

Women's Representation at Federal Legislative and Executive Bodies: A Comparative Study of Pakistan and Malaysia

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Abstract: Prior research has been focused on the assessment of women representation in lower house of the parliament. This study examines an overtime growth for the descriptive representation of women in both the legislative and executive bodies of Pakistan and Malaysia. Time series plot is used to assess overtime growth of women representation since independence of the countries. The results indicate substantial increase in woman representation over the years in both the countries. However representation of women in both the legislative and executive bodies of Malaysia is better than Pakistan except lower house of the parliament, which is due to reservation of 60 seats for women in Pakistan. The results of t-test indicate that the mean difference between the two countries is significant in the upper house of the parliament but not significant only powerful in lower house of the Parliament.

Keywords: Comparison of Pakistan and Malaysia, federal legislative and executive bodies, women representation

INTRODUCTION

Under-representation of women in legislative bodies has become a global issue thereby gaining interest of researchers of the entire world (Paxton *et al.*, 2010; Bergh, 2009; Celis, 2009; Stockemer, 2008; Tremblay, 2007; Whitford *et al.*, 2007; Norris, 2006; Sainsbury, 2004). Considerable work has been done in both developed (Nielsen and Morten, 2010; Paxton *et al.*, 2010; Bernardi *et al.*, 2009; Koning, 2009; Tremblay, 2007; Whistler and Mark, 2007; Norris, 2006) and developing countries (Jabeen and Muhammad Zafar, 2009; Bergh, 2009; Bano, 2009; Davies, 2005; Allwood and Khursheed, 2004). Scholars around the world are of the view that despite constituting half of the world population, the representation of women in the national legislature is only 18% and may be regarded as marginal (Krook, 2010; Bano, 2009; Wolbrecht and David, 2007).

Even in advance societies the representation of women has increased only marginally from 9% in 1995 to 16 percent in 2004 which is much lower than the critical mass of 30 percent envisaged at Beijing (Paxton *et al.*, 2010; Devlin and Robert, 2008). However, recently it reached to 50 percent especially in Nordic countries, 19.9% in OSCE member countries (excluding Nordic countries) and 22.2% in American societies in 2010 (IPU, 2010). The representation of women in most of the developing countries is much below than those of advanced countries and is about

10.1% in Arabs, 13.2% in Pacific, 18.4% in Sub Saharan Africa and 18.7% in Asian countries in 2010 (IPU, 2010).

Scholars explained such variations by a variety of factors including institutional factors such as type of government, electoral process, party system, quotas (Paxton *et al.*, 2010; Stockemer, 2008; Francechet and Piscopo, 2008) socio-economic factors like class-distinction, illiteracy, per capita income, poverty (Jabeen and Muhammad Zafar, 2009; Whistler and Mark, 2007) and cultural factors such as customs, traditions and religion (Bano, 2009). Factors responsible for women's overall under-representation is largely common across nations while the degree of under-representation varies from nation to nation (Norris, 2006). Therefore, special measures and techniques cannot bring similar outcome for all nations, rather customized strategies are mandatory to overcome the problems of women's under representation (Halder, 2004).

Although considerable work has been done on women's representation in federal legislature around the world as an individual country case study (Jabeen and Muhammad Zafar, 2009; Paxton *et al.*, 2007; Halder, 2004; Lovenduski and Pippa, 2003) or cross countries analysis (Paxton, 1997) but less work has been done on the overtime comparative analysis of women representation in both the federal legislative and executive bodies in general (Krook, 2010; Stockemer, 2008; Whitford *et al.*, 2007) and in the context of

Malaysia and Pakistan in particular. The analysis of women representation in federal legislature is valuable but not comprehensive. For broader and overarching view of women representative comparative analyses of women representation in both the federal legislative and executive bodies are mandatory.

