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Women in Electoral Politics

An Account of Exclusion

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During the 2018 general election in Pakistan, Syeda Zahra Basit Bukhari was one of fourteen women candidates fielded by the winning party, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), for a National Assembly seat. She was the only woman contesting the election from the NA-184 constituency, which is located in the Muzaffargarh district in southwest Punjab. Bukhari was a new entrant in politics, and conventional wisdom deemed her a “weak candidate.”¹ Her husband, Syed Basit Sultan Bukhari, had already served two terms in the National Assembly and had contested the 2018 election as an independent candidate in the neighboring constituency; he joined the PTI after he won. The PTI election campaign poster for NA-184 carried Syeda Zahra Basit Bukhari’s name but a picture of her husband’s face rather than her own. In the lead-up to the election, the Pakistan Muslim League–Nawaz (PML–N) candidate for the NA-184 seat, Syed Haroon Ahmed Sultan, was caught on video at a public meeting with constituents asserting that voting for women candidates was *haram* (prohibited). Sultan was a member of the Punjab provincial cabinet at the time and was contesting elections from one additional national constituency and two provincial constituencies on PML–N tickets. In 2010 he had been the subject of a police complaint for allegedly beating his wife until she fainted and threatening to kill her.² He was required to appear in front of the Election Commission for his statement about women candidates, but he ended up contesting the election anyway.

Zahra Bukhari’s experience as a faceless candidate—including on the ballot largely by virtue of her husband’s involvement in politics and the only woman candidate in her constituency facing an opponent who publicly engaged in misogynistic speech and was alleged to have committed domestic violence in private—may not be a universal experience, but it is not atypical either. The 2018 election in Pakistan saw the highest number of women

candidates running for National Assembly seats in a general election to date. There were a number of uplifting stories of women breaking barriers, such as the one of Zartaj Gul, a young woman from Waziristan with no political family connections who started her political career as a member of the PTI's student wing, the Insaf Student Forum, in 2005 and rose up through the party ranks to defeat two strong political stalwart candidates for a National Assembly seat in Dera Ghazi Khan district. At the same time, and despite there being a record number of women candidates competing, fewer women (eight) actually *won* National Assembly seats in 2018, compared to elections in 2008 (sixteen) and 2013 (nine).

Electoral politics in Pakistan today remain a male-dominated affair. Men heavily outnumber women as elected representatives at all levels of government, in party leadership positions, and even on the electoral rolls. This pattern of women's exclusion and underrepresentation is of course neither unique to Pakistan nor to the sphere of formal politics. Indeed, men outnumber women in positions of political decision-making across countries at differing levels of development and across different regime types; women's relative absence from politics in Pakistan also mirrors their absence from other formal workplaces and public spaces more broadly. The female labor force participation rate for women in Pakistan in 2016 was 25 percent, which is lower than countries with similar income levels. Moreover, most of the women in the labor force are employed in rural agricultural work or the informal sector (Field and Vyborny 2016).

In this chapter I highlight some key factors shaping the systematic exclusion of women from electoral politics in Pakistan. I focus on four main channels of women's entry into electoral politics—political parties, electoral institutions, families, and voters—and explore how features of each channel perpetuate the exclusion of women. I also consider the effectiveness of various institutional solutions, such as mandating women's presence through a historical guarantee of reserved seats, and, more recently, party candidate quotas. While these solutions do well in achieving numerical targets, they do little to change party incentives for greater inclusion beyond minimums. I conclude with lessons for more effective institutional design for making progress toward women's inclusion in politics.

Parties and the Institutional Environment

Political parties serve as the primary gatekeepers of individuals' entry into electoral politics. Existing research from various contexts has identified certain characteristics of parties—their ideological leanings and party organizational structures (Caul 1999), the presence of women among party elite (Kunovich and Paxton 2005), and their rules for candidate selection (Pruysers, Cross, and Gauja 2017)—to explain differences in their selection and

support of women as electoral candidates. Similarly, we may look to the characteristics of individual political parties in Pakistan to understand the extent to which their structures and strategies are inclusive of women. Among the large mainstream parties, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), which is historically left-leaning and socially progressive, has had two women, Nusrat Bhutto and Benazir Bhutto, serve as party chair. The substantive character of women's inclusion in the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI)—the oldest Islamist party in Pakistan—is entirely different. While women are essentially absent from the JI's central party leadership, its women's wing operates as a highly active yet separate structure within the party (Siddiqui 2010). However, a comparison of Pakistani parties on their promotion of women as electoral candidates shows that parties that are otherwise ideologically and organizationally quite different look remarkably similar. Figure 9.1 shows the percentage of women among the candidates fielded by major parties for general seats in the 2018 general election.

