



# Exploring the Influence of Sociocultural Norms and Gender Biases on Women's Empowerment in Pakistan

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Exploring the Influence of Sociocultural Norms and Gender Biases on Women's Empowerment  
in Pakistan.

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A Thesis in the Field of International Relations  
for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

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## Abstract

Gender-based discrimination continues to be widely prevalent across the globe, particularly in developing countries. The WEF Global Gender Gap Report 2021 ranks Pakistan as one of the five worst countries for women on the global gender gap index. Despite having equal constitutional rights in place, the practical standing of women in Pakistani society remains subordinate to men. Why have women's constitutional rights not translated into their equal standing in society?

To answer this question, this study puts forth the hypothesis that sociocultural norms and gender biases are hindering progress towards women's empowerment in Pakistan. This study tests the hypothesis by exploring how sociocultural norms and gender biases influence women's access to three strategic empowerment areas including education, employment, and political freedom. Study findings confirm widespread gender biases and gender discrimination in Pakistan, which has severe implications for women, as they face security concerns, mobility restrictions, limited educational and professional advancement opportunities, and other complex challenges. Furthermore, results suggest that gender biases may influence women's access to the three empowerment areas in varying degrees. However, political dimension shows the weakest correlation between gender biases and gender outcomes; Bangladesh is explored as an outlier. With the assumption that traditional norms are more pronounced in rural areas, results from an urban and rural analysis show that while women in rural areas face more disadvantages in education, women in rural areas have higher employment rates than their urban

counterparts. Moreover, employment gender gaps were found to be lower in majority of Pakistan's rural regions than in urban areas, with the exception of Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA), one of the most rural regions in Pakistan, where the highest employment gender gap and lowest female employment rates were observed. The lowest employment gender gap was observed in rural Sindh. Overall, this research finds that while sociocultural norms, patriarchal trends, and gender biases hinder women's empowerment, they are not the only determinants of gender outcomes in Pakistan, as there are many other factors at play.

Existing literature has helped surface other crucial factors that play a role in gender outcomes, such as economic development and state capacity. However, what's missing is a holistic view and understanding of how sociocultural norms are influencing gender landscape in Pakistan and women's access to the three empowerment areas, which this research attempts to address.

## Dedication

I dedicate this research to the women in my family and my father. Gulzar Fatima (my mother), Late Laiq-un-Nisa Naqvi (my grandmother), Maniya Imam and Injila Imam (my sisters) for their endless encouragement and being my rock, and Arif Imam (my father) for unconditionally empowering me and giving me the freedom to pursue my dreams, irrespective of gender stereotypes that are common in our Pakistani society. I also dedicate this research to my best friend, Dr. Fizza Joffrey, for her support throughout the research process. Lastly and most importantly, I dedicate this research to all the women and girls of Pakistan who have been deprived of their human rights solely due to their gender. This research is my tribute to them.

## Acknowledgments

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge Bathsheba Zewde for her work on women's rights in Ethiopia, *Barriers to Women's Empowerment in Ethiopia: Exploring and Understanding the Effects of Cultural Norms and Practices*, which inspired my gender equality research on Pakistan.

Secondly, I would like to acknowledge my Thesis Director, Dr. Mashail Malik, for her endless guidance. This research project could not have been possible without her support.

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## Table of Contents

Dedication .....	v
Acknowledgments.....	vi
List of Tables .....	ix
List of Figures.....	x
Chapter I. Problem Statement and Background.....	1
1.1 Economic Participation & Opportunity .....	3
1.2 Educational Attainment .....	4
1.3 Political Empowerment.....	5
1.4 Women’s Status in the Constitution of Pakistan.....	7
1.5 Defining Social Norms .....	9
Chapter II. Literature Review .....	12
Chapter III. Research Methods .....	25
Chapter IV. Data Analysis .....	28
4.1 GSNI Wave 6 Findings on Pakistan .....	30
4.2 GSNI Wave 6 Data on Pakistan Political, Educational & Economic Bias .....	31
Political Bias .....	31
Educational Bias .....	31
Economic Bias .....	31
4.3 Wave 7 Data on Political, Educational, and Economic Dimensions: .....	31
4.4 GSNI7 Data on Political, Educational, and Economic Biases.....	33



Political Bias .....	33
Educational Bias .....	34
Economic Bias .....	34
4.5: Correlation Analysis on the Relationship between Gender Norms & Gaps...	35
4.6: Urban and Rural Trends in Pakistan .....	38
Education .....	39
Employment.....	47
Chapter V Discussion and Lessons from Bangladesh .....	53
Chapter VI. Conclusion .....	56
References.....	59

## List of Tables

Table 1 Pakistan’s Global Sub-Rankings by WEF for 2021 .....	3
Table 2 Definitions of Gender Bias for the Gender Social Norms Index.....	29
Table 3 Bias Indicators of the Wave 7 Multidimensional Gender Social Norms Index....	32
Table 4: Gender Social Norms Index Wave 7 (GSNI <sup>7</sup> ).....	33
Table 5 Correlation Analysis: Political Dimension .....	35
Table 6 Correlation Analysis: Educational Dimension .....	36
Table 7 Correlation Analysis: Economic Dimension .....	37
Table 8 No Education Rate by Location.....	39
Table 9 Illiteracy Rate by Location .....	40
Table 10 Primary School Net Attendance Ratios by Location .....	41
Table 11 Middle/Secondary School Net Attendance Ratios by Location .....	41
Table 12 Top Reasons for Girls Not Attending School (Urban) .....	43
Table 13 Top Reasons for Girls Not Attending School (Rural) .....	45
Table 14. Employment Trends by Location .....	47
Table 15. Regional Employment Trends .....	50

## List of Figures

Figure 1 The UNDP-HDRO Gender Social Norms Index .....	28
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## Chapter I.

### Problem Statement and Background

While many developing countries around the world codify gender equality in formal institutions and laws, gender gaps continue to persist. Gender inequality has always been an issue in Pakistan, and women are often treated as second-class citizens, despite having equal rights in the Constitution of Pakistan. Why is there a gap between the formal guarantee of rights and the actual standing of women in Pakistani society? This research answers this question by showing that the process of achieving gender equality in Pakistan is not linear. The rugged state of the gender equality landscape in Pakistan is unlikely to improve until and unless we challenge grass-roots factors that are disadvantageous to women's empowerment efforts. Despite institutional laws that guarantee equal rights and further women's empowerment, this research explores how deep-rooted sociocultural norms and gender biases are hindering gender equality by restricting women's access to key strategic empowerment areas including education, employment, and political freedom.

This chapter establishes an understanding of Pakistan's gender landscape and the goal of this research by 1) exploring findings and setting comparative regional perspectives on gender equality based on the World Economic Forum (WEF) Global Gender Gap Report 2021; 2) understanding women's legal status according to the Constitution of Pakistan; and 3) outlining specific questions this research attempts to answer.

Women in Pakistan face a plethora of human rights abuses and systemic gender discrimination. The Islamic Republic of Pakistan is home to the 2nd largest Muslim population in the world, with a total population of over 220 million<sup>1</sup>, 49% female.<sup>2</sup> According to the WEF Global Gender Gap Report 2021, Pakistan secured a global ranking of 153rd out of 156 countries. These rankings are abysmal and have continued to worsen in recent years, which is an indicator of the seriously regressive state of women in the country. Pakistan's ranking on the Global Gender Gap Index has dropped from 143rd in 2017 to 148th in 2018 and dipped further to 151st place in 2020. This benchmark is specifically measured against four dimensions: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment. This study's scope includes three of these dimensions: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, and political empowerment.

This section establishes global and regional context on gender equality by exploring WEF gender gap findings. The regions of South Asia (62.3%) and Middle East and North Africa (60.9%) were reported to have the widest gender gaps, and Western Europe was reported to have the narrowest gender gap (77.6%) as of 2021. Bangladesh has emerged as the best-performing country in South Asia, with a global ranking of 65. Furthermore, Nepal ranks 106, Bhutan ranks 130, and India is at an unimpressive 140th spot on the index. Lastly, Afghanistan is not too far from Pakistan (152), ranking the worst at the 156th spot on the index.<sup>3</sup> Pakistan's global sub-rankings for 2021 are presented in Table 1 below.

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<sup>1</sup> United States Department of State, *Pakistan*, 12 May 2021.

<sup>2</sup> The World Bank. *Population, Female (% of Total Population) - Pakistan*.

<sup>3</sup> World Economic Forum. *Global Gender Gap Report 2021*. 30 Mar. 2021.

Table 1 Pakistan’s Global Sub-Rankings by WEF for 2021

Dimension	Global Ranking
Economic Participation & Opportunity	152
Educational attainment	144
Political empowerment	98

Section 1.1 dissects the report’s findings to further examine these three dimensions to set the stage for this research.

### 1.1 Economic Participation & Opportunity

Economic Participation and Opportunity was identified as one of the most critical areas for South Asia to close its gender gap. The lack of progress in women’s labor force participation hinders economic opportunities for women not only in Pakistan but across the region. Only 22.3% of women in India, 22.6% in Pakistan, and 38.4% in Bangladesh are active in the labor market. The average rate of female participation in the labor force is 51% of the male labor force participation rate. In Nepal, however, over 85% of women participate in the labor force.

The report further reveals gender discrimination wide pay gaps for employed women:

The presence of women in senior roles is even more rare: women make up just 4.1% in Afghanistan, 4.9% in Pakistan, 10.7% in Bangladesh and 14.6% in India. As a result, the disparity in income between men and women is large in most countries. In Pakistan and Afghanistan, the income of an average woman is below 16% of that of an average man, while in India it is 20.7%.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, not only are women’s labor force participation rates seriously low in the region, but women also face serious disadvantages when employed, such as wide pay gaps, limited upward mobility, and other forms of gender discrimination that will be

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<sup>4</sup> World Economic Forum. *Global Gender Gap Report 2021*. 30 Mar. 2021.

explored in later chapters. On the global economic participation and opportunity index, Afghanistan ranked the worst at the 156<sup>th</sup> spot. Pakistan and India were not far behind in 152<sup>nd</sup> and 151<sup>st</sup> places, respectively. Furthermore, Bangladesh earned a global ranking of 147, Bhutan 130, and Nepal secured a higher ranking than its neighbors at 107<sup>th</sup> place in economic participation gender gap.

