

## Quest of Women for Selfhood in Politics: A Role of Stakeholders in Pakistan

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### **Abstract:**

*The quest for women's selfhood represents a profound journey of self-discovery and empowerment, challenging societal expectations and reviewing traditional gender roles. Women have historically faced limitations on their autonomy and identity, often constrained by cultural norms and systemic biases. The pursuit of selfhood involves breaking free from these constraints, embracing individuality, and cultivating a sense of agency over one's life. This journey may encompass various dimensions, from asserting the right to education and career opportunities to challenging stereotypes and expectations regarding women's roles. Moreover, the quest for women's selfhood in politics is an assertive and transformative pursuit, challenging historical marginalization and seeking a meaningful review of women's roles in governance. Women entering the political sphere engage in a multifaceted journey, demanding recognition, representation, and the right to shape policies that directly impacts their lives. This quest involves overcoming systemic barriers, from deeply entrenched gender biases to institutional obstacles that hinder women's political participation. The pursuit of women's selfhood in politics is not merely about occupying positions of power but also about reshaping the political landscape to be more inclusive, responsive, and reflective of the diverse perspectives that women bring. It entails dismantling stereotypes, amplifying women's voices on critical issues, and fostering an environment where women are not only present in political spheres but are actively involved in shaping the agenda and policies that advance gender equality and societal progress. This study explores the women role in 21<sup>st</sup> century for their selfhood and examines the contribution of stakeholders in perspective of Pakistan.*

**Keywords:** *Selfhood, Quest, Women, Stakeholders, Politics, 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Pakistan, etc.*

### **Introduction**

"Women's selfhood" refers to the unique and individual identity of women, encompassing their personal beliefs, values, aspirations, and experiences. It is a multidimensional concept that goes beyond societal expectations and roles traditionally assigned to women. Women's selfhood involves their sense of autonomy and the ability to shape their own lives, choices, and narratives. It recognizes the diversity among women, acknowledging that each woman has a distinct and complex identity influenced by factors such as culture, education, socioeconomic status, and personal experiences. The concept of women's selfhood emphasizes the importance of women defining themselves on their terms, breaking away from limiting stereotypes, and participating fully in various aspects of society. It encompasses the right to make decisions about one's own life, pursue personal and professional goals, and contribute to the broader social fabric.

In modern era, women have played a pivotal role in shaping their own identities and defining their selfhood in various spheres. Here are some key aspects of women's roles in the 21st century that contribute to their selfhood. Women have increasingly asserted their individual agency and autonomy, making decisions about their lives, careers, relationships, and bodies. This includes choices related to education, career paths, and family planning. The 21st century has witnessed a significant increase in women pursuing higher education and excelling in various professional fields. Women have broken barriers in traditionally male-dominated industries,

fostering a sense of accomplishment and empowerment. Women entrepreneurs and innovators have made notable contributions to business and technology. Many women have founded and led successful startups, challenging gender norms.

Women have become influential voices in shaping cultural narratives and promoting positive representations in media and the arts. They contribute to changing societal attitudes and expectations. Women are increasingly prioritizing their health and well-being. This includes advocating for comprehensive healthcare, addressing mental health issues, and promoting positive body image. Women are leveraging social media platforms to express themselves, share their stories, and connect with communities. Online spaces provide avenues for self-expression, activism, and networking.

The recognition of Intersectionality is shaping women's understanding of their identities. Women are acknowledging the diverse factors that influence their experiences, such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic background. Women are redefining traditional gender roles within families and relationships. Discussions around equal partnerships, shared responsibilities, and work-life balance contribute to shaping women's roles in both domestic and professional spheres.

Women are connecting globally to address common challenges and share experiences. International movements and collaborations contribute to a sense of solidarity and shared goals for gender equality. As women navigate the complexities of the 21st century, their roles in various domains reflect a dynamic and evolving selfhood. The emphasis on individual agency, advocacy, and breaking barriers contributes to a more inclusive and equitable society. While progress has been made, ongoing efforts are essential to address remaining disparities and challenges that allow Pakistani women to define their roles and selfhood.

