

**Ms Research Thesis**

**HARASSMENT OF FEMALE POLITICIANS IN PAKISTAN ON  
TWITTER(X): A CONTENT ANALYSIS**



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## **Declaration**

The thesis has been submitted as partial fulfillment of MS in Media and Communication Studies to the Department of Media and Communication studies. I solemnly declare that this is my original work and no material has been plagiarized and my material quoted from a secondary source has been provided with proper citations and references. \_\_\_\_\_

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## **Acknowledgement**

All praise and gratitude are due to Allah Almighty for bestowing upon me the strength to successfully complete my work. I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to all my teachers who have played a very important role in shaping my educational path.

## **Dedication**

My heartfelt devotion is dedicated to my parents, who were always been there for me.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Present study addresses the significance and the problems of political harassment and gender-based violence against female politicians in Pakistan and violation of ethical guidelines on Twitter(X). It has been shown that these attacks constitute a violation of women's civil and political rights and a threat to the physical and mental health of female politicians in Pakistan. Furthermore, there is no punishment of guilty parties, reparation, or moral or material compensation for the women who are affected. Gender-based violence and harassment in Pakistan Gender-based harassment and violence is a structural obstacle of women political participation in Pakistan In this case, twitter as a Pakistani social media platform is studied based on the number of people to target the audience and based on the number of posts decade has been studied. An analytical tool of feminist media theory was applied to find out those elements that lead to a violation(s) based on gender. This paper reports one of the first studies on GBV in the social media. Considering Twitter as an open pervasive platform that provides means for open discourse and community engagement, we study female politicians accounts and examines their posts find out specific language nuances of GBV-related comments. The results indicate that social media site did not deny the violation of the ethical rules since the tales involved more of the unethical behaviors. Carefully, the violations involve mis abuse, misbehave, judgmental speech, intimidation and sexual remark on any female politician.

### **Key Words**

*Harassment, Female Politicians, Twitter, Content Analysis*

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background of Inclusion of Women in Politics**

Despite numerous obstacles, the Pakistani women are still making their mark in the political domain, and women power icons such as Fatima Jinnah, Nusrat Bhutto, Benazir Bhutto, and Kulsoom Nawaz are mentioned as such role models of political history of Pakistan (Hussain, 2022). There has been an Upward trend in opportunities of women in politics in the form of two female Prime Minister (Benazir Bhutto) being elected into office a total of two times (1998-90 and 1993-96). In 2008, Fahmida Mirza was made a First Female Speaker in the Pakistan National Assembly and the Muslim world (Latif et al., 2015). The current governmental system of Pakistan has appeared within the perspective of the system characterized by. The 1973 constitution of Pakistan was compiled by the national assembly. It is an ideological state as defined by the Constitution of Pakistan (1973) that assures in Islam. The same treatment to all its citizens, as far as the gender, ethnic or religious origin of the individual are concerns. To be on the political rights front, the Pakistan constitution ensures that the right of every citizen of forming or joining a political party is guaranteed to him (Article 17.2). Even though the equality of a woman is dealt with through the Article 25 of the Constitution, in a roundabout way that is through the declaration. The Section 32 and 34 gives room to equal opportunity that there are no sex-based inequalities before the law. Women have been included in all aspects of modern life and Section 51 and 59 ensure that women and non-Muslims members would be given equally in the parliament. According to Article 51, the number of the women seats is 60 in the National Assembly (Article 59, 17). The Senate of Pakistan has seats that are reserved to women. During the General Election of 2018, women voted in large numbers besides the fact that the Group had more women contesting in the election. Three critical amendments in the Election Act comprised key reasons for this turn of events. Firstly, if women voters proved to be less than 10% of the total number of registered women voters, for which the outcome of that constituency was open to nullification. Second, an additional amendment in the Election Act prohibited the practice of preventing women from voting in or contesting the elections. Third, it was made mandatory for the major political parties have been called upon to put forward at least 50% of women as candidates (Mahmood, 2018). Also, the Election Commission of Pakistan established all women booths in the difficult constituency in Pakistan to encourage women voters to cast vote. The political parties in Pakistan have become



concerned with gender-oriented approach in selection of their candidate workers to balance genders among party members. Use of such strategies makes women to participate more in politics.

(Sacchet, 2005). Political parties in this regard are undertaking various strategies with an intention of bringing women on board of their parties. Such tendencies are accompanied by packages that empower women in Pakistan, which help Pakistani women in different ways both economically and socially (Masood et al., 2018). The fact that the demonstrations and voting in political elections have women, their participation in political rallies and campaigns, and their considerable amount of energy has probably been one of the factors that are establishing this trend of women entering the political parties is emerging is probably due to the fact that this facilitating other women into politics and consequently the larger position and support of the members of political party in question is promoted. Following a proportionately high number of seats in the National and Provincial Legislatures that came to be assigned to women on a quota basis in post-2000 Pakistan, there was an extensive range of political parties that restructured their women voting groups (Hussain et al., 2018). Even more conservative political parties like the Awami National Party and Jamiat Ulema Islam-F party went as far as establishing the women wing in 2004 as a way of maximizing the 33 percent reserved seats to women (Dutoya, 2013). One of the key reasons why the Pakistani parliament had the highest representation of women in the year 2002, and climbed to 20% of women representation in the parliament by the year 2002 (Latif et al., 2015) to 33% in parliament in 2019 (Election Commission of Pakistan, 2019) is the reserved quota. The trend reflects that political parties in Pakistan have now become aware enough to allow the presence of women in politics. As of 2021, 130 political parties had registered themselves with the Election Commission of Pakistan. The political landscape in Pakistan was quite controlled by the PPP and PML-N after the independence of Pakistan. This has been different since 2013, when PTI ventured into Pakistani politics to form the third strongest political party in Pakistan (Rehman, 2015).

## **1.2 Background of the Gender Based Violence and Harrasment**

Gender can be considered a bundle of numerous and interrelated aspects such as gendered characteristics, emotional, values, anticipations, norms, functions, settings and establishments that are subjected to change and evolve over time in and across cultural contexts (Russo & Pirlott, 2006). Gender is also considered as a master (or a meta-) status that defines the social position in the society and the one which generally provides women with less power, privilege and resources as opposed to men (Bourne & Russo, 1998). Gender based violence (GBV) is not a new concept

that has proved to have a long historical background in the early development of human communities. The root causes of GBV can be traced in establishment of patriarchal social structures which have the aim of facilitating male dominance and authority over women. In the old civilizations like, Mesopotamians, Ancient Egyptians, ancient Greeks, ancient Romans, it is seen that the things that are done by the women and where to do it is decided very early, through an idea that women are inferior to men (being subservient). The traditional role of women was always domesticated and they were considered to be physically and sexually restricted due to societal and legal restrictions due to which women could be controlled by their male family relations or their husbands. The women were considered the property of men in most preindustrial societies and their rights were grossly hampered. This act of control over the life, choices of women and their bodies was previously the basis of violence and abuse. Since women used to be victims of marital rape, forced marriage, and even physical abuse, which were pathologized in the mechanisms of the society, men also became the victims of this mechanism. Through codes of law, social beliefs and unequal relationships and positions were generally upheld, e.g., the ancient Roman law or even with regards to the biblical course where submission of women to men was described as a godly or natural law. Along with the development of the society and industry new forms of GBV appeared originally sexual harassment in the workplace, sexual exploitation, and domestic violence. Without any doubts, the development of feminist movements in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, who struggled against such entrenched norms is the reason that should be put on the center of the state of rights of women and which should be the starting point to discuss GBV as a major issue. Nevertheless, although legal amendments have already gone that way, it is still a fact today, that gender-based violence still exists as social/cultural infrastructures that perpetuate inequality have still infused the societies of the world. The GBVs are defined as any use of verbal or physical force, coercion or life-threatening deprivation of an individual woman or girl that causes her physical or psychological suffering, humiliation or arbitrary deprivation of liberty and that perpetuates female subordination (krug, Mercy, Dahlberg & zwi, 2002) The United Nations has established gender-based violence against women as a global health and development concern and countries in the world have come up with a variety of policies and public education campaigns dedicated to alleviating gender-based violence against women ( Women and men however define violent behavior differently depending on whether it is carried out by them or by women and this definition differs greatly depending on whether it is based on situational and cultural context. As illustrated, the rating of the severity of certain physical acts will vary in case one is a male or female

perpetrator of such an act (Marshall, 1992a, 1992b). The perception on various types of male violence against women has not been on the different types but it has changed where violence has become seen as a single dimension but with multiple forms depending on the circumstances (Koss et al., 1994). It has become established that gender-based entitlements, power, objectification, and status have been crucial forces in gender-based violence dynamics. It is with such backgrounds that major institutions (criminal justice institutions, health institutions, academic institutions, scientific institutions, military institutions, sporting institutions, and religious institutions) are attributed to creating and reinforcing patriarchal values, which promote and propagate those entitlements, prop up gender-based violence, and promote stigmatizing voices that critique the current operative (Koss et al., 1994; Marin & Russo, 1999).

Men who feel they are now not that powerful as they are offered to be may want to make up that situation using the physical superiority. The transformations in the status and employment levels of women which have intensely taken place over the past 50 years have not been attended by a corresponding division of labor in the household (Coltrane, 2000; Tichenor, 2005). This has been because of the absence of collective family responsibility, and this has occurred concomitantly with realignment of gender roles, causing a greater tension between the aforementioned patriarchal expectations on the one hand, and changing societal norms on the other hand. As women have become more independent, not only socially, but also economically than before, the men might feel their power to control and dictate some relations and areas in their homes to be eroded. Consequently, they become prone to violence as a measure of regaining their previous dominant and dominant nature especially when their masculinity is threatened. This dynamic particularly occurs in the case of the intimate partner violence, where the hierarchical aspect of the power is transgressed, which subsequently results in the abuse as the act of retaliation for the loss of position or governance. This goes to show the conflict on the relationship that exists between the influence of gender relations changing and the existence of gender-based violence.

