

## GENDER GAPS IN POLITICAL LEADERSHIP OF PAKISTAN: IDENTIFYING BARRIERS AND STRATEGIES FOR WOMEN'S ADVANCEMENT WITH SPECIAL FOCUS ON KP POLITICAL STRUCTURE

**Sumaira Gul\***

Lecturer Department of Political Science, Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women University Peshawar,  
[Sumaira@sbbwu.edu.pk](mailto:Sumaira@sbbwu.edu.pk)

**Shaista Taj**

Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women University Peshawar, [dr.shaistataj@sbbwu.edu.pk](mailto:dr.shaistataj@sbbwu.edu.pk)

**Nargis Zaman**

Lecturer Department of Political Science Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women University Peshawar,  
[nargiszaman89@gmail.com](mailto:nargiszaman89@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

*In this study, the gender disparities in political leadership in Pakistan are examined, with a special emphasis on the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province. Despite advances in gender equality around the world, women still face substantial obstacles to political representation and leadership roles. This study tries to pinpoint the precise difficulties and impediments to women's advancement in political leadership positions in Pakistan, especially within the distinctive political system of KP. The root causes of the gender leadership gap in politics are identified in this research study by a thorough examination of the literature and analysis of primary and secondary data. Deeply ingrained patriarchal norms, prejudice in culture and society, lack of access to resources and education, political party dynamics, and a lack of institutional assistance are a few of these. Additionally, this research not only discusses the difficulties but also offers suggestions and techniques for advancing women in political leadership.*

**Keywords:** Political leadership, gender, culture, traditions, institution.

### INTRODUCTION

Women make up roughly 50% of the global population. However, their level of political engagement does not match their size. In their efforts to become more politically active, women have had to overcome a number of challenges. Despite significant progress and a softening of the rigid position and attitude of society toward their participation in politics, women in legislative and at other levels of political engagement still confront a number of challenges. (Rogers, 2005).

These days, there is a global debate over women in politics and how they get involved in politics. Pakistan is not an exception to this discussion that has been going on throughout Southeast Asia for the past 20 years (Jalalzai & Krook, 2010). Since Pakistan's independence, women in politics have been a source of concern. The government authorities have taken efforts to ensure women's political empowerment at various times (Jafar, 2005). The government of Pakistan has implemented a number of measures towards women's empowerment. These measures include "allocating 33% of KP's local government quota to women," "passing a law prohibiting cases of sexual harassment against women," and "banning the Swara of women." The Pakistani government has implemented each of the aforementioned reforms at various points to ensure women's emancipation (Naazer, Mahmood, & Ashfaq, 2017).

Pakistan has been undergoing political reforms relating to women's empowerment for the past twenty years, much like other countries in the area. Most critically, the period from 1998 to 2008 has been acknowledged as crucial for advancing the goal of women's emancipation and empowerment (Zia, 2009). The reforms General Pervaiz Musharraf has implemented since 2002 have drastically altered

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\* Corresponding Author

Pakistan's political climate. Women are becoming more visible in Pakistani politics thanks to the political reforms. Women received a 17% quota in the National Assembly, Senate, and four provincial Assemblies during the General Musharraf administration due to the implementation of LFO 2002. Additionally, the government of Pakistan distributed 33% of the seats in the local government system to women. The strength of the women members of the government in Pakistan's local government system was shown by the parliaments of 2002 and 2008. The strength of the women's representation in the legislature was at its highest in the 2002 and 2008 sessions. The number of women parliamentarians in parliaments in 2002 and 2008 was at its highest (Bari, 2005).

For every country to thrive sustainably and democratically, gender equality and women's empowerment are essential. In creating policies, making choices, and advancing the interests of various people, political leadership is essential. However, despite improvements in some sectors, Pakistan and other nations continue to have gender inequalities in political leadership. In order to achieve gender equality and inclusive government, there needs to be a large increase in the number of women in political leadership roles.

Pakistan, a nation with a diversified population and a rich cultural legacy, has worked to encourage women's involvement in politics and combat gender inequality. However, women continue to be underrepresented in positions of political leadership, which limits their ability to dictate public policy and the development agenda of the country (Saiyid, 2001). Effective measures to increase women's political representation and leadership must take into account the underlying causes of this gender disparity. One of Pakistan's four provinces, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, offers a distinctive background due to its unique political system, cultural dynamics, and particular difficulties women confront in participating in politics. Investigating the gender inequalities within this framework can reveal regional hurdles to women's success and provide insight into initiatives that can be specifically designed to overcome these barriers (BiBi, 2020).