Despite progress, women continue to be underrepresented in political leadership roles. Barriers such as patriarchal norms, societal expectations, and limited support networks can impede their political participation and influence. Gender-based violence, including domestic abuse, harassment, and honor killings, remains a pervasive barrier. Fear of violence can limit women's mobility, personal freedom, and their ability to assert their rights. In some regions, limited access to healthcare services, especially for reproductive health, can negatively impact women's well-being. Barriers may include cultural taboos, financial constraints, and inadequate healthcare infrastructure. Deeply ingrained cultural and religious norms can act as barriers to women's selfhood. Expectations surrounding modesty, marriage, and family roles may restrict their autonomy and decision-making power.

### **Literature review**

Priyanka (2021) study quest for selfhood among women artists in South Asian visual culture has garnered increasing scholarly attention, reflecting broader discourses on gender, identity, and artistic expression. Within the diverse and dynamic landscape of South Asian art, women artists navigate complex socio-cultural contexts, negotiating tradition and modernity, authenticity and representation, and personal and collective narratives. It explores the ways in which women artists assert agency and challenge normative frameworks through their creative practices, engaging with themes of femininity, power, resistance, and belonging. Scholars analyze how women artists interrogate patriarchal structures, subvert stereotypes, and reclaim their voices, often drawing from indigenous traditions, historical narratives, and contemporary realities. Moreover, the study reflects on the role of women artists as agents of social change, advocating for gender equality, inclusivity, and cultural diversity within the art world and broader society. Through critical examinations of artworks, exhibitions, biographies, and

theoretical frameworks, the study underscores the significance of women artists' contributions to shaping South Asian visual culture and advancing discourses on selfhood, identity, and representation in the global context.

Thwaites (2013) explores the intricate dynamics of identity formation and agency within the context of women's naming choices upon marriage. Drawing from interdisciplinary literature in sociology, anthropology, psychology, and feminist studies, the review delves into the multifaceted considerations that influence individuals' decisions to retain, change, hyphenate, or create new surnames upon marriage. By examining cultural norms, legal frameworks, gender dynamics, and personal motivations, this study discusses the complexities surrounding naming practices and their implications for individual autonomy, family dynamics, and societal perceptions of gender roles. Moreover, the review highlights how naming decisions serve as symbolic acts of self-definition, reflecting individuals' negotiation of tradition, modernity, and gendered expectations within diverse socio-cultural contexts.

Anderson et, al. (2002) discusses on self-identity elucidates the intricate interplay between interpersonal relationships and individual identity formation. Drawing from social psychology, sociology, and interpersonal communication studies, scholars explore how significant others—such as romantic partners, family members, friends, and mentors—shape individuals' sense of self through various mechanisms of influence, including social comparison, social support, and role modeling. The study highlights the importance of attachment theory and social identity theory in understanding how individuals derive meaning, validation, and a sense of belonging from their interactions with significant others. Moreover, researchers examine the role of identity negotiation and co-construction processes within relationships, emphasizing the reciprocal nature of identity formation and the dynamic exchanges that occur between individuals and their social environments.

Shotwell & Sangrey (2009) the relationship between women's selfhood and politics is intricate and significant, as political dynamics can profoundly influence and be influenced by the self-identity and agency of women. Women's selfhood is closely tied to their political participation and representation. When women actively engage in politics, whether as voters, activists, or leaders, they contribute to shaping policies that reflect their perspectives and address issues relevant to their lives. Political decisions and policies have a direct impact on various aspects of women's lives, including education, healthcare, reproductive rights, and workplace equality. Women's selfhood is intricately linked to the societal and political frameworks that shape these policies.

Schneider (2013) discusses that women's selfhood often involves the advocacy for gender equality and women's rights. Political engagement allows women to influence and shape the legal and social landscape, working towards dismantling discriminatory practices and ensuring equal opportunities. Women in politics may face unique challenges related to gender biases, sexism, and stereotypes. Navigating these challenges requires resilience and a strong sense of self, as women work to assert their identities and contribute meaningfully to political discourse.

