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Analyzing Commitments to Gender Equality and Women Representation: Role of Political Parties in Pakistan

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Abstract

This study explores the role of political parties in ensuring a significant number of women and developing gender-equal policies at the party level. In-depth interviews were conducted with ten women MPs from three mainstream national political parties of Pakistan, including Pakistan Tehreek-EInsaaf (PTI), Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), and Pakistan People's Party (PPP). The participants were selected using criterion sampling; they must have been associated with political parties for ten years as women party workers. The collected data has been analyzed through the major themes that emerged from primary data that also have been linked with secondary data for further extended explanations. The significant findings of this study revealed that party ideology and policy documents play a substantial role in determining women's representation and persistence in the parties. The study indicated that organizational structure also directs the women's presence in senior committees in the parties. Moreover, more centrally tend to be recruited through party leaders. However, highly institutionalized party more likely to open doors for women candidates and have less reliance on party leaders. The study recommends gender-neutral party policies to ensure gender equality and women inclusive approach within the party ideology, context, policies, and structure.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Women Representation, Political Parties, Party Ideology, Organizational Structure & Policy Documents.

Introduction

Political parties are considered micro power institutions persuaded by various formal and informal institutional norms, internal policies, rules, and measures (Hall & Taylor, 1996). Moreover, political parties significantly influence democracies (Mainwaring & Scully, 1995) and the composition of legislatures. Parties are considered the gatekeepers for women to access power and critical positions within the micro institution, responsible for promoting gender equality and adopting gender-neutral policies by recruiting more women (Kittilson, 2006; Macaulay, 2006). Moreover, political parties play a significant role in growing women's descriptive representation in parties, the process of recruiting, and selecting women aspirants and women access to power positions within the party as well as legislature (Norris, 1997; Caul, 1999; Norris & Lovenduski, 1995, Kittilson, 2006). Women's inclusion in political parties has been contributed in different ways; change in party norms, rules, and behavior of male colleagues (Sacchet, 2005;

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Macaulay, 2006; Caul, 1999; Kunovich & Paxton, 2005). Besides, they played a positive role in adopting gender quotas, and pro-women policies and enhancing women's political empowerment (Krook, 2005, 2008; Caul, 2001; Araujo & Garcia, 2006). Party Ideology may promote and express the commitment to gender equality in different ways; first, by taking more women in senior positions (Kittilson, 2005), having party policies, strategies, and programs to address gender inequalities such as training, financial support, and quotas at party level (Lovenduski, 1993).

Another important factor is party ideology in enhancing women's representation in parliament and left parties are more concerned with supporting women's candidates because they follow egalitarian ideologies (Beckwith, 1992, 1986; Duverger, 1955). Further, Lovenduski (1993) highlighted that the left party's approach to supporting women's candidacies should be observed over time as it's based on party ideology and ideological spectrum. However, left parties are inclusive and tend to include those marginalized groups traditionally out of power like women (Matland & Studlar, 1996). Moreover, party rules may also play a significant role in including women's parties and ensuring gender equality at the party level. Parties can enhance women's candidacies through the party formal rules as a form of party quota (Caul, 2010).

Moreover, the structure of party organization may be affected by three factors: centralization, candidate location, and institutionalization. The first factor centralization deals with the decision-making in the party hierarchy. As in highly centralized party leaders tend to include women candidates within the party structure. However, the institutionalization deals with the recruitment process of MPs (Caul, 2010). It is also highlighted that more institutionalized parties are more likely to follow a rule-oriented process to recruit MPs (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995). Moreover, in highly institutionalized parties more have less chance to be discriminated against and get a better chance, and party leaders may have less room for favouritism in highly institutionalized parties (Caul, 2010).

Besides, the ideology of different parties may affect women's representation at the party level. Some studies showed that the egalitarian ideology of left parties is more flexible and supportive of women candidates than the right parties (Duverger, 1955; Beckwith, 1986). However, later studies showed that all left parties had not worked to promote women workers in parties. Thus, old left parties are less likely to deal with social inequalities and are more concerned about socio-economic issues. Conversely, the new left parties tend to understand the issues of underprivileged groups and focus on gender equality matters (Caul, 1999).