Pakistan was classified as the second least gender equitable nation in the world in 2016 according to the Global Gender Gap Index. Women's political participation is regarded to be a key component of gender equality, and Pakistan has a very wide gender participation gap. It's important to ensure gender equality in political engagement. The male-female variance in voter turnout in Pakistan's 2018 general elections was 9.1%, with 11 million fewer women exercising their right to vote than men. The widespread gender disparity in turnout in rural areas is typically attributed to communal norms, but in metropolitan areas, local political figures rarely restrict women from voting. However, through our analysis, we discovered that urban seats had a wider disparity than rural constituencies. Unfortunately, only 40% of Pakistan's 46 million registered voters who are women took part in the 2018 elections. The widespread gender disparity in turnout in rural areas is typically attributed to communal norms, but in metropolitan areas, local political figures rarely restrict women from voting. (Cheema, 2019).

In Pakistan, there are 97 million eligible voters, of which 54.5 million are male, 42.4 million are female, and 100,000 are transgender. With an almost 12-million-voter gender gap, Pakistan is the least democratic nation in the world for female election participation. According to a recent review of district-level data by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), the discrepancy is over 500,000 even in the most developed regions of the country, including Lahore and Faisalabad. According to turnout statistics from 2018, the largest metropolitan areas have a substantially wider gap than the remaining constituencies in each province. Punjab has the most disparity between its largest metropolis and the rest of the region, with Lahore's gender turnout differential being the largest (Fatima, 2018).

In the current scenario less women were elected to general seats in the 2018 general election than in previous ones. This was the first general election held following the passing of the Election Act of 2017, which grants women 5% of the seats on political party ballots. Social activists and international donor organizations praised the act. According to Khan and Naqvi (2020), the Act is seen as a support for the democratic process. . For better understanding of the gender disparities in political leadership in Pakistan, this research article will concentrate on the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) political system. This study aims to provide information by analyzing the obstacles and difficulties women encounter in obtaining political leadership roles and by looking at effective tactics from other nations.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A survey of the literature revealed that different authors had diverse opinions about the reasons why Pakistan has a low level of female political participation. According to several authors and experts,

Pakistan's low level of female political participation is a result of patriarchal society, sociopolitical circumstances, and other reasons. However, no specific studies have been done to determine why women are not allowed to vote, especially in Pakistan's rural areas.

According to Naqvi and Khan (2018), agreements between political parties and religious leaders are among the sociopolitical factors that prevent women from voting in Pakistan. In some rural places, these pose substantial obstacles to women's political engagement. Despite the new law and the requirement that 10 percent of women vote in each constituency.

In a research study, Awan (2016) very clearly outlined the barriers to women's political participation. He explained that these barriers include women's dependence on men, their lack of financial independence to make decisions at the household and community levels, and their inability to participate in electoral and political processes without the approval of their male counterparts.

Akhlaq and Anwar (2017) in their study, *Femininity and Women Political Participation in Pakistan*, make an argument on women's political participation. They claimed that over time, more and more women registered to vote, appeared on electoral rolls, and participated in elections, leading to an increase in both the number of women voting and voter turnout. There are several barriers for women to vote and participate in the political process in Pakistan's rural communities due to the low or nonexistent acceptance of their participation.

According to Xavier and Ghazala (2013), who described Pakistani women's voting patterns, it is difficult for rural residents to exercise their right to free mobilization and attend to the polls. They cannot get information about voting and cannot visit polling places on Election Day to exercise their right to vote since they do not have access to various resources.

Ideas Institute of Development and Economic Alternative Report (2019) reveals that the prime challenge during 2018 general election was female voter's registration. This report briefly explain challenges faced by women to participate in electoral process in 2018 general elections and an action plan was introduced through this report to cope with these challenges in future. Different initiatives were adopted through this research project to gauge the intensity of women disparities in term of political participation and a way out was suggested at the conclusion of the report.

Strengthening Women's Political Participation in Pakistan Oxfam International November 2020 Report exposes that despite significant improvements in many nations around the world, women still do not have the same opportunities or treatment as men. Inequality between men and women fundamentally denies women's rights and is a major contributor to poverty. In comparison to men, women frequently have fewer resources, less influence, and less power. Their ethnicity, age, color, class, marital status, and sexual orientation all contribute to the violence and exploitation they are subjected to.

