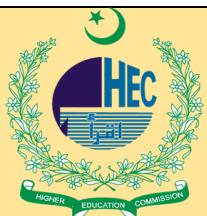



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Political Empowerment of Women: Participation, Barriers, and Governance Outcomes in Balochistan, Pakistan
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ABSTRACT

The political empowerment of women is a very important aspect of democratic governance and inclusive development, but the level of involvement of women in the political decision-making process is low in most conservative and underdeveloped nations. This paper explores the scope, the factors and the consequences of the women political participation in Balochistan in Pakistan. Using an exploratory mixed research method, primary data were gathered using structured questionnaires with women of different socio-economic status, educational levels, and ethnic orientations in the Quetta District. Statistical tools were applied to analyse quantitative data and thematic analysis to analyse qualitative data to provide the lived experiences and social-cultural limitations of women. The results indicate that deeply rooted patriarchal values, inhibiting cultural values and practices, economic dependency and inaccessibility to institutional services are some of the factors greatly affecting the successful involvement of women in governance especially in rural regions. Even though the policy interventions like gender quotas and reserved seats have seen women become increasingly represented in numbers, the interventions have not been translated into translating into real political power and leadership positions. One of the enabling factors that are identified is education; women have become more politically aware, confident, and ambitious to be a leader, but the problem is that not all women have equal access to education and economic opportunities, which limits the active empowerment. The research also shows that there is a close connection between the socio-economic status, education and participation of women in political affairs. The study comes to the conclusions that sustainable women political empowerment in Balochistan needs a combination of approaches that are based on both policy implementation and institutional change as well as educational investment, economic empowerment, and community-based cultural change. The results are evidence-based and can be used by policy makers, development practitioners and civil society organisations in their efforts to enhance gender inclusive governance in marginalised settings.

Keywords: Women political empowerment; gender equality; women in governance; political participation; Baluchistan.

Introduction

The ability of women to actively participate in politics and hold positions of political authority is essential to the exercise of democracy and the achievement of political power as a way of strengthening women's political rights through the formulation and implementation of policies (Dar & Shairgojri, 2022). Globally, women have made considerable achievements in the exercise of their political rights, yet there are still considerable gaps in the less developed and

more conservative areas of the world, specifically in Balochistan, Pakistan. In Balochistan, there are still a number of social, economic, and cultural barriers that limit the extent to which women are able to participate in the political and social affairs of the country (Shah & Ahmed, 2021).

In such cases, discrimination often stems from the hegemonic masculine systems of patriarchy, which dictate women's movement, independence, presence, and, ultimately, systemic discrimination against women in society (Javidan, 2021). This leads to women's political participation either being viewed as socially wrong or culturally intolerable. Within international development policy, women's leadership and representation have been recognized as key areas of focus for the last few decades. In the context of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs), for example, most goals and targets call for the removal of inequalities and the attainment of leadership positions in both developed and developing countries as fundamental for sustainable development (Leal Filho et al., 2023). Nonetheless, women's representation in political decision-making positions remains a global challenge in spite of international commitments. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) estimates indicate that, in most countries, women make up only 15 percent of the total number of members of parliaments, and only a few countries meet or exceed the 33 percent recommended level of representation. For democratic systems to be resilient and effective, women's political participation must be ensured (Monopoli, 2020). After a few advancements, the remaining parts of South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa still have severely low numbers of political representation for women. Discriminatory legislation, sexual and gender-based violence, and patriarchal systems of society all remain as solid factors, along with the lack of economic and educational resources. As an example, women made up 24% of the United States Congress in 2019, while in India, 9% of candidates in the national elections were women and only 14% of the elected representatives were women (True, 2020). A variety of strategies have been used worldwide to improve the presence of women in politics, ranging from changes in legislation, to gender quotas, to leadership training, to the promotion of campaigns to raise awareness. Of all the strategies that exist, gender quotas appear to be the most successful in raising the number of women present. An example of successful institutional intervention is the affirmative action policy in Rwanda, where women made up more than 60% of the national assembly and lower house of parliament by 2019 (Demir, 2019). All of these strategies demonstrate the need for more context-specific and targeted strategies in order to improve political representation of women.

The political participation of women is a complex, multi-dimensional issue, even in countries that have implemented progressive political policies. Factors such as structural discrimination, socio-economic vulnerability, and a lack of education, continue to inhibit women's ability to fully engage in political activities (Opoku, 2021). Therefore, formal political enfranchisement, in women's suffrage, is only a first step; it needs to be supplemented with consistent and extensive reforms to address the deeply rooted cultural norms, institutional practices, and socio-economic inequities that fuel the marginalization of women. In Pakistan, the representation of women in politics has been historically limited by socio-cultural barriers, as well as institutional constraints, even though Pakistan has a constitution that guarantees equal political rights. For a long time, women's participation in politics was largely symbolic. Although there have been some positive changes such as; the addition of reserved seats for women in the provincial and national assemblies, the adoption of some protective legislation like the domestic violence law, and the improvement of women's visibility in politics, the country as a whole still lacks substantive political empowerment for women (Ajodo-Adebanjoko, 2021).

These problems have been exacerbated in the province of Balochistan due to poverty, illiteracy, and a lack of infrastructure and services such as health care. Moreover, because of the rigid tribal structures, women are even further disadvantaged. The socio-cultural environment is highly endogamous and male-dominated. These factors lead to further restrictions on women's participation in public life, and as a result, women are underrepresented in the provincial governance structures, where important decisions are made by men that impact the lives of women (Alam, 2021).

In Pakistan, both governmental and non-governmental organizations, have implemented programs to increase women's political awareness, assist women in building leadership skills, and encourage women to become politically active and join political associations (Dolan et al., 2021). As a result, there is a notable discrepancy between the gaps in policy and the outcomes of any potential changes. Developing context-specific approaches to mitigate the sociocultural and structural obstacles to women's advocacy in Balochistan is necessary to encourage advocacy for the socio-political agency of women. Consequently, this study aims to analyse the current status of women's political engagement in Balochistan, identify obstacles to women's political participation, and assess the impact of enhanced women's political participation on governance. Through this, the study seeks to enhance the understanding of the gendered dynamics in the exercise of power within governance, and to provide practical recommendations for the political empowerment of women in this marginalized area.

Research Methodology

For this study the author selected an exploratory research design, as it is most appropriate for the identification and analysis of relationships that have not been documented, and have the potential to impact women's participation in governance, especially in the remote, and politically restrictive, Balochistan, Pakistan. In these types of studies, the flexibility offered by exploratory research is an asset to identifying and understanding the contextual and structural factors that are shaping participation phenomena. In this instance, the design facilitated the analysis of the cultural, familial, and societal factors that operate as constraints to women's involvement in the public and political sphere. Due to the multi-dimensional nature of women's political empowerment, the author adopted a mixed-methods approach to capture both the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of the study. This approach provides a framework to examine the degree of political participation of women as well as the socio-cultural and institutional factors that explain and condition that participation (Vis & Stolwijk, 2021).

Research tools included structured questionnaires. Using questionnaires, the study quantified women's political awareness, level of participation, and perceptions of governance, while enabling the researchers to make generalizations about the study population. This method served the study's purpose of examining the constructs of social expectations, power dynamics, and informal political institutional frameworks that act as other obstacles to women's political participation (Belaïd et al., 2021). Using multiple frameworks, the researchers were able to construct a sophisticated, integrated, and substantive account of women's political participation in Balochistan.