This relative *lack* of variation across parties regarding the nomination of women is at least in part a product of the common institutional environment that all parties face. The design of electoral institutions has implications for women's overall presence (or, more accurately, absence) in electoral politics. Multiple empirical studies on women's presence in parliaments around the world confirm that women's descriptive representation is higher in countries with proportional representation systems compared to majoritarian electoral systems, when accounting for other factors (Wängnerud 2009). Moreover, within proportional representative systems, greater district magnitude (i.e., more seats per electoral district) appears to facilitate greater entry of women (Norris 2006). On the other hand, single member majoritarian districts—as in Pakistan—imply higher barriers to entry for new parties as well as new candidates within existing parties. When a party can award only a single ticket within a constituency, it is often the women within parties, who are perceived as less competitive or “risky” candidates, who lose out. “When nominating candidates for an election in single-member districts, a party can exclude women and then justify it by arguing that they chose the best person for the job (oftentimes, this candidate is a male)” (Johnson-Myers 2016, 12).

Another feature of the 2018 nomination numbers shown in figure 9.1 is that all parties nominated at least 5 percent women candidates in compliance with Section 206 of the Election Act 2017, which required that when selecting candidates for general seats, parties “shall ensure at least five percent representation of women candidates.” The provision marked the first instance of party-based candidate quotas for women and was enforced prior to the 2018 general election by the Election Commission of Pakistan. Noncompliance with Section 206 leads to political parties not being allotted electoral symbols.³ Nevertheless, parties' compliance with the requirement can only be described as minimal, as the largest percentage of women candidates was

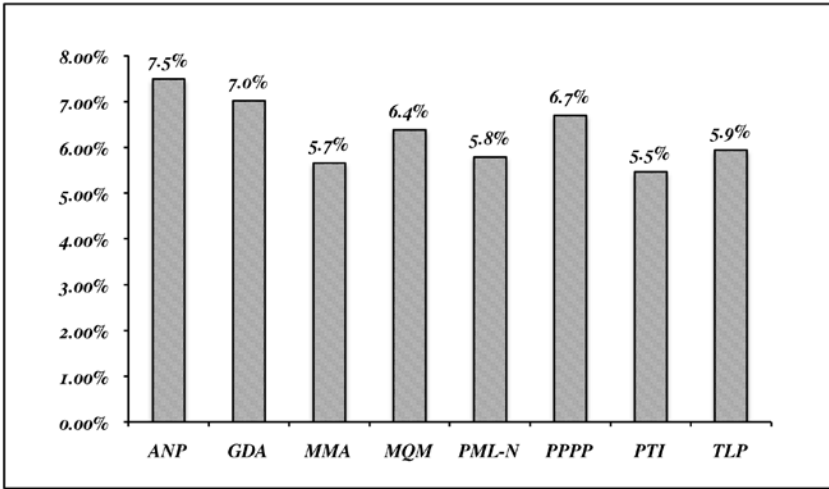


Figure 9.1. Women as a percentage of total candidates fielded on general seats for the national and provincial assemblies in 2018, by party

Source: Election Commission of Pakistan, “Statement Showing the Five Percent Women in General Seats Under Section 206 of the Election Act, 2017,” July 6, 2018.

still the paltry 7.5 percent put up by the Awami National Party (ANP). Moreover, women candidates across parties complained that they had been fielded in uncompetitive constituencies.⁴

Reserved Seats

Prior to the 5 percent provision of 2017, the main institutional tool for ensuring women’s numerical presence in political decision-making was the mandated seat reservations in the legislature. The question of mandated presence of various groups in legislative bodies predates Pakistan’s independence. As Jensenius (2015) notes, the subject of quotas first entered the stage during the drafting of the 1909 Indian Council Act (Morley-Minto reform) documents, which legitimized the election of Indians to legislative councils for the first time during the British Raj. The 1909 act guaranteed representation for Muslims as well as certain interest groups (e.g., landowners, tea planters) but mandatory representation for women was not on the table at the time. The 1935 Government of India Act, however, included provisions for reserved seats for women as well as for other communal groups in various assemblies (Htun 2004; Krook and O’Brien 2010).