## 1.2 Educational Attainment

The Educational Attainment subindex shows the narrowest gender gap, as most countries have made significant progress in this dimension, and reveals positive global trends in education:

Globally, women are more likely to be enrolled in higher levels of education than men. While fewer girls are enrolled in primary education than boys (88.2% versus 90.5%), on average, there is virtual parity in secondary education, and women actually exceed men in tertiary education attainment. In 2018, 40.6% of women and 35.6% of men in the world were enrolled in tertiary education, a sign that women are pursuing education as a channel for advancement.<sup>5</sup>

While these positive trends of educational advancement are promising, many women are still denied equal access to education in many parts of the world, and there continue to be stark differences between global averages and some countries. There are still locations where women's literacy rate is substantially lower than men's; in countries including Pakistan, Angola, and Yemen, less than 67% of the literacy gender gap has been bridged. Female literacy rates remain as low as 53.7% in Afghanistan, 65.8% in India, 59.7% in Nepal, 57% in Bhutan, and 46.5% in Pakistan.<sup>6</sup> Countries including Pakistan, Angola, Nigeria, and Chad continue to have a 15% or higher gender gap in

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<sup>5</sup> World Economic Forum. *Global Gender Gap Report 2021*. 30 Mar. 2021.

<sup>6</sup> World Economic Forum. *Global Gender Gap Report 2021*. 30 Mar. 2021.

primary education enrollment. In South Asia, Afghanistan ranked the worst on the Educational Attainment subindex at the lowest ranking of 156. Pakistan ranked the second worst in South Asia at 144th place, while neighboring countries show slightly better rankings, including Nepal at 134th, Bangladesh at 121st, Bhutan at 117th, and India at 114th place.

Pakistan is the world's second-highest country with out-of-school children. According to UNICEF, an estimated 22.8 million children in Pakistan aged 15-16 are out of school. In the age group 5-9, 5 million children are out of school, and 11.4 million adolescents between the ages of 10-14 are not receiving formal education. Statistics on primary-level enrollment show that an estimated 10.7 million boys and 8.6 million girls are enrolled. These numbers drop at the lower secondary level, with 3.6 million boys and 2.8 million girls enrolled. In the Sindh province, 52% of the poorest children are out of school, 58% of them girls, and 78% of girls are out of school in Balochistan.<sup>7</sup> If Article 25A of Pakistan's Constitution mandates compulsory education, regardless of gender, what is keeping girls out of school? The data analysis in chapter 5 will shed more light on the gender gap in Pakistan's literacy rates and explore some of the main reasons why children drop out of school.

### 1.3 Political Empowerment

The Political Empowerment subindex shows considerable gender disparity across South Asia, as gender gaps remain the widest in this dimension compared to others. The report has shared regressive trends in the subindex, indicating a prominent decline in

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<sup>7</sup> UNICEF. *Education: Giving Every Child the Right to Education*. UNICEF Pakistan,



women's representation in politics. Between 2020 and 2021, the share of women ministers in Pakistan decreased from 12% to 10.7%, and in India from 23.1% to 9.1%. The World Bank 2021 data shows that only 20% of seats are held by women in the national parliament of Pakistan.<sup>8</sup>

There are no countries in the South Asia where the share of women in parliament is above 33%. Bhutan has earned the lowest ranking of 137 on the political empowerment subindex. Pakistan ranked 98, followed by Afghanistan at 111, while Nepal and India ranked 61 and 51, respectively. Bangladesh earned an impressive ranking of 7, not only the highest in South Asia but also higher than most developed nations in the world, including the United States (37), the United Kingdom (23), France (20), and Germany (10). Bangladesh is also the only country where women have held the head of state position longer than men in the past 50 years. Chapter 6 will explore the case of Bangladesh further. Hence, the above analysis of gender gap rankings shows that gender-based disparities exist across all three dimensions in Pakistan and regionally.

Limited accessibility across these three empowerment areas results in severe implications on the quality of women's day-to-day life by contributing to their status as the subordinate gender. Women are also vulnerable to serious human rights violations such as domestic violence, femicide, rape, honor killings, child marriage, and other forms of gender-based violence. While Pakistan's regressive rankings in the global gender gap index raise urgent concerns, they only show a 50,000 ft. view of the gender inequality problem. This research attempts to explore the grass-root causes behind the problem.

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<sup>8</sup> The World Bank. *Proportion of Seats Held by Women in National Parliaments (%) - Pakistan*. 2021.

## 1.4 Women's Status in the Constitution of Pakistan

To find ways to bridge Pakistan's gender gap, we must explore the enabling root causes, and the first step towards that is to examine the legal status of women in the Constitution of Pakistan. The Constitution of Pakistan dedicates a full chapter to fundamental rights including Article 25, The Equality Clause, that guarantees equality of all citizens and prohibits discrimination against women. Article 25 states:

All citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law.

There shall be no discrimination on the basis of sex.

Nothing in this Article shall prevent the State from making any special provision for the protection of women and children.

Furthermore, Article 25A, Right to Education, provides compulsory access to education to all children from ages five to sixteen, irrespective of gender. Article 27, Safeguard against discrimination in services, guarantees equal opportunity in employment, and prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex. The first clause of Article 27 states

1) No citizen otherwise qualified for appointment in the service of Pakistan shall be discriminated against in respect of any such appointment on the ground only of race, religion, caste, sex, residence or place of birth.

Provided that, for a period not exceeding [forty] years from the commencing day, posts may be reserved for persons belonging to any class or area to secure their adequate representation in the service of Pakistan:

Provided further that, in the interest of the said service, specified posts or services may be reserved for members of either sex if such posts or services entail the performance of duties and functions which cannot be adequately performed by members of the other sex.

Moreover, Article 17 of the constitution recognizes the political right of every citizen, including women, to form a union, association, and be a member of a political

party. In 2002, the constitution was amended through The Legal Framework Order, which reserves special seats for women in Parliament and Provincial Assemblies.<sup>9</sup>

Below is a list of articles of women's constitutional rights in Pakistan:

Article 3 calls upon the State to eliminate all forms of exploitation.

Article 4 provides for the right of individual to enjoy the protection of law and to be treated in accordance with the law. This applies to the citizens as well as "to every other person for the time being within Pakistan" without distinction. This article also clearly states that certain rights cannot be suspended.

Article 25 ensures equality before the law and equal protection of the law and states that there shall be no discrimination on the basis of sex alone.

Articles 25(3) and 26(2) allow the state to make special provisions for the protection of women and children.

Articles 26 & 27 provide for equal access to public places and equality of employment in the public and private sector.

Articles 11 & 37 (g) prohibit trafficking in human beings as well as prostitution.

Article 32 makes special provisions for the representation of women in local Government.

Article 34 directs the state to take appropriate measures to enable women to participate in all spheres of life and social activities.

Article 35 asks the state to protect the marriage, the family, the mother and the child.

Article 37 (e) directs the state to make provisions for securing just and humane conditions of work ensuring that children and women are not employed in vocations unsuited to their age or sex, and for ensuring maternity benefits for women in employment

Articles 51 & 106 provide for the reservation of seats for women in the legislatures.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.*

<sup>10</sup> Women Development Department: Government of Punjab. *Constitutional Provisions Regarding Fundamental Rights.*

Hence, the Constitution of Pakistan provides equal fundamental rights to both men and women in every area of society. But is that enough? Despite codified laws and policies that further women's empowerment, widespread gender discrimination, and women's rights violations are widespread in the country.

This study aims to understand the grassroots factors hindering women's empowerment efforts in Pakistan. Moreover, this research investigates how sociocultural norms and gender biases, based on patriarchal traditions, impact women's access to three strategic empowerment areas of education, employment, and political empowerment that are crucial to leveling the gender equality landscape in Pakistan.

### 1.5 Defining Social Norms

The primary goal of this research is to investigate the impact of sociocultural norms on women's empowerment and establishing a clear definition of social norms helps us better grasp of how they apply in the context of Pakistan's complex gender landscape. Terms like sociocultural norms, social norms, and gender biases are used interchangeably because they are often interrelated and are always talked about in the context of gender outcomes in this study

According to the Handbook of Social Psychology,

Social norms are rules and standards that are understood by members of a group, and that guide and/or constrain social behavior without the force of laws. These norms emerge out of interaction with others; they may or may not be stated explicitly, and any sanctions for deviating from them come from social networks, not the legal system. Social norms can include general, societal expectations for our behavior; the expectations of valued

others for our behavior; our own expectations for our behavior; and standards that develop out of our observations of others' behavior.<sup>11</sup>

Cialdini and Trost argue that “people seek to influence others and allow themselves to be influenced by others in almost every interpersonal segment of their lives,” calling it the social influence process. Social norms, conformity, and compliance essentially have three goals: to behave effectively and according to pre-set societal standards, to build and maintain relationships, and to manage self-concept. These goals can interact with social situations in different ways. Certain situations can activate an individual's motive for social approval based on surrounding environments.

There are two key takeaways relevant to this study. First, based on the definition above, social norms are rooted in societal expectations, standards, and sanctions, rather than the legal system. This partly contributes to the discussion of why women's constitutional rights have not translated into equal standing in society, suggesting that long-held norms and customs are often more important than codified law in the Pakistani society. Second, the three goals behind Cialdini and Trost's social influence process can potentially explain why women often fail to advocate for their own rights. The data analysis in chapter 5 will later show, it's not just men, but remarkably high percentages of women in Pakistan have internalized gender biases, which directly impact gender outcomes in educational, economic, and political spheres. Challenging long-held social and cultural frameworks may come with a high cost for women, such as social approval, essentially challenging their self-concept and place in society.