Proposed Study Area

The study site is Quetta District, Balochistan. This area is both politically important as well as a representative of the remains of the urban and rural socio-cultural configurations, giving it the potential to serve as a microcosm of the other parts of Balochistan. Quetta is inhabited by various ethnic groupings, each with its own unique cultural attributes that shape society's expectations of women and their participation in leadership, governance, and the public

sphere. This enabled the researchers to explore the differential impacts of various cultural attributes on women's political participation.

The primary focus was on women located in Quetta who are involved, or are potential participants in, governance activities (Lehri & Zakir). The study population constituted women from various socio-economic and educational strata, as well as women from different ethnic groups. Such diversity enabled the study to obtain a broad spectrum of viewpoints and experiences, which in turn enhanced the range of analysis and external validity of the research findings.

Study Variables

The dependent variables of the study were concerned with women's political participation and the resultant governance status. These were ascertained for women's inclusion in governance and the extent of participation in political parties, voting, political rallies, and political discussions. The study also focused on the socio-cultural, economic, and political aspects that constitute the vertical (top-down) dimensions of political participation for women and, therefore, the barriers that inhibit women's participation in politics. Moreover, the study assessed the effect of women's political participation on policymaking in the areas of gender, health, education, social welfare, and other areas to determine the extent of impact.

The independent variables encompassed the socio-economic status, indicated by income, occupation, and self-sufficiency; the socio-cultural factors, including the general expectation and the gender bias limiting women's roles in the public sphere; and the supportive institutional framework, including state and non-state actors' initiatives to encourage women's engagement in politics. Other independent variables, considered as critical for building political awareness, leadership, and civic activism, were educational attainment and participation in the community. A total of 500 women were randomly sampled for the study in Quetta, with the sample covering all age, education, income, and place of residence (rural and urban) categories. Such a sample design enabled the study to capture the varied experiences and challenges of women in political participation across the district.

Sample Size Justifications

The sample can be calculated using social science population studies formula as follows:

$$n_0 = \frac{Z^2 pq}{e^2}$$

Where:

- n = required sample size
- Z = standard normal value corresponding to the desired confidence level
- p = estimated proportion of the population possessing the attribute of interest
- $q = 1 - p$
- e = margin of error (level of precision)

The formula applies guarantees the sample has sufficient statistical power and representation.

Research Analysis Tools

To build depth in the analysis and to cover the entire methodology spectrum, qualitative and quantitative analysis were adopted in the study. Data from the questionnaires was processed using SPSS for quantitative analysis. While utilizing SPSS, the researcher was able to obtain descriptive statistics as well as correlation and regression analyses, to understand the relationship between the various demographic factors and level of political participation of women. The use of SPSS in the study facilitated a comprehensive methodology, allowing for the

integration of the quantitative perspective and a more in-depth analysis of the experiences of the participants. This contributed to the research findings in terms of reliability and validity added.

Results and Discussions

Demographic Distribution Analysis

The demographic patterns exhibit distinct gender differences through age, employment, and education, as shown in Figure 1. In the age data, we see that there are more female respondents than male respondents in every single age group from 15 to 45. Women's involvement is especially noteworthy in the younger age categories, demonstrating that the lower and middle age ranges of the adult population encompass a more considerable share of female respondents than male respondents. Women are more prevalent in the survey across all age categories than men.

The differences between the male and female respondents are also evident in the employment status by age. The largest gap in this regard can be observed in the 25–35 age group, where female respondents are significantly more than male respondents. This is also observed in the 20–25 and 35–45 age groups, where there is a noticeable dominance of female respondents and where there is not much representation of males. This reflects the prevailing patriarchal structures and the socio-economic conditions that restrict, reduce, or otherwise limit the involvement of women in public and political life.

The completion of different levels of education reveals the distinct differences between the genders. As shown in Figure 1, women show higher levels of enrolment in all of the different education levels. This is even more apparent at the levels of bachelor's and master's degrees, where the enrolment of women is much higher as compared to the male respondents. The fact that women are attaining more higher levels of education than before is a positive sign that women are gaining more access to higher education and also suggests that women have the potential to be more active in politics and political leadership. However, the following parts of the research show the paradox of the situation, whereby more levels of education attained do not lead to more representation in politics or more positions in the higher levels of political decision making.

