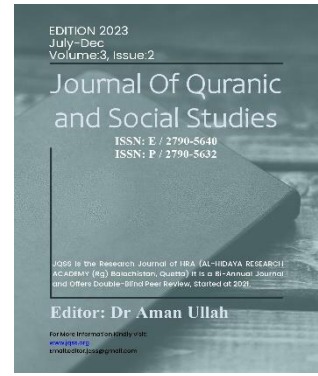



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## Socio-Cultural Challenges to Women's Political Participation in Makran, Balochistan

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## Abstract

This research paper explores the socio-cultural challenges to women's political participation in Makran division of Balochistan, Pakistan. The study uses a comprehensive literature review and a sample survey to identify the barriers that hinder women's political participation, including cultural and societal norms. The study uses randomly selected primary data of 310 respondents using semi-structured Questionnaire. The findings of this research elucidated that there are significant social and cultural challenges to women's political participation in Makran region. As a consequence, women have a weak position in the political setup. The findings have significant implications for policymakers, civil society organizations, and advocates working towards promoting gender equality and inclusive political systems that reflect the diversity and interests of all citizens.

**Keywords:** Political Participation, Social Norms, Cultural Challenges, Maternal role, Wifhood, Male-dominancy and Patriarchy, Makran

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## Introduction

In recent decades, strides have been made toward achieving gender equality in various spheres of society. However, one area that continues to grapple with deeply entrenched barriers is women's political participation. Despite significant progress, women around the world still remain underrepresented in political decision-making processes, both at local and national levels. As noted by researchers such as Norris and Inglehart (2019), women remain underrepresented in political office and decision-making bodies around the world (Inglehart, 2019). This phenomenon is not solely a consequence of institutional or legal shortcomings; rather, it is intricately tied to socio-cultural challenges that persist in numerous societies. Social and cultural factors restrict women's political engagement to a great extent. These include gender stereotypes and biases that affect how women are perceived by voters and other political actors, as well as norms and practices that restrict women's mobility and ability to participate in public life. For example, in some societies, women are expected to prioritize their family responsibilities over political activities, or they may face harassment and violence if they attempt to challenge traditional gender roles or participate in politics. The interplay of social norms, cultural values, and historical precedents has created a complex web of obstacles that hinder women from taking active roles in politics. This research paper delves into the intricate tapestry of socio-cultural challenges that impede women's political participation, analyzing the multifaceted dynamics that perpetuate gender disparities in this crucial domain. By examining these challenges, this paper aims to shed light on the pervasive societal norms and beliefs that continue to suppress women's political engagement. This research paper explores the intersection of culture and politics, investigating how cultural perceptions of gender roles, familial duties, and societal expectations act as formidable barriers.

Despite global efforts towards gender equality, women's political participation remains a persistently unresolved challenge. Despite advances in various sectors, women continue to be underrepresented in political decision-making processes at local and national levels. This discrepancy is not solely due to institutional or legal shortcomings but is intricately linked to deeply entrenched socio-cultural barriers. These barriers, encompassing norms, values, and historical legacies, hinder women from taking active roles in politics, thereby limiting diverse perspectives and hindering the creation of inclusive governance structures. While progress has been made, the extent of these socio-cultural challenges demands comprehensive exploration and understanding to pave the way for effective strategies to address the gender gap in political participation.

The study on "Socio-Cultural Challenges to Women's Political Participation in Makran" holds significant importance by addressing a pivotal concern for our society. It aims to unravel the barriers that hinder women's active involvement in politics, which not only reinforces gender equality but also fosters inclusive democratic governance. By identifying these socio-cultural challenges, the research can guide policy formulation, promote socio-economic development, challenge harmful stereotypes, and contribute to a global dialogue on achieving gender parity. This study's significance is underscored

by its potential to reshape societal norms, policies, and academic discourse. It sheds light on the critical role of women's participation in political processes, prompting a reconsideration of gender biases and driving more comprehensive policymaking. As societies strive for progress, the insights garnered from this research offer a pathway to fostering a fairer, more representative, and prosperous future for all. The importance of addressing these socio-cultural challenges cannot be overstated. Women's perspectives and experiences bring unique insights to political discourse, and their equal participation is essential for the creation of more inclusive and representative governance structures. As societies strive to achieve true gender equality, understanding the underlying socio-cultural factors that hinder women's political participation is paramount.

### **Literature Review**

Women's political participation has been the subject of extensive research and analysis in recent years, with scholars exploring the various challenges and barriers that women face in accessing political power and participating in decision-making processes. In this literature review, some of the key contributions to this field will be examined and the main themes and trends that have emerged in the literature will be identified.

