

**The Role of Women Leadership in Political Activism: Insights from the
Political Profile of Maryam Nawaz Sharif**

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Abstract

The study aims to discuss women role in leadership and political activism, but this paper in true spirit focuses on the view of Maryam Nawaz Sharif, a dynamic political personality of Pakistan. She has become one of the most influential leaders of Pakistan Muslim League (N) and has actively participating in awareness raising for democracy and opposing establishment rule. This research considers her role in political activism summarizing how her leadership has accomplished to merge gender, politics and power in a society that was dominated by male superiority. This study focuses on how women leaders in South Asia have been facing certain contests and how they can take up new prospects by studying the speeches and public meetings and policy level proposals of women friendly political parties. Further it also envisions how Maryam Nawaz has encouraged women for the political activism and the overall impact of her leadership in shaping the new political framework of Pakistan. The study concluded that Maryam Nawaz encouraged the discourse of women empowerment in the politics by focusing on good and active governance. The women leadership have contributed to policy and in influencing public opinion in masculine political domains.

Keywords: Political activism, women empowerment, women political participation, Maryam Nawaz.

Introduction

"The higher you go, the fewer women there are. The challenge is to stay determined to bring more women along."— Wangari Maathai¹

The study focuses on women's leadership and political activism of more

¹ Maathai, Wangari. *Unbowed: A Memoir*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006.
<https://books.google.com/books?id=F2ZcAAAAMAAJ>.

inclusive, equal and democratic societies globally. Women are usually focus on health, education, gender, and social needs since these are always overshadowed in a dominated system made by men. For instance, Liberian's Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, and New Zealand's Jacinda Ardern, all have shown that women leadership is bright to restructure post- war contexts and accomplish crisis via social justice angle. This also contributes to the movements for human rights and democracy like those enacted by women political activist Malala Yousufzai, whose stance for girls' education for instance, has drawn international attention on girls.²

However, women leaders and activists are still undergoing considerable snags today. Our organizational culture, and social norms are major impediments that are keeping women away from being engaged in politics. Women as leaders are often treated to bad comments or lecherous remarks, plans, or disparaging comments and are less likely to get fair reporting by the media .³Still, activism from in the world on gender parity in political leadership, including the adoption of a gender quotas in parliaments, has pushed for and achieved increased extents of women and decision making in political matters. The authority of women to voter in elections guides the qualitative increase in women political leaders is crucial in nurturing of just and democratic oriented societies across the globe.

The women role in politics has expressively transformed from what it was, especially during the second half of the 20th century when they won not only their right to vote but also right to hold a public office. All of these political changes with the evolution of gender quotas, international conventions like the convention on the "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women", (CEDAW), and feminist waves have paid to increasing women's political contribution .⁴ Women occupy significant leadership positions in the world today, typified by figures such as Angela Merkel and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. But still,

²Yousafzai, Malala, and Christina Lamb. *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban*. Little, Brown, & Co, 2013.

³Trimble, Long. "Gendered Media Coverage of Women in Politics: Still Firing the Double Bind." *Politics & Gender* 13, no. 3 (2017): 331–353.

⁴Krook, Mona Lena. "Violence against Women in Politics." *Journal of Democracy* 28, no. 1 (2017): 74–88.

gender gaps in political representation continue to endure where women face structural discriminatory facets impeding full equality of political rights.⁵

In history, South Asia has provided a ground of patriarchal structures that also shaped women political participation over the years, we have come far. The political exclusion that continues work together with the roles attributed to woman of wife, mother/hostess also was reflected at a time when society in general were mainly relegated to traditional non publicly visible concern within the household. At the same time, South Asia also produced some of the most prominent female political leaders Indira Gandhi (India), Benazir Bhutto (Pakistan) and Sheikh Hasina (Bangladesh) who not only broke gender-ceiling but played a crucial role in defining national narrative and policies.

