

Women as Voters and Candidates: A Critical Analysis of Electoral Inclusion in KP under Post-Musharraf Democratic Governments

ABSTRACT:

This paper will explore the relationship between women political participation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) throughout the post-Musharraf democracy period which has been characterized by massive political reorganization and institutionalization changes in Pakistan. With the advent of the democratic government through the military rule, new vistas of involvement were made available to the women in KP, although there were still structural strains that curtailed their involvement. This study discusses how socio-cultural norms, patriarchal attitude and security issues interacted with changing political institutions to influence the role of women in electoral politics, party systems and the forums of decision making. In the analysis, the researcher will consider two major provincial governments, the Awami National Party (2008-2013), and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (2013-2018) who have put forward the measures in a bid to foster gender inclusion. The ANP government was concentrated in the area of legislative changes and symbolic representation, whereas the PTI administration was more concentrated on the areas of strengthening the institutions, development of the local governments, and increased delivery of the public services. In spite of these, the substantive political empowerment of women was crippled by the lack of proper policy implementation, low mobility and economic dependency. The qualitative research through the help of policy documents, election reports and scholarly works can observe the progress and the further challenges of women in political field of KP. Women as Voters and Candidates: A Critical Analysis of Electoral Inclusion in KP under Post-Musharraf Democratic Governments.

KEY WORDS:

Women's Political Participation, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Post-Musharraf Era, Gender Inclusion Policies, Socio-Cultural Barriers

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Introduction

For a long time, women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) have been limited in participating politically because of lasting cultural, economic and political barriers (Bari, 2005; Naz & Chaudhry, 2011). Customs such as patriarchy, traditions in tribes and ideas about gender have usually prevented women from taking part in public and political life. In rural

areas where customs are strongly opposed to them, women's involvement in politics is still very low, even though the law includes protections and legislative positions for them.(Mumtaz, 2005).

But Pakistan started undergoing political changes from the early 2000s, mainly because General Musharraf (1999–2008) introduced decentralization policies meant to support democracy (Cheema, et al., 2006). With the Local Government Ordinance in 2001, there were now requirements for women to be involved on local bodies. While these reforms in KP led to some new possibilities, their adoption was uneven thanks to pervasive patriarchy, limited actual power and only modest symbols of support (Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1987).

Once civilian rule was restored after Musharraf in 2008, there was new energy for people to participate in democracy. Between 2008 and 2013, the Awami National Party (ANP) ran the province, while Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) started leading it from 2013 onwards. Both parties put policies in place to improve women's involvement in politics, but the results were different. ANP wanted progress, but its efforts were severely hindered by insecure regions and opposition to its ideas. Through its reforms, PTI tried to increase the number of women in government and local politics. Going forward, rural women experienced difficulties of having tight controls over movement, facing a traditional culture and dealing with acts of extremists (Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, 2016).

Being involved in politics by women is necessary for strong democracy and a just society. As women participate more in politics in KP, society's institutions develop the ability to deal with traditional roles for women and men. Even so, the real meaning of participation also comes from being supported by society, economically and by groups and institutions.

The focus of this study is on the ways in which women began to participate in politics following Musharraf and during the ANP and PTI governments. The study looks at historic changes, pinpoints ongoing hurdles and identifies both useful opportunities and effective approaches for raising participation. Focus points on the study are on how political parties, electoral changes, civil communities and media groups impact different social, economic and security conditions (Shah & Waseem, 2017).

The 18th Constitutional Amendment of 2010 allowed provinces greater independence and might also help more women take part in politics. But in KP, it was a big problem because of insecurity, particularly around the border with Afghanistan, where women rarely spoke out about politics for fear of violence.

That is the case, but some progress can be noticed. More women standing in local elections, the greater focus of the media and aid from NGOs have slowly helped to open doors for participation in politics. The information shows that KP's political culture is softly but noticeably transforming (Shah, 2019).

The purpose of this thesis is to preserve and evaluate both the breakthroughs and the remaining issues in the world's move towards sustainability. Because of this, it hopes to present useful ideas and guidance to promote women's empowerment and better democratic practices in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Along with these changes, the post-Musharraf democratic space also stimulated a wider discussion in the country on gender equality and political inclusion. Women voices in the governance were increasingly being given importance by parliament, political parties, civil society organizations and international partners (Government of Pakistan, 2018).