Smith (1994), Women's selfhood gains visibility when women are adequately represented in political decision-making bodies. Having women in positions of power helps challenge stereotypes, broadens perspectives, and contributes to the development of inclusive policies. Political education and awareness empower women to understand and engage with political processes. A politically informed woman is better equipped to navigate societal expectations, contribute to policymaking, and advocate for her rights. However, the relationship between women's selfhood and politics underscores the interconnectedness of personal identity, societal

structures, and political systems. Empowering women politically not only enhances their individual agency but also contributes to the creation of more equitable and inclusive societies.

Scott (2020) described the impact of dementia on the selfhood and identity of women is explored through a social constructionist approach, recognizing that identity is not an intrinsic, fixed quality but rather a socially constructed concept. In the context of dementia, this perspective acknowledges the role of societal norms, cultural expectations, and interpersonal relationships in shaping an individual's sense of self. The progressive cognitive decline associated with dementia challenges conventional notions of selfhood, as memory loss and cognitive impairments alter the continuity of one's narrative. The social constructionist lens emphasizes the importance of examining the societal discourse surrounding dementia, how it influences perceptions of identity, and how individuals, particularly women, navigate the evolving landscape of selfhood within the context of this neurodegenerative condition. Understanding the social construction of identity in the face of dementia contributes to more compassionate and person-centered approaches to care and support for affected individuals.

Jamal (2006) research exploration of women's selfhood in the context of gender, citizenship, and the nation-state in Pakistan is a multifaceted inquiry into the intricate interplay of identity and societal constructs. In a nation where cultural norms and traditional roles often shape gender roles, women's selfhood becomes a complex negotiation within the realms of citizenship and national identity. The study on this subject delves into the challenges and opportunities faced by Pakistani women as they navigate societal expectations, political structures, and cultural dynamics. It scrutinizes how state policies, legal frameworks, and citizenship rights contribute to or hinder the realization of women's selfhood. The study examines grassroots movements and advocacy efforts that challenge traditional norms and strive for a more inclusive understanding of women's roles in the construction of the nation-state. The literature collectively paints a nuanced picture of women's selfhood, shedding light on the dynamic relationship between gender, citizenship, and the construction of the Pakistani national identity.

### **Research Methodology:**

The present study employs a qualitative approach, drawing on secondary sources to analyze and interpret the complex dynamics of women's participation in politics in the Pakistani context. The qualitative research approach utilizes thematic analysis to identify recurrent themes, patterns, and key insights. This study aims to uncover the challenges, opportunities, and stakeholder contributions in facilitating or hindering women's quest for selfhood in politics. The present research draws attention to women's empowerment and political sociology. Through a qualitative lens, the study seeks to contribute nuanced perspectives to the ongoing discourse on women's political agency in Pakistan, shedding light on the intricate interplay between women, stakeholders, the political landscape and the socio-cultural context in Pakistan.

### **Significance of the Study**

The study on the "Quest for New Women Selfhood in Pakistan's Politics and the Role of Stakeholders" holds significant implications for both academic discourse and practical policymaking. In a country like Pakistan, where women's participation in politics faces multifaceted challenges rooted in societal norms, cultural barriers, and systemic inequalities, understanding the dynamics of women's quest for selfhood within the political sphere is essential. By examining the roles and interactions of various stakeholders, including political parties, civil society organizations, governmental institutions, and the broader community, the study sheds light on the complex dynamics shaping women's political agency and empowerment.

Moreover, it offers insights into the strategies, mechanisms, and interventions necessary to overcome barriers and foster an environment conducive to women's meaningful participation in politics. By addressing the Intersectionality of gender, culture, and politics, the study contributes to broader discussions on democratization, gender equality, and social justice, offering valuable insights for policymakers, activists, and scholars seeking to advance women's rights and empowerment in Pakistan and beyond.

