

Impact of International Conventions on Woman Political Participation in Pakistan and Bangladesh (2000-2020)

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Publication History:

Received: April 17, 2025

Revised: April 25, 2025

Accepted: April 28, 2025

Published Online: May 03, 2025

Keywords:

Feminist Institutionalism,
Women's Political Participation,
CEDAW,
Gender Quotas,
Pakistan and Bangladesh,
Patriarchy and Informal Institutions,

Research related to Academic Areas:

International Relations, Gender
Studies and South Asian Studies

Acknowledgment:

This paper is written as part of the requirements for the PhD degree in International Relations at the School of Politics and International Relations, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad. The author gratefully acknowledges the supervision and guidance of Dr. Saweeda Rahman throughout the research process.

Ethical Consideration:

This study has no aim to hurt any ideological or social segment but is purely based on academic purposes.

DOI:

10.5281/zenodo.15568725

Abstract

Women's political participation in Pakistan and Bangladesh remains limited despite constitutional provisions and gender quotas, with Pakistan allocating 17% reserved seats in parliament and 30% at the local level, while Bangladesh offers 14% in parliament and 33% locally. Although both countries have formally committed to international gender conventions --Pakistan ratified CEDAW in 1996 (with reservations) and Bangladesh in 1984 (with reservations) -- their implementation remains symbolic due to deep-rooted patriarchal norms. International frameworks such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA), and the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda aim to mainstream gender equality in political institutions. These frameworks have influenced gender-related laws and policies in both countries, yet failed to deliver substantive representation due to informal institutional resistance. This study employs a qualitative comparative case study method using document analysis, guided by the lens of Feminist Institutionalism (FI). The findings reveal that while Bangladesh has taken a step ahead by adopting a National Action Plan (NAP) for WPS in 2019 and incorporating gender budgeting, both countries continue to exhibit symbolic female political participation driven by dynastic politics, male patronage, and weak institutional enforcement. The study concludes that meaningful gender inclusion requires restructuring informal institutional norms alongside formal reforms.

Introduction

South Asia is predominantly a patriarchal region; the region is plagued with political and economic instability as well as gender inequality. It is noteworthy that Pakistan and Bangladesh both have ratified and formally committed to gender-based international conventions yet formal equality co-exists with informal patriarchal practices in their institutional designs. International Conventions such as CEDAW¹, BPFA² and WPS³ agenda are international frameworks to mainstream gender however the formal commitments of Pakistan and Bangladesh have not translated into substantive representation of Women.

Both states have worked on codifying gender political participation. The constitutional provisions, women quotas in parliaments and local bodies and numerous gender-based laws are significant formal advancements in gender equality. On the contrary, women in parliament are powerless. They are not active enough in decision-making and informal practices such as male patronage, patriarchal power structures and male dominated political party leadership hinder substantive representation of women and reduce their inclusion to mere symbolic representation.

This article explores the impact of these international conventions on Pakistan and Bangladesh. It is viewed through the Feminist Intuitionism (FI) lens to examine the interaction of formal rules for instance gender quotas and gender-based legislation with informal rules such as dynastic politics and male patronage. It interrogates the gendered outcomes and their potential for transformation into gender equitable outcomes⁴.

Theoretical Framework

Feminist institutionalism (FI) is an insightful approach for understanding the correlation in global gender norms and local political institutions. FI is derived from New Institutionalism, it argues that institutions are formally and informally gendered in their structures, functions and outcomes⁵. This approach recognizes that conventional institutionalism cannot be comprehended unless gendered norms and their impact on the structure of an institution are not considered.

Gendered Institutions

Conventional approaches of institutionalism for instance rational choice theory, historical institutionalism theory and sociological institutionalism theories contributed significantly in understanding political behavior of political actors and evolution of political practices. However, these theories often overlook

¹ Convention for Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women

² Beijing Platform for Action

³ UNSCR 1325 also known as Women Peace and Security Agenda

⁴ Sarah Childs and Mona Lena Krook, "Analysing Women's Substantive Representation: From Critical Mass to Critical Actors," *Government and Opposition* 44, no. 2 (2009): 125–45; Fiona Mackay and Merryl Kenny, "New Institutionalism through a Gender Lens: Towards a Feminist Institutionalism," *International Political Science Review* 31, no. 5 (2010): 573–88.

