



**FRIEDRICH NAUMANN
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Pakistan

Women Legislators' Political Participation in Pakistan 2018-20



Supported by Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom.



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Abbreviations

CAN	call attention notice
FAFEN	Free and Fair Election Network
KP	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
MNA	Member of National Assembly
MPA	Member of Provincial Assembly
PILDAT	Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency
PIPS	Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services

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Foreword

Given growing recognition of the untapped capacity of women political leaders and legislators, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) felt it necessary to commission a study on how women have fared in terms of performance and participation in the country's national and provincial assemblies. There is little doubt that women's participation in politics helps advance gender equality—it affects the range of policy issues that are considered and the types of solutions that are proposed. Indeed, it may be fair to say that whether a legislator is male or female, has a distinct impact on their policy priorities.

There is also strong evidence that, as more women are elected to office, there is a parallel increase in policymaking that emphasizes the human rights of families, women, and minorities. The role of the Women's Parliamentary Caucus in influencing legislation on women's rights is a case in point. And yet, women continue to be underrepresented in the political and economic decision-making process. This must change.

In order to meet development goals, to build strong, sustainable democracies, and to ensure that the fundamental rights of all citizens are protected and promoted, women must be encouraged, empowered and supported in becoming strong political and community leaders. In this context, the role of all political parties cannot be overemphasized: it is they who are responsible for promoting women's access to decision-making positions and supporting the work they do. The media too plays a critical role in informing public opinion about the place of women in society and politics.

HRCP is grateful to Fauzia Viqar, former chairperson of the Punjab Commission on the Status of Women, and her team for having carried out this study in challenging circumstances, given the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, and for producing a document we hope will inform the debate on women's political participation in Pakistan. We would also like to thank the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom for its support in making this study possible.

Executive summary

This report aims to assess women legislators' political participation in Pakistan for the first two parliamentary years (2018–20) of the current national and provincial assemblies (2018–23) with a primary focus on the functions of legislation and oversight (all political parties). It uses qualitative and quantitative data generated through perception surveys, secondary research, focus group discussions, key informant interviews and statistical analyses of data available on assembly websites.

The study is based on a framework assessing legislators' performance against eight indicators, including attendance, chairing committees, presenting resolutions and call attention notices (CANs), asking questions, introducing bills and passing adjournment motions, all of which have broadly been included under three categories: representation, oversight and legislation. We developed a sample of 50 people, including male and female legislators, along with key informants from civil society organizations.

The study was subject to several limitations due to challenges related to data collection and accessing legislators in a short span of eight weeks. All the assemblies, except that of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), referred the team to their websites, where the data is either incomplete or only available in a narrative form that is tedious to analyse. Data from the Balochistan Assembly was not made available despite multiple requests, as a result of which the team relied on data from FAFEN.¹ Similarly, the attendance data for the Sindh Assembly is not posted on its website, nor was it made available despite repeated requests.

COVID-19 and related health safety concerns made it impossible to conduct in-person interviews or gather legislators successfully for focus group discussions. Online interviews also became difficult for some legislators due to IT-related challenges. Some legislators were sceptical of the study, often not revealing information or giving politically correct replies to prevent any possible backlash from the government and political parties.

Key findings

During these two years, despite being a fifth of the numerical strength of the assemblies, women parliamentarians outperformed their male colleagues against most of the reviewed criteria, including attending parliamentary proceedings (Table 1).

Table 1. Comparative performance of male and female parliamentarians

	National Assembly		Punjab Assembly		Sindh Assembly		KP Assembly		Balochistan Assembly	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Membership	20	80	20	80	19	81	19	81	17	83
Attendance	80	67	77	48	-	-	68	65	-	-
Standing committees chaired	6	94	42	58	14	86	14	86	29	71
Resolutions	44	56	33	67	44	56	42	58	6	94
CANs	30	70	47	53	35	65	28	72	14	86
Questions	36	64	37	63	42	58	25	75	2	98
Private members' bills	24	76	0	100	38	62	0	0	-	-
Adjournment motions	-	-	47	53	25	75	24	76	-	-

Note: M = male, F = female. All data in percentages.

Representation of women as committee chairpersons in the National Assembly was one third of their proportional strength. Similarly, women remained under-represented in Sindh and KP in chairing standing committees. However, women accounted for over twice their proportional share in the Punjab Assembly. Similarly, the Balochistan Assembly gave an additional 50 percent share of women members of the provincial assembly (MPAs) in chairing standing committees.

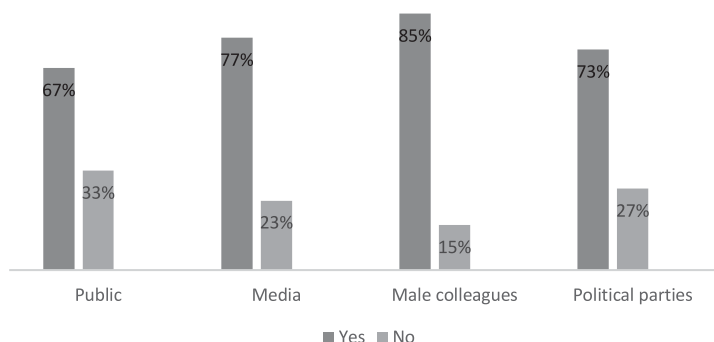
¹ <https://fafen.org/>

Women MPAs tabled more than twice their proportional share of resolutions, as did women MPAs of the Sindh and KP assemblies. Women MPAs in Punjab also exceeded their share in tabling resolutions. In Balochistan, however, women MPAs tabled a third of their proportional share of resolutions. Similar trends were seen in the remaining indicators as is evident from Table 1.

Key barriers to women legislators’ effective legislation and oversight

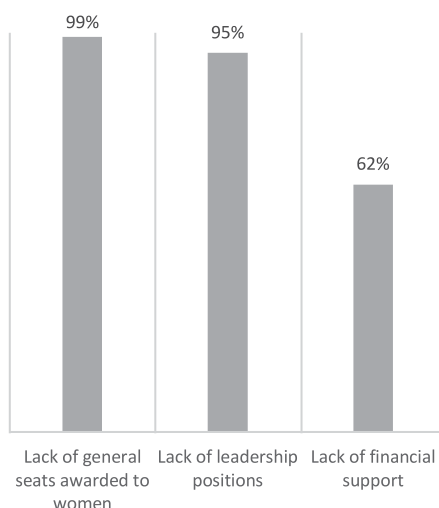
Despite active participation, women legislators continue to face challenges in the effective conduct of parliamentary functions (Figure 1). Women legislators identified discriminatory cultural norms and stereotypes of women in society as one of the most significant barriers, which not only hindered their entry into politics, but also continued to impact their performance in the assembly.

Figure 1. Sources of gender discrimination identified by women legislators



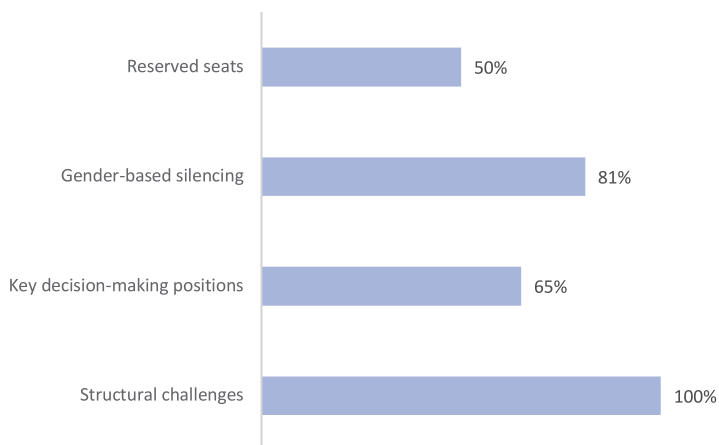
Another barrier identified by them was discriminatory party behaviour (Figure 2). Women legislators repeatedly highlighted the unwillingness of political parties to promote women in their ranks. Thus, women are often left out of key decision-making positions in the assemblies and parties. Political parties are also reluctant to allot election tickets to women for winnable general seats and women who are elected to reserved seats are looked down upon and marginalized by both men and women on general seats.

Figure 2. Key barriers identified by women legislators (within parties)



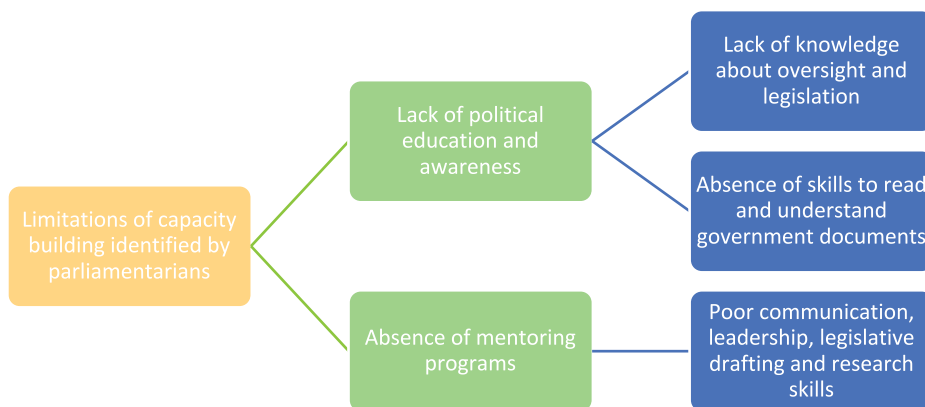
Women legislators also said that gender-blind institutions (government, parliament, political parties) and processes (elections, judicial appointments) make it harder for women to enter and excel within the political arena (Figure 3). Moreover, absence of gender equality policies, a sexist working culture and lack of safety and respect for women in the political sphere make it difficult for women to perform their legislative functions effectively. Additionally, biased media coverage depicts politics as a masculine profession and women legislators are often asked regressive or discriminatory questions that focus less on their work as a legislator and more on their personal lives.

Figure 3. Key barriers identified by women legislators (within assemblies)



Lack of political education and knowledge of processes among women and a lack of research support or access to relevant information makes it difficult for legislators to propose evidence-based reform or to conduct effective oversight (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Limitations of capacity building identified by parliamentarians



Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations are offered:

Empower women and enhance their participation in politics

- Provide an enabling environment for women by building supportive, gender-sensitive infrastructure

- The media should highlight the role of women politicians by asking pertinent questions and increasing their presence on talk shows
- Increase the number of general seats allotted to women under Elections Act 2017 to at least 15 percent
- Increase educational campaigns
- Collaborate with civil society and women’s caucuses to increase educational campaigns in order to reach out to more women, and especially those in rural areas.