This study will fill this gap in the literature by analyzing comparative patterns and variations of women representation in the federal legislative and executive bodies of Pakistan and Malaysia. By analyzing the implications and the practical aspects of these measures and the problems of women at domestic and societal level this study will also suggest the proposals to make the environment conducive for implementing revolutionary steps by the government with the help of civil society and NGOs along with due cooperation of the masses. The selection of two Asian countries is based on the ground that despite many socio-economic and cultural differences the two countries are similar in terms of legacy and current state and trajectory of women's representation as both countries have a parliamentary form of government with bicameral legislature and bureaucratic structure. Furthermore, both are declared Islamic states and are capable of being the real modern Islamic countries who can exhibit the working model of peace of Islam to the whole world.

LITERATURE REVIEW

- **Women in politics: reflections from Pakistan:** Pakistan got independence on 14th August 1947. It originally had two wings, West Pakistan and East Pakistan but the latter got separated in 1971 and became Bangladesh. Pakistan now consists of five provinces (Sind, Punjab, Khyber Pukhtunkhwa Balochistan¹ and Gilgit Baltistan²); two federally administered areas (Federally Administered Northern Areas (FANA) and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA)); Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK); and the Federal Capital Area (FCA) of Islamabad (Wikipedia, 2010; Stone *et al.*, 2006). Pakistan being a federal state is governed by the constitution of Pakistan 1973. The constitution allocates functions and demarcates powers between federation and federating units. The constitution empowered the federal government to legislate on matters presented in the Federal Legislative List while the residuary powers vested to the province³.

Pakistan has bicameral legislature comprising of National Assembly (the lower house) and the senate (the upper house) with 342 and 100 members respectively. The President is the titular head of the state while the Prime Minister is the head of the government. The population of Pakistan is 163.76 million out of which 84.98 million are male and 78.78

million are female (Pakistan Statistical Year Book, 2009). About 20% of the population lives below the international poverty line of US\$ 1.25 a day (Wikipedia, 2010). Pakistan has a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society. Pakistan is a multilingual country with more than sixty languages being spoken. English is the official language of Pakistan while Urdu is the national language. Other major languages include Punjabi, Pashto, Sandi, Balochi, Saraiki and Kashmiri.

Politics of Pakistan: Under the provisions of the constitution of Pakistan 1973 both men and women enjoy equal rights of voting and contesting⁴. The constitution not only guarantees equal fundamental rights to every one and prohibit discrimination on the basis of gender rather bound the government to provide spaces for all marginalized groups including women in the government machinery⁵. It is also provided in the constitution that the state shall make endeavor to ensure full participation of women in all government sphere of national life (Jabeen and Muhammad Zafar, 2009; Bano, 2009)⁶.

The parliamentary system of Pakistan provide equal right of voting to every citizen of the state if he/she is over the age of 18 and a right of contesting if he/she have a graduation degree (14 years of schooling) and a 24 years of age for National Assembly and 30 years of age for senate (Wikipedia, 2010). National Assembly comprises of 342 (282 directly and 60 proportionally) elected members for the period of five years unless sooner dissolved. The senate comprises of 100 indirectly elected members (provincial assemblies) for a period of fixed six years having representation on the principle of provincial parity, however, one-half of its members retire after every three years (Yazdani, 2003)⁷.

Women and politics in Pakistan: The political status of women in Pakistan varies considerably across regions, classes and locations due to demographic differences, socio-economic characteristics, and the impacts of religion and feudal/tribal nature of society (Jabeen and Muhammad Zafar, 2009). Predominant male society restricts women only to household activities and does not allow them to interact with the men. The political participation of women remained at low priority except in the days of independence when they were involved on equal footing (Bano, 2009; Saiyid, 2001). The role of political parties in the mobilization of women in political environment is negligible one. The political parties and masses used women for voting in elections. Their role with in the party is limited to the organization of women wing, mobilization of women in favour of party and motivating other women for agitation and rallies. Their role in decision making is not only limited rather negligible (Jabeen and Muhammad Zafar, 2009; Bano, 2009; Saiyid, 2001).