## **Discussions**

### **Role of International Organizations for Women Political Empowerment**

Various international organizations play significant roles in promoting women's political empowerment globally. The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) leads efforts to mainstream gender equality and women's empowerment across all areas of the UN's work, including political participation. UN Women provides technical assistance, capacity-building programs, and advocacy support to governments and civil society organizations to enhance women's representation in politics and decision-making processes. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) works closely with national parliaments to promote gender-sensitive policies, increase the number of women parliamentarians, and foster a conducive environment for women's political participation. Additionally, organizations like the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) support women's leadership development, electoral reform, and civic education initiatives to strengthen women's engagement in political processes at local, national, and international levels. Through their collective efforts, these organizations contribute to advancing gender equality, promoting women's rights, and building more inclusive democracies worldwide. Chaban et al (2017)

### **Gender Gap in Pakistan Politics**

The gender gap in Pakistan politics remains a significant challenge, with women severely underrepresented in decision-making positions at all levels of government. Despite constitutional provisions and electoral quotas aimed at promoting women's participation, cultural, social, and structural barriers persist, limiting women's access to political power. Deep-rooted patriarchal norms, discriminatory practices, and limited educational opportunities hinder women's ability to contest elections, engage in political activism, and hold leadership roles. Furthermore, issues such as violence against women, lack of support networks, and inadequate access to resources further marginalize women's participation in the political sphere. While progress has been made in recent years with the election of women to parliament and provincial assemblies, the gender gap in Pakistan politics underscores the urgent need for comprehensive reforms, targeted interventions, and societal transformation to ensure equitable representation and meaningful participation of women in governance and decision-making processes. Raza & Soahiab (2010)

### **Women Political Elites in the History of Pakistan Politics**

In the history of Pakistan politics, women political elites have played pivotal roles despite facing significant challenges and barriers. Prominent figures such as Benazir Bhutto, the first woman Prime Minister of Pakistan, and Fatima Jinnah, a key figure in the independence movement, have left indelible marks on the nation's political landscape. Benazir Bhutto's leadership during turbulent times and her advocacy for democracy and women's rights inspired generations of women to engage in politics. Similarly, Fatima Jinnah's courageous stance against authoritarianism and her role as a symbol of resilience and patriotism remain iconic in Pakistan's history. Despite their contributions, women political elites in Pakistan have encountered systemic sexism, societal prejudices, and targeted violence, underscoring the enduring challenges faced by

women in attaining and maintaining positions of political power. However, their legacy serves as a beacon of hope and resilience, inspiring women across Pakistan to continue striving for equal representation and participation in the political arena. Jabeen (2013)

### **First Period of Women Participation in Pakistan's Politics 1947-2000**

Since Pakistan's independence in 1947, women's participation in politics and parliament has been marked by notable figures who have defied societal norms and political barriers to make significant contributions to the nation's governance. Begum Ra'ana Liaquat Ali Khan, the wife of Pakistan's first Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan, was a pioneering figure who championed women's rights and welfare initiatives. In the early years of Pakistan's history, women like Fatima Jinnah, the sister of the founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah, emerged as influential political figures, advocating for democracy and social reform. However, it was under the leadership of Benazir Bhutto that women's political representation saw a significant boost. Benazir Bhutto, who served as Prime Minister in the 1980s and 1990s, not only shattered glass ceilings but also emphasized the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment in Pakistani society. Other notable women leaders during this period include Nusrat Bhutto, Begum Nasim Wali Khan, and Begum Kulsoom Nawaz, who played active roles in shaping Pakistan's political landscape. Despite facing immense challenges, including gender-based discrimination and violence, these women political elites paved the way for greater gender inclusivity in Pakistan's parliament and politics during the latter half of the 20th century. Their contributions laid the groundwork for subsequent generations of women leaders to continue advocating for gender equality and progressive change in Pakistan's political arena. Bano (2009)