Increase support within political parties

- Increase proportion of women’s seats to 33 percent across all local governments
- Allocate at least 15 percent winnable tickets to women in general elections and provide support (financial and other) to ensure women’s success
- Increase the number of women in executive committees and other decision-making positions within the party

Promote women’s participation within the assemblies

- A gender-based performance tracker should be mandatorily available on the websites of all assemblies to increase sensitivity

Legal framework to promote gender sensitivity in legislatures

- Amend the Rules of Procedure to include gender-sensitive language, which includes differentiating between the male and women legislators by using the terms ‘him’ and ‘her’ respectively
- Allocate a time slot to women legislators for speeches, questions, and other assembly matters
- Strengthen and enhance the role of women’s caucuses through a legal cover

Legal provisions for improved oversight

- Enable improved input by reducing the number of participants in matters of public interest
- Strengthen Committee role by granting suo motu powers to committees in all the Legislatures

Capacity building

- Provide high quality, mandatory induction and continuous professional development trainings for new and continuing legislators with a focus on assembly business, communications, and lobbying skills, and strategic oversight

Networking and mentoring

- Encourage active networks among legislators and the assemblies to enable exchange of information, issues, and experiences and strengthen women’s parliamentary caucuses
- Organize structured mentoring programmes for women legislators and cultivate linkages to gender equality advocates/experts outside the parliament for supporting legislation and oversight work

Provision of research support for legislators

- Provide easy access to well-sourced libraries (physical and online) with digital and physical records
- Create a digital portal for budget information (allocations and expenditures)
- Bring focus on gender equality by establishing a technical gender research unit
- Provide staff, offices, researchers, and other support infrastructure to legislators for increased effectiveness and improved performance

Introduction

The Constitution of Pakistan commits to women's empowerment through special measures if required, to achieve the objective of equality of citizens. Gender equality is important for a responsive and accountable democratic society.² Enhancing women's political participation is an important mechanism for achieving the goal of gender equality which not only requires an enabling environment for women's participation in politics at the grassroots and in legislatures, but also measures to support women's contribution as legislators. Worldwide, women represent 24.5 percent of members of the parliament, with 24.3 percent in the Upper House while 24.6 percent belonging to the Lower House.³ In Asia, women make up 19.7 percent of the representatives of the combined Houses.⁴ Disparity between female and male representation in Parliament is a challenge that needs to be addressed across the world.

Pakistan's turbulent political history, wrought with coups and military rule, corruption and a twisted form of political Islamization has made it difficult for women to gain social, political, and economic parity. Their call for rights was sometimes relegated to a secondary status in the name of culture and, during Zia ul Haq's dictatorship, in the name of religion. Since the decade of the 1990s, when the democratically elected governments achieved some sort of continuity, if not stability, there has been an opening up of democratic spaces for women by the state in the form of reservation of increasing number of seats in the legislatures as well as within the local bodies. Women's political activism and female voices have also continued to grow strong, both as political candidates and constituents. Thus, despite constraints, women play an active role in politics as legislators.

Women's journey through the legislatures

To understand women's journey in the legislatures, it is important to trace their presence and participation in assemblies of Pakistan, both at the federal and provincial levels. It began with the first Constituent Assembly (1947-54) which included two firebrand leaders, Begum Jahan Ara Shahnawaz and Begum Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah who tabled a Charter of Women's Rights to demand equality of status and reserved seats for women.⁵ With the exception of the second Constituent Assembly of 1955, each successive assembly has had women representatives raising their voice on important political and social issues. The second assembly had no women but, in the next four Constituent/National assemblies, there was a small number of women parliamentarians on reserved and general seats. These ranged from eight in the 1962-65 assembly, six in the 1965-69 assembly, seven in the 1971-77 assembly, and 11 in the 1977-79 assembly respectively. The period from 1971-1977 also saw an increased number of women in key decision-making positions in the government including as provincial Governor and Deputy Speaker. During this time, Nusrat Bhutto remained a highly visible figure on women's issues, leading the government delegation to the First World Conference on Women in Mexico (1975). The aftermath of the conference led to the formation of a Women's Rights Committee that recommended far-reaching reforms to improve women's legal status.⁶

Despite his decision to encourage confinement of women's activities within the four walls of the house, General Zia ul Haq's Majlis-e-Shura (Federal Advisory Council) brought in 20 women members on reserved seats which increased to 22 in 1985 with addition of two elected members. The 1988 elections continued the 20 seats for women but the provision for reservation expired before the 1990 elections and was not revived till 2002. Hence, in the 1990 National Assembly, Benazir Bhutto and Nusrat Bhutto were the only two women who were elected to general seats. Women's reserved seats had expired due the sunset clause in the Constitution which stated that the provision would expire after three election cycles and reservation of seats could not be revived in successive Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz-led governments. The general elections of 2002 and 2008 under General Pervez Musharraf, saw an unprecedented increase in the number of reserved seats for women both, in the

² <https://www.al.undp.org/content/albania/en/home/library/poverty/strengthening-womens-political-participation--an-analysis-of-the.html>

³ <http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ <https://www.ids.ac.uk/publications/women-in-politics-gaining-ground-for-progressive-outcomes-in-pakistan/>

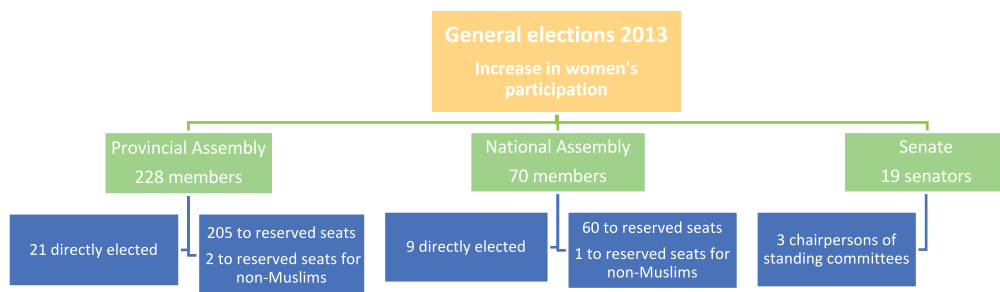
⁶ Ibid.

provincial and national assemblies with Pakistan surpassing the world average of 15 percent. However, despite an increase in women’s representation, the number of directly elected women still remained low at 13 and 16 respectively, in the National Assembly. Numbers were similarly low in the provincial assemblies.

The politico-military rule in the decade of 2000 was rejected by women activists who stood against the undemocratic government of General Pervez Musharraf. Yet, there were many advances in women’s empowerment through the legislatures. These included enactment of over a dozen laws dealing with various forms of violence against women and creation of institutions like the National Women’s Caucus, Women Development Ministry and the Commissions on the Status of Women. These institutions have helped strengthen parliamentary bodies and processes, improved the capacity of legislators, and enabled effective oversight on state activities.

The general elections of 2013 saw a sharp increase in women contesting for general seats of the National Assembly and the four provincial assemblies (Figure 5). This rise was reflective of a general increase in women’s political participation with more women registering as voters in the democratically elected government. In these elections, a total of 228 women (19.5 percent) entered the National and provincial assemblies altogether.⁷ Women were also given leadership roles and brought in the federal cabinet and as members of standing committees.

Figure 5. Number of women legislators in assemblies after general elections 2013



The Elections Act 2017 mandates an allotment of 5 percent general seats for women and 17 percent reserved seats in all assemblies but despite this provision, fewer women were elected on general seats in 2018 in comparison with the previous government.⁸ In the first two years of the present government, even though women have primarily entered legislatures on the basis of reserved seats, they have raised their voice effectively for a diverse range of issues, despite political and social constraints in the assemblies and in the society.

Objectives of the study

This study aims to analyse the role of women legislators in Pakistan in the first and second parliamentary years (2018-2020) by using qualitative and quantitative data generated through secondary research, focus group discussions, and interviews. It analyses the effectiveness of women legislators in performing their parliamentary functions of representation, legislation and oversight through a diverse set of themes.

The study includes (but is not limited to) the following broad themes:

- Women legislators’ performance in the federal and provincial assemblies since August 2018

⁷ <https://fafen.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/FAFEN-Women-Legislators-Performance-Report-2017-18.pdf>

⁸ Ayesha Khan and Sana Naqvi. (2020). Dilemmas of representation: Women in Pakistan’s assemblies. *Asian Affairs*, 51(2). <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03068374.2020.1748414>

- The extent to which women legislators are involved in key decision-making, including through federal and provincial committees and caucuses
- Constraints to women's participation in politics and effective democratic governance, and ways to overcome such obstacles
- The need for, and effectiveness of, affirmative action to boost women's political voice

Methodology

Scope

This study aims to assess the performance of women legislators in the past two parliamentary years (August 2018-August 2020) across five legislatures in Pakistan and to identify key barriers to women's effective political participation.

Confidentiality

Research participants were provided with detailed information about the project and its objectives to help them understand the nature of the research. Participants were assured of confidentiality of their responses and their informed consent was obtained at the onset of the interviews. Any quotes for the study are added with names after express permission of respondents.

Research methods

This report employed a set of quantitative and qualitative research methods and tools:

Desk review

A few key documents and relevant national and international studies on effective legislator performance models were reviewed. The reviewed documents included Rules of Procedure of the provincial assembly of the Punjab 1997; provincial assembly of KP Procedure and Conduct of Business Rules, 1988; Rules of Procedure of the Provincial Assembly of Sindh, 2013, Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business, 1974.

Key informant interviews

Interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with members of legislatures and key stakeholders from civil society organizations working on political participation of women (see Annexes 1 and 2).

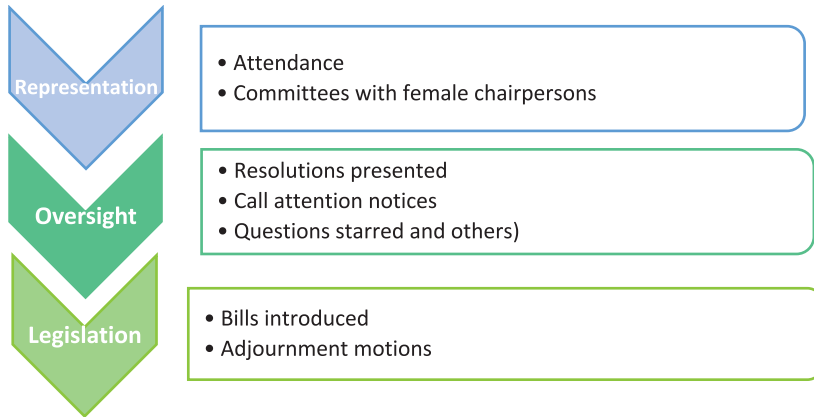
Data collection from assemblies

Data on key performance indicators (given below) was obtained from websites of the four provincial assemblies and the National Assembly in a narrative form, analysed and presented in tabular/visual forms.

Performance assessment framework

A legislator's performance assessment framework was devised after review of national and international performance assessment tools. Eight indicators are selected under three categories of 'oversight', 'legislation' and 'representation'. These include numbers of legislative business generated by women legislators in seven categories (Figure 6).

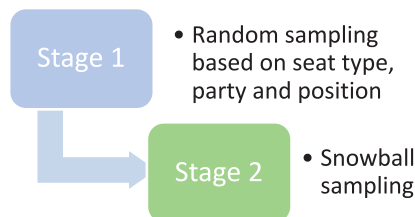
Figure 6. Summary of the three parliamentary functions: representation, oversight and legislation



Sampling

A two-stage, sample design was used to produce a representative sample of female and male members from the four provincial assemblies and the National Assembly (Figure 7). In the first stage, the sample was selected through random sampling, whereby legislators were selected on the bases of representation of women in assemblies by seat type (elected or reserved), by party, and by position (ministers, advisors, special assistants, committee chairs and members).

Figure 7. Different stages of sampling interviews

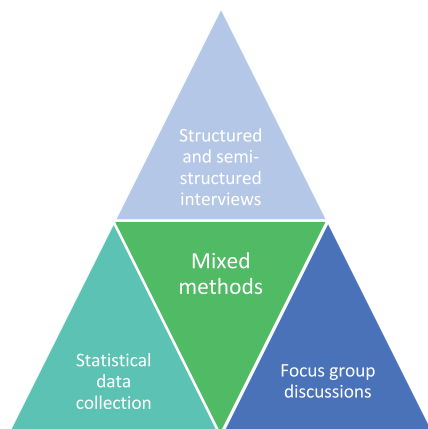


In the second stage, the sample was selected through snowball sampling whereby, legislators interviewed earlier gave contacts of other legislators who would be relevant and interested in the study. In this manner, a total sample size of 50 respondents was developed, including male and women legislators and key informants from civil society organizations.

