



## Money, Politics and Gender Equality: An Analysis of Assets of Women Legislators in Pakistan (2002-13)

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### Abstract

*This paper studies the economic status of Women legislators through data from their assets submitted to the Election Commission of Pakistan from 2002-2013. The findings indicate that strong financial status is an important pre-requisite for successful entry into the politics. This study found that the majority of elected women belong to an elite class. It is also evident that the common Pakistani woman is still miles away from the corridors of power because she does not have sufficient economic resources to participate in politics.*

**Key Words:** Political institutions, financial resources, gender equality, economic status

### Introduction

Women have unequal opportunities to participate in the politics worldwide. In 2014, women had only 21.2 percent representation in the world while it was only 11.67 percent in 1995 (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2014). During the twenty-year period from 1975–1995, female representation increased only 0.7 percent, whereas, in the upper houses of the parliaments, a decline was observed (Balington & Karam, 2005). It is also argued that gender equality is not achievable in existing political structures without adopting some quota policy (Mansbridge, 2005). Furthermore, it has been suggested that women's inclusion in politics would carry something constructive to politics (Bacchi, 2006). Phillips (1995, p. 66) pointed out that due to having particular needs and concerns and male dominated political institutions could not address these adequately. There are evidences that women's presence can change the formal political norms and values, and such legislatures would, in fact, adopt more women-friendly policies and legislation (Wängnerud, 2009). Despite commendable efforts of the United Nations Organization and various affirmative measures adopted by states, gender equality in politics remained a Herculean task worldwide.

There are a number of factors that have a strong impact on women's low level of political representation. Women do not have equal access to the financial resources necessary and that is the reason that women are not considered strong candidates for elected office. It is argued that lack economic resources is a foremost impediments to women's participation in electoral politics (Brodie, 1991). One study (Barrow-Giles, 2005) has found that women face diverse monetary constraints at various stages of their political careers. One study concludes that a central condition for achieving gender equity in politics is resource mobilization (Baker, 2006).

Scholars have been studying the link of women economic status and gender equality for a long time. It is argued that political finance has a profound effect on the unequal participation and representation of both genders in the electoral processes of a country but the subject has rarely been discussed in Pakistan. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) published pioneering work on this issue. One chapter is still considered a foremost study to this field (Ballington 2003). In 2007, United Nations Development Program (UNDP) published a report on election financing and gender (UNDP, 2007) and another report was published

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by Women’s Environment and Development Organization on Women Candidates and Campaign Finance (WEDO 2011). Another relevant study is Campaign Finance and Gender Disparity (Maltbie 2011). A few other scholars have country-level research. One such study by Sachet (2011) indicated that women do not get equal financial support of the political parties and mostly male gets more financial support from political parties (p. 32). International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) published another report in 2014 (IDEA, 2014) and one of a chapter written by Ballington and Kahane on gender and political finance has discussed this important dimension of political finance and gender equality. This study found strong pieces of evidence that money is one of the most influential factors that determine women’s and men’s successful entry into electoral politics (Ballington & Kahane 2014: 303). Another study reviews, international experiences in the field after having fieldwork in Tunisia and Yemen (Ohman & Lintari 2015). In Pakistan, scholars have not focused on this important issue. It looks imperative to discuss this important gadget for achieving gender equality in politics.

The paper intends to explore the role of money in providing women and men equal opportunities for contesting elections for the national parliament. In Pakistan, women are allowed to contest elections for general seats, but they could not manage to win a considerable number of seats (See Figure 1). Taking into consideration the low level of women’s representation on general seats, it was considered appropriate to introduce gender quota in Pakistan to increase women’s numbers in the Parliament.

### Women’s Political Representation in Parliament of Pakistan

Women’s reserved seats have been part of the previous parliaments in Pakistan since its creation in 1947. Women are also allowed to contest elections for constituency seats. Different electoral arrangements thus have produced different types of legislators. There are three types of seats in which women can be elected; general seats, minorities’ seats but women reserved seats. It is interesting to study the performance and behavior of four types of legislators in a single parliament.

