

Gender Studies

Question:

According to your opinion, what are the main issues in women as representatives in Pakistan?

Outline:

① Introduction.

② Main issues in Women as Representatives in Pakistan.

(a) Cultural Barriers: The invisible chains

(i) Patriarchal society.

(ii) Family restrictions.

(iii) Cultural Norms

(b) Political Landscape: A male dominated arena.

(i) Gender Bias in Political Parties.

(ii) Limited leadership opportunities.

(iii) Patronage networks.

(c) Legal and Structural hurdles:

The policy gap

(i) Insufficient Quotas

(ii) Weak enforcement of laws

(iii) Electoral System Issues

Socio-
(d) Economic Challenges: The financial divide.

(e) Security Concerns: The safety dilemma.

(f) Media Representation: The visibility Crisis.

(g) Support Systems: The missing links.

(h) Public perception: The mindset Challenge.

(i) Skepticism about women's Capabilities.

(ii) Social Stigmatization.

③ Way Forward for enhancing women's representation.

(a) Building foundations through Educational empowerment.

(b) Legal and policy reforms for strengthening frameworks.

(c) Leveling the playing field through Economic Support.

(d) Capacity building.

④ Conclusion.

Answer:

In Pakistan women's representation in politics faces myriads of challenges that stymie their potential and stifle their voices. From deep rooted cultural barriers and a male-dominated political landscape to economic and security concerns, the road to political equality is fraught with obstacles. Despite significant strides over the years and, including legal reforms and reserved seats for women, true parity remains elusive.

① Main Issues in women as representative in Pakistan.

(a) Cultural Barriers: The Invisible Chains-

Cultural Barriers significantly impede women's representation in Pakistan due to entrenched patriarchal norms and gender roles. In patriarchal societies like Pakistan's, certain societal expectations are associated with each gender, expecting them to work/ behave accordingly.

This gender role divide limits women to domestic responsibilities, thus, hindering their political engagement. The cultural norms also become the leading cause of family restrictions. Gender Studies theories, like Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence that he explained in his work "**Male Domination**", explain how cultural norms subtly reinforce power dynamics, making it difficult for women to assert themselves in male dominated spheres (2001). Examples from rural areas show that women often require ~~on~~ women often require male permission to engage in public affairs.

(b) Political Landscape: A Male Dominated Arena.

The political landscape in Pakistan remains largely male dominated. Political parties often exhibit gender bias favoring male candidates over equally capable female candidates. According to the **Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN)** report written on 2014 elections, "980 women candidates were nominated by 111 political parties to contest on General seats

which constitutes about 4.6% of the total 8037 candidates fielded. This percentage is even below the mandated 5% minimum representation requirement set by Section 206 of the Elections Act, 2017. And despite making their way to Pakistan's ~~assemblies~~ Parliament, the actual influence and decision making of these women are limited. Even the patronage networks crucial for political success, tend to exclude women, making it difficult for them to gain influence.

(c) Legal and Structural hurdle:

The Policy gap-

Legal and structural hurdles present significant challenges to women's representation in Pakistan. According to UN Women report ^{"Participation of Women in Politics"} presented in 2013 about women representation in politics, while there are reserved seats for women, the quotas are often insufficient and inadequately enforced. The lack of strict implementation of gender equality laws further exacerbates this issue, as the legal framework to support women's participation exists but

is not effectively utilized. The electoral system itself poses barriers, such as complex nomination processes and limited support for women candidates. ~~For example~~ One example of legal and structural hurdles is inefficiency of 2002 legal reforms in Pakistan introduced under President Pervez Musharraf, aiming to increase women's participation in legislative bodies by reserving 17% of seats for women in National and Provincial Assemblies. It was limited ~~due~~^{to} its inability to significantly enhance women's political influence.

(d) Socio-Economic challenges: The financial divide.