### **Second Period of Women Participation in Pakistan's Politics 2000 to 2023**

Since the turn of the millennium, women's participation in Pakistan's politics and parliament has continued to evolve, with several prominent figures making significant contributions to the country's governance. Notably, Benazir Bhutto remained a central figure in Pakistani politics until her assassination in 2007. As the first woman to lead a Muslim-majority nation, Bhutto's leadership inspired many women to engage in politics despite facing numerous challenges and threats to her safety. Following Bhutto's tragic death, her party, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), continued to be led by prominent women politicians such as Hina Rabbani Khar, who served as Pakistan's Foreign Minister in 2011, becoming the youngest and first woman to hold the position. Similarly, Sherry Rehman, known for her advocacy on human rights and women's issues, has been a prominent voice within the PPP. In addition to the PPP, other political parties have also seen women rise to prominent positions. For instance, Maryam Nawaz, the daughter of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, has emerged as a key figure within the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), actively engaging in political discourse and mobilizing support for her party. Furthermore, women like Asma Jahangir, a renowned human rights lawyer and activist, have contributed to shaping Pakistan's political discourse through their advocacy for democratic values and social justice. Despite persistent challenges, including gender-based discrimination and violence, women political elites in Pakistan have continued to play influential roles in shaping the country's political landscape, advocating for gender equality, and advancing the rights of women and marginalized communities. Prominent females in Pakistani politics are, Zubaida Jalal, Fahmeeda Mirza, Zartaj Gul, Shela Raza, Andleeb Abas, Sania Nishter, Manika Bukhari, Farzana Raja, Kushbakhat Shujat, Sherry Rehman, Saira Bano, Tehmina Doultana, Uzma Kardar, Kashmala Tariq, Shumaila Farooqi, Shazia Marri, Kanwal Shauzab and others.

### **Barriers for women selfhood and empowerment in Pakistan**

Despite progress, women in the 21st century continue to face several barriers that impede their ability to fully realize their selfhood and potential. These barriers are often rooted in deep-seated societal norms, discriminatory practices, and structural inequalities. Persistent gender discrimination and stereotypes limit women's choices and opportunities. Preconceived notions about traditional gender roles can restrict their pursuit of diverse careers, education, and personal aspirations. In certain regions, limited access to quality education remains a significant barrier for women. Socioeconomic factors, cultural norms, and security concerns can hinder girls' enrollment and completion of education, limiting their intellectual and professional development.

The gender pay gap persists in many industries, reflecting systemic inequalities. Women often earn less than their male counterparts for the same work, impacting their economic independence and contributing to broader gender disparities. Discrimination in the workplace, including bias in hiring, promotion, and unequal treatment, poses barriers to women's professional advancement. Workplace cultures that tolerate harassment or lack flexibility can hinder their career growth.

A digital gender divide exists, with women facing limited access to technology and digital skills. This divide can hinder their participation in the digital economy and limit opportunities for online education and networking. In some contexts, insufficient legal protections for women's rights, including gaps in legislation addressing domestic violence and marital rape, can leave women vulnerable to discrimination and abuse. Women belonging to marginalized groups, such as those from minority communities or with disabilities, may face compounded barriers due to Intersectionality, making it crucial to address multiple layers of discrimination.

Addressing these barriers requires a comprehensive and intersectional approach, involving changes in societal attitudes, legal reforms, and supportive policies to create an environment where women can fully embrace their selfhood and contribute to society on equal terms. In the 21st century, several enabling factors have emerged to empower women in shaping their roles and selfhood. Access to quality education stands as a fundamental catalyst, equipping women with the knowledge and skills necessary for personal and professional growth. Equal employment opportunities and supportive workplace policies, such as fair hiring practices and work-life balance, contribute to women's economic empowerment. Robust legal protections, addressing gender-based discrimination and violence, create an environment conducive to women's rights. Increased political representation ensures women's voices are heard in decision-making processes. Healthcare access and awareness programs contribute to women's overall well-being, while economic opportunities and entrepreneurship foster financial independence. Positive media representations challenge stereotypes, and digital inclusion provides women with access to information and opportunities. Supportive social norms, community networks, and intersectional approaches further contribute to dismantling barriers, fostering a more inclusive and equitable environment where women can define their roles on their own terms.