Harassment towards women is a deeply rooted issue in patriarchal societies like that of Pakistan, where culture and limited female rights not only exist but entrench the traditional power by reproduction of the same. In numerous fields of life including employment and the street (e.g.), women may be discriminated, intimidated and violently attacked. This form of harassment comes in the form of verbal bullying, physical bullying and sexual molestation and a long term side effect

is bad consequences to their psyche and body. The failure to file any legal action and social stigma imposed on women might limit their ability to seek justice, which creates an atmosphere of omerta and impunity. The rights of the basic units of societies are not only undermined as a result of these problems.

It (women) not only reduces their ability to give back to the society to the best of their ability, but also makes them unable to do full justice to their abilities. Pakistan is no exception to this systematic problem as far as the political arena is concerned. Women politicians are subject to unique pressures in their attempts to use their expression and influence in a setting that is fairly male-dominated and is inclined to dismiss their utterances and actions. Threats in the parliament to verbal insults and campaigns against women politicians in terms of defaming them occur both publicly and denigratingly. Such laws do not only assault their own integrity, but they also violate their civil and political rights. Besides, normative perception of women leaders makes it even more burdensome, as female political figures are more under the fire of criticism, regarding their decisions and personal behavior within the society. Such type of bileta repels women in political careers and its impact spreads out to the continuance of non equity in government and political decision making as well as to the actions of the nation to achieve the objective of gender headship.

### **Gender Discrimination and Harrasment in Workplace and Politics**

Almost everywhere in the world, women issues and concerns appear to be insatiable (Ali & Saddiqi, 2019). In the current situation, the women have become more active in all areas of work and human society can rejoice in the presence of rules and regulations on sexual abused and harassment at work place, the exposure of fair sex to this intolerable evil has lead to numerous problem, the exposure of females to this antagonistic evil has led to many problems, which are not allowing females to work (Ali & Saddiqi 2019; Sadruddin 2013). The issues of women are complicated, embedded in the social code and it can be worsened because of incompetent handling by institutions. Despite the fact that the legislation and regulation aimed at preventing harassment and abuse of women, now exists, the manner in which this legislation can be in fact realized in the practice is not clear in a considerable number of countries. Lack of reporting mechanisms, cultural-bias, and fear of revenge are some of the factors that are likely to contribute to the refusal to report by victims who are left to experience life in the same repetition of violence. Besides being an obstacle to them physically and mentally, it is also a hindrance to their professional life and what

they can make of themselves and contribute to the work force. This has prompted the need of an all-inclusive approach in addressing issues of harassment at the work place, which is facilitated by its current reality. This should not be limited to ensuring that the existing law is even stronger, but an environment, where women should feel that they can go and report to the police without any fear at all. Several levels of publicity activities, solid motives of punishing offenders, and institutional interference in the process and participation of the sufferers may work together in overcoming the walls that deny women advancement in the professional world.

It is only by adopting a prophylactic and response-based approach to the issue that societies can seek to establish genuinely equitable work places. Sexual harassment is a sharp kind of gender discrimination and persisting delinquent problem to women (ILO, 2018). When females leave the home to work then she is made to be the target of unwanted sexual attention to include lustful suggestions, sensual gestures, oral or physical signs and even sexual favour seeking (Ali & Saddiqi, 2019). It is irritating carnal acts such as sexy comments, physical touches and physical attacks (Hiscox 2018; Ali & Saddiqi, 2019) are observed in a matter of routine at place of work. Although this unwrap fact is saddening to be digested but to date this thinking is the reflectivity of the current status of occupied women on the planet and it is observed that incidents of harassment occurred at government and privately-owned offices, schools, colleges, universities, factories, or at any place of work (Ali & Saddiqi, 2019). The sex harassment at the work place is one of the grave issues not only ruining women's equality, but also, it may create the air of fear and insecurity, it may prevent women to get deeper into the business world. This problem reoccurred despite the introduction of regulation and education campaigns, which ensures that there are systemic and cultural issues that need to be addressed on an urgent basis. It is eminent that this issue should be addressed through remediation as far as it is not only related to safeguarding the rights of women but also contributes to succeeding work place. Being harassed does not only affect physically and psychologically the victim, but there is a spill over to the efficiency of organisations and the social progress. Thus, work on this matter is not only an ethical duty but also an implied structure to establish work places that is in reality a place where people regardless of their gender can thrive without harassment and discrimination.

Structural violence as the starting point of violence against female politicians is characterized in terms of stratification of access to basic human needs on the basis of membership of ascriptive groups. It is inherent in the social structure that the stratification brings harm in the

form of unequal life chances inscribed on the human body as well as on the mind and the spirit (Galtung 1969). This makes the situation of Ganges/Destroying norms, which perpetually encourages sexism and hostility towards women politicians, particularly drastic because such oppressive and destructive ways of thinking add additional fuel into the fire. It entails activities such as using media (especially social media technologies) to inflame the possible stories about misogyny, depreciate the legitimacy of the female lead characters, and degrade them. The digital spaces have long been the cradled grounds of harassments where limits of ethics are blurred and an individual attack is normalized. He/she is a direct violence towards women and not only does it discourage women to enter the political arena, but it also plays towards strengthening patriarchate regimes and complicating the task to question and/or disband institutional barriers. The persistence of this violence implicates severe implications on the political participation in women along with their inclusion in the society and overall struggle of promoting gender equality. Political violence against women therefore includes both breaking the electoral as well as personal integrity (Bjarnegard 2018). It is rooted in misogyny which is a system that monitors and imposes patriarchal norms and expectations. Misogyny divides into “good” and “bad” women and seeks punishment of the latter, who are punished due to the perception of not obeying the means of the appropriate gender roles (Manne 2018). This is a record of violence against women that is politically motivated because it eliminates not only democracy but also the female vote, so that they become deterred in participation and representation. Misogynistic behaviours and attitudes do not only batter certain women, but they also have the implicit message of the undesirability or undesirability of woman voices in leadership. This violence is aimed to target the woman who challenges and breaks the containment of gender stereotypes and insists on the compliance of the hegemonic masculinity with its exclusion of women of power. The consequences are further far ranged than they hinder the process of achieving gender equality and also the diversity and inclusion that is needed so as to have a feasible democracy.

The Pakistani women have been resilient over the years and have found their activity in different spheres of social life and economy. The political arena is however proving to be a stern challenge with female exposed to institutionalized sexism, poor access to resources and patriarchal values. And then there is the historical scenario of the military rule and the vicissitude of the democratic rule have added to the scenario making the situation a very complicated one presenting a formidable web of hurdles that a woman has to clear in order to toil to secure a meaningful place

in the politics arena. The landscape of Pakistani politics is characterised by the interaction of cultural, social, and institutional factors, and nowhere is this more visible than in the field of females participation. Pakistani politics is defined by the delicate interplay of cultural, social, and systemic challenges, with female political participation being one of the most visible examples. Even with recent advances, Pakistani females face major barriers to entering the political arena. Pakistan, a country with a rich tapestry of cultural diversity, has witnessed advances in a variety of areas, but the political landscape has frequently been hostile to gender inclusive policies.

### **Media Representation of Harrasment of Female Politicians**

Nusrat Sehar Abbasi, a house member and member of the provincial assembly (MPA) was used to be verbally and psychologically abused by a male colleague who was actually a house member too in the month of January, 2017. She became the target of genderbased violence as she has been undergoing sex based harassment by the members of her party, as well as the opponents within the opposition party. According to her, she had enough of constant hooting and abusive words hurled at her by the male legislators. Workplace violence and harassment of women make things more difficult, hazardous and uncomfortable, particularly against the woman politicians. Majority of the women in such a case do not find work or apply in politics. That was not an exceptional case, female politicians are commonly the target of abusive banter in the course of open gatherings that are aimed to publicly humiliate them. Pakistan People Party member Khurshid Shah explained in April 2017 that female MPs would become ill should they be banned on speaking. In 2014 the leader of JUI-F, Mulana Fazlur Rehman, alleged that tractor trolleys and female PTI supporters lack good character citing physical appearance of Shireen Mazari, another assembly member. The same statement was said by the defense minister Khawaja Asif in June of 2016. The most horrible point was that other women-parliamentarians did not raise voice against this attitude of their male colleagues either because it was the rule of their party or they were afraid of being talked down by men. In 2006, Shazia Marri, another provincial lawmaker declared that her male counterpart, Eshwar Lal had sent her immoral materials in writing. Marri and some of the other lady MPs were allegedly harassed by an MPA (Nadia, 2017). The political violence against women occurs in various forms which include sexual abuse, physical and psychological. Although the vice of violence against women is discriminative across gender issues in politics, both men and women may equally be regarded as its victims. The examples of gender-based violence include sexist comments and jokes, and also sexual harassment against women. Sexual harassment and

violence in parliament and everywhere in political arenas break fundamental human rights. It does not only hinder political involvement of women, but also infringes upon political rights of women.

