed ratio is 60:40, whereby 60 per cent could be allotted to party members and 40 per cent to technocrats and subject experts.
4. Demand compliance with and create awareness on the requirement for all political parties to conduct intraparty elections, with emphasis on diversity, gender and inclusion as a goal.
5. Disseminate international comparative research from other countries that shows how women add value to an economy and society when their representation is mainstreamed. Incentivize women's increased participation in politics and political parties as a broader vested interest to aspire to.
6. Advocate for women's political participation through awareness campaigns in local languages in traditional media, social media, schools and in rural areas that reflect local sensitivities.
7. Initiate and conduct political schools or study circles to engage, train and inspire younger women for political roles. This likely will require training on interpersonal skills.
8. Develop, lobby for or commission courses to be taught as stand-alone modules, certifications or as part of a larger (annual or semester-long) course on women and politics at the university and college levels.
9. Develop and conduct more advocacy, awareness or creative campaigns on women's historical role in and contributions to politics, the State and society as a result of their politics and political participation for more visibility of their legacy.

10. Support soft tools for advocacy and awareness, such as the fine arts, television shows, movies or other mediums, to subtly promote the social and transformative messaging for equality and mainstreaming of women into politics.
11. Adopt and enforce (Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority) strict policy guidelines and rules against the broadcasting of any misogynist content, remarks or gestures in media programmes by any guest or anchor.
12. Conduct (civil society organizations) more sensitivity trainings and discussions with media practitioners, in collaboration with the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority and other relevant regulatory bodies to ensure that sexist remarks, slurs and abuse are identified and recognized as a problem and that appropriate steps to address them are taken in accordance with the law.
13. Require (Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority and other relevant bodies) that all media houses develop an internal code of conduct against harassment, misogyny and sexist and hostile content and ensure compliance with the workplace harassment law. Additionally, require that media houses conduct gender-sensitization training for all staff and that only certified anchors are allowed to conduct talk shows.
14. Put in place (Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority and other relevant bodies) effective redress mechanisms for handling complaints related to sexist and misogynist media content.
15. Take the sensitivity and capacity-building trainings (civil society organizations) to local-level constituencies rather than conducting them only in urban city centres.
16. Demand that local governments be made operational and effective.
17. Include men in capacity-building and gender-sensitivity training workshops or create separate programmes focused on men for their training and capacity-building on gender sensitivity.
18. Work on projects that build up the economic empowerment of women. Women as a class need to be empowered and uplifted at the grass-roots level because better education, better skills and better professions can help them find their voice. Support

projects that incentivize girls' access to education and women's access to work and other rights in a way that influences and shapes social and familial behaviour in a positive and beneficial manner. Incentives could include a stipend and meals for every girl who is enrolled and attends school.

19. Increase (civil society organizations) engagement with women parliamentary caucuses, both provincial and national, to promote consensus, strategy and a collective and united stance among all female parliamentarians against sexist slurs, abuse and remarks and other issues facing women in politics. These caucuses should be encouraged and supported to develop internal support groups to strengthen the knowledge, skills and confidence of female parliamentarians.
20. Provide more opportunities to women to engage with men and vice versa in professional settings for political discourse and networking.

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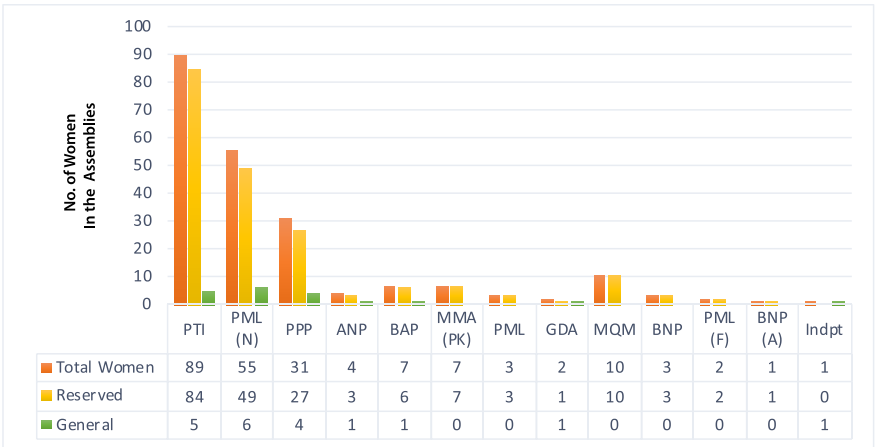
Annex

Breakdown of representation of women in the Assemblies, by political party and by reserved and general seats, 2018–2022 (as of July 2022)



	PTI	PML (N)	PPP	ANP	BAP	MMA (PK)	PML	GDA	MQM	BNP	PML (F)	BNP (A)	Indpt
Total Women	89	55	31	4	7	7	3	2	10	3	2	1	1
Reserved	84	49	27	3	6	7	3	1	10	3	2	1	0
General	5	6	4	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1

About the author

Nida Usman Chaudhary holds LL.B (Hons) and LL.M (Law & Development) from University of London. She is a diversity and inclusion advocate with over 12 years of work experience. Her focus areas include access to justice, gender equality and diversity in the legal profession.

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