### **Legal barriers**

One of the main challenges to women's political participation is related to legal barriers. Discriminatory laws and policies that restrict women's rights to vote or run for office remain a significant obstacle in many parts of the world (Mukhopadhyay, 2020). For example, in Saudi Arabia, women were not allowed to vote until 2015, while in some countries, women face quotas or other restrictions that limit their access to political power (Mansour, 2021). Furthermore, even when laws and policies exist to promote women's political participation, they may not be effectively implemented or enforced (Haley, 2019).

### **Social and Cultural Barriers**

Women's political engagements are greatly influenced and restricted by social and cultural factors. Gender stereotypes and biases that affect how women are perceived by voters and other political actors can make it difficult for women to win elections or access positions of power (Childs, 2017). Moreover, societal norms and practices may restrict women's mobility and ability to participate in public life (Inglehart, 2019). For example, women may face pressure to prioritize their family responsibilities over political activities or may face harassment and violence if they attempt to challenge traditional gender roles (Chakraborty M, 2020).

The literature on the participation of women in the political arena highlights the ongoing challenges and constraints that women experience in accessing political power and participating in decision-making processes. These challenges have significant implications for democracy, governance, and human rights. Therefore, it is essential to address these barriers and promote gender equality and inclusive political systems. By highlighting these challenges, the research article aims to discuss the socio-cultural challenges that women face in Makran division.

## Research Design

For any study, it is very important to have a good research design in order to draw the correct conclusion. Quantitative methods could be used to gather large-scale data on social and cultural challenges to women's political participation. A questionnaire is used to collect data from a large number of respondents. This data is analyzed using statistical methods to identify patterns and see the frequency of each variable. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software is used to take out the frequency. For the distribution of the questionnaire, purposive sampling technique is used. Participants who had 16 years of education or above could become part of this study. 310 questionnaires were distributed in three districts of Makran division named Kech, Panjgur and Gwadar district. 103 questionnaires were distributed in each district with the exception of district Kech with 104 questionnaires.

## Results and Discussion

There are numerous research studies that indicate the challenges women face in political participation, both globally and within specific regions or contexts. Here are a few examples of such research.

Patricia McFadden and Aili Mari Tripp (2001) look at the challenges that women face in political participation in Africa, and argues that cultural barriers, economic constraints, and gender-based violence are the main obstacles. The article emphasizes the importance of addressing these issues to enhance the participation of women in politics and improve gender equality (Tripp P.M., 2001).

Robtel Neajai Pailey (2014) examines the barriers and chances to female political involvement in post-conflict Liberia. The study finds that women face multiple challenges in political participation, including gender-based violence, lack of access to resources and networks, and discrimination. However, the study also identifies several strategies for promoting women's political participation, including the use of quotas, targeted capacity-building programs, and increased support for women's economic empowerment (Pailey, 2014).

Above are some examples of political constraints on women. Now let's see the situation in Makran.

**Table 1. Challenges to Women's Political Participation in Makran.**

Valid	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	3	1.0
Disagree	25	8.1
Agree	181	58.4
Strongly agree	101	32.6
Total	310	100.0

This table presents the frequency and percentage distribution of responses to the survey statement. The response options for "Challenges to women's political participation in Makran." are listed in the first column: "Strongly disagree", "Disagree", "Agree", and "Strongly agree".

In this survey, there were 310 valid responses, with very few respondents, indicating "Strongly disagree", while the responses for "Disagree" are relatively more but overall less, with 25 (8.1%) respondents which too is a small number in whole. More than half of respondents chose "Agree", while nearly one-third of them selected "Strongly agree". Overall, the results suggest that a significant majority of the respondents (91%) agree or strongly agree that women face challenges in political participation in Makran. This indicates that there is a widespread perception among the respondents that women in Makran encounter obstacles or difficulties in participating in the political process. Only a small minority of the respondents either disagrees or strongly disagrees with this statement.

#### Social Hurdles

Here are some research studies related to women facing social restrictions in political participation.

"Women's Political Participation in Afghanistan: Social and Cultural Barriers" by Sayed Hamed Hashemi and Sultan Barakat examines the cultural and social obstacles to females' political participation in Afghanistan, including the influence of traditional and patriarchal norms, and the impact of conflict and insecurity. The study recommends several strategies for promoting women's political participation, including increased support for women's education and leadership development, targeted outreach campaigns, and the adoption of gender-sensitive policies (Barakat, 2013).

"Social barriers to women's political participation in India" by Nabanita Datta Gupta studies the social hurdles to females' political participation in India, including gender stereotypes, social norms, and economic constraints. The study finds that females' education, availability of resources and networks, and the adoption of gender-sensitive policies are important factors in promoting women's political participation (Gupta, 2012).