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<sup>11</sup> Cialdini, Robert B., and Noah J. Goldstein. *Social Influence: Compliance and Conformity*. Annual Review of Psychology, vol. 55, no. 1, 2004, pp. 591–621.

To understand how sociocultural norms and practices influence gender equality in Pakistan, the following questions are to be explored in this research:

1. If the Constitution of Pakistan guarantees equal rights to women, what stops them from equal participation in these three areas? What are the reasons and explanations behind policy vs. practice discrepancies?
2. How do sociocultural norms and gender biases influence women's empowerment in educational, economic, and political spheres?
3. Do women in urban areas have better empowerment opportunities compared to their rural counterparts?
4. What are the global and regional gender equality trends, and are there any learnings for Pakistan?

## Chapter II.

### Literature Review

The chapter below reviews relevant literature to discuss several variables that influence gender outcomes and explores societal and domestic implications of these gender imbalances across education, employment, and political spheres. If Article 25 of Pakistani constitution formally gives equal rights to women, why are women still oppressed? Why is Constitutional law not fully translating to women's equal standing in society? Although no simple answer to these questions has been found, existing literature brings forth various causes, explanations, and repercussions of gender imbalances in Pakistan and in neighboring countries.

Qurat Rana (2022), in her assessment of gender inequalities in Pakistan, argues that educational access and inequity is a socioeconomic issue. Due to extreme poverty, rural families often lack apt financial resources to provide a better education for their children. Additionally, rural communities of Pakistan face a plethora of challenges such as lack of infrastructure and school facilities like buildings, electricity, and safe drinking water. To make things worse, a scarcity of educated female schoolteachers creates obstacles for girls to attend school. Issues such as lack of government funds and unfavorable political activity also contribute to lower enrollment of girls in schools.

Rana's gender assessment in educational achievement and political involvement observes strong gender discrepancies. She emphasizes on the role played by cultural factors, patriarchal ideas, and traditional standards in shaping men's and women's gender roles in society and provides policy recommendations for Pakistan's national and

provincial governments to practically address these gender disparities. However, her work is missing two critical components; 1) empirical evidence suggesting how gender norms and patriarchy influence such gender inequalities; and 2) an exploration of the role of government and institutional factors in gender outcomes.

Anu Rammohan and Patrick Vu (2018) fill some of these gaps by using nationally representative data to examine the role of economic and sociocultural factors in influencing women's educational outcomes in India. Consistent with Rana's findings, their economic analysis indicates that households in wealthier districts are more likely to educate girls compared to poorer districts. Wealthier areas have more financial resources and higher enrollment rates, which tends to result in greater gender equity in schooling. Exploring cultural factors affecting women's schooling, evidence shows that patrilocal exogamy, a common social system in India in which the woman (from an external community) migrates to reside with or near the husband's kin after marriage, has a strong association with greater gender gaps and negative educational outcomes for women in India. This is especially evident in Northern India, where patrilocal exogamy is commonly practiced and gender inequity in education is more pronounced. In Pakistan, where patrilocal residence is often the primary form of post-marital residence due to it being a predominantly patriarchal society, findings on how cultural institutions such as patrilocality influence gender equality can be relevant.

Literature on gender inequality often outlines helpful policy recommendations to foster women's empowerment via governmental efforts, without analyzing the actual role played by various governmental factors in gender outcomes. As we have established, constitutional rights do not necessarily translate to women's equal status in society,



which implies that there are other state factors at play. Østby et al. (2016) bridge this gap by investigating whether such gender disparities in education persist due to low state capacity and support at the governmental level, or due to state willingness factors that foster systematic gender-based discrimination against girls. After studying 57 developing countries for the period of 1970-2010, including Pakistan, findings suggest that gender inequality in education primarily exists due to factors related to state willingness and not state capacity. While capacity factors such as economic development have a positive relationship with gender parity in education, authors find the relationship to be statistically insignificant. On the contrary, high urbanization levels were found to have a very strong effect on gender parity in education.

Overall, state willingness factors were found to have a stronger effect on government's ability to carry out policies that effectively address gender inequalities. The study explores three factors that affect willingness: ethnic fractionalization, religion, and democracy. Greater ethnic fractionalization was found to negatively impact government supported public service programs and may represent a political barrier to state investment in education, translating into pronounced gender disparities and slower progress towards equality. According to the UNESCO Global Monitoring Report 2015, gender gaps in education are often greater among ethnically disadvantaged groups, compared to ethnically and linguistically homogenous countries. Furthermore, less gender parity was found in countries where Islam is the majority religion, except for Middle East and North Africa where the rate of female secondary education has progressed rapidly during this period. Lastly, it is found that democracy has no independent effect on gender parity for the countries sampled.

While Østby et al. provide pivotal framework to understand which state factors influence gender equalities in education, one limitation of this work is a lack of country-specific discussion on the implication of studies variables. A country focused discussion of how variables such as bureaucratic quality, urbanization, ethnic fractionalization, religion, democracy level, population, and others influence gender equality could have helped to bring to life unique challenges faced by sampled developing countries. For example, how has ethnic fractionalization influenced gender equality in India? Or what is the role of Islam in gender outcomes in Pakistan?

Another strand of literature explores the repercussions of educational gender inequality on a societal and household level, and how such disparities translate into women's day to day life in Pakistan. Sundus Saleemi (2021) puts forth a causal relationship between gender discrimination and gender gaps in education, implying that gender inequality in education results from gender discrimination, which consequently results in more gender discrimination in other dimensions, such as women's participation in the labor force and domestic violence. She notes, "Low levels of education are a key barrier to women's participation in the formal labour force, which has been stagnating for a long time. Due to their lack of schooling and skills, most women cannot find lucrative jobs."

Women's low access to education also translates into low access to the labor market. The money they make is not enough to support themselves and their families, which often leads them to depend on household men who are typically able to earn more. Saleemi also notes an important link between domestic violence and literacy rates:

According to the official Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) 2017 – 2018, 28 % percent of women aged 15 to 49 experienced physical violence

at home. The prevalence of domestic violence was higher in rural areas. Not by coincidence, it was highest where women's literacy rates were lowest.<sup>12</sup>

These findings help draw suggestive patterns of how gender discrimination in education is interlinked with gender outcomes in household and society. Women's restricted access to education often results in their low participation in the labor force and reduced financial empowerment, which makes them financially dependent and subordinate to men. Consequently, this dependence results in increased domestic violence, particularly in rural areas where women typically don't have the same access to education and employment as urban parts of the country.

Ayesha Khurshid (2016) examines how women's education and access to labor market in rural and low-income communities of Pakistan impacts and challenges gender relations within the domestic sphere. She finds that education plays an important role in challenging traditional gender norms in the context of employment opportunities and family decision-making. She also explores how education creates a gendered hierarchy between *parhi likhi* (educated) women vs. *unparh* (uneducated) women within the domestic sphere.

Khurshid articulates three interrelated shifts in the domestic gender landscape driven by women's access to education. First, her research shows that women's education contributes to reshaping traditional gender norms by giving *parhi likhi* women access to male dominated spheres of jobs, public mobility, and an increased status and authority in family decision-making. These results suggest that higher education can lead to changed gender norms. Second, education also reinforces the traditional gendered division of

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<sup>12</sup> Saleemi, Sundas. *How Illiteracy perpetuates oppression of Pakistani Women*.

domestic labor. She finds, “The educated women were expected to become “perfect domestic subjects” through excelling in their traditional roles as homemakers and childcare providers.” Third, education develops a new gendered hierarchy between parhi likhi and unparh women within the same families, with exclusive opportunity and privileges given to parhli likhi women.

Khurshid also challenges conventional and linear narrative that women’s education results in gender equality by making an important argument:

This ethnographic analysis reveals how gender equality is a complex process shaped by structural inequalities and cultural norms that determine the meaning and purpose of education in a specific context.

Achieving equal access to education is not enough in achieving gender equality, until and unless we challenge cultural norms and domestic implications. Cultural norms and domestication of women is a bigger issue than meeting strategic empowerment needs.

Khurshid’s work points to a causal relationship between education and norms that runs in the opposite direction to the one hypothesized in this study. This research argues that social norms are restricting women’s access to education, but her work shows that women’s higher education can in fact challenge and reshape social norms by giving them more autonomy and authority in the household and increases their access to the labor market.

As discussed in section above, the WEF Global Gender Gap Report 2021 identifies economic participation and opportunity as one of the most crucial areas for South Asia. According to the World Bank, as of 2021, Pakistan has a female labor force participation rate (% of female population ages 15%) of 21%. With nearly half of Pakistan’s population being women, the low labor market participation rates have grave implications not only for women’s financial empowerment, but the country’s overall

economic development. Beyond inequality in access to labor market opportunities, women also face financial disparities when they are employed and typically earn less than men due to very large wage gaps. On average, a Pakistani woman's income is only 16.3% of men. As some of the literature reviewed in the above section suggests, higher education can change gender outcomes in the economic dimension by giving women more access to employment opportunities.

This section explores literature on other factors influencing labor market opportunities for women in Pakistan. A 2016 policy brief on female labor force participation in Pakistan put forth by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) notes that despite improvements in recent years, Pakistan's female labor force participation is still well below other countries with similar income levels. The ADB policy brief presents few different reasons why that may be, including mobility restriction, wage discrimination, and bias inducing social and cultural norms.