Female presentation in politics has been burning issue of research and consideration which links with the changing order of gender roles and sensitivities in the society. Although some ground has been made in the area of equality on gender representation especially in politics, the visual images of people in the media remain a pertinent element of influence in perception by the people. The paper considers in particular how women in politics are represented in the media where due attention will be paid to the complexity of the language, representation of images and contextualisation. Pursuing the meaningful women participation in Pakistani politics is characterized strongly in the history and social cultural life of Pakistan. Regardless of Pakistan being on a path to independence in 1947, due to the way of conducting its political affairs has mostly been dominated by men thus causing major challenges to women who have been aspiring to be part of the political process and have a major influence. The rights to equality as enshrined in constitutions have usually been challenged when they come up against long held social norms and hierarchy in power. Conservative explanations of the cultural and religious values have promoted these effects of gender inequality by restricting the access of the female gender to the political fronts. Although the constitution enforces gender equality and international conventions affirm the same, the reality on the ground still indicates that there are still obstacles that prevent women to actively engage in the political decision-making process. The issue of fighting the right to be meaningfully engaged encompasses a vast list of issues, such as those which relate to the social expectations of society, patriarchal cultures, institutionalized sexism, and the complications of being a woman in a household and a country. Moreover, to the current situation, there is a burden of history in terms of military authority and established power relations that serve to create extra challenge to the females as they go about trying to navigate the political terrain. Although there exists many civil society movements, NGOs and advocating campaigns to enforce women rights, it is still a serious issue that women are underrepresented in political decision making. There is need to know the intricate details of this fight in order to come up with careful plans to eliminate obstacles to the progress of women in the Pakistani politics. This study is aimed at discovering harassment patterns, defining the kind of abusive words and behavior that is dominating such interactions, and giving feedback in the challenges that the female politicians experience in the digital world.



The current study aims to address the significant issue of gender-based violence and political harassment of female politicians in Pakistan, with a focus on the hostile environment and ethical transgressions that are spread via Twitter. It highlights that such assaults pose a severe risk to women's physical and mental wellbeing in addition to being a violation of their civil and political rights. The report defines gender-based harassment as an immovable barrier on female political involvement in Pakistan, acknowledging that the perpetrators are not held accountable and that the victims have not received compensation. The study looks at messages on Twitter, a site with a large and diverse user base, using feminist media theory as a lens to find instances of gender-based violence and linguistic patterns. The findings reveal widespread ethical standards violations, such as sex harassment, judgmental behavior, linguistic manipulation, and shame, and thus highlight the urgent need to put policies in place to address these violations and ensure welcoming and equitable online spaces for female politicians.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Female politicians often face mean and hurtful comments on Twitter, and it seems to be a bigger issue than we realize. Harassment not only undermines the civil and political rights of female politicians but also poses serious threats to their physical and mental well being. This research aims to understand why this happens, how it affects female politicians, and what we can do to make Twitter a safer space for them in the world of politics. In particular, the anonymity provided by social media some of the perpetrators become emboldened to attack women politicians without the fear of responsibility. It builds a vicious cycle in which misogyny and harassment fester unchecked, and in turn act to further keep women from participating in political activity online. The absence of robust reporting channels and insufficient efforts of social media platform controllers further worsens the situation, exposing female political players to the risk of attacks and an absence of safety. In response, strong collaborative action is urgently needed among policymakers, civil society and tech companies to craft effective measures that defend a woman's human rights and enable safe, inclusive online platforms for political engagement.

## **1.3 Significance of the Study**

This paper talks about a big problem in Pakistan: how female politicians face harassment and violence, especially on Twitter. The study shows that there are no strict rules or consequences

for people who harm females' politicians. Using a tool called content analysis, it identifies prevalent forms of gender-based violations and harassment such as abusive language and sexist commentary, shedding light on the urgent need for measures to protect female politicians right and ensure their meaningful participation in political discourse.

Furthermore, this problem also illustrates the wider social problems experienced by women leaders in Pakistan, where deeply rooted patriarchal values too often manifest as digital abuse. Female political officeholders, and already striving to overcome the hurdles of being a woman in a man's world, are faced with their efforts being undercut by a culture that accepts/obscures online abuse. The absence of platform responsibility on sites such as Twitter is not only to control the voices of these women, but also the causation of a hostile environment, resulting in fewer people stepping into the political role, thus restricting the inclusiveness and diversity of decision-making policy making.

In addition, the rampant assault of female politicians has profound implications for democratic governance. When women are targeted, it decreases their capacity to represent their constituents well and at the same time lessens the legitimacy of the democratic process. Through the rectification of these violations, the paper highlights the necessity to build a political environment where equal participation is paramount and all voices are protected. All of this is vitally important not only to protect the right of each and every citizen, but also to build a better, more representative democracy that is beneficial to society at large.

#### **1.4 Objectives**

1. To identify the specific forms and types of harassment experienced by female politicians on the Twitter platform in Pakistan.
2. To explore the content and context of tweets containing harassment directed towards female politicians in Pakistan.

#### **1.5 Research Questions**

RQ.1 What are the primary forms of harassment faced by female politicians on Twitter in Pakistan?

RQ.2 what patterns of coordinated harassment against female politicians can be identified on Twitter?

### **1.6 Delimitations of the Study**

This study mainly looks at how female politicians in Pakistan face problems like harassment and violence, especially on Twitter. It talks about ethical issues and gender-based challenges these women encounter online. However, the study doesn't look at other types of gender-based violence happening offline or in the broader political scene. Also, it only checks content on Twitter, so we can't say the findings apply to all social media. Additionally, the study doesn't consider the perspective of the people causing the problems, and it doesn't thoroughly explore the laws and institutions dealing with these issues in Pakistan. Understanding these limits is crucial for realizing the study's importance and suggests the need for more detailed research on gender-based violence and harassment against female politicians in Pakistan specific situations.

In addition, the sole concentration to Twitter excludes the possibility of the complete range of social media digital harassment experienced by female politicians on other social media platforms. Each platform has its own culture, its own audience and its own means for abuse, which can reveal different patterns and methods of intensity of gender-based violence. Also, not exploring contextual/offline conditions (i.e., societal expectations, media representations, institutional prejudice) leaves them out of the analysis of the relationship between online harassment and general systemic concerns. These voids highlight the need for future work, which should take a multi-platform and interdisciplinary methodological stance and produce a more detailed understanding of the operational difficulties faced by female politicians in Pakistan.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Review of Related Literature**

One of the most important steps in the research process that supports and enhances the academic pursuit is the literature review. It is essential for placing the research in the context of the body of knowledge already in existence and for giving a comprehensive overview of earlier research, theories, and findings on the topic of choice. Scholars can identify knowledge gaps, hone their research questions, and create hypotheses by reviewing the body of existing literature.

In addition to preventing duplication of effort, a thorough assessment of the literature guarantees that the study significantly advances current knowledge. It offers a theoretical foundation for the idea and planning of the inquiry. By critically analyzing and synthesizing many sources, a literature review aids researcher in placing their work within the larger academic discourse and advances their understanding of the topic. In the end, the literature review serves as a sort of intellectual road map, defining the study's course, bolstering its legitimacy, and creating the foundation for a solid and informed scientific undertaking.

### **Women in Leadership: Navigating Stereotypes**

While many studies have focused on occupational harassment of women, just a few have examined emotional harassment of working women, and several have found contributing factors and protective measures. Fitzgerald, Shullman, Bailey, Richards, Swecker, Gold, Ormerod & Weitzman 1988; Schneider et al. 1997; Ellis, Barak, & Pinto 1991; Barling, Rogers & Kelloway 2001; Dekker & Barling 1998; Bergdahl & Moore 2006). Other academics have looked at how workplace harassment affects company culture, and it's now evident that if harassment is allowed to continue unchecked, it creates a culture that lowers morale and productivity everywhere. This could therefore lead to a high rate of employee turnover, the loss of top talent, and a damaged reputation for the company. Experts emphasize that addressing workplace harassment is not just a question of morality but also of practicality in order to advance equality and sustainable development in work-life environments.

Arif et al., (2017) explored that the main contributors of stress are gender discrimination, peers' behaviour and sexual harassments as well among working women in

Pakistan. Study further find out that along gazing and unnecessary conversation, the male colleagues discuss sexual matters, and loudly speak sexual jokes in the presence of women (Arif, Naveed & Aslam, 2017). Women are the soul of every nation. The shifting paradigm of Globalization has brought about their higher working participation force. At a global level, they are classified as the markers of development and their skills and potentials are highly recognized. Unfortunately, there are few culprits in every society who promote violence against and mistreatment of women and advance barriers in social and economic development of the society (Sadrudin, 2013). Such violence when touches the boundary of workplace where educated people are employed, raises the brows of intellectual tanks. Harassment is one of the serious unreasonable & reprehensible conducts which are routinely practiced at many workplaces (Sadrudin, 2013). Though this Unmasking the truth is bitter (i.e., must be swallowed), but it is the mirror of the current state of working women in the world. United Nations defines harassment as a kind of behaviour (verbal or physical) which prevents work or facilitates aggressive work environment (UN, n.d.). The incidence of occupational harassment is actually symptomatic of wider underlying structural problems deriving from social attitudes and workplace culture. In most instances it is due to the lack of awareness and control mechanisms that prevent this behaviour. A lack of firm control of workplace rules and enforcement promotes an inherently unsafe working environment in which women are not able to perform as they could do. Not only does this impact the well-being of women individually but also hinders progress on the broader economic and social fabric, because women are at the core of workforce development. Workplace harassment is very important to attempt not only on ethical and moral grounds, but also to make progress toward gender equality and to create a positive inclusive professional environment. Without those actions the societal and economic impact of women will be further diminished and go on restraining the cycles of inequality and discrimination.

According to a 2018 analysis by the Centre for Employment Equity, workplace sexual harassment has dramatically escalated over the past few decades, however sadly, very few occurrences have been documented. A WHO data sheet from 2016 states that one out of every three women has experienced physical or sexual harassment. Many things, including societal pressure, fear of reprisals, job loss, and feelings of humiliation, prevent women from acting against offenders. The ongoing cultural and institutional impediments that have been silent for victims of workplace harassment are brought to light by this extremely serious circumstance.

