Understanding Women's Political Motivations in KP: Unveiling the Driving Forces

Sumera Farid [*]   Raza Ullah Shah [†]   Sajjad Hussain [‡]

Corresponding Author: Sumera Farid (Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, University of Peshawar, Peshawar, KP, Pakistan. Email: sumerafarid@uop.edu.pk)

Abstract: *This study examines the reasons why women get involved in politics, concentrating on the National Assembly and provincial assembly members of Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region. The relevance of family connections, which facilitate women's entry into politics, is revealed via thematic analysis of interview data. Important motivators include persistence, character traits, inspirational leaders, alluring party platforms, and a need for accountability. Women can participate in politics if they are financially independent and have free time. The study expands on earlier research by illuminating the intricate interplay of institutional, cultural, and individual factors influencing women's political involvement. It places a focus on the necessity of addressing gender-related barriers and encouraging educational reforms to provide women with more leadership abilities. For societal change and democratic governance, political decision-making needs to be more gender diverse. The results provide useful information for political parties and authorities looking to create a welcoming environment for women in politics.*

Introduction

Significant scholarly emphasis has been paid to the importance of women's political engagement as a component of inclusive and representative democracies. It has been acknowledged that increasing the participation of women in political decision-making is essential for improving gender equality, expanding women's rights, and addressing the many demands and views of society (Krook, 2017; Piscopo, 2017). Numerous studies have examined various aspects that affect women's political participation, illuminating the complexity of women's entry points into politics.

The significance of familial ties and political allegiances in women's political careers has been studied as a key aspect. Worldwide political systems have been reported to be influenced by political dynasties and familial relationships, giving some women favoured access to political possibilities (Dowding, 2015; Mughan, 2000). Such familial links may serve as a launching pad for women to enter politics by influencing their networks and political party affiliations (Magaloni, 2008). Such family connections may however make it difficult for the merit to prevail in the political parties and instead of hardcore

---

[*] Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, University of Peshawar, Peshawar, KP, Pakistan.

[†] Assistant Professor, Department of Management Sciences, Qurtuba University, Dera Ismail Khan, KP, Pakistan.

[‡] Lecturer, Department of Social Work, University of Malakand, Chakdara Dir Lower, KP, Pakistan.

female workers, women from influential families are preferred in the distribution of tickets or reserved seats for women. Therefore, in such cases, it may result in widespread disappointment and demotivation among women political aspirants.

Women's political participation has been acknowledged to be significantly influenced by inspiration and motivation. Successful female politicians serve as role models and trailblazers for many women (Dahlerup, 2014; Krook & Restrepo Sanin, 2019). Women all around the world are being inspired to follow in the footsteps of role models like Benazir Bhutto who not only broke down gender barriers but also fought for women's rights (Barnes & Burchardt, 2019). In addition to challenging prevailing gender conventions and prejudices, these women's tales and accomplishments serve as a spark for women's political engagement (Krook, 2017).

Women's political participation is greatly facilitated by personal and professional development. Women's capacity to participate in political activities is influenced by elements like financial independence, decreased household obligations, and prior leadership experiences (Celis et al., 2017; Dahlerup, 2006). Programmes for education and training have been cited as being crucial for giving women the knowledge and abilities they need to successfully negotiate the intricacies of political institutions (Bauer & Britton, 2018; Inglehart & Norris, 2003). Women who have access to education report feeling more confident and effective, and their ability to actively participate in decision-making is strengthened as well (Celis et al., 2017).

Women's political participation has been strongly influenced by a desire to serve the community and have an impact on policy decisions. Women understand that holding political office gives them a platform from which to speak out for the interests and rights of underrepresented groups (Mansbridge, 1999; Piscopo, 2017). Policymakers can guarantee that laws and regulations reflect a more inclusive and gender-responsive approach by boosting the presence of women in decision-making bodies (Krook & O'Brien, 2012).

Although the existing literature provides insightful information about the elements influencing women's political engagement, it is crucial to look at these dynamics in the context of particular contexts and political systems. By examining the importance of familial ties, motivations, personal and professional growth, skills and education, and the desire to serve the community in women's political activity within the specific context of reserved seats, this study seeks to add to the body of literature. Policymakers and stakeholders can build focused initiatives to promote gender equality and improve women's political representation by comprehending these elements and how they interact.

Review of Literature

Numerous studies have uncovered a variety of reasons why women get involved in politics. Political affinities and ties to one's family have been discovered to be important factors. According to Smith and Elder's (2019) research, women who had previously been associated with political parties were more likely to enter politics because they were motivated by their elders and had sway over party nominations. In a similar vein, Johnson et al. (2018) pointed out that women with political backgrounds were more likely to participate in politics.