Socio-economic challenges severely limit women's political representation in Pakistan, particularly due to economic dependencies. Many women lack the financial resources for political campaigns which are resource intensive. For example according to OICCI report of 2024 titled, "Increasing Women's Inclusion in the Pakistan Economy", while women constitute 49% of population, only 24%

of them are actively involved in economic activity. The FLFP rate remains the lowest among regional peers, with only 21% of eligible female workers employed formally. This financial divide limits their performance exhibition. Moreover, there are insufficient opportunities for political training and skill development, leaving many women ill-prepared for the complexities of political life.

(e) Security concerns: The Safety dilemma

Another major factor that is deterrent for women aspiring political role is Security dilemma. According to Amnesty International report (2019) women officials often face harassment, threats and violence, creating an unsafe environment for political engagement. Cases like that of Benazir Bhutto's public assassination during a political campaign underscores the severe risks involved for women in Politics. The lack of safe campaigning spaces and inadequate legal protection discourage many women from participating in politics.

(f) Media Representation: The Visibility Crisis.

Media representation significantly impacts women's political participation in Pakistan, often perpetuating negative stereotypes and underrepresentation. Women either do not get any media representation or when they do, it is mostly about their personal life rather than political. Such a kind of representation through media results in biased public opinion that discourages ^{support for} female candidates. As Anjum Zia in her work, "Representation of women in Media: An Analytical Report" shows that women politicians in Pakistan receive only about 7% of media coverage during election campaigns.

(g) Support System: The missing links.

While robust support systems are essential to boost women's political representation, ~~the~~ a notable absence of mentorship programmes has been observed. A proper community support and solidarity in challenging patriarchal structures could have been a source of not only ensuring women participation

but also improving their performance on political platforms. But women are being deprived of this support. Many successful politicians, like Sherry Rehman, often cite the importance and lack of mentorship and networks in their political journey.

(h) Public perception: The Mindset Challenge

In societies like Pakistan's, where capabilities are attributed in terms of gender, societal skepticism about women's leadership capabilities still persists.

Tradition voter preferences also lean ^{more} towards male candidates than female.

Such kind of public perception poses a challenge to women's political representation in Pakistan. A survey titled, "Gender biases in electoral preferences" found that 84% of Pakistani voters prefer male over female candidates. This shows how often female politicians encounter public doubt about their competence and leadership, affecting their electoral process.

③ Way Forward for enhancing Women's Representation.

(a) Building Foundation through Educational Empowerment.

Educational empowerment ^{can} plays a significant role in raising political awareness among women. Promoting female education from an early age can build strong foundation for future political engagement. It will not only equip women with the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate political landscape but will also challenge cultural norms that restrict their roles in public life. Therefore, expanding educational opportunities is a key step towards fostering greater women's representation in politics.

(b) legal and Policy reforms for strengthening framework.

while ^{different} legal and policy reforms were made over the period of time after independent ever since Pakistan came into being, the efficacy of these reforms still gets questioned. Therefore more focus needs to be given to effectiveness

and implementation of these reforms. Electoral reforms that simplify the candidate nomination process and provide financial support and ~~enhancing~~ ^{anti-harass-}ment laws with strict enforcement to protect women in politics can encourage more women to run for office.

(c) Leveling the playfield through Economic support

As discussed before lack of economic ⁱⁿdependence hinders women's participation in ~~the~~ political arena. Therefore, economic support is critical for leveling the playfield for women in politics in Pakistan. This can be achieved by establishing dedicated funds and providing microfinance loans that can empower women to finance their campaigns and reduce economic barriers. Thus, by addressing financial disparities, economic support initiatives can significantly enhance women's representation in politics.

(d) Capacity Building:

Another major step in enhancing women's representation in politics can be

capacity building. Capacity building is necessary for enhancing the skills and leadership qualities of women. Initiatives like "Women's Parliamentary Caucus" in Pakistan should be encouraged. Investing in capacity building can create a pipeline of skilled women leaders ready to participate in and transform political landscape.

④ Conclusion:

In short while there still exist a number of challenges that need to be addressed regarding women representation in politics in Pakistan, there is alot that can be done to ~~enforce~~ enhance women's participation. ~~And~~ And bridging the gap for gender equality in political representation requires a multifacted approach that involves reframing legal and policy system but also continuous evolution and monitoring to ensure their effectiveness.