Soon after independence the newly born state granted the suffrage to women in 1947 and right of vote in 1956 (Bano, 2009). All the three constitutions (1956, 1962 and 1973) provided for the reservation of seats for women in legislature (Yazdani, 2003). The democratic regime of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto (1970-1977) opened the gate of all services to women and reserved 15% seats in National Assembly and 5% seats in Provincial Assemblies (Bano, 2009). After imposing Martial law in 1977, the then Chief Martial Law administrator General Zia-ul-Haq took many steps to empower women such as the establishment of women division, commission on women and the inclusion of chapter on women in the sixth plan (Yazdani, 2003). However, the promulgation of Haddood ordinance banned women participation as spectators in sports, imposed purda, suspended fundamental rights including the right to be free of discrimination on the basis of sex (Zaidi, 2005).

In 1988 soon after becoming the first female Prime Minister of Pakistan Benazir Bhutto took many steps for the wellbeing of women like the establishment of women ministry, women studies centre at five major universities, women police stations and first women bank but did not reserve women seats in national legislature (Coleman, 2004; Kamal, 2000) After becoming Prime Minister of Pakistan Nawaz Sharif enacted the Qisas and Diyat ordinance, which was strongly opposed by the opposite political parties, human rights activists and women organizations. He also failed to reserve seats for women in the national legislature (Zaidi, 1999).

In 1999, the then chief Martial law administrator, General Pervez Musharraf, removed the democratic government of Nawaz Nashrif and imposed Martial Law in the country. He took mega steps to improve the status of women in Pakistan. The then Parliament passed women protection bill and removed some articles of hudood ordinance, reserved 10% quota for women in Central Superior Services and across the board departments and reserved 60 seats for women in National Assembly (Cheema *et al.*, 2005; Zaidi, 1999). The later decision 60% reservation was against the natural distribution of male and female in the country and might hamper the expected upliftment of women due to decreased competition among female due to higher percentage reservation than male and due to possible proxy inclusion of less potential candidates manipulated by male due to their decreased percentage.

Barriers to women representation: Although women representation in legislative bodies has been significantly increased over the years, however, their representation and participation in politics and decision making is still very limited (Paxton *et al.*, 2010). There are number of political, legal (Paxton *et al.*, 2010), socio-economic and cultural factors that restrict women form political arena (Jabeen and Muhammad Zafar, 2009; Whitford *et al.*, 2007; Sainsbury, 2004). The political instability, corruption, insecurity, lack of

political awareness, dominance of elite class, dominance of feudal lords and tribal led society are the main political factors that restrict women from politics (Jabeen and Muhammad Zafar, 2009). The quota system (Murray, 2010; Paxton *et al.*, 2010; Bano, 2009), the deprivation of women from their right of vote, profession and freedom of expression under the umbrella of prevailing cultural and religious restrictions especially in tribal led societies are the legal flaws that refrain women to enter in political arena of a country (Jabeen and Muhammad Zafar, 2009; Cheema *et al.*, 2005). The prevailing cultural norms, societal traditions and religious orthodoxy are the various cultural restriction imposed on women that exclude them from national politics (FBS, 2003). Illiteracy, limited access to education, poverty, economic dependency and mobility constraints are the various socio-economic factors that hinder women from the political process of a country (UNDP, 2000).

- **Women in politics: reflections from Malaysia:** Malaysia got independence on 13th August, 1957 and it is a federation of thirteen states and three federal territories (Azizah, 2002). However, at the time of independence there were eleven states. Two other states namely Sabah and Sarawak joined it in 1963. Sultan heads the nine states while the other four states are governed by the governor appointed by the King, known as *Yang Dipertuan Agong* (YDPA) (Wikipedia, 2010). The king is elected by the Sultans among themselves through self made Council of Rules for a period of five years⁸. The King and the Sultans rules in accordance with the advice of Prime Ministers and the Chief Minister accordingly. The Prime Minister and the Chief Ministers are elected directly by the people through general election usually held after every five years. Malaysia has a bicameral legislature comprising on House of Representative (Dewan Ra'ayal) the lower house and Senate (Dewan Negara) the upper house⁹. The House of representative consist of 222 member elected for a period of 5 years while the Senate consist of 70 members (26 elected and 48 appointed) for a period of 3 years (Wikipedia, 2010)¹⁰. The population of Malaysia is about 28,908,795 including 14,712,570 male and 14,196,225 female (Wikipedia, 2010)¹¹. Malaysia is a multicultural, multiethnic and multilingual society. The native language is Malay, which is also a national and official language of Malaysia. The other frequently spoken languages are Chinese, English and Tamils.