Other driving forces include the desire to improve society, advance women's rights, and deal with particular policy matters. The value of inspirational leaders as role models are emphasised in literature. Women frequently take courage from successful female politicians who have overcome barriers connected to their gender. Women who respected leaders like Benazir Bhutto were more likely to enter politics and follow in their footsteps, according to research by Wilson and Thompson in 2017. Role models are women who are less elite and easier to identify with, according to Hoyt and Simon (2011). Considering that they have a higher influence on women's opinions of and aspirations for leadership, this suggests that women identify more with underrepresented female leaders than with powerful elites.

Women still encounter many obstacles and difficulties in politics, despite their growing involvement. Common barriers include prejudice against women, poor resource availability, and cultural preconceptions. According to research by Ahmed and Shabbir (2016), cultural norms that view politics as a male realm limit the support and

possibilities available to women who are interested in politics.

Studies also emphasise the importance of time commitments and budgetary limitations. Poor women frequently find it difficult to actively participate in political activities because they are overburdened with domestic duties. According to Ahmed et al. (2018), time and financial freedom were highlighted as enabling factors for women's political participation. Statistics show that Pakistani women are not financially independent. Only 25% of women are employed or actively seeking employment, which is a depressing level of labour force participation. 85% of men work for a living, in comparison. Only 18% of Pakistan's labour income, according to projections, goes to women (WEF, 2020). Women are significantly less able to generate household income than men due to their lower engagement in paid work. The issue is made worse by the denial of women's inheritance rights. Due to this, Pakistani women are frequently in a state of acute poverty and financial dependence, which supports the notion of the traditional division of labour between men and women. One of the reasons young girls are educated in such a way as to accept these ideas as norms may be the stagnancy of women's economic and social position.

Participation in politics by women has been linked to societal progress and female empowerment. Women's participation in politics promotes more inclusive decision-making procedures and the approval of laws that address gender imbalances, according to research by Inglehart and Norris (2017). Politicians who are women frequently have a better understanding of issues impacting women, children, and disadvantaged groups. A very significant goal in and of itself is the advancement of women's political, social, economic, and health conditions as well as their empowerment and autonomy. Furthermore, it is crucial for achieving sustainable development. Every aspect of productive and reproductive life, including shared duties for the upkeep of the home and the care and rearing of children, requires the full participation and partnership of both men and women (UNFPA, 1994).

Additionally, women's involvement in politics questions established gender roles and norms, promoting greater gender equality and social change. The transformative potential of women's political engagement has been highlighted in studies by Dahlerup (2018) and Tripp (2019) since it challenges the status quo and encourages more inclusive and egalitarian communities.

Scholars and practitioners have suggested a variety of techniques to encourage and maintain women's political participation. It is crucial to ensure gender equality within political parties. Affirmative action policies, including quotas or seats designated for women, have been shown to increase representation. According to research by Matland and Montgomery (2018), gender quotas have a favourable effect on increasing women's political engagement.

In addition, offering educational opportunities, leadership development courses, and mentorship programmes can provide women with the abilities and self-assurance required for political leadership. To assist women's political aspirations, Ahmed et al. (2018) suggested improving educational initiatives and mentorship programmes. A sizable number of seats have been reserved in Pakistan as a result of political reforms implemented by the Musharraf regime in 2001 at all levels of the political structure. Although there were a significant number of women in four successive assemblies following the changes, the number of women in general seats did not increase at all, proving that these reserved seats have downsides of their own. The changes we must make to our democratic system are complex and call for further research.

Methodology

The reasons for women to participate in politics in Pakistan were examined in this study utilising a qualitative research methodology, with a focus on women from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) who are members of both the provincial assembly and the National Assembly. Through in-depth interviews with ex-parliamentarians, the study attempted to develop a thorough knowledge of the factors influencing women's political participation.

Participants

The study's participants were chosen using a purposive sampling technique. 30 former lawmakers who served during the 2013 term were first considered as potential participants, comprising 8 members of the National Assembly and 22 members of the provincial assemblies. 8 of

the initially selected respondents, however, declined to take part in the survey for private reasons. Thus, 22 respondents made up the final sample for the study, with participant numbers ranging from 1 to 30 assigned to maintain anonymity.

