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## Women's Political Participation during Bhutto Regime 1971-1977

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### ABSTRACT

The paper examines Pakistan's historical and current trends in female participation in politics by analyzing Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's Islamic socialist philosophy and the PPP's new strategies in government (1971–1977). It investigates Bhutto's policies, including the formation of the PPP's women's wing, seats reserved for women, and labor reforms, which sought to assimilate women into the political sphere and focused to address gender disparities. The study contextualizes these efforts within the socio-political hindrances of the time, plus cultural conservatism and systemic discrimination, and things to see the role of figures like Begum Nusrat Bhutto in the empowerment of women. The research also aims to link these historical initiatives to modern opportunities put forwarding by digital technologies, analyzing how emerging platforms can supersede systemic challenges, bridge rural-urban divisions, and forgo wide-ranging political participation. It argues that leveraging technology for political awareness, education, and networking can expand out the legacy of Bhutto-era reforms. The study underscores the importance of digital platforms while focusing obstructions such as lack of information, safety issues, and limited access to resources, ultimately advancing gender equity in politics. By employing a secondary method of data collection, historical records and scholarly articles alongside reports serve as the foundation of this research to deliver a thorough analysis of women's political progression in Pakistan while exploring current direction possibilities. The findings encompass the importance of assimilating historical precedents with innovative solutions to studies considering maintainable and inclusive political development.

**Key Words:** Women's Participation, Gender, Political, Bhutto's Regime

### Introduction

After the segregation of East Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh in 1971, Pakistan experienced a period of substantial political and social turmoil. The loss of its eastern wing left the country in a state of surprise and confusion. The political scenario was characterized by a need to reconstruct national identity and address the wounds of the civil war. During this time, women's political participation originated to gain attention, with struggles to include women in the

political process becoming more noticeable. After the 1971 national crisis ended Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto showed his route to power. Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto created the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) during 1967 to fulfill his objective of Islamic socialism. Bhutto's charismatic leadership and his ability to build a "New Pakistan" boomed with the crowds. Under his leadership, the PPP created a women's wing, which played a remarkable role in mobilizing female political involvement. This period saw a massive involvement of women in politics, including figures like Begum Nusrat Bhutto making efforts to empower women within the party and outside (Shahzad, Rehman, & Inayat, 2022). During the Bhutto regime, several plans were beginning to empower women politically. The PPP's women's wing played a vital role in organizing female voters and motivating their participation in the political process. This period also witnessed the employment of women to key positions within the party and government, which aided in breaking old-fashioned gender barriers and set a pathway for future female political leaders in Pakistan (Shami, 2009).

Political participation among women stands at the forefront during the remains of the millennium. Multiple research projects and theory-based and logical analysis promote female political participation. World leaders now recognize without objection the crucial role women play in political systems. Today we find this settlement clearly documented through multiple international agreements that ensure political parity for women in elected positions. The Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) through Article 7 asserts state parties must establish adequate actions to eliminate women's political and public life discrimination (CEDAW). According to records Pakistan is among the 15 countries worldwide where women have served as prime ministers or presidents alongside 190 countries in total (Bari, 2009). Women gained both electoral rights and representation in Pakistan immediately after the country achieved independence in 1947. The right to vote remains safeguarded by each successive constitutional authority since 1947. During the 1970 elections the PPP presented manifesto points to achieve societal equality through female prestige parity with men. At that moment women put great hope into Bhutto's regime because of his politics towards female equality. Several rights-based groups lobbied to include protections for their privileges and rights in the Constitutional draft during 1972 and 1973. On April 15, 1972 Begum Nasim Jahan addressed the assembly regarding interim constitutional enactment stressing out that 48.7 percent Pakistani women faced mistreatment and stereotype as "Western" by both inside and outside the parliament gallery. She examined constitutional history to determine that women held a position inferior to male citizenship rights within their Islamic nation (Khan, 2023).