In Asia's Eastern part, women got high level places in politics over the years, but their participation at grass root level is low-spirited. Cultural, economic, and institutional limitations all restricted their entrance in South Asian politics, despite such boundaries the region has produced many prominent women leaders like Indra Gandhi, Benazir Bhutto, Hassina Wajid and Khalda Zia etc. These women leaders were having strong profiles and came with political background but despite that they remained in problematic situations of a male dominating political scenario. These leaders were also known as important Muslim women political leaders. Despite having strong family background in politics, they faced religious and gender disapproval. The situation at grass root political institutions, the women endorsement is still disappointing.

The South Asia women also facing significant encounters for expressive sharing in the political system, with cultural confines, economic breaks, and institutional barricades. Even if efforts for women representation, like gender quotas in local councils and political wings in major parties have supported raise their presence.⁶ In Pakistan, also, designated parliamentary seats have increased for

⁵Paxton, Peter, and M. M. Hughes. *Women, Politics, and Power: A Global Perspective*. 2nd ed. SAGE Publications, 2014.

⁶Rai, Shafqat. "Gender Quotas and the Politics of Empowerment in India." *Comparative Political Studies* 44, no. 5 (2011): 572–599.

women participation in legislative assemblies, but power generally remains restricted by male-dominated party structures. Though progresses have taken place, the inclusive inclusion of women in South Asia politics but still much to do needed.

Objectives of the Paper

- To comprehend the exclusive contributions of women leaders to political activism
- To explore the part and effect of women in political activism with a case study on Maryam Nawaz.
- To scrutinize the problems and contributions of women leadership in existing politics.

Research Questions

1. What are the exclusive contributions of women leaders to political activism?
2. To what extent Maryam Nawaz formed political activism in Pakistan?
3. What problems do women face in leadership in a patriarchal political system?

Women in South Asian Politics

The women in South Asian politics have a long history of struggle, and have achieved quite some milestones in shaping regional and national political dynamics, the gender-based dichotomy that affects South Asian Politics has historically remained substantially unchanged. South Asia is also unique as that region has produced the highest number of women politically were though men dominated in politics, Indira Gandhi (IND), Benazir Bhutto (PAK) Sheikh Hasina (BDA) and Sirimavo Bandaranaike (SLA), etc. Top female political leaders from South Asia place it on one elite footing. These were women that shattered the patriarchal political systems to reach heads of state, in fact. Frequently emerging from political dynastic families, their role as leaders contested the belief that in the region of women provided political power should be male.⁷ But their ascension to

⁷Jalal, Ayesha. "The Convenience of Subservience: Women and the State in Pakistan." *Feminist Review* 37, no. 1 (1991): 57–88.

power in a male-dominated network also underscores the pernicious role of family and male networks in defining political opportunities for women across South Asia. However, such leaders may be more the exception than the rule because of significant structural and cultural barriers women face in South Asian politics.

South Asian countries have taken distinguished steps to enhance women in political milieu in wake of certain challenges. The implement of gender quotas, on the other hand has been an effective way to increase the presence of women representatives. Keeping in the scenario in India, where; 33 % of seats in local councils are reserved for women, the constitutional arrangement recognized as Panchayati Raj program and troughed notable increment with parts for area administration to mayor bureaus .On the other hand, in Pakistan's reserved parliamentary seats for women has enabled a higher number of women into the legislative assemblies, but their influence is usually constrained by the dynamics and control vested in male-dominated party politics. While this has resulted in higher levels of visibility for women in the field of politics, there continue to be systemic difficulties that prevent the full expression of their political power by refraining them from influencing policy decisions.

South Asian women in politics have also significantly supported this groundswell with many at the forefront of popular movements for civil liberties, education and gender-equality. Women's organizations have led many of these movements, campaigning on violence against women, reproductive rights and economic empowerment.⁸ Women's engagement in politics has played significant part in antagonizing the authoritarian administrations over the years for supporting the democracy. Aung San Suu Kyi in Myanmar and for women's rights movements in Pakistan and India.