A research paper written by Sohela Nazneen about women political agency explore that Women were unable to strategically influence political parties with their votes, and when they do attempt to do so, they encounter major obstacles. In fact, Pakistani political parties spent less heavily on encouraging female votes in urban than in rural areas. In the latter, clan chiefs organize women into voting blocs to increase support for political parties. This research demonstrate that women can and do exercise political agency in challenging contexts despite concerns about repression, rigid societal standards, and male gatekeeping. The gatekeepers of political parties and regional state agencies further enforce these rigid norms. Sticky norms persist despite women participating in public protests, which suggests that in these situations, norms may become barriers to social cohesion.

Saira Bano in her research paper "Women in Parliament in Pakistan: Problems and Potential Solutions" reveals that reviewing global developments in the area of women's political empowerment reveals a variety of reports on global advancement. There are still many issues that need to be handled. Only a small number of nations have met the UN's targets for a 30% participation (which would eventually rise to 50%). Over the past few years, some progress has been made in improving women's political representation and in realizing how crucial women's participation in politics is to democracy. Women continue to face significant obstacles in democratic as well as military regimes equally.

## **Research Questions**

1. What are the main obstacles and difficulties women in KP encounter on their path to political leadership positions?

2. What role does Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) political system play in the gender leadership gap from political perspective?
3. What methods and techniques can be used to fill the gender gap in the context of KP?

### Aims of the study

1. with a special focus on the KP province, to review and assess existing literature and research on the gender inequalities in political leadership in Pakistan.
2. To identify the main institutional, sociological, and cultural obstacles that women encounter in Pakistan while trying to enter and advance in political leadership roles.
3. To research the distinct political system gender inequality within the political landscape of Pakistan, particularly in KP
4. To examine and evaluate effective tactics and strategies used in other nations to support women's ascent to political leadership and to determine whether they might be applicable in the context of KP.
5. To put forth concrete suggestions and tactics that are adapted to the KP political system in an effort to remove the aforementioned obstacles and improve women's political leadership roles.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

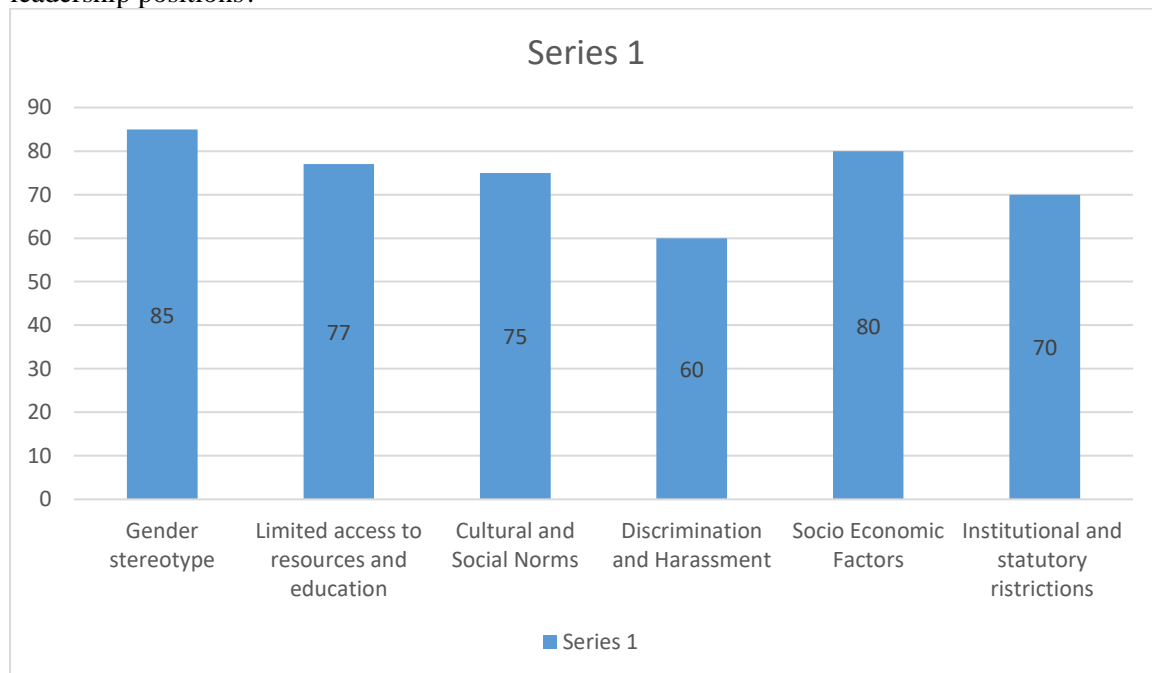
### Data Collection

Interviews with 30 female political leaders, 10 party representatives, and 10 members of civil society organizations, and other pertinent KP stakeholders was used to gather primary data. In addition to offering solutions for removing gender barriers, these interviews offered insights into their experiences, perceptions, and difficulties encountered in political leadership roles. Secondary data was also gathered through examining official government papers, NGO reports, policy documents, and statistics pertaining to political representation, women political empowerment and gender equality, in KP. To identify recurring themes, trends, and significant obstacles faced by women in political leadership in KP, interview data was thematically analyzed and the conclusion was drawn from it.