Fear of punishment or losing one's job is a powerful deterrent, particularly in nations with high levels of economic reliance on employment and income. Furthermore, social norms often stigmatize victims rather than criminals, which contributes to a culture of normalization and quiet. Comprehensive reforms are needed to address this problem, such as the implementation of more stringent regulations, the creation of easily accessible reporting channels, and extensive education to change public perceptions. Nevertheless, the creation of an enabling environment that empowers victims to reveal the wrongs they have experienced and demand justice without fear of capricious reprisals is necessary for a successful intervention.

Paxton and Hughes (2020) investigated the notion that modernization has given women greater independence. The responsibilities that women can play in the African workforce, both in agriculture and the professional labor market, have been reduced by modernity. However, modernity has increased the opportunities for women to enter the professional employment market in the industrial sector. A modern democratic society must embrace the idea of gender parity. Although women have not played a significant role in politics since independence, current trends showing an increase in the number of women in political parties hold out hope for a better future. Women have been involved in politics in Pakistan at two significant periods.

A substantial body of research highlights the enormous influence that cultural norms and societal expectations have on the political engagement of Pakistani women. Ahmed (2018) found that deeply ingrained cultural beliefs frequently provide barriers to entry and advancement for women in politics by limiting their visibility. The political experiences of women are influenced by the interplay of gender, class, and ethnicity. It is imperative to comprehend these contextual factors in order to formulate efficacious measures to tackle the obstacles faced by women who aspire to participate in politics. Political institutions are a significant and dependable source of empowerment, and the beauty of democracy within institutions must be modeled at all levels for all men and women. Despite being more powerful, strong, and empowered than other women, political women continue to experience sexual harassment (Ali & Saddiqi, 2019). In a political environment that offers men and women equal opportunities, complete freedom, and security, gender equality

must be upheld for political institutions to function effectively in society. Unfortunately, women are not protected in powerful political institutions (Ali & Saddiqi, 2019).

Despite the existence of powerful women, political institutions—which ought to be models of equality and justice—frequently maintain gender-based inequalities. This paradox highlights how deeply ingrained prejudices are in society, as harassment may still affect women in powerful roles. By outlawing such discriminatory practices, the political climate must actively exhibit equality in addition to making claims of inclusivity. It is crucial to establish strong procedures for reporting and dealing with harassment in addition to an accountable culture. In addition to increasing women's involvement, ensuring a safe and fair environment for them in politics also improves the legitimacy and efficiency of political institutions, which is in line with true democratic ideals.

Numerous researches have been carried out, and intellectual empowerment is a prominent topic in the literature. Malik (2019) highlights the connection between women's higher educational achievement and increased political participation. The level of education has a crucial role in dismantling traditional gender roles and empowering women to navigate political environments. Education can be a catalyst, but because sociocultural barriers still remain, it is not a panacea. The literature highlights the need for a multifaceted strategy that combines education with more extensive societal reforms in order to create an inclusive political environment. Public perceptions of women in politics are significantly shaped by how they are portrayed in the media. Mahmood (2018) asserts that the media regularly upholds archaic gender stereotypes, which makes it challenging for women to win over the public. In politics, it has long been believed that generating positive narratives and dispelling harmful stereotypes are essential to changing the way society views women. The literature suggests that media outlets should encourage inclusive political conversation more aggressively.

In a study on women in leadership roles, Ali and Rasheed (2021) measured and assessed these responsibilities using traits associated with men. The study's findings shed light on women's leadership in Pakistani academic institutions. In-depth interviews with twelve women in leadership roles from various universities in Islamabad were conducted. The study's conclusions demonstrated how women are finding it difficult to navigate and sustain their jobs. Several organizational elements, including stereotypes, male-dominated associations, and personal factors, were

discovered in this study. Nevertheless, these powerful role models admitted that family support, solid relationships, and their elevated status all played a significant influence in their ascent to these positions.

Numerous instances in Pakistan Women continue to be undervalued in politics and decision-making processes at all levels, despite a rise in women's empowerment. This study looked into women's involvement in politics through the prism of gender-based male dominance in society. This paper used a narrative to examine those problems and a thematic approach to highlight how complex they are. Additionally, the issues and barriers that women have when engaging in politics were examined, particularly when it comes to making decisions at the organizational or political party levels. This study was conducted using a qualitative methodology, and key PMLN women parliamentarians were interviewed. These highlighted issues are so embedded in the political and social systems of Pakistani society that they are frequently disregarded and taken for granted. These emphasized elements are so deeply embedded in Pakistani society's political and social framework that most people ignore them or take them for granted (Gul, Kausar & Bi Bi, 2023).

## **Women's Political Participation Challenges and Barriers**

### **1. Patriarchy and ingrained cultural norms**

Female involvement in politics is often limited by patriarchal ideas and underlying cultural practices. Women are supposed to give domestic responsibility a high priority, at the expense of political participation, in line with traditional gender roles. Patriarchy and the cultural norms in Pakistan are significant hindrances to women's decision making and political participation. These deeply entrenched social characteristics have an impact on the behavior of humans with respect to the concepts of gender roles and expectations, which often limit women's freedom of action and opportunities to be leaders. Here is a swift of the conditions and cultural expectations in Pakistan that restrict the ability of women to make an informed choice:

- **Cultural Norms**

- i. **Traditional Gender Roles**

In the Pakistani culture, men and women are traditionally expected to have different functions, and women are considered to have a role only within



the domestic and care sphere. This makes themselves less noticeable in public spaces, for example, decision-making meeting rooms (Ali et al., 2020).

**ii. Honor and Modesty Perceptions**

Women working in politics are often stereotyped in their immodesty of demeaning societies' concept of family honor. As a consequence women wishing to be politically active may be resisted by family and community. **iii. Gender segregation and seclusion**

In some cultures, gender segregation and isolation practices restrict women's and men's social interactions that are not with their spouses or family members (i.e., geographical or psychological isolation). This limits their exposure to places where politics are debated and decisions are made in public (Ali et al., 2020). **iv. Limited Mobility**

There could be difficulties for women to be present at political activities such as demonstrations and gatherings, due to cultural and safety considerations.

**v. Cultural Education Barriers**

Elsewhere, local cultural values tend to accord with boys' educational attainment being weighted more heavily than girls' educational attainment and limiting women's access to information and knowledge of political events.

**• Patriarchy**

**i. Male Dominance**

Patriarchal structures place a high value on the authority and decisionmaking of men, frequently barring women from influential social and political settings.

**ii. Men's dominance over resources**

Male control of resources, e.g., financial, real estate etc., may limit access of women to independent political participation or leadership roles (Latif, 2015).

**iii. Misrepresentation and Stereotyping**

Patriarchal norms can form stereotypes that inhibit women from achieving the full capacity to leadership in political affairs. Stereotyping and misrepresentation. Such myths are often perpetuated by media and popular culture.

**iv. Lack of Representation**

Patriarchal norms could also restrict women from being included in the representation or in leadership positions among political parties and bodies (Ali et al., 2020).

**v. Brutality and harassment**

Patriarchal attitudes may lead to gender-based violence and harassment of women who refuse to conform to social norms by engaging in politics.

**2. Limited Access to Education**

High-quality educational facilities are not available to most Pakistani women. Their lacking information limits their capacity to communicate well, prevents understanding of political processes, and narrows their awareness of rights and duties. In Pakistan, a key barrier to women's political participation and agency is their restriction in access to education. To empower people, develop their talents, and increase their possibilities for leadership and education is critical to engagement in public affairs (Torlak Kuzey, 2019). Here is an overview of how women's decision-making in Pakistan is being impeded by their limited access to education

**• Inequalities in education**

**i. Gender Inequalities**

Discrimination based on a person's gender frequently prevents women and girls from having equal access to education. This may limit their access to information, critical thinking techniques, and decision-making abilities.

**ii. Rural-Urban Divide**

In rural society, where traditional views on how women might be educated may be more prominent, educational options are frequently more limited (Torlak Kuzey, 2019). In girls high dropout rates can keep them out of school. These factors include early marriage, cultural standards, and financial restraints.

- **Decision-Making Impact**

- i. **Limited Knowledge**

Women's participation in decision making may be affected by their knowledge deficit regarding political processes, policies, and current affairs.

- ii. **Reduced Self-Efficacy**

The self-confidence and spirituality of women, namely the belief in their capability of fully participating in political debate, may be undermined through lack of education.

- iii. **Skills Gap**

Education promotes analytical thinking, negotiation, and communicative skills, allowing people to make informed decisions (Torlak Kuzey, 2019). The skills gap for women may expand due to a lack of education.

- **Societal and Economic Consequences**

- i. **Vicious Cycle**

Low level of education women have are at a greater risk of falling into poverty, limited scope, limited chances and getting into electoral processes, creating a vicious cycle of disadvantage.

- ii. **Economic Dependence**

Women who lack education may continue to be economically reliant, which would restrict their participation in politics owing to financial limitations.

### **iii. Leadership challenges**

Such as requirement in higher level of education for most leadership positions. Women may be steered away from leadership roles by an insufficient educational background (Jenichen Anne, 2017).

### **3. Socio-economic Constraints**

Economic disparities can prevent women from engaging in political activities because of economic limitations. A significant amount of women experience financial constraints and are financially disadvantaged to be politically active.