Women faced obstacles when they entered Pakistan's political domain soon after the country gained independence in 1947. Even as political systems gave women voting privileges and representation opportunities they still maintained minimal involvement in political operations. The early years witnessed only a few women in the political zone, including figures like Begum Shaista Suhrawardy and

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Begum Jahanara Shahnawaz making noteworthy achievements. Women achieved minimal political representation despite multiple attempts to improve their standing yet many of their activities remained restricted by their male counterparts. Society and multiple obstacles in Pakistan halted the political development of women in the country. Traditional gender roles alongside cultural norms create barriers which restrict what public activities women can participate in. Lack of educational opportunities and economic rights further diminished women's value thus creating barriers to their political inclusion. Men dominated the political space while female political contributors received discrimination and social conflict from institutional structures and public society. (Gul, 2020).

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto established his vision for women by drawing directly from his socialist principles and commitment to social equality. His vision incorporated equality beliefs while attempting to construct an all-inclusive community that recognized women as active nation builders. Bhutto created policies to enable women by providing them access to educational and employment opportunities alongside political engagement. The government made substantial steps to limit female political involvement while recognizing their ability to support national development (Allauddin, Alizai, & Rind, 2020). Bhutto's socialist ideology had sympathetic implications for gender equity in Pakistan. Through institutional reforms his administration pursued women's rights while tackling male-female inequality. Female political engagement experienced important stimulation through the women's wing establishment within the Pakistan People's Party (PPP). Bhutto's policies also concentrated on improving women's right of entry to education and healthcare, which were necessitating for their empowerment. These struggles laid the foundation for an advanced equitable society and set an example for future governments to stay working towards gender equality (Technology, 2013).

### **Literature Review**

Through his research Awan examines various elements that impacted Pakistan women's public participation in politics throughout history. The article examines the historical, political, and socio-cultural dynamics that have formed the political scenery for women in the country, with a focus on how these forces have either assisted or delayed their active participation in the political process. Awan's article be responsible for a detailed historical and political analysis of the factors that have marked the political participation of women in Pakistan. His arguments underline the tension between legal reforms and cultural obscurantism, the challenges imposed by military regimes, and the lasting struggles by women to carve out seats for political action. Awan's analysis finds support in wider studies about women's political growth which contains both developments and declines in Pakistani political powers. Female political engagement in Pakistan emerged from distinguished policies and social movement activity as well as established

patriarchal barriers and Awan provides critical perspective into this multifaceted history. (Awan, 2016).

A research paper offers an in-depth analysis of the growing role of women in Pakistan's political arena. The article inspects the socio-political dynamics that have formed women's engagement in politics from the pre-independence period through the post-independence periods. Syed's work is crucial in comprehending the coming together of gender, politics, and society in Pakistan, stress the legal, cultural, and institutional barriers to women's full involvement in political life. The research of Syed expands our understanding of women's political experiences in Pakistan while aligning with modern literary investigations exploring the divide between law reforms and women's practical political capabilities. (Syed & Tabassum, 2014).

A book deals a comprehensive analysis of the complicate and multilayered position of women in Pakistan. Through a thorough examination of socio-cultural, political, and legal factors, she discovers the ways in which women's rights, roles, and status have been shaped by both historical and modern forces. The book delves into the intersectionality of gender with social norms, laws, and political structures, demonstrating how these domains motivated women's everyday lives and their capability to access opportunities in various spheres. The author precises the key themes and underlines its contributions to the academic discourse on gender studies in Pakistan, while also engaging it in the broader context of existing literature. Also it contributes meaningfully to gender studies in South Asia, offering critical insights into how socio-cultural and legal frameworks continue to effect women's lives in Pakistan (Tabassum, 2016).

Farzana Bari's (2009) work ponders a thorough analysis of the complex realities of women's political participation in Pakistan during 2002-2007, concentrating on both the opportunities and limitations faced by women parliamentarians. While the quota system permitted for greater descriptive representation. Bari's analysis reveals that the substantive impact of women in Parliament endured restriction. The patronage-based system, along with deeply ingrained patriarchal structures, intended that many women parliamentarians lacked the political independence and institutional power necessary to push for meaningful gender-sensitive reforms. Through her research Bari extends discussions about gender quotas while advocating for revolutionary structural reforms which empower female politicians to overcome traditional gendered systems in political leadership. The document provides an inclusive examination of women's political engagement, emphasizing the historical and structural barriers that have downgraded women in political arenas. It evaluates the mainstream development paradigms that maintain gender disparities, arguing that simple participation in development processes does not guarantee women's empowerment or equality. The paper highlights the demands for a critical analysis of the gendered nature of democracy and development, which often removes women from citizenship and political engagement. It argues the dual arguments for women's enclosure in politics: the human rights perspective advocating for equal