Politics in Malaysia: The political system of Malaysia based on federal constitutional monarchy, where the King is the ceremonial head of the state with limited discretionary powers and acts with the advice of Prime Minister (Wikipedia, 2010; Azizah, 2002)¹². The Prime Minister is the head of government and exercises all the

powers of the federation (UNDP, 2007). The federal constitution of the state guarantee full freedom and extend equal right of voting (if he/she is over the age of 21)¹³ and election for Senate (not less than 21 years of age for house of representation and Malaysian citizen, must not be a prison sentenced for a year or longer, must not have been fined MYR 2,000 or more), every member of the state irrespective of gender, race, religion and class¹⁴. The role of constitutions is limited as the government is based on Westminster system (Azizah, 2002).

Women and politics in Malaysia: Since the independence of the country in 1957, women are enjoying the right of vote and holding offices (Ariffin, 1999). Half of the registered voters in the country are women and are actively participation in national politics. They are providing their full supports to their male counterparts in raising funds, running election campaigns and inspiring lady voters to come and vote during national elections (Azizah, 2002). Women always remain in front of election campaign, party procession, agitation and strikes. Despite such significant role of the women, their representation in national politics is very limited (UNDP, 2007). Generally male enjoyed more political powers than women in Malaysian society. Historically in Malaysia all the top politician, leading businessmen and religious practitioners were the male.

Barriers of women representation: Despite the government supportive policies for the advancement of women to different aspects of social life, women are under presented in many areas particularly in decision making position in governments. Such under presentation is due to many factors like political, religious and socio-cultural (UNDP, 2007). Although prevailing political culture in Malaysia is very conducive for the women to participate in political activities, however, their limited representation in decision making bodies limiting their platform to raise women issues and critical mass or collective bargaining power in key positions to effectively influence the policy-making process of the country (Ariffin, 1999). Traditionally the religious and cultural environment of the country restricts women to domestic matters than to political matters (Azizah, 2002). Predominantly male society doesn't allow women to work outside rather retained women in the boundaries of house to work for the wellbeing of family members. Consequently, women had little opportunities to develop their skill in public domain (Ariffin, 1999).

DATA AND MEASURES

Data: In this study the analysis is done for the growth of women representation at the federal legislative and executive bodies of the two Asian countries namely

Pakistan and Malaysia. The growth rate of women representation in lower house (National Assembly/House of representatives) of both the countries since their independence is evaluated. Also the growth of women representation in the upper house (the Senate) from (1994-2009) and (1995-2009) is evaluated for Pakistan and Malaysia respectively because data was available for that period. The ministerial positions categorized at two levels such as Federal/Cabinet Ministers and Minister for State/Deputy Ministers and bureaucratic positions from two and four levels such as Secretary General and Deputy Secretary General for Malaysia and Secretary, Additional Secretary, Joint Secretary and Deputy Secretary for Pakistan to cover top level managerial positions. The data are drawn from the IPU (2010) and Inter-Parliament Union's PARLINE data base supplemented additionally by the work of Bano (2009) and UNDP (2007) and the government websites.

Measures: We used time series plot to show the trends in the growth of women representation overtime in federal legislature while bar chart and tables to depicts % of women representation at ministerial and bureaucratic level. Time series plot analyze change over time by focusing on intra-country change-estimating both starting positions (intercepts) and trends (slopes) for each country. As an example, consider Fig. 1, which presents women's political representation in the lower and upper house of the federal legislature of Pakistan and Malaysia since their independence 1947-2010 and 1955-2010. T-test was used to test the mean difference between Pakistani and Malaysian women representation in both legislative and executive branches of the Federal government.