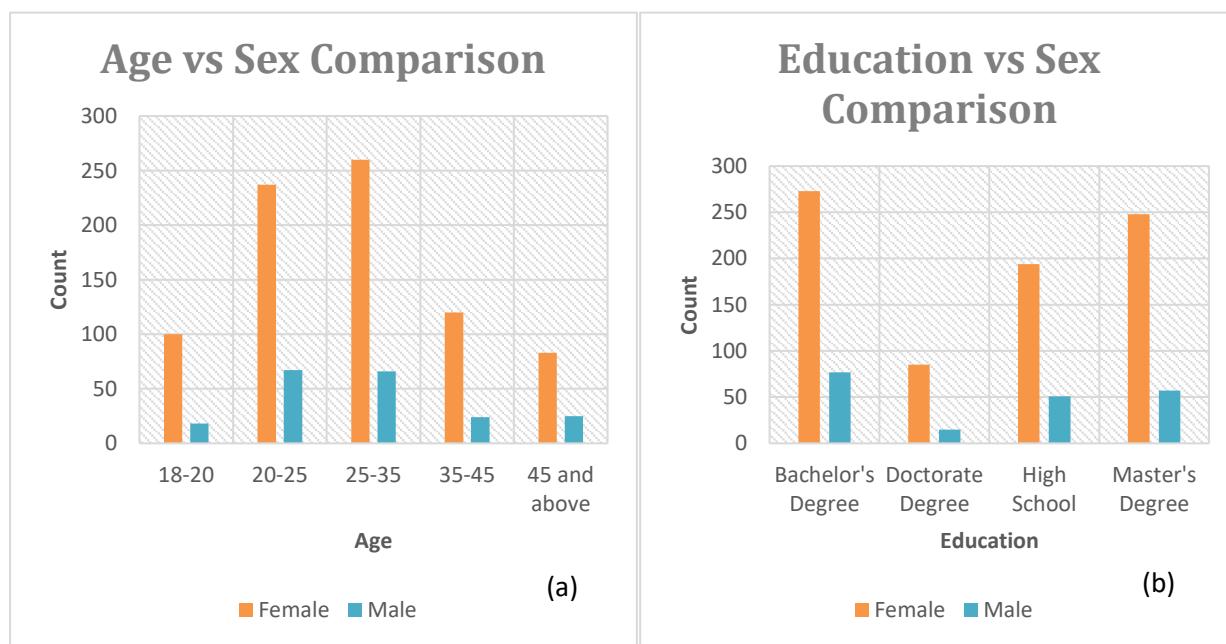
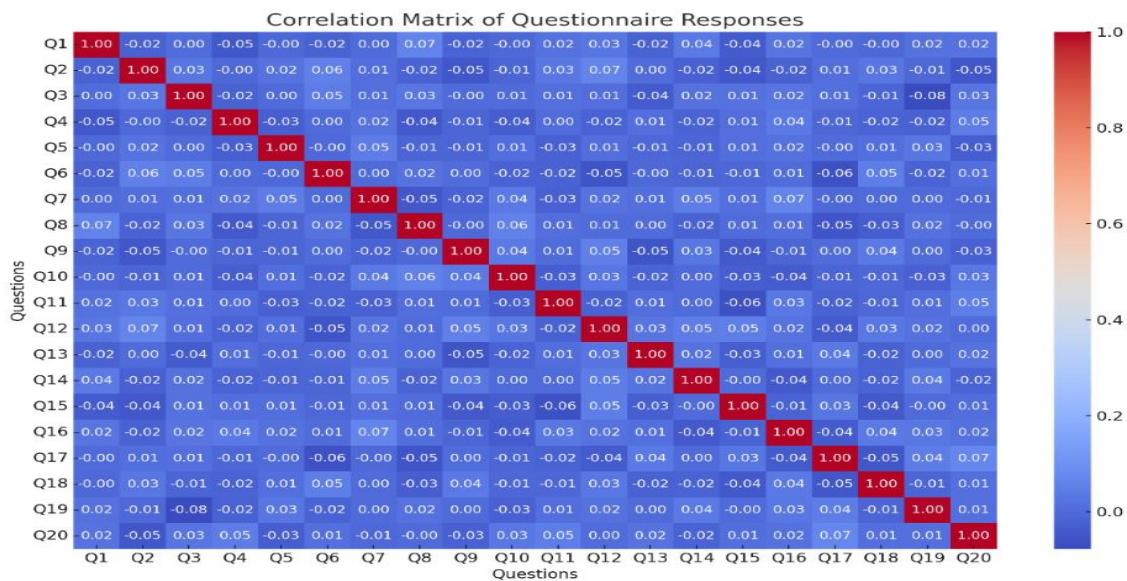
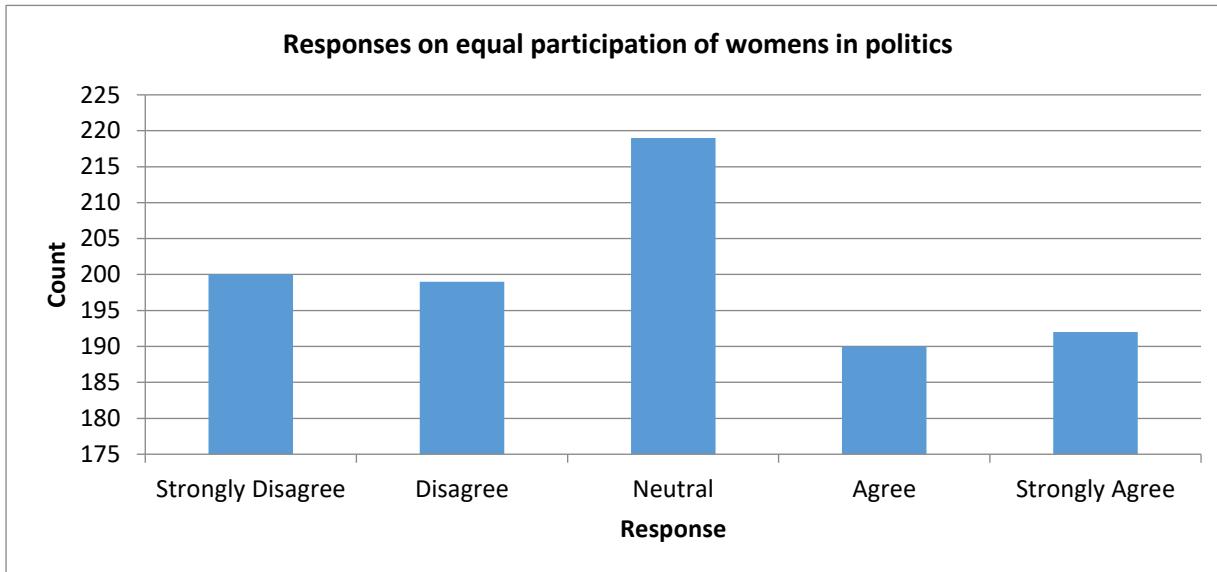


Fig.1 (a) age vs sex comparison of participant (b) education vs sex comparison of respondents**Figure 2 Correlation Matrix of Questionnaire Responses****Responses on Equal Participation of Women in Politics**

With the data collected, we have created a bar chart that shows the responses regarding views on equal participation of woman in politics. The least engaged response was the Neutral response, where 220 people selected it meaning unsure/indifferent on the subject.

**Figure 3 Responses on Equal Participation of Women in Politics****Responses on Adequate Representation in Decision-Making**

The bar chart presents the data concerning the representation in the decision-making process. There was also the highest percentage of Agree response along with 210 respondents who fully agree to this. Second, there is Strongly Agree which attracted about 200 responses indicating conviction on claiming representation.

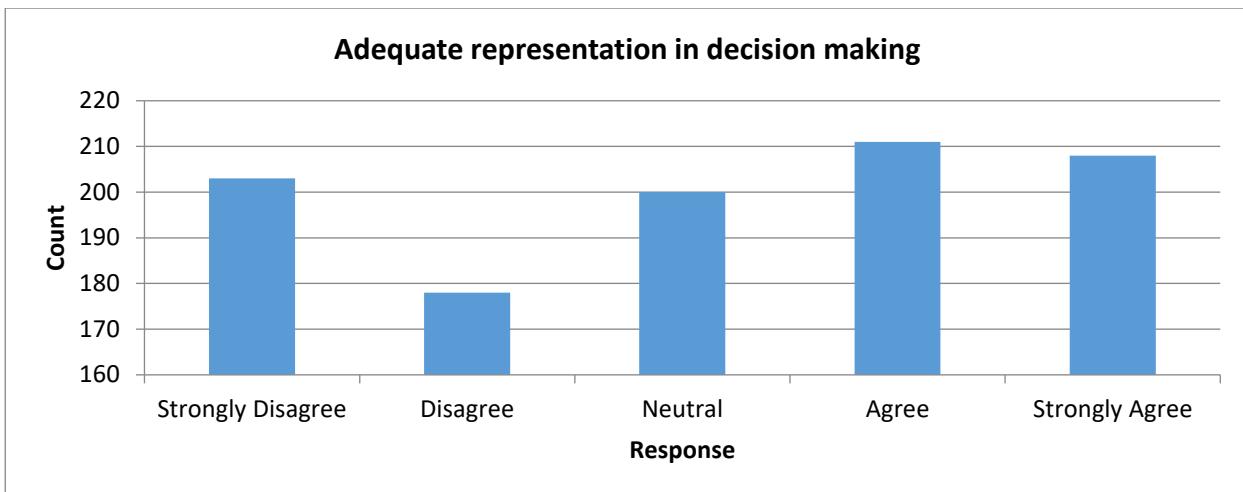


Figure 4 Adequate Representation in Decision-Making

Impact on Governance

Figure shows how the people have perceived the empowerment programmes and the resultant effects of these programs on the governance in Balochistan. A substantial number of all the respondents (160) concurs with the fact that these programs have had a positive effect on governance. There is a significant amount of those who are neutral (140), which suggests that they are not sure or strongly dislike. Around 120 respondents hold a strong agreement, and they have a great support to the initiatives. But 100 of them disagree and 50 of them are strongly disagreeing which shows scepticism or opposition.