Data collection

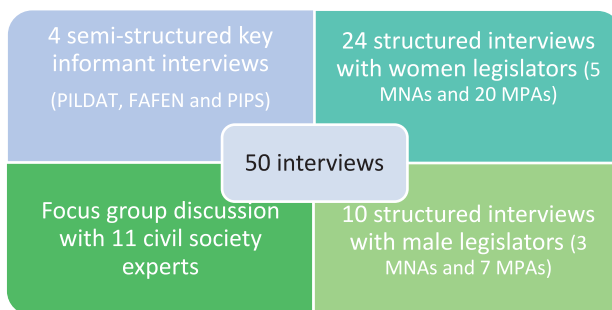
This study adopts a mixed-methods approach by using a combination of interviews and data analysis (Figure 8). Semi-structured and structured interviews and focus group discussions were held mainly online and telephonically with members of legislatures (female and male) and, key civil society stakeholders working on political participation of women. Those were combined with statistical analysis of data on key legislative business indicators obtained from assemblies' websites. Our objective was to overcome the weakness of each method for generating nuanced and reliable information.

Figure 8. Different methods of collecting data for the study



A total of 50 people were interviewed (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Number of interviews conducted with different groups

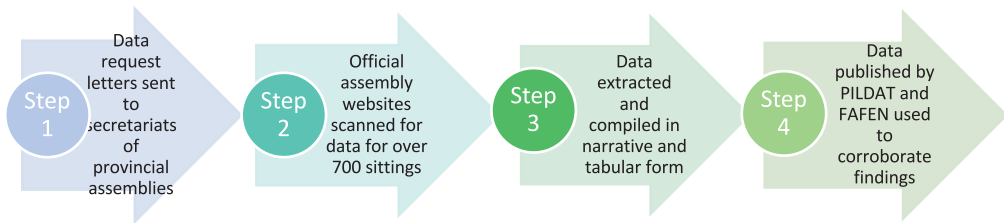


The interview questionnaire was designed after review of studies on assembly processes and role of legislators (Annex 2). The tool was pilot-tested on three legislators (current and former) and two key informants (PIPS and country representative of UCLG-ASPAC) to improve the design and flow of the interview. The finalized questionnaire was rolled out for the remaining participants.

Quantitative data for the study was collected from a mix of sources due to limitation of data availability in Balochistan. Data request letters were sent to the Secretariat of the four provincial assemblies which guided us to their respective websites from where all information was derived. The Balochistan Assembly refused to share information beyond the publicly available scant information on resolutions only. Performance on points of order was obtained from FAFEN under its Open Parliament Initiative.

Data obtained from the websites of the Punjab, Sindh and National Assemblies was scattered and not available in an easily analysable form. The KP Assembly website was best organized with all data in an easily analysable form. Researchers completed the task of extracting and compiling information available on the official website in narrative form as ‘Summary of Proceedings’ and converted it into a tabular form, field by field and row by row. This was a laborious and time-consuming process with over 700 sittings across the five assemblies in the first two years of the assemblies. Secondary data published by PILDAT and FAFEN was also used to corroborate research findings (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Process of conducting research



Study limitations and challenges

Data collection challenges arose from the form in which data is available and due to inconsistency of reporting format for selected indicators requiring rigorous quality assurance by the researchers to ensure integrity of findings. Incomplete data also made it necessary to pursue assembly officials for missing information. While most data issues were addressed, Balochistan data on four indicators and Sindh data on a few sittings could not be included.

The COVID-19 pandemic mandated safety protocols made in-person visits to the assemblies and interviews with legislators difficult, especially given the difficulty of accessing legislators even in normal times. Legislators often did not keep interview appointments, partly because of their busy schedules but partly due to the culture of taking in-person engagements more seriously than online interactions. Sample size for interviews could have been expanded if in-person meetings were easily possible.

In some situations, it became difficult to conduct interviews online due to technical difficulties where some legislators had poor mobile connectivity or did not have access to the internet.

Some legislators were either sceptical of the study or fearful of breaching party discipline by speaking of institutional or cultural challenges and despite assurance of anonymizing findings, some refused to give an interview. Others either gave vague or politically correct responses or did not reveal too much information in case it might harm their relationship with their party. It required a lot to build rapport and making them comfortable in sharing insights and information.

Male legislators felt that a study on women legislators should include women interviewees only and were unsure of how they could contribute. They had to be convinced of the significance of their opinion in creating a holistic picture, after which some agreed to participate in the study.

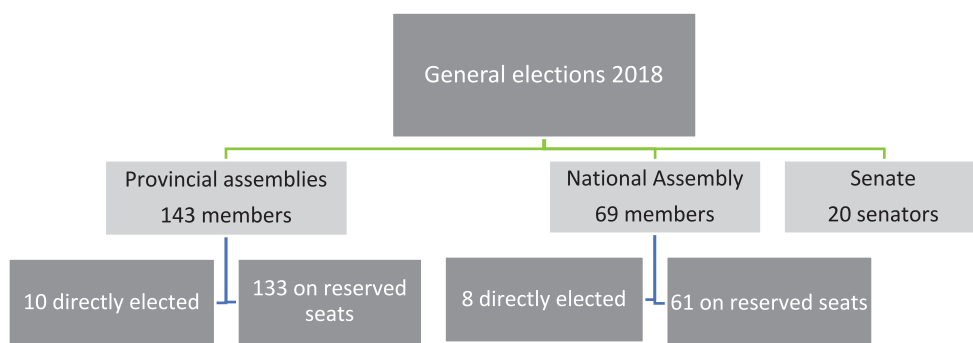
Key findings: Performance of women legislators

Analyses of women legislators' performance in the National Assembly of Pakistan and the four provincial assemblies of Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan and KP is derived from two key sources:

- Data on key performance indicators for legislators in the assemblies
- Interviews with legislators and key informants about what women legislators think about their own performances, how male legislators view women's performance and barriers that hinder women's political development.

Figure 11 shows the number of women legislators in assemblies after the general elections of 2018. Data on performance indicators under the three categories of representation, legislation and oversight indicates that women have carried out their function in all three categories actively and successfully.

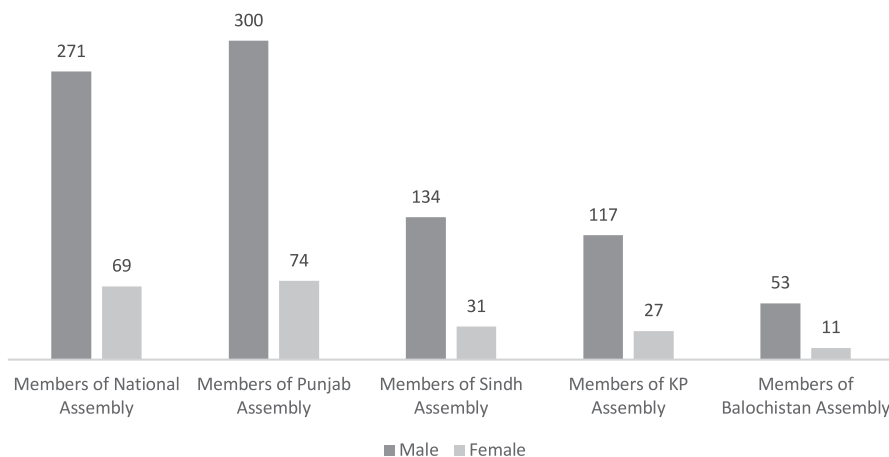
Figure 11. Number of women legislators in assemblies after general elections 2018



Data on women's performance: Representation

Figure 12 gives the number of men and women legislators in the national and provincial assemblies.

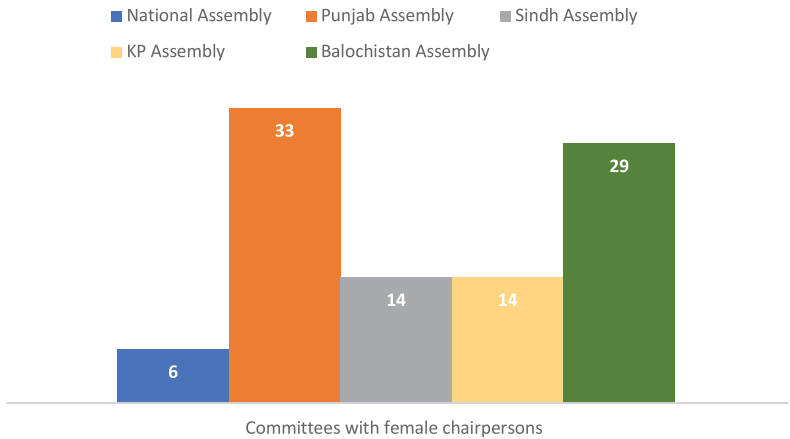
Figure 12. Number of men and women legislators in national and provincial assemblies



Committee chairs and members

Women’s presence on committees as members and chairs is varied across the provinces and in the National Assembly (Figure 13). At the national level, a total of 6 percent of women legislators serve as chairs of committees.⁹ In Punjab, 33 percent women lawmakers have been selected as committee chairs and in KP, 14 percent women are chairpersons. In Sindh, 14 percent of women lawmakers have been selected as chairpersons, whereas 81 percent of women are members of committees. In Balochistan, 78 percent women are members of committees and 29 percent serve as committee chairpersons.

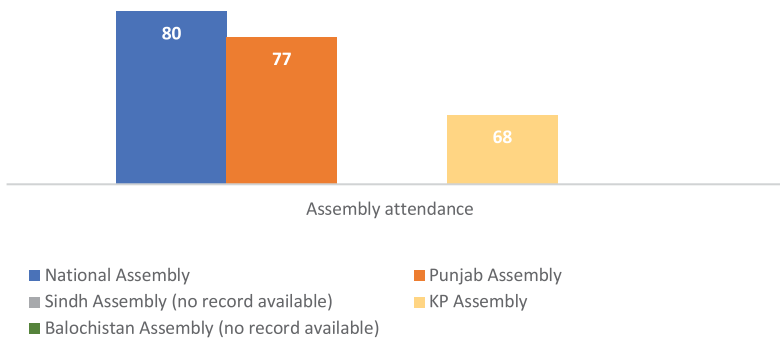
Figure 13. Women chairpersons of standing committees in all five assemblies (percentage)



Attendance

Data compiled for the cumulative 712 sittings in 72 sessions of the assemblies indicates that women attended sessions in numbers far higher than proportionate across all assemblies.¹⁰ Female attendance in the National Assembly was the highest at 80 percent. Figures from Punjab and KP also show that a higher proportion of women legislators attended all assembly sessions in proportion to their numbers (Figure 14).

Figure 14. Attendance of women legislators in the National, Punjab and KP Assemblies (percentage)



⁹ In the National Assembly, two women legislators are chairs of standing committees, while three are chairs of parliamentary committees.

¹⁰ This total does not include the number of sittings and sessions for the Balochistan Assembly because no data for this was available on its website.