Although this transition was slow, it brought about a conducive atmosphere of changes in KP which bridged the gap between politics and social development and human rights. With the emergence of democratic institutions and the rise in political competition (through electoral activities), political parties started to realize that they needed to mobilize women as voters, workers, representatives. This was gradually leading to attitudinal change even in the conservative districts, where women were traditionally excluded in making decisions that affected them (Naz & Chaudhry, 2011).

Nevertheless, with these encouraging indicators, there was still an unequal participation throughout the province. A great number of women still had behavioral conditions of structural disadvantages associated with poor literacy levels, information with less access, dependence on economics, and non-secure political environments. Formal assent against women voting continued in a number of constituencies, with the result of the resistance to their political presence being so strong. (Election Commission of Pakistan, 2013; HRCP, 2016). Security issues, particularly militant attacks, assassinations, and fear of vengeances also curtailed the freedom of women to participate in a political meeting, freedom to stand freely and participate in campaigning or contesting an election. These problems prove that political changes are not sufficient because social acceptance and security are also crucial factors enabling women to participate in the governance).

Despite these limitations, the fact that the number of women in political parties and various levels of government is increasing gradually is a significant development in the political arena of KP (Bari, [2005](#); UN Women, 2017). A larger proportion of women have started taking up party wing leadership, legislative debates and speaking concerns regarding health, education, violence, and social justice. Their existence is having a slow but steady impact on the policy priorities and is pushing the world towards a culture where women are seen as agents and not passive beneficiaries. Additionally, the growth of media and online platforms and youth participation campaigns have given women new means to voice their opinion, defy stereotypes, and find networks that cut across geographic lines.(UN Women, 2019; Bari, [2005](#)).

In general, the political involvement of women in KP after Musharraf is an issue of both successes and challenges. The democratic governments brought new avenues of representation but culture, insecurity and institutional inefficiency still played a role in making significant changes slow. However, the gradual, rather lumpy, increase in the visibility of women and their participation points to a change trend which bodes the future. The answer to this question is the necessity to comprehend how these patterns were formed, developed, and influenced provincial politics in order to determine some roadmap to further empowerment (Phillips, 1995; Kabeer, 1999).

In this work, thus, the political participation of women has been placed in the context of the overall development of the democracy of KP. It will examine legislative changes, electoral patterns, political party tactics and the socio-cultural context in a bid to provide a holistic evaluation of issues that have influenced the role of women in post-2008 politics. The final aim is to add knowledge and information that could help policymakers, civil society, and political actors to develop measures that could enhance inclusivity, safeguard women rights, and enhance democracy practices in the province (UN Women, 2017; Bari, [2005](#)).

Historical And Contemporary Trend Of Women's Political Participation In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (2000-2022)

In this chapter, we closely examine the transformations in women's participation in politics in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) between 2000 and 2022. During the last twenty years, the mix of tradition, beliefs, political thinking and gender rights movements has impacted the way women contribute to politics. The introductory section of the chapter studies General Musharraf's military regime (from 2000 to 2008) which promoted many changes such as motivating more women to participate in political life. Then, the author looks at the period when the ANP government (2008–2013) attempted to get women involved in provincial politics by suggesting new ways and strategies.(Mumtaz & Shaheed, [1987](#); Naz & Chaudhry, [2011](#)).

In this chapter, readers find out how the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) gained influence and what steps the party took to update the government and improve women's rights. Although PTI took steps towards improving women's lives and social welfare such campaigns faced opposition from conservative society and political opposition. The next part of the chapter studies both notable achievements and ongoing challenges in women's involvement in politics, from participating in voting to being involved in provincial assemblies and activism. By

looking at things from the past and present, this chapter tries to spot both the changes and the staying barriers that make it hard for women to be fully involved in politics in KP.

Political participation by women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa grew significantly between 2000 and 2008 under the influence of changes introduced by General Pervez Musharraf (Bari, [2010](#)). The time period was a turning point in Pakistan's political system since the government launched the Devolution of Power Plan 2001, raising the number of women serving at the local government level. This arrangement meant that 33% of each local body's posts would be held by women, at Union, Tehsil and District Councils. Many women in KP, including those attending for the very first time, now participate in politics since the situation previously kept females out of public life (Mumtaz & Shaheed, [1987](#)).

Because Musharraf was head of the military, his government allowed greater opportunity and freedom for women. By issuing the Legal Framework Order (LFO) in 2002, women were again allowed reserved seats in both the National Assembly, with 60 seats and in Provincial Assemblies at 17% of the total seats (Government of Pakistan, 2002). With these guidelines, women acquired real roles in politics and became noticeable in making important decisions.

