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Challenges and Prospects for Women's Leadership in Politics

A- Introduction

While progress has been made, significant obstacles persist, hindering full and equal participation of women. Addressing these challenges and capitalising on the opportunities require concerted efforts from individuals, organisations, civil society, political parties and governments.

C- Challenges for Women's Leadership in Politics

B- An Overview of challenges Women face and Prospects exist for them ^{as} Political Leadership

- i- Gender biases and stereotypes
 - a) Women as weak, shy and emotional creatures
 - b) McKinsey & Company 2023 report; Women in workplace
- ii- Cultural and Societal norms
 - a) Not allowed to partake in socio-political activities
 - b) Case in point; Women right situation in Afghanistan
- iii- Lesser access to financial resources
 - a) Only 40% women get share in inheritance
 - b) Financial resources of family occupied by men
- iv- Absence of party support
 - a) Prioritise male candidate over female

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v- Under-representation of women

a) 26.1% Women representation in European parliaments

b) 20% women representation in Pakistan's national assembly

vi- Violence and harassment

a) Case in point: Every 7 in 10 female politicians in Montenegro experience harassment

vii- Lack of mentorship and role-models

a) No focus on political academics

b) Females are discouraged to get interested in politics.

D- Prospects for Women's Leadership in Politics

i- Increasing global advocacy and awareness

a) Ensuring women representation

b) Balanced and holistic decision making.

ii- Rising women's movement

a) Case in point; The 30% club - which demands 30% women in political offices

iii- Shifting Public perception

a) Normalising women in administrative positions and political leadership

iv- Support of political parties and civil society.

a) Special quota for women candidates

b) Women-wings of political parties

v- Empowerment by digital and social media

a) To reach wider audience

b) Female legislators abundantly use in campaign

vi- Supportive policies and legal framework

a) Women being physically weaker are more dependent on law and policy

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- vii- Increased female voter participation
- Female candidate to attract female voters
 - Continuously constricting gender voter gap

DE - Way Forward for Women's Leadership in Politics

F - Conclusion

"Women are the stars in sky, yet they remain invisible amidst the brighter lights of their male counterpart", said Sara Mardini, a Syrian women right activist. No matter how much women strive in professional life, they remain far behind males. Same is the case with political sphere, where women face diverse landscape of challenges. Gender biasness and stereotypes including with the cultural norms hinder their progress. It becomes quite difficult for them to maintain work-life balance. Political landscape everywhere is patriarchal, so they have to face violence and harassment more often. Women have less access to resources, whether financial or societal. Women are politically marginalised, first because they usually lack political schooling and secondly they are not fully recognised by political parties. Although enormous challenges exist for women, but advancement in regard of women's leadership has been made. Increasing global advocacy and impacts of women movements have helped shifting public perception. Digital empowerment-

of women has changed the whole context. Women start getting recognition from political parties and have attained civil society's support. Supportive policies to women and viable legal framework have been made for women. While progress has been made, significant obstacles persist, hindering full and equal participation of women. Addressing these challenges and capitalising on the opportunities require concerted efforts from individuals, organisations, civil society, political parties and governments.

Over the course of history, women always had lesser representation in politics, especially in leadership roles. Women are considered less politically competent ^{as compared to} men which put a blockade to their progress. This is approximately equal in all types of political spheres, whether it's democracy or dictatorship. It can be visualised from the context of United States, which is world's oldest democracy and it has not offered any female head of stateship in hundred of years. With the advancement of time, women

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are breaking the glass ceiling and marking their presence in political and professional life spheres. Despite of their efforts, parity is yet to achieve. Women face multifaceted challenges in their pursuit to achieve leadership in politics. Some of these challenges are discussed below.

The main problem women face is of gender biasness and stereotyping. Women are regarded as weak, shy and delicate creatures. They are worldwide assumed as unfit for key leadership roles and administrative positions. "Women represents roughly one in four c-suite leaders and women of colour just one in sixteen" [Micknsey & company, Women in the workplace 2023, october 2023].

This is because of traditional believes that associate leadership with masculinity. It makes harder for women to be seen as capable leaders. Political leadership demands individuals to be very vigilant and emotionally strong. Implicit and explicit biasness about women lead to them being perceived as less authoritative and competitive.