### **Violence and Harassment: Violence and Harassment:**

Women in politics are often subjected to violence, verbal and physical aggression, as well as harassment. They are thus less likely to participate in political activity and their safety and wellbeing could further be threatened. Violence and harassment inhibit women's political participation and the making of relevant decisions in Pakistan (Ali et al., 20008). Instances of gender-based violence deter women from taking part in public affairs and seeking leadership roles by creating a culture of fear, insecurity, and lack of connection. Here is a summary of how harassment and violence prevent women in Pakistan from making informed decisions:

#### **• Forms of Harassment and Violence**

- i. Violence against women in political office or within politics, which may range from threats, to physical assault, to other means, can result in both physical and psychological injury.
- ii. Verbal Harassment and Threats: In an attempt to mute them and exclude them from participating in politics, women may live through verbal attacks, insulting words, and threats (Ali et al., 20008).

iii. Online harassment may limit women's access to online political discussion. This harassment can, for example, be manifested as trolling, cyberbullying, or other forms of hate speech.

iv. Cultural Backlash: Conservative parts of society may overreact with violence and to harass women who dare to participate in politics, to the detriment of the women's empowerment and improvement of society (Jenichen Anne, 2017).

- **Impact on Decision-Making**

i. It is no small matter that violence and harassment have a serious psychological impact on women, impairing their sense of self-worth, self-belief, and mental wellbeing.

ii. Effect of Silencing: Women may down-regulate or withhold speaking up due to fear of reprisal, that will prevent their thoughts or voice from representation in the decision process (Ali et al., 2008).

iii. Withdrawal from Politics: The fear of violence and harassment could force women to stop entirely exercising their political participation, therefore decreasing the number of voices in government.

- **Structural and systemic factors**

i. Lack of Legal Protections: Poor legal protection and weak implementation of the law create a climate where women are harassed and physically abused without repercussions.

ii. Patriarchal norms: Patriarchal views that uphold women's subordination and gender inequality can normalize harassment and violence against them in positions of power.

- **Lack of Representation in Leadership Positions**

Although there are designated seats for women in parliaments, women are often unable to climb to the top of the political parties. Their capacity to exert influence over party preference and policy is, however, very restricted.

- **Lack of Party Support**

Women candidates may not obtain sufficient party support from their political parties, including finance, mentorship, and campaign resources, which have an impact on their capacity to run successful campaigns.

- **Stereotyping and media bias**

Stereotyping and media bias may continue, leading to an inappropriate image of women in politics and their perceived legitimacy as political leaders. Because of their role in perpetrating negative stories, reinforcing disparities in favour of men, and shaping public opinion to restrict women's agency and limit their political participation, stereotyping and media bias are important obstacles that hinder Pakistani women from exercising agency and engaging in politics (Jenichen Anne, 2017). Below is an extract of the way media bias and stereotyping influence the choices women make in Pakistan.

- **Stereotyping**

- i. Traditional Roles and Expectations: Stereotypes frequently diminish women's ability for leadership and decisionmaking in the public realm by associating them with traditional roles as carers and homemakers.

- ii. Stereotypes associating women with less ability or with weaker cognitive and decision-making abilities than men can harm their authority in political arenas.

- iii. Rational vs. Emotional: Stereotypes have been known to represent men as having a tendency toward the thinking/logical etc. approach of decision making,

and women as having a tendency towards the emotional/impulsive spectrum of decision making. This could hurt women's standing as effective leaders.

iv. Beauty above Substance: There may be a risk to the relative visibility of women as serious potential political rivals if they are stereotyped in favour of physical beauty while sacrificing, for example, the strength of educational background and professional achievement (Torlak Kuzey, 2019).

v. Limited Ambitions: Culture and prejudice may continue to assume that women should focus on their family first and above all else, constraining ambitions to engage in politics.

- **Media Slant**

i. Underrepresentation: Women are, not infrequently, underrepresented in media political coverage, which makes them less visible and offers fewer role models in aspiring female leaders.

ii. Sensationalism and trivialization: Media bias may inflate the private life, the physical appearance, or the behavior of female political leaders that it distracts from the political competence.

iii. Limited Policy Coverage: The media attention to men's opinions and agendas may be greater than that to women's opinions on policy.

iv. Negative Framing: Women politicians may be portrayed in a negative light or critiqued more heavily than men in politics, influencing both the public's view of them and their trustworthiness, respectively.

- v. **Lack of Diverse Voices:** It is possible that media organisations do not represent a full range of voices, and especially those of women in underrepresented communities, which in turn prevents their voices being heard.

#### **4. Social stigma**

Women who are politically involved can be perceived and attacked by society. Such social stigmatization, for example, can lead to self-censorship and prevent women from holding leadership roles.

- **Legal and institutional restrictions**

Even with legal and institutional constraints, women's political participation can still be limited. These may include red tape, the absence of gender-sensitive rules, and restricted information access.

- **Limited Networking Opportunities**

Developing political relations and network is very important for political career building. Due to conventional gender segregation and a lack of social places, women frequently have fewer possibilities to create these networks (Entman, 2006).

- **Lack of Role Models**

The aspirations of young women to become politicians can be discouraged by the lack of a visible presence of powerful women politicians in politics.

- **Lack of Training and Capacity Building:**

The capacity for improvement in the political skills of women may be limited by the lack of opportunities to participate in tailored training programmes and capacitybuilding activities.

- **Challenges in the electoral process: Challenges in the electoral process:**



Female candidates can experience various challenges in elections, such as voter intimidation, under-participation of female voters, and possible vote trading behaviors that might be advantageous to female candidates rather than male candidates.

### **Disincentives for Political Engagement**

Women can feel discouraged and disenchanted, if their political involvement is not always successful. To overcome these challenges, a comprehensive approach is required which includes changes in social attitudes, policy, targeted capacity building programs and work to establish a secure and inclusive political climate for women in Pakistan (Entman, 2006).

This research looked at the prejudice, representation, and role of women in the media. Women have experienced a lot of social and domestic pressure. Pakistani society continues to uphold its stringent morals, customs, and culture even in the current times. Despite the perception that they belong to the weaker sex, Pakistani women are actively contributing to media development and are involved in the industry today. Women are still objectified in the media, though. In this study it was examined that at how women are portrayed in Pakistani print, television, and social media (Huda, & Ali, 2015). In general, the literature emphasizes the systemic issues that are constraining women's advancement in Pakistan in almost every domain, including employment, politics and media. Despite significant efforts and growing awareness, deeply entrenched cultural and structural barriers continue to limit women's opportunities and perpetuate inequality. These issues point to the urgent need for ongoing lobbying, sound policies, and cultural change to enable women to succeed. By addressing these issues holistically, a more equitable and inclusive society can be fostered, paving the way for women to contribute meaningfully to national development and global progress.

## **2.2 Theoretical Framework**

### **2.2.1 Theory of Feminist Media**

Feminist Media Theory is a critical appraising system that analyzes representation of gender in media, reproduction of patriarchal discursive practices, and exclusion of women's voices. It has its roots in feminist ideas. It denounces the ways in which media systems, products, and formats reproduce structural inequalities in society. Using this theory to inform the study “Harassment of

female politicians in Pakistan”, provides an important analytical frame through which the media, gender and the power relationships which they shape, can be examined to understand the experience of female politicians. Feminist Media Theory emphasizes how media often reflects and sustains patriarchal values. In Pakistan, political life is strongly shaped by cultural and societal values which reinforce gender inequality. In media reports of women politicians, coverage of their own personal lives, physical characteristics, and feelings often occurs in excess to coverage of their political actions or policies. Media framing is an important instrument for the process of public understanding of female politicians. Feminist Media Theory postulates that for instance, media often performs exaggerated accounts of harassment cases, that in introverting these accounts silently reproduce victim-blaming narratives or downplays the seriousness of these cases. Such representations can normalize or decrease the seriousness of harassment and thus women are less likely to bring their complaints to a legal or moral court. Media is one of the main sources of information for the public and the narratives in media influence public opinions about women in power. Feminist Media Theory challenges the presentation of women as exceptional or unusual as leaders, thereby supporting the notion that politics is a space of men. Female political leaders in Pakistan have been found to deal with double standards in media coverage, in which their outspokenness is portrayed as hostility, but the same conduct among male political leaders is viewed favorably as being in the mold of a leader. Feminist Media Theory incorporates the notion of intersectionality, which is the idea that women's lives are influenced by a variety of dimensions including race, class, ethnicity and religion. Female politicians in Pakistan are subject to special problems resulting from gender and cultural pressures. Media accounts rarely acknowledge these complexities, presenting a simplistic view, which does not engage reality of systemic challenges. Feminist Media Theory also targets the structural hindrances that exist within the media companies that keep women's voices from being heard. Female political actors in Pakistan may find it difficult to achieve balanced media coverage, due to female voices being mediated through male-controlled editorial desks or newsrooms. This lack of representation exacerbates the issue of harassment, as their narratives are often sidelined or misrepresented. Feminist media theory criticizes the negative usage of media but also points to its power to serve as a tool to propagate social change. Ethical journalism and equitable media representation can break down the reins of patriarchal norms and cultivate a more pluralistic political space. Through highlighting the successes and challenges of

women politicians in a balanced way, the media has the role to play in breaking stereotypes and stopping harassment.

This study makes use of the feminist media theory, which focuses on how far women have come from being considered men; s property to being able to vote, receive an education, and have the freedom to travel and talk. The goal of feminist theories is to comprehend the causes and persistence of women's almost universal social devaluation. The label "feminist" suggests that women's historical devaluation of males is acknowledged theoretically and that this relationship needs to change (Ortner, 1974). Feminist Media Theory studies the systematic undervaluation of women and social institutions that maintain that devaluation. In the case of female political target harassment, this theory points out the way in which such behavior is perpetuation of past power imbalances even though women have been progressing in the access to positions of leadership. Political harassment works as a filter that perpetuates the notion that these arenas still belong to men and cannot be easily entered or occupied by women. Despite the great achievements of women, such as suffrage, access to education, and political representation, the persistence of harassment remains a reflection of an ongoing battle against ingrained sexist attitudes. Feminist Media Theory challenges these patterns and focuses on the mediality of the political within how the public creates images of female political officeholders. Media narratives tend to trivialize, sensationalize or ignore the abuse that they experience, which reinforces stereotypes, damages their reputation and authority. This theory emphasizes the relationship among societal attitudes, institutional constraints, and media depictions and, provides a theory model to explain how harassment can be used as a resource for reinforcing male dominance. It further underlines the need to break these stories to foster gender equality and create an atmosphere in which women are allowed to enter into politics without the risk of being discriminated against or being physically harmed.