Women have been granted equal political rights, since the independence of Pakistan in 1947, however, their representation in the legislative and party level remained very low and therefore remained invisible as no substantive change occurred in the early period of independence. The Government of India Act 1935 introduced the gender quotas in the sub-continent and this colonial legacy was followed by Pakistan after independence. Pakistan opted to adopt reserved seat type, gender quotas. The provisions of women reserved seats were incorporated in the three constitutions of Pakistan of 1956, 1962, and 1973. The number of women seats were increased to twenty in 1985 by General Zia-UL-Haq.

This provision of the reserved seats lapsed in 1988. It is evident from Figure 1 that this significantly decreased women’ representation in the parliament. In 1990, women’s representation was just 0.8 percent and in the coming elections of 1993 and 1997, it remained 1.8 percent and 2.8 percent respectively (UNDP, 2005). It indicates that without the provision of gender quotas, women could not reach in the parliament in a significant number. It is evident from the data that only 113 women have been members of the Pakistani parliaments for fifty years since 1947–97 (Mumtaz, 1998).

General Pervez Musharraf on 21<sup>st</sup> August 2002, announced another Legal Framework Order (LFO). It brought back the provision of women reserved seats. This time, a substantive number of seats (60) were reserved for women in the National Assembly. This constitutional provision also increased women candidates in the 2002 elections. First time, the GEM (Gender Empowerment Measure) ranking of Pakistan was significantly improved. This development brought Pakistan to the 58<sup>th</sup> on the list of 102 countries, while it was on 100<sup>th</sup> in 1999 on the GEM index. After getting this standing, Pakistan came higher in ranking than some of the developed countries (UNDP, 2005). Pakistan has the highest percentage of women’s representation in South Asian region (IPU, 2011).

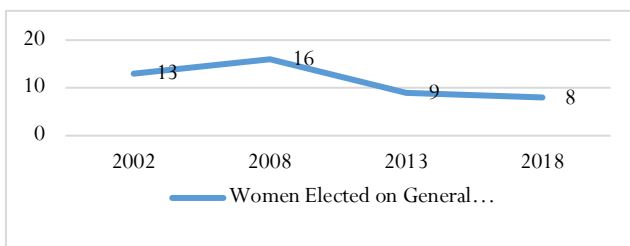


Figure 1: Women Elected on General Seats (2002-2018)  
Source: ECP, 2018

In the 2002 elections, a significant increase in number of women elected on general seats were observed. First time 13 women were elected a member of the National Assembly of Pakistan on general and in the next elections, 16 women were elected on general seats. It indicates that women were gaining more representation in legislatures but in next elections in 2013 only 9 women were able to be elected on general seats. Although in 2017, parliament passed the Elections Act 2017 that bounds political parties to ‘ensure at least five percent representation of women candidates’ (the Elections Act 2017) but that could not help more women to be elected on general seats as only 8 women could succeed on general seats. Women success on general seats has resemblance with the title of one book, “Women of Pakistan, Two Step Forward, and One Step Back” (Mumtaz & Shaheed 1987).

The Figure 1 demonstrates that in every next elections, number of contesting women candidates on general seats increased significantly, but it did not help more women to be elected in the National Assembly. It indicates that there is no direct connection between the number of women candidates and the number of elected women in the National Assembly. It is surprising that even adoption of five percent legislative quotas in 2017 elections, could not help them to win more seats. It is observed that political parties always award tickets to women in weak constituencies. It also supports the argument that only adoption of quota is not enough to curtail barriers to women’s political participation (Zatterberg, 2009). In the 12<sup>th</sup> National Assembly, 73 women became the member. In the 13<sup>th</sup> National Assembly, three more women were elected, which increased women’s representation to 22.2 percent. It indicates a decreasing trend that women lost six women members in the 14<sup>th</sup> National Assembly.

The development of democratic institutions in the country will remain a dream until women are allowed to be part of mainstream politics. Successive governments have taken special initiatives for the development and empowerment of women, however,

Authoritarian rule has stunted the growth of strong political institutions and the development of democratic culture in which there is a more active political participation of the people beyond the electoral process and where public representatives genuinely feel the need to reflect the interest of their constituents and held accountable by them (Zia and Bari, 1999, p. 49).