ANP Government and Gender-Inclusive Political Developments (2008–2013)

Between 2008 and 2013, the Awami National Party (ANP) government mostly followed a progressive and secular way of running the province when compared to its previous rulers. The ANP, a Pashtun-nationalist and democratic socialist party, incorporated human rights, education, and gender equality in its political agenda. Hence, some legislature was passed to commend women rights and have them participate in the national decision-making (Naz & Chaudhry, [2011](#)).

ANP made women be able to have a say in Provincial Assembly by encouraging women politicians to participate and establish sound places in the party. It collaborated with the external parties to ensure that its policies were geared towards recognizing gender equality. The enactment of laws to combat domestic violence, sexual harassment and discrimination was made possible by many female legislators across parties, including ANP. Additionally, the government sponsored public awareness and gave more money to development programs aimed at women (UNDP, 2018).

But, despite making effort, the government struggled to carry out its gender equality strategy. Because militancy and extremist violence grew in KP, mainly in Swat, women found it hard to freely move or join political activities. Bombs were dropped on many girls' schools and these female workers were regularly threatened or physically attacked. Even so, Begum Nasim Wali Khan and others showed that the ANP wanted to include a wider range of women in public life (Bari, [2010](#)).

The ANP Government didn't completely solve KP's gender problems, but it did put into place new laws and traditions that gave women more political authority. At this time, people tried to blend tradition and progressivism in an area that was known for being socially traditional.

From 2008 to 2013, the ANP worked to enhance the rights of women with legal and institutional efforts. Since the party understood the obstacles women had in public life, it did its best to protect women's rights and create a place for them in governance (Bari, [2005](#)).

A major improvement to employment law was the Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, ([2010](#)) which succeeded at the national level thanks to the support of progressive parties, including the ANP. Even though the law came from the federal government, it had to be carried out locally in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with

help from the provincial administration. It was the ANP that helped secure and enforce the law across the province (Naz & Chaudhry, [2011](#)).

With this law, a key change was made to protect and honor women in both work and political circumstances. The goal was to make workplace harassment a crime and to include committees and ombudspersons to protect women from staying away from public service for fear of harassment. Since the business behind gender inequality was very familiar to them, the ANP's close ties to Canadian feminism supported their decision.

Likewise, ANP speakers commonly defended laws that maintained women's rights in both areas where they worked and in their homes. Although most laws were passed by the federal government, the ANP government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa made it easier for dialogue about gender justice which was a big change from the region's old conservative way of viewing these matters. Because of its position in the provincial assembly and support of civil groups, the ANP helped increase legal rights and political involvement for women.

Nonetheless, the results of these laws often relied on how much they were implemented, explained and followed in local areas which were still facing major challenges. A lot of women in rural communities did not understand what their rights were or were unable to access justice since customs, fear or system problems existed. Still, the ANP push for changes in the law helped Khyber Pakhtunkhwa become more inclusive for women (Naz & Chaudhry, [2011](#)).

PTI-led Reforms and Women's Representation in Politics (2013–2018)

After being elected in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2013, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) planned reforms to improve government effects, make administration more open and enhance public services (PTI Manifesto, 2013). The reformists recognized including women in politics as very important to the development of democracy; however, the degree and reach of these changes differed (Bari, [2005](#)).

Reserved seats for women in the province's assembly were kept by the PTI government, so female participation in making laws did not stop. In addition, the party put effort into increasing the involvement of women in elections. Ensuring that a minimum of 10% of female voters turned out in every one was a major achievement. Should this threshold not be reached, then the results could be declared void. Suffrage was mostly about ending the tradition of women not being given the vote due to rules made and agreed upon by men. Because politicians faced consequences from elections, they began encouraging women to vote (Khan & Bano, [2018](#)).

Passing the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Local Government Act in ([2013](#)) is considered a big achievement by PTI, as it improved local governance in the region. Within this structure, the party brought back the local body system and provided women with representation at all steps — union councils, tehsil councils and district governments. As a result, the law kept quotas for women and gave grassroots groups more chances to be involved in politics.

Because of this, people from all backgrounds, with a focus on those from country villages, could now influence what felled near their place of residence. Thanks to politics, many women were able to build their skills which would become useful in politics if they moved forward. Still, it was common for cultural and traditional reasons to limit women's full involvement and some female elected officials made decisions influenced by men in their family (Mumtaz & Shaheed, [1987](#); Naz & Chaudhry, [2011](#)).