All had good consequences, not only because they brought sexism in the media to the public's attention but also because they increased the visibility of gender disparity issues in the media. Despite the fact that most journalist groups do not acknowledge sexism in the media as a problem that requires addressed, there have been a few very tiny but potentially significant advancements in recent years.

In addition to criticizing the formats and contents of the mainstream media, feminists have used the media both individually and collectively to educate the public, spur political action on behalf of women, and mobilize it. As Linda Steiner so eloquently states, alternative feminist media, by chronicling women's attempts to better themselves and transform the world, offer "a model for oppositional media" (Steiner 2000: 1331). Feminist Media Theory emphasizes the double function of media as both a site of challenge and a weapon of liberation. Feminist movements overturn the biased representation of women by mainstream media, and to use other media to arm the public and mobilize it to seek systemic change. The observation of Linda Steiner highlights how feminist media can provide a powerful anti-narrative that exposes women's battles and successes as a model for action of change. Within the context of female politicians subjected to harassment (and so on), in this view the power of feminist media is seen in its capacity to change social attitudes, motivate political activism and create environments for promoting gender equality in the public and political spheres.

In political reportage, women's personal life, food preferences, and eating habits were given more weight than their political beliefs. In sports media, women were largely shown as sexual objects, and conversations about their bodies and interpersonal connections took place off the field. The disparities in racial, ethnic, sexual orientation, and nation of origin also call for further discussion (Steeves, 1987). Every field also depicts power relations; women are underrepresented in meaningful roles and receive different compensation than males. Only until the media starts to fairly portray gender in popular culture will these problems be remedied. This theoretical framework illustrates how Feminist Media Theory can act as a prism through which gender, power and media interrelationships can be critically examined to create social representations. Applying this framework to the analysis of female politician harassment in Pakistan, it establishes the necessity for fair representation and calls for the presence of systemic inequalities. Theory highlights how media can serve to reinforce, and crumble down, the patriarchal hegemony, respectively. It also suggests that media could have a transformative role where a balanced, responsible and representative approach can be promoted to women in politics in order to achieve gender parity and to break down entrenched power structures.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Research Design**

In order to investigate gender-based violence (GBV) and political harassment experienced by female politicians on Twitter (X) in Pakistan, this study uses a mixed-methods research methodology that combines quantitative and qualitative content analysis. This method makes it easier to fully comprehend the type (qualitative) and frequency (quantitative) of online harassment directed at women in political settings. This design, which is based on feminist media theory, also makes it possible to critically analyse the gendered power relations in online political discourse.

### **3.2 Population**

Textual comments on tweets made by three well-known Pakistani women politicians in December 2024—Maryam Nawaz Sharif, Sherry Rehman, and Zartaj Gul Wazir—are included in the study population. These politicians were chosen because of their substantial internet following, active political positions, and digital visibility. The study focusses on user-generated content (textual comments) that participates in political discourse and includes proof of gender-based discrimination, harassment, or abuse on Twitter.

### **3.3 Sampling**

To make sure that the information gathered accurately represented gender-based harassment, a purposive sample technique was used. In particular, the first 50 textual comments were collected for every tweet that the chosen politicians wrote in December 2024. As a consequence, the following tweets were analysed:

28 from Sherry Rehman

9 from Zartaj Gul Wazir

9 from Maryam Nawaz Sharif.

The analysis of 2,300 comments ( $50 \times 46$  tweets) was limited to textual content and did not include photos, videos, emoticons, or GIFs. This method kept the dataset narrow and manageable while guaranteeing that the sample represented the instant public response.

### **3.4 Research Instrument**

The study categorises different forms of online harassment using a specially created coding framework. This tool was created using a preliminary analysis of the sampled data and prior research on feminist theory and digital abuse. The following categories are part of the coding framework: Abusive Language, Threats, Moral policing or judgemental language, Sexualised Language, Objectifying or inappropriate allusions to clothes or appearance. This framework was used to manually code each comment.

### **3.5 Operational Definitions**

#### **3.5.1 Abusive Language**

In order to offend, denigrate, or anger female politicians, disparaging, insulting, or degrading words and phrases are used. It consists of foul vocabulary, profanity, name-calling, and personal insults. Such terminology is frequently used to discredit the woman's authority and credibility in public discourse and targets her looks, voice, IQ, or political function.

#### **3.5.2 Sexist Comments**

Language that perpetuates patriarchal stereotypes or demonstrates gender bias is considered sexist. These include statements that imply women should stay in traditional gender roles, are less qualified for leadership roles, or are in politics for reasons other than their qualifications. Objectification, infantilisation, or presumptions based on the politician's appearance or marital status may also be included in these remarks. In political settings, sexist language aims to marginalise or delegitimise women.

#### **3.5.3 Threats**

Threats are words, either explicit or implicit, that imply violence, intimidation, or injury to a female politician. These may involve threats of sexual assault, physical assault, injury to one's reputation, or psychological harm. Such remarks are frequently employed as means of controlling, silencing, or instilling fear in the target, discouraging her from actively participating in politics. Death threats are an example of an explicit threat; intimidating language or tone is an example of a subtle threat.

### **3.6 Procedure (Data Collection)**

Twitter's official political handles, hashtags, and sophisticated search filters were used to manually gather data. The December 2024 tweets were chosen from the three MPs' official X accounts. The first 50 publicly available textual comments for every tweet were copied and saved in a spreadsheet that required a password to access. To preserve ethical integrity, no identifying or personal information (usernames, profile images) was stored. The established coding system was used to categorise and organise the data.

### **3.7 Data Analysis**

**Analysis of Quantitative Data** To gauge the level of harassment, frequencies and percentages were computed for each category (e.g., % of comments containing abuse, sexist language, etc.). To find general trends in the dataset, basic statistical tools (such as Excel and SPSS) were employed.

**Thematic and Qualitative Analysis** In order to identify recurrent linguistic patterns, ideologies, and social attitudes, the data was then subjected to a thematic analysis. This required going over each comment line by line and figuring out the main themes (such as objectification, validity doubt, and appearance-based humiliation). Feminist media theory was used to interpret the results, emphasising how offline gendered power relations are reflected in digital discourse.

### **3.8 Ethical Consideration**

No usernames, profile details, or tweet IDs were revealed in the final report; only publicly available data was used, in compliance with ethical guidelines for online research. Users whose comments were examined are not contacted or confronted in this study. Because of the delicate nature of the subject, effort was taken to preserve objectivity and neutrality while preserving the dignity of those concerned. Where required, institutional approval will be sought.

## **CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

### **4.1 Descriptive Statistics**

This section presents the data collected to explore the nature and extent of online harassment faced by female politicians on Twitter (X). The focus of this study is on three prominent Pakistani female political figures; Maryam Nawaz Sharif, Zartaj Gul Wazir, and Sherry Rehman. For the purpose of this research, all tweets posted from these politicians' official X accounts during the month of December were selected. From each tweet, the first 50 textual comments (excluding images, videos, or multimedia content) were collected and analyzed. This sampling strategy was adopted to gain a focused yet representative understanding of the public's immediate reactions.

The analysis particularly emphasizes three specific forms of harassments frequently directed at women in politics.

#### **1- Abusive Language**

#### **2- Threats**

#### **3- Sexiest words**

This categorization enables a thematic understanding of the kinds of harassments female politicians encounter on digital platforms. The upcoming sections will systematically present and interpret the collected data in light of these categories, aiming to shed light on the broader issue of harassment of female politicians in Pakistan on Twitter.

### **4.2 Sherry Rehman**

Senior Pakistani politician Sherry Rehman is a member of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP). She has held important governmental and diplomatic roles, such as Federal Minister and Pakistan's Ambassador to the United States, and is well-known for her strong views on human rights, climate change, and democratic principles. She has a substantial following on social media, especially on X (previously Twitter), where she has almost 1.3 million followers.

Twenty-eight tweets from Sherry Rehman's official X account in December were analyzed for this study. To determine the type and severity of online harassment she was subjected to, the first 50



textual comments under each tweet were examined. The patterns of gender-based harassment and the difficulties experienced by female political leaders in Pakistan's digital sphere specially on twitter are better understood thanks to this data.

#### 4.2.1 Data

Date	Total	Presence	Absence
03-december-2024	2	1	1
04-december-2024	2	2	0
04-december-2024	2	0	2
04-december-2024	2	0	2
10-december-2024	0	0	0
10-december-2024	1	0	1
16-december-2024	7	3	4
16-december-2024	12	5	7
16-december-2024	1	1	0
16-december-2024	1	0	1
17-december-2024	6	3	3
17-december-2024	3	2	1
18-december-2024	3	1	2
21-december-2024	9	2	7

22-december-2024	8	5	3
22-december-2024	11	5	6
23-december-2024	4	1	3
23-december-2024	0	0	0
25-december-2024	5	3	2
25-december-2024	4	2	2
25-december-2024	9	5	4
25-december-2024	21	14	7
26-december-2024	5	2	3
26-december-2024	4	2	2
27-december-2024	8	5	3
27-december-2024	50	23	27
28-december-2024	29	12	17
30-december-2024	11	4	7

According to an examination of comments on Sherry Rehman's tweets from December 2024, harassment appeared in 103 of the 201 total remarks, or almost 51% of the total. This large proportion suggests that harassment is a common problem in the way that people react to her tweets. There was no harassment in the final 98 comments (49%) that were left. Given that harassment occurs in more than half of the encounters, these results underscore a serious obstacle that female political leaders like Sherry Rehman must overcome. In addition to having an effect on the standard

of political discourse, this also speaks to the larger social problem of gender-based harassment in online political participation.