Following independence, the Indian Constituent Assembly granted electoral quotas (that is, reserved seats) to scheduled castes and tribal groups (SCs and STs) but not to Muslims or women. It was not until the 1970s that the

debate around reservations for women was revived in India, where women's representation had become inseparable from the question of representation of other groups. Htun (2005) notes that the Indian Committee on the Status of Women considered the position of women only vis-à-vis other groups and drew an explicit distinction between women as a "category" and caste and religious groups as a "community" or "minority." Htun (2005) and Jensenius (2016) both note that the controversy surrounding reserved seats for women stemmed from anxiety that such reservations would privilege upper caste Hindu women, especially at the state and national levels. This framing of reservations for women as a tradeoff has sometimes posed obstacles to the adoption and expansion of such reservations. While electoral representation of religious minorities has been a source of controversy and violent clashes in Pakistan, the issue has remained separate from the issue of women's representation.⁵ Indeed, although the efforts of women's rights activists in Pakistan have frequently been accused of being "elitist" (Saigol 2016), the trade-off argument has not been a salient one in Pakistan. On the one hand the absence of such obstacles in Pakistan has allowed for relatively easier consensus around the principle of reservations for women. On the other hand this has meant that the political discourse around women's reservations in Pakistan has been largely bereft of considerations of intersectionality or a real discussion of how the *type* of representational disadvantage faced by women may be similar or different to that faced by other groups. Although women's rights activists and scholars have raised the issue of limitations of reserved seats as a solution to women's underrepresentation, it was not until the 2017 Election Act that a different institutional tool (party candidate quotas) was seriously considered and adopted.

Pakistan upheld reservations for women in its first constitution of 1956: 10 seats in the 310-member unicameral parliament for a period of ten years. While the number of reservations for women varied between the 1956 and 1962 Constitutions and the 1969 Legal Framework Order, the provision remained intact. The 1973 Constitution introduced a bicameral legislature with 10 seats reserved for women in the 210-seat National Assembly for a period of ten years; by presidential order in 1985 the reservation was increased to 20 seats for women and an additional 10 seats for minorities.⁶ The provision for reservations reached its ten-year expiry mark before the 1990 elections and reservations were not revived until 2002. Figure 9.2 shows the proportion of women as contesting candidates and as members of the National Assembly in elections held since 1977. The terms lacking reservations (for assemblies elected in 1990, 1993, and 1997) saw the lowest presence of women in Parliament.

The restoration of quotas in Pakistan under Gen. Pervez Musharraf's military government in 2002 came on the heels of increased international activism around gender quotas leading up to the 1995 Beijing Conference and

from the sustained in-country efforts by domestic activists and civil society organizations following it (see Khan 2018). One contemporaneous report by a leading domestic nongovernmental organization states:

With Aurat Foundation taking the lead, several women's rights organizations organized a round table discussion in July 1995 with representatives of three major political parties of the country—PPP, PML-N, and ANP—on the issue of women's reserved seats. The discussion resulted in signing of a joint declaration by the party representatives to restore women's reserved seats and extend the provision to the Senate. [. . .] In 1998, a country wide signatures campaign was undertake[n] by advocacy organizations to secure support for the principles of reservation and a 33 percent representation. Wide-spread endorsements were received from more than 1500 Civil Society Organizations; thousands of individuals; opinion leaders; legislators of 19 political parties; [and] some ministers and office bearers of several women wings of political parties (Aurat Foundation 2012, 32).

Scholarship devoted to explaining the global proliferation of gender quotas emphasizes the role of international and regional norm-diffusion (Krook 2006), international democracy promotion efforts (Bush 2011), collective action by women (Htun 2016), the formation of women's coalitions (Kang and Tripp 2018), and the structure of party competition (Weeks 2018). While each of these factors may have contributed to the adoption of expansive reservations for women at all levels of government in Pakistan in 2002, it is worth noting that Pakistan is one of five countries that already had quotas for women prior to the 1970s so the 2002 reservations were a restoration and expansion of the quota policy, not a new adoption per se.⁷

Nevertheless, the 2002 reforms guaranteed a significant increase in the proportion of seats reserved for women in national and legislative assemblies (to 17 percent), and expanded this guarantee to the newly established local governments under the Local Government Ordinance 2001 (to 33 percent). Over thirty-six thousand women came into power at the union council, *tehsil*, town, and district levels through the first elections held under the Local Government Ordinance 2001 (Reyes 2002). Civil society organizations and international aid agencies capitalized on this window of opportunity for women's political entry to encourage novices to run for local office and later to train the newly elected women entrants. The 33 percent reservation, combined with the sheer number of positions available and lower resource-based barriers to entry at the local level created space that was truly accessible to a diverse set of entrants: "While very limited information is available on this subject, existing studies show that most [women councilors] are less than 45 years old (57 percent); more than half are illiterate (53 percent); most are

housewives (73.7 percent); very few own land; and an overwhelming majority has never contested elections (79 percent), neither have their families (64 percent)” (Bari 2001, xiii–xiv).

The introduction of local governments represented a shift in the mechanism by which reserved seats would be filled: at the union council level women were to be elected to reserved seats through direct rather than indirect elections. However, the elections—held under military rule—were non-partisan, which meant that despite facilitating the entry of tens of thousands of women into the formal electoral arena, the reform had limited implications for providing incentives to political parties to include more women in their ranks.