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representation and the instrumentalist view proposing that women's unique experiences and values can improve political homily. The document calls for an allowing environment that addresses the socio-economic and political limitations faced by women, recommending policy measures to constricted the femininity gap in education, health, and employment. It underlines the significance of research and documentation of successful initiatives to promote women's political empowerment, finally advocating for a systemic change in both national and international frameworks to achieve gender equality in governance and development processes (Bari, 2005).

This study focuses the multi-layered challenges and barriers experienced by women in Pakistan's political landscape, mainly regarding their contribution in the electoral process. Research specifies that ingrained gender biases, cultural norms, and institutional hindrances significantly deter women's political engagement (Shafiq, Arshad, & Riaz, 2024). Study by (Gruber & al., 2021) explore the relationship between political empowerment and women's psychological well-being, finding that engagement in political processes is related to improved self-esteem and concentrated feelings of powerlessness (Irshad, Riaz, Mahmood, & Akram, 2023). The research investigates how women political elites use their positions to create policies which enhance social and psychological empowerment while exploring the obstacles they encounter alongside systemic gender biases along with patriarchal beliefs. Furthermore, (Shakil, Akram, Sultan, Aqeel, & Ayub, 2023) underscores the psychological and economic measurements of these trials, noting that women in politics often encounter significant stressors that impacts their mental health. Research demonstrates how passing new laws must occur together with women's increase in political leadership positions to create policies which respond to gender needs. The proposal demands complete support for women's empowerment through combinations of law-based and sociological and economical practices while requiring public agencies and non-governmental entities to work together strategically for establishing an integrated system that helps women participate deeply in democracy and abolishes gender discrimination in Pakistan.

Research on women's political participation in Pakistan does not examine how new technology platforms work together to empower women politically. New investigations explore patriarchal systems and legal changes while adopting quota systems to study women's political activism but research concerning the digital transformation of women's political engagement across social media platforms remains limited. The effects of digital literacy and online activism on giving women political and social influence have received insufficient research attention despite analyses of psychological and economic aspects of women's political engagement. This research gap demonstrates its importance in present-day digital society because technology centralizes democratic functions and political activities while necessitating comprehensive study to develop digital solutions that advance national women's political engagement.

## **Research Objectives**

- The research examines the effects that Bhutto's reform implementations had on enhancing women's membership in Pakistan's political system.
- The investigation examines both the PPP women's wing role in political mobilization and integration of women throughout 1971–1977.
- The research evaluates the political barriers facing women during Bhutto's government coupled with methods for eliminating these hurdles.
- The examination includes a study of how digital platforms contribute to overpowering fundamental structural barriers that block Pakistani women from political participation.
- This study explores how Bhutto's initiatives can link with current digital opportunities to achieve full political engagement contributions of the PPP women's wing in mobilizing and integrating women into politics during 1971–1977.

## **Research Questions**

- Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's political ideology together with legislative reforms during 1971–1977 influenced how women joined the political life of Pakistan.
- What level of effectiveness characterized the women's wing of the Pakistan People's Party to activate female engagement in political processes over this period?
- The existing technological innovation and digital platforms should adapt systemic obstacles to girls' political involvement in Pakistan to replicate approaches from Bhutto's administration for women empowerment political engagement during this period?

## **Analysis**

Islamic societal beliefs. Economic justice formed part of the framework which strived to fix social inequalities through female empowerment. Under Bhutto's leadership his government worked to advance women's standing through various new reforms for society. Economic independence received heavy emphasis through his government because Bhutto believed that economic independence would foster women's empowerment. The policies introduced by Bhutto aimed at both confronting gender role traditions while driving women toward prominent roles in national public service. The implementation of these reforms encountered powerful difficulties. Religious and cultural conservative forces regularly postponed progress toward female empowerment programs. The complications did not slow Bhutto's commitment to women's rights which established foundations for future progress. His revolutionary decisions to introduce women into political structure along with economic positions during his administration remained