### DATA ANALYSIS

Data were collected from semi structured interviews from the female political members, civil society activists, party representatives, and other pertinent KP stakeholders for the in-depth analysis of the issue.

What are the main obstacles and difficulties women in KP encounter on their path to political leadership positions?



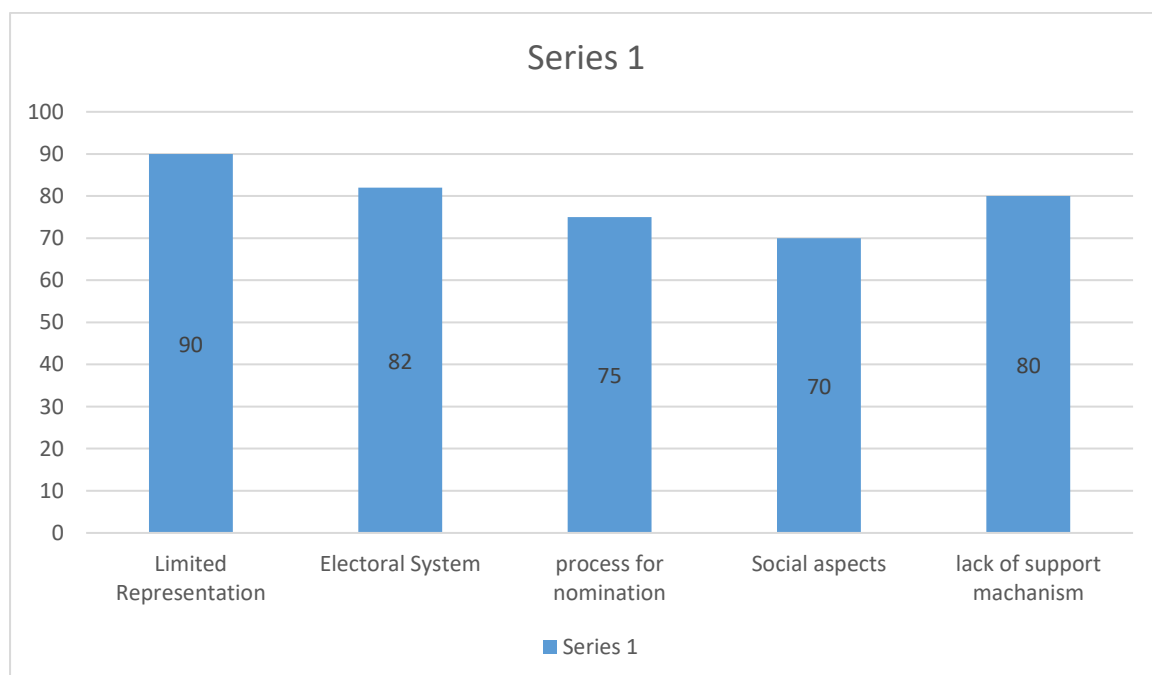
From the total respondents 85% considers Gender Stereotypes and cultural Expectations as a major obstacle to women political participation. Women's opportunities to participate in politics are frequently constrained by entrenched gender stereotypes and cultural expectations. Women may be deterred from running for political office by traditional views that link leadership and masculinity. When they question these gender norms, women could encounter opposition and reaction.

Another major obstacle identified by 77% of the respondents is limited access to resources and education: Women's aspirations for political leadership may be hampered by inadequate access to resources and high-quality education. Women's ability to gain the information and competences required for effective leadership may be hampered by educational inequality and a lack of chances for skill development.

Existing cultural and social standards can be a major obstacle for women seeking political office as identified by 75% of the respondents. The mobility, autonomy, and power of decision-making for women may be constrained by patriarchal structures and traditional cultural norms. These standards can make it harder for families and communities to assist their male counterpart in politics. Discrimination and Harassment is the problem faced by women from the time unknown. 60% of the respondents opined that because of their gender, women in politics frequently experience discrimination, bigotry, and harassment. They might run into challenges with party nominations, campaign money, and media coverage. Women who are interested in leadership positions may be deterred by the fear of gender-based violence, internet abuse, and slander.