This paper reviews whether having gender quotas could help to reduce the role of money in the politics of Pakistan. As it is observed that finance is an important consideration in countries that do not have such type of quota policies (Ballington & Kahane 2014). Only money is not a factor that influences gender equality in the electoral process, but it has been found to be the dominant element in many countries of the world. This dimension of electoral politics has so far received slight consideration from the Pakistani perspective. First, it looks appropriate to have a clear view of the status of women in Pakistan. It will help to understand the significance of money in the politics of Pakistan and how Pakistani women have fewer economic resources and opportunities to contest elections.

### The Situation of Women in Pakistan

The constitution of Pakistan grants equal political and civil rights to women but unfortunately, they are scarcely equal to their male counterparts. Pakistan is placed in the group of Medium Human Development countries, with a Human Development Index (HDI) ranking of 136 out of 177 states.

**Table 1.** Gender Development Index (2017)

Gender Inequality Index (Ranking)	Share of seats in parliament (Percent)	Population with at least some secondary education (% ages 25and older)		Labour force participation rate (% ages 15 and older) 2017	
		Female 2010-17	Male 2010-17	Female	Male
		133	20.0	27.0	47.3

Source: UNDP, 2017

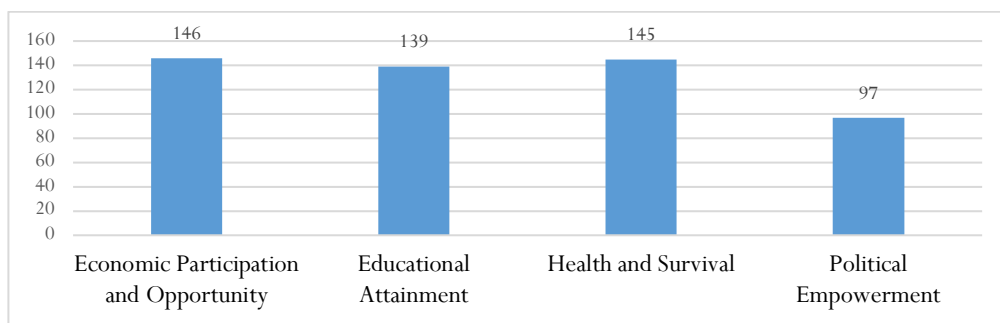
The above table indicates a noticeable disparity in male and female life expectancy, adult literacy rate and estimated income (in US \$). It is evident that there is a certain type of inequalities still existing in Pakistani society.

The ranking of Pakistan in the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) was 82 out of 93 countries (UNDP, 2008). The GEM quantitatively measures the empowerment of women in having power over earned financial resources and their share in political and economic decision-making (UNDP, 2008).

Even though during 2008–13, women have 22 percent representation in the National Assembly, but only two women were appointed as ministers in the federal cabinet. Additionally, Pakistan was at a low ranking among the UN registered countries in the Gender-Related Development Index (GRDI). Notably, the Global Gender Gap (GGG) reported Pakistan in the third position in the list of the world’s ten worst offenders. In the list of these ten countries, nine are Muslim-majority states. The GGI Index is based on four indicators: economic sharing, educational attainment, political empowerment, and health.

**Table 2.** Pakistan Gender Gap Index Ranking 2018 Source: UNDP, 2017

Gender Development Index		Human Development Index (HDI) (Value)		Life Expectancy At Birth (Year)		Expected years of Schooling Years		Estimated Gross National Income per capita (2011 PPP \$)	
Value	Group	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
0.750	5	0.465	0.620	67.7	65.6	7.8	9.3	1642	8786



**Figure 2:** Pakistan Gender Equality Ranking (2017)

Source: World Economic Forum, 2018

Under the ‘economic participants’ category, Pakistan is ranked 146; in ‘educational attainment’ it is ranked 139 and in ‘health’ it ranks 145. The only positive ranking for Pakistan is for the ‘political empowerment of women’ where it ranks 97 and this is directly attributed to the gender quota (World Economic Forum, 2018).