RESULTS

Women representation in lower house of Pakistan and Malaysia since independence: Figure 1 shows the overall women representation of both the countries from their date of independence. The data reveals significant difference in women's legislative representation in the lower house of the federal legislature of the two countries. Women representation increased significantly in Pakistan as compare to Malaysia. In Pakistan the women representation has reached to 22.22% in the year 2008 whereas in the same period women representation in Malaysia is 9.9. Increased women representation in Pakistan is the result of positive policy of the then government to reserve 60 seats for women in National Assembly of Pakistan¹⁵ (Jabeen and Muhammad Zafar, 2009; Suri, 2007), whereas non-reservation of seats for women is the main cause of limited women representation in Malaysia (UNDP, 2007).

The in-depth analysis of data indicates inconsistent trends in the growth of women representation in both

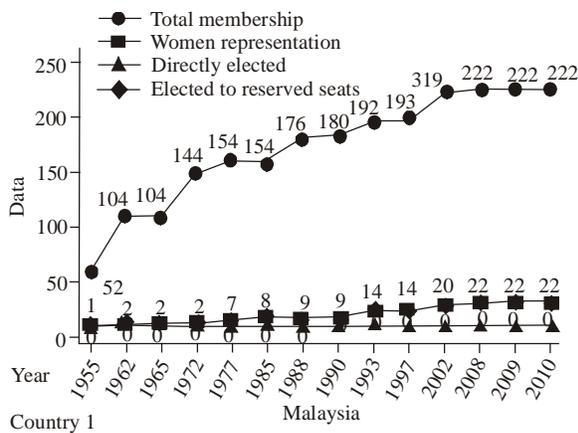
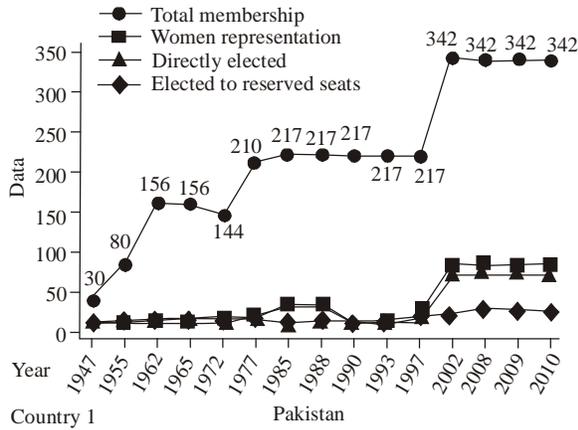


Fig. 1: Comparative woman representation in the lower house of federal legislature of Pakistan and Malaysia

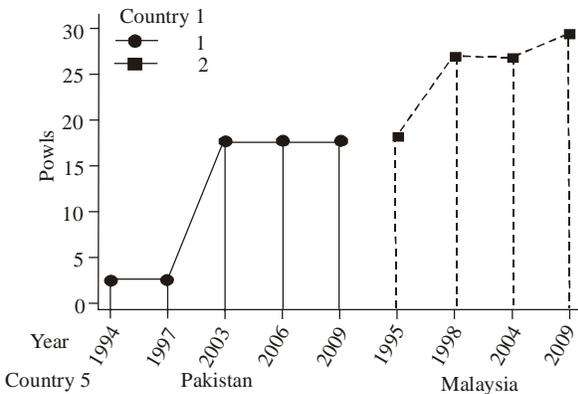


Fig. 2: Comparative women representation in senate of Pakistan and Malaysia

the country particularly in Pakistan. In 1947 the women representation was 6% but it dropped down to zero in 1955 and reached to 3.8% in 1962). It took for about 26 years (from 1962 to 1988) to move from 3.8% to 11.1% (in 1988). Women representation was dropped to .9% in 1990, moved upward and went to 1.8% and 2.8% (in 1993 and 1997 respectively) and finally jumped to 21.645 and 22.22% in 2002 and 2008 respectively. As

Table 1: The application of t-test for women representation in lower house

Depended variable	Mean difference		t*	df	p
	Pakistan (N = 15)	Malaysia (N = 14)			
Women representation	26.27	11.21	1.714	27	0.098

t*-test is two tailed

Table 2: The application of t-test for women representation in senate

Depended variable	Mean difference		t*	df	p
	Pakistan (N = 15)	Malaysia (N = 14)			
Women representation	11.12	24.33	2.883	7	0.024

compared to Pakistan consistent increase in women representation has been found in Malaysia except during the year 1988 (5.11%) and 1990 (5.00%) when slight decrease in women representation has been recorded.