### **Challenges for women selfhood and empowerment in Pakistan**

Pakistani women face a range of challenges in their pursuit of selfhood and empowerment. Gender-based discrimination and deeply entrenched cultural norms often limit their opportunities. Access to education remains a significant hurdle, particularly in rural areas where traditional values may prioritize boys' education over girls'. Workplace discrimination, including unequal pay and limited career advancement, persists, reinforcing gender disparities. Women also grapple with societal expectations that may curtail their choices in marriage, family, and professional life. Moreover, instances of gender-based violence, including honor killings and

domestic abuse, continue to pose serious threats to women's well-being. Legal reforms addressing these issues are in progress, but their implementation and societal acceptance remain ongoing challenges. Cultural and societal norms often reinforce traditional gender roles, making it essential to continue advocating for change to ensure Pakistani women can fully realize their selfhood in the face of these obstacles.

### **Opportunities for women selfhood and empowerment in Pakistan**

In the 21st century, Pakistani women have encountered transformative opportunities that contribute to their selfhood and empowerment. Increasing access to education, supported by scholarships and initiatives, has empowered women to pursue higher studies and diverse career paths. Entrepreneurial opportunities have expanded, with initiatives encouraging women-led businesses, fostering innovation and economic contributions. Efforts to enhance political representation have resulted in improved visibility for women in governance, enabling them to shape policies and advocate for their communities. Legal reforms addressing gender disparities and protecting women's rights signify a more supportive environment. The media and arts industry has recognized the contributions of Pakistani women, allowing them to challenge stereotypes and shape cultural narratives. The rise of digital platforms has given women a global voice, fostering connectivity, community, and advocacy. Health and well-being initiatives, supported by NGOs, contribute to the overall welfare of Pakistani women. These opportunities collectively signify a positive shift, allowing women in Pakistan to navigate and redefine their roles in the 21st century on their own terms.

### **Role of stakeholders for women selfhood**

Safdar & Ghani (2018), various stakeholders play crucial roles in shaping the opportunities and challenges that Pakistani women face in defining their selfhood in the 21st century. These stakeholders encompass government bodies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the private sector, the media, and the wider society.

The government holds a pivotal role in implementing policies that support gender equality, education, and economic opportunities. Legislation addressing issues such as workplace discrimination, violence against women, and family laws significantly impacts women's selfhood. Non-governmental organizations and civil society groups play a vital role in advocating for women's rights, providing support services, and initiating community-based programs. They often bridge gaps in education, healthcare, and economic empowerment, contributing to women's autonomy.

The private sector can promote women's empowerment by creating inclusive workplaces, ensuring equal pay, and providing opportunities for career growth. Supporting women entrepreneurs and businesses led by women contributes to economic empowerment and self-reliance. The media plays a crucial role in shaping societal perceptions. Positive and diverse representations of women in media contribute to challenging stereotypes and promoting a more inclusive narrative, fostering a sense of selfhood that goes beyond traditional roles.

Schools and universities contribute significantly to shaping women's selfhood by providing access to quality education and promoting a supportive learning environment. Educational institutions play a role in breaking down gender stereotypes and fostering critical thinking. Meanwhile, International organizations can provide support through funding, expertise, and collaborative initiatives. They can influence policies and advocate for women's rights on a global scale, fostering an environment conducive to the empowerment of Pakistani women.

Religious institutions can play a role in interpreting religious texts to promote gender equality and discourage discriminatory practices. Positive engagement with religious leaders can



contribute to changing societal attitudes towards women's roles. Additionally, local leaders and influencers within communities play a crucial role in shaping cultural norms and attitudes. Their support for women's rights and empowerment initiatives can contribute to changing mindsets at the grassroots level.

Basu (2010), Families play a fundamental role in shaping women's selfhood. Supportive family environments that encourage education, career aspirations, and individual choices contribute significantly to women's empowerment. Women themselves are key stakeholders in their selfhood. Their determination, resilience, and active participation in societal and economic activities contribute to breaking barriers and reshaping their roles in the 21st century. However, collaboration and coordination among these stakeholders are essential to create a comprehensive and supportive ecosystem that empowers Pakistani women, allowing them to define their selfhood on their own terms and contribute meaningfully to society.