**Table 2. Social Restrictions to Women's Political Participation in Makran.**

Valid	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	3	1.0
Disagree	52	16.8
Agree	189	61.0
Strongly agree	66	21.3
Total	310	100.0

The table shows the responses of 310 people regarding the statement ". Social restrictions to women's political participation in Makran". Of these responses, very few people, only 3 strongly disagreed with the statement, less than one-fourth of people disagreed, nearly two-thirds of people agreed, and around one-fifth of them strongly agreed with the statement. Overall, the results show that the majority of respondents agree or strongly agree with the statement, with a smaller proportion indicating disagreement.

### **Illiteracy-A Barrier to Women's Political Participation**

Here are some studies on illiteracy and females' political engagement:

"The Impact of Illiteracy on Women's Political Participation in Pakistan" by Shazia Yaqoob investigates the association between illiteracy and females' political engagement in Pakistan. The research finds that illiteracy can limit women's political engagement, as it reduces their ability to read and write, access information, and communicate effectively (Yaqoob, 2018).

The Role of Literacy in Women's Political Empowerment in India" by Parul Bhardwaj and Vandana Singh examines the significance of literacy in fostering women's political empowerment in India. The said research finds that literacy can play a crucial role in increasing the knowledge of females regarding politics, interest and involvement as it provides them with the skills and confidence needed to engage with political issues and institutions (Singh, 2019) .

**Table 3. Illiteracy- A Barrier to Women Political Participation in Makran.**

<b>Valid</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strongly disagree	4	1.3
Disagree	103	33.2
Agree	131	42.3
Strongly agree	72	23.2
Total	310	100.0

According to the data, the majority of the respondents which is less than half of the participants agree that illiteracy is a barrier to women's political participation in Makran. Additionally, one-third of the respondents disagree with this statement. Around one-fifth of the participants strongly agree that illiteracy is a barrier to women's political participation in Makran and very few participants strongly agree with this statement. This suggests that a significant portion which is around two-thirds of the respondents considers illiteracy to be a hindrance to women's political engagement.

**Table 4. Makran is a Male-dominated Society.**

Valid	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	18	5.8
Disagree	67	21.6
Agree	145	46.8
Strongly agree	80	25.8
Total	310	100.0

The table reveals a majority of the respondents either agree or strongly agree that Makran is a male-dominated society, while nearly one-fourth of the respondents disagreed and a very few strongly disagreed indicating that the majority of the participants perceive Makran as a society where men hold more power and influence than women. This perception could have an impact on women's political participation as they may feel discouraged or marginalized in political spaces.

### **Patriarchy- A Barrier**

There is a significant body of research that suggests that male dominance in society can create significant barriers to women's political participation. Here are a few examples of research studies related to this issue:

"Gender Stereotypes and Women's Political Participation: The Role of Gendered Expectations in Male-Dominated Democracies" by Mona Lena Krook examines the role of gender stereotypes in male-dominated democracies and how they can limit females' political involvement. The study finds that gender stereotypes can create significant difficulties in the participation of females in politics because they can lead to discrimination, lack of support, and negative attitudes toward women who seek political office (Krook, 2010) .

"The Role of Male Allies in Promoting Women's Political Participation" by Jessica L. Preece and Dana M. Moss investigates the effect of male allies in increasing female political engagement. The study finds that male allies can play a crucial role in challenging gender stereotypes, advocating for gender equality, and creating more inclusive political environments that support women's participation (Moss, 2019).

**Table 5. Patriarchy- A Barrier to Women's Political Participation in Makran.**

Valid	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	4	1.3
Disagree	44	14.2
Agree	183	59.0
Strongly agree	79	25.5
Total	310	100.0



The data shows that the majority of participants either agree or strongly agree that a male-dominated society creates barriers to women's political participation in Makran. Only a small percentage, less than one-fourth of the respondents either disagree or strongly disagree. Therefore, it can be said that the data suggests that there is a significant perception that a male-dominated society creates barriers to women's political participation in Makran.

### Cultural Challenges

Worldwide women face cultural challenges when it comes to political participation. Here are some research studies related to women facing cultural barriers in political participation.

"Women's Political Participation in Bangladesh: Cultural Barriers and Success Factors" by Sabiha Islam explores the cultural barriers in her work, Women's Political Participation in Bangladesh: Cultural Barriers and Success Factors, such as patriarchal norms and gender-based violence. The study finds that females' education, ingress to data and networking chances, and affirmative action policies are significant reasons for promoting female political participation (Islam, 2013).

"Gender and Political Participation in Africa: Challenges and Prospects" by Patricia McFadden and Aili Mari Tripp studies the cultural hurdles to females' political participation in Africa, including gender stereotypes, social norms, and religious beliefs. The study recommends several strategies for overcoming these barriers, including affirmative action policies, political party reform, and increased support for women's leadership development (Tripp P. M., 2001).

"Cultural Barriers to Women's Political Participation in Pakistan" by Syeda Quratulain Bakhteari studies the cultural obstacles to females' political participation in Pakistan, including patriarchal norms and gender stereotypes. The study finds that women's education, targeted outreach campaigns, and the use of quotas are significant elements in promoting females' political participation in the country (Bakhteari, 2014).