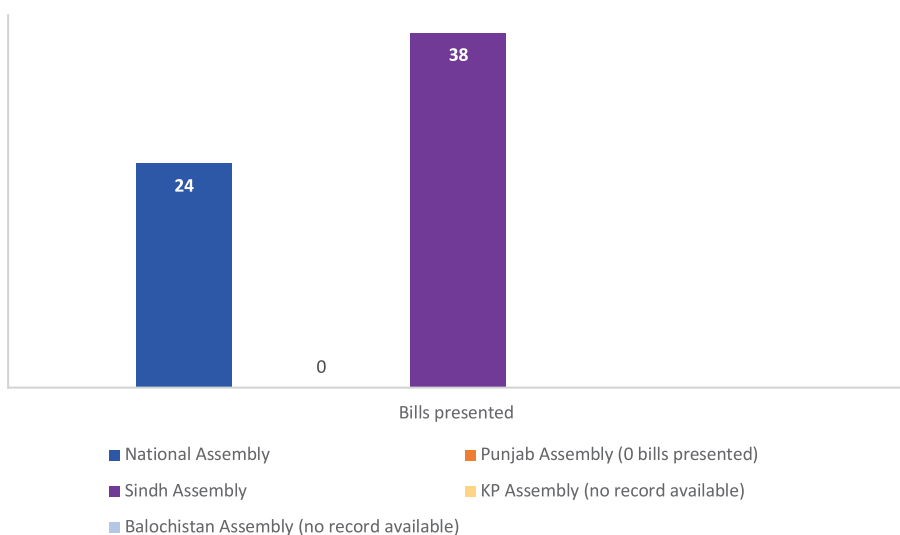
Data on women's performance: Legislation

Private member's bills

In terms of introducing legislation, women legislators presented 24 percent of the bills in the National Assembly (Figure 15); 21 percent of the bills were moved by women individually, while 3 percent were moved jointly. In the Sindh Assembly 38 percent of the private member bills were moved by women legislators individually, with no bills being jointly moved. However, in Punjab, no private members' bills were presented by women legislators. Moreover, we were unable to find records for Balochistan and KP.

These bills addressed a wide range of issues: in Sindh, the bills were primarily concentrated on education and water resources. In the National Assembly, women legislators presented bills mainly on issues concerning law and parliamentary affairs, interior, human rights, foreign affairs and local government.

Figure 15. Bills presented by women legislators in the National and Sindh assemblies (percentage)

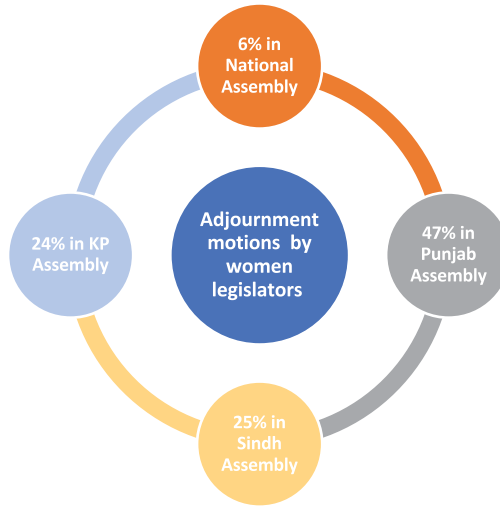


Adjournment motions

The adjournment motion is an extraordinary procedure to draw the attention of the House to a recent matter of urgent public importance having serious consequences and in regard to which a motion or a resolution with proper notice would be too late. If admitted, an adjournment motion leads to setting aside the normal business of the House for discussing a definite matter of urgent public importance.

Only 6 percent of the adjournment motions have been moved by women in the National Assembly. At the provincial level, women in the Punjab and KP assemblies have been actively taking part in moving adjournment motions with 47 percent and 24 percent respectively in the two assemblies (Figure 16).

Figure 16. Adjournment motions by women legislators at the national and provincial levels



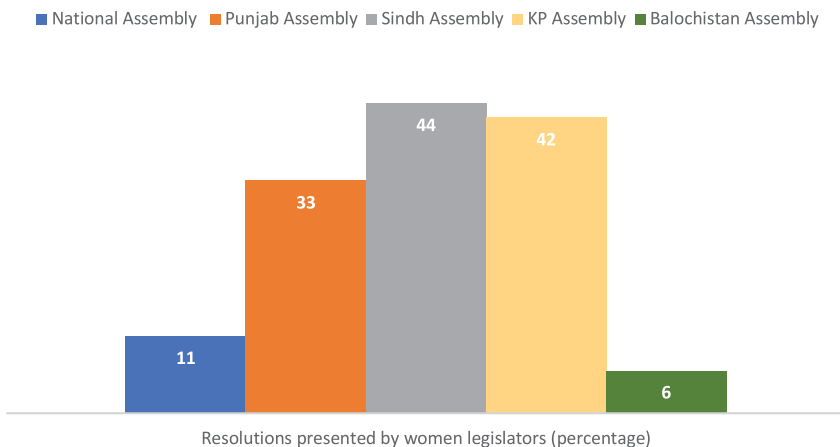
Data on women’s performance: Oversight

Despite women only making up about 20 percent of the assemblies’ strength, they are amongst the most active in oversight of the government. Their limited numbers in comparison to male parliamentarians has not prevented them from actively holding the government accountable through legislative instruments such as resolutions, call attention notices, raising points of order and asking questions, starred and others.

Resolutions

In the National Assembly, women legislators moved 11 percent of the resolutions individually, while 33 percent of them were jointly presented (Figure 17).

Figure 17. Resolutions presented by women legislators in all five assemblies



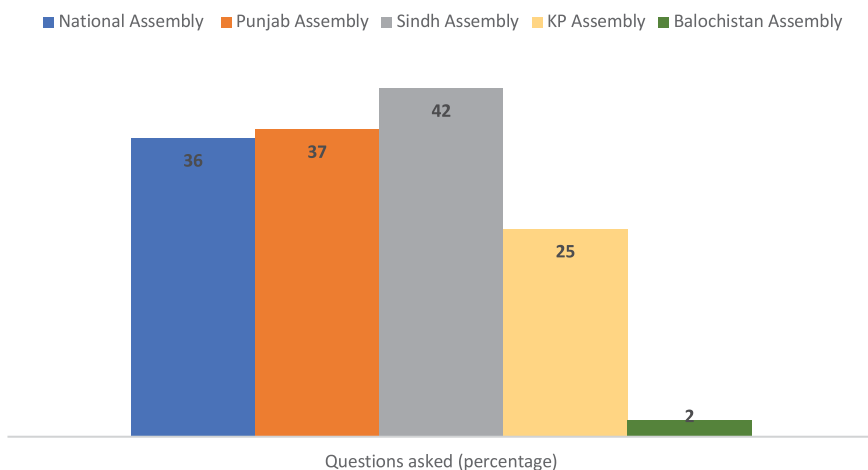
At the provincial level, in Punjab, women legislators presented 33 percent of the resolutions individually. In KP, 25 percent of the resolutions were sponsored by women lawmakers individually while 17 percent were sponsored jointly along with male legislators. In Sindh and Balochistan 44

percent and 6 percent of the resolutions were moved by women respectively. The issues raised by women legislators on the national and provincial level ranged from education, foreign affairs, harassment, acid attack cases, human resources, healthcare, prisons, culture, as well as law and parliamentary affairs.

Questions

In the National Assembly, women legislators asked 36 percent (1448 out of 4031) of the questions on a diverse range of topics which included, human rights, climate change, foreign affairs, health, education, commerce as well planning and development (Figure 18). At the provincial level, in Punjab women legislators asked 37 percent (507 out of 1363) of the questions, while in KP 25 percent (66 out of 268) of the questions were asked by women. In Sindh, women legislators asked 42 percent (280 out of 668) of the questions whereas in Balochistan only 2 percent (3 out of 161) of the questions were asked by women. Women in provincial assemblies asked questions on a variety of subjects which includes but is not limited to sports, revenue, population welfare, transport and local government.

Figure 18. Questions asked by women legislators in all five assemblies



Call attention notices

Women legislators in the National Assembly presented 21 percent (39 out of 185) of the call of attention notices individually while 9 percent (16) were presented in collaboration with other legislators (Figure 19). In Punjab, women presented 47 percent (25 out of 53) of the CANs. In Sindh 35 percent (139 out of 356) of the CANs were moved by women individually and 65 percent (256/356) jointly. In KP, 28 percent (39 out of 144) were moved individually by women legislators, whereas 1 percent was moved in collaboration with male lawmakers. Moreover, in the Balochistan Assembly, 14 percent (3 out of 22) of the CANs were moved by women. The notices addressed a diverse set of issues ranging from education to, work, services, law and parliamentary affairs etc (Figure 20).

Figure 19. CANs presented by women legislators in all five assemblies

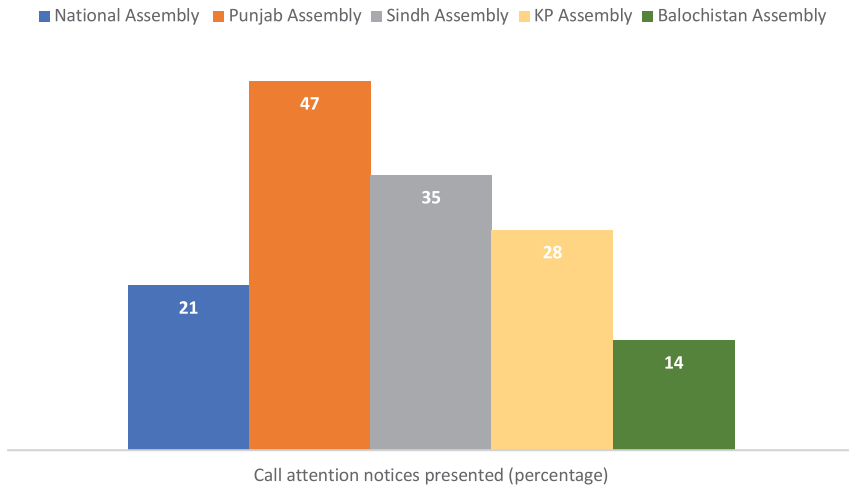


Figure 20. Range of topics on which women legislators raise their voices across five assemblies



Women legislators are active in speaking on a wide variety of issues that range from women rights to day-to-day public activities. Frequently discussed issues include education, human rights, and foreign affairs, communication, relief, rehabilitation and settlement, food supply, livestock and dairy development.

Top women performers in the national and provincial assemblies

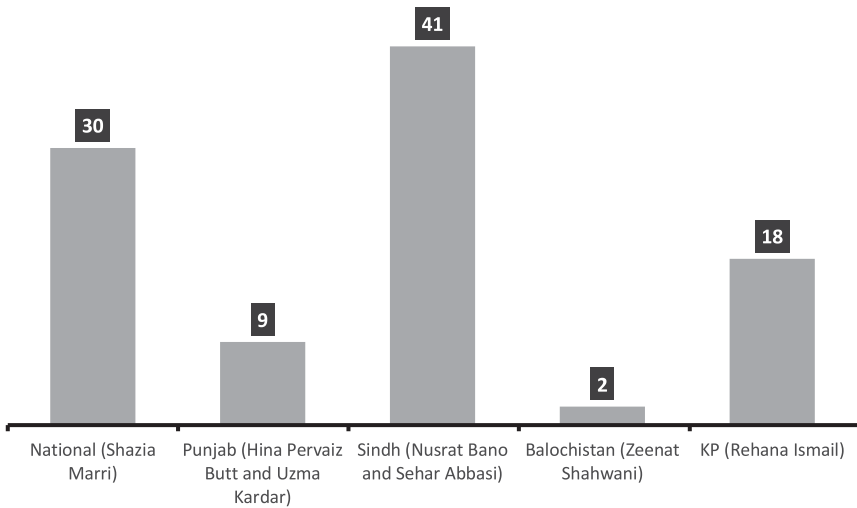
Top performers among women legislators have been identified on the basis of the various indicators analysed in the study. The top women performers are based on the number of CANs, resolutions,

questions, privilege, and adjournment motions presented as well as points of orders raised. Some of the notable top women performers at the provincial level include Hina Pervaiz Butt and Uzma Kardar in Punjab, Nighat Yasmin Orakzai, and Rehana Ismail in KP, Bushra Rind and Zeenat Shahwani in Balochistan. The information of top performing women is summarized below:

Call attention notices

CANs allow the members of the assembly to highlight a matter of public importance and require a three-day advance notice. No debate is allowed, a maximum of five movers are permissible on one day. Figure 21 gives a summary of the top performing women legislators who have moved CANs across all five assemblies.