### **Conclusion**

In the 21st century, Pakistani women have experienced transformative changes, emerging as dynamic contributors to various facets of society. Overcoming traditional norms, an increasing number of Pakistani women have pursued higher education and ventured into diverse professional fields, challenging stereotypes, and expanding their roles in the workforce. This era has witnessed a rise in women's political participation, with notable representation in both local and national governance. Entrepreneurs, artists, and activists have emerged, using their voices to reshape cultural narratives and advocate for women's rights. Despite persistent challenges, such as gender-based violence and cultural expectations, Pakistani women exhibit resilience and determination, leveraging digital platforms to amplify their stories and promote social change. The evolving roles of Pakistani women in the 21st century reflect a complex interplay of tradition, progress, and a steadfast commitment to defining their selfhood on their own terms.

Women's selfhood is intricately connected to politics, encompassing their individual identities, aspirations, and agency within the political landscape. When women actively engage in political processes as voters, advocates, or leaders, they shape policies that directly impact their lives. Political decisions influence key aspects of women's selfhood, including their access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. Advocacy for women's rights and participation in feminist movements becomes an expression of women's agency, challenging societal norms and contributing to a more inclusive understanding of selfhood. The representation of women in political arenas is pivotal, offering diverse perspectives and breaking stereotypes. Women in politics often navigate gender biases, demanding resilience and a strong sense of self as they work towards legislative changes that address issues such as discrimination and violence. Ultimately, the relationship between women's selfhood and politics is dynamic, reflecting the reciprocal influence between individual identities and the broader political landscape.

### **Further Suggestions:**

#### **Legal Reforms and Implementation:**

Strengthen the implementation of existing laws and policies aimed at promoting women's political participation, including electoral quotas and affirmative action measures. Enact additional legislation to address gender-based discrimination and violence against women in politics, ensuring accountability for perpetrators and protection for victims.

#### **Institutional Support:**

Enhance the capacity and resources of institutions responsible for promoting gender equality and women's rights, such as the National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) and the

Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). Establish mechanisms within political parties to promote women's leadership development, provide training opportunities, and create inclusive decision-making processes.

**Improving Literacy and Education:**

Invest in education initiatives aimed at improving female literacy rates and promoting gender-sensitive curricula that emphasize civic education, political awareness, and leadership skills. Implement programs to eliminate barriers to education for girls, including addressing economic constraints, cultural norms, and geographical challenges.

**Enhancing Women's Participation:**

Encourage women's participation at all levels of politics, from local government bodies to national assemblies, through awareness campaigns, outreach programs, and mentorship opportunities. Facilitate networking and collaboration among women leaders and activists to build solidarity, share best practices, and amplify their voices in political discourse.

**International Support and Collaboration:**

Forge partnerships with international organizations, donor agencies, and diplomatic missions to access technical expertise, financial resources, and knowledge-sharing platforms to advance women's political empowerment initiatives. Advocate for international commitments and conventions, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), to be integrated into national legislation and policy frameworks.

In shaping the roles of Pakistani women in the 21st century and fostering their selfhood, a myriad of stakeholders play instrumental roles. The government's policies and legislative framework significantly impact women's rights, education, and economic opportunities. Non-governmental organizations and civil society groups contribute through advocacy and community-based programs, addressing gaps in education and healthcare. The private sector influences women's selfhood by creating inclusive workplaces and supporting women-led businesses. Media and arts stakeholders play a crucial role in challenging stereotypes and shaping positive narratives. Educational institutions and community leaders contribute to changing societal attitudes, while international organizations provide support and advocacy on a global scale. Religious institutions and families, as primary influencers, are integral in fostering supportive environments for women's empowerment. Ultimately, the collective efforts of these stakeholders are essential in creating an inclusive and empowering landscape.

By implementing these recommendations, Pakistan can create an enabling environment that empowers women politically, strengthens democratic institutions, and fosters inclusive governance practices conducive to gender equality and social progress.

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