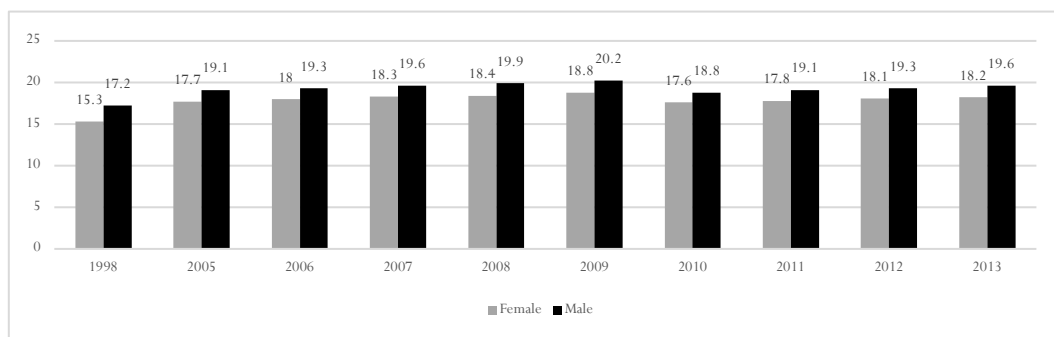
**Table 3.** Male and Female Population (1947–2013)

Year	Female (000)	Male (000)	Both Sexes (000)	Proportion of Females
1947	15,100	17,400	32,500	46.5
1951	15,593	18,147	33,740	46.2
1961	19,920	22,960	42,880	46.5
1972	30,476	34,833	65,309	46.7
1981	40,021	44,233	84,254	47.5
1998	63,478	68,874	132,352	48.0
2005	75,614	81,080	156,695	48.3
2006	77,344	82,859	160,203	48.3
2007	79,083	84,644	163,728	48.3
2008	80,834	86,437	167,271	48.3
2009	82,596	88,238	170,834	48.3

2010	83,753	89,755	173,509	48.3
2011	85,509	91,586	177,095	48.3
2012	87,279	93,431	180,711	48.3
2013	89,061	95,288	1,84,349	48.3

Source: *Compendium on Gender Statistics of Pakistan, 2014*

It is evident from Table 4 that the population of males and females has narrowed down from 1947 to 2009. It has been steady since 2005-09 (48.3 percent). The majority of women live in rural areas.



**Figure 3:** Urban Population by Gender (1998-2013)

Source: *Compendium of Gender Statistics of Pakistan, 2014*

There is a slight difference between male and female urban population. The above figure indicates a strong trend of migration from rural to urban areas that have increased the women population in urban areas. In 2009, a 50 percent increase has been observed. There are certain reasons for such a huge increase in urban areas. In cities, there are better opportunities for work, health, and education. Urban areas are considered more secure for women due to more liberal social values.



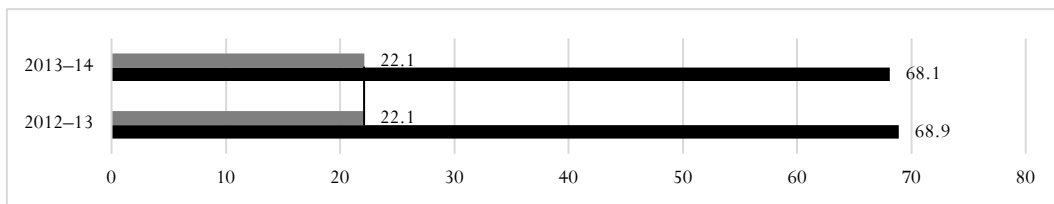
**Figure 4:** Male and Female Literacy Rate (10 Years and Above)

Source: *Compendium of Gender Statistics of Pakistan, 2014*

In urban areas, gender gaps in education are almost non-existent, but in rural areas, strong gender disparities still exist. Poverty, cultural constraints and supply-side inadequacies are the central cause of such type of gender disparity in education in rural areas. Many schools in rural areas lack infrastructure and appropriate facilities to run those schools in a proper way. Even many of them do not have compound walls, toilets, and clean water. Girls' enrollment is highly affected by these factors.