Do Reservations “Work”?

A large body of literature is dedicated to examining the effects of quotas for women—in their various forms—on outcomes of interest, for example, increased presence of women after quotas are removed (Bhavnani 2009), the substantive representation of women’s policy preferences (Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004), or changes in voter evaluations of women as leaders (Beaman et al. 2009). Some recent scholarship also points to the limitations of what quotas can reasonably be expected to achieve. In the case of quotas for women in Latin America, Htun (2016, 69) notes: “Quotas gave women presence in power, but not the power to make effective use of their presence.”

The question of whether reserved seats for women in legislatures “work” depends in no small part on what metric is used to measure effectiveness. Certainly, reserved seats mechanically ensure that women are present in legislatures—and as the data presented in figure 9.2 show, in the absence of reservations (1990–97) women are essentially absent from Parliament. Such presence may be normatively desirable in and of itself. Nevertheless, existing studies on the effectiveness of quotas have tried to compare men’s and women’s relative effectiveness in legislatures by examining metrics such as attendance, the content and substance of speeches made, the questions asked, bills proposed, and bills passed. In the case of Pakistan, women legislators in the National Assembly during 2017–18 were more likely than their male counterparts to be present at hearings, and they contributed to 39 percent of all parliamentary business despite comprising only 20 percent of the membership.⁸ While performance data is collected for all legislators, Bari (2015, 11) notes that performance has been used disproportionately to scrutinize the performance of women legislators. This double standard is not lost on women. Bari quotes one legislator’s frustration: “Why is everyone interested to assess our performance? How about men? They don’t even bother to attend parliamentary sessions. What have they done? Why no assessment is being done on their performance?.” Murray (2014, 520–21) attributes this

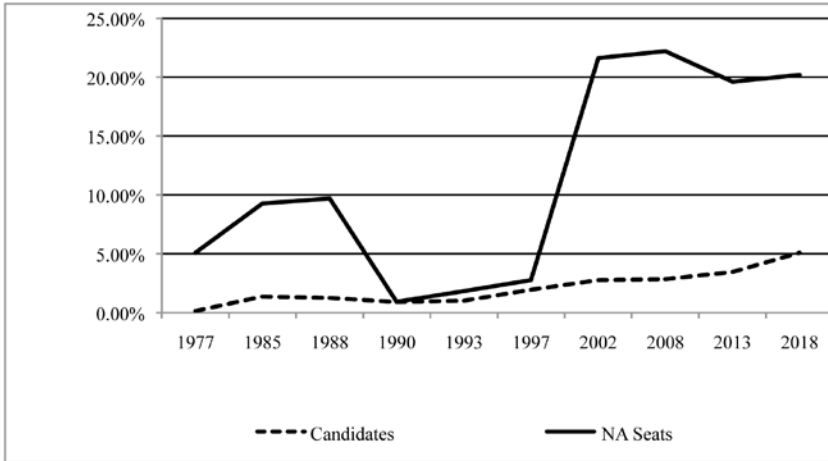


Figure 9.2. Women as a percentage of total candidates contesting election to general seats in the National Assembly and as a percentage of all sitting legislators in the National Assembly, 1977–2018

Source: Based on calculations from multiple sources: Mehdi 2010; NDI and ANFREL 2013; and Colin Cookman, *Pakistan Elections Data 2018*, accessed October 30, 2018, https://github.com/colincookman/pakistan_elections.

Note: To the greatest extent possible, single candidates standing (and winning) for multiple constituencies are counted only once.

tendency, which spans policy and academic debates on the effectiveness of quotas to the way quotas are framed as a solution to the underrepresentation of women rather than the overrepresentation of men:

The focus on women’s underrepresentation has the unintended consequence of framing men as the norm and women as the “other.” With men’s presence already accepted as the status quo, the burden of proof for justifying presence lies with the outsiders wishing to enter politics (women), rather than with those already present in excessive numbers (men). Men are required neither to prove their competence nor to justify their inclusion. This is not to say that individual men are immune to all scrutiny, but rather that the competence of men as a category is not questioned. Women, in contrast, are placed under close scrutiny to ascertain whether they “deserve” a greater presence in politics.

Certainly the very design of Pakistan’s quotas—reserved seats that are allotted to women through indirect election on a party basis *in addition to* (rather than as a proportion of) the general seats that a party has already won—reflects an unwillingness to formulate the core problem of unequal representation as one of men’s overrepresentation (as Murray suggests) rather than simply women’s underrepresentation.

