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## **The Role of Political Parties in Political Empowerment of Transgender in Pakistan: A Case Study of Lahore (2008-2024)**

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### **Abstract**

Among all the marginalized minorities in Pakistan, the Transgender community must rank among the most oppressed and violated groups of Pakistan. In this research paper, a critical analysis of how the political parties contributed to the development and enactment of transgender rights laws in Pakistan between 2008 and 2024 is discussed with Lahore as a case study. It specifically draws attention to two pieces of historic legislation, the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018, and the Amendment Act, 2022. The study employs a qualitative case study method and uses secondary sources of data, revealing legislative materials, media articles, and statements. The research finds that although certain political parties have supported the legislation and representation of transgender people, others have worked against these initiatives or weakened them. It concludes that although certain legal milestones have been achieved, the absence of implementation, and the growing conservative discourse still pose a challenge to the actualization of transgender rights in Pakistan. Through its localized approach to the issue, the study will add to the existing body of knowledge about the influence of political processes on the rights of marginalized groups and the significance of political will in the legislative protection and social integration.

**Key Words:** Political Parties, Transgender Rights, Transgender Person Act 2018 (Protection of Rights), Amendment Act 2022, Marginalized Community, Gender Identity, Lahore, Political Empowerment.

### **Introduction**

Among all the marginalized minorities in Pakistan, the Transgender community must rank among the most oppressed and violated groups of Pakistan. I am choosing the case study of Lahore from 2008 to 2024, because there was a shift from the military rule of General Pervez Musharraf to the democratic rule of the Pakistan People's Party in 2008. Due to that democratic rule, political parties came into

power, and legislative measures regarding transgender rights began. The country took legislative action to reduce inequalities, but its execution and acceptance by citizens remain unsteady. The political party system needs to focus on transgender empowerment because it determines legislative changes and controls public attitudes regarding social inclusion. Transgender activism has strengthened in Pakistan through major political and legal achievements, but several barriers limit transgender people from achieving full political participation.

The research investigates political party actions toward transgender empowerment from 2008 to 2024 by evaluating their policy strategies and their electoral presence and advocacy work. Throughout history, transgender individuals who locals call *Khawaja siras* maintained their special position within South Asian culture. The pre-colonial societies recognized transgender individuals and showed them respect until British colonial laws began to criminalize non-heteronormative identities through the Criminal Tribes Act in 1871 (Rehan, 2020). After independence, transgender persons faced ongoing socio-political exclusion from major aspects of political and economic, and social life. In 2009, Pakistan established major transgender rights by granting the Supreme Court recognition to transgender individuals as separate from male and female categories, giving them the right to obtain national identity cards (Nadra, 2009). The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018, became the most crucial legal development by offering legal recognition to transgender people and blocking discriminatory barriers in their employment and education while enabling them to pick their official gender designation (Government of Pakistan, 2018). The progressive legal framework surrounding transgender rights has received support, yet political parties demonstrate sluggishness towards implementing participation policies for transgender citizens in government programs.

Pakistani transgender participants have shown rising political involvement in recent times, though major problems persist within political environments. Thirteen transgender candidates entered the 2018 general election by contesting different national seats (Dawn 2018). The political candidates' first appearance in elections became a historical moment, but financial difficulties prevented their success, alongside insufficient party backing, along societal prejudice negatively affected their election chances. The extent of transgender rights support within Pakistani political parties varies across different political groups. The Pakistan People's Party (PPP), together with Awami Workers Party (AWP), leads the political support for transgender rights alongside their advocacy for inclusion. The PPP became the first party to create Senate legislation for transgender protection (PPP, 2017). Right-wing and conservative political parties headed by PTI and JUI show resistance to backing transgender rights because of their religious and cultural standpoints (The Express Tribune, 2022). The political rights of transgender individuals strongly depend on the ideological positions of political parties in Pakistan. Political parties show varying levels of support for transgender rights, yet most parties prevent transgender people from holding leadership positions or making policy decisions (UNDP Pakistan, 2023). Transgender individuals avoid political participation because institutional support is absent. The 2018 elections exposed the electoral and voting challenges that transgender candidates encountered because of financial limitations and security threats, and voter rejection (Election Commission of Pakistan, 2018). Transgender individuals in Pakistan experience extreme vulnerability to

discrimination and violence throughout society. Multiple reports document targeted killings and other violent incidents against transgender individuals throughout recent years (The News International, 2024). The hostile environment prevents numerous people from participating in political activities openly.