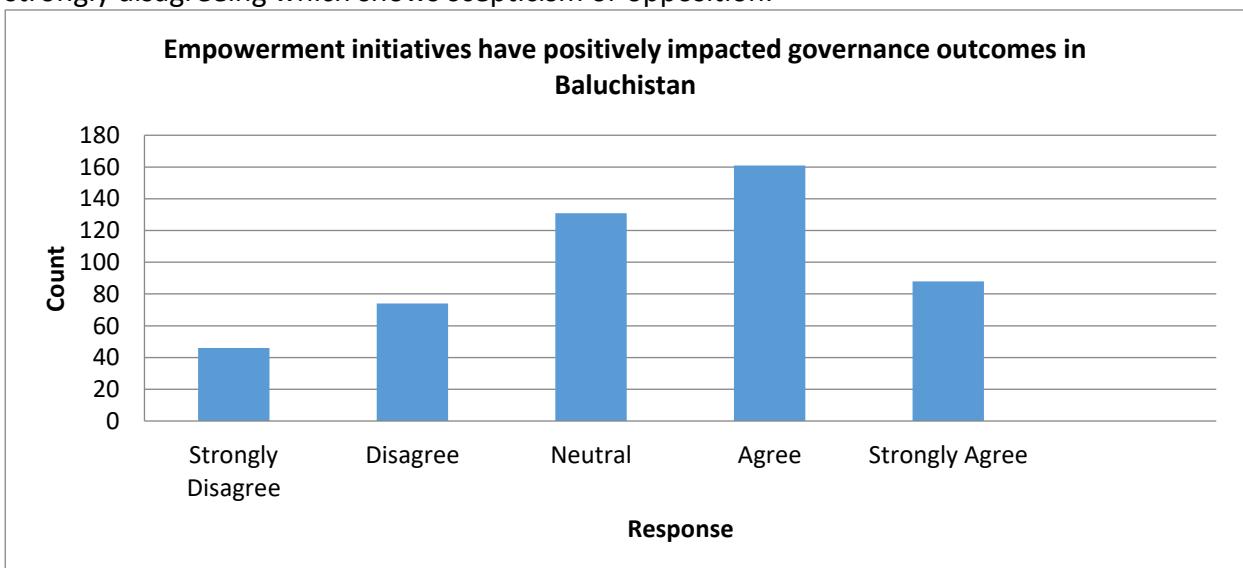


Figure 5 Perception of Empowerment Initiatives in Governance

Socio-Cultural Influences

In Balochistan as shown in Figure 10, the socio-cultural norms are the interfering factors of political participation by women. Up to 250 respondents agreed with the statement on the overriding influence of traditional and cultural influence. Many people also greatly concurred with the statement thus, the high degree of concordance on this specific question.

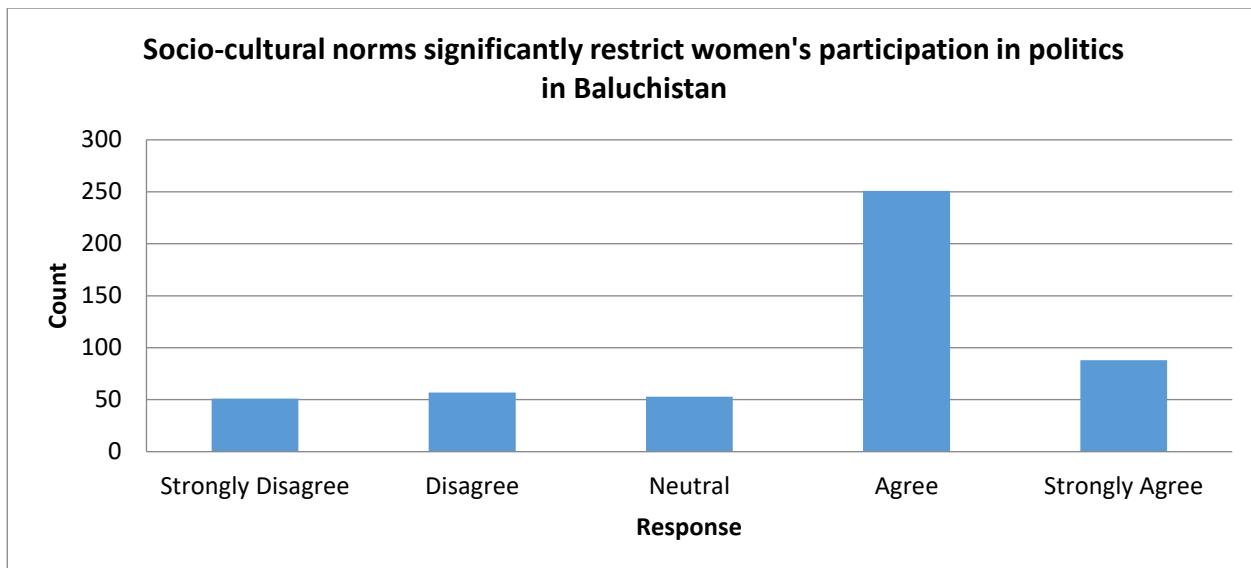


Figure 6 Socio-cultural norms restrict women's political participation in Balochistan.

Community-Level Efforts for Political Empowerment

The Figure 7 illustrates a bar graph that shows the opinions of the discrimination of women in the political processes. The community had 56% strong and agree with the statement, and 400 people answered this way in particular. There were not many participants in the neutral zone and even less in disagree or strongly disagree category.

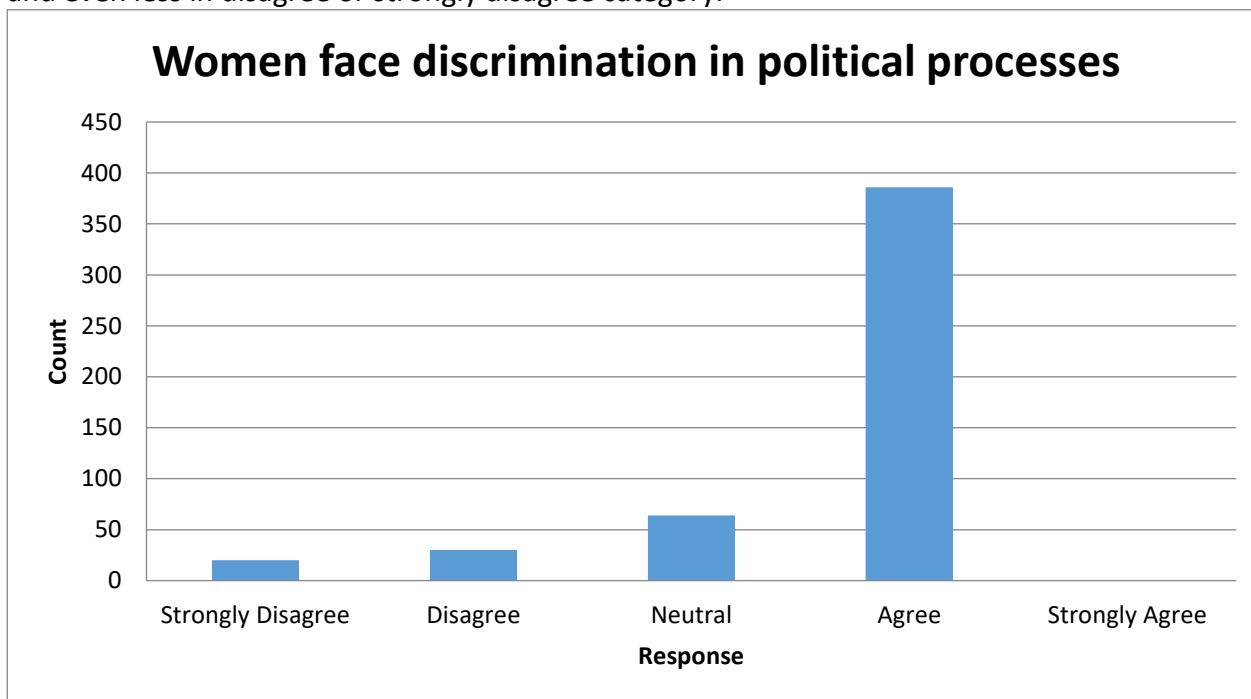


Figure 7 Responses on women facing discrimination in political processes

The outcome that represents the reaction to the statement regarding the recognition of women during political debates is represented in the form of the bar graph in figure 7. The remainder of the participants prevailed with such opinion, and they were around 300 respondents. Some of the respondents were at the mid-point in regard to feeling about recording video calls, whereas a small proportion were at the opposite end of the spectrum where they disagreed or strongly disagreed.