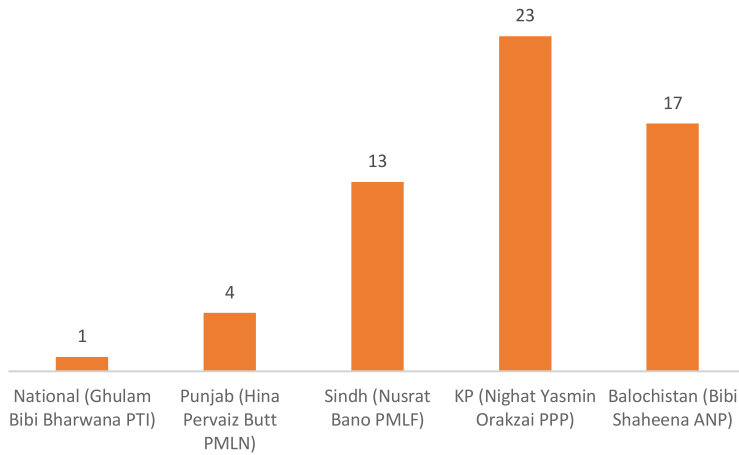
Figure 21. Call attention notices: Top women performers in all five assemblies (percentage)



Resolutions

Resolutions are moved by individual members and are also generally subjected to balloting process. Although resolutions passed by the House are not mandatory for the executive to follow, they tend to display the will of the legislators. Figure 22 gives a summary of the top women performers who presented resolutions during the first and second parliamentary years.

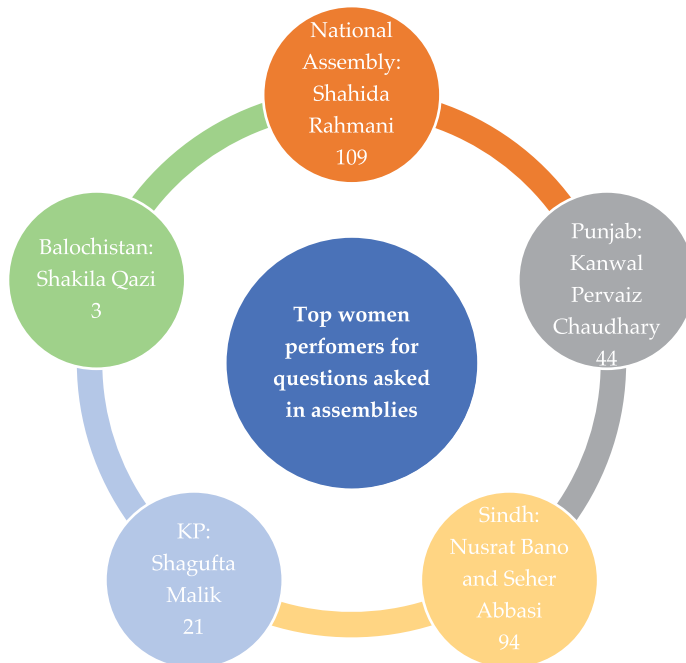
Figure 22. Resolutions: Top women performers in the national and provincial assemblies



Questions

These are the most important tool available to legislators, as it allows them to question the functions of a department. Members can directly inquire about the dealings of a department and the executive is mandated to respond.¹¹ Figure 23 gives a summary of the number of questions asked by top women performers at the national and provincial level.

Figure 23. Questions: Top women performers in the national and provincial assemblies

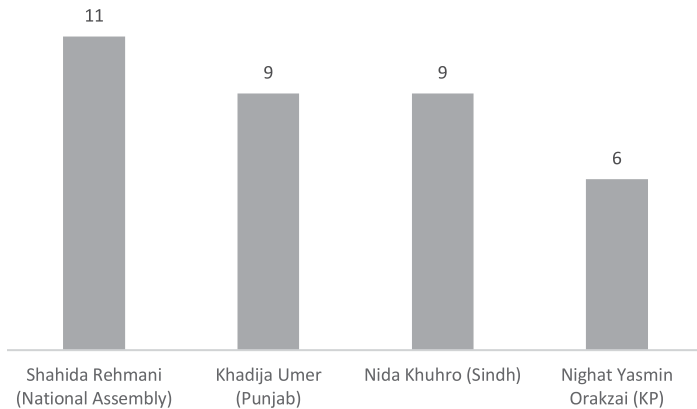


¹¹ If a member feels that a question has been incorrectly answered in order to conceal facts from the public, then the member may move a privilege motion against the minister concerned.

Adjournment motions

Adjournment motions can be invoked if a major event has occurred which requires immediate debate. The matter must be a single identifiable event that has recently occurred and is of public importance. Figure 24 gives a summary of the number of motions passed by top women performers in all four assemblies, National, Punjab, Sindh and KP. The study was not able to access data for the Balochistan Assembly.

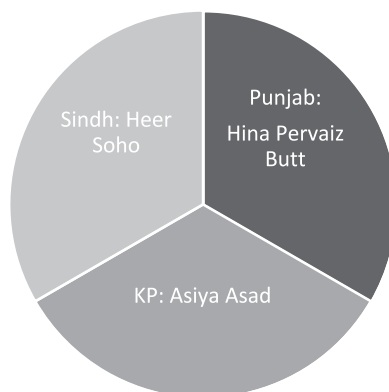
Figure 24. Top women performers in assemblies for number of adjournment motions passed



Privilege motions

These types of motions differ from adjournment motions as they aim to point out a breach of privilege of a member or of the assembly or of a committee. A breach of privilege occurs when a member is prevented from participating in the proceedings of the House. It can also occur when a member brings the institution of Parliament, a committee or any of its members into disrepute.¹² Figure 25 gives a summary of the top women performers in presenting privilege motions.

Figure 25. Privilege motions: Top women performers for Punjab, Sindh and KP assemblies



¹² <https://pildat.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/HowtobeanEffectiveLegislator.pdf?>

Points of order

This rule allows members to draw attention of the chair to any violation of procedure and deviation of practice that maybe taking place in the assembly.¹³ However, for this study, this indicator has only been calculated for Balochistan and the data has been extracted from the secondary data published by FAFEN on their official website (Figures 26 and 27).

Figure 26. Top three women legislators who raised points of order in the Balochistan Assembly

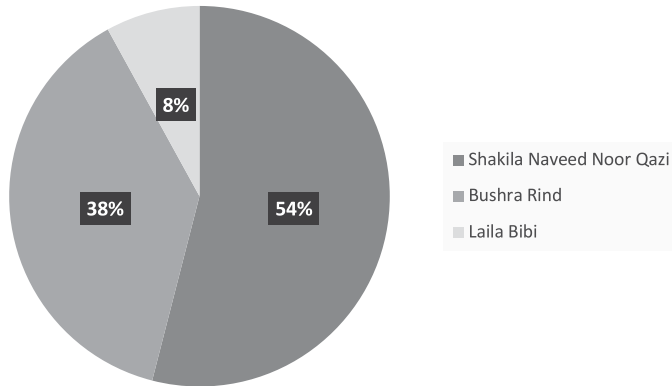
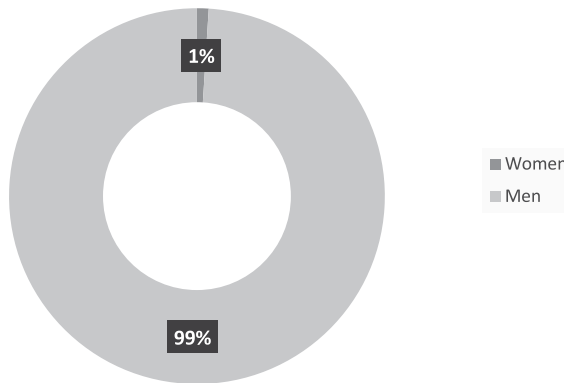


Figure 27. Comparison between points of order raised by women and men in the Balochistan Assembly during first and second parliamentary years



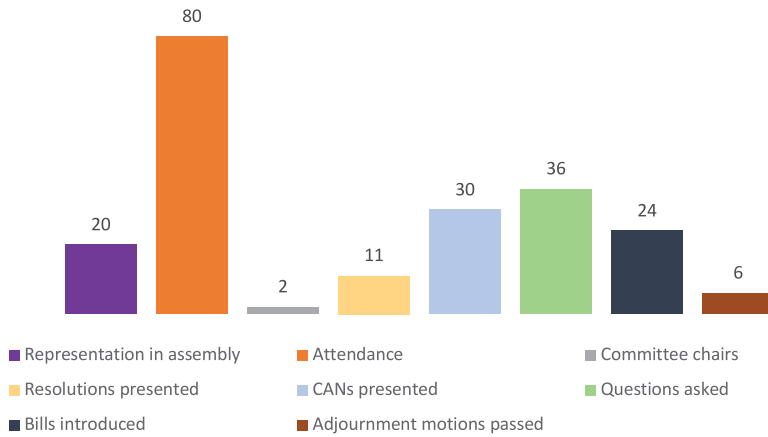
Data on the national and provincial assemblies

National Assembly

Women legislators in the National Assembly have been extremely active in participating and attending all assembly sessions. Figure 28 reviews the overall performance of women in the NA, which includes attendance, number of committees with women chairpersons, number of bills, resolutions, CANs and motions presented.

¹³ http://www.na.gov.pk/uploads/publications/rules_procedure.pdf.

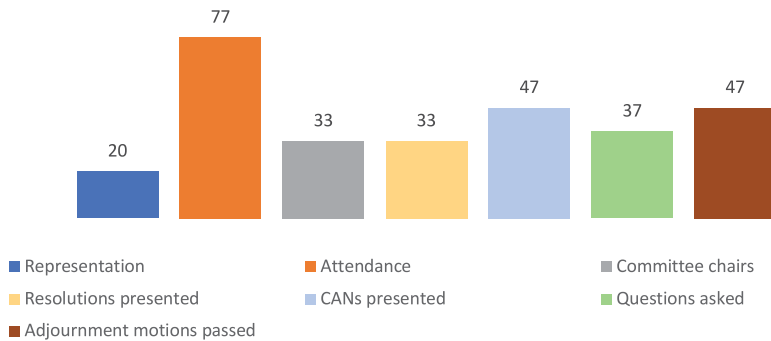
Figure 28. Summary of women legislators' performance in the National Assembly (percentage)



Provincial assemblies

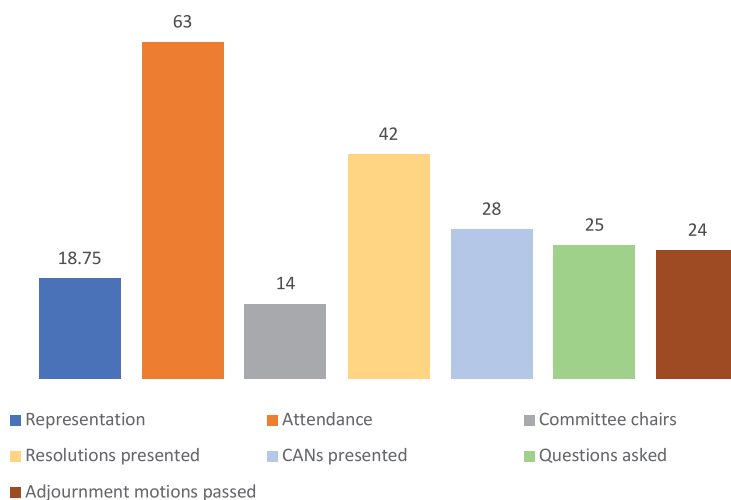
Accurate data could only be obtained for the assemblies of Punjab, Sindh and KP (Figures 29, 30 and 31). The graphs below do not depict Balochistan's performance in the first and second parliamentary years.