Women in Pakistan often do not have equal access to employment opportunities because of mobility restrictions that result from sociocultural norms and women's safety concerns. An estimated 40% of women report that their male family members do not permit them to go outside the home to take up paid employment opportunities, and 15% of women report that they themselves do not wish to work outside their homes. Women in Pakistan also often depend on male household members for transportation due to social taboos against women riding bicycles or motorcycles. A 2014 ADB survey of women in Karachi who travel often shows that 85% of working women reported being harassed on public transportation by male passengers, drivers, or conductors. These factors limit both urban and rural women's ability to find gainful employment opportunities outside their

homes. Furthermore, a positive association is found between female labor force participation and vehicle ownership in the household, which may indicate that women in families who own cars have an easier time traveling to work without experiencing harassment.<sup>13</sup>

Mobility restrictions are only one of the factors that hinder gender equality in employment. Muhammad Sabir (2015) conducts an empirical investigation into gender inequality in Pakistan's labor force and finds that women in Pakistan are highly disadvantaged in labor force participation due to various discriminatory factors that enable systemic gender disparity. Compared to men, women have lower chances of getting hired and higher chances of losing their jobs if employed. Women with less than postgraduate level of education face discrimination in formal sectors and struggle to find employment. The employment data analysis in chapter 4 will provide further insights into these trends.

What happens if we give women more financial independence? Rohini Pande et al. (2021) explore how increasing women's control over earnings impacts gender roles and norms in rural India and findings show that while social norms play a role in keeping women out of the labor market, giving women increased financial control challenges these norms. According to The World Bank 2021 rural population data, 63% of Pakistan's total population and 65% of India's total population is rural. Due to similarities in culture, demographics, and rural population between the two countries, it can be argued that this research, although focused on rural India, can help set the context for female labor participation in Pakistan as well.

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<sup>13</sup> Tanaka, Sakiko, and Maricor Muzones. *Policy Brief on Female Labor Force Participation in Pakistan*. Asian Development Bank, 6 Mar. 2020.

The research notes that female labor force participation remains low in emerging economies, including India.

Despite robust economic growth, India's FLFP declined from 32 percent in 2005 to 21 percent in 2018, making Indian women some of the least employed in the world (ILO, 2020). Yet nearly one third of Indian housewives express an interest in working (Fletcher et al., 2018).

What is stopping so many women from joining the labor force? The answer may lie in traditional and conservative gender norms around employment that are prevalent in India, Pakistan, and other parts of the world. The research notes:

In World Values Surveys spanning 60 countries between 2010 and 2014, a third of respondents stated that when women earn more than husbands it causes problems in the household, and nearly half state that children suffer when their mother works. In many countries, a wife who works outside the home is a source of social stigma or shame for her husband, who is expected to be the primary breadwinner (Boudet et al., 2012; Bernhardt et al., 2018). When internalized by women, such norms directly lower their utility of working (Akerlof and Kranton, 2000). When internalized by men, these norms may also reduce women's work through intra-household channels (Bertrand et al., 2015).<sup>14</sup>

The patriarchal belief that men should be the primary breadwinner of the household reinforces the social stigma against working women. Pande et al. argue that gender roles are keeping women out of the labor force, but giving women increased financial control and creates a ripple effect challenging and shifting these norms. To collect evidence, the study conducted a randomized controlled trial covering 197 village clusters in northern Madhya Pradesh region and focused on the government workfare program called the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS).

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<sup>14</sup> Field, Erica, et al. *On Her Own Account: How Strengthening Women's Financial Control Affects Labor Supply and Gender Norms*.

To test the hypothesis of the study, female workers received bank accounts, training in account use, and direct deposit of wages into their own accounts, versus their husbands in order to increase their control over earnings. Research findings show that strengthening women's control over wages via direct deposit and training, referred to as D<sup>2</sup>T classification in the study, had substantial positive impacts on women's ability to work for public and private sector, translating into gains in financial agency and financial activity. Greater earnings control encouraged women to work and led to 0.15 standard deviation unit increase in account use and 0.12 standard deviation unit increase in banking autonomy. The impact is largest for the subset of constrained women, who are less likely to have worked and had husbands who strongly opposed female work due to higher social costs. Over the three-year study period, direct deposit and training resulted in broader empowerment gains for women in terms of economic engagement and mobility, broad liberalization of women's work-related norms, and a positive shift in perceptions of community norms.

This work illustrates a causal relationship between women's economic empowerment and social norms that runs in the opposite direction to the one hypothesized in this study. While authors agree that gender norms keep women out of the labor market, research findings suggest that giving women financial agency can challenge and reshape these norms by accomplishing broader empowerment for women, indicating a causal arrow that runs both ways. This presents an opportunity for future research.

If strengthening women's financial control results in their economic empowerment, can similar lessons be drawn in the political dimension? Ali Cheema, et al. (2022) conducted a field experiment in Pakistan by studying the effects of a



nonpartisan canvassing campaign and exploring the theory of male household members as “gatekeepers” of women’s political participation. While gender gaps in political participation are common in democracies, according to their research, 11 million fewer women than men voted in the 2018 national election in Pakistan, contributing to a 9.1 percentage point national gender gap in election turnout<sup>15</sup>. This gap is stark, but also not surprising. The explanation may lie in the patriarchal norm of men acting as “gatekeepers” of women.

Cheema et al. test the gatekeeper theory by testing the influence of political interventions with the goal of educating women to increase their participation rates. The research notes that the evidence of intervention influence in developing countries differs from developed nations. While an intervention campaign increased women’s turnout in rural Pakistan, similar efforts proved to be ineffective in Mali and Ghana. In order to understand the effectiveness of such campaigns, it is important to understand how political interventions to increase women’s political participation relate to the theory of men acting as gatekeepers.

The authors note:

Interventions targeting women implicitly assume that the decision to participate in politics is one that women can make, and act on, independently. However, this may not generalize to patriarchal settings where men act as “gatekeepers” within households and women’s public engagement is subject to these men’s attitudes and behaviors.<sup>16</sup>

The canvassing experiment in Pakistan finds that targeting only women with a political canvassing campaign is ineffective at increasing turnout, but that was not the

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<sup>15</sup> Cheema, Ali, et al. *Canvassing the Gatekeepers: A Field Experiment to Increase Women Voters’ Turnout in Pakistan*. *American Political Science Review*, vol. 117, no. 1, 18 May 2022.

<sup>16</sup>Cheema, Ali, et al. *Canvassing the Gatekeepers: A Field Experiment to Increase Women Voters’ Turnout in Pakistan*.

case when men were included into these discussions. In households where canvassing efforts targeted men, women's turnout increased by 5.4 percentage points. Additionally, in households where both men and women were canvassed, women's turnout increased by 8.0 percentage points. The research further documents that households where both men and women were canvassed, men are significantly more likely to support women's role in democracy and respondents are more likely to discuss politics with each other. Also, male respondents in these households are more likely to enable women's participation by organizing resources such as transport to the polling station. Such evidence is absent from households where only women or only men are canvassed. Therefore, the research documents that canvassing both men and women at a household level can have dramatic effects not only on political turnout, but outcomes beyond that.

These findings have direct relevance for contexts where patriarchal norms designate male household members as gatekeepers affects women's public lives. This theory may also apply to areas beyond political participation, including women's access to education, employment, and mobility freedom (Becker 2019; Jayachandran 2015; Pande 2015). Often times, women's participation in public life can be highly dependent on men's willingness to share critical resources with them.

Overall, the literature review above has put forth several factors that influence gender outcomes, such as economic development, cultural practices such as marital patrilocality, and mobility restrictions. Furthermore, existing literature has implied that the relationship between the independent variable (sociocultural norms) and dependent variables (gender gaps in education, economic, and political dimension) may run in the opposite direction of what is hypothesized in this study. Factors such as higher education

and increased financial authority were found to challenge and even change traditional social and gender norms. It was found that women's higher education resulted in increased access to the labor market and challenged domestic norms by increasing their authority in family decision-making (Khurshid 2016). Similar results were observed in the economic dimension, where increasing women's financial authority resulted in changed norms and broader empowerment gains for women (Pande et al. 2021). However, giving women the freedom to make political decisions independently did not garner similar results. Household men had to be involved in political interventions in order to increase women's voter turnout in rural Pakistan (Cheema et al. 2022), indicating that traditional social and gender norms may influence women's political participation due to men acting as "gatekeepers" of women. I argue that the causal arrow probably runs both ways, where social norms influence gender outcomes for women and increasing women's access to education, economic opportunity, and political freedom results in changed norms. However, further research is needed to establish this argument.

### Chapter III.

#### Research Methods

Answering the research question requires an in-depth analysis of sociocultural norms and gender biases and how they impact gender outcomes in Pakistan. In the above sections, the WEF Global Gender Gap Report 2021 has been used as a data source to set the problem, but the WEF report alone is insufficient to support or refute the hypothesis, because it does not shed light on the role played by sociocultural norms and biases on gender outcomes in educational, economic, and political dimensions. I test the hypothesis put forth in the study via two methods explained below.

The first method attempts to identify existing gender biases across the three dimensions covered in this study. The independent variable studied in this method was sociocultural/gender norms, and the three dependent variables were gender gaps in educational, economic, and political dimensions. To collect data and insights on gender biases in Pakistan and other nations, the World Values Survey (WVS) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)'s Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI) were used as primary sources. The UNDP Human Development Report Office (HDRO) has established the Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI), which measures beliefs, biases, and prejudices to assess how social norms obstruct gender equality. Constructed based on responses from the World Values Survey (WVS), wave 5 (2005-2009) or wave 6 (2010-2014) it collects data from 75 countries accounting for 81% of the global population. The Gender Social Norms Index was first introduced in the 2019 *Human Development Report*

and comprised of four dimensions: political, educational, economic, and physical integrity. The first three dimensions are most applicable to this research. Based on its 2019 research, HDRO published the *2020 Human Development Perspectives--Tackling Social Norms: A game changer for gender inequalities*, which has been leveraged as a data source for social biases and provides a methodology to calculate social biases using the latest wave of WVS data (wave 7). To calculate the latest political, educational, and economic biases in Pakistan and other countries, I leveraged the WVS wave 7 (2017 – 2022) data to build a simple index using UNDP’s methodology and calling it GSNI<sup>7</sup>, the <sup>7</sup> in the title indicating wave 7 data.