Besides political matters, the PTI wanted to focus on expanding women's chances to learn, get healthcare and earn an income. Insaf Rozgar Scheme and Insaf Health Cards focused on those facing hardship, especially women and provided free or reduced-price healthcare as well as loans or help with employment. Programs included here made a difference by allowing women to reduce their financial troubles and focus on getting educated, treated by doctors and securing money.

Young women in city centers received digital skills and vocational knowledge, thanks to the provincial government's initiatives. The goal of these programs was to increase women's opportunity to take part in society, but they didn't have much impact in the more traditional and less progressing parts of the country (Bari, [2010](#)).

Criticism And Gaps

No matter how strongly PTI tried, people still complained that they had not increased women's involvement in top posts within the party or in important ministries. Even though establishment existed, women mostly did not lead important organizations and continued to have little impact on key policy choices. While the party said it supported women's empowerment, women were rarely involved in important decisions.

In general, PTI's administration introduced new structures and started some useful programs to help women participate in politics. Even with good policies at the grassroots level and improved access to elections, problems related to social beliefs, gaps in policy execution and few leadership positions for women hindered their full political empowerment in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Recent Trends and Shifts in Women's Political Roles (2018–2022)

Between 2018 and 2022, efforts to include women in politics in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were built on earlier work, though new ideas arrived from regional and global changes. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the continued rule of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf saw the state emphasize technology, help for the population and changes in institutions which affected women's politics in multiple ways. Still, there were unequal results because of continuing structural and cultural barriers.

Increased Awareness And Engagement

Women in Peshawar, Mardan and Abbottabad began seeing the importance of politics and flew to Islamabad with their husbands. Women were able to access politics, get educated and share their thoughts about social issues, largely because of social media. Online conversations about women's and voting rights led many educated women to care about public and government matters.

Furthermore, women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa made their voices heard after noticing national discussions about domestic violence, rights of inheritance and sexual harassment at work.

Female Participation In Local Government Elections

There were more female representatives in local government election phases held throughout 2021–2022, especially from conservative and semi-urban regions (Election Commission of Pakistan, 2022; UN Women, 2022). Candidates from both genders took part in the elections, with women trying their luck both in reserved constituencies and in general seats. Even though some still came up against resistance from family or traditional groups, their involvement began to change how society viewed things (Khan & Bano, [2018](#)).

During early periods, some women gained experience being in local bodies and when they returned, they had grown wiser and stronger. Having gained knowledge of governance, these women contributed more to development projects and local conflict resolution, contradicting the idea that women's part in politics is empty.

Youth Involvement And Civil Society Support

There was notable growth in young women's participation — especially among those who are educated. Training, seminars and policy dialogues all attracted the involvement of students and young professionals. NGOs and projects supported by donors joined forces with provincial agencies to hold programs for young female leaders focusing on voting in elections, government matters and leadership.

Consequently, the presence of women increased in the parties involved, although their influence differed among parties. Official or not, playing such roles led many more women to join politics, since it had mainly been men leading all decisions.

Policy Support And Institutional Challenges

Introduced by the PTI government, Ehsaas Program helped poor women, leading to greater empowerment for all women. The KP Women Empowerment Policy 2015 which came before, was also looked at again, focusing on improving budgets, safety in the workplace and protection services.

Even so, executing ideas was still a big problem. Most of the provincial bodies responsible for gender equality did not have the support, money or workforce to do their jobs well. In addition, female politicians mostly gained office through reserved seats, with few managing to be elected in general seats which means it was hard for women to overcome strong cultural beliefs.

Changing Social Narratives

During this time, people's view of these industries slowly began to shift, despite all the problems. Women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa began getting more attention on media shows, at events and when leading groups in society. With them in office, people began to question what women had to offer in terms of politics.

Efforts by local women leaders to sign up more women to vote reached many districts, including places where women's voices were formerly silenced. Even though these shifts varied in different parts of the province, they indicated that more people were realizing women need to be involved in building a healthy democracy.

Conclusion

To enable women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to take an effective, continuous role in politics, there is the necessity to not just have the laws as well as the provisions in the constitution: It is actually necessary to support such provisions and reinforce them as well to make it possible to ensure that the laws are apparently enforced as well. In as much as the Pakistani constitution contains significant assurances (including provisions to reserve a seat in legislative houses by the women), such policies on their own cannot automatically turn into actual political empowerment. The effective force of these legal solutions is greatly affected by the way they are appropriately brought into actions and are inferiorly promoted with back-up policies and institutional mechanisms.