Figure 29. Summary of women legislators' performance in the Punjab Assembly (percentage)



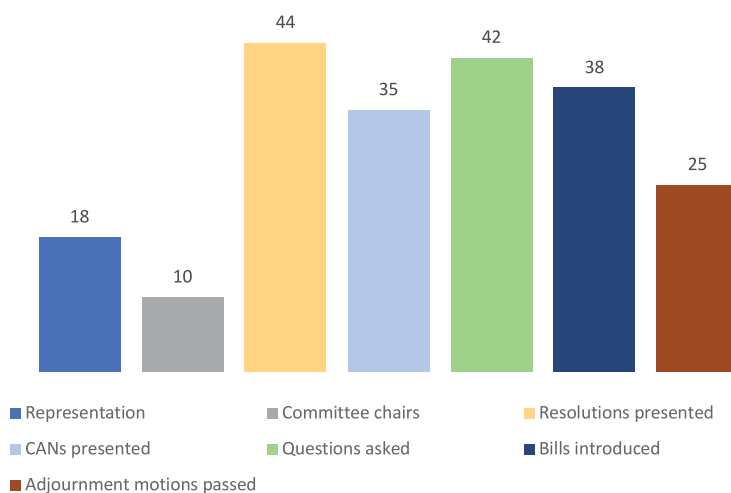
Women made up 18.75 percent of the KP Assembly. However, their attendance was at 63 percent, with legislators actively participating in presenting resolutions, CANs and asking questions.

Figure 30. Summary of women legislators' performance in the KP Assembly (percentage)



In Sindh, women represented 18 percent of the assembly, and were highly active in introducing bills, asking questions, presenting resolutions and CANs.

Figure 31. Summary of women legislators' performance in the Sindh Assembly (percentage)



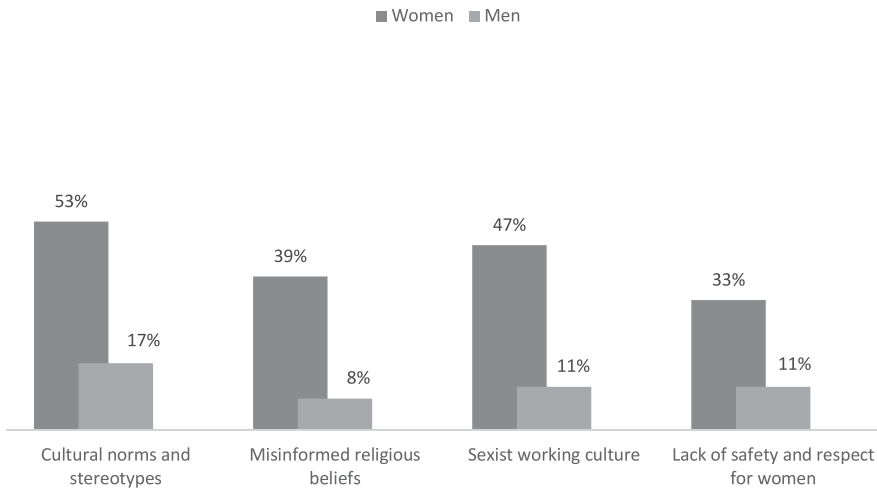
Barriers to effective legislation and oversight by women legislators

What prevents women’s full participation in politics and what impedes their role in contributing fully and effectively to legislation and oversight in assemblies across Pakistan? While women legislators are extremely active in their participation in the assemblies, they continue to face difficulties in the conduct of both functions as legislators.

The study provides an analysis (based on interviews with legislators and key stakeholders) of the main socio-cultural (Figure 32) and institutional barriers that hinder the ability of women legislators to perform their functions effectively. Some of these barriers include discriminatory social norms; bias within political parties and assemblies; resources for capacity building and insufficient research infrastructure and support for women legislators to pass legislation and conduct oversight.

Societal barriers

Figure 32. Societal barriers identified by women legislators during interviews.



Discriminatory social norms

Social norms were reported to be a key barrier to development of women legislators in Pakistan. These include negative attitudes and behaviours towards women in politics that result in discouraging many women from entering politics and prevent development of a gender-sensitive environment within political parties and the assemblies, serving as a barrier for women candidates as well as legislators.

Responses indicate that the issue of women’s political participation is not rooted in law. It is linked to the patriarchal mindset whereby, women are required to have the support or permission of males (fathers, brothers, uncles, husbands and sometimes *biradaris* or clans) for participation in politics. In the more conservative provinces such as KP and Balochistan, limited women’s political participation and social inferiority of women work as hindrances to women’s political growth.¹⁴ Several MPAs and members of the National Assembly (MNAs) reported to have faced active opposition from their families when they joined politics, since it is traditionally seen as a male domain and not suitable for ‘chaste’ women. Responses also indicate that families are reluctant for them to join politics for fear of being subjected to character assassination, media and public scrutiny. Young women in politics face increased societal challenges, especially at the local level. Responses from both male and women legislators further indicated that in general, women face public harassment on a regular basis.

¹⁴ M. Z. Zakar. (2014). *Strengthening women’s political participation and leadership for effective democratic governance in Pakistan*. Search for Common Ground Pakistan.

Biased media coverage

Representation of women leaders in traditional media is highlighted as an important obstacle to gender parity globally.¹⁵ Responses from a majority of MPAs and MNAs showed that media in Pakistan plays a major role in reinforcing discriminatory social norms towards women. The media portrays women negatively, scrutinizing them on the basis of their physical appearance rather than their position on issues and considering women on reserved seats insignificant in the political processes.

Male legislators on the other hand, felt that the mainstream media is equally discriminatory towards both men and women and that the media is a marketing tool which aims to create stories that would create the most noise, sparing no politician, male or female. One MPA also believed that men actually faced more discrimination than women on the media.

On the oath-taking day, some media persons asked me how much my bag cost. They asked another woman about how much time she took for getting ready in the morning and from where she gets her makeup done. We were offended by these questions because they were specifically targeting women. Why don't they ask men the same questions that they were asking women legislators?

Woman MPA, KP Assembly

Social media can be an effective tool for political outreach and legislators are increasingly using it to share their views. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram have transformed the way politicians interact with citizens, and vice versa.

On social media, people constantly harass women. I have been repeatedly harassed on these platforms and called all sorts of abusive slurs.

Female MNA from Punjab

Unfortunately, social media has also brought new risks for women parliamentarians. 10 female respondents shared that they had received insulting remarks and threats at multiple points throughout their political career. Women legislators report that harassment from the public has created a created a fear of social media and consequently, held them back in representing themselves effectively on social media platforms. Civil

society stakeholders confirmed that women legislators have been unable to use social media for mobilization and campaign purposes effectively.

Lack of an enabling environment

Many respondents felt that while the social environment in Pakistan may not pose serious challenge to women in politics, physical structural challenges like lack of bathrooms, car-park spaces for self-drivers, day-cares for women politicians who are mothers etc. are bigger challenges to efficient conduct of functions of legislation and oversight for women legislators.

70 percent of women are demotivated because of the restrictions placed by society on their mobility. Currently, there are no subsidized transportation facilities available for women to help them overcome these mobility barriers.

Female MPA from Sindh

Institutional barriers

Bias within political parties

Discrimination and gender stereotypes flow from society into political parties. MNAs and MPAs across the political spectrum find it difficult to gain access to leadership or decision-making positions, and felt they are subjected to greater scrutiny that requires they work harder than men to prove themselves.

¹⁵ https://www.womenpoliticalleaders.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Final_13012015_The-Female-Political-Career.pdf

Parties also hesitate to allot winnable seats in the general elections to women and instead, they are given tickets of those constituencies where the parties do not have a stronghold. All of the women interviewed for the study-many of them on reserved seats- had campaigned for their male colleagues

Political parties do not financially support women, and therefore they only allot tickets to women for those seats on which they know that the party will lose. This election also saw political parties allotting general seats to women in areas where the former knew they were going to lose.

Female MNA

at some point, and several of the campaigns were for high-profile candidates who ended up winning their constituencies. Women are usually taken on board for organizing campaigns and canvassing as they have the ability to approach the female populace and going door-to-door during electoral campaigns.¹⁶ However, they are rarely considered for party nominations to run for elections against general seats, even

though they felt confident of winning these seats on their own if parties supported them with opportunities and resources. Legislators argue that the electability of women candidates may not increase if they are not given the platform to contest elections.

Women only come into decision-making positions by accident

Female MNA

Barriers within assemblies

a. Challenges of reserved seats

Responses from female and male parliamentarians indicate that women on reserved seats are often discriminated against because they have not fought the general election and do not have a public mandate. Their status is diminished because many are seen as proxies or placeholders for their party or their families, and their main role is just seen to be holding on to power for their male leaders. 'Male colleagues derisively refer to them as *khairati* or 'charity' seat holders and assume they must follow party positions on all matters.'¹⁷

A negative aspect of the reserved seats is that you are not given the same preferences as the elected candidate, for example, if the local deputy commissioner of your constituency calls a meeting, he will only invite the elected representative and not the reserved seat one because they feel that you don't deserve to be there, since you have not fought the election, thus you don't have representation.

Female MPA from KP

The perspective that women on reserved seats are placeholders trying to follow party narrative is also shared by women who are elected through general elections. One MPA (general seat) felt that the women on reserved seats served as party supporters, who would often try to block bills from opposing parties by starting pointless or unconstructive debates. Responses from MNAs and MPAs (especially MPAs) stated that there is also a sense of animosity between women who are generally elected and the ones who are on reserved seats.

Women elected on general seats sometimes view women on reserved seats as being privileged and undeserving of their position in the assembly. Women on reserved seats on the other hand feel discriminated against by the Speaker who they feel give more time to male legislators and women elected on general seats. Legislators on reserved seats are also seated in the back rows, which means that there are lesser chances for them to participate in Assembly debates in comparison with legislators in the front.

b. Representation in key decision-making positions

Key decision-making positions are essential in developing the political skills of women legislators. Responses from key informants and interviews indicate that Assembly Rules do not provide for supporting women in key positions. Across assemblies, men hold leadership positions where, of the 34 standing committees in the National Assembly, only two have women chairpersons. Participants

¹⁶ M. Z. Zakar. (2014). *Strengthening women's political participation and leadership for effective democratic governance in Pakistan*. Search for Common Ground Pakistan.

¹⁷ A. Khan and S. Naqvi. (2018). *Women in politics: Gaining ground for progressive outcomes in Pakistan* (Working Paper 519). IDS.

in the focus group discussions indicated a decline in participation of women in decision-making positions in the PTI government in comparison with previous governments.

An MNA stated that visibility of women in leadership positions in the assemblies will serve as motivation for other women, aspiring to enter politics. It will also lead to making legislation gender-sensitive and gender-centric legislation. Moreover, key positions of ministers, chairpersons of committees, parliamentary secretaries, deputy speaker and speakers of assemblies apart from being a learning platform will help showcase women's skills and abilities.

c. Structural challenges

The study observes that structural challenges in the assemblies is one of the key barriers for legislators of both genders. One MPA expressed that she felt that there was a gender bias towards women, and they are given less time to speak on the floor in comparison to their male colleagues. Moreover, an MNA stated that women are not allowed to speak in the morning while the assembly is active, and are only granted a chance after 9 pm, when attendance and interest have both diminished. Women legislators felt excluded from important legislative matters due to their gender, demanding a provision in Rules that allocates a percentage of time for women to ask questions.