In order to test the hypothesis, a cross-country correlation analysis was conducted to explore the relationship between independent and dependent variables listed above. For each dimension, I calculated the Correlation Coefficient ‘R’ by allocating GSNI<sup>7</sup> social bias findings as the X value (independent variable) and WEF subindex rankings as the Y value (dependent variable) to show a positive or negative correlation between variables. The correlation results in this study are suggestive and need more work, presenting an opportunity for future research.

For the second method to test the hypothesis put forth in this study, I explore urban and rural trends in Pakistan by leveraging the 2017-18 Pakistan’s National Institute of Population Studies (NIPS) and the Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey (PDHS) as the primary data source. While the World Values Survey has been a crucial data source for determining gender norms and social biases, one limitation is that it does not provide an in-depth breakdown of urban and rural responses to survey questions. Analyzing urban and rural trends is critical in answering the research question, with the expectation that

rural areas tend to have more pronounced patriarchal traditions and sociocultural practices than urban regions. The 2017-18 Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey was conducted with support of the DHS program, a project funded by USAID to support population and health surveys in countries worldwide. This survey was also supported by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Department for International Development (DFID) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) with an objective to provide current estimates on women's empowerment status, domestic violence, fertility, marriage, family planning, malaria, childhood mortality, HIV/AIDs, disability, and other dimensions.

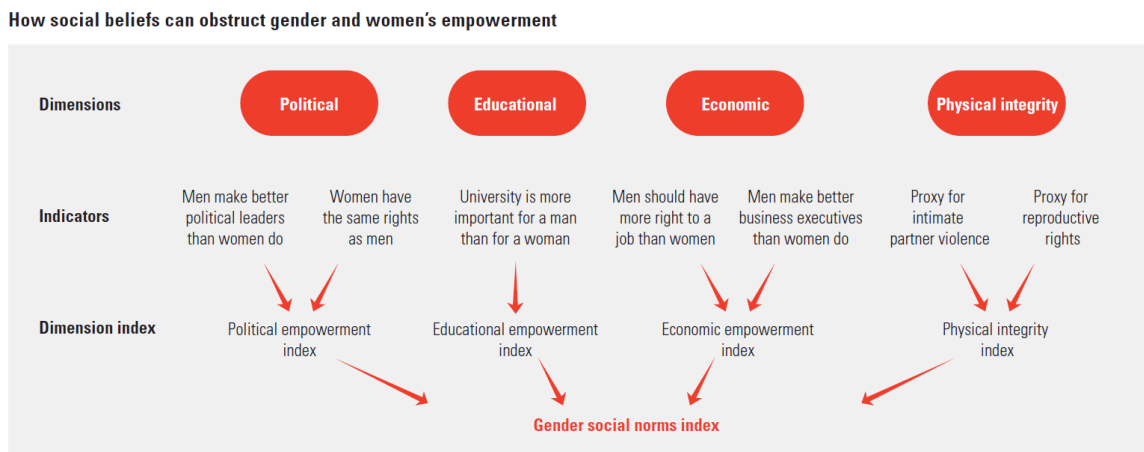
The survey provides estimates on a national level from urban and rural areas across four provinces of Pakistan, including Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), and Baluchistan, as well as ICT Islamabad and the FATA region. Approximately 16,240 households across Pakistan were visited and surveyed. Survey demographics include all ever-married women aged 15-49 in all selected households, and ever-married men aged 15-49 in one-third of the selected households were interviewed. There are two limitations to this method; 1) the 2017-18 PDHS does not include political indicators. Therefore, no information was obtained regarding urban and rural trends in politics, as it mainly focuses on educational, economic, and predominantly female health-related dimensions; and 2) the population sample surveyed only includes ever-married men and women aged 15-49, which limits the sample size, but is useful in establishing gender and location patterns relevant to this study.

## Chapter IV.

### Data Analysis

In this section, I test the hypothesis via two methods explained above. The first method explores political, educational, and economic biases in Pakistan and other countries by leveraging the 2020 Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI) which uses responses to seven questions from the World Values Survey as indicators. Figure 1 below illustrates the methodology of the UNDP-HDRO Gender Social Norms Index, and Table 2 presents the definitions of gender bias.

Figure 1 The UNDP-HDRO Gender Social Norms Index <sup>17</sup>



Source: Mukhopadhyay, Rivera and Tapia 2019.

<sup>17</sup> UNDP, *2020 Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI): Tackling Social Norms: A game changer for gender inequalities*. New York. 2020.

Table 2 Definitions of Gender Bias for the Gender Social Norms Index<sup>18</sup>

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Choices</b>	<b>Bias definition</b>
Political	Men make better political leaders than women do	Strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree	Strongly agree and agree
	Women have the same rights as men	1, not essential, to 10, essential	Intermediate form: 1–7
Educational	University is more important for a man than for a woman	Strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree	Strongly agree and agree
Economic	Men should have more right to a job than women	Strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree	Strongly agree and agree
	Men make better business executives than women do	Agree, neither, disagree	Agree
Physical integrity	Proxy for intimate partner violence	1, never, to 10, always	Strongest form: 2–10
	Proxy for reproductive rights	1, never, to 10, always	Weakest form: 1

As shown in Table 2, the Gender Social Norms Index defines individual respondents with a bias against gender equality as those who chose ‘agree and strongly agree’ from given answer choices. For the political indicator question answered on a 1-10 numerical scale, the index defines individual respondents who choose a rating of 7 or

<sup>18</sup> Mukhopadhyay, Rivera and Tapia 2019.



lower to be biased. The physical integrity dimension was omitted for this research. The report describes the index as:

- Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI):  
Percentage of people with at least one bias among seven indicators.
- Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI2):  
Percentage of people with at least two biases among seven indicators.

#### 4.1 GSNI Wave 6 Findings on Pakistan

Now that we have established a clear understanding of index dimensions, indicators, and definition of bias, this section takes a deeper dive into existing gender biases in Pakistan based on WVS wave 6 (2010 – 2014) data. According to the index, 99.81% of overall respondents have reported at least one gender bias, while 98.07% of respondents have at least two biases gender biases. The share of people with no gender bias is only 0.19.

The findings show that men and women in Pakistan share high gender-based social biases. GSNI Table A2 provides a deeper analysis of biases by gender and shows that 99.61% of women respondents and 100% of men respondents have reported at least one gender bias, while 96.61% of women respondents and 99.45% of men respondents have at least two gender biases across dimensions. The share of people with no gender bias is low, 0.39% for women and 0% for men.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> UNDP, 2020 *Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI): Tackling Social Norms: A game changer for gender inequalities*.

## 4.2 GSNI Wave 6 Data on Political, Educational & Economic Bias in Pakistan

This section dives into the World Values Survey Wave 6 data on the three dimensions covered in this study.

### Political Bias

According to GSNI, 81.32% of overall respondents in Pakistan have a gender bias in politics, with 74.79% of women and 87.46% of men respondents reporting a bias against gender equality in the political dimension.

### Educational Bias

GSNI shows that 51.11% of overall respondents in Pakistan ‘agree/strongly agree’ with the respective indicator, suggesting a gender bias in education. Of these respondents, 49.35% are women, and 52.77% are men.

### Economic Bias

According to the index, 91.02% of overall respondents in Pakistan are reported to be biased against gender equality in the economic dimension. These respondents account for 87.09% women and 94.72% men.

In summary, GSNI wave 6 data on Pakistan shows gender biases in all three dimensions, with the lowest bias in education, which is a positive takeaway, and the strongest gender bias was observed in the economic dimension.

## 4.3 Wave 7 Data on Political, Educational, and Economic Dimensions:

This section examines gender biases in education, economic, and political dimensions based on the Word Values Survey’s (WVS) Wave 7 findings. WVS wave 7 took place worldwide in 2017-2022 and features data for 59 countries/territories. UNDP Human Development Report Office has not released a Gender Social Norms Index based on wave 7 findings yet. However, we can apply the same framework as the prior report to the latest WVS data and create a simple version of our own index to measure gender biases in Pakistan and other countries--calling it GSNI7. Figure 3 below is an adaptation of Figure 2 taken from HDRO’s 2020 report and outlines three dimensions, four indicators (relevant questions asked in the WVS), and bias definitions (remains the same as UNDP-HDRO 2020 GSNI) to be applied to GSNI7 methodology.

Table 3 Bias Indicators of the Wave 7 Multidimensional Gender Social Norms Index

Dimension	Indicator	Choices	Bias definition
Political	Men make better political leaders than women do	Strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree	Strongly agree and agree
Education	A university education is more important for a boy than for a girl	Strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree	Strongly agree and agree
Economic	Men make better business executives than women do	Strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree	Strongly agree and agree
	When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women	Strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree	Strongly agree and agree

#### 4.4 GSNI7 Data on Political, Educational, and Economic Biases

Based on the framework illustrated in Table 3 above, GSNI7 (Table 4) looks at data from 7 countries out of 59 covered in WVS wave 7 to set a comparative perspective across regions.