Among the problems is the fact that numerous legal frameworks are not exploited, but they are undermined by the deficiency of responsibility. A case in point is the reserved seats which are in some instances filled on patronage and not on merit or commitment to serve the people. Also, policies that ought to motivate women are hardly implemented and thus, political parties and other stakeholders tend to avoid or evade their duties.

Thus, the purposeful attention to the elimination of gaps in the current framework and the cultivation of the positive environment that encourages the participation of women in politics and on all its tiers is required to enable the existing legal guarantees to become procedural and effective. This is in regard to nomination process that should be transparent, shield women against intimidation by politics and urging parties to make women candidates more than the especially reserved quota.

Essentially, reinforcing such structures implies that it is more than the existence of laws. It is an all-encompassing strategy that involves change in the law-making sector, political determination, and institutional backing that will enable even out the playing field so that women will be on a par with men in the political scene of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Women have achieved reserved seats that are stipulated in Article 51 and 106 of the Constitution of Pakistan, which has been critical in influencing women in the Political mainstream in Pakistan. These constitutional requirements ensure that there are guaranteed quotas of seats belonging to women in both national and provincial assemblies as well as the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly. Although these acts have been formulated with intentions of having females represented in government, the actual effects are based on the implementation processes.

Reservations, in most cases however, have increasingly turned into a symbolic rather than an actual process of filling up the reserved seats. Frequently, women are rec This jeopardizes the very basis of the quota system, whose aim should be to facilitate the needs of capable women so that they can voice the interests of the oppressed communities, and be significant members of the policymaking discussion.

One solution to this issue is to make the nomination of women to reserved seats a transparent and merit-based process by the political parties. There should be internal party elections, or screening kindred whereby, candidates should be judged based on their commitment towards politics in conjunction with their knowledge on matters concerning the people, and leadership abilities. Parties ought to be motivated--by law or by money--to give preference to women who have experience in local governance, civil society work, or public service.

In addition, there should be measures to punish parties that practice selection. To take an example, the Election Commission of Pakistan can be mandated to oversee the fill-in procedure of nominating reserved seats and require explanations of all the nominations, particularly in cases where there is a nepotistic claim.

Lastly, women on reserved seats cannot be considered as silent members of the legislature. Departments of parliament and political parties should foster this by providing them with leadership training, mentoring them, and involving them in important committees. It is only through following through with ensuring women on reserved seats are empowered, seen, and heard in productive ways that these constitutional guarantees become real in the sense that they provide the women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa the political agency that they deserve.

Although constitutional provision like reserved seats has opened a door of entry into politics by women, the rest of the electoral system presents substantial barriers to their active and effective participation. To mitigate these setbacks, it is necessary to improve the existing electoral laws to establish a clearer and more representative process when it comes to politics in Khyber Pakistan.

Already, a major legislative initiative is the (Election Act of, [2017](#)), the section of which mandates re-polling in constituencies where the percentage of vote by women is below 10%. This has proved to be a great step in highlighting the systematic exclusion of women in the political inequity on the election. There is however inconsistency in executing this clause and it is also narrow in breadth. By broadening the requirements of such provisions and introducing more rigorous surveillance strategies, it is possible to guarantee that women are not forced or intimidated to vote.

To enhance the presence of women further, the electoral laws must be changed to ensure that political parties present a certain percentage of women candidates on general seats, rather than just nominate women on reserved seats. This step would compel parties to engage women in active and competitive politics as opposed to appointment them to reserved seats with little power. The laws may establish financial rewards or sanctions related to adherence to the gender-based list of candidates, which will motivate sincere experiences in developing female management.

Also, the distribution of party tickets should be made more transparent. Nowadays it is not an uncommon practice to have access to a number of eligible women being declined a ticket to make way of male applicants for political trading, family lineage traditions or threat of constituency. Let the law provide stringent rule against

discriminating and make any assurance that women who are qualified under the eligibility should have equal chances of chance at candidacy.

One last essential area of change is in terms of campaign funding and safety assurances of women candidates. The expenses of trying to run an office are both socially and financially demanding which prevents the women from pursuing the elections in most of the instances. These gaps need to be filled with the help of state-sponsored support as lower nomination fees, the use of state-owned media, and special security measures placed around female candidates, particularly in conflicted areas.

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