### **Literature Review**

Pakistan lacks the political participation of minorities. In colonial rule, the British enacted the Criminal Tribes Act 1871 and branded transgender community and other social minorities, a threat to public order and morality. Later on in 2009, the Supreme Court of Pakistan passed an act for transgender protections, and in 2011, they were given the right to cast a vote, and then later on in 2018, thirteen transgender individuals contested the election. The marginalization of this community also depends on the lack of awareness among transgender people about their rights. (Akhtar et al.,2021)

Multiple research investigations have studied the legal system that Pakistan has in place regarding transgender rights. As a major legislative achievement, the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018, granted transgender people the capability to self-determine their gender identity while providing protections and giving them access to education and employment (Khan, 2019).

Legal protections exist, but studies show these safeguards have no meaningful impact on the ground since Pakistani society maintains resistance and key institutions lack support, as well as conservative groups oppose transgender rights (Jamal, 2021). The legislation encounters opposition from religious groups, which drives calls for amendments that could damage its operational outcomes (Malik & Qureshi, 2022).

Academic experts observe that transgender people do not achieve proper representation in the political process. During the 2018 elections, Pakistani transgender candidates took part in their first electoral run, although they faced setbacks from insufficient party endorsement along with insufficient campaign funds (Riaz 2020). The Pakistan People's Party (PPP), together with other left-leaning political forces, serves as the leading advocate for transgender rights, while JJ and JUI-F, alongside other right-wing factions, work actively against transgender inclusion reforms (Ali, 2023).

The political parties operating within Pakistan demonstrate varied methods to handle transgender rights issues. The PPP, together with the Awami Workers Party (AWP), relies on progressive policies to support transgender rights, and the PPP became instrumental in passing the 2018 Transgender Act. (Ahmed & Saleem, 2022). Right-wing parties together with religious groups oppose transgender rights because they believe these rights violate Islamic values, which results in extensive misinformation efforts (Rehman, 2023).

Most scholars suggest Pakistan's political system demonstrates superficial transgender involvement instead of serving their needs effectively (Nasir & Khan, 2021). Political parties end up endorsing transgender rights only when these matters help them win elections or build favourable global reputations, but not because of authentic social justice principles (Siddiqui, 2020).

The PML-N's manifesto supports a policy that makes efforts to secure and promote inclusive development for all sectors of society in Pakistan, mostly focusing on women, children, minorities, and the transgender community. We can notice that mainstream political perspectives now recognize the need to officially protect the rights of marginalized people and help them get more involved. Some of the progressive policies supported by the PML-N are legal reforms, support for important institutions, and the introduction of ways to prevent and inspect rights violations with the aim of giving equal rights to everyone. The party made it clear that they aim to apply the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act and include more from the transgender community in the public sector, schools, and jobs. The writings by Phillips (1995) and Fraser (2003) about inclusive politics underline that empowerment can only be achieved with both identity recognition and distribution of resources. Here, PML-N helps social inclusion by linking laws that protect rights with the country's economic matters. Yet, the document does not give the specific steps or deadlines necessary for carrying out its promises, and this is a common issue found in electoral manifestos related to rights-based governance (Hassim, 2006; Rai, 2008). Though it discusses minority and gender-related matters, the manifesto fails to present any practical steps, such as affirmative actions and quotas that can improve transgender participation and representation of religious minorities.

### **Materials and Methods**

This paper contains a qualitative case study design to understand how the political parties play a role in the political empowerment of transgender people in Lahore, Pakistan, between the years 2008 and 2024. A qualitative framework has been used because it is well adapted to examining the intricate social phenomenon, especially the ideological, legislative, and representational functions of political parties. Such an approach enables deep analysis of the political discourses, policy reports, and lived experiences, and focuses on the overlap of political ideologies (the left and the right) and transgender rights movement in the Pakistani context. The exploratory analysis is incorporated in the research design in order to examine how the political institutions have framed, supported, or opposed transgender issues. Academic journal articles, research reports, government policy reports, and media coverage are some of the sources of secondary data. The main data interpretation method is the content analysis. The method helped the researcher to recognize common themes, patterns of ideologies, and contradictions in political discourses and systems of policies. Parliamentary records, party manifestos, official documents, and interviews are coded to show the stance of different political parties - particularly how left-wing parties, such as the Pakistan People (PPP) and Awami Workers Party (AWP) differ concerning right-wing and religious parties, including Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F), Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), and elements of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) on the legislation and discourse of transgender rights.

### **Result and Discussion**

Over the period of 16 years from 2008 to 2024, this study gives a clear insight into how and through which ideologies and manifestos of the political parties, the legislation, and the society's attitude toward transgender people were changed. By focusing on the political parties, this study bridges an important gap between activism, policy making, and academic research. It offers a useful perspective to

stakeholders on how to design a framework for inclusive government. Another importance of the study is that the provincial concentration is specifically focused on Lahore, the capital of Punjab. Transgender persons' situation in Lahore is rather unique due to the political, cultural, and socio-economic specifics of the region, which have impacts on national tendencies, so the study of the situation in Lahore (Punjab) will be particularly revealing for understanding the dynamics of the situation with transgender individuals in Pakistan.