Women in South Asian Political Movements

The South Asia region has introduced world famous political leaders' men

⁸Basu, Amrita. *Women, Political Parties, and Social Movements in South Asia*. UN Research Institute for Social Development, 2004.

and women that have always showed them as fronts in shaping multiple political movements. Especially women in the region stand strong and decisive for their political rights against authoritarian regimes for democracy and independence. In first quarter of the 20th century, women played a crucial role against anti-colonial movements in India and Sri Lanka. especially In India, Sarojini Naidu got fame in the local freedom movement.⁹ Agnes de Silva of Sri Lanka also stand for independence and took part in movement for women self-determination.¹⁰ In Pakistan, during the 1980s, human rights activism particularly women's rights reached a climax under Gen. Zia-ul-Haq's military dictatorship: laws became severe and severely restricted women's freedom. Organisations such as women's action forum mobilized against these repressive laws. peacefully taking to the streets and engaging in political activism for gender justice. By joining, they helped create wider democratic movements in the country but also showed a fundamental responsibility of women against authoritarianism.

Apart from the independence and resistance movements women of South Asia have played significant role in promoting human rights and education for all, and equality for basic needs of life. For instance, in India, movements like the Chipko Movement spear headed by women in the rural areas where women held their trees in a hug to avoid being cut servers as an example that depict how women organize themselves to defend their environmental and community rights. In like manner, the women in Nepal who are involved in the Maoist insurgency that is campaigning for new social and political order; in Sri Lanka, women are involved in the civil strife between the Tamil and Sinhalese factions.¹¹ These movements show that women activism has been focal in participating various political and social causes embracing political issues in the country in addition to social nationalisms, environmentalism, and ethnic conflicts.

⁹ Geraldine. *Women in Modern India*. Cambridge University Press, 1996.

¹⁰ Jahan, Rounaq. *Bangladesh Politics: Problems and Issues*. Dhaka University Press, 1995.

¹¹ Alison, Miranda. "Women as Agents of Political Violence: Gendering Security." *Security Dialogue* 35, no. 4 (2004): 447–463.

An Analysis of Women Leaders Political Activism in South Asian Countries

Women have technically served as leaders in South Asia and have actively engaged in political activism and increasingly influencing the direction of politics in their respective nations with concern to democracy, human and social rights. Despite the cultures of the societies in which these women find themselves serving being highly jihadists, many of them have risen to these positions of power and authority and defying all odds to break the norms that have for many years seen women locked out from taking up top positions of power. In this paper, political activism of key leaders from South Asian region will be discussed, Indira Gandhi, Benazir Bhutto and Maryam Nawaz, Sheikh Hasina o and Sirimavo Bandaranaike. All these leaders impacted their respective countries and are role models to future generations of women on leadership.

- **Indira Gandhi: India's Iron Lady**

Indira Gandhi was India's first and only female prime minister, who served two terms from 1966-1977, and again from 1980 until her assassination in 1984. Gandhi was politically active basing on his/her belief in an economically powerful independent India. In a nutshell, her contribution was to nurture and help in the diffusion of the Green Revolution that improved agriculture productivity and made India a food secure country. She also nationalized banks and promoted policies which could be used for social justice, agricultural development, and upliftment of weaker sections of the society.¹²

- **Benazir Bhutto: First Female Prime Minister of Islamic World and A Champion of Democracy in Pakistan**

Benazir Bhutto, Islamic world and Pakistan's first female Prime Minister made history by holding this position two times with several challenges. When Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, her father, was hanged by General Zia ul Haq military dictatorship,

¹²Frank, Katherine. *Indira: The Life of Indira Nehru Gandhi*. Harper Collins, 2001.
ISSN: 2789-1038

Benazir stepped into politics as the leader of Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the defender of democracy in Pakistan. Her activism in the state was characterized by personal penalties such as imprisonment, house arrest and exile. However, despite these challenges the author outlined Bhutto's never fading democracy principles.