This study aimed to highlight how the party ideology, organizational structure, and policy documents, including manifestos, influence women's descriptive and substantive representation in the political parties in Pakistan. It also examined how the party follows the gender-equal approach in terms of its ideology, context, and

documents. Furthermore, this study is the first attempt to analyze the commitments of political parties to identify gender inequalities in their rules, norms, and culture.

Research Question

This study followed by the central research question:

1. How have the political parties committed to gender equality in their ideology, structure, and party policy documents?

Review of the Literature

Political parties are considered gatekeepers for women's descriptive and substantive representation in political parties. They also recruit and select suitable candidates and have control over party candidate lists (Gallagher & Michael, 1988). The equal representation of women can positively impact political party organization, ideology, rules, and culture. Literature showed that four-party characteristics may influence women's descriptive representation including political party organization structure, party ideology, party rules, and women activism within the political parties (Caul,1999).

Literature shows that centralized political parties can enhance women's proportions more easily. Moreover, they have more pressure to have more women-inclusive party organizations. In centralized parties, leaders have more pressure to promote women's candidates through gender-sensitive part policies (Matland & Studlar, 1996). Moreover, the institution also influences the proportion of women in political parties. Another study reported that the highlighted institutionalized parties have more rules to be followed (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995). Highly institutionalized parties are more likely to provide equal space for all MPs regardless of power dynamics and gender politics within the set rules and procedures (Caul, 1999). Moreover, institutionalized parties adopt women-inclusive measures including quotas (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995). The structure of the candidate selection procedure is easier and more transparent for insiders and outsiders to understand (Czudnowski, 1975).

Another important finding highlighted that leaders from institutionalized parties may have less influence to favour certain candidates and discriminate against the rules and selection criteria (Caul, 1999). Conversely, less institutionalized parties may allow party leaders to violate the rules and have more biased candidate nominations based on their political capital, resources, and personal status. Moreover, the newcomer women might have less personal political capital, resources, and liaison with party workers and their male colleagues. Literature also highlighted another important factor contributing to the proportion of women in political parties Party Ideology can

influence women's descriptive representation studies showed that left parties are more likely to strengthen women's candidates. Because they hold egalitarian ideologies (Beckwith, 1986: 1992; Duverger, 1955). Another study highlighted that left parties are more inclusive and sensitive towards the excluded groups from power dynamics (Matland & Studlar, 1996). In addition, the women's wing of left parties is more flexible towards adopting new ideas than centrist or conservative parties. Importantly left parties have more women in decision-making within the party (Caul 1999). Another study reported that right parties are less inclusive and do not nominate more women due to women's traditional roles. Moreover, women's movements are linked to new left parties rather than old ones (Jenson, 1995; Kitschelt, 1989).

Furthermore, parties may have a higher proportion of women through creating formal gender-sensitive rules (Caul, 1999). Quota adoption by political parties does not guarantee women full and equal representation in parties. The quota system is linked with other factors including party ideology, electoral system, party organization, and gender rules and norms at the party level. In addition to the party ideology, the commitments regarding gender equality are also important for enhancing women's representation and participation in the party. The study argued that initiatives can be taken to increase women's representation and enhance women's participation through capacity building and financial resources (Lovenduski, 1993).

Literature showed that women are under-represented in executive committees in the legislative assemblies (Javed & Malik, 2021a; Javed & Malik, 2024), and more likely to nominate and perform secondary roles like election campaigns (Javed, Malik & Hussain, 2021) and the vows written in policy documents (manifestos) have not been taken into practice by most of the political parties (Javed & Malik, 2021b). Global literature showed that Latin America, Costa Rica, Mexico, Brazil, and Panama adopted different measures by making gender-sensitive policies at the party level (Llanos & Sample, 2008). Moreover, some studies have found that many women in decision-making positions with active engagement in a party may change the party rules, culture, and norms (Macaulay, 2006; Caul, 1999; Sacchet, 2005).