Institutional and statutory restrictions are also barring women to actively participate in politics. 70% of the respondents consider it an uncompromised hurdle for women's political advancement and the problem get intense due the inadequate implementation of gender-responsive policies, regulations, and quota systems. Women's access to political spaces and resources is hampered by discriminatory laws, a lack of enforcement mechanisms, and inadequate support networks. Socioeconomic Factors are also contributing a lot to gender gap in politics and 70% of the respondents expressed their concern that financial hardships and economic inequalities have a disproportionately negative impact on women's political engagement. For women with low financial resources, the expenditure of political campaigns, especially travel costs, might be a barrier.

Data was collected through interviews from the respondents. Main research question was, What role does Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) political system play in the gender pay gap in political leadership?



From the above chart we can analyze the contribution of KP Political system in promoting gender gap the following are the outcomes of the research question

**Limited Representation:** It's a reality that women are underrepresented in important decision-making bodies inside the political system. Underrepresentation of women in political parties, legislative bodies, and local government organizations are a few examples of this. Women's ability to influence policies, promote gender-responsive legislation, and attend to the particular needs and concerns of women constituents is diminished when they are not in positions of power and influence.

**Electoral System:** It may be difficult for women to win elections in KP due to systemic biases or other obstacles. Women candidates may suffer from issues like, lack of mechanisms for proportional representation, Additionally, possibilities for new and aspirant women leaders to enter politics may be constrained by the dominance of old political networks and clientelism.

**Processes of Nomination of Parties:** Political parties are important in the selection of candidates, and their internal procedures may contribute to gender inequality. It may be challenging for women to obtain party nominations for electoral elections due to biased nomination processes, unofficial networks, and patriarchal party structures that favor male candidates over female candidates. The lack of resources and support offered by political parties to female candidates may cause the gender gap in political leadership to extend even more.

**Social Aspects:** The political system functions within the larger social environment of KP, which may contain ingrained beliefs, customs, and behaviors that support gender inequality. Conservative gender roles and stereotypes are just one example of a sociocultural element that can deter women from running for office and restrict their access to political networks and resources. It can be difficult for women to devote time and money to pursue political leadership since social expectations about women's duties and responsibilities may place a higher priority on family responsibilities than political involvement.

**Institutional Barriers:** The institutional framework in KP, including the laws, policies, and governance arrangements, may contain biases that obstruct the political growth of women. Systemic impediments to women's access to political leadership can be created by discriminatory behaviors, a lack of gender-responsive legislation, and a lack of funding for initiatives promoting women's political empowerment.

**Lack of Support Mechanisms:** The political system may not have enough support systems in place to handle the unique requirements and difficulties faced by women in positions of political leadership. Women's advancement can be hampered and the gender gap can be perpetuated by inadequate gender mainstreaming measures, insufficient funding for programs promoting women's political empowerment, and a lack of mentorship and training opportunities.

The third research question from the respondents were, what methods and techniques can be used to fill the gender gap in the context of KP?

When the question for methods and techniques was asked from the respondents there was a mix response from them. Their answers were coded to get a comprehensive solution for filling the gender gap through implementation of policies.

1. A thorough examination of KP's political system is necessary to comprehend how it contributes to the gender disparity in political leadership. Policymakers, civil society organizations, and political parties can create focused interventions and changes to support women's meaningful involvement and leadership in KP's political environment by addressing these structural elements. In other countries, a number of ideas and tactics have been successful in advancing women in political leadership. The following examples can offer insights, but tailoring these tactics to the unique context of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) necessitates careful consideration of cultural, socioeconomic, and political factors.
2. Implementing quota systems has shown to be successful in boosting the representation of women in political leadership. At various levels of government, reserved seats or quotas can be assigned to female candidates, ensuring a minimum proportion of women's involvement. Quotas can provide women a foothold in politics and aid in upending conventional power systems. Such quota schemes can be modified and put into place within the KP election system to assist narrow the gender leadership gap.
3. Women's Political Empowerment Programs: Creating focused initiatives and programs that work to increase women's political power, leadership potential, and self-assurance can have a positive impact. These initiatives may include networking events, mentoring schemes, and training sessions especially created for potential female leaders. These programs can help

women in KP become more politically skilled and give them the support they need to navigate the political system by being tailored to the particular needs and difficulties they experience.