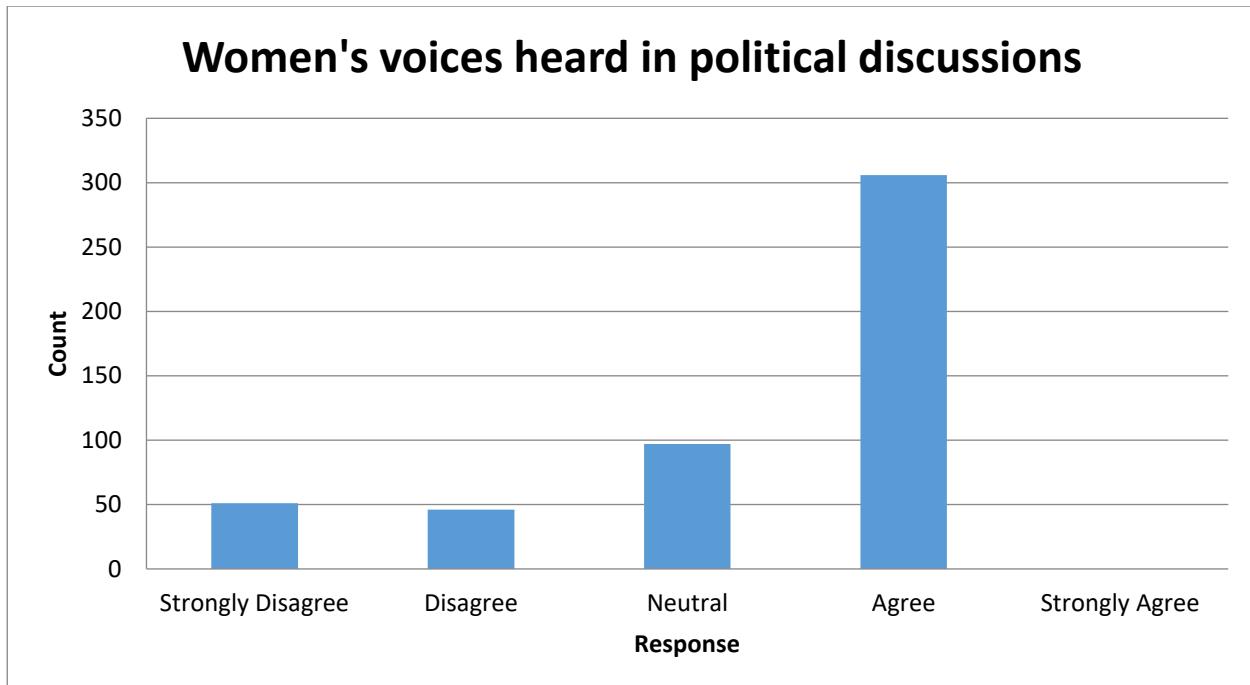


Figure 8 Responses on women's voices being heard in political discussions

The answers are shown in the figure 14 in relation to the efficiency of the support structures to women. Other people shared the same opinion and there were approximately 300 responses in the agreement of the opinion. There are few who disagree and strongly disagree, and there are only a few who are neutral. These findings illustrate overall impressions as far as the support structures are concerned, and also give a hint as to how the current schemes can be changed to become better.

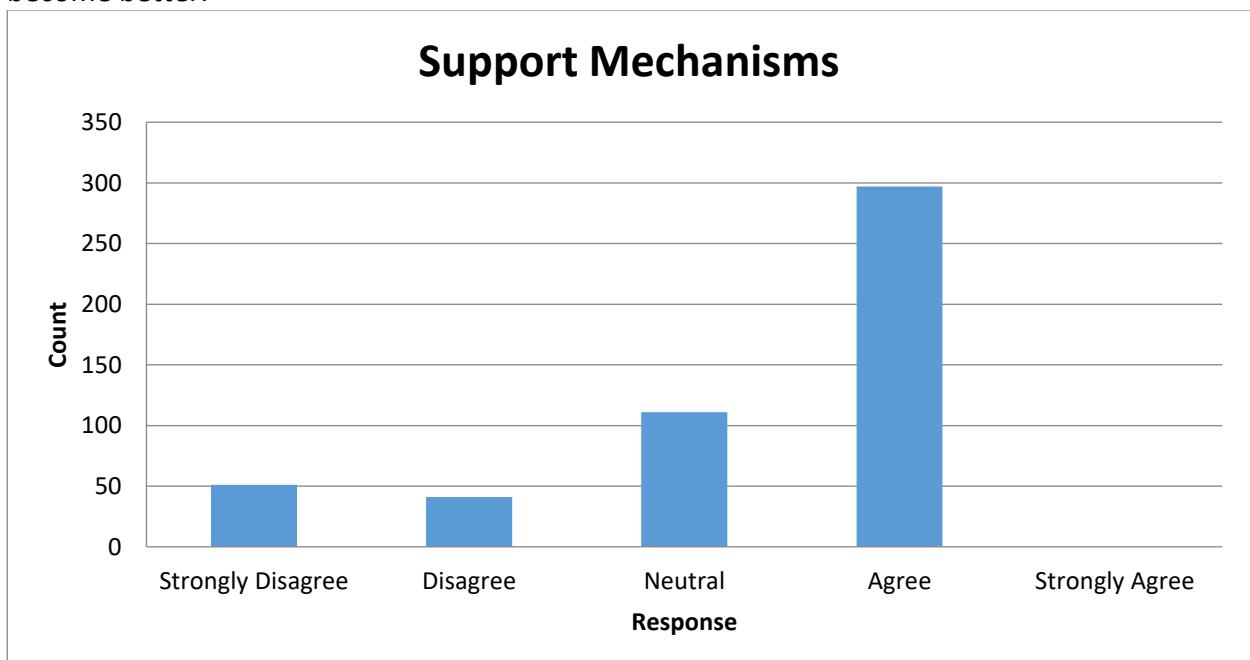


Figure.9 Responses on the effectiveness of support mechanisms for women

The answers regarding the effectiveness of the women empowerment programs were also noted down and the percentage findings were presented in figure 9. The answers are not very uneven, and a significant proportion of respondents is between the two who support the sale

of the breast pumps. Nevertheless, a good amount confirmed, or firmly confirmed the efficacy of these programs, and some rejected it or severely rejected the programs.