⁵ Mackay and Merryl Kenny, "New Institutionalism through a Gender Lens: Towards a Feminist Institutionalism"; Louise Chappell, "Comparing Political Institutions: Revealing the Gendered 'Logic of Appropriateness,'" *Politics & Gender* 2, no. 02 (June 2006), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X06221044>.

the embeddedness of gender in institutional logic⁶. FI argue that institutions are gender blind, this gender blindness reproduces gender power asymmetries. Political Institutions impact women political participation not only formally through electoral laws and criteria for gender quotas but also through informal means such as party gate-keeping, patronage politics and gendered norms of leadership.

FI provides significant insights to understand gender power structures particularly while discussing normative frameworks such as BPFA, CEDAW and WPS agenda. These frame works have been developed over the years to mainstream gender equality. They provide formal practices to mainstream gender however the success of these conventions is subjected to local institutional practices of respective countries. FI is chosen as a lens for this study because it presents a gendered lens not only to understand whether these frameworks are adopted by Pakistan and Bangladesh but it also helps to understand how these conventions are interpreted and resisted in the political systems of both states.

Formal and Informal Practices

FI recognizes the impact of both formal and informal norms in institutions. Formal norms are defined as the formal rules and practices for instance constitutions, legal frameworks, electoral laws whereas informal norms include socio-cultural norms, political practices and unwritten rules⁷. It is observed that while formal rules promote gender inclusion, informal rules resist such reforms. For instance, in Pakistan and Bangladesh formal rules notable gender quotas enable women representation in parliament however informal rules such as patronage politics, political dynasty mostly limits substantive representation and confine women to mere symbolic representation⁸.

This phenomenon undermines what FI scholars call “Institutional layering” and “Path dependency” of gender reforms⁹. FI scholars state that new reforms do not replace old institutions instantly by simply making a policy. They are layered into existing structures that may subvert or reinterpret them in such ways that maintain the existing status-quo.

⁶ Georgina Waylen, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Gender and Politics* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Georgina Waylen, “Informal Institutions, Institutional Change, and Gender Equality,” *Political Research Quarterly* 67, no. 1 (2014): 212–23.

⁷ “How Are Political Institutions Gendered? - Vivien Lowndes, 2020,” accessed March 14, 2024, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0032321719867667>.

⁸ Sohela Nazneen and Simeen Mahmud, “Gendered Politics of Securing Inclusive Development,” SSRN Scholarly Paper (Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network, September 28, 2012), <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2386614>; Farzana Bari, *Role and Performance: Assessment of Pakistan Women Parliamentarians, 2002-2007* (Islamabad: Pattan Development Organization, 2009); Farida Jalalzai and Farida Jalalzai, *Shattered, Cracked, or Firmly Intact?: Women and the Executive Glass Ceiling Worldwide* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁹ Waylen, *The Oxford Handbook of Gender and Politics*; Fiona Mackay, “Gender and Political Representation in the UK: The State of the ‘Discipline,’” *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations* 6, no. 1 (2004): 99–120, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-856X.2004.00129.x>.

Norm Translation

One notable contribution of FI is its focus on “Interpretation of rules” this simply means the way actors interpret or attribute meanings to formal rules in a given institutional and cultural setting¹⁰. This is particularly relevant while discussing how international conventions like CEDAW, BPFA and WPS are localized in any respective country. FI scholars argue that formal ratification of international convention is not enough, as it mostly underscores the persistence of informal practices that could be potential barriers to its transformative potential.

This can be better understood through the example of Pakistan’s ratification of CEDAW. CEDAW is ratified by Pakistan though with reservations. The implementation of CEDAW provisions in Pakistan is often subjected to cultural and religious interpretation¹¹. Similarly, formal rules like reserving gender-based seats in the parliament have increased women representation in the parliament however patronage politics and the criteria associated with these reserved seats hinder substantive representation of women in Bangladesh¹². Keeping such examples in view FI scholars argue that introducing new reforms without restructuring old institutions will only result in coexistence not transformation¹³.