There are a number of constraints that restrict female participation in the economy, including non-acceptance of the credit of their role, women's immobility, unawareness about new economic prospects and

societal sensitivity of women as inferior status in the society. Now, there is an acceptance of a more public and active role of women that has opened the new doors for their economic empowerment. The low economic status of women is considered an important constraint to their political participation. The analysis of the economic status of elected female legislators revealed that strong economic status is imperative to winning the seats in elections.



**Figure 5:** Women Participation in the Labour Force

Source: *Compendium of Gender Statistics of Pakistan, 2014*

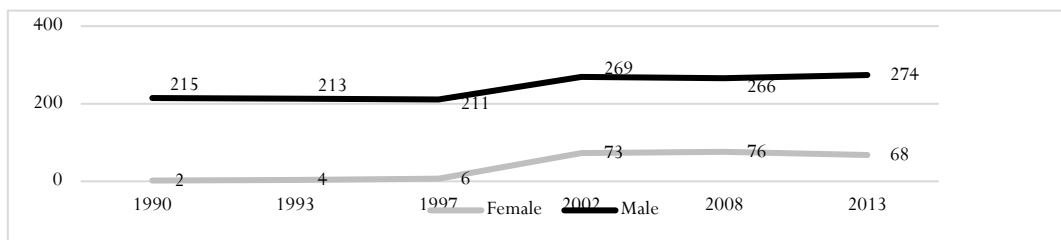
Women’s economic empowerment has been given less attention in Pakistan. Mostly, women are working in the labour force, but they have a nominal share in managerial posts. The unemployment rate is also higher for women than men. Women in Pakistan also have low share in registered voters. In the 2002 elections, there had been a difference of 5.6 million between male and female registered voters. It means there is a difference of 7.6 percent between and female registered voters on the electoral rolls. This difference has been 6.1 million in the 1997 elections. It indicates the slight improvement in the 2002 elections, but it might be due to the lower the age of voters to 18 years.

**Table 4:** Registered Voters (in Millions), 1985–2002

Year	Registered Voters			
	Total Voters	Male Voters	Female Voters	Difference (in millions)
1988	46.21	24.82	21.38	3.44
1990	47.06	25.38	21.70	3.68
1993	50.38	27.46	22.92	4.54
1997	55.07	30.60	24.47	6.13
2002	71.86	38.71	33.16	5.55
2013	86.19	48.59	37.60	10.99

Source: *Election Commission of Pakistan, 2014*

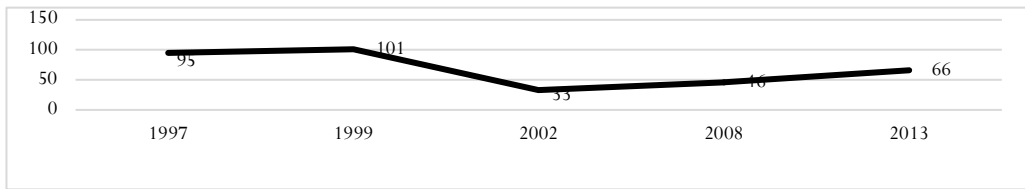
It is ironic that in every next election the difference between male and female registered voters has increased significantly. There are certain reasons for the under-registration of female voters. It is argued that cultural norms, illiteracy, lack of awareness about the electoral registration process, mobility restrictions are the major factors that restrict women registration as voters (UNDP, 2005, p. 12). It is also a common perception that fewer females cast their votes than males.



**Figure 6:** Elected Members of the National Assembly by Gender (1990–2014)

Source: *Compendium of Gender Statistics of Pakistan, 2014*

During from the period from 1990-1997, the absence women reserved led to their low representation. After the revival of provision of women reserved seats in 2002, women’s representation increased significantly in the National Assembly. It is First time that 73 women were elected as a member of the National Assembly. All these affirmative measured could only increase women’s representation to 21 percent.



**Figure 7:** Pakistan, Gender Empowerment Measure Ranking (1997–2013)

Source: UNDP, 2014

It is evident from Figure 6 that The Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) ranking of Pakistan has improved significantly after the adoption of gender quota in 2002. It has moved Pakistan from 101 positions to 33 positions in 2002 and at 46<sup>th</sup> position in 2008.