Research Methodology

This study adopted the interpretive paradigm to explore the socially constructed reality within the party culture towards women party workers. The ontological belief under this paradigm claims that realities are multiple, fluid, and context-specific (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Particularly in the context of the present study researcher's focus was on understanding how party elites ensure gender equality in terms of their party ideology and organizational structure. Moreover, how women part worker interprets their activities out of their world and into the setting of the party culture. So, this paradigm helped the researcher gain in-depth insights and understanding from the emic perspective of participants.

Participants

Ten women were taken as participants by criterion sampling. Criterion sampling includes selected cases based on meeting some criteria of interest (Patton, 1990). Those women belonged to three mainstream political parties, including Pakistan Tehreek- E- Insaaf (PTI), Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), and Pakistan People's Party (PPP). The inclusion criteria for the political parties were, that these parties are national and have more women representation within the party and biggest parties of Pakistan. The inclusion criteria for the participants were that they had been associated with a political party for the last ten years as a party worker. However, other regional, and national parties based on different interests including religion, and region, are not part of this study. Such as Jamaat-i-Islami (JII) seeks religious, Awami National Party, and Baluchistan National Party are more concerned with national regions, and MQM represents the interests of Indian migrants and several other religious parties (Suri, 2007).

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Therefore, qualitative interviewing tends to be seen as involving the construction or reconstruction of knowledge more than the excavation of it (Mason, 2002). The have been taken because of the ontological position of the study.

Ethical Considerations

In the present study, the researcher argued about major ethical issues informed consent of participants, confidentiality of data, disclosure of participants' real names/pseudonyms, and deception. Before conducting interviews with participants, the oral consent was taken after after gaining an explanation of the purpose of the study. The researchers signed the written consent form for the participants after explaining the conditions as mentioned earlier. The second issue was maintaining the confidentiality of the data and explaining to participants that we would be taking their audiotapes if they didn't have any issue with it. Nevertheless, these types of data would be used for this research study only.

Findings and Discussion

Data were analyzed through thematic analysis. The following major themes emerged from the interview data.

Party Ideology

Party Ideology plays an important part in increasing women's descriptive and substantive representation in political parties and women's legislative affairs. Participants of this study belonged to three major political parties of Pakistan,

including Pakistan Tehreek-E-Insaf (PTI), Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), and Pakistan People's Party (PPP). These parties are different based on their ideology. A significant change can be traced back to the political history of Pakistan since 2008 when third-party PTI became a nation-wide accepted political party in the presence of two traditional parties: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan People's Party (PPP).

Pakistan People's Party (PPP) has high voter strength from the Sindh Province, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) from Punjab Province, while PTI grasped significant voter support in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province and stepped into an orderly rotation system based on two parties. The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan People's Party (PPP) are dominated by the Sharif and Bhutto families in Punjab and Sindh, respectively (Wu & Ali, 2020). Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan People's Party (PPP) are based on an oligarchy system as they are more recognized by patronage rather than ideology (Khan, 2018). However, PTI has no patronage background and is ideologically based on "change in existing status quo politics" in Pakistan. Moreover, PTI supports and guarantees women's and children's rights (Wu & Ali, 2020). However, the PMLN and PPP are "clientelistic parties," more concerned with the networking of social relationships, have more power, and use resources for the benefit of their candidates (Wu & Ali, 2020). In South Asia, it is challenging to classify political parties on their ideological basis; right, center, and left; because, frequently, it has been applied in Western parties. However, few parties have declared themselves 'left' as self-description. In the region, parties cannot be judged in the continuum of right and left. Though, parties have been described as socialist, pragmatic, egalitarian, democratic, and nationalist. Thus, some party elites say that they are egalitarian and do not follow any ideology (Suri, 2007).

In Pakistan, party ideology has not been declared as right and left, but regarding the mainstream three political parties, Pakistan Tehreek-E-Insaf (PTI) is a socialist democrat, Pakistan People's Party (PPP) is center-left, and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) as a center-right party (CIDOB, 2012). As the newest party in a two-way party system in Pakistan having socialist democrat ideological lines, PTI gives more space to the women party workers. Corresponding to previous literature, that also showed that new parties have fewer union ties and embedded hierarchies, allowing the new candidates in the nomination process (Caul, 1999). As one of the participants reported:

> "*I decided to join PTI as a grass-root worker and am personally convinced with the ideology of PTI, that brings a change in conservative and traditional politics in Pakistan*."