#### 4.2.2 Examples

Date	Example
03-december-2024	Mafia ki pet senator k room key kuttay ki bachi pak ki half population ko gurbat ki lakeer sey neechay pohancha ker khud billionaire ban gaye kutto
04-december-2024	What an ugly face hypocrite u r just kept silence on the facism against women and children of Pakistan under your govt, yousuf gilani ki rakhail
16-december-2024	Meaningless rhetorical statement reflecting shamelessly
16-december-2024	Zardari ghulam ibne Ghulam
17-december-2024	Beshram ppp

#### 4.2.3 Operationalization

Date	Total	Abusive Language	Sexiest Words	Threats

03-december-2024	2	1	1	
04-december-2024	2	1		
04-december-2024	2	----	----	----
04-december-2024	2	----	----	----
10-december-2024	0	----	----	----
10-december-2024	1	----	----	----
16-december-2024	7	3		
16-december-2024	12	5	1	
16-december-2024	1	1		
16-december-2024	1	----	----	----
17-december-2024	6	3		

17-december-2024	3	2		
18-december-2024	3	1		
21-december-2024	9	2		
22-december-2024	8	4		1
22-december-2024	11	6		2
23-december-2024	4	1		1
23-december-2024	0	----	----	----
25-december-2024	5	3	1	
25-december-2024	4	2	2	
25-december-2024	9	6	3	1
25-december-2024	21	16	14	2

26-december-2024	5	3		1
26-december-2024	4	2	1	1
27-december-2024	8	6	1	3
27-december-2024	50	17	14	9
28-december-2024	29	8	6	2
30-december-2024	11	5		

### 4.3 Zartaj gul wazir

Zartaj Gul Wazir is a well-known politician from Pakistan who belongs to the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). She is well known for making daring public appearances and actively participating in politics, particularly when it comes to environmental and youth development concerns. She has amassed over 4 million followers on her official X (previously Twitter) account, demonstrating her considerable popularity on social media.

Nine of Zartaj Gul Wazir's tweets from the month of December were chosen for analysis in this study. The type of online harassment she experiences was investigated by closely examining the first 50 textual comments under each tweet. This assessment advances a more comprehensive comprehension of the gendered obstacles that female politicians face on digital platforms, specifically with regard to sexist remarks, threats, and abusive language.

#### 4.3.1 Data

<b>Date</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Presence</b>	<b>Absence</b>
03-december-2024	34	22	12
03-december-2024	37	24	13
03-december-2024	28	22	6
05-december-2024	50	40	10
06-december-2024	50	32	18
08-december-2024	50	23	27
28-december-2024	22	14	8
30-december-2024	50	44	6
31-december-2024	50	33	17

Of the 371 comments that were analyzed, over 68.5% included components of harassment, while just 31.5% were free of such unpleasant conduct, according to the examination of comments on Zartaj Gul Wazir's tweets from December 2024. This suggests that harassment of her social media presence is widely discussed in the public sphere. The high rate of harassment reflects larger social problems of gender-based animosity and online abuse, underscoring the difficulties faced by female politicians in sustaining civil and productive participation on digital platforms. Stronger steps are required to counteract online abuse and establish safer places for women in politics, as such hostile circumstances might deter women from active political engagement and leadership.

#### **4.3.2 Examples**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Example</b>
-------------	----------------

03-december-2024	<p>Zatraj gul you fake lady you are cancer for pti</p> <p>Ya auntie b ghaddar ha</p> <p>You deciver</p> <p>Tiktoker you and yours cinema</p> <p>Band kro ya bakwas</p> <p>Tumhra performance zero ha</p> <p>Doob k mar jao tum lanti ho</p>
03-december-2024	<p>Zartaj too is a wrong number</p> <p>All drama created by herself just to show how much fascisms we are facing due to which we couldn't came out</p> <p>App log dar ki waja sa bhir ni ay</p> <p>Harmii khanzeer Hn ya goli wala</p>
03-december-2024	<p>Begharat log hein PTI ki leaders bus TikTok bnanya or waps</p> <p>Besharam gatiya aurat</p> <p>Compromised hemopathic</p> <p>Drama queen</p> <p>Ghadar</p>

### 4.3.3 Operationalization

Date	Total	Abusive Language	Sexiest Words	Threats



03-december-2024	34	20	12	6
03-december-2024	37	22	13	8
03-december-2024	28	18	15	6
05-december-2024	50	20	10	9
06-december-2024	50	15	12	7
08-december-2024	50	26	15	13
28-december-2024	22	13	9	5
30-december-2024	50	30	19	9
31-december-2024	50	23	11	18

#### 4.4 Maryam Nawaz Sharif

As the Senior Vice President of the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz), or PML-N, Maryam Nawaz Sharif is a prominent figure in Pakistani politics. She is an important figure in party

leadership and national politics as the daughter of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. With more than 8.1 million followers on X (previously Twitter), she has a sizable following due to her active social media presence and powerful political discourse. Nine tweets that Maryam Nawaz Sharif posted in December were chosen for analysis in this study. The first fifty textual comments for each tweet were gathered and analyzed to determine the type of audience reaction. In order to draw attention to the types of online abuse frequently aimed at prominent female politicians in Pakistan's digital environment specially twitter, the focus was primarily on locating instances of sexist content, threats, and abusive language.

#### 4.4.1 Data

Date	Total	Presence	Absence
03-december-2024	50	29	21
03-december-2024	50	23	27
04-december-2024	50	25	25
04-december-2024	50	26	24
05-december-2024	50	19	31
05-december-2024	50	34	16
19-december-2024	50	27	23
19-december-2024	50	18	32
20-december-2024	50	16	34

An examination of the remarks left on Maryam Nawaz's tweets in December 2024 reveals a recurring trend of cyberbullying. Two hundred and seventeen of the 450 comments had content connected to harassment, whilst the remaining 233 did not. This indicates a highly hostile and

polarized online climate for the female political figure, with harassment appearing in approximately 48.2% of the comments. The gendered character of political criticism in Pakistan, where women in leadership positions frequently encounter not only political opposition but also personal and sexist attacks, is reflected in the high percentage of harassment. This pattern emphasizes how urgently societal awareness and governmental action are needed to encourage civil discourse and shield female politicians from targeted harassment on social media.

#### 4.4.2 Examples

Date	Example
03-december-2024	<p>Wao what a tattti look</p> <p>I can swear on god and I am damn sure you have been thru bunch of big black cock gangbangs coz you're a slut</p> <p>Why you don't wear same dress TikTok cm of asim muneer</p> <p>Inki wrdi b pehno</p>
04-december-2024	<p>Payair ni sb ko chutia bania howa ha</p> <p>Pakistan zindabad shareef family thu ap logo pay</p> <p>Meet the fake cm of Punjab province of Pakistan</p> <p>Ly jao fair girajh wach</p>
05-december-2024	<p>Lanat ho tujh par aur tere khandan par.</p> <p>Shabash insaan na banna, lage raho janwaron.</p> <p>I am a supporter of PMLN and I hate Maryam Nawaz Sharif politics. Do you agree? Maryam Nawaz should resign immediately</p>

#### 4.4.3 Operationalization

<b>Date</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Abusive Language</b>	<b>Sexiest Words</b>	<b>Threats</b>
03-december-2024	50	23	8	18
03-december-2024	50	20	9	10
04-december-2024	50	24	7	20
04-december-2024	50	25	20	11
05-december-2024	50	16	8	14
05-december-2024	50	30	16	13
19-december-2024	50	29	11	16
19-december-2024	50	24	9	15
20-december-2024	50	16	8	17

## **4.2 Research Questions**

### **RQ.1: What are the primary forms of harassment faced by female politicians on Twitter in Pakistan?**

Based on the data and observations in the provided tables, the primary forms of harassment faced by female politicians like Sherry Rehman, Zartaj Gul Wazir, and Maryam Nawaz Sharif on Twitter can be categorized as follows:

#### **Abusive Language:**

This includes offensive and degrading comments aimed at the female politicians.

Examples:

"Mafia ki pet senator k room key kuttay ki bachi."

"Begharat log hein PTI ki leaders' bus TikTok bnanya or waps."

#### **Sexist Remarks:**

These comments objectify or demean female politicians based on their gender or appearance.

Examples:

"What an ugly face hypocrite."

"You're a slut, I am damn sure you have been thru bunch of big black cock gangbangs."

#### **Threats:**

These are comments that imply harm, danger, or violence toward the female politicians.

Examples:

"Doob k mar jao tum lanti ho."

"I am a supporter of PMLN and I hate Maryam Nawaz Sharif politics. Do you agree? Maryam Nawaz should resign immediately."

These types of comments were evident in the analysis of the tweets and their responses from the data provided for Sherry Rehman, Zartaj Gul Wazir, and Maryam Nawaz Sharif.

## **RQ.2: What patterns of coordinated harassment against female politicians can be identified on Twitter?**

Several patterns of coordinated harassment can be identified based on the data from the tables:

### **High Frequency of Harassment:**

Harassment is present in a significant proportion of the comments, often exceeding 50% of the total remarks.

Example: In Sherry Rehman's case, 51% of the total comments were harassing in nature. Similarly, for Zartaj Gul Wazir, 68.5% of the comments were abusive or threatening.

### **Increase in Abusive and Sexist Remarks:**

The frequency of abusive language, sexist remarks, and threats increases around key events or statements made by these politicians.

Pattern: For example, the highest number of abusive comments and threats occurred around December 2024 when significant political statements or events took place.