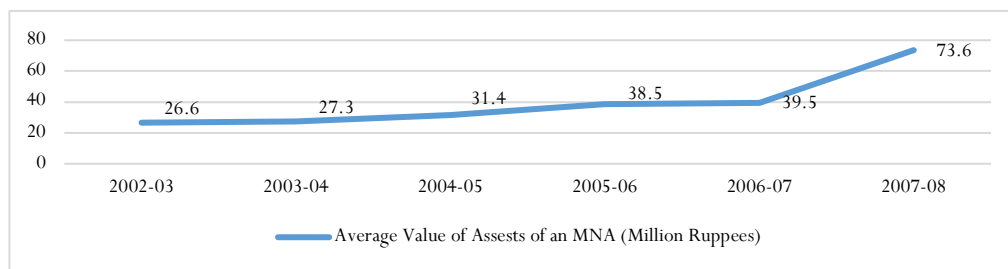
### Economic Status of Female Legislators

It is mandatory for all legislators to announce their financial properties. According to Section 42 (A) of the Representation of the People Act, 1976 and Section 25A of the Senate (Election) Act, 1975, every year, all elected legislators need to provide details of their properties and liabilities to the Election Commission of Pakistan. If any member does not submit the declarations, ECP can disqualify that elected members. The purpose of this exercise is to not only curb corruption, but also ensure transparency about the financial assets of the parliamentarians. Every member of the parliament has to submit a form duly filled. The form requires the following information: cash in hand; cash in the bank; bank account; jewelry; car; business capital within and outside the country; loans if any and total net value. The basic objective of this analysis of women’s financial situation is to know whether these elected women members of the parliament represent the women of Pakistan economically. Analysis of form submitted by women MNAs has shown that women parliamentarian was not serious in filling required information and considered it only a legal formality (Bilal, 2004).

Data for this analysis is based on reports published by the Election Commission of Pakistan and two other studies (Bilal, 2004; PILDAT, 2007; PILDAT, 2009). One study (Bilal, 2004) has pointed out that those women members did not provide correct information regarding their financial assets. These forms lack information in the correct manner and women members-only provided abstract information. One member declared that she has agricultural land that she got as inheritance, but did not disclose its worth (Noor Jahan Panazai). Another MNA declared that she has a house in a foreign country, but did not declare its exact location or its worth. One MNA declared that she got the house from her father of worth Rs. 30000000 but did not specify its location. Many of the members mentioned the word, but did not declare its location. It was argued,

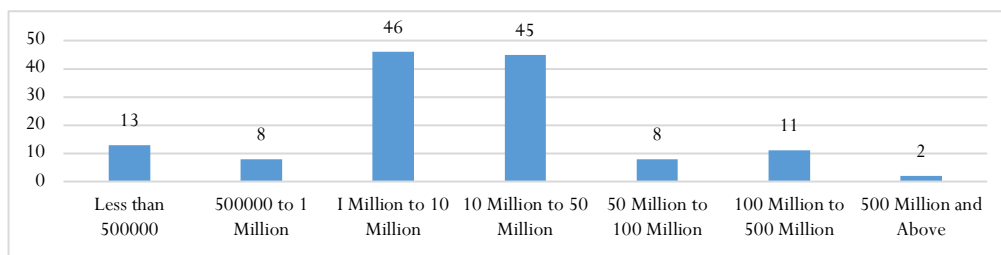
On average, they are financially comfortable. Although some are more comfortable than others, none of them are financially destitute and so at first glance, one can raise the question in financial terms. Do these women really represent the [common] Pakistani women? (Bilal, 2004, p. 32).

Another study entitled, ‘How Rich is Pakistani MNAs: Key Points from the Analysis of the Declaration of Assets Submitted by MNAs for the Years 2002-2003 to 2005-2006’ provided detailed information about assets of all MNAs including women (PILDAT, 2007). This analysis has made it clear that economically these women members represent elite class and an ordinary Pakistani woman is still away from the seats of power. During the interviews, it was also observed that the majority of elected MNAs were living in big houses, situated in big cities. The location of the house and inside environment told a lot about the financial status of these women. It is obvious that ordinary women of Pakistan, having limited resources, cannot be part of such type of political culture. It also indicates that without having sufficient financial resources, an ordinary woman could not become a member of the parliament.