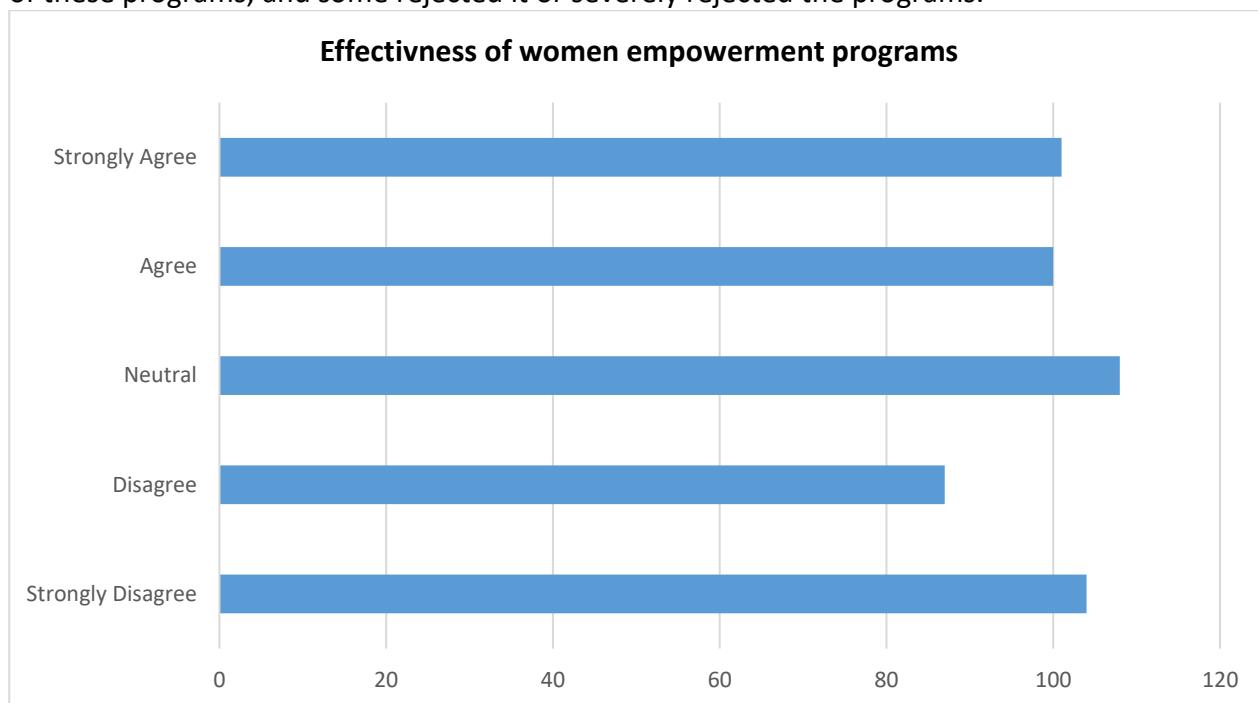


Figure 10 Responses on the effectiveness of women empowerment programs

When asked about the role that the media played in empowering women, the respondents responded in the manner demonstrated in Figure 16 below. Most of the respondents assented with the statement and approximately 200 of the contributors agreed with the statement. A third group was still non-committal, either due to indecision or ambivalence as to the role of the media.

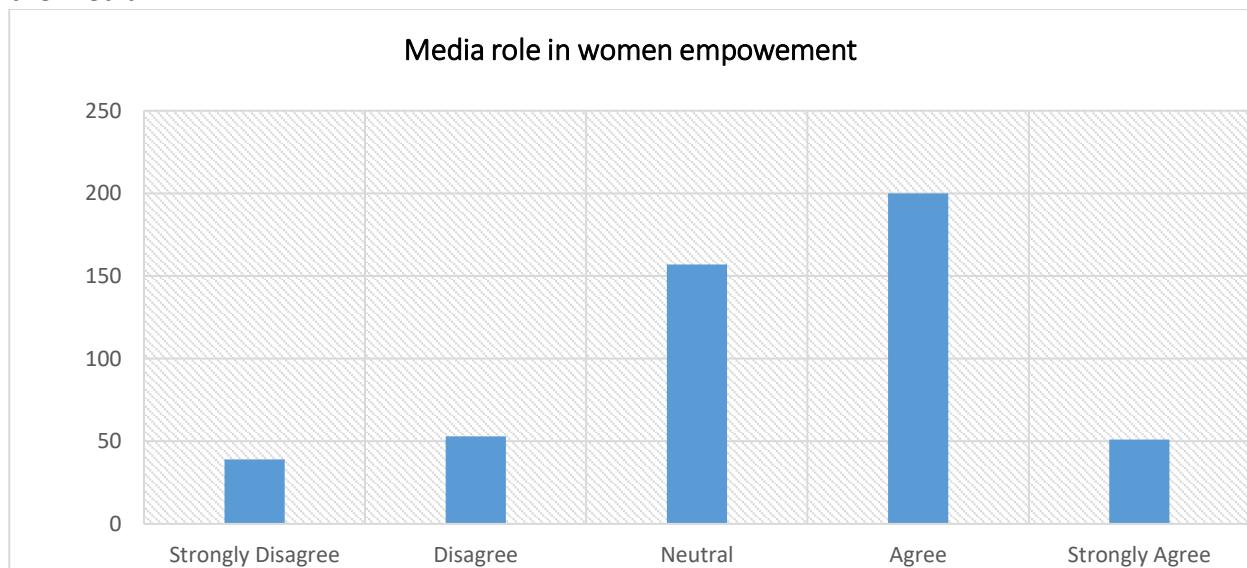


Figure 11 Responses on the media's role in women empowerment

The attitude of the respondents towards the participation of women in decision making of the community is shown in figure 11. The pattern of answers is fairly symmetric and rather well distributed; a significant portion of the participants responded to the question with agreeing or strongly agreeing, and the answer is an indication that the women are involved in decision making in the communities.