FI offers an insightful lens to explore how international conventions interact with local institutions and political structures. It goes beyond the surface level analysis of descriptive women representation and delves into more impactful questions like

- 1) What institutional norms shape how international norms are received?
- 2) Are formal commitments compatible with informal decision making?
- 3) How are female politicians constrained by political dynasties, patronage politics and security discourses?

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, comparative case study methodology, guided by the theoretical approach of Feminist Institutionalism. The aim of this study is to explore how international conventions particularly BPFA, CEDAW and WPS agenda have shaped or shifted the institutional conditions of women political participation in Bangladesh and Pakistan.

Bangladesh and Pakistan were chosen as case studies owing to their overwhelming similarities. For instance, colonial legacy, cultural similarities, political instability, ratification of these conventions and patriarchal social structure. Despite these similarities both states have some differences as well. For

¹⁰ Louise Chappell and Georgina Waylen, “GENDER AND THE HIDDEN LIFE OF INSTITUTIONS: GENDER AND THE HIDDEN LIFE OF INSTITUTIONS,” *Public Administration*, February 2013, n/a-n/a, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9299.2012.02104.x>.

¹¹ Abdul Qayyum Gondal, “Women’s Rights Protection: Analysis of Implementation of CEDAW and Beijing Declaration in Pakistan,” *Women’s Rights Protection*, January 1, 2023, https://www.academia.edu/124600958/Womens_Rights_Protection_Analysis_of_Implementation_of_CEDAW_and_Beijing_Declaration_in_Pakistan_.

¹² Nazneen and Mahmud, “Gendered Politics of Securing Inclusive Development.”

¹³ Mackay and Merryl Kenny, “New Institutionalism through a Gender Lens: Towards a Feminist Institutionalism.”

example, Bangladesh has a different political trajectory compared to Pakistan and both states chose different pathways to women political participation.

This study is based on document analysis. Primary documents such as national reports on BPFA, CEDAW and WPS will be analyzed and discussed. Similarly shadow reports by women organizations mentioning gaps in the implementation of these conventions and critically analyzing their implementation will be taken into account. In Pakistan women organizations such as Aurat Foundation, Shirkat Gah and Women Action Forum have produced insightful reports on these conventions¹⁴. Similarly, Mahila Parishad and Nari Pokho in Bangladesh have critically analyzed the implementation of gender related international conventions¹⁵. The documents will be analyzed through feminist institutional lens it will observe the impact of informal practices on the transformative potential of these conventions.

The limitations of the study are lack of transparency in decision-making institutions in both countries. Nonetheless the study provides a nuanced approach to the impact of international conventions on women political participation.

Case Studies of Pakistan and Bangladesh

- **Historical Trajectory of Women Political Participation in Pakistan**

Pakistan came into existence on 14th August 1947. During the first eleven years (1947-1956) Pakistan didn't have a constitution. The decision-making body of the state was the constituent assembly. There have been two constituent assemblies in Pakistan. In the First constituent assembly two women were included as members of the constituent assembly namely Begum Shaista Ikramullah and Begum Jahanara Shahnawaz¹⁶. They belonged to East and West Pakistan respectively. The first constituent assembly was dissolved on 24th October 1954, unfortunately the second constituent assembly had no female members. In 1956, the first constitution of the country was promulgated. This constitution provided only three seats for women in the assembly¹⁷. In 1962 this constitution was abrogated and the new constitution offered only six seats for women in parliament. The last and current constitution of Pakistan was promulgated in 1973 this constitution proposed 10 seats for women for a period of ten years or three general elections whichever came first. After this the quota was supposed to lapse and women were to join the parliament through general elections with no gender quota¹⁸. In the 1990s the quota lapsed and there were no reserved for women till 2002¹⁹.

¹⁴ "Aurat Foundation," accessed March 12, 2025, <https://af.org.pk/af-annual-reports.php>; Aurat Foundation, "Legislative Watch," *Women and Politics*, 2008; Pranab Kumar Panday, *Women's Political Participation in Bangladesh: Institutional Reforms, Actors and Outcomes* (New Delhi: Springer, 2013).

¹⁵ Panday, *Women's Political Participation in Bangladesh*.

¹⁶ Khawar Mumtaz and Farida Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back?* (London ; Atlantic Highlands, N.J., USA: Zed Books, 1987).