Previous studies considered (a) the political instability and (b) expiry of the provision of women reserved quota were the main factors responsible for such inconsistent growth of women representation in Pakistan (Bano, 2009). The political instability was emerged when in 1979 the then Chief Martial Law administrator General Zia-ul-Haq imposed second Martial Law in the country and suspended the constitution and all fundamental rights. However in 1985, he decided to hold election for National Assembly, though nonparty basis and doubled women's reserved quota to (20%), which remained continued during the election of 1988 but this provision expired before the election of 1990 elections and has not been revived until 2000 (Bano, 2009). Despite steady increase in women representation from the sole representation in 1955 to 22 currently, Malaysian women's share in the lower house of the parliament has not yet surpassed the acceptable level of 30% which is perceived as critical criterion in impacting decision making process set by international agencies like Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 1995.

Mean difference of Pakistan and Malaysia: To measure the mean difference between the two countries in respect of women representation in the lower house of Federal legislature, t-test was performed. The result shows that the mean difference of Pakistan and Malaysian is not significant but powerful as the p-value = 0.98 (Table 1).

Women representation in upper house of Pakistan and Malaysia since independence: Figure 2 shows comparative percentage of women representation in senate (the upper house) of both the countries. Data reveals significant growth in the % of women representation over the years in both the countries. However, percentage of women representation (28.13%

Table 3: Comparative women representation at top level managerial positions

Pakistan				Malaysia			
Managerial Positions	Total	Women representation	%	Managerial positions	Total	Women representation	%
Secretary	48	4	8.33	Secretary general	21	1	4.76
Additional secretary	28	0	0	Deputy secretary general	44	9	20.45
Joint secretary	60	1	1.66	---	---	---	---
Deputy secretary	106	6	5.66	---	---	---	---

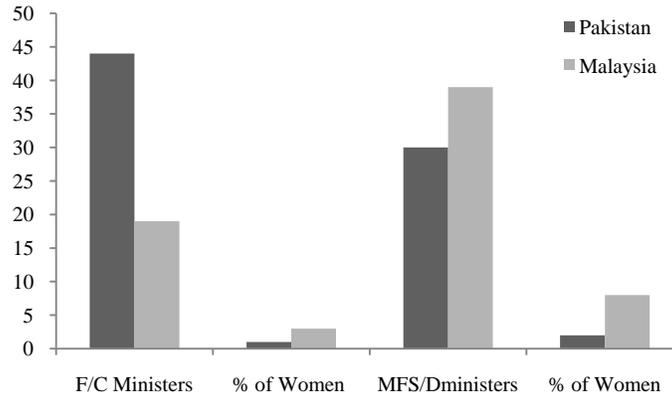


Fig. 3: Comparative women representation at ministerial positions

in 2009) in upper house of Malaysia is much higher than the % of women (17% in 2009) in senate of Pakistan. Women representation in the upper house of Malaysia was 17.4% in 1995 and went to 26.1% in 1998 which was a remarkable increase. There was a slight decrease in women representation in 2004 (25.7%) however jumped to 28.13 in 2008 showing steady growth of women representation in Malaysia. As compared to Malaysia women representation in the upper house of the parliament of Pakistan was less. It was about 2.3 in 1994 and remained at this figure until 2002 and then jumped to 17% in 2003 and remained unchanged since then.

Mean difference of Pakistan and Malaysia: To measure the mean difference of two countries in respect of women representation in the upper house of Federal legislature, t-test was used. The result reveals that the mean difference of Pakistan and Malaysian is significant with $p=0.24$ (Table 2).

Women representation in executive branch:

Women representation in ministries: Figure 3 indicates % of women representation at ministerial level of the two countries. The comparison of two countries shows that % of women representation at ministerial level is high in Malaysia than Pakistan. Out of 30 Cabinet Minister 2 are the women (6.67%) in Malaysia, where out of 44 Federal Ministers only 1 is women (2.27%). Furthermore Malaysia has 8 (20.51%) women Deputy Ministers out of 39, where as Pakistan has only 3 (15.79%) out of 19 Minister for states.