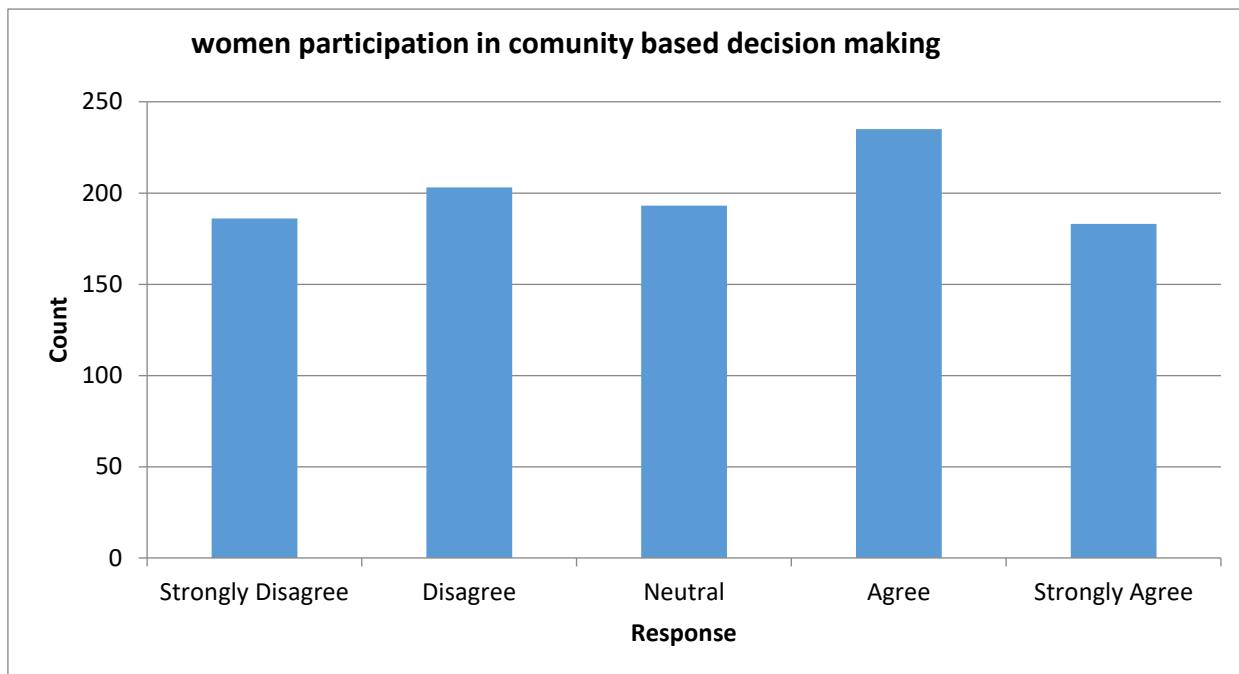


Figure 12 Responses on women's participation in community-based decision-making

Table 1 indicates the responses on the influence of various factors on the empowerment of women in different categories which involve community influence on the women decision making, economic influence, legal influence on women, religious influence and education influence. The answers are spread in five levels: SD, D, NS, A, SA. Moreover, standard deviations of every category have also been provided to indicate variation of the responses. The one that had the highest consensus was the role of education which had 198 individuals acquiesce in the statement that education empowers women. Meanwhile, four of the solutions indicate statistically significant counts of the neutral answers, which could indicate the lack of or low efficiency of activities in these areas: Leadership Training and Economic Empowerment.

Table 1 Responses to factors influencing women's empowerment and their standard deviations

Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Standard Deviation
Access to Leadership Training	56	67	135	176	66	47.29059103
Community-Level Decision-Making	46	73	119	179	83	45.90424817
Economic Empowerment	47	77	132	177	67	47.70744177
Government Policies Addressing Women's Needs	36	67	122	194	81	54.5270575
Impact of Traditional Gender Roles	42	68	116	196	78	53.56117997
Legal Support for Women's Rights	58	69	115	186	72	47.18050445

Political Motivation	49	72	130	173	76	45.14421336
Religious Influence	50	73	120	182	75	46.85722997
Role of Education	48	72	101	198	81	51.87292165
Transparency in Electoral Processes	43	73	134	167	83	44.52415075

Figure 13 depicts the mean response to factors that influence the empowerment of women placed under Strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and strongly agree. This spread of answers provides one with an idea of the decision-making on community level, economic self-sufficiency, the role of women in law, education of leaders and religion.

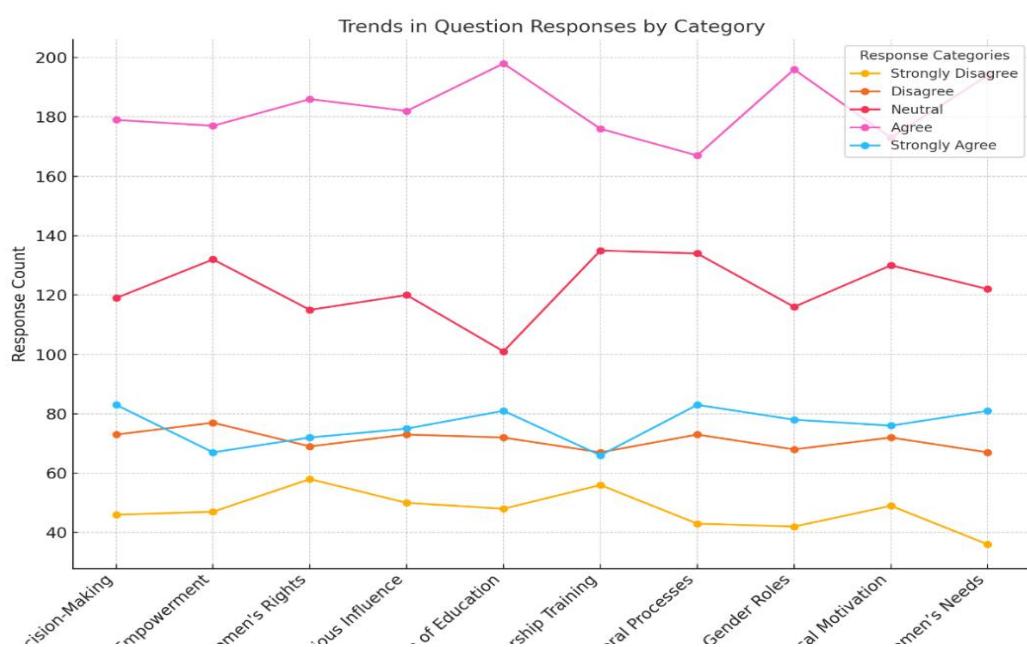


Figure 13 Trends in response categories across factors influencing women's empowerment
 Figure 14 indicates how a single category of response correlates to other categories of response including Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, and Strongly Agree concerning the different factors that influence the women empowerment. Correlation values are represented in the matrix by being coloured in gradient with negative ones representing strong negative correlation and positive one representing strong positive correlation.

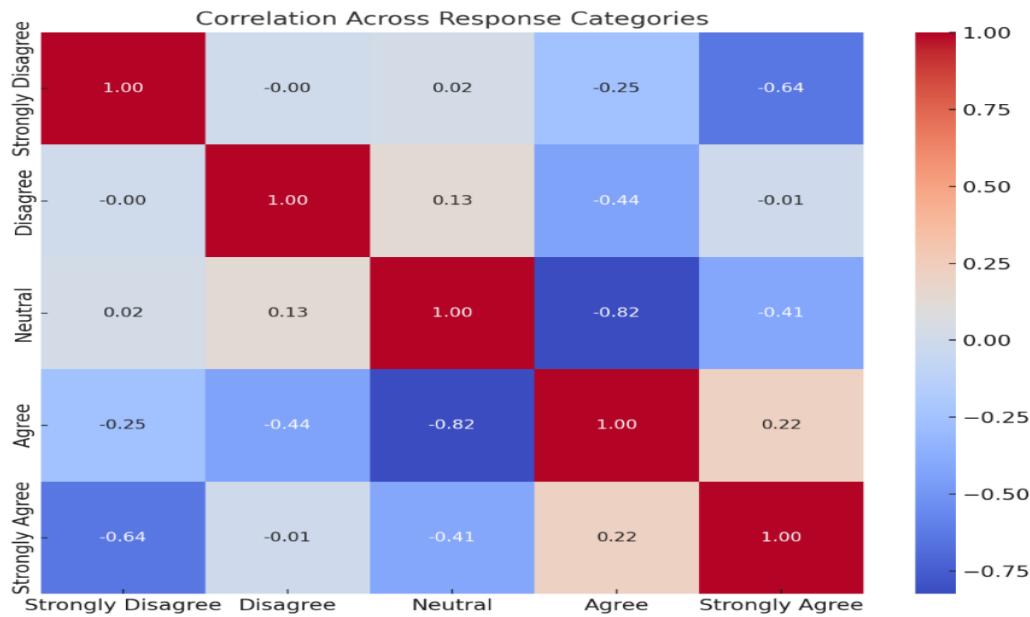


Figure 14 Correlation matrix of response categories on women's empowerment factors
Regional Disparities in Political Empowerment

Figure 13 compares the urban and rural participation in governance by examining 3 types namely: A survey of Level of participation, hindrances and motivational factors to participate. Comparing the degree of participation with the clients comparing the statistical information it can be seen that the urban clients are more active in the process of governance, as compared to rural ones, with the participation rate of above 70 percent to 50 percent.