¹⁷ "Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan," accessed April 3, 2024, <https://pakistancode.gov.pk/english/UY2FqaJw1-apaUY2Fqa-apaUY2Fvbpw%3D-sg-jjjjjjjjjjjjjj>.

¹⁸ "Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan."

¹⁹ Mussarat Jabeen, "Political Representation of Women in Parliament of Pakistan after Restoration and Increase in Gender Quotas (2002 to 2018)," *Pak-Euro Journal of Medical and Life Sciences* 41 (March 30, 2021): 163–74.

During this period there was a phase of authoritarian rule under Zia ul Haq (1977-1988). This phase was huge setback for women in Pakistan. Zia introduced Draconian Laws under his Hudood Ordinance for women paradoxically he also introduced reserved seats for women in the parliament. However, the informal socio-political setting of the country was plagued by patriarchal norms, enforcement of religious fundamentalism, patronage politics and gendered electoral violence. Women organizations particularly Women Action Forum have been active during this period calling out the gender apartheid in the country. This situation continuously hindered the transformation of women legal rights into substantive political agency. Women representation was merely a symbolic gesture.

- **Gender Quotas**

The year 2001 was turning point in the struggle for politics rights of Pakistani women. General Pervaiz Musharaff who was the president of Pakistan via a referendum promulgated a Legal Framework Order 2002 which reserved 60 seats for women in the National Parliament and 30% seats in the local bodies. The 60 seats make-up 17% of the seats in the parliament²⁰. This is the largest quota seats allocated for women in Pakistan. Nevertheless, these seats provided a formal path to the parliament however the criteria for the seats made women dependent on political parties that often cater to patronage politics and dynastic politics.

The criteria for these reserved seats underscore the spirit of this measure. Political parties are supposed to provide party lists to the election commission to nominate women on reserved seats. For every three seats won by a political party they can nominate one woman on reserved seat. There is no pre-requisite like experience, education etc. for this nomination the sole requirement in gender²¹. This makes political parties the main gate keepers. It also makes women dependent on party leadership which is predominantly male. Party leadership reinforces the patriarchal patronage structures in the parliament²². Although party manifestoes narrate a different story. Party manifestoes often call upon equal participation of women in politics often influenced by international conventions yet their candidate selection process is heavily gendered. Women are seldom fielded as general candidates unless they belong to a political family. Which implies that political dynasty is a key mechanism for including women in politics²³.

- **Impact of International Conventions**

Pakistan ratified CEDAW in 1996 with reservations particularly regarding personal laws²⁴. These reservations undermine the true essence of the convention. However, due to Pakistan's

²⁰ "Legal Framework Order, 2002," accessed April 15, 2025, https://www.pakistani.org/pakistan/constitution/musharraf_const_revival/lfo.html.

²¹ "Legal Framework Order, 2002."

²² Abeeda Qureshi and Sara Ahmad, "Reserved Seats for Women in Pakistan: Reinforcement of Patriarchy and Powerlessness (2002–2018)," *Women's Studies International Forum* 94 (September 2022): 102629, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2022.102629>.

²³ Bari, *Role and Performance*.

²⁴ "CEDAW," UN Women – Asia-Pacific, accessed April 15, 2025, <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/countries/pakistan/programmes-pakistan/cedaw>.

dependence on foreign aid, pressure from international organizations such as UN and repeated calls of attentions by the local feminist organizations considerable progress have been noticed in the legislative aspect. The Violence against women act, Protection of harassment against women act, anti-rape law 2021, Protection of anti-women practices 2011, Election Act 2017 are a few gender-based laws that protect the legal rights of women in Pakistan and reduce gender gap²⁵.

Women, Peace and Security agenda proposes that every country adopts a National Action Plan for gender equality. Pakistan have failed to comply, Fareeda Shaheed argues that the WPS agenda is largely absent from Pakistani policy discourse as peace and security are left to the military. Pakistan have militarized peace and security instead of gendering it²⁶.

- **The Paradox of Formal Commitments and Informal Patriarchal Practices in Pakistan**

Formal commitments to international conventions have not paved the way to women Substantive representation in the parliament. Women representation is limited due to the limited mobility norms and religious mindset in the conservative²⁷. Moreover, it is noted by FI scholar Moona Leena Krook that female members of parliament are often offered stereotypical roles and token representation in the parliament²⁸. This clearly reflects the argument put forward by FI scholars that introducing formal rules wouldn't change the informal structure of an institution unless the gendered structure of the institution is challenged²⁹. In Pakistan it can be observed that informal practices neutralize the formal rules and reduce women representation in parliament to mere tokenism.