New parties tend to allow women workers. As previous literature also showed, the year of entry in the political system of parties may affect the women's descriptive

representation. Like New Zealand, the newest party, Groen, has higher women representation than all other Dutch political parties (Leijenaar,1993). However, a participant from another leading party in Pakistan reported that:

> *"PML-N follows the traditional norms for the grassroots workers and is more likely to support women having familial ties in politics*."

As Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) holds the center-right ideology (CIDOB, 2012) they believe in vertical social networking as previous literature also showed that right parties are less likely to nominate women candidates (Rule, 1987). In addition to ideology, western literature showed that parties with the center and left ideological lines are more likely to advocate gender equality and inclusive citizenship (Sacchet, 2005) and promote gender issues (Caul, 1999; Norris, 1993; Rule, 1994; Waylen, 2003; Sacchet, 2005). However, the proper parties may also initiate gender-related issues as they might follow the trend of left and Centre parties to attract women's voters (Lovenduski, 1993).

Party Organization

Party as an organization is essential for its members at the party level, particularly for women**.** Most parties have a hierarchal organizational structure relatively decentralized. National parties have working units at three levels, national, provincial, and local. Three party-level factors are essential for the centralized organizational structure: first, position (in power or opposition), geographical spread, and the leader (Suri, 2007). However, the centralization of parties is related to the decision-making process, either centralized or only handled by the party leadership. Because it affects women's representation and restricts their performance within the political parties, the inclusion of women in governing bodies and the party's decision-making process can lead to, what extent, any party believes and practices gender equality. Literature shows that globally women are under-represented in decision-making positions, although they have 40 and 50 % descriptive representation within the political parties (Ballington, 2012).

Most political parties work with their allied bodies, and they are called party wings. Parties closely work with different administrative wings, including youth, women, and student wings. Moreover, some parties have other bodies, called cells, that work for different social disadvantages and professional groups in society. However, party members must work with and join at least one of the wings and cells (Suri, 2007). In Pakistan, PTI has a wing system at the national level. They have fourteen different wings, including women, young, lawyers, labour, Insaaf welfare, doctors' forums, sports, and culture (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, 2021). Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) has seven different working wings: kisaan, minority, traders, professionals, women, and business & Commerce (Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz, 2021).

However, in Pakistan, we have few women on governing boards of political parties, and gender equality has not been ensured in internal decision-making structures. One of the participants reported that:

> *"Women MPs have not been taken on board for key decisions, and they get to know about important decisions after the meeting of party elites"* (PML-N). Conversely, another participant reported that "*Only those women members are called for party meetings which are ministers"* (PTI).

In the case of Pakistan, women are not permanent members of governing boards of political parties in the case of PML-N party structure is highly masculine; however, PTI, as a new political party, integrated women into party boards but those who have power positions in Parliament. Previous studies confirmed that very few women secure top positions and a large number at the bottom in the organizational structure of parties, so an increase in power decreases the number of women (Roza, Lianos & Roza, 2011).

The critical mass in the parties might have more opportunities to achieve gender equality in the organizational structure of political parties. Importantly, if more women are being worked in senior positions in the party structure, they might have more gender-sensitive policies and less gender-biased party culture. As one of the participants highlighted:

> "*We always have been appointed in low ranked party wings, related to education and social welfare….*".

This finding is also consistent with previous literature that the party appoints women MPs to the structure based on a division of labour as an extension of the traditional role of women as caregivers (Kittilson, 2006). Women being appointed are less prestigious than the committees where they are being appointed, like public and economic affairs (Roza, Lianos & Roza, 2011).