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leading among his time until succeeding politicians expanded these efforts (Azeem, 2020)

During Bhutto's term multiple policy transitions emerged that aimed to boost women's presence in politics. The major reform under Bhutto's government brought reserved positions to women in local government bodies. The policy introduced reserved seats for women in order to establish their political voice in addition to their ability to shape local decisions. Not only did Bhutto's administration promote workplace labor reforms to protect women's rights but it also promised expanded female presence throughout the public sphere. Despite these initiatives the effects of these implementations varied widely. The reserved seat policy led to higher local government participation for women yet it did not establish meaningful political power opportunities for them. The newly elected women faced stiff resistance from male colleagues who simultaneously treated them as lower priority members during collaborative decision-making processes. (Siddiqui, 2020). These policies served as key movements which built women's political participation and pushed forward the need for sustained gender equality initiatives in politics.

Women's rights history created by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto takes an intricate spectrum of diverse expressions. His political initiatives established structural base from which women developed stronger roles in society. The widespread support Bhutto gave to educated women's economic freedom became a founding principle that later politicians such as his daughter Benazir Bhutto built upon. Once she became Prime Minister of Pakistan Benazir Bhutto used principles derived from her father Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's political lifetime to both maintain her public role and auspiciously progress women's rights. During his rule Bhutto demonstrated how implementing progressive policies proved difficult because of the traditional values that characterized the nation. Women encountered strong resistance throughout his political rule because his administration mirrored the prevailing cultural and religious constraints which limited women's equality. Bhutto's progressive ideas about empowering women endured as an essential element of his historical impact while inspiring Pakistan's fight against gender inequality. (Syed S. A., 2023).

The Pakistan People's Party launched a female caucus composed of members who wanted to strengthen women through political engagement and strengthen their role within Pakistan's political environment. The party initiated this movement because both social justice and gender equality were important to their worldview which clarifies the overall vision of the PPP. By design the women's wing established itself to build an area where women could freely express their worries while fully taking part in political activities. This initiative rejected conventional gender norms to defend Pakistani women's rights throughout a society dominated by male authority. As the PPP began recognizing the need to confront women's priorities through unique organization during the early 1970s they established their women's wing. This decision formed as a result of two factors: the transnational movement for women's liberation and the awareness

growth regarding women's rights political recognition. Through its female wing the party achieved two major goals: mainstreaming women from various social backgrounds into community organizing while maintaining support for equality initiatives. (Shahzad, Rehman, & Inayat, 2022).

Through extensive grassroots mobilization the women's wing of the PPP worked to educate rural and urban women about their political rights. To educate women about political engagement and boost their involvement the wing conducted rallies and seminars and organized workshops. The targeted efforts wanted to dismantle obstacles stopping women from political participation while establishing mechanisms for hearing their individual voices (Hanif, 2009) Through their political work the women's department worked together with government to focus on securing plans that protected women's rights and achieved gender equality. Women's organizations together with civil society groups cooperated actively with the wing to secure legislative plans favorable to women's interests. The party worked to establish both reserved seats in local government positions and full inclusion of gender issues in their political platform. During the period from 1971 to 1977, the PPP women's wing acquired some significant milestones in promoting women's political integration. Thanks to the reserved seats policy women obtained improved participation opportunities within local government institutions. Through this policy women gained political voice to actively participate in decisions made at the basic governance level. Through their advocacy work the women's wing secured workplace reforms that established women's rights benefits thus enabling improved public sphere engagement. (<https://new.ppp.org.pk/party-structure/>) The path to political acceptance for women suffered various obstacles along the way. Traditional social forces strongly defended their opposition against female participation in political processes which directly impacted the women's wing of the party. After securing positions in local government the majority of female representatives encountered blatant disrespect and subsequent refusal of participation in major decision-making roles. Despite resistance and multiple obstacles the PPP women's wing maintained its dedication to gender equality and advocated to develop broader political representation for women throughout Pakistan.