Women representation in federal bureaucracy: Table 3 shows a comparative % of women

representation at the top level management of both the countries. From the results we can see that Pakistan has more women representation at Secretary Level, while Malaysia has more women representation at Deputy Secretary General level. Pakistan has 8 (8.33%) women out of 48 Secretaries whereas Malaysia has only 1 (4.76%) women out of 21 Secretary General. In contrast Malaysia has 9 (20.45%) women out of 44 Deputy Secretary Generals whereas Pakistan has no women out of 28 Additional Secretaries, 1 (1.66%) out of 60 Joint Secretaries and 6 (5.66%) out of 106 Deputy Secretaries.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Present study found substantial growth in women representation over the years in both the countries. The findings of the study are in consistent with the findings of Paxton *et al.* (2010) which found substantial increase in the growth of women representation in the lower house of the federal legislature. The growth rate of women representation in lower house of the parliament of Pakistan is much higher than Malaysia, which is due to the reservation of seats for women. The study confirms and supports the findings that quota/reservation of seats for women have greater impacts on the growth of women representation in national legislature (Paxton *et al.*, 2010; Suri, 2007). The mean difference between countries is not statistically significant but powerful which left untouched by the previous research.

Study found considerable overtime increase of women representation in the upper house of the federal legislature of both the countries, which remained

untouched in the existing literature. However Malaysia is leading in this front by having more women in the upper house as compared to its counterparts. This is due to nomination of senators by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong (king) of Malaysian, which is not practiced in Pakistan. In Malaysia each of the thirteen states indirectly elects 2 senators while the remaining has been appointed by the king (Wikipedia, 2010). This confirms the plea of previous studies that special quota or appointed/nomination of women has positive impacts on the growth rate of women representation in the national legislature (UNDP, 2007). Research at hand found higher representation of Malaysian women in the top managerial level (federal bureaucracy), especially at the post of Deputy Secretary General than Pakistani women which is due to high literacy rate and increased levels of women in the workforce (Stockemer, 2008; Matland, 1998).

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End notes:

- 1 Law makers approve the name in 18th amendment of the constitution passed on April 8, 2010
- 2 On 29 August 2009, the Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order 2009, was passed by the Pakistani cabinet and later signed by the country's President.
- 3 18th amendments enhances provincial autonomy by abolishing concurrent list where both federation and federating units could legislate
- 4 Article 25 of the constitution of 1973
- 5 Article 27 of the constitution of 1973
- 6 Article 34 of the constitution of 1973
- 7 Article 50 of the Constitution stipulates a Majlis-e-Shoora (Parliament) of Pakistan consisting of the President and two Houses to be known respectively as the National Assembly and the Senate. The Constitution provides for a Parliamentary form of Government with a bicameral legislature. Senate, the Upper House was first formed in 1973. The membership of the Senate, which was originally 45, was raised to 63 in 1977 and to 87 in 1985. The membership of the Senate was raised from 87 to 100 in 2002.
- 8 See Article 32 (3) of the federal constitution of Malaysia
- 9 See Article 44 of the federal constitution of Malaysia
- 10 See Article 45 (1) and 46 (1) of the federal constitution of Malaysia
- 11 Data was retrieved through <http://www.epu.gov.my/html/themes/epu/images/common/pdf/ecostat/pdf/1.2.5.pdf>, accessed June 1, 2010.
- 12 See Article 40a (1) of the federal constitution of Malaysia
- 13 See Article 119 (1) of the federal constitution of Malaysia
- 14 See Article 8 (1-5) of the federal constitution of Malaysia
- 15 Sixty seats in the National Assembly of Pakistan have to be filled through Proportional Representation (PR) based on the percentage of popular vote received by the different parties in general elections. Only parties which secure at least 5% of votes are eligible to nominate women candidates. These 60 seats are not reserved within the general seats, but are in addition or parallel to the 272 directly elected general.