After Zia's demise, Bhutto returned to Pakistan and in 1988, she became the first female head of any Muslim country. The main areas of political activity of the woman were the rights of the poor, the rights of women, and human rights. The disagreements with Pakistan's authoritative military and most importantly scandalous corruption cases during her two non-consecutive terms as Prime Minister. Nevertheless, the task of Bhutto as a bearer of democracy continued to be important till her assassination in 2007. It's just sad news and remind us of the dangers posed to women in politics, though her spirit lives on inspiring women activists in Pakistan and other part of the world.¹³

- **Maryam Nawaz: The New Politics of Political Activism in Pakistan**

After Benazir Bhutto, the new blood of a political leader Nawaz Sharif joined the politics known as Maryam Nawaz. After expelling of her father from the power and his imprisonment, Maryam decided to join politics and become the leader of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz or PML-N. Her activism refers to anti-Pakistan military politics and advocacy for democratization. As a woman, Maryam has raised a voice against the challenges that cost them the right to participate in politics in Iran, and a defender of democracy and supremacy or civilians at the cost sometimes including her detaining.¹⁴

Maryam's leadership style is quite different from typical female roles widely depicted in Pakistani politics. While She was first elected as a political icon alignment with her families' dynastic political power, she has started voicing out her own political agenda, which at many times comes in contradiction with the system and other political power houses. By participating in the anti-government rallies of

¹³Ibid

¹⁴Quddus, Syed Abdul. *Nawaz Sharif: Courage in Leadership*. Sheikh Ghulam Ali & Sons, 1991.

the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), Maryam has put herself into a strategic role in future politics of Pakistan. The extent to which she can rally people, and her democratic approach qualifies her as one of the most influential female politicians in modern Pakistan.¹⁵

- **Sheikh Hasina: The Guardian of Democracy in Bangladesh**

Another prominent political activist of South Asia is Sheikh Hasina who served serving Bangladesh as its Prime Minister. Updated in 2015 and early 2016 Hasina, the daughter of Bangladesh's founder Sheikh Mujibur Rahman has been the leader of the Awami League since the 1980s. for Democracy, Secularism and Human rights is the most significant motivation of her activism. Following her father's assassination in 1975, Hasina had to flee the country, later got back to steer her family's supremacy in Bangladesh's politics. Since the assumption of Ms. Hasina, Bangladesh has recorded significant achievements in the sphere of economic growth, poverty alleviation and social justice. However, her political achievements and her efforts for women empowerment in the context of Bangladesh are worth appreciating.¹⁶

- **Sirimavo Bandaranaike: First Female Prime Minister of the World**

Sirimavo Bandaranaike of Sri Lanka gives the world the first female Prime Minister being in power three times within 1960 to 2000. After the tragic shooting of her husband, Solomon Bandaranaike who was the Prime Minister, Sirimavo took the mantle of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). Srimavo Bandaranaike's political activism was more towards socialism and nationalism, and she brought policies into her country which sought to remove several trade barriers such as the nationalization of most important industries in Sri Lanka.¹⁷

¹⁵Ibid

¹⁶Nazneen, Sohela, and Simeen Mahmud. "The Gendered Politics of Securing Inclusive Development." In *the Politics of Inclusive Development*, 197. 2012.

¹⁷Cooray, Moris. "Sirimavo Bandaranaike and the Politics of Sri Lanka." *Asian Survey* 41, no. 4 (2001): 663–679.

However, like any other leader, Bandaranaike also faced many crises; some of them were her ability to control the ethnic problems between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. These tensions would later culminate into a civil war. However, thanks to Mrs. Sirimavo the country and the south Asia region benefited from her leadership having inspired future female leaders in south Asia and the world at large regarding the participation of women in leadership positions.

Pros and Cons of Political Activism in Pakistan

The political activism in Pakistan has a history full of diversity in adopting leaders at junctures be them navigations from time to time through the testy tides of political turmoil, military dictatorships and transitions towards democracy. Benazir Bhutto and Maryam Nawaz, they are Two major female political figures who played an important role in the politics of the country. In their leadership and motion, born of a history of authoritarian excess. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the father of Benazir Bhutto, who was himself a former Prime Minister of Pakistan, had established an Islamic Socialist ideology in Pakistan that sparked middle class reform spirituality. And after his assassination at Rawalpindi in 1979; Benazir became his legacy and hope for democracy in Pakistan as his high educated daughter. She first became the chair of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) during a military dictatorship in General Zia-ul-Haq era, and her political career continued under four subsequent administrations during 2007 or 2008. Under Bhutto leadership, the PPP started a robust political movement against General Zia's government for democratic restoration of democracy and civilian rule. This political activism opened the ways of Benazir's position as Prime Minister in 1988. She was interested in developing social welfare programs for women.¹⁸ Even though she was opposed with huge political disinclination and corruption accusations, Bhutto's leadership verified practical promise to democracy.¹⁹The most salient fact about her is that she survived an earlier attempt because of the bravery and commitment of one people—no one else can make

¹⁸Weiss, A. M. "Benazir Bhutto and the Promise of Pakistan." *Asian Survey* 49, no. 6 (2009): 1052–1.