One less problematic metric for assessing the effectiveness of quotas is whether they “normalize” women’s presence and thus allow more women to enter the electoral arena in the future. This seems to be the case for village-level quotas in India, where Bhavnani (2009) finds that in constituencies that have had reservations for women in the past, women candidates have a higher chance of winning in subsequently held elections even in the absence of a reservation. He suggests this happens both because reservations introduce women who can win elections into the electoral arena and because they change parties’ perceptions of women’s ability to win elections. In a rich study of the candidate-selection process in Pakistan, Mufti and Jalalzai (2017) assess whether similar gains are observed in Pakistan. They approach the question by studying whether women who enter Parliament on reserved seats subsequently seek seats in general elections and suggest that “pervasive clientelism and patriarchal family structures deter women from entering politics and makes it too costly for political parties to nominate aspiring women to general seats” (4).

An important point of difference between the effects of reservations in India versus Pakistan is that the *design* of reservations in Pakistan precludes the channels for normalization identified by Bhavnani (2009). Since reserved seats for women are filled by indirect rather than direct election, they do not afford women entrants the experience of contesting an election nor do they signal to political parties that women are capable of doing so. Moreover, as Mufti and Jalalzai (2017) note, the lack of an electoral constituency for women on reserved seats excludes these women from the opportunities and incentives to nurture electoral connections that would make them viable candidates in the future. The lack of a constituency is then somewhat self-fulfilling in that women on reserved seats who start out without one are also ostensibly not spending the time to cultivate one for the future. In a single member district, of course, it is possible that any effort to do so could be seen as an attempt to displace the male legislator(s) or aspirant(s) from their party. The high productivity of women in the legislative arena may well come at the opportunity cost of time spent in constituency service, which is arguably more highly rewarded by voters and would make women electorally viable candidates for general seats.

All in the Family

Despite performing poorly on most indicators of women’s inclusion in electoral politics, Pakistan is one of seventy countries to have had a woman prime minister or president to date. This apparent paradox is not specific to Pakistan: cross-country research shows that, if anything, the presence of a woman head of state is correlated with *lower* levels of gender equality on a number of indicators (Jalalzai 2008; Jalalzai and Krook 2010). The puzzle of

women breaking the glass ceiling of the highest political office in countries with low levels of gender equality is often understood through the lens of kinship or dynastic politics (Jalalzai 2008). Indeed, in the South Asian cases of Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, the women who have held the highest elected office—Khaleda Zia, Sheikh Hasina, Indira Gandhi, Benazir Bhutto, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, and Chandrika Kumaratunga—have all succeeded fathers or husbands in those positions.

Alongside political parties, families and kinship networks serve as important gatekeepers for entry into the electoral arena in Pakistan. Cheema, Javid, and Naseer (2013, 1) describe the political class of Punjab as “heavily dominated by dynasties, held together by ties of blood and marriage, which impede the participation of non-dynastic aspirants to public office.” While dynastic connections are important political currency for both men and women, they seem to be especially important for understanding women’s entry into and trajectory within electoral politics. Chandra (2016, 21) discusses this reality in the case of India: “Dynastic Members of Parliament (MPs) are found in significant proportions across gender categories. But women MPs are considerably more likely than men to have dynastic ties. 58 percent of women MPs in 2004, 69 percent of women MPs in 2009 and 43 percent of women MPs in 2014, compared to 17 percent, 25 percent and 19 percent of male MPs in these respective parliaments.”

A similar pattern holds up in Pakistan and is, in fact, a far starker situation. Figure 9.3 shows the proportion of winning candidates (male and female) in general elections from 1985 to 2008 who are dynastic. A winning candidate is coded as dynastic if he or she was preceded in electoral office by a family member who was a legislator. The gender gap in dynastic connections for winning candidates is large, and in the 1990, 1993, and 1997 elections *all* women who won general seats were preceded by family members who served as legislators.

How should we understand the gendered role of dynastic connections in electoral politics? While the preponderance of dynastic politicians is often seen as a mechanism for excluding and impeding new entrants, Chandra (2016) and Basu (2016) view family as an “equalizing force” for women’s entry into the electoral sphere in a context where systematic barriers in party structures and, as in the case of India, a lack of national- and state-level reservations, otherwise prevent entry. An alternate read, of course, is that dynasticism is a barrier rather than a channel, as nondynastic women have a much harder time entering than do nondynastic men. It is important to note that family connections seem less important when barriers to entry are lower, i.e., at the local levels of government. In the case of India, Basu (2016) cites a 2000 study of *panchayats* (local councils) in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan, and finds that unlike at the national and state levels, most women representatives at the panchayat level *did not* come from

political families. This is similar to the earlier cited finding from a study of local bodies in Pakistan, which finds that 64 percent of women who were elected in the 2002 election did not have a family member who had previously contested an election, which is in stark contrast to the high proportions in national and provincial legislatures visualized in figure 9.3.