Table 4: Gender Social Norms Index Wave 7 (GSNI7)<sup>20</sup>

Country	Period	Political Bias: % of people biased by political dimension: Men make better political leaders than women do (Q29)	Educational Bias: % of people biased by education dimension: A university education is more important for a boy than a girl (Q30)	Economic Bias: % of people biased by economic dimensions (Q31 + Q33) *
Pakistan	2018	75.8	42.8	80.8
Bangladesh	2018	61.6	59.5	71.25
Ethiopia	2020	40	16	41.45
Iran	2020	33.8	46.9	59.5
Germany	2017 - 2018	8	4.2	9.15
New Zealand	2019 - 2020	5.8	2.7	5.25
Canada	2020	15.2	6.8	10.05

#### Political Bias

A strong gender bias is observed in Pakistan in the political dimension. According to GSNI7, 75.8% of Pakistani respondents are reported to have a gender bias in the

<sup>20</sup> Haerpfer, C. et al, *World Values Survey: Round Seven*. 2022.

political dimension. Other countries showing a strong political bias include Egypt (81.2%), Myanmar (70%), and Nigeria (74.7). Compared to wave 6 data, Pakistan's gender bias in politics shows a 5.5 percentage point improvement. It is interesting to note that Bangladesh shows a high bias of 61.6% against gender equality in the political dimension but earned an impressive ranking of 7 in the 2021 WEF report's political empowerment subindex, higher than most developed nations in the world. Is Bangladesh an outlier? Chapter five will explore the case of Bangladesh further.

### Educational Bias

According to GSNI7, 42.8% of respondents in Pakistan reported gender bias in this dimension. Compared to wave 6 data, Pakistan's reported bias in education shows an 8.3 percentage point improvement. Bangladesh shows a high educational bias, with 59.5% of respondents 'agreeing or agreeing strongly' with the respective indicator. The lowest gender bias in education is observed in Andorra, with only 2.6% of respondents reporting a bias.

### Economic Bias

Pakistan shows high levels of gender bias in the economic dimension. Pakistan leads with 80.8% of respondents reporting a gender bias, followed by Bangladesh and Iran at 71.25% and 59.5%, respectively. Compared to wave 6 data, Pakistan shows a 10.2 percentage point improvement in gender bias in the economic dimension.

#### 4.5: Correlation Analysis on the Relationship between Gender Norms & Gender Gaps

This section tests the hypothesis by conducting a cross-country correlation analysis to understand the relationship between gender-based social norms & biases and gender gaps across the three dependent variables: educational, economic, and political dimensions. Tables 5, 6, and 7 calculate this relationship for each dimension via Correlation Coefficient 'R' by using GSNI7 bias as the 'X' value and WEF subindex ranking as the 'Y' value to show a positive or negative correlation between variables.

Table 5 Correlation Analysis: Political Dimension

Country	Political Bias in GSNI7 (%)	WEF Political Empowerment Subindex Ranking
Pakistan	75.8	98
Bangladesh	61.6	7
Ethiopia	40	28
Iran	33.8	151
Germany	8	10
New Zealand	5.8	4
Canada	15.2	29

Based on Table 5 above, the correlation between the independent variable (gender-based bias) and dependent variable (gender gap in political empowerment) is  $R =$

0.375. Although, technically, this is a positive correlation, the relationship between these variables is weak, which indicates that high gender bias may not influence political outcomes as strongly. This weak correlation is evident in the case of Bangladesh, with the highest ranking of 7 in South Asia in the WEF political empowerment subindex despite showing a high gender bias of 61.6% in the political dimension.

Table 6 Correlation Analysis: Educational Dimension

Country	Educational Bias in GSNI <sup>7</sup> (%)	WEF Educational Attainment Subindex Ranking
Pakistan	42.8	144
Bangladesh	59.5	121
Ethiopia	16	141
Iran	46.9	119
Germany	4.2	55
New Zealand	2.7	1
Canada	6.8	1

Based on Table 6, the correlation between the independent variable (gender bias) and dependent variable (gender gap in education) is  $R = 0.734$ . This is a moderately positive correlation, which indicates that there may be a tendency for a high gender-based educational bias to result in a high gender gap in education, and vice versa. Interestingly, while Bangladesh reports a higher gender bias in education than Pakistan, its ranking is 23 points better than Pakistan on the educational attainment subindex. Additionally, Ethiopia reports a quite low gender bias of 16%, but its ranking on the education

subindex is 141, nearly as poor as Pakistan. These results suggest that the correlation between these variables may be weak.

Table 7 Correlation Analysis: Economic Dimension

Country	Economic Bias in GSNI7 (%)	WEF Economic Opportunity Subindex Ranking
Pakistan	80.8	152
Bangladesh	71.25	147
Ethiopia	41.45	128
Iran	59.5	150
Germany	9.15	62
New Zealand	5.25	27
Canada	10.05	40

Based on Table 7, the correlation between the independent variable (gender-based bias) and dependent variable (gender gap in economic empowerment) is  $R = 0.9521$ . This is a positive correlation, which suggests that gender bias may influence gender outcomes in the economic opportunity and empowerment dimension. The positive correlation is



evident in Pakistan, with a high gender bias of 80.8% against women's employment and a poor ranking of 152 in the economic opportunity subindex. The data analysis below will shed more light into the state of women's employment in Pakistan.

In summary, the above cross-country correlation analysis suggests an overall positive correlation between the independent and dependent variables, indicating that social norms and gender biases may have the tendency to influence gender outcomes across three dimensions in varying degrees. The highest correlation is seen in the economic dimension, while political dimension shows the weakest correlation between variables, which may explain the case of Bangladesh. Overall, correlation results presented in the data analysis above are suggestive and need more work, presenting an opportunity for future research.

#### 4.6: Urban and Rural Trends in Pakistan

This section leverages urban and rural data on educational and economic trends from the 2017-18 Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey (PDHS). Unfortunately, PDHS does not include political indicators, which limits this section to education and employment findings. With the assumption that traditional gender norms are likely to be more pronounced in rural areas, this section will examine gender gaps in illiteracy rate, net school attendance ratios, and employment rate broken down by urban and rural areas.

## Education

First, this section examines illiteracy gap in urban and rural areas. Looking at the overall percentage distribution of men and women aged 15-49, 49.2% of women are reported to have ‘no education,’ compared to 25.4% of men, establishing an overall gender gap in education.<sup>21</sup> Table 8 below provides the percentage of men and women with no education broken down by urban and rural areas.

Table 8 No Education Rate by Location<sup>22</sup>

Location	Males with no education	Females with no education
Urban	22.7	32.5
Rural	40.9	59.3

The data in Table 8 shows a higher ‘no education’ gap in rural locations, as well as a higher percentage of women with no education in rural areas, compared to urban. Furthermore, the survey defines ‘literacy’ as “Respondents who have attended higher than secondary school are assumed to be literate. All other respondents, shown a typed sentence to read aloud, are considered literate if they could read all or part of the sentence.<sup>23</sup>” Therefore, men and women outside of this population are considered illiterate, also indicated as ‘cannot read at all’ on the literacy subindex. Overall, 49.6% of women ‘cannot read at all’ vs. 30% of men. Table 9 below breaks down illiteracy rates by

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<sup>21</sup> The DHS Program. *Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey 2017-18*.

<sup>22</sup> Pakistan DHS 2017-2018.

<sup>23</sup> Pakistan DHS 2017-2018.

location. Illiteracy rates were based on the percentage distribution of men and women who cannot read at all.

Table 9 Illiteracy Rate by Location<sup>24</sup>

Location	Male illiteracy %	Female illiteracy %
Urban	18	29.1
Rural	38	61.5

As shown in Table 9, wide gender gaps in illiteracy can be observed across both locations. However, this gap is higher in rural areas. Women’s illiteracy rate is considerably higher in rural areas than in urban areas, which supports my hypothesis.

In the next section, primary and secondary net school attendance rates (NARs) are examined to see if similar trends are observed in school attendance in urban and rural locations. Table 10 and Table 11 below look at net attendance ratios as percentage of primary level (ages 5-9 years) population attending primary school and secondary level (ages 10-14 years) population attending secondary school in urban and rural locations. I will also examine some of the main reasons from the survey that indicate why children are dropping out school. The NAR for primary school is the percentage of the primary-school age (5-9 years) population that is attending primary school.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Pakistan DHS 2017-2018.

<sup>25</sup> Pakistan DHS 2017-2018.

Table 10 Primary School Net Attendance Ratios by Location<sup>26</sup>

Location	Male	Female	Gender Parity Index (GPI)
Urban	68.4	66.4	0.97
Rural	58.0	50.3	0.87

Primary school net attendance ratios in Table 10 shows similar gender and location trends as the section above. A gender gap in primary school attendance exists in both locations, but the GPI shows that rural locations have a higher gender gap in primary school attendance, compared to urban areas. These findings suggest that girls aged 5-9 years in rural areas may not have access to the same educational opportunities as boys in the same age group. Furthermore, there is 16.1 percentage-point gap in urban vs. rural female primary school attendance rate, indicating that girls in urban locations are more likely to be attending primary school compared to their rural counterparts. The NAR for middle/secondary school is the percentage of the middle/secondary-school age (10-14 years) population that is attending secondary school.

Table 11 Middle/Secondary School Net Attendance Ratios by Location<sup>27</sup>

Location	Male	Female	Gender Parity Index (GPI)
Urban	47.9	49.8	1.04
Rural	35.7	28.3	0.79

<sup>26</sup> Pakistan DHS 2017-2018.

<sup>27</sup> Pakistan DHS 2017-2018.

In Table 11, urban secondary school net attendance ratios highlight a unique trend: While there is a gender gap observed in urban secondary school attendance, it is a reverse-gap. A GPI ratio of 1.04 indicates that, in urban locations, more girls aged 10-14 years are participating in secondary level education, compared to boys in the same age group. The gender gap in secondary school attendance in rural areas continues to be more pronounced at 0.79 GPI, indicating that more boys than girls are attending secondary school in rural areas. Furthermore, there is 21.5 percentage-gap in urban vs. rural female secondary school attendance rate, indicating that girls in rural locations are much less likely to be attending secondary school, compared to their urban counterparts. This is the widest location gap observed in female school attendance, suggesting that secondary school-aged girls are the most educationally disadvantaged.