Emerging technologies and digital platforms have the prospective to build on historical initiatives like those of the Bhutto regime to empower women in Pakistan. Bhutto's policies laid the groundwork for women's political participation by emphasizing education and economic independence. Digital platforms serve today to amplify gender equality outreach because they offer women educational sources and networking possibilities. The delivery of online educational programs and digital literacy visions provides women the required abilities to participate in political activities through their development of essential skills. (Akram, 2023). These platforms simplify knowledge exchange among women while creating virtual communities which seek collective political engagement. Assuming women in remote locations have access to similar opportunities as those in cities digital platforms create opportunities to unite urban women with rural women. Political



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awareness and education programs delivered by mobile devices reach women across rural regions thus enabling them to grasp their rights while motivating their political involvement (Zaman, 2019). Modern technology will help us expand upon Bhutto's historic achievements to ensure Pakistan's women have comprehensive political rights.

Technology plays a fundamental role in helping Pakistan break past historical barriers from socio-political hindrances which slowed down women's political participation. Women experience their main obstacle from the fact that they do not have enough access to information combined with limited available resources. Digital platforms solve this issue through their ability to provide unlimited political content about processes and policies and candidate details to women seeking access.

(Masood, 2023)The specific power of social media enables users to boost awareness of important issues as well as engage female participants in political activism activities. Through online communities combined with networks women can both exchange information and provide mutual support and advocate for their rights. Through technological solutions we can manage barriers to women's political empowerment which stem from safety and security issues. Online platforms create risk-free spaces which allow women to take part in political discussions and activities while remaining protected from harassment and violence (2023). The tracking of gender-based violence through digital tools serves two productive purposes: it allows us to identify offenders while simultaneously developing safer spaces for women in Pakistan. Thanks to technological resources we should break past traditional barriers that prevented women from engaging in Pakistan's political system.

The Bhutto regime's dedication to female empowerment during its rule creates essential directions about using technology for improved female political involvement in digital times. Through digital education and economic training programs Bhutto's focus on women's education and independence works as a foundation to expand opportunities within the digital realm. (Awan T. M., 2024). The programs provide important educational content to help women grow their political abilities for leadership and participation. Digital platforms serve as a platform for women to establish collaboration networks that build a community of action. Modern technology allows the extension of Bhutto's political inclusion programs through the creation of wide-ranging and equitable political systems which benefit women. The combination of online voting platforms and digital tools enables effortless election participation for women and enables effective discrimination and gender-based violence monitoring and reporting systems (2024).

## **Conclusion**

The political engagement status of women received major historical influence from Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's combination of Islamic socialism during his rule in

Pakistan. Through educational reform and the provision of economic autonomy and political representation Bhutto set up a challenge to established gender conventions in traditional society. Through the establishment of advocacy channels the women's wing of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) fostered political institutional progress for their ground-level activists. Systemic challenges and cultural resistance did not stop these initiatives from carving out social spaces for women to become engaged in politics. Through his vision Bhutto strived to direct women's inclusion beyond typical gender equality efforts into the creation of a balanced society where women could legitimately contribute their voices to national development objectives. His government implemented women-friendly reforms which gained both, autonomy for women during his presidency as well as establishing lessons for present-day gender equality strategies in Pakistan.

The initiatives from Bhutto's era teach us essential strategies for using modern technology to eliminate underlying barriers toward female political involvement. Digital platforms present fresh possibilities which extend historical work toward granting women access to information and political engagement along with educational opportunities. Online resources eliminate cultural boundaries as well as geographic constraints which enables undeserved rural and urban women to unite and stand for their rights together. Social media Platforms enable women's voices to grow stronger while establishing secure platforms for political talk and forging a path towards the next cadre of women leaders. Technology enables systematic discrimination and violence monitoring that helps develop a more extensive and fair political framework. The innovative developments build legally upon Bhutto's foundational supervision work so it can address present-day challenges and unlock digital innovation potential. The combination of innovative historical research approaches with new technology introduces major opportunities to improve female political participation in Pakistan. Gender equality advances successfully through ideological commitment when institutional frameworks support these policies. Digital technology functions as an enabler to construct upon this heritage by confronting structural limitations to maintain balanced gender distribution within all political arenas. For Pakistan's future development through its transitioning social and political landscape requires modern tools to be integrated with historical perspectives. The efforts of Bhutto should be strengthened by deploying digital networks to create sustainable systems which establish lasting female empowerment and political representation networks to trigger a new global wave of women's power.

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