If five questions are supposed to be asked in the assembly, time should be divided as such that at least one question is asked by a woman legislator.

Female MPA from Sindh

Responses also indicate that due to the lack of gender balance that exists in the assemblies, women are just being used to complete the quorum. Women MPAs and MPAs both stated that the seating arrangement in the assemblies is flawed where Ministers and mostly men are seated in the front two rows, while the rest, especially women are seated at the back. This results in most of the time for speaking being taken up or allotted to the front rows, while the middle- and back-benchers are rarely heard. One MNA stated that women prepare speeches, but they never get an opportunity to speak as they are seated at the back.

The female MPA in question wanted to contribute her perspective on a specific water issue. However, the male legislators did not give her a platform to speak because they believed that since she is a woman, she won't know anything about water or land issues. When she reiterated that she is a landowner and is aware of the issues, the men did not believe her, because in their mind, women do not own properties and cannot be *zamindars*.

Key informant relates an experience narrated to him by a female MPA from the Punjab Assembly

One of the major structural barriers observed by respondents is the lack of authority granted to committees by the assemblies. Legislators state that according to assembly rules, committees are not granted *suo motu* powers,¹⁸ which means they cannot take initiative with regard to any relevant issue. Another major hindrance is that parliamentary secretaries cannot participate in legislative businesses (resolutions, CANs) as they are part of the Executive.¹⁹ The 2018 government has a massive representation of women legislators in all assemblies, many of whom have been selected as parliamentary secretaries, however structural flaws in the assembly system has limited their power.

Moreover, legislators feel irrelevant to budget making because of prioritization and finalization of budgets before it is brought to the floor for discussion. Adversarial politics also makes it difficult for legislators from both treasury and opposition to engage with bills. Members of the treasury do not have space to oppose government bills and members of opposition are not given time or space to oppose a bill meaningfully. Legislation by the government is also not shared with the MPAs ahead

¹⁸ The exception is the Punjab Assembly which introduced an amendment in 2020 that grants power to committees (see section on Rules of Procedure).

¹⁹ This is a problem regardless of gender. However, for women legislators, especially those on reserved seats, the role of a parliamentary secretary can serve as a great learning tool, but one which she cannot properly utilize due to structural constraints.

of time, which means that when the bill is brought to the floor, members may not be prepared with adequate research to raise pertinent questions on the bills.

While these structural flaws affect all legislators, for women they can be more problematic. For women legislators on reserved seats, positions as parliamentary secretaries and chairpersons of committees can serve as a learning platform; legislators demanded the system should be amended so that women legislators can participate more actively in parliamentary affairs.

d. Capacity-building

Several MPAs and MNAs (male and female) have critiqued the lack of a foundational political training for legislators upon entry and, limited capacity building opportunities during their terms. Assembly business is complicated and requires time and training to develop an understanding of complex processes such as legislative drafting, understanding the rules of procedure, lobbying and strategy for moving legislation.

Responses from MPAs indicated that at the provincial level, many assume that the duty of the MPA is to attend to local matters and not the policy making for the constituency that they represent. MPAs are also often unaware of their oversight function and their role to hold the government accountable for the people. Therefore, MPAs lack the necessary skills to perform their functions well.

There are no institutional mentorship programmes, no human resources, not everyone can read and understand legislation, and it's very technical. Not everyone can read the Rules of Business. Occasionally it is felt that the language is written in such a difficult manner that the ordinary citizen cannot read it.

Female MNA

Trainings conducted by the Pakistan Institute of Parliamentary Studies are seen as effective in building skills by many legislators. However, several parliamentarians (male and female) consider trainings rendered unproductive because the legislators do not take them seriously, and only attend them to mark their attendance. One MPA responded that trainings provided by organizations are not enough to develop the full gamut of skills required, and are often exclusive, i.e. only a handful of parliamentarians are selected by the assemblies to attend the

parliamentary training workshops and study programmes. Some legislators also found capacity building by civil society and UN organizations as agenda-driven rather than needs-driven. Many legislators felt that while the content of trainings is relevant, training methodology is ineffective and results in little value added to their legislative drafting or strategic communications skills.

Women legislators, especially those on reserved seats often have little or no experience of politics before they are inducted in assemblies, and felt that male legislators, even as new inductees, have more experience and confidence in conducting parliamentary affairs, due to their public exposure and engagement. Male legislators reiterated that even as new entrants in assemblies, they had prior experience with grassroots politics. Hence, women MPAs and MNAs have to work harder than their male colleagues to learn the legislative business.

In Pakistan, MPAs are seen in a more local role in the sense that they should also clean the *naalas*, and fix the traffic lights, resolve domestic issues.

Male MPA from Sindh Assembly

Mentoring by senior members who have served previous terms, is an important tool for imparting skills among new entrants in politics; they may have experience as professionals, but politics is a different skillset. Mentoring and capacity-building programmes should focus on developing leadership skills, interpersonal communication skills, research skills, oversight mechanisms and legislative drafting skills for improved conduct of parliamentary affairs.

e. Research support for legislators

Women legislators interviewed nearly unanimously cited research support to be essential to the business of legislature. One MNA stated that research helped in drafting bills, speeches, questions and other oversight tools, and that this is even more important for women because they have to be better prepared than men, in order to be taken seriously. MPAs complained of limited access to information, including a lack of digitized resources and translated documents. They found that their

There is a dire need for researchers and access to literature for legislators, which is currently not readily available. This limits legislators from being effective especially if they are less educated

Female MPA from Punjab Assembly

inability to access information on government performance or budget expenditures of the various departments impeded their ability to raise pertinent and important issues related to implementation of legislation.

It is through oversight that the parliament can hold the government accountable on behalf of the people, consequently ensuring that government policy and action are both efficient and commensurate with the

needs of the public. Legislators are not provided offices or administrative support to enable legislative drafting or conduct post-legislative scrutiny that would ensure efficient, speedy and cost-effective implementation of laws. Although limited resources are a hurdle regardless of gender, this is a bigger barrier for women legislators who have greater issues with mobility and, access to information and the public than their male colleagues. An MPA from Sindh stated that lack of research facilities created a lot of hurdles in implementing legislation.

Recommendations

Discussions with legislators and desk review indicate a challenging social environment, continuing institutional barriers in the form of lack of female leadership in parties and committees, need for gender-sensitivity in the policy framework and through the rules of procedure, and women not allocated winnable seats, instead being confined to reserved seats, with limited mandate. Recommendations in this section are meant to encourage greater participation of women in politics and to create a conducive environment for political growth of legislators.

Societal barriers: Challenging discriminatory social norms

The measures recommended below will support enhanced women's participation in politics by addressing discriminatory socio-cultural norms that enforce gender bias:

- Awareness of women's right to equality and public participation should be introduced early, as part of school curriculum to address negative stereotypes associated with women in public life.
- Educational campaigns in collaboration with civil society and women's caucuses can make a difference in reaching out to more women, especially in the more conservative regions. These campaigns aim to develop political knowledge of women, educating them on their political and social rights and responsibilities while also developing a political culture that encourages participation of women. If these campaigns succeed in promoting moderate religious messages, negating misconceptions about women's participation in politics, political parties might find it easier to field women candidates on general seats.
- An enabling environment requires supportive, gender-sensitive infrastructure. Public buildings and assemblies must include women-friendly facilities such as bathrooms, day-care centres and car parks. Easier, safe and reliable access to transport will increase mobility for women, enabling better participation in politics at local, provincial and national levels. Measures against harassment in public should be seriously enforced, so that women feel safe enough to actively participate in the public sphere.
- One of the first steps towards political participation is exercise of the right to vote, hence campaigns to remove societal and bureaucratic barriers (lack of national identity cards that give women an official record with the system) should be conducted.
- The media should highlight the role of women legislators and their parliamentary work by asking pertinent questions and increasing their presence on talk shows. Positive media portrayal of women will help improve the image of women politicians, allowing the public to view them as potential candidates for general seats. It will also encourage more women to come out and participate in politics.

Political parties and government should reduce the finances of the election campaigning, the costs should be reduced, there should be more incentives in the form of facilities and increased salaries so that more people are encouraged to join politics.

Male MPA from Sindh Assembly

Institutional barriers

Addressing bias within political parties

The Constitution of Pakistan reserves around 17 percent seats across all assemblies for women, whereas the Elections Act 2017 mandates a minimum of five percent representation of women candidates on general seats by political parties. Desk review and interviews with women legislators on general and reserved seats indicates unwillingness of political parties to field women candidates on winnable seats and they sometimes provide tickets in areas where the party does not have a stronghold, resulting in defeat of candidates there. Responses also indicate that there are limited opportunities for leadership positions inside the party.

Key recommendations to address bias within political parties include:

- Parties should allot more winnable tickets to women—approximately 10-15 percent.

- Parties should give more leadership positions internally to its women members.
- Parties should encourage women to participate in local government elections, and their proportion of seats should be further increased to 33 percent across all local governments. Local government is the foundation of a governance system and fundamental to deepening democratic values and system. It serves as a training ground or nursery for women politicians, especially those who come without any political clout or money. Previous local governments demonstrated the transition of women without any family background in politics and women from lower socio-economic strata from local to provincial and sometimes national legislatures.

Addressing barriers within the assemblies

- Remove discrimination against reserved seats by providing development funds and mandate to women’s reserved seats. This will enable greater political engagement with issues and constituents.
- Increase the number of general seats allotted to women to at least 15 percent. The Election Commission should move amendments to the Elections Act after bringing all stakeholders on board to increase the number of general seats allotted to women to at least 15 percent. Reserved seats should be retained until women start entering the assemblies on general seats in equal proportion to their male counterparts.
- Increase women’s representation in key decision-making positions including the cabinet as ministers and advisors, chairpersons of committees to 33 percent and appoint them as deputy speakers, and speakers of assemblies. Key decision-making positions are essential learning grounds for women legislators. Women’s presence in prominent roles can be increased through legal provisions or parliamentary tradition. Women members should collectively raise the demand for increase in representation, with active support from civil society activists. Improved representation in committees will not only increase their visibility and growth, but it will also improve the quality of legislation by drawing on networks with civil society organizations and experts who are not consulted otherwise.
- Introduce a provision in the Rules of Procedure providing that the chair and the deputy chair of each committee cannot be of the same gender.²⁰

Policy/legislative structure changes

There is an absence of a gender-sensitive legal framework that impedes the development of women legislators. The Assembly system, which is governed by Rules of Procedure, is critiqued for lack provisions for women as well as limiting powers of committees and Executive to participate in legislative matters.²¹ Gender-sensitive policies, procedures, rules and practices are the foundation of a non-discriminatory, gender friendly working culture and environment, which can increase substantive representation in practice by validating the views, perspectives and priorities of both women and men, whether serving as elected officials or as parliamentary staff.²²

Policy framework for gender sensitivity

- The Rules of Procedure should be amended to include gender-sensitive language, which includes differentiating between the male and women legislators by using the terms ‘him’ and ‘her’ respectively.
- A code of conduct should be developed to instil gender-sensitivity in parliamentarians’ behaviour.²³ This goes beyond prevention of harassment to promoting equity in parliamentary processes through implementation of the code and training to members as well as Assembly staff.

²⁰ <https://www.al.undp.org/content/albania/en/home/library/poverty/strengthening-womens-political-participation--an-analysis-of-the.html>

²¹ The limitation in powers is a problem faced by both male and women legislators.

²² <https://www.al.undp.org/content/albania/en/home/library/poverty/strengthening-womens-political-participation--an-analysis-of-the.html> (p. 8)

²³ Moldova established a Code of Conduct for Public Servants in 2008, which specifically outlined provisions relating to non-discriminatory behaviour and equal opportunities Article 4.1 of the Code requires public servants to behave in an impartial, non-discriminatory, fair manner without prioritizing certain individuals or groups on the basis of sex. The Moldovan Parliament also introduced induction training for all incoming parliamentarians, which included a module on gender-equality and specifically gender-responsive budgeting.