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Along with gender biasness, women are also primary to bear the brunt of cultural and societal norms. In many parts of the world, women are not allowed to partake in political activities. Especially, in third world countries, where patriarchal customs are dominating women are deprived of basic human rights, let alone the case of political leadership. In her speech at death anniversary of Nelson Mandela, Malala Yousafzai said: "Right now millions of Afghan girls are imprisoned. Those girls are barred from school and offices are experiencing depression". This is not the case of one country or one society alone. Women worldwide face marginalisation on the hands of cultural norms, although its degree vary from society to society. So, how comes the point of women assuming political leadership come, when majority of them do not have their basic rights.

Similarly, women ~~do~~ have lesser access to financial resources.

Politics anywhere in current era demand strong monetarily backing

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of individuals. Political campaigns, seminars, meetings and public gatherings cost a huge amount of money. Generally, the financial resources of family are occupied by males and females do not have financial freedom. This curb on their financial independence limits their participation in political as well as social activities. In a society where women experience gender wage gap and do not able to get their due share in inheritance, it becomes impossible for them to have access to required finances. Eventually, they cannot pursue their political goals pertaining to financial problems.

These financial and social constraints on women led to their neglect by political parties. Political parties support and prioritise individuals with strong financial background and developed societal links. Women lag behind men in both cases, because they are less financially and socially stable. Political parties generally do not deduce policy framework for women. In political

parties, the weakest of all sub-divisions is generally the women-wing of that party. Women in party are not consulted in crucial decisions. They do not get their due share in party tickets. Even the reserved seats to women are not distributed on merit, rather the families of male politicians are awarded over real workers. Thus, the absence of support from political parties, led to failure of women in securing political leadership.

Absence of support from political parties results in under-representation of women in political sphere. Any political arena, be it political parties, political organisations, assemblies or any decision-making platform, concentration of women is pretty low as compared to men. They are disproportionately absent from political leadership and decision-making positions worldwide. According to PILDAT, "Pakistan's National Assembly has 20 percent representation of females" in case of India BJP's government which is regarded as pro-women

government has increased Lok Sabha seats for women to 30 percent, earlier they were 15 percent". The condition is no better in Europe and Central Asia. "Women representation in parliaments across Europe and Central Asia stands at 26.1 per cent, trailing behind global average of 26.5 per cent". Hence, women are underrepresented in political realms worldwide.

Moreover, women in politics ubiquitously face violence and harassment. Because they are more prone to it. Harassment has many forms, but political women generally face offensive jokes, slurs, offensive gestures, unwelcoming physical contacts and annoying posters. These lead to the character assassination of woman individual. Some women, with specific ethnicity and colour are more likely to be targeted. This is a dilemma existing not only in a specific country, but all across the globe. A recent study by Daniela Gasparikova, Resident Representative of UNDP to Montenegro, shows that;

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"Every seven in ten women politician in Montegro, experience some form of violence and harassment".

Such activities arise social concerns and hinder women participation in politics.

Also, the lack of mentorship and role models for women in politics

is a significant barrier to their advancement. The presence of

a female role model is helpful for aspiring women to pursue

their political goal. It is quite difficult to find a true role

models. If we visualise in the context of South-Asia, Pakistan, India

and Bangladesh have women as head of states. All of them,

Benazir Bhutto, Sheikh Hasina, and Indira Gandhi were from privileged

background. None of them really had a political struggle to

achieve that position. Such cases do not intrigue the young

females. As far as mentorship is concerned, women are restrained

from developing political interests.

They are discouraged to get indulge in political quagmire.

Thus, women are not guided to develop interest of political leadership.

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Challenges for women in political domain are enormous and glaring. ^{But} With every coming day situation is getting better everywhere. Women are marking their foot-steps in political arenas. As challenge's for women's political leadership are very large, prospects are many too. Some of them are discussed below.

In the recent years, there has been seen increasing global advocacy and awareness for women inclusion in political leadership. Political offices and their decisions affect all the individuals equally regardless of gender. Then why political offices have concentration of males. Women's ~~are~~ equal representation and participation in politics and public life is essential for development of society. Increasing global advocacy for women's political leadership is critical to advancing gender equality and ensuring that women's voices are fully represented in decision-making. As renowned author Sheryl Sandberg said; "The more women in leadership, the more balanced and holistic the decision will be". Therefore, an

existential support for women's leadership in politics is evident. Increasing advocacy for women's political leadership has given rise to number of women's movements. These movements work on the agenda of securing rights for women and maintaining their representation in decision-making corridors. The struggle of women political rights in the form of started movement started in the United States as Suffrage Movement. This movement succeeded by attaining voting rights for women in 1920. Few notable movements are, The National Organisation for Women (1966), Women's March (2017), and The 30% Club. "Founded in 2010, The 30% Club campaigns for a critical mass of women in leadership roles, targeting the goal of having at least 30 percent women in political offices and corporate boardrooms". These movements have potential to secure leadership positions for women in political landscape. Women's movements have resulted in shifting public perception about women's inclusion in leadership