- **Impact of Political Actors**

Apart from political parties the significant actors in political processes are Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) and judiciary. The ECP in 2020 issued a Gender Mainstreaming Framework that provides gender disaggregated data³⁰. However, the enforcement of this framework is not consistent. Furthermore, the ECP Act 2017 mandates 5% tickets from every political party during general elections³¹. This condition is often overlooked by political parties and there is no mechanism in place to sanction this Act.

Meanwhile the judiciary occasionally offer progressive rulings in favor of women for instance the 2013 Peshawar High Court decision regarding women voting rights. Though mostly the operate

²⁵ Muna Khayal Khattak and Farooq Arshad, "The Case of Institutionalizing Women Political Participation in Pakistan's Legislature: Prospects and Challenges," *Pakistan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 11, no. 4 (December 30, 2023): 4819–25, <https://doi.org/10.52131/pjhss.2023.v11i4.1958>.

²⁶ Farida Shaheed, "Contested Identities: Gendered Politics, Gendered Religion in Pakistan," *Third World Quarterly* 31, no. 6 (2010): 851–67.

²⁷ Foundation, "Legislative Watch."

²⁸ Childs and Krook, "Analysing Women's Substantive Representation."

²⁹ Mackay and Merryl Kenny, "New Institutionalism through a Gender Lens: Towards a Feminist Institutionalism"; Chappell, "Comparing Political Institutions."

³⁰ "Election Commission of Pakistan," accessed March 20, 2024, <https://ecp.gov.pk/general-elections#>.

³¹ "ECP Summons Party Heads over Failure to Allocate 5% Tickets to Women," accessed April 15, 2025, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2491709/ecp-summons-heads-of-several-political-parties-to-explain-shortfall-of-women-tickets>.

withing the existing patriarchal norms and have not contributed in advancing women political rights³². Finally, political dynasties work as constraining factor in women political representation. There is no doubt that this dynamic facilitates descriptive representation it reinforces patriarchal patronage and neutralizes the impact of formal reforms through laws³³.

- **Historical Trajectory of Woman Political Participation in Bangladesh**

Woman political participation in Bangladesh presents a unique case. Bangladesh is the only democratic country ruled by women for more than 25 years. Similarly, it is the only country where the mainstream political parties are chaired by women. On the contrary women political participation in the parliament is a completely different scenario. This shows a paradox of high symbolic representation of women and low substantive representation. Bangladesh promulgated its constitution in 1972 and it upholds gender equality³⁴. The article 65 of the constitution provides reserved seats for women in Parliament. Bangladesh institutionalized women politically early on through reserved seats provision. However, their political agency is arrested due to patriarchal political structures³⁵.

Two women namely Khaleeda Zia and Sheikh Haseena Wajid have been the most prominent figures in the political landscape of Bangladesh. These women have ruled Bangladesh alternatively since the 1990s. Unfortunately, their political prominence shows dynastic politics not substantive representation. Both of these women have failed to transform the patriarchal party structures of their political parties³⁶.

Women in Bangladesh still face political violence, patriarchal party gate keeping and religious fundamentalism. This discourage women to join politics especially at the local bodies level where these informal norms are more pronounced³⁷. Bangladesh has a robust civil society yet women face push backs from conservative actors³⁸.

- **Gender Quotas**

Bangladesh's constitution reserved 50 seats for women in its parliament. They make up 14% of the total seats compared to 17% seats in Pakistan National Parliament. The prerequisites to nominate a woman for reserved seat in Bangladesh mirror that of Pakistan. Hence women in politics in Bangladesh face the same predicament. The party leadership dependent criteria

³² Shaheed, "Contested Identities."

³³ Jalalzai and Jalalzai, *Shattered, Cracked, or Firmly Intact?*

³⁴ "The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh," accessed March 18, 2024, <http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-details-367.html>.

³⁵ Nazneen and Mahmud, "Gendered Politics of Securing Inclusive Development."