**Figure 8:** Average Value of Assets of an MNA (2002-08)  
 Source: PILDAT, 2009

Figure 8 clearly indicates that in every year's assets of elected legislators have been increasing at a rapid pace. From 2002 to 2007, there has been a steady increase, but in the year 2007-2008, there has been a massive increase in assets. During the period of 2007-18, Nuzhat Sadiq with assets worth 1.514 Million was the richest woman legislator (PILDAT, 2009). Fair and Free Election Network (FAFEN) (2013) compiled the data available on the election nomination form V in which candidates declared their assets. This study reviews the assets declared by women elected to reserve seats. This paper surveys, the data from the 12th, 13th and 14th National Assemblies of Pakistan. In these three assemblies, women from various political parties, including PMLQ, PMLN, PPP, PTI, MQM, Religious Parties, and ANP were present. This analysis has found strong shreds of evidence that women legislators of Pakistan Muslim League (Q) and Pakistan Muslim League were considerably richer than women legislators of other parties.



**Figure 9:** Analysis of Worth of Assets of Women Elected on Reserved Seats (2002-13)  
 Source: FAFEN, 2013, PILDAT, 2007 and 2009

It is evident from Figure 8 that 46 of women legislators have assets worth between Rs. 10-50 million, and 45 the second-largest group has assets worth between Rs. 1-10 million. In these two categories, the majority belongs to Pakistan Muslim League (N) or Pakistan Muslim League PML (Q). The majority of members of followers and members of these parties belong to industrialists and business owners and it is evident from the value of the net worth of the assets of the elected women MNAs of these parties.

It is also that 13 women legislators have declared a total net worth of less than Rs. 500,000. Of these members, three belong to PPP and 3 to religious parties. The economic status of women legislators also reflection of the political party constituencies. Although, PTI has a lesser sample size, but this party claim to be the party of educated youth and the middle class. Pakistan People's Party always assets to be the party of the poor and the only party that tries to give representation across the socioeconomic scale.

Statistics about the economies status of elected MNAs indicates that political parties extremely exclude the lower and lower-middle-class women representation in the parliament. The leadership of political parties has exclusive control over the woman's nomination on reserve seats and only women from the feudal and elite class are provided opportunities. It indicates that elected women on reserve seats do not represent the majority of the country's female population.



## **Conclusion**

The study has found that only women from the feudal class or having a strong family background have been awarded the tickets for general seats as well as on women reserved seats. Mostly, party workers were neglected and they were given a very small share and even on those few seats, political parties do not show any enthusiasm to help women to win the elections. Many political parties do not award tickets to women on general seats especially religious parties.

It is clear from the analysis that personal influence, family background, and relationship with party leadership played a key role in woman's nomination general and reserved seats. The majority of these nominated women had not been a very active worker. The member of the women's wings of the different political parties' complained that the selection procedure was biased and non-transparent. Party leadership did not consult women's branches in the selection process. Another serious problem has been the absence of rural women in the Parliament as the majority of female legislators came from urban areas. It was perceived that quota women were obliged to follow their respective party lines. The indirect mode of the election also puts these women at the mercy of male members. This prevents women from taking an independent stance across the parties, even on women's issues.

The paper finds clear evidences that the economic status and family background of a woman play a key role for her successful entry into politics of Pakistan. All women elected on general seats have strong financial status and belong to upper class families. In rural areas, women candidates were selected from feudal families. Only a small number of women from middle class were accommodated on reserved seats. These women had a long association with political parties as members of the women's wings. The available data have confirmed that women legislators do not represent a common Pakistan woman. It also indicates another problem that issues of common Pakistani women are rarely discussed in the Parliament of Pakistan because elected legislators come from elite class who do not have an understanding and familiarity with the problems of poor women in rural areas. It is suggested to bring middle class women into the Parliament of Pakistan for more frequent dialogue on collective problems of women. Until, political parties do not support and encourage middle class women to participate in the political process, many gender issues will remain unsolved.

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