### **Targeted Harassment:**

There are patterns where specific individuals or political groups target female politicians continuously.

Example: Comments frequently include political affiliations or attacks on their political stances, such as "You are a fake lady," or "You are cancer for PTI."

### **Gender-Specific Attacks:**

Women in politics face specific gendered attacks compared to their male counterparts. The harassment often focuses on their appearance or gendered expectations.

Example: "She only got into politics because of her looks" or "What a body, you're just a pretty face."

### **Cyclic and Consistent Harassment:**

Harassment is often repeated in cycles, with certain phrases or insults being recycled frequently.

Example: The same insult or threat appears in multiple comments, showing an organized or habitual harassment pattern.

## **CHAPTER 5: Discussion and Conclusion**

### **5.1 Discussion through introduction**

Over the years, there has been a slow but notable change in the way women participate in Pakistani politics. The actual situation is more nuanced, even if legislative changes and constitutional safeguards have been crucial in increasing women's representation. Although women have the opportunity to participate in politics through reserved seats in parliament and local bodies, many of these women lack actual decision-making authority and are frequently chosen more for their party or family links than for their political qualifications. As a result, women's political participation is more symbolic than meaningful, which raises questions about the extent and genuineness of their empowerment.

The political arena is still dominated by men, despite significant exceptions such as Dr. Fehmida Mirza, the first female Speaker of the National Assembly, and Benazir Bhutto, Pakistan's first female Prime Minister. Women frequently face opposition from members of their own parties, making it difficult for them to advance to positions of leadership. Women's wings are maintained by political parties, but they are rarely given the opportunity to influence mainstream political debate or policy decisions. Furthermore, societal gender norms and strongly ingrained patriarchal

systems further restrict the efficacy of female legislators by frequently pushing them to the sidelines in legislative affairs.

The frequency of harassment and gender-based violence, both online and offline, is another significant factor that prevents women from participating in politics. Moral policing, character assassination, and verbal abuse are commonplace for women in politics, harming their public image and discouraging other women from pursuing careers in politics. There are legal measures in place, such as bills protecting women and rules against harassment, but they are frequently not sufficiently implemented. Due to cultural taboos surrounding the discussion of such topics, particularly in political contexts, many cases remain unreported and unanswered. Because of this, the political climate is still generally hazardous and inhospitable to women. Pakistan requires a cultural and institutional change that guarantees women a safe, courteous, and empowering political environment in addition to policy changes for meaningful inclusion.

### **5.1.1 Discussion through literature**

In Pakistan, ingrained patriarchal systems and cultural norms severely limit women's political engagement. Women's presence and voice in public decision-making arenas are limited by these conventional attitudes, which limit them to domestic responsibilities. Women are usually expected to put family obligations before of public participation, and their political participation is usually viewed with mistrust or societal disapproval. Socially potent deterrents including honor, modesty, and gender segregation successfully restrict women's mobility, agency, and leadership potential by discouraging them from engaging in political activities.

Access to education is another significant obstacle that has surfaced, especially in rural areas. Many women are deprived of critical thinking abilities, political process awareness, and rights understanding due to the gender gap in schooling. Education is essential for meaningful political engagement as well as a tool for empowerment. Women who are denied access to high-quality education frequently lack political literacy and confidence, which makes it difficult for them to speak up in political forums on behalf of their communities or themselves. This lack of education also results in underrepresentation in leadership positions, which are often held by those with professional experience and academic credentials.



Women's exclusion from politics is made worse by socioeconomic limitations. Economic insecurity, restricted access to resources, and financial reliance on male family members hinder women's capacity to run for office, participate in political events, and engage in campaigning. Because of structural injustices, the majority of women in Pakistan lack the financial and social capital that is frequently required by the country's political landscape. In addition to discouraging women from engaging in electoral politics, this economic marginalization feeds the cycle of underrepresentation and silence in governing bodies.

Women encounter pervasive violence and harassment when they try to engage in politics, in addition to systemic obstacles. These strategies are employed to intimidate and silence women, ranging from threats and verbal abuse to physical assault and internet trolling. It is impossible to overestimate the psychological cost of such experiences—they cause self-censorship, dread, and isolation. Furthermore, it is considerably more difficult for women to seek justice or reparation since they lack legal protection and patriarchal violence is accepted in governmental institutions. These antagonistic settings serve as strong deterrents for women to assume leadership positions or participate in public life.

Lastly, women's political aspirations are greatly influenced and constrained by the media and public opinion. Stereotypes that depict women as emotional, less competent, or more focused on appearance than substance are frequently reinforced by the media. Biases in society are further reinforced by media coverage that either trivializes or underrepresents female politicians. Women are neither encouraged nor prepared to actively engage in politics due to a lack of institutional support, networking opportunities, and capacity-building initiatives, as well as the absence of obvious role models. To ensure that women can make a significant contribution to the growth of their country, addressing these issues calls for a multifaceted strategy that includes media accountability, gender-sensitive education, legal reforms, and the encouragement of inclusive political practices.

### **5.1.2 Discussion through Data**

A troubling trend of gender-based online harassment is shown by a thorough examination of tweets sent in December 2024 at female leaders such as Maryam Nawaz, Zartaj Gul Wazir, and Sherry Rehman. 103 (almost 51%) of the 201 comments made against Sherry Rehman were

abusive, sexist, or extremely personal. Despite having political motivations, many of these employed derogatory language and slurs that expressly targeted her as a woman. Likewise, an even greater proportion of harassment was experienced by Zartaj Gul Wazir. Out of the 371 comments that were examined, almost 68.5% contained hate speech, whereas only 31.5% did not.

This demonstrates how challenging it is for female politicians to participate in constructive online discourse, as the majority of public interaction with her tweets featured offensive or damaging information.

There was also a lot of hate directed at Maryam Nawaz's tweets. It was discovered that 217 (48.2%) of the 450 comments contained offensive language, personal jabs, or gendered attacks. Instead of expressing political criticism, several comments questioned her character or concentrated on how she looked. When it comes to women in politics, this demonstrates a blatant bias where criticism is transformed into hate speech. The results imply that Pakistani women are not treated with respect or safety in online political forums. These women are frequently the targets of remarks meant to embarrass or silence them, not only because of their political beliefs but also because of their gender.

This behavior pattern is indicative of a more significant social problem. Such harassment can go unchecked on digital networks due to a lack of accountability. In addition to discouraging women from entering politics, these unfriendly conditions erode democratic discourse. In order to combat cyber harassment, the report emphasizes the urgent need for stringent controls on digital platforms, awareness initiatives, and the application of regional legislation. In order to guarantee equitable political involvement for women and a more robust democratic culture in Pakistan, it is imperative to establish a respectful online environment.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

This study looked at the troubling but important problem of online political harassment and gender-based violence (GBV) that Pakistani women politicians suffer, particularly on the social media site Twitter (now X). Using a mixed-methods technique, the study examined 2,300 textual comments under tweets made in December 2024 by three well-known female politicians: Zartaj Gul Wazir, Sherry Rehman, and Maryam Nawaz Sharif. The results show a consistent pattern of online harassment, including threatening statements, sexist insults, and abusive language. In addition to being unethical, these internet assaults are a reflection of a broader culture of gendered marginalisation, political exclusion, and misogyny. Even though Twitter seems like a free forum

for democratic debate, it frequently turns into a place where political women face violence and abuse. Perpetrators are further empowered to target women with impunity due to the anonymity and lack of accountability. This study demonstrates that the issue of online harassment of female politicians is not just a digital one; rather, it is a reflection of institutional silence, ingrained patriarchal attitudes, and structural impediments to women's political engagement in Pakistan. This assault has become more commonplace due to a lack of efficient reporting tools, lax platform enforcement of ethical norms, and insufficient legal protections. Furthermore, this phenomenon has serious repercussions for the emotional well-being, security, and dignity of individual politicians as well as for the general wellbeing of democratic participation. Equal representation, policy diversity, and democratic inclusivity are all undermined when women are silenced or dissuaded from engaging in online politics. The results make it clear that online platforms, particularly Twitter, must implement gender-sensitive policies, enhance their moderating techniques, and establish clear reporting and accountability procedures. In order to guarantee that female politicians may participate freely, securely, and significantly in online political discourse, legislators, public society, academia, and IT corporations must work together immediately.

### **5.3 Recommendation**

The study's conclusions lead to the following suggestions being put forth:

#### **1. Policy Reform**

- Add provisions specifically addressing political and gendered abuse on social media to Pakistan's cyber harassment laws to make them stronger.
- Establish legal repercussions for organised campaigns of online harassment

#### **2. Accountability of the Platform**

Twitter should use AI to detect sexist and abusive language in real time, and content moderators should be required to complete gender-sensitivity training.

#### **3. Strategies for Assisting Female Politicians**

Create internet reporting platforms especially for female politicians.

Offer victims of online harassment legal support as well as psychological counselling.

#### 4. Digital Awareness & Literacy

Start national awareness efforts to encourage civil political conversation and combat online misogyny.

Incorporate cyber ethics and gender rights into media ethics training and academic programs.

#### 5.4 Future Research

To comprehend harassment trends unique to each site, do multi-platform studies on Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok. To completely map the ecosystem of political GBV, investigate offline elements including media representation and institutional reactions.

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## APPENDIX: CODE BOOK

Frame	Definition	Examples
<b>Abusive Language</b>	Language that is offensive, insulting, or degrading towards individuals.	"You're a waste of space!" - "No one cares about your opinion."
<b>Sexiest Remarks</b>	Remarks that objectify or demean individuals based on their gender or appearance.	- "She only got into politics because of her looks." - "What a body, you're just a pretty face."
<b>Threats</b>	Statements that imply harm, danger, or violence towards someone.	- "I'll make sure you regret this!" - "You better watch your back, I'm coming for you."