In summary, we have established that 1) overall, a gender gap in illiteracy has been observed, indicating that more women are illiterate compared to men. The gap in literacy rates is especially evident in rural areas than in urban areas; and 2) Net school attendance ratios also show a higher gender gap in rural locations. These findings help support my hypothesis by showing that education gender gaps are more pronounced in rural areas, which is likely because traditional gender norms tend to have a stronger foothold in rural locations, influencing girls' access to education.

As a supplemental explanation, the section below discusses some of the main reasons why boys and girls drop out of school. Table 12 and Table 13 below outline the top five reasons why boys and girls ages 5-24 have dropped out of school in both locations. Exploring the varying reasons behind education discontinuation for urban and rural populations can provide more insight into the unique location-related challenges

influencing women’s access to education and help us understand whether men also face similar challenges. Percent distribution of the de facto household members aged 5-24 who dropped out of school by the main reason for not attending school, according to sex and residence.<sup>28</sup>

Table 12 Top Reasons for Girls Not Attending School (Urban)<sup>29</sup>

Main reason	Female	Male
Got married	22.3	0.7
Further education not necessary	20.7	8.9
Not interested in studies	16.2	28.7
Costs too much	15.9	11.9
Need to earn	4.1	36.1

Table 12 shows various reasons why boys and girls are dropping out of school in urban locations. ‘Got married’ is reported as the biggest reason why girls have dropped out of school (22.3%), which appears to be a quite insignificant reason for boys to have dropped out of school (0.7%). This data point suggests that getting married (early) may hinder women’s access and/or participation in school. Prior discussion on how cultural practices such as patrilocal exogamy negatively influence gender equality in education

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<sup>28</sup> Pakistan DHS 2017-2018.

<sup>29</sup> Pakistan DHS 2017-2018.

can help provide some explanations.<sup>30</sup> This also presents an opportunity to further study post-marriage trends in Pakistan and a married woman's role in the household and society.

The second biggest reason for girls in urban areas to drop out of school is 'Further education not necessary' at 20.7% and 8.9% for boys. I find this indicator rather vague as it does not provide a specific reason due to which they have decided to not pursue further education. The third main reason 'Not interested in studies' indicates that boys may be less interested in studies, compared to girls (28.7% vs. 16.2%, respectively).

Moreover, the last two reasons indicate how socioeconomic factors influence gender outcomes in education. 15.9% of girls (vs. 11.9% boys) have reported high cost as a reason to have dropped out of school, which suggests that, if cost is a concern, urban households are more likely to send boys to school rather than girls. Lastly, 36.1% of boys have reported dropping out of school due to the need to earn vs. 4.1% girls, indicating that a need to earn is not as significant of a cause for girls to drop out of school. The gap in male vs. female responses here is noteworthy, because it may point towards societal standards and expectations from men to be the primary financial providers and household breadwinners, consequently resulting in dropping out of school to fulfill these expectations. Percent distribution of the de facto household members aged 5-24 who dropped out of school by the main reason for not attending school, according to sex and residence.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Anu Rammohan and Patrick Vu, 2018

<sup>31</sup> Pakistan DHS 2017-18.

Table 13 Top Reasons for Girls Not Attending School (Rural)<sup>32</sup>

Main reason	Female	Male
Not interested in studies	17.1	33.8
Further education not necessary	16.6	6.6
Got married	15.9	1.3
School too far	13.5	2.7
Costs too much	11.6	10.1

Table 13 above shows some differences in reasons for boys and girls in rural areas to drop out of school, compared to Table 12. In rural locations, girls have reported dropping out of school largely due to a lack of interest in education. Consistent with urban trends, boys in rural areas are significantly less interested in studies (33.8%), compared to girls. Interestingly, ‘Got married’ is the third main reason reported for girls in rural areas to drop out of school vs. the first reason for girls in urban areas. Similar to urban trends, getting married is not a significant reason for boys to drop out of school (0.7% vs. 1.3%, respectively). Furthermore, the fourth main reason girls have reported dropping out of school in rural areas is longer school distance (13.5%). Comparatively, school distance does not appear to be a significant reason for boys at only 2.7% reporting

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<sup>32</sup> Pakistan DHS 2017-2018.



it as a reason to have dropped out of school, which may be indicative of women's mobility restrictions and safety concerns (ADB 2016).

Finally, high schooling cost is reported as the fifth main reason why girls have dropped out of school. Consistent with urban trends, 25% of men in rural areas report 'need to earn' as one of their top reasons to discontinue school. Only 0.7% of girls report the same reason, which again indicates that men tend to face stronger financial pressures, irrespective of urban or rural locations. However, these trends also show that women in urban settings are more likely to discontinue their education so they can earn money (4.1% urban vs. 0.7% rural), which may suggest that women in urban locations face relatively less mobility restrictions, may have more access to gainful employment, and may have the opportunity to experience more financial freedom overall, compared to their rural counterparts, who might be more likely to follow traditional gender norms of being housewives. However, data suggests otherwise. The next section will answer some of these questions by exploring PHDS 2017-18 findings on male vs. female employment trends by location and region.

## Employment

To test my hypothesis in the economic dimension, this analysis looks at gender gaps in employment broken down by rural and urban locations. PDHS data below is based on percentages of ever-married men ages 15-49 by current employment status and other background characteristics such as current marital status, residence, level of education, region, and more. Table 14 provides PDHS employment trends by location. Percentage of ever-married women and men aged 15-49 who are currently employed.

Table 14. Employment Trends by Location<sup>33</sup>

Gender	Urban	Rural
Male	96.4	96.0
Female	14.4	19.0
Gender Gap (percentage points)	82	77

As shown in Table 14, the gender gap between both urban and rural employment is quite drastic. There is an 82 percentage-point gender gap in urban areas and a 77 percentage-point gap in rural areas. Contrary to the assumptions in this method, Pakistan's DHS employment data shows a higher gender gap in urban employment levels, compared to rural employment. Additionally, data indicates that more women are currently employed in rural areas of Pakistan, compared to their urban counterparts. This may partly be because more women than men are likely to be employed in the agriculture

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<sup>33</sup> Pakistan DHS 2017-2018.

sector, which is predominantly rural. According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, Agriculture is also the largest sector of Pakistan's economy, accounting for 50% of the country's employed labor force and contributing to Pakistan's GDP by roughly 24%.<sup>34</sup>

According to 2017-18 PDHS:

Women are far more likely to be employed in agriculture than men (32% versus 21%) Women are slightly less likely than men to be employed in professional/technical/ managerial occupations (12% versus 13%), as well as clerical services (less than 1% versus 3%), sales and services (14% versus 22%), and unskilled manual labour (7% versus 22%). Women are more likely to be involved in skilled manual labour than men (35% versus 20%).

Women are more likely to be involved in skilled manual labour than men (35% versus 20%). Women are slightly less likely than men to be employed in professional/technical/ managerial occupations (12% versus 13%), as well as clerical services (less than 1% versus 3%), sales and services (14% versus 22%), and unskilled manual labour (7% versus 22%).

Other factors that influence women's employment rate include the number of children, education levels, and wealth. Ever-married women with 5 or more children have highest employment rate of 20.5%, followed by 19.1% employment rate of women with 3-4 children, and below 15% employment rates are observed for women with 2 children or less. On education levels, the highest employment rate (21%) is observed among women with no education, followed by women with higher education with an 18.4% employment rate. Women with secondary and primary education show an employment rate of 9.9% and 15.5%, respectively.

Moreover, factors like age, marital status, and wealth also play a role in women's workforce participation rates. Women ages 35-39 show highest employment

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<sup>34</sup> Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, *Agriculture*.

levels at 22.6%, followed by women ages 40 - 44 at 21.6% and age 45-49 at 21.8%. Of ages 15 – 19, 8.7% are employed, and women ages 20 – 24 and 25 – 29 show employment rates of 11.9% and 13.5%, respectively. Marital status also appears to play a role in women’s employment status. 16.3% of married women are employed, compared to 38.9% of divorced, separated, or widowed women, which may suggest that, in the absence of a husband, divorced, separated, or widowed women are more likely to enter the labor market to financially support themselves. On wealth quintile findings, the lowest female employment rate of 11.5% is observed in the highest wealth quintile and the highest female employment rate of 27.3% is observed in the lowest wealth quintile. In comparison, minor and statistically insignificant differences are observed in male employment percentages across the same background characteristics, indicating that, compared to men, women’s employment is more susceptible to unique societal challenges and circumstances.

Exploring regional employment trends broken down by urban and rural locations help uncover additional insights. In the section below, Table 15 presents the percentage of ever-married women and men aged 15-49 who are currently employed across Pakistan’s provinces. In consistency with overall employment data covered in the section above, regional employment data also shows wide gender gaps and shows that women might not have an urban advantage when it comes to employment.

Table 15. Regional Employment Trends<sup>35</sup>

Region	Women	Men	Gender Gap
Punjab (Urban)	15.3	96.4	81.1
Punjab (Rural)	22.1	97.2	75.1
Sindh (Urban)	14.7	97.4	82.7
Sindh (Rural)	29.0	98.0	69
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) (Urban)	9.2	91.5	82.3
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) (Rural)	7.0	91.3	84.3
Balochistan (Urban)	8.7	94.8	86.1
Balochistan (Rural)	10.6	95.6	85
ICT Islamabad	15.8	95.2	79.4
FATA	0.9	92.9	92

In consistency with overall employment data covered in the section above, regional employment data also shows wide gender gaps and suggests that women might not have an urban advantage when it comes to employment. According to Table 15 above, widest gender gaps in employment are recorded in the FATA region at 92%, with only 0.9% of women participating in the workforce. The second widest gender gap is observed in Baluchistan's urban and rural employment (86.1 percentage-point gap vs. 85 percentage-point gap, respectively). In Baluchistan, more women are employed in rural

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<sup>35</sup> Pakistan DHS 2017-2018)

areas (10.6%) than their urban counterparts (8.7%). The third widest gender gap of 84.3 percentage points is observed in the KPK's rural areas. KPK also shows a slight urban advantage for women as more women are employed in urban areas (9.2%) vs. their rural counterparts (7%).<sup>36</sup> Comparatively, Punjab and Sindh show more narrow gender gaps than other regions, but both regions show more women employed in rural locations than urban. Respondents from Punjab and Sindh have the highest rate of rural female employment (22.1% and 29%, respectively) vs. other regions. Rural Sindh also shows the narrowest employment gender gap of 69 percentage-points. Furthermore, a higher proportion of women in rural Sindh are participating in the labor force than their urban counterparts. The second lowest employment gender gap of 79.4 percentage-points is observed in the capital city of Islamabad with 15.8% of ever-married women currently employed.<sup>37</sup>

The above analysis of rural and urban employment trends has helped us establish that 1) the gender gap in Pakistan's employment levels is alarming, indicating that women are at a serious economic disadvantage; and 2) regional and location trends have indicated that women in rural Pakistan are more likely to be employed, compared to their urban counterparts. Survey findings also show that while additional circumstances such as age, marital status, number of children, and education levels can play a crucial role in a woman's ability to work, their impact on men's employment status was statistically insignificant.