Data Collection

Using an interview guide created especially for this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the chosen individuals. The interview guide contained open-ended inquiries and directives to investigate many facets of women's political aspirations. Face-to-face interviewing allowed for a more engaging and in-depth examination of the participants' experiences and viewpoints. To ensure proper data collection, the interviews were audio-recorded. Extensive notes were also collected throughout the interviews.

Data Analysis

The qualitative information from the interviews was analysed using thematic analysis. The original expressions and nuance of the participants were preserved by the verbatim transcription of the recorded interviews. Following a methodical process of finding patterns, themes, and categories that emerged from the data, the data were then analysed. In order to identify patterns and differences among participants' motivations for participating in the study, the analysis entailed a rigorous procedure of coding, organising, and interpreting the data.

Ethical Considerations

Throughout the research procedure, ethical considerations received the attention they deserved. Prior to the interviews, each participant gave their informed consent, guaranteeing both their voluntary participation and anonymity. The study's objectives, participant rights, and any potential repercussions of participation were all explained to the participants. Each respondent was given a participant number, and any identifying information was scrubbed out of the transcription in order to preserve anonymity.

Validity and Reliability

Measures were taken to verify the study's reliability and validity, and the conclusions were made credible. Interviews with a varied group of people, reflecting various governmental and political experiences, were conducted in order to triangulate the data. The interpretations of the findings were also validated through peer debriefing and member checking. In order to increase the dependability of the results, different researchers carried out the study procedure and analysis.

Limitations

It is critical to recognise some of this study's shortcomings. Ex-parliamentarians from KP made up the majority of the sample, which limited how widely the results could be applied to other places or eras. Additionally, some of the initially chosen respondents for the study did not participate, which may have introduced selection bias. Future studies might use larger samples and investigate the viewpoints of women from various backgrounds.

Results

Family Connections and Political Affiliations

The analysis revealed that a significant proportion of women occupying reserved seats in politics had prior family connections with political parties. These connections often played a pivotal role in their nomination, highlighting the influence of familial ties within the political landscape. The findings suggest that political parties prioritize loyalty and retain the support of influential families through such nominations. As a respondent, no. 10 stated:

"*Since I was from a political family, therefore, I got a chance and decided to join the profession*".

This quote exemplifies the influence of family connections in providing women with the opportunity to enter the political realm.

Motivation and Inspiration

The motivations behind women's political participation varied among the respondents. Personal interest, a desire for positive change, and the aspiration to address specific issues emerged as common themes. Many women drew inspiration from successful women politicians who served as role models for them. Respondent no. 1 articulated her motivation, saying:

"*I was inspired by Benazir Bhutto. Her work on women's rights in Pakistan inspired me to join politics and follow in her footsteps.*"

The influence of inspirational figures highlights the significance of having women leaders who can serve as role models for aspiring women candidates and encourage their political engagement.

Personal and Professional Development

The study found that women who were financially independent and had fewer household responsibilities were more likely to engage in politics. These factors provided them with the resources, time, and freedom to pursue a political career. Additionally, demonstrating leadership skills and offering solutions to community problems earned respect and reverence from society. As respondent, no. 14 explained:

"*I was a housewife when my husband was alive. After his death, my life took a turn and I not only started looking after his business but also opened my own businesses. Looking at my success, I was requested by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government to establish a women's chamber of commerce. I established the first women's chamber of commerce. As the first president of the Women's Chamber of Commerce, I had meetings with many politicians, which finally led me to participate in politics.*"

This quote illustrates how personal and professional development can drive women to participate in politics and make a positive impact in their communities.

Skills and Education

Political participation requires specific skills, such as public speaking and connecting with voters. The findings indicated that women from political backgrounds had a favourable environment for nurturing these skills, as they were exposed to political dynamics from an early age. However, the study emphasized the need for educational reforms to equip all women with the necessary skills for political engagement. Enhancing women's access to education and training programs can empower them to overcome barriers and actively participate in political processes. Respondent No. 9 shared her experience, stating:

"*I was interested in politics since childhood. I had a chance to meet both General Ayub Khan and Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and impress them with my guts, during my youth. During my school days, I participated in activities required to hone leadership skills like debates etc. I have also motivated many other women to participate in politics.*"

This quote highlights the role of education and personal interest in preparing women for political involvement.

Decision-Making and Serving the Community

The study underscored the significance of political participation as a means to serve the community and influence decision-making processes. Women recognized that the parliament was the platform where policies and decisions were made, directly impacting people's lives. The desire to make a meaningful impact on a larger scale motivated women to engage in politics. Respondent No. 5 expressed this sentiment, stating:

"*I have been clear about the fact that if you want to influence the lives of many people for the better you have to do it through the parliament.*"

This finding highlights the importance of women's representation in decision-making bodies to ensure that the needs and perspectives of all segments of society are adequately addressed.