³⁶ Jalalzai and Jalalzai, *Shattered, Cracked, or Firmly Intact?*

³⁷ Shivani Chandramohan et al., "Diagnosing Norms and Norm Change in Rural Bangladesh: An Exploration of Gendered Social Norms and Women's Empowerment," *BMC Public Health* 23 (November 24, 2023): 2337, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-023-17213-2>.

³⁸ "The Aid Lab: Understanding Bangladesh's Unexpected Success | Oxford Academic," accessed April 15, 2025, <https://academic.oup.com/book/7707?login=false>.

reinforce dynastic politics and women in parliament are reduced to male proxies³⁹. Bangladeshi political parties though headed by women are different than Pakistani political parties. The party chooses women from political elites and dynastic families for reserved thus sustaining informal patriarchal norms of male patronage in politics. Women are rarely provided general seats party tickets based on their merit. Other factors such as clientelism and campaign financing also work against women political participation⁴⁰.

This raises the question that why does Bangladesh rank higher than Pakistan in terms of women political participation. Bangladesh's local bodies elect more women that raises the descriptive representation of women. However, these women also serve as male proxies and don't display substantive representation of women. The glass ceiling remains intact and power is retained with men⁴¹.

• **Impact of International Conventions on Women Political Participation in Bangladesh**

Bangladesh ratified CEDAW long before Pakistan in 1984 yet it recorded the same reservations as Pakistan. Bangladesh maintains its reservations of Article 2 and 16 of CEDAW that concerns personal and legal laws. Unlike Pakistan, Bangladeshi civil society have compelled the government to adopt several genders-based frameworks that comply with International Conventions. Some of these frameworks include National Women Development Policy (2011) and gender budgeting initiatives⁴².

BFPAs have been very effective in women political participation in Bangladesh. It is a platform that accelerated the existing struggle for legal and institutional reforms. This platform also provides legal aid to female candidates and transparency in nominating female candidates⁴³. Bangladesh proposed the UNSCR 1325 which is also known as the WPS agenda. It is the first South Asian State to launch the National Action Plan based on WPS in 2019. However, like most South Asian states drafting a law or framework is never enough because implementation is often contrary to informal practices.

³⁹ Nazneen and Mahmud, "Gendered Politics of Securing Inclusive Development."

⁴⁰ Naila Kabeer, "Social Exclusion, Poverty and Discrimination Towards an Analytical Framework," *IDS Bulletin* 31, no. 4 (October 2000): 83–97, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1759-5436.2000.mp31004009.x>; S. Bano, "Women in Parliament in Pakistan: Problems and Potential Solutions," 2009, <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Women-in-Parliament-in-Pakistan:-Problems-and-Bano/3dcadf97c075e41cdc365937d88103e82d31df08>.

⁴¹ F. Chowdhury, "Problems of Women's Political Participation in Bangladesh: An Empirical Study," 2004, <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Problems-of-Women%27s-Political-Participation-in-An-Chowdhury/3addac43fdd874b2b729b790fa2ca414e395199b>.

⁴² Asian Development Bank, *Bangladesh: Gender Equality Diagnostic of Selected Sectors* (Asian Development Bank, 2018), <https://www.adb.org/documents/bangladesh-gender-equality-diagnostic-selected-sectors>.

⁴³ Nazneen and Mahmud, "Gendered Politics of Securing Inclusive Development."

This disconnect in policy and practice is often criticized by feminist scholars and activists. FI scholars observe this failure to enforce gender-based mechanisms and state that the informal structures deter women from actively participating in politics⁴⁴.

- **The Paradox of Formal Commitments and Informal Patriarchal Practices in Bangladesh**

Bangladesh's formal commitments to International Conventions have not enhanced substantive representation of women. Despite being ruled by women for more than two decades there have been no improvement on the grassroots level⁴⁵. FI scholars often highlight this aspect where formal and informal rules co-exist in such a way that the persistence of informal rules nullify the expected results of formal rules⁴⁶.

This can be observed by studying the political manifestoes of mainstream political parties such as Awami League and Bangladesh National party. The manifestoes preach gender equality and the party leadership often declare verbal support to the conventions yet the informal practices such as male patronage, exclusion of women from leadership positions in the parties, lack of regular intra party elections and symbolic representation of women neutralize the formal rules drafted for gender inclusion⁴⁷.