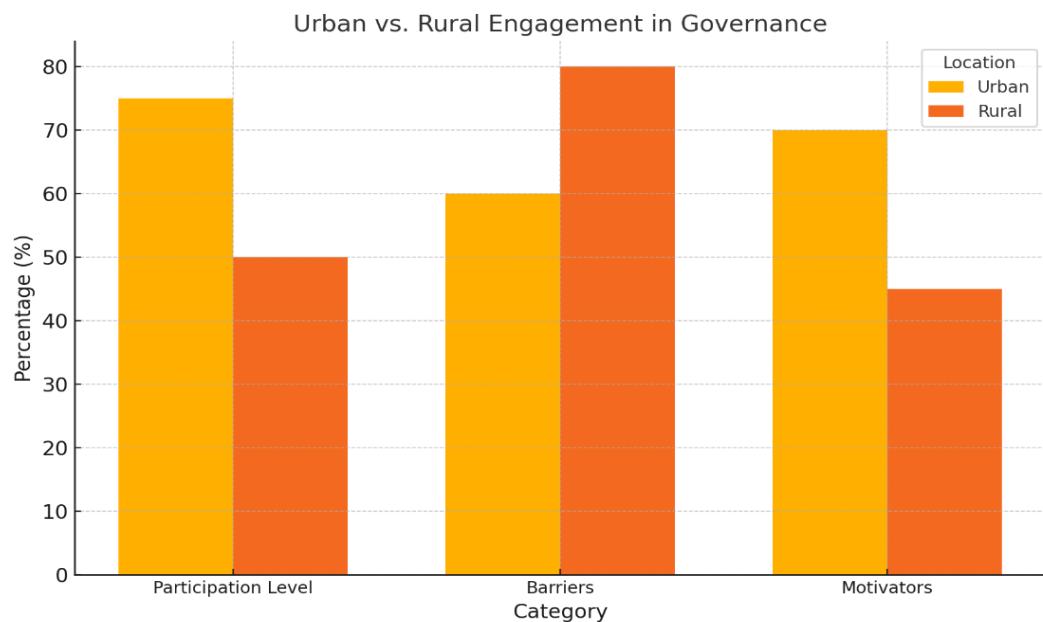


Figure 15 Urban vs. rural engagement in governance across participation, barriers, and motivators

Discussion

The end to this research is a testament to the points of the investigation work, both to the fruits and failure in the political socialization of women in Balochistan. Although there are very few women in decision making positions, the few women have shown that they add value to the process of inclusive governance (Mangubhai & Lawless, 2021). Terminating the circumstances that hinder the empowerment of women hence involves community, organizational and global level change strategy. These reforms should be a context-sensitive engagement, which is complicated in terms of the structural feature; hence, it is vital to make action effective and sustainable. Another significant element that is closely related to this process is the identification of the policy makers, community and civil society linkages to come up with integrated and implementable strategies (Drieghe et al., 2022). The cultural beliefs and practices are not rigid and other cultures have transformed through intensive crusade and sensitization. In the Balochistan, the religious and tribal leaders can say a lot to the society; it can be the game-changer to change the perception of the society (Ahmar, 2023). Therefore, social embedding practices that reveal the role of women in leadership would be a long way in transforming the mindset of young girls. The issues of women as a subject of the economy are highly connected to poverty and underdevelopment in Balochistan (Bashir et al., 2023). Women do not have any opportunity to access financial services using the conventional finance system, and this only exacerbates the situation among women. That is why we should develop new finds to the old problems, such as women-only microfinance groups, and entrepreneurship schemes come in handy here. This should be done with an aim of educating women on issues related to business management and leadership to ensure they are actively involved in politics and economy. The other outcome of micro-finance is a shot of funding on political parties, body politic of women and grants in aid to women candidates among others proving to increase women political participation and representation particularly among women of low-income calibre (Wasua, 2022). Yet above the question must be the access, quality, relevance must be made. Schools and colleges should have educational programs that focus on creativity, e-freedom, community mindedness and Self-actualization which are the key aspects of power-assertion. Girl child must also be able to dream of one day holding positions in leadership and the schools should provide an environment that will help them achieve this dream. Moreover, non-formal education in the form of community workshops in most societies creates the much-needed knowledge and skills, which women without formal education ought to possess. There are other culture sensitive grassroots educational programs that can thus be promoted to mobilize the families to facilitate girl education in the conservative regions. The point is that this effort along with the policies that presuppose equal opportunities in the educational field can increase the confidence of women and their involvement in politics. Education is and must continue to be the sole largest weapon in bringing a change in any given society. Scholarship programs, both apprenticeship and leadership training among girls and young women may be useful in nurturing a generation of future leadership starved people who will be willing to compete in political offices. Education also gives them confidence since they can be in a position to cope with political challenging sectors and be assertive in governance. I support the author, yet the thing is that it is impossible to represent correctly these long lines of nothing and at the same time exclude some useless information saying something like I told you everything in the last chapters, but that is not necessary to know the topic. Nevertheless, despite the improvement, there are still immense challenges to the empowerment of women posed by political institutions. In fact, gender quotas, women-only seats have been introduced but seldom followed with enforcements. Sadly, nomination of women to very high-ranking posts is hampered by political parties hence the grievances are real. The structural changes

ought to also indicate what can be done with individuals who contravene the policies which have been established to allow gender equity to be implemented. This is especially handy to make sure that women receive equal opportunities in the political sectors since the institutions can also offer the appropriate frameworks to assign value to the issue and, therefore, realize sustainable change. Simultaneously to that, cooperation with the international organizations in terms of financing and independent gender-sensitive policies to be observed may also play a role in leverage to discover the methods of imposing such policies in the politically non-eligible settings. Moreover, institutions would not wait until Political Culture is framed but instead, they should be proactive in order to build an inclusive Political Culture. Feminisation process encompasses the activities that politically parties and electoral institutions of countries make to enable women to be improved during elections. Women leadership programs who are already in political offices which they can use to enhance their performance can help to make positive change and induce change that is desired in the society. The governmental and non-governmental organisations can also contribute to the advancement of these programs with the objective of offering support to such a cause. The current study has been explored in alternative prose in a prosaic way mentioned below:

Conclusions

The paper has highlighted that women should be empowered politically, especially in Balochistan, Pakistan. The legal provisions aimed at achieving equal rights of women have failed to resolve the issues that women in Balochistan have been facing in their affairs. The first and the most obvious reasons why there are no representatives of female governance are not having an equal say, economic support by men, and limited education. As the research indicates, although several reforms have been implemented as illustrated by the study as in offering quotas and reserving seats to women, little progress has been made as far as the issue of influence of women in politics is concerned. Patriarchy usually presents a big challenge to women, who are not adequately informed about politics in rural regions. Meanwhile, this study also indicates that improvements can be achieved. This can be done by improving the education of women, economic growth and encouraging culture change in order to improve their presence in politics. In addition, policies and legislations that are more efficient like providing equal roles to women and outlawing discrimination, should be enacted to help women participating in decision-making. Both the changes in the policies and the local measures are necessary to enhance the political participation of women in Balochistan. Frail Voice Its research can be useful to those who advocate equality between the sexes and female politics in Asia.

Recommendations

It must also involve contacting the youths through the assistance of schools and college to transform the mentality of the generations radically. Other related and cultural practices that depict empowered women in leadership role would also transform social narrative in an encouraging manner. The idea of blended learning solutions aimed at rural population as a recipient is efficient to supplement the traditional methods of schooling and address breaks in operations. Interactive courses such as governance and rights-based courses can assist women to be more politically active.

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