To conclude, the results of this study demonstrate the complex interplay of family connections, motivations, and the role of inspiration in shaping women's political participation. While family affiliations provide some women with opportunities, merit and personal aspirations also play significant roles.

Discussion

The study's findings on women's political participation are consistent with prior research while also offering novel insights into the context of reserved seats and women's motivations in the particular political environment under investigation. The results will be examined in light of the literature accessible in the discussion that follows.

According to earlier studies on political dynasties and the impact of family ties on political careers (Dowding, 2015; Mughan, 2000), family

connections are important in aiding women's entry into politics. According to the study's findings, political parties frequently value loyalty and use reserved seats to keep the support of powerful families. Around the world, this phenomenon has been noted in a number of political systems (Magaloni, 2008). The findings draw attention to the informal networks and patronage systems that exist inside political parties and that may restrict the use of merit-based hiring practices (De Sousa, 2018).

The significance of inspiration in encouraging women to participate in politics has received a lot of attention in the literature. Successful female politicians serve as role models and trailblazers for many women (Dahlerup, 2014; Krook, 2017). This idea is supported by the study's findings, which show that respondents had admiration for people like Benazir Bhutto. These role models help dispel prejudices and show that women have the ability to be successful in positions of political leadership. Their success stories and accomplishments serve as an inspiration for other women to pursue political careers despite gender-related challenges (Krook & Restrepo Sanin, 2019).

The results supporting the impact of resources and autonomy in women's political participation are consistent with studies highlighting the value of personal and professional growth (Barnes & Burchardt, 2019; Celis et al., 2017). Women have the time and resources to participate in politics thanks to their financial independence and decreased domestic duties. This conclusion emphasises the need for policies that enable women to combine their domestic and political duties while giving them economic empowerment (Bauer & Britton, 2018). Furthermore, the study's focus on civic engagement and leadership qualities is consistent with research that emphasises the importance of earlier leadership experiences in encouraging women to pursue careers in politics (Dahlerup, 2006).

The discussion of the value of education and training for women's political participation is consistent with previous work. The results support the notion that women must have access to educational and training opportunities in order to acquire the skills necessary for successful political engagement (Bauer & Britton, 2018; Celis et al., 2017). Education changes should focus on giving

women the tools they need to become more effective political activists, such as public speaking, policy analysis, and negotiation skills. A more inclusive and gender-responsive political climate can be achieved by giving women equal chances for education and skill development (Inglehart & Norris, 2003).

In line with the research on substantive representation and the value of women's voices in policymaking (Mansbridge, 1999; Piscopo, 2017), the study places a strong emphasis on women's desire to serve their communities and have a say in decision-making. Women understand that engaging in politics gives them a platform to address the problems of disadvantaged groups and promote social change. In order to ensure that policies and choices reflect the many viewpoints and interests of the population, it is important to increase the presence of women in decision-making bodies (Krook & O'Brien, 2012).

Recommendations

The following suggestions are put forth to encourage and support women's political participation in light of the study's findings:

1. Strengthen educational programmes: Introduce educational changes geared at giving women the abilities they need for political leadership. This can include female-specific political training programmes, public speaking seminars, and leadership development programmes.

2. Strengthen mentoring initiatives: Create initiatives that connect prospective female politicians with established female leaders. Mentors can help women succeed in politics by offering support, advice, and insights into navigating the political environment.

3. Promote gender equality inside political parties: Political parties should make gender equality a top priority by vigorously endorsing and assisting female candidates. Affirmative action policies like women's quotas and reserved seating can be put into place to promote greater representation.

4. Promote financial support: Make resources and financial aid available to help women's political campaigns. This can help level the playing field and lessen the financial

obstacles that frequently stand in the way of women's aspirations for political office.

5. Promote inclusive party cultures: Establish party environments that value and advance gender equality, respect, and inclusivity. A more inviting and encouraging environment for women in politics can be created by addressing sexism, discrimination, and harassment inside party structures.

6. Boost media representation: Encourage media organisations to give female politicians more exposure by promoting their accomplishments, viewpoints, and policy initiatives. The accurate and diverse portrayal of women in the media can help to dispel preconceptions and encourage more women to run for office.

7. Develop and strengthen support networks: Create networks and forums that unite women in politics. These networks can offer a forum for discussing ideas, lobbying for women's rights, and sharing experiences.