To understand the differential role of dynastic connections for men and women, Folke, Rickne, and Smith (2017) draw on work on women's entry into labor markets to develop a theory in which dynastic connections serve as a signal of candidate quality to both parties and voters. Since fewer women are present in the electoral arena and parties and voters have lower levels of experience with women candidates and representatives, they both may rely more heavily on this signal than they would for male candidates, who are present in larger numbers and for whom they have more information on past performance. Folke, Rickne, and Smith's theory has a dynamic component: they predict that as more and more women enter politics over time, parties and voters will gain greater information on women's performance and their reliance on political connections as a sign of performance will decrease, allowing more nondynastic women to enter. While a rigorous empirical test of their theory in the Pakistani case is beyond the scope of this chapter, a decline has occurred in the share of dynastic legislators among women legislators in 2002 and 2008 (see figure 9.3) concurrent to the expansion of reservations that brought more women into office. This drop in the share of winning women candidates with dynastic connections at the provincial and national levels is also consistent with a competing explanation related to an increased *supply* of nondynastic women candidates. If the experience of holding local-level positions is a potential pathway for women to contest general elections and seek higher office, then the large numbers of nondynastic women who had the chance to run for and win local office in 2002 may affect the composition of the pool of women candidates in subsequent elections.

The role of family in women's political entry goes beyond just dynastic connections. Family members may also be important players in the decision about whether individual women run for office or not, either by explicitly exercising control over a woman's decision to participate or by implicitly influencing an individual woman's ability to balance family and household responsibilities with a political career. These same considerations, however, generally affect women's entry into the labor market, not specifically politics. Basu (2016) suggests that while political family connections may offer women some modicum of protection from violence in the political sphere, it is important to remember that the threat of violence for women is often greatest inside the home and coming from other family members. For women who choose to enter politics, or any career, against the wishes of family members, there is a real threat of retributive violence within the

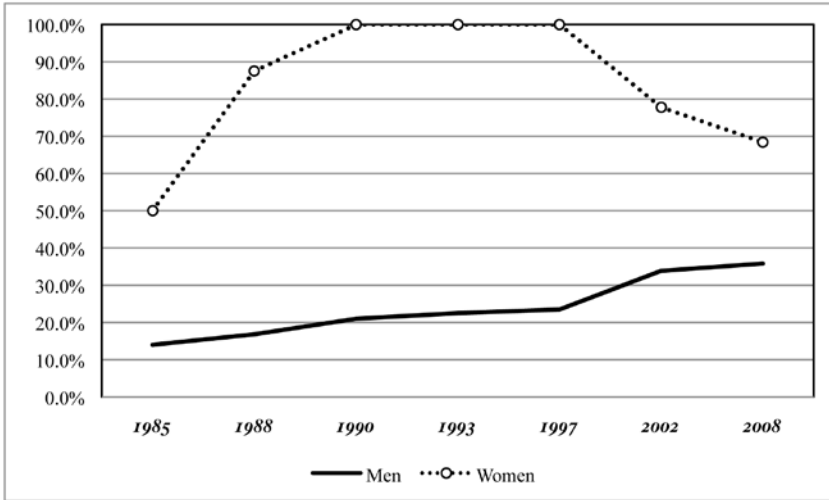


Figure 9.3. Proportion of winning candidates, in general elections to national and provincial assemblies, who are dynastic (1985–2008)

Source: In-progress data collection and research project, “Dynastic Politics in Pakistan” at the Institute for Development and Economic Alternatives (IDEAS), Lahore.

Note: The figure shows winning candidates on general seats; women legislators entering on reserved seats are not included. Thanks to Ali Cheema, Farooq Naseer, and Luke Sonnet for providing the gender disaggregated summary statistics.

family. Instances of such violence are documented in a set of biographies of thirty-six women who were elected as local government representatives compiled by the Aurat Foundation (2008, xiv):

There were some women who had to face so much family opposition and hostility that they suffered severe mental stress and even physical abuse. [. . .] Zaib-un-Nissa Bhatti’s brothers used to beat her when she went out to help the people of her area. [. . .] Khadeeja Bibi’s husband locked her [in her] room for three days so that she would not be able to file candidacy papers. Shameem Ara’s family and in-laws were both violently against her taking part in politics. Her brothers went around the area, forcing people to swear that they would not vote for her.

However, there are just as many or more instances of active family support: “The majority of women councilors had the support of their families to enter politics” (Aurat Foundation 2008, xiii). Nonetheless, the possibility of violence from family members suggests that it is precisely the women with supportive families who disproportionately enter into politics. For those who genuinely fear lack of support or retribution, it would be only a strategic decision to opt out.