¹⁹Hussain, Zahid. *Nawaz Sharif under Siege*. Vanguard Books, 2023.

a similar claim.²⁰Maryam Nawaz, the daughter of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, also a frontrunner to Pakistan's political activism scene. In 2017, her father was declared ineligible from his position as prime minister with corruption charges and investigations started against him on high level. That time she with her mother Kalsoom Nawaz emerged as key players in his father's party Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N).

The PML(N) launched a campaign to gain massive public support against the then establishment elites. Maryam Nawaz criticized the judiciary and other establishment personnel for being wrong charges of corruption against her father and other party leaders.²¹ She remained in limelight during the anti-establishment protests during her father's detention. In her speeches and meetings with media, she unleashed vitriol against the military's role in politics and also demanded democratic reforms.

Maryam Nawaz Rise in the Punjab Politics

Maryam Nawaz, the daughter of Ex-Prime minister Nawaz Sharif has started working as a key figure in Pakistani politics particularly Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). She has found success wearing her family heritage like armor, with a father who was three-time Prime Minister. Her life has been influenced by this political history, and it opened a path for her to engage with politics, first through membership in PML-N ranks from a young age and later as an outspoken voice for the cause of democratic governance in Pakistan. Maryam Nawaz was born in a most influential family of Pakistan. Her father, Nawaz Sharif, was not only an experienced politician but also the head of PML-N that has largely dominated Pakistan's political scene for years. Her family has a political history from her grandfather, Muhammad Sharif who was one of the most influential tycoons in Pakistan.²²A consequence of

²⁰Bhutto, Benazir. *Reconciliation: Islam, Democracy, and the West*. Harper Collins, 2008.

²¹ Akhtar, M. J., T. Ashraf, Y. Ali, and S. Gull. "Reading of Pakistan's 2002 and 2008 Elections: A Descriptive Analysis." *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences* 39, no. 1 (2019): 213–237.

²²Ibid

this legacy was Maryam's early political consciousness and, eventually, her decision to serve in an important position within the PML-N .At first, she remained unconcerned with public politics, preferring to focus on social and charitable issues, but as her father's political career foundered, Maryam's prominence in the party began to rise.

Maryam could find the politics when last year Nawaz Sharif was disqualified to be office bearer after Panama Papers scandal. However, with Nawaz Sharif facing numerous legal challenges, Maryam Nawaz emerged as a central figure in the PML-N and worked on rallying public support while coordinating the party's response to the legal battles faced by her father. The BBC news has mentioned her entry in politics as; *"She was launched as a young face of Sharif's PML-N party to attract the youth and to counter former cricketer Imran Khan's growing popularity among youngsters."*²³

Her leadership throughout this period marked a substantial move in her political participation, transitioning from a family role to a further public and self-confident existence in national politics. According to a prominent journalist Sohail Warraich, *"She is her father's closest aide, his most reliable adviser."*²⁴

Though, her political career started in 2012 when she took responsibility for the election campaign in 2013 general elections. Maryam became an MNA from constituency NA-119 and an MPA in the PP-159 under NA-123 in 2024 General elections. Later, she was appointed as the Chairperson of the PM-Youth Programme in 2013. Regardless of her energetic role, she resigned from that position in 2014. As a result of her appointment, she was legally challenged in the High Court. In keeping with the directive of the party, she opted to hold that PP-159 seat as well. On 26 February 2024, she takes oath as 20th Chief Minister of Punjab, marking the history as first female CM of the largest province. She was popular with party's base, particularly women and youth as she mobilized around her specific political strategy. Her fiery speeches against the alleged intervention of judiciary and military in political matters made her distinct and she claimed herself to be a diehard champion

²³BBC News. "Maryam Sharif: Pakistan's Next Political Star?" February 17, 2017.