Globally, many cases have shown that parties have taken some measures to ensure women's participation in internal decision-making structures as it reflects their perspective to shape the party policies, strategies, agendas, and priorities (Ballington,2012). In the case of Pakistan, political parties have not set any internal rules to ensure women's presence in party governing boards by taking any party-level measures. One of the participants highlighted that *the "Party has no strategy to get women insights regarding key decisions."* If the party develops any legal rule, the masculine culture within the political parties might be minimized in executive committees, leadership positions, and governing boards, so women can get a chance to speak and reflect their opinions as party workers on an equal basis. We can learn from other Asian countries, the example in India, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)

developed a strategy by reserving 33 percent seats for women in the party leadership positions. Likewise, in Cambodia, the Sam Rainsy Party (SRP) has opted for internal party quotas to ensure women's participation in governing boards (Ballington, 2012).

Gender Equality in Policy Documents

Notably, the principles of gender equality mentioned in policies and documents may impact women's representation within the political parties. Whatever parties committed in the documents have to translate their words to achieve women's inclusive approach in the party organizational structure (Lovenduski, 1993). These policy initiatives could help women as "statutory legitimacy" while having negotiation in the parties (Roza, Lianos & Roza, 2011). Concerning the case of Pakistan, most political parties have their manifestoes as party documents; however, they only make for the electoral purpose to shape the voter's attitude. However, the party's commitments towards gender equality can be traced through manifestoes as to what extent the party sets positive benchmarks for women's empowerment and development. Moreover, there is a difference between the party's constitution and manifestos; constitutions deal with its core values.

On the other hand, manifestos are developed for electoral purposes (Kandawasvika-Nhundu, 2013). In Pakistan, every party has its manifesto One of the participants highlighted that

> *"Party has committed to women empowerment in manifestoes, but they do not implement their commitments*." Moreover, another participant also showed concern that "*Party promise in the document only, as in 2013 manifesto, PPP committed to 'Increase 10 % quota for women on general seats' (p,28-PPP manifesto), and PML-N committed for 'Inclusion of women in influencing political party policies and process' (P, 14-PML-N), in reality, parties never translated their pledges into actions".*

Overall, three mainstream parties PTI, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), and Pakistan People's Party (PPP), have agreed on women empowerment, including social, economic, political, and gender-based violence. However, in the case of political empowerment, there is a need to ensure women's inclusive approach in the party's overall organizational structure and power positions. As previous literature also argued, explicit party commitments for a gender-equal approach are the first step to work on gender parity and gaps in the organizational structure of political parties. They need to integrate gender-responsive policies and strategies to handle gender inequalities at the party level (Kandawasvika-Nhundu, 2013).

Conclusion

The current study aimed to explore the influence of organizational structure, party ideology, party rules, and policy documents on gender equality and women's representation in the mainstream political parties of Pakistan. Thus, findings showed that these are essential factors to achieve gender equality in the parties. Pakistan Tehreek-E-Insaf (PTI), as the newest socialist democrat and the leading party in Pakistan, is more likely to have an inclusive approach towards women party workers, but party policies regarding gender equality have not been considered. Furthermore, the institutionalized party is more inclusive of marginalized groups including women who are being discriminated against due to less power. Moreover, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), as center-right, are less likely to ensure gender equality as they hold networking and patronage strategies. Additionally, the more centralized party is more likely to consider party leadership in decision-making regarding women's inclusion in the party structure.

They must develop a gender-sensitive party approach in organizational structure by discouraging political masculinity and proxy representation of women. However, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) has pledged in the policy document (Manifesto, 2013) to ensure women's political empowerment but was unsuccessful in translating it into party policies and agendas. This study opens the discourse of party organization including centralization, institutionalization, party ideology, and policy documents in the scholarship of politics and gender according to local perspective. Additionally, it argues that mainstream political parties may strengthen the party organization and set the gender-sensitive party ideology and party rules. This must be reflected in their internal party rules, documents, and practices regarding women candidates.

Recommendations

Significant findings recommend that political parties must develop gender-neutral policies to ensure women's representation in power positions, inclusion in party organization and structure, and board committees. Furthermore, party policies must be based on a gender-equal approach to address male and female Party workers' issues equally. Also, parties should closely work on electoral manifestos by ensuring women's political empowerment as party workers, candidates, aspirants, and MPs.

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