Family considerations may also shape the trajectory of women's participation after entering politics. The relatively public nature of a political life means that women may be more restricted by gendered norms of public behavior than they would in some other career. An important area in which this phenomenon manifests is electoral campaigning. While many women candidates ran active campaigns in the 2018 elections, there were also many women nominees who ran limited or no campaigns. In the opening anecdote the absence of Zahra Bokhari's own face from her election poster was explained by her campaign manager as being due to the fact that she belonged to a "Syed family" and "our women do not publicize their pictures."

Voters

While political parties exercise control over candidates' nominations, it is ultimately voters' decisions that determine candidates' fortunes in the electoral arena. Even in the party-controlled selection process strategic elites try to nominate candidates who they think will be preferred by voters and are hence "electable." A number of studies have examined voter preferences for women candidates in various contexts to unpack the "demand-side" explanations for why women may be underrepresented among candidates and representatives: it may simply be that there are fewer women in politics because that is what voters want.

Measuring whether and how voters use gender as a metric for evaluating a candidate is a complicated task. In 2018, 4.5 percent of all women candidates who contested general elections for the National Assembly won seats, while 8.7 percent of male candidates did. At first glance these numbers may suggest that women face an electoral disadvantage and voters penalize women candidates. However, in the 2018 election in particular, women candidates complained about being fielded from uncompetitive constituencies by their parties. If parties disproportionately field women candidates from constituencies where the party itself is uncompetitive, it is unclear whether it is really voters who are penalizing women or if parties are just setting up their women candidates to lose.

Nevertheless, we may look to data on public attitudes toward women in politics for suggestive evidence on Pakistani voters' preferences. Figure 9.4 displays survey responses from the sixth wave of the World Values Survey (conducted in fifty-nine countries) to the question of whether respondents agree with this statement: "On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do." In the case of Pakistan, an overwhelming majority of respondents (72 percent) either strongly agree or agree with the statement, which is high both in absolute terms and relative to the proportion in other countries surveyed that year.

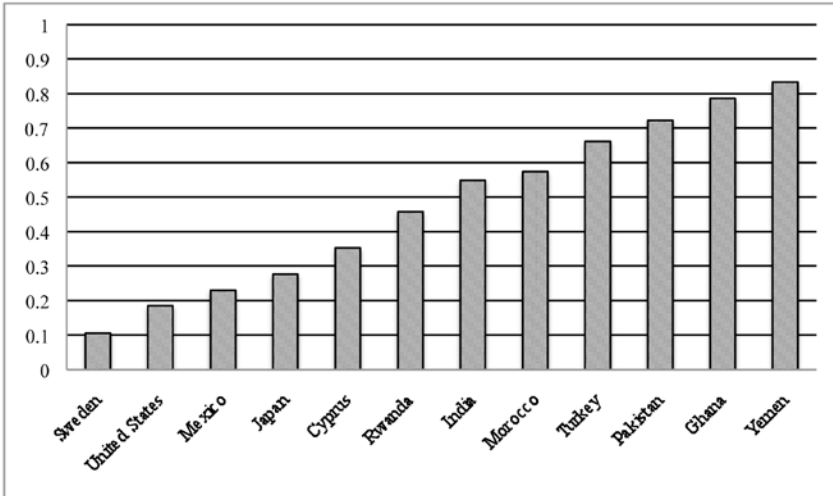


Figure 9.4. Proportion of respondents, by country, who strongly agree or disagree with the statement: “On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do.”

Source: Dataset from R. Inglehart et al., eds. (2014), “World Values Survey: Round Six, Country-Pooled Datafile Version,” <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV6.jsp> (Madrid: JD Systems Institute).

Note: In each country the survey was conducted among 1,200 respondents weighted to be nationally representative using the most recent census numbers available at the time. Full details on the survey sample and methodology are available in the WVS-6 documentation: <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSContents.jsp>.

Additionally, in a survey conducted before the 2018 elections among 2,500 households in Lahore, Cheema et al. (2019) found that a sizable proportion of respondents (40 percent) think it is inappropriate for women to stand as candidates in elections and a third (both men and women) believe that merely *discussing* politics is solely a man’s job. Similarly, in a 2016 survey of eight hundred men and women in the Faisalabad district, Khan (2017) found that only about half (53 percent) of women respondents say they would feel comfortable disclosing their support for a candidate that others in their household did not favor. In contrast, 80 percent of men said they would feel comfortable doing so. Not only are women excluded from formal positions of power, they also appear to be systematically excluded from informal political conversations in their own homes.