²⁴Ibid.

of civilian supremacy in governance. Maryam Nawaz's rise in politics is closely tangled to her family's political inheritance and her initial participation in the PML-N. Her direction in times of political emergency has coagulated her role as a protuberant political personality, backing for democratic governance and the rights of citizen political leadership in Pakistan.

Timeline of Maryam Nawaz Sharif in Pakistani Politics	
2011-12	Appeared as a new political figure in PML-N rallies started dealing Nawaz Sharif's election drive and media policy.
2013-14	Selected as Chairperson of the "Prime Minister's Youth Programme" (PMYP) after her father became Prime Minister. Played a significant part in PTI dharna, in defense of the PML-N government via media and public meeting.
2016-17	Became Chairperson of "PML-N Strategic Communication Team". became Member of PML(N) central to party for narrative-building. Declared Disqualified from holding public office after "Panama Papers case" decision against Nawaz Sharif. Remained active in politics despite banning.
2018-19	Arrested from Aeroplan with Nawaz Sharif before the new General Elections. Emerged as a "symbol of resistance" for PML-N. Free on bail, and led party operations and reorganized PML-N at grassroots structure
2020-21	Grow into a voice in "Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM)" against the PTI government. Selected "Senior Vice President of PML (N)
2022-23	Stand with party in "no-confidence motion" that finally succeeded in removing the Imran Khan's government. Raised up to "Chief Organizer of PML-N" duty with party renewal and enlistment countrywide.
2024-25	Contested and won Punjab Assembly seat. Appeared as PML-N's robust provincial leader. Elected "Chief Minister of Punjab "as first woman and 20 th CM in Punjab's history. Introduced governance reforms in Punjab, women-empowerment policies, youth initiatives programs, health policies and development plans across Punjab.

Challenges to Maryam Nawaz in Political Milieu

It was a difficult task for Maryam Nawaz to enter in practical politics on her way to the top of Pakistani politics. Her rise through politics has been met with

intense scrutiny due to her being the daughter of a former Prime Minister, besides ongoing corruption cases which have embroiled both herself and her family. Besides, as a woman leader in male dominating political framework in Pakistan, Maryam has set her strong demons. She has been mostly criticized based on gender by her adversaries.

Maryam Nawaz Scandals regarding corruption scandal, Panama Papers involving heavy corruption referenced all over social media. Her father Nawaz Sharif was disqualified from office on corruption charges by the Supreme Court of Pakistan in 2017. Later, Maryam was also accused in the investigations that followed and was convicted by an accountability court in 2018 over her ownership of assets overseas which went undeclared. She was under arrest in August 2019 from Lahore Kot Lakhpat Jail, when she came to see her father, in reference with the Chaudhry Sugar Mills case. Her legal team approached the LHC for her bail in November.

Maryam turned into more energetic in politics in her father's nearly four-years self-exile in the UK. She became the vice-president of PML-N for the first time in 2019. She directed large anti-government gatherings in the country, ferociously disapproving Imran Khan, the PTI, law-enforcement agencies and judiciary for her father's removal and purportedly carrying the PTI chairman into power. Zaigham Khan wrote in [PRISM](#) in 2023 about Maryam's style of politics in these words; *"inconsistent style of political activism, characterized by alternating periods of high activity followed by prolonged absences, made it challenging for her to maintain a consistent political persona. This approach seemed to have been employed ostensibly to provide Shehbaz with an opportunity to negotiate with the establishment"*.²⁵

Her conviction has been put on hold, but the charges have persisted, and critics say it gave her an unfair advantage in a country where punishment for innocence of her family's alleged misuse of power is ferocious. The legal dispute has turned out to be a major roadblock for her, not just eroding her credibility to opponents as she pitches herself as a reformist leader. Besides legal charges she

²⁵Dawn. "Burden or Opportunity?" February 25, 2024.

remained focused on her stance.