Despite academic works and awareness, transgender role in Political participation, social inclusivity, and media representation remains underexplored. Many other factors, such as race and ethnicity, have been ignored and have an important role in the social and political empowerment of transgender individuals (Intersectional Analysis). This research will investigate how political parties have influenced the socio-political empowerment of transgender people through their support and contradiction to the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018, and the amended Act 2022. The engagement of political parties in both policy development and public opinion transformation, and inclusive government, makes their advocacy for transgender rights inconsistent. Left-leaning and progressive parties show support for transgender rights, but right-wing and conservative parties typically oppose inclusive policies because of their religious and cultural beliefs. The political disagreement regarding transgender rights fragments policy options, which restricts these individuals from achieving meaningful influence in government processes. Transgender individuals face multiple obstacles, including political party discrimination and insufficient electoral process funding and institutional backing, as well as social prejudice and physical threats.

The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018, matches numerous international human rights obligations, yet its implementation remains inconsistent because conservative groups inside Pakistan oppose its enforcement (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Political parties must play a vital role by supporting policies that match global human rights standards to help Pakistan fulfil its international transgender rights obligations. The research investigates how international treaties affect domestic transgender rights policies while studying political party reactions to these international obligations. So here, we will also look into the key differences and similarities that exist between the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018, and the amendment act 2022, and also the views and approach of right and left-wing political parties in Pakistan toward these acts. The key similarities in these acts include access to basic facilities such as health and education, protection from discrimination and violence, recognition of gender identity, legal documentation, and social involvement. But on the other hand, the existing differences are as follows:

**Table 1:** *Difference between Transgender Protection Act 2018 and the Amendment act 2022*

<b>Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018</b>	<b>Amendment Act 2022</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allowed self-recognition of gender identity.</li> <li>• This act prohibits discrimination, violence, and harassment against transgender individuals.</li> <li>• Passed under the government of Pakistan People Party and implemented under Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), and supported by PML-N, PPP, ANP</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Removed self-perceived gender identity and introduced the formation of a medical board for gender identity.</li> <li>• Changed inheritance laws to be based on birth-assigned sex.</li> <li>• Supported by right-wing parties, including JI, JUI-F, and PTI factions due to religious pressure.</li> </ul>

Along with that, some human rights activists and LGBTQ+ advocates have also shown their concern and opposed the amendment act by saying it denies basic transgender rights and empowerment. Both the right and left-wing political parties have different stances regarding these acts based on their ideologies.

**Table 2:** *Stance of Different Political Parties*

<b>Right-Wing Parties (JI, JUI-F, PTI Factions)</b>	<b>Left-Wing Parties (PPP, ANP, Some PML-N members)</b>
Support transgender laws on a religious and traditional basis.	The left-wing political parties advocate equal rights for transgender community.
They consider Transgender Act 2018 as un-Islamic.	They support Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018.
Supports the formation of a medical board for gender identity.	According to them, self-perceived gender identity aligns with human rights principles.
They link this act with LGBTQ+ rights and also consider it a Western influence.	They think that the Amendment Act 2022 is a back step in achieving transgender rights.

From overall debate, where transgender community have experienced positive impact in protecting their basic rights, beside this, they have been facing negative impacts such as reduction in inheritance rights and create legal confusion. Although the PML-N are not against the transgender act, but they even did not do anything to implement this act. So, this study will analyse and elaborate the role of political parties in protecting and preaching the rights of transgender in the social and political context through legislation and ideologies.

Research on transgender empowerment in Lahore from 2008 until 2024 requires an assessment using the approach of Social Constructivism Theory to understand political party involvement. These explanations investigate how societal values form transgender identities while political actors decide on transgender inclusion through their assessment of advantages and disadvantages.

### **Theory of Social Constructivism**

According to Social Constructivism, knowledge, identity, and social life come from society's interactions, not from some pre-existing place. It claims that our experiences of reality are influenced by what we interact with in life, culture, words, shared beliefs, and events of the past (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). This theory was formed from sociology, education, and international relations and argues against seeing gender as something fixed by nature. Social Constructivism shares that collective ideas and the influence of ideology drive people's actions, norms, and laws. This theory within gender identity, Social Constructivism, sees gender as formed by social interactions such as the ways we speak about it, our social behaviors, and official government recognition (Butler, 1990; Gergen, 1999). That is most relevant for transgender individuals because their daily lives go against traditional notions of gender.

In Pakistan, society has created specific meanings for transgender identity, starting with Khawaja Siras' influence in the Mughal courts, their outlawing by the British, and the neglect they faced afterwards (Rehan, 2020). They reveal that transgender identity changes based on major ideas and the power of official institutions, not on genetics alone.