These findings on public opinion may lead us to be pessimistic about the prospects of women’s entry into electoral politics in Pakistan in the future. However, over time it may be possible to counter voters’ apparent bias against women candidates and representatives if parties were to endorse more women and voters were exposed to greater numbers of women. The Indian

case provides reason for some cautious optimism for long-term change on this front: a study on the effects of village-level reservations for women finds that villages with a female head of the village council saw “improve[d] perceptions of female leader effectiveness and weaken[ed] stereotypes about gender roles in the public and domestic spheres” (Beaman et al. 2009, 1,497).

Conclusion

Women’s low numerical representation in the electoral arena in Pakistan stems from the design of electoral institutions, the incentives of political parties, the constraints imposed by families, and gender biases among the electorate. These factors interact with each other, rather than operating independently, to produce the condition of women’s low presence in politics. While there is no silver bullet that can address all of these factors together, ignoring how they interact can lead to poor policy design with unintended consequences. The 5 percent women candidate nomination requirement is an example. While the rule mechanically forced parties to nominate a minimum proportion of women candidates, it did not change party incentives—under a majoritarian electoral system coupled with a perception of women candidates as electorally weaker—to nominate women beyond uncompetitive constituencies. Even though women nominees protested against being given tickets for uncompetitive districts, the presence of reserved seats in addition to party quotas potentially served as a “safety valve” for party elites who could reassure the women fielded from uncompetitive districts that they would be accommodated on a reserved seat were they to lose in general elections. In this way a lack of consideration of how other factors might shape party incentives meant that a well-intentioned policy failed to achieve greater inclusion of women in the electoral arena.

It is entirely possible that effectively changing party incentives to include greater numbers of women in high-stakes provincial and national elections is simply very difficult. On the candidate supply side, the high barriers to entry for this level of election (e.g., needing family connections to be a viable candidate) seem to be even higher for women. Local-level elections, on the other hand, provide a lower-stakes, lower-barriers space where parties may be more easily convinced to take a chance on women candidates and a more diverse set of women candidates may be able to contest. The varied composition of the cohort of women councilors who came to power in the 2002 elections is a testament to this possibility. Moreover, the experience of contesting elections and holding office at a lower level may have “knock-on” effects for the supply of women candidates seeking higher levels of office in the long run.

On the voter side, exposure to women in positions of local leadership may have the additional effect of reducing gender bias among the elector-

ate, as evidence from neighboring India suggests. While similar documented evidence does not exist regarding exposure to women in higher positions of power, it is possible to imagine why it may be difficult to see similar gains. Voters may be able to brush off instances of women in positions of high leadership as rare exceptions rather than as the norm, and they may not shift their perceptions about women as leaders more generally. Moreover, such shifts in perception may require greater access to and sustained contact with a female representative, which is difficult for a provincial or national representative to provide but is in fact the intended goal for local representatives in a decentralized system. Moving beyond indirectly electing women to reserved seats at the national and provincial level to directly electing them on reserved seats in local government may allow for greater inclusion, both instantaneously and in the longer term by durably shifting party and voter perceptions of women as leaders.

Notes

1. Mian Abrar, "PPP, Independents to Make Hay on PTI's Flawed Ticket Distribution in Muzaffargarh," *Pakistan Today*, July 14, 2018.
2. "MPA Beats Pregnant Wife, Threatens Her with Death," *Express Tribune*, September 25, 2018.
3. Election Commission of Pakistan press release, May 11, 2018, <https://www.ecp.gov.pk/PrintDocument.aspx?PressId=55126&type=PDE>
4. Jahangir, Munizeh, "The Invisible Candidates Shut Out of Pakistan's Election," *Guardian*, July 24, 2018."
5. In particular the question of separate versus joint electorates for election to seats reserved for religious minorities in national and provincial assemblies was a source of controversy from the 1950s until 2002, when separate electorates were finally abolished.
6. The mechanism of seat reservation for women and minorities was different, however. For women, "the members to fill seats reserved for women which are allocated to a Province under clause (4) shall be elected in accordance with law on the basis of the system of proportional representation by means of a single transferable vote by the electoral college consisting of the persons elected to the Assembly from that Province." For minorities the seats would be filled under a separate electorate system, with the entire country serving as a single constituency. President's Order No. 14 of 1985, *Gazette of Pakistan*, Extraordinary, part 1, March 2, 1985.
7. Bush (2011) excludes Pakistan from her quantitative analysis on the grounds that it is "an outlier that involves different causal processes."
8. Free and Fair Elections Network, "Women MPs Contribute 39 percent Parliamentary Business during 2017–18," accessed October 2018, <http://fafen.org/women-mps-contribute-39-parliamentary-business-2017-18/>.
9. Benazir Shah, "A Female Candidate's Faceless Election Campaign," *Geo News*, July 20, 2018.