The New York Times columnist Bari Weiss illustrated this dichotomy well in her Column about the seemingly paradoxical way. It has made her one of the country's most popular political figures especially among women voters all without changing herself to adhere to traditional gender norms in Pakistani politics. Women political leaders in Pakistan, such as Maryam Nawaz, are pivotal in mobilizing their respective communities and empowering marginalized groups. As the daughter of the former Prime Minister of Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif (2013-2017), and a prominent leader of the PML-N, Maryam Nawaz has focused on mobilizing her party between elections with a particular focus on women and youth. Her speeches explicitly articulate themes of democratic governance and social justice. She presents herself as an ally to social movements assertive for increased rights for marginalized communities including highlighting women's rights through her regular conference addresses at educational seminars, medical camps, agriculture events, or religious gatherings.²⁶ Women political leaders acknowledge that women and marginalized groups often face limited access to quality education, healthcare and political representation. Through explicit inclusion within populist movements or popular support networks during election cycles these politicians seek to politicize previously excluded citizens into politics by providing them with a platform from which to voice their demands.²⁷

²⁶Dawn. "Maryam Nawaz's Leadership Challenges." February 25, 2024.

²⁷Rehman, Zia. "Maryam Nawaz: A Political Leader in the Making." *The Diplomat*, 2021.

Key Challenges to Maryam Nawaz in Politics		
Category	Challenge	Explanation
Gender	Patriarchal Political outlook	Pakistani politics is male dominated, making leadership getting problematic for women
Political Dynasty Blame	“Heir Apparent” Condemnation	Adversaries often fire her political rise as family legacy rather than excellence.
Legal Barriers	Court Cases and Analysis	Legal disagreements have pretentious her public image and political impetus.
Public Perception	Mixed prevalent getting	Whereas popular among PML-N followers, she faces cynicism among unbiased voters.
Leadership Contrast	Continuous Assessment with Nawaz Sharif/Shahbaz Sharif	Hopes to bout her father’s political height add pressure.
Institutional Resistance	Relations with Establishment /Bureaucratic Challenges	Steering power dynamic forces in Pakistan’s political scheme is multifaceted
Media Criticism	Concentrated Media Examination	Her declarations and activities are often heavily discussed and criticized
Political Experience	Comparatively late entrance into active politics	Compared to senior leaders, her practices are seen as limited by opponents
Balancing Politics and Governance	Performance hopes as CM Punjab	Carrying out effective governance while handling political opposition is challenging.

Women’s Political Leadership: Contributions and Impact

- **Mobilization and Empowerment**

Some of these women political leaders include; The Wife of Nawaz Sharif, Maryam Nawaz has boosted up the communities and enhanced the power of the oppressed groups. Maryam Nawaz of PML-N has also been playing an active role as the head of the PMLN. She has been the connection between the electorate,

especially women, youths, and the party. Its modeled speeches and political campaigns contain key ideas of human rights and democratic governance; social justice and women's political rights; therefore, it places her firmly within the category of the empowered of the 'voiceless.' Women leaders like Maryam Nawaz make affirmed that they would take steps for women education, health and political participation. This means giving them the power to participate in the political process whenever such groups are involved in political movements. Maryam Nawaz and other women focus on social interests, literacy, and health sectors, which are ignored in standard political parliament discussions. Their contributions include policy making to empowering the young women of today to appreciate the political system and take up future leadership roles.

Leadership Strategies

Navigating male-dominated social as well as political structures, Maryam Nawaz faced significant challenges inside and outside the party. Many PML-N prominent and loyal leaders refused to work under her leadership, for instance Shahid Khakan Abbasi and left party on these grounds. In his former statements, he claimed to stay with party till his last breath.²⁸

For women, getting political influence often face obstacles to command. So, Maryam also faced and still faces hate speeches publicly and on social media. In Pakistan's acutely patriarchal society, females in politics frequently facing confrontation at many ends, their male counterparts' and also less support by the social norms that are discouraging for female leadership. Maryam has deliberately navigated these tests by leveraging her family's political inheritance and line up herself with wider democratic and anti-corruption stories that reverberate with the public.²⁹ Her leadership style underlines devotion to her party and her father's political dream, letting her to uphold strong backing within the PML-N.

²⁸Guramani, Nadir. "PML-N's Abbasi Confirms He Resigned from Party Post, Says Chief Organiser Maryam Should Get 'Open Field'." *Dawn*, February 1, 2023.