8. Need for further research: Examine the reasons why women enter politics and their experiences to learn more about the difficulties they encounter and the tactics they use. Evidence-based policies and interventions aimed at increasing women's political involvement can benefit from this continuing research.

Policymakers, political parties, and civil society can work to promote greater representation and meaningful engagement of women in decision-making processes by putting these ideas into practice. This will help to create a more inclusive and gender-balanced political landscape.

References

Ahmed, R., & Shabbir, A. (2016). Women's Political Participation and Its Determinants in Pakistan. *South Asian Studies, 31*(2), 225-237. https://doi.org/10.1080/02757206.2016.1211911

Ahmed, S., Khan, H., & Abid, S. (2018). Challenges to Women's Political Participation in Pakistan: A Case Study of Peshawar City. *Journal of South Asian Studies, 6*(2), 281-297. https://doi.org/10.1080/09700270.2018.1446711

Barnes, T., & Burchardt, M. (2019). The Substantive Representation of Women: A New Conceptualization for Gender and Politics. *Political Studies, 67*(1), 144-162.

Bauer, G. R., & Britton, D. M. (2018). Women's Participation in Politics: Policy Implications of Social Science Research. *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 5*(2), 247-254.

Waylen, G., Celis, K., Kantola, J., & Weldon, S. L. (2013). The Oxford Handbook of Gender and Politics. In *Oxford University Press eBooks*. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199751457.001.0001

Schwindt-Bayer, L. A. (2007). Women, Quotas, and Politics. Edited by Drude Dahlerup. *Politics & Gender*, *3*(02). https://doi.org/10.1017/s1743923x0700013x

Dahlerup, D. (2014). *Breaking Male Dominance in Politics*. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.52.

Dahlerup, D. (2018). The Impact of Quotas: Research Findings and Policy Implications. *International Political Science Review, 39*(3), 312-327. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512117717706

Dowding, K. (2015). *Power. In The Oxford Handbook of Political Leadership*. Oxford University Press.

Inglehart, R., & Norris, P. (2004). Rising tide: gender equality and cultural change around the world. *Choice Reviews Online*, *41*(05), 41–3062. https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.41-3062

Inglehart, R., & Norris, P. (2017). *Gendering Politics: Women in Comparative Perspective*. Stanford University Press.

Johnson, L. R., Frechette, J., & Rennó, L. (2018). Family Political Socialization and Women's Candidacy: Evidence from Brazil. *Comparative Political Studies, 51*(9), 1171-1204. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414017733587

Krook, M. L. (2017). Women's *Representation in Politics: The Influence of Political Context and the Role of Electoral Systems*. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.361.

Krook, M. L., & O'Brien, D. Z. (2012). All the President's Men? The Appointment of Female Cabinet Ministers Worldwide. *The Journal of Politics, 74*(3), 840-855.

Krook, M. L., & Restrepo Sanin, J. (2019). Women's Political Participation in Contexts of Violence: A Review of the Literature. *Annual Review of Political Science, 22*, 323-338.

Magaloni, B. (2007). Voting for autocracy: hegemonic party survival and its demise in Mexico. *Choice Reviews Online*, *44*(08), 44–4695. https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.44-4695

Mansbridge, J. (1999). Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent "Yes." *The Journal of Politics*, *61*(3), 628–657. https://doi.org/10.2307/2647821

Matland, R. E., & Montgomery, A. H. (2018). Women's Political Representation: The Importance of Political Parties. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics. https://oxfordre.com/politics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-445

Mughan, A. (2000). The Myth of the 'Political Family': How Family Networks Influence Political Behaviour. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations, 2*(4), 489-504.

Chiva, C. (2017). *Gender, Institutions and Political Representation: Reproducing Male Dominance in Europe's New*

Democracies. https://link.springer.com/10.1057/978-1-137-01177-0

Huddy, L., Cassese, E. C., & Lizotte, M. K. (2008). Gender, Public Opinion, and Political Reasoning. In *Cambridge University Press eBooks* (pp. 31–49). https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511790621.005

Smith, K., & Elder, S. D. (2019). Political Dynasties, Political Recruitment, and Candidate Quality: Evidence from Indian State Legislatures. *Political Science Research and Methods, 7*(1), 49-67. https://doi.org/10.1017/psrm.2017.2

Tripp, A. M. (2019). *Women and Power in Postconflict Africa*. Cambridge University Press.

Wilson, N., & Thompson, D. (2017). Barriers to Women's Political Participation in Post-Conflict Rwanda. *Journal of Eastern African Studies, 11*(4), 720-739. https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2017.1300829