Now let's see the situations in Makran in terms of cultural challenges.

**Table 6. Cultural Barriers to Women's Political Participation in Makran.**

Valid	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	7	2.3
Disagree	32	10.3
Agree	184	59.4
Strongly agree	87	28.1
Total	310	100.0

The table shows the responses of the participants regarding the statement "Cultural barriers to women's political participation in Makran". In this survey, there

were 310 valid responses, with very few respondents indicating "Strongly disagree", while the responses for "Disagree" were also few. The majority of respondents chose "Agree". Approximately one-fourth of them selected "Strongly agree".

Overall, the results suggest that the majority of participants agreed or strongly agreed with the mentioned statement that women in Makran face cultural barriers when it comes to their political participation. Only a small percentage disagrees with this statement, and a few strongly disagree. The percentage of respondents who strongly agreed is slightly lower than in the previous example, while the percentage of those who disagreed is slightly higher. However, the overall pattern is similar in that most respondents agreed with the statement.

### **Wifehood as a Barrier to Women’s Political Participation**

Some research suggests that women with caregiving responsibilities, including wives and mothers, may face additional challenges when it comes to political participation. Here are a few examples of research studies related to this topic:

"The Impact of Caregiving on Women's Political Participation" by Elizabeth C. Matto studies the impacts of caregiving on the participation of female politics. The study finds that women with caregiving responsibilities may face additional challenges when it comes to political participation, as they often have limited time, resources, and energy to devote to political activities (Matto, 2017).

"Maternalism and Women's Political Participation" by Mirya R. Holman examines the role of maternalism in shaping women's political participation. The study finds that women who are mothers may be more likely to prioritize issues related to children and families, but may also face additional challenges when it comes to balancing their caregiving responsibilities with political participation (Holman, 2016).

Overall, these studies suggest that caregiving responsibilities, including wifehood and motherhood, may present additional challenges for women's political participation. Addressing these challenges may require policies and initiatives that support women's caregiving responsibilities, such as affordable childcare centers, adaptable work plans, and policies concerning parental or maternal leave.

**Table 7. Wifehood as a Barrier to Women’s Political Participation in Makran.**

<b>Valid</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strongly disagree	4	1.3
Disagree	119	38.4
Agree	147	47.4
Strongly agree	40	12.9
Total	310	100.0

The data shows that more than half of the respondents agree or strongly agree that wifehood is a barrier to women's political participation in Makran. Meanwhile, more than one-third of the respondents disagree or strongly disagree with the mentioned statement. As a result, it is possible to assume that a significant portion of the participants believe that being a wife could be a barrier to women's political participation in Makran, but it is not the majority view.

**Table 8. Motherhood as a Barrier to Women's Political Participation in Makran.**

Valid	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	2	0.6
Disagree	120	38.7
Agree	149	48.1
Strongly Agree	39	12.6
Total	310	100.0

Nearly half of the respondents agree that motherhood is a barrier to females' political engagement in Makran. A little more than one-third of them disagree with the statement while very few strongly disagree. Less than one-fifth of them strongly agreed with the statement. Overall, the majority of respondents expressed concerns about motherhood being an obstacle to females' political life or career.

## **Conclusion**

This research paper has highlighted the challenges that hinder women's political participation in Makran and the significance of addressing them for the development of inclusive and effective political systems. The data clearly shows that women in Makran face a lot of challenges such as social and cultural hurdles. Among these one of the significant is illiteracy and the male-dominated society in Makran. A society that is dominated by males and females who are expected to stay at home and assume the role of a wife or mother, is keeping them completely out of political issues. Moreover, illiteracy is another social issue that fuels the fire because someone who does not know her own rights, how comes she would fight for others and even for herself as she is unaware of her own legitimate rights. The findings suggest that despite progress in recent years, significant barriers still exist in the region, including cultural and societal norms, maternal roles, male domination and illiteracy. However, the paper suggests overcoming these challenges and promoting women's political participation through quotas, affirmative action policies, and the creation of women's caucuses and networks. The research also emphasizes the importance of addressing the intersectional nature of these challenges and recognizes the need for tailored solutions that account for the diversity of women's experiences and perspectives.

## Recommendations

To overcome these challenges, some steps are required. To develop targeted education and training programs to bridge the illiteracy gap, alongside advocating for supportive policies recognizing women's caregiving responsibilities and political roles, including maternity leave and flexible work arrangements. Establish mentorship initiatives connecting seasoned women politicians with newcomers, fostering guidance and encouragement. Launch media campaigns to challenge stereotypes and amplify positive depictions of women in politics, complemented by grassroots collaborations with community leaders for gender-sensitive discussions and initiatives fostering women's active engagement.

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