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political position. Over the course of history, women have been neglected to have concentration in political offices. But, emphasis on political rights of women has ~~cha~~ attracted the focus of public. They have started normalising women in administrative positions and political leadership. "Women are more interested in social ~~fee~~ and political legislation, than men, their civic sense is as sharp as men" [Mazhar-ul-Haq, Political Science; Theory and Practice]. Hence, the stereotypes about women ~~#~~ are being broken and a shift in public perception is evident about their role as political leaders. Due to that shift in public perception, women are securing support of political parties and civil society. This is because of gradual global shift in inclusion of women in political landscape. Political parties are looking for more diversification and following the essence of democracy. Due to this, an unprecedented rise has been witnessed in the number of female political contender. 9n

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recent elections in Pakistan, number of female contestants were quite large as compared to previous elections. According to Election Commission of Pakistan; "In General Elections 2024, 3139 women candidates have stepped forward as compared to 1687 in 2018 and 1171 in 2013". This increase in number of ^{women} candidates is because of support of political parties and civil society. Digital and social media is game changer in this regard. It provides women with a platform to have their say, express their views, and amplify their voices on important issues. With the advancement of technology and widespread of social media, it is easy for women to lay hands on it for their political pursuit. It is helpful. A 2019 research study focusing on 107 countries from across the world shows that; "More than 85 per cent of female legislators make use of social media with level higher during the campaign period". Digital and social media

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empower female candidates to effectively and efficiently approach everyone.

Moreover, supportive policies and legal frameworks help women inclusion in political leadership. Over the years governments have strived and deduced some rules to include women in political landscapes. Women are regarded as minority and their voices get suppress pertaining to sociocultural barriers. Women are therefore dependent on legal supportive frameworks to overcome these blockades. As Muna Khan said, "Women being physically weaker are more dependent on law and government, state and society for protection of their rights". Every country has devised legal plans and supportive policies to include women in administrative tier of state. These policies and framework are guardian of women's political rights. Also, increased female voter perception is another advantage for women's leadership in politics. It is very likely for female candidate to attract female voters. Female voters constitute a little less

than half of voters. Increasing voter participation of women is beneficial for women candidates. Also, more the female voters, more they have their say in political and social issues. In early times women do not have vote rights. Even in the democracy like United States women get right to vote in 1920 about one and half century after the birth of United States. Then women started getting their vote registered. Although women still have lesser vote registration than men, but their concentration is continuously on rise. "In Lok Sabha election of 2019, women voter turnout was 67.19 percent, which was 0.21 percent less than overall" [Ahmed Bilal Mehbob, Electoral Gender Gap, September 2024]. Hence, rise in women's voting participation is productive for women candidates in politics.

The challenges facing the women's leadership in politics are significant, but there are also number of prospects. It is important to continue to work to address the challenges and to support

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women's political participation. Concerted efforts are required to support and eventually achieve gender equality. It should be started from grass-root level by schooling political activism in women. Awareness must be provided to women and importance of human women's leadership in politics must be highlighted. Organisations of women should be encouraged and supported. Their efforts to empower women and to advocate for their political rights must be promoted through social and mainstream media. At higher level political parties should adopt measures to ensure that women are represented in their leadership and candidates lists. Government should make ~~an~~ extensive legislation to protect political rights of women - By taking these actions we can help to create a more inclusive and representative political system.

Conclusively, one may say that Women's leadership in politics have quite complex problems but, in the meanwhile they

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have plenty of opportunities. They face gender biasness and certain societal norms which diminish their potential. They do not get proper representation in political offices. Women ^{have} neither financial freedom at home nor they have political party support in society. Violence and harassment against women is ubiquitous in all political societies. There is no true role model for women to follow in political leadership and they also lack mentorship. As challenges are many, prospects are also too much. There has been an evident increase in advocacy of women's leadership in politics. Recent years have seen number of women right movements that resulted in shift of public perception. Political parties are devising plans and governments are making legal framework to ensure women participation in political leadership. It is necessary for progress of society as former US secretary of state Madeleine Albright said; "Societies are more stable, if women are politically and economically empowered— This is why I pursued this agenda".