



What is a caucus?

According to Cambridge Dictionary, a caucus is **“a small group of people in a political party or organization who have a lot of influence or who have similar interests.**

According to Encyclopedia Britannica: Caucus is a **“political group or meeting organized to further a special interest or cause.**

In the United States, the term came to denote **a meeting of either party managers or voters which nominates candidates for office or selects delegates for a nominating convention.**

The term also denotes **a faction within a legislative body that attempts to pursue common legislative objectives** by influencing either party policy on proposed legislation or legislative offices.

Caucus are sometimes also called **coalitions, study groups, task forces, or working groups.**

Origins

The word caucus originated in Boston, United States, in the early part of the 18th century. It was the **name of a political club, called the Caucus, or the Caucus Club** which hosted public discussions and the election of candidates for public office.

Caucuses around the world



The United States Congress has scores of caucuses. They cover a diverse range of subjects and issues and include **5G caucus, Access to Legal Aid caucus, Addiction, Treatment and Recovery caucus, American Sikh Caucus, Cement Caucus, Climate Solutions Caucus, Coal Caucus, Fragrance Caucus, Friends of Egypt Caucus.**

Many other countries have also started establishing parliamentary caucuses. Some recent examples include:

Rwandan Women Parliamentary Forum

The Uganda Women Parliamentarians Association was instrumental to lobbying for The Indonesian Women's Political Caucus (KPPI) working with women's NGOs In Brazil, the women's caucus votes as a bloc. This has allowed them to pass a quota

Caucuses in Pakistan

A **women parliamentary caucus** has been working in Pakistan since 2008. It was the first of its cross-party forum dedicated to make legislative interventions on women's rights issues. It includes **all the women members** of the National and the Senate; has a rotating presidium which changes in every election cycle; and has a **12 member governing council** that has representation from all the main parliamentary parties as well as both the houses of the parliament.

A **Senate Caucus on climate change** has also been working since 2008. It is headed by **PPP Senator Sherry Rehman.**

A **Sustainable Development Goals Task Force** has been set up in recent years. It is headed by Riaz Fatiana and has 47 members including **such political adversaries as Akhtar Mengal, Shahzain Bugti, Maulana Asad Mehmood** and such technocrats as Andleeb Abbas and Ayesha Ghaus Pasha

What can caucuses do?



According to GSDRC, a partnership of research institutes, think-tanks and consultancy organizations, **gsdrc.org**, caucuses can undertake the following functions:

- Influencing government and political processes by helping to shape the agenda and by providing information and advocacy;
- Raising awareness of an issue by acting as a catalyst for communication between government and civil society, and by providing information and advocacy;
- Acting as a watchdog that concerned individuals and groups are aware when relevant legislation is up for review;
- Providing a platform for members of caucuses to act as spokespeople for their issues, thereby streamlining information and raising awareness;
- Providing oversight of the budget;
- Promoting the legislative implications of international human rights instruments;
- Ensuring that relevant legislation is enforced.

The achievements of caucuses?

The caucuses can achieve a lot as is obvious from the **performance of the of women parliamentary caucus in Pakistan**. Over the last three years, it has

- Managed to get **four acts of parliament passed**. These include:
 - a) The Zainab Alert, Response and Recovery Act, 2020
 - b) The Enforcement of Women's Property Rights Act, 2020
 - c) The Islamabad Capital Territory Rights of Persons with Disability Act, 2020



- Managed to have **one bill passed by the National Assembly and two bills passed by Senate.**
- Managed to introduce **seven bills in Senate.**
- Managed to **introduce 30 bills in the National Assembly**, including four by the government and 26 as private member bills.

Challenges

There is always distrust among caucus members coming from different parties. This is particularly so in the extremely polarized and highly fractured Pakistani politics. One way of addressing this challenge is to develop an inclusive leadership mechanism based on a consultative and collaborative decision-making. In the US Congress, for instances, some caucuses have co-chairs belonging to both the parties.

It is often difficult for caucus members to agree on the best way of addressing disagreements and differences. This challenge can also be addressed through a consultative, collaborative and inclusive leadership mechanism.

Caucuses face administrative and financial barriers and often lack support from parliamentary leaderships. The first part of this challenge can be addressed through secretarial support to be offered by RDPI and SDPI. The other part will be addressed once the caucus starts making itself heard with its legislative interventions and initiatives.

Lessons learnt

The very fact that parliamentarians have organized around a particular issue in the form of a caucus increases the visibility and legitimacy of that issue.



Caucuses have to address tendencies of the majority-group leadership of the various political parties to inject partisan politics into caucus work. It is important, therefore, to have a limited and well-articulated agenda covering only those issues that are of common interest to all involved political groupings -- -- without issues that will cause cross-party disputes.

Non-partisan leadership of these caucuses can be difficult to achieve, but is essential.

Care should be taken to be as inclusive among the parties as possible.

Why do we need a caucus on renewable energy?

A UNDP guide for parliamentarians across the world emphasizes the need for asking the following questions by the members of cross-party parliamentary forums:

- To what extent are we meeting the population's energy needs? What percentage of the population remains without secure energy access?
- Is intermittency an issue? If so, on what scale, and to what extent is this deterring economic development and investments?
- To what extent has rural electrification been achieved? In what region(s) do problems persist, and what solutions have been (or are being) proposed?
- What do projections indicate with regards to future energy demands? Will we be able to meet growing energy needs with our current generation capacity? How much added capacity do we expect to need, and what strategies are in place to secure this?

The guide then stresses upon the fact that **renewable energy will transform economies** the world over in the coming years. It states that the **countries and communities that embrace the potential of new technology** to bring the benefits of electricity to their citizens, while simultaneously reducing carbon emissions, **will see their economies grow**. This is because renewable energy technologies **promote human development by stimulating economic development, mitigating climate change, contributing to energy security and providing important health benefits**.



Making the transition to renewable energy will not be easy but parliamentarians are in a unique position to take action because:

- they are the one group of people who have all the levers needed to act on a problem;
- they vote on laws, impose taxes and approve state budgets;
- they oversee the operations of government and have direct access to Ministers, Prime Ministers and Presidents;
- they can influence national policy, build strong legal frameworks, direct spending in new directions, and establish stronger policies and targets for action on climate change and renewable energy.

In short, the **transition to a post-fossil fuels world will benefit considerably from the support of parliamentarians** ready to use their political capital for the promotion of renewable energy.

Sources: UNDP, GSDRC