- Enhance the role of women’s caucuses in the legislative process. Caucuses are rarely endowed with power to initiate legislation but when given such a clout, like in Kosovo,²⁴ can play a significant role in legislative advocacy. Hence, women’s caucuses should be allowed to form a strategic voting bloc to influence legislative and policy formulation.²⁵

Rules of Procedure: Amendments for improved oversight

The Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business aim to equip the legislators with oversight tools to effectively hold the Executive responsible, on behalf of the citizens of Pakistan. While these rules are meant to be gender-agnostic, they can enable better women’s political participation by improving the following processes:

- Reduce the number of participants in matters of public interest to enable better quality of input.
- Grant suo motu powers to all committees at the national and provincial level to enable initiating inquiries and provide input in bills before or during presentation on the assembly floor.²⁶
- Permit individual members to ask questions on behalf of their constituents during Question Time.
- Permit and enable opposition and minor parties to initiate a committee of inquiry
- Provide for a system to monitor effectiveness of parliamentarians’ oversight
- Permit experts and interested public representatives in committees for support in oversight.²⁷
- Include a regular review of assemblies’ Rules of Procedure and parliamentary practices to ensure they support parliamentarians’ role and ability to conduct effective oversight.
- A special committee should be created that will ensure the review of the Rules of Procedure every three to five years.
- Institute oversight to ensure that the scope of privilege motions is strictly adhered to, in order to avoid wasting time on irrelevant matters, and enable raising of relevant issues.

Capacity building

Responses from key informants and parliamentarians showed that new legislators struggle to be part of the system. Often, they do not have knowledge of their core functions and responsibilities until much later in their terms. Measures below are recommended to strengthen capacity of legislators for oversight and legislation:

- Provide high quality and mandatory induction trainings for new legislators and continuous professional development for all legislators with a focus on Assembly business, communications, and lobbying skills, strategic oversight, etc. This will require strengthening the role of parliamentary education institutions like PIPS and also by enabling civil society organizations and think-tanks to engage with parliamentarians systematically.
- Communications training should be provided for effective media and public relations. These will help prepare women to effectively engage and influence target audiences and communicate messages in a concise manner.²⁸

²⁴ The Women’s Caucus of the Kosovo Assembly played a significant role in introducing gender-sensitive reforms to the assembly’s rules of procedure. The four amendments included the adoption of more gender-sensitive language in all assembly documents, the women’s caucus having the ability to propose a candidate for the Deputy President of the assembly, the chair and deputy chair being of different genders, as well as the composition of all committees should reflect the power of political parties and genders. The caucus also played a key role in the adoption of a legislated gender quota which required at least 30 percent representation of women on party lists. (UNDP)

²⁵ <https://www.al.undp.org/content/albania/en/home/library/poverty/strengthening-womens-political-participation--an-analysis-of-the.html>

²⁶ The Punjab Assembly is the only assembly that has recently amended this rule and has given its committees the power to conduct matters on their own.

²⁷ In Albania, a special sub-committee on gender equality and juvenile issues brought together national experts in gender-based violence, parliamentarians, and international organization representatives to discuss gender-based and domestic violence. This resulted in a set of recommendations on how to improve prevention of violence and protection of women rights through legislation and in practice.

²⁸ <https://www.al.undp.org/content/albania/en/home/library/poverty/strengthening-womens-political-participation--an-analysis-of-the.html>

- Social media has become a primary tool for public engagement. Women legislators should also be trained to use social media in a safe manner for increased public engagement and to ensure high visibility.
- Women legislators should be encouraged to develop niche expertise according to interest as it will help legislators on reserved seats to be taken more seriously.

Research support for legislators

- Research facilities are seriously under-developed across assemblies in Pakistan. Women legislators reported lack of research support as an important obstacle and demanded digitized information, data resources and information for effective legislation and oversight.
- Establish a technical gender research unit in the Assembly to support gender equality initiatives and mainstream gender equality in parliament's strategy, policies, and operations.
- Research and logistical support should be increased for legislators. The government should collaborate with political parties and civil society organizations for a substantive increase in research resources.
- Introduce e-legislatures like in KP to enable digitizing processes and resources. Strengthening the role of technology will improve access to research for legislation, oversight of implementation, and outreach to citizens
- Establish well-resourced libraries with digital and physical records. These should include a digital portal with information on budget allocations and expenditures (obtained from Finance departments and Ministry of Finance) and on the expenditure of funds available to MPs. Portal can initially be for members of the Committee on Finance and other parliamentarians but can later be made available to the general public.²⁹
- Provide staff, offices, researchers, and other support infrastructure to legislators for increased effectiveness and improved performance.

Networks and mentoring

- Legislators should have active networks among assemblies and be provided forums to exchange information, issues, and experiences. Effective avenues for networking include women's parliamentary caucuses and parliamentary committees on gender equality. Caucuses are important to push for legislation and oversight on social issues across parties. They also provide a forum for women to network and exchange information.³⁰
- Structured mentoring programmes or sessions for women legislators should be organized by the Women's Caucus of the Assembly. This mentoring would introduce new legislators to the written and unwritten, formal and informal, rules and procedures of the Parliament. The sessions will also enable faster learning and improved performance in shorter timeframes.³¹
- Cultivate linkages to gender equality advocates and experts outside the parliament for supporting parliamentarians in legislation and oversight.³² Communication with civil society must be regular and institutionalized. One way of engaging outside experts is through their representation in committees as co-opted members.

²⁹ <https://pildat.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/HowtobeanEffectiveLegislator.pdf>

³⁰ The Women's Parliamentary Caucus of Pakistan has played a significant role in influencing legislation on women's rights. Some of their achievements include the Amendment to Women in Distress and Detention Fund Act that provided mandatory financial and legal assistance to women in prisons, the Criminal Law (Second Amendment) Act for Acid Crimes and the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act.

³¹ In the UK a mentoring programme was launched in 2011, which aimed to build women's political skills, exposing them to parliamentary life and creating networks of aspiring and established women politicians.

³² In Burundi, the Association of Women Parliamentarians, with the support of IPU organized a consultative seminar on the problem of gender-based violence. The consultations included 100 stakeholders – from parliament, government ministries, human rights bodies, law enforcement agencies, civil society and the media.

Conclusion

Women play a vital role in Pakistan's assemblies in promoting legislative and policy frameworks that support gender equality. The study observes that, while women legislators fully participate and are committed to performing their parliamentary duties, legal and cultural factors hinder their performance and growth. Discriminatory social norms, a biased assembly system, limited research and financial support as well as limited capacity-building opportunities make it difficult for women parliamentarians to perform their functions of oversight and legislation effectively.

This study emphasizes that there is a dire need for affirmative action to boost women's political voice and enhance their role in parliamentary affairs. While it is true that once women join the parliament, they try to understand the system and learn from experience, it is also true that formal training and support from political parties and government organizations is required to enhance their participation and performance in legislative work.

Annex 1: List of respondents

<i>No</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Category</i>
1	Aasiya Riaz	KI
2	Ali Imran	KI
3	Samar Abbas	KI
4	Saud Sahibzada	KI
5	Khawar Mumtaz	CSO
6	Salman Abid	CSO
7	Irfan Mufti	CSO
8	Mumtaz Mughal	CSO
9	Sumiyya Yousaf	CSO
10	Tahira Habib	CSO
11	Sameena Nazir	CSO
12	Shazia Shaheen	CSO
13	Zia ur Rahman	CSO
14	Ali Pervaiz Malik	MNA (M)
15	Andleeb Abbas	MNA
16	Ghazala Saifi	MNA
17	Kanwal Shauzab	MNA
18	Noor Alam Khan	MNA (M)
19	Rahat Aman Ullah Bhatti	MNA (M)
20	Romina Khursheed Alam	MNA
21	Shaista Pervaiz	MNA
22	Shaza Fatima Khawaja	MNA
23	Syma Nadeem	MNA
24	Adeeba Hassan	MPA Sindh
25	Adeel Ahmed	MPA Sindh (M)
26	Asia Saleh Khattak	MPA KP
27	Asiya Asad	MPA KP
28	Ayesha Bano	MPA KP
29	Bilal Ghaffar	MPA Sindh (M)
30	Bushra Butt	MPA Punjab
31	Faiza Malik	Former MPA Punjab
32	Faiza Mushtaq	MPA Punjab
33	Hameeda Mian	MPA Punjab
34	Hasnain Mirza	MPA Sindh (M)
35	Heer Soho	MPA Sindh
36	Ishrat Ashraf	MPA Punjab
37	Mehmood Jaan	MPA KP (M)

<i>No</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Category</i>
38	Noreen Arif	MPA AJK
39	Omar Omari	MPA Sindh (M)
40	Rabia Azfar Nizami	MPA Sindh
41	Sadia Sohail Rana	MPA Punjab
42	Sadiqa Sahibdad	MPA Punjab
43	Samar Haroon Bilour	MPA KP
44	Shamsa Ali	MPA Punjab
45	Sidra Imran	MPA Sindh
46	Sumaira Ahmad	MPA Punjab
47	Tahia Noon	MPA Punjab
48	Uzma Kardar	MPA Punjab
49	Uswa Aftab	MPA Punjab
50	Arshad Mahmood	CSO Sialkot

Annex 2: Interview guide

Name

Age

Education

Marital status

General or reserved seat

Professional/work experience

Previous assembly terms: provincial and national

Party committee membership or executive positions in the party

Background information

Motivation

What motivated you to join politics? Family members in politics?

Time and expectations management

Has your immediate family supported your political career (parents, siblings, husband, in-laws)?

Are you able to strike a balance between family and political life (time and expectations)? Did you have to compromise your ambitions to do so?

Education, skills and experience

What education or skills background do women parliamentarians need to manage their parliamentary role well?

Barriers

Gender discrimination

Have you experienced gender discrimination as a woman politician?

If yes, specify:

- Public
- Media
- Male colleagues
- Party

Matrix				
To what extent do you think the factors below have an impact on women's parliamentary performance and prevent them from coming into politics?	Not at all	Minor	Fair	Significant
<i>Social-cultural barriers</i>				

Regressive and old cultural norms and stereotypes about women in society and in politics				
Misinformed religious beliefs/misinterpretation about women in society				
Discriminatory or sexist working culture in government, parliament, provincial legislature (office), harassment				
Lack of safety and respect for women in the political sphere				
<i>Institutional barriers</i>				
Absence of gender equality policies and legal regulatory framework (constitutional, election law) promoting women's participation				
Legal discrimination against women (Rules of Procedure or laws)				
Unwillingness of political parties to promote women in their ranks or in decision-making positions in assembly				
Biased media coverage of women				
Time commitment				
<i>Barriers related to tools, capacities and resources</i>				
Lack of solidarity among women				
Lack of financial resources for oversight and political mobilization (lack of offices, logistics, transportation, etc.)				
Lack of political education and knowledge of processes among women				
Lack of research support or library resources to access relevant information, language, etc.				

Constraints

Do/did you get an equal opportunity to speak up (CAN/question/resolution/motion) in parliamentary sessions? What/who has prevented you from speaking out?

How frequently do you take part in general parliamentary discussions or the budget process? (Very frequently, somewhat frequently, or rarely).

If no or low response, what are the two major hindrances that prevent you from participating? (Resources, skills, gender).

What are the key issues on which you raise your voice?

Enablers

How can you overcome the challenges mentioned to increase your participation in parliamentary work?

Conclusion: Any other comments/recommendations



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