In summary, Pakistan DHS analysis of urban and rural trends suggest that varying degrees of gender gaps exist in both education and employment. Are gender gaps wider

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<sup>36</sup> *Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey 2017-18*

<sup>37</sup> *Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey 2017-18*

in rural areas compared to urban areas? This has appeared to be largely true for the education dimension, where findings have shown higher illiteracy rates for women than men, and these gender gaps are higher in rural areas than in urban areas. Furthermore, there is a higher gender gap in net school attendance ratios in rural locations, compared to urban areas. These findings help support my hypothesis by showing that rural areas have higher gender gaps in education, which may suggest that sociocultural norms and gender biases may influence women's access to education.

Moreover, the analysis of Pakistan's employment rates shows trends opposite of this study's hypothesis. Survey findings have shown wider gender gaps in urban areas of Pakistan, compared to rural locations, with the exception of KPK, indicating that women in urban areas may not always have greater employment opportunities than women in rural areas. In fact, not only women's employment rates are higher in rural areas, but employment gender gaps are observed to be lower in Pakistan's rural areas, compared to urban. These findings present an opportunity for further investigation into each province of Pakistan to understand their rural economies and the respective employment opportunities they present for women. For example, the role played by the agriculture sector in women's employment in rural Pakistan can be further investigated. In parallel, these results also help identify a pressing opportunity for Pakistan's urban regions to increase employment opportunities for women overall.

## Chapter V.

### Discussion and Lessons from Bangladesh

This chapter explores what makes Bangladesh unique and if there are lessons to be learned. Bangladesh has ranked 65 on the WEF Global Gender Gap index, making it the top-highest-ranking country in South Asia. Although GSNI7 suggests strong gender biases in Bangladesh politics, its ranking in the political empowerment subindex is even more remarkable at a high 7. These results force one to ask: Is Bangladesh a political outlier in South Asia?

Bangladesh is the only country in South Asia where women have held the head of state position longer than men in the past 50 years. According to GSNI7, Bangladesh reported a high bias of 61.6% against gender equality in the political dimension, but its high ranking in the WEF report contradicts these results. Haque (2021) argues that Bangladesh's gender landscape in politics is often misrepresented on the global scale due to two women holding the highest office since 1991. At subnational levels, gender disparities are prevalent in Bangladeshi politics.

Although Bangladesh has made progress in closing its gender gap in education and economic participation, its political spheres continue to be male-dominated due to various factors such as patriarchy, religion, and cultural norms. Moreover, the country's social norms often promote Bangladeshi women to be viewed as mothers and wives, while men are viewed as the breadwinners. Consequently, politics is also considered a male space, hence inappropriate for women. In addition, men are often seen as better



candidates, making it harder for women to achieve leadership positions.<sup>38</sup> Haque's argument is consistent with GSNI7 Bangladesh findings that use the statement *Men make better political candidates than women* as a bias indicator in the political dimension. Moreover, women hold few leadership positions in Bangladeshi politics, despite election laws that reserve at least 33% of committee positions for women. Lastly, political violence and corruption often discourage women from participating in politics.

According to the International Organization of Parliaments (IPU)'s ranking of women in national parliaments, Bangladesh ranks at 108th position, with 73 out of 250 parliamentary seats taken by women, accounting for only 20.9% of total seats. These findings suggest that women in Bangladesh face disadvantages due to sociocultural norms and challenges, and the country's high ranking on the political subindex may be skewed due to two women holding the highest office since 1991. Comparatively, Pakistan is not too far off, with only 20.5% of lower or single House seats taken by women, as of 2018 elections.<sup>39</sup>

However, there are still social development lessons to be learned from Bangladesh. Asadullah et al. (2014) investigate how Bangladesh has accelerated its social development compared with countries of similar levels of per capita income. Popularly referred to as the Bangladesh conundrum (Mahmud, Ahmed, & Mahajan, 2008), the country has been able to make remarkable progress in economic and social development, surpassing Pakistan and India in several dimensions, including female school enrollment. Their analysis shows that Bangladesh made exceptional progress to bridge the gender gap

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<sup>38</sup> Haque, Ruaksana. *Despite a Woman at the Top, Bangladesh's Politics Are Still Male Dominated*. International Republican Institute, 8 Oct. 2021.

<sup>39</sup> IPU Parline Global Data on National Parliaments. *Monthly Ranking of Women in National Parliaments*.

in primary and secondary education by the mid-1990s, despite being a patriarchal society. When exploring the causes behind Bangladesh's social development progress, authors found limited evidence in support of foreign aid or government funding. Instead, non-government stakeholders such as the NGO sector was found to play a critical role. By partnering with Bangladesh's government and international development aid agencies, NGOs were able to launch several social awareness campaigns and low-cost and innovative development initiatives, often putting women at the forefront, that helped improved several indicators including health, education, poverty, unemployment, child mortality, and gender and mobility norms.<sup>40</sup> The case of Bangladesh presents a unique NGO-led development model which partially helped overcome the capacity argument arising from poor governance and institutional quality. These findings also suggests that long-lasting social change can come from grassroots and community-led initiatives.

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<sup>40</sup> Asadullah, M. Niaz, et al. *Paths to Development: Is There a Bangladesh Surprise?* World Development, vol. 62, 2014, pp. 138–154.

## Chapter VI.

### Conclusion

Overall, this research has shown that gender inequality is prevalent in Pakistan and globally. Although the Constitution of Pakistan grants equal rights to the women of Pakistan, significant gender gaps persist across three strategic empowerment areas of education, economic opportunity, and political freedom. This study aimed to understand why women's constitutional rights have not translated into their equal standing in society by exploring the role of sociocultural norms and gender biases in gender outcomes. As a part of this research, I have shown where Pakistan stands in its global gender gap rankings while establishing comparative regional and global contexts from other nations across the study. In many countries, including Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India, sociocultural norms and patriarchal trends that are disadvantageous to women's empowerment efforts continue to prevail.

I have tested my hypothesis by exploring how sociocultural norms and gender biases influence women's empowerment in Pakistan via two methods. The first method attempted to identify gender biases across the three dimensions covered in this study (educational, economic, and political) by examining respective indicators from the World Values Survey (WVS). UNDP's GSNI framework has been groundbreaking in analyzing social norms and gender biases based on WVS data. Results have indicated that both men and women in Pakistan share strong gender biases in educational, economic, and political dimensions.

Furthermore, I conducted a correlation analysis to understand how these findings relate to the respective WEF gender gap subindex rankings. With limitations, these results have supported my hypothesis by suggesting a positive correlation between gender biases and gender gaps in these dimensions. Moreover, the correlation between gender biases and gender gaps in politics is found to be the weakest out of the three dimensions; and the case of Bangladesh as a political outlier in South Asia has been further explored to draw potential lessons. The correlation results in this study are suggestive and need more work, presenting an opportunity for future research.

The second method to test my hypothesis analyzed rural and urban trends from the 2017-18 Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey (PDHS), with the expectation that social norms and traditional practices tend to be more pronounced in rural areas, while urban regions tend to be more progressive; hence, rural locations should have higher gender gaps. A significant limitation of this method was a lack of political indicators in PDHS. For this reason, this analysis does not cover factors related to women's political empowerment and only includes results from education and employment trends. Another limitation was that the population sample surveyed only included select households with ever-married men and women aged 15-49, which was a statistical limitation, but the findings were useful in establishing gender and location patterns. Results show a higher illiteracy rate for women than men, and the illiteracy gender gap is higher in rural locations of Pakistan. Moreover, gender gaps were observed in primary and secondary school attendance ratios, with a higher gender gap in school attendance in rural locations, compared to urban areas. On the other hand, employment trends from PDHS showed drastic gender gaps in employment for both urban and rural locations, but gender gaps

were found to be higher in urban locations. Additionally, results indicate higher employment rate for women in rural regions of Pakistan, except for the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), where urban women are observed to have a slight advantage over their rural counterparts. Punjab and Sindh emerged as the top provinces in Pakistan with the highest rates of employed women.

Overall, results from this analysis support my hypothesis in the educational dimension by showing that women in rural areas face more disadvantages in schooling. These results may suggest that, due to sociocultural norms and patriarchal traditions typically being more pervasive in rural settings than urban, they may be an influencing factor in women's access to education.

On the contrary, findings in the economic dimension (examined via PDHS urban and rural employment trends) refute my hypothesis to a large extent by indicating that women in rural areas of Pakistan have higher employment rates than their urban counterparts. Additionally, gender gaps in employment were found to be lower in most of Pakistan's rural regions than in urban areas. The lowest employment gender gap was observed in rural Sindh. However, the Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA), one of the most rural regions in Pakistan, stands out with the highest gender gap in employment and the lowest rate of female employment. A deeper analysis of FATA's social norms and gender equality trends presents an opportunity for future research.

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