²⁹Javaid, Umbreen. "Women in Pakistan's Political Struggle: Case of Maryam Nawaz." *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences* 40, no. 1 (2007): 67–80.

Maryam Nawaz Mega Projects in Punjab from 2024-2025	
Education	Honhaar Scholarship Program, Merit-based scholarships for higher education students across Punjab, Laptop & Digital Inclusion Initiatives, Laptops and IT access for students
Health	Maryam Nawaz Health Clinics, Advancement in primary healthcare, Upgradation of basic health units (BHU)with well facilities, Free Medicines and Diagnostics Program, Free medicines and free medical tests in public hospitals. Construction of new hospitals like Nawaz Sharif Cancer Hospital etc.
Housing	Apni Chhat, and Apna Ghar Program
Cleanliness	Suthra Punjab Program
Economic development	Asaan Karobar Financing Scheme
Women Empowerment	Women Development & Protection Programs
Green Initiative for Better Environment	Green Punjab Initiative
Infrastructure	Urban Development & Road Rehabilitation

Impact of Maryam Nawaz on Future Women Leadership

Maryam Nawaz has played significant part in inspiring new women leaders in Pakistan. As a popular female leader in a patriarchal political milieu, she epitomized a historic move towards higher gender parity in the developing country.³⁰ With the numerous legal cases and well-organized antagonism and hostility from different sides, she remained active and strong to achieve her set goals, she has certainly evidenced that hurdles and criticism on her cannot stop doing good for her

³⁰Tahir, Zulqernain. "Maryam Kick-Starts PML-N Campaign with Attacks on PTI." *Dawn*, January 16, 2024.

people in Punjab.³¹

She has played a great role towards changing the perceptions of the people of this country regarding women issues and women empowered political seats. In this way, women's roles in politics have been changing over time in Pakistan gradually but certainly because of her efforts. She has been an icon for future generation of women leaders and political activists through advocacy, visibility and resilience; this has afforded overall movements in gender equality and political activism.³²

The elevation of Maryam Nawaz to the level of the first female chief minister of Punjab is now seen as a welcome change in Pakistan. That makes her job even more complicated because of the controversy surrounding the election and rigging allegations that escalated the divide more than ever. As it is noted through the article, to eradicate political deliberate hostility and reestablish the people's faith in the political process, Maryam is to empower as well as incorporate. Though, her privileged upbringing as the daughter of a prominent political leader may spare her some of the ways in which the system undermines women in politics, conversely, she does not have the parliamentary experience that might make her more resistant to the backlash which could ensue.³³

Conclusion

The long political activism of Maryam Nawaz Sharif, who joined politics in 2013, also proved how women influence and change traditional gender. Her journey in the political map of Pakistan shows that women can lead movements and shape narratives in developing societies that are oppressive of women. Maryam engages an attitude towards women as leaders challenging stereotypical perception that a woman can only lead a party but cannot lead a political campaign. The capacity to support, express connotation against voices of opposition, and create an autonomy

³¹Khan, Farida. "Women's Leadership in South Asia: The Rise of Female Political Figures." *Asian Journal of Political Science* 30, no. 2 (2022): 115–133.

³²Dawn. "Maryam Nawaz — PML-N's Heir Apparent." January 26, 2024.

³³Dawn. "Burden or Opportunity?" February 25, 2024.

of leadership without references to male counterparts entails growing phenomenon of women leadership in South Asia. Maryam's political journey also reveals the roles of systemic constraints on women political actors with political harassment, media pressures and cultures of victimization and objectification. But her tenacious approach holds a new paradigm that women are coming to the political activism leadership fold by force as a norm. Her political persona represents a primary examination of the harsh environment in which the female leadership transmutes the tenors and intros of political battles, stirs up movements, and confronts prejudicial disparities. While it may be observed that the quest for the establishment of more appropriate political structures have been fueled by women in leadership structures globally, it can consequently concluded that, the contributions of women in the leadership of the world currently in the global society will play a decisive role towards the establishment of the significant political systems that will give way to more befitting and more ethical structures that befits the society in the future.

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