- **Impact of Political Actors on Women Political Participation in Bangladesh**

Bangladesh Election Commission have taken a few steps towards gender mainstreaming in politics. They have occasionally offer training programs, workshops and awareness' sessions to female politicians. Despite these efforts it has failed to implement any legal mandate to implement gender equal legislations⁴⁸.

Bangladeshi judiciary have been quite active have given remarkable decisions related to harassment and violence against women cases. However, the courts have not pursued the institutional barriers to mainstream women in politics. Furthermore, dynastic politics have taken over the essence of substantive representation of women in politics. Elite women capture of reserved seats and dynastic women ruling the country have created high symbolic representation whereas women still face exclusion from decision making bodies of the parties⁴⁹.

Comparative Analysis of Pakistan and Bangladesh

The aforementioned discussion shows that both states similarly paradoxical correlation with formally committing to international conventions while informal resisting the translation of these commitment into actions. Informal practices such as patriarchal mindset, dynastic politics and gendered electoral

⁴⁴ Childs and Krook, "Analysing Women's Substantive Representation."

⁴⁵ Panday, *Women's Political Participation in Bangladesh*.

⁴⁶ Childs and Krook, "Analysing Women's Substantive Representation."

⁴⁷ Panday, *Women's Political Participation in Bangladesh*; Nazneen and Mahmud, "Gendered Politics of Securing Inclusive Development."

⁴⁸ Bank, *Bangladesh*.

⁴⁹ Jalalzai and Jalalzai, *Shattered, Cracked, or Firmly Intact?*

violence nullify the effects of gender-based convention such as CEDAW, BPFA and WPS. The following displays a comparative analysis of women political participation in Bangladesh and Pakistan.

International Convention	Pakistan	Bangladesh
CEDAW Ratification	1996 (with reservations)	1984 (with reservations)
Beijing Platform for Action	Participated in 1995, Integrated selectively	Participated in 1995, Influenced the National Women Development Policy
WPS (UNSCR 1325)	No NAP	NAP launched in 2019
Reserved seats in Parliament	17%, Indirect Election	14%, Indirect Election
Quota at Local level	30%. Direct Election	33%
Role of political parties	Male dominated, Limited participation on general seats	Symbolically headed by women, limited participation in general seats
Impact of International norms	Influenced electoral and gender-based laws particularly about women harassment	Gender budgeting, influenced local quotas, launched NAP for WPS
Dynastic politics	Benazir Bhutto, Maryam Nawaz display dynastic politics	Khaleeda Zia, Sheikh Hasina Wajid display dynastic politics
Election Commission	Gender framework drafted, Weak implementation	Gender initiative exists, Low capacity
Civil Society	Strong advocacy	Strong advocacy

The clearly shows that formal commitments to international conventions in both states did not produce the expected outcomes. This dilemma persists due to the persistence of informal practices. In order to have fruitful outcomes both require deliberate efforts to bring structural changes through social awareness and education.

Conclusion

The aforementioned discussion leads to the conclusion that formal institutional changes are insufficient. Tangible gender-equal outcomes require more than just formal rules, laws and practices. FI scholars argue that meaningful gender mainstreaming is subjected to the transformation of informal institutional design⁵⁰. Pakistan and Bangladesh are examples of norm localization; this means that international gender norms are selectively adopted to co-exist with the pertaining local structures. Norm localization aids status-quo and maintains the power dynamics⁵¹.

⁵⁰ Chappell and Waylen, "GENDER AND THE HIDDEN LIFE OF INSTITUTIONS"; Waylen, "Informal Institutions, Institutional Change, and Gender Equality."

⁵¹ Mackay and Merryl Kenny, "New Institutionalism through a Gender Lens: Towards a Feminist Institutionalism."

In conclusion, ratifying and inculcating international gender conventions due to international pressure doesn't guarantee gender mainstreaming. Substantive representation of women and meaningful gender parity can only be achieved through institutional innovation such as revising the criteria for gender reserved seats, democratization in political parties, regular intra-party elections and deliberate efforts to disintegrate patriarchal patronage in political parties. Both states need a comprehensive framework to address these informal power structures.