4. Election reforms that are gender-conscious: Promoting women's advancement in political leadership can be facilitated by introducing electoral reforms that address gender prejudices and structural hurdles. This can involve actions like developing systems to address gender-based violence and harassment during elections, changing electoral rules and procedures to promote transparency, adding female quotas to candidate selection procedures.
5. Political Party Reforms: Supporting internal party reforms can help to develop political settings that are more diverse and gender-responsive. Women's development in political leadership can be facilitated by encouraging political parties to adopt gender quotas for candidate selection, encouraging women's participation in party decision-making bodies, and cultivating a culture of gender equality within parties. Engaging with political parties in KP to promote these reforms can aid in the development of more female-friendly party structures.
6. Opportunities for Mentorship and Networking: To help women leaders negotiate the political scene, mentorship programs should be established that connect together young leaders with seasoned politicians. Women can form alliances, gain access to resources, and increase their profile in politics by participating in networking events like conferences, seminars, and women's caucuses.
7. Engaging Civil Society Organizations: Working with civil society organizations that promote gender equality, political involvement, and women's empowerment can be beneficial. These groups can promote legislative changes, train and assist female candidates, and spread awareness of the value of female political leadership. Creating alliances with pertinent KP groups can help advance the political empowerment of women by utilizing their knowledge and resources.
8. Promoting governance that is gender-responsive: A supportive climate for women's political growth can be created by encouraging gender-responsive governance practices at all levels of government. This includes integrating gender perspectives into the processes of developing policies, allocating funds, and making decisions. Women's advancement in political leadership can be further supported by promoting accountability and monitoring procedures to ensure the implementation of gender-responsive policies.

## **FINDINGS**

The results of the study "Gender Gaps in Political Leadership of Pakistan: Identifying Barriers and Strategies for Women's Advancement with a Special Focus on KP Political Structure" show that women in Pakistan face numerous obstacles and difficulties when trying to advance to positions of political leadership, particularly in the context of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) political structure. The following important conclusions are highlighted by the analysis of the data gathered:

1. Societal expectations and gender stereotypes: Women who want to be in positions of political leadership continue to face significant obstacles due to traditional gender stereotypes and societal expectations. According to the findings, current norms link leadership to masculinity, which causes resistance and resentment when women challenge traditional gender roles.
2. Limited Access to Education and Resources: Women's aspirations for political leadership are hampered by a lack of adequate access to high-quality education and resources. The research demonstrates that the underrepresentation of women in political leadership roles is a result of educational differences and a lack of chances for skill development.
3. Cultural and social norms are a major barrier to women holding political leadership positions since they are strongly ingrained in patriarchal organizations. The results of the study show that conservative attitudes and a lack of mobility hinder women's political engagement and influence. Due to traditional expectations, families and communities frequently prevent women from pursuing political ambitions.
4. Discrimination and Harassment: Because of their gender, women in politics frequently experience discrimination, bigotry, and harassment. According to the research, women have challenges when it comes to party nominations, campaign money, media coverage, as well as gender-based violence and internet harassment. Such incidents deter women from seeking positions of political leadership.



5. Female role models and support networks are lacking. Due to the underrepresentation of women in political leadership roles, aspirant female leaders have few accessible mentors and support systems. According to the statistics, women's confidence, networking, and skill development are hindered by the lack of mentorship opportunities and encouraging surroundings.
6. Dynamics of Political Parties The gender gap in political leadership is influenced by internal party dynamics. limited inclusivity, patriarchal party structures, and biased nomination procedures
7. Institutional and Legal Barriers: Women's political advancement is seriously hampered by the ineffective application of gender-responsive laws, policies, and quota systems. Women's access to political spaces and resources is hampered by discriminatory laws, a lack of enforcement mechanisms, and inadequate support networks.
8. Socioeconomic Factors: Women's political engagement is disproportionately impacted by economic inequality and budgetary restraints. According to the research's findings, women with low incomes may find it difficult to participate in political campaigns because of the expense of doing so, including travel costs.

These results demonstrate the complex nature of the women leadership gaps in Pakistan, particularly within the KP political system. The development of plans and initiatives to close gender inequalities and improve women's advancement in political leadership depends on an understanding of these obstacles. The study emphasizes the necessity of focused initiatives, such as quota systems, women's political empowerment programs, electoral reforms, party reforms, mentorship opportunities, and gender-responsive governance practices, to get over the obstacles found and promote an inclusive and equitable political environment in KP and throughout Pakistan.

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