Analysis of how parties in Pakistan address, challenge, or alter the status of transgender individuals can be facilitated with Social Constructivism. Culture, religion, news images, and international human rights discussions often help to define the decisions made by political institutions (Wendt, 1999). For example, left parties such as the PPP and AWP usually agree with progressive views on human rights and gender equality, which gives a new understanding of inclusion (Ahmed & Saleem, 2022). When it comes to gender, JUI-F and JI from the right typically say the 2018 Transgender Act is against Islam and foreign-driven. Both parties are influencing people's opinions on gender and rights by taking action, passing laws, and sharing narratives (Siddiqui, 2020).

Viewing things from Social Constructivism makes it easier to understand how international treaties (like UDHR, CEDAW, and Yogyakarta Principles) are understood in Pakistan. Yet, although these models try to make human rights universal, their use in a country has to be seen through how political participants build and agree on legitimacy and moral issues within a local discourse (Qazi, 2022; Shah, 2020).

In the framework of transgender emancipation, this theory assists in the understanding of how the construction of gender diversity in Lahore has been viewed, and these constructions have impacted the exclusion or incorporation of transgender people. Transgender rights in Pakistan suffer from historical, cultural and religious, and political narratives that establish gender as a fixed binary value.

As essential establishments within society, political parties serve dual functions to either propagate or oppose characteristic norms established among society members. Under pre-colonial Pakistan society, Khawaja Siras received social respect, but British colonial rule brought about their systematic discrimination (Rehan, 2020). The process of marginalization started during colonial times and continues through current times because political parties maintain orthodox societal beliefs.

The public perception of transgender individuals develops through multiple factors, including how they are represented in media, along with religious remarks and legal authorities. Right-wing political parties, along with conservative organizations, opposed the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018, because they aligned with established gender norms (Human Rights Watch, 2021). This study investigates whether political parties support or disrupt constructed perceptions of transgender individuals by evaluating their policy initiatives and statements, and political enactments

### **Conclusion**

This paper has addressed the rather ambiguous and conflicting nature of the role of political parties in delivering a legislative and socio-political environment in favor of transgender rights in Pakistan, and more specifically in Lahore between the years of 2008 and 2024. This study has found that the issue of transgender empowerment has been largely affected by the political ideologies, religious opinions, and electoral interests of how various parties deal with the matter. Whilst leftist parties like Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Awami Workers Party (AWP) have supported transgender-inclusive policies, including the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018, rightist parties, Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F) have been in the forefront to oppose these policies, on religious and cultural grounds. The analysis of the 2018 Act and the 2022 Amendment Act demonstrates the vulnerability of human rights protection to political change and the pressure of society. The addition of a medical board in the 2022 Amendment and the modification of inheritance rights serve as an example of how conservative power can take away the progressive legal achievements. Despite parties publicly declaring their support for transgender rights in their manifestos, little is done to implement them in practice; this is as a result of a lack of political will, opposition by society, and institutional reinforcements. Under the concept of Social Constructivism, the given research emphasizes that transgender identity and rights in Pakistan are historically and socially constructed aspects dependent on power structures, historical narratives, and political discourses. Trans people remain marginalized not due to some inherent societal principles but because these principles are created and supported by political forces and establishments.

Thus, empowering transgender community in Pakistan will not be possible by merely passing laws, but a long-term political will by parties, laced with social awareness, comprehensive education, and execution machinery. The example of Lahore is representative of the country and becomes a vivid reflection and a mirror of all the steps that have been made and issues that remain pending to achieve transgender rights in Pakistan.



## **Recommendations**

The following are some of the recommendations based upon my analysis and assumptions:

- Make sure that the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018, is effectively implemented by establishing the institutional framework of monitoring, reporting, and enforcement.
- Withdraw or review the Amendment Act 2022, particularly those parts that go against international best practices on human rights.
- The political parties must also institutionalize transgender people within their ranks, not just as candidates but also in policy formulation committees and decision-making organs.
- Establish a reserved seat or quotas for transgender persons in the local and national assemblies to ensure political representation.
- The manifestos of all the major parties should lay out measurable steps that they will take regarding transgender rights, with timeframes and systems of responsibility.
- Carry out nationwide sensitization campaigns to educate the masses on gender diversity, human rights, and to destroy myths and stigma.
- Include gender courses and LGBTQ + rights in the programs of schools and universities.
- The political parties ought to work with the NGOs, transgender rights groups, and global human rights institutions to come up with inclusive policy platforms.
- Bring domestic laws into conformity with international treaties, like CEDAW, UDHR, and the Yogyakarta Principles.
- Empirical studies regarding the socio-political situation of transgender people should be financed by the government and used as the basis of policy making.
- Establish a mainline database recording the instances of discrimination, violence, and political involvement of transgender individuals.

## **Conflict of Interest**

The authors showed no conflict of interest.

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