

# Impact Of Female Participation On Political Rights And Governance In Azad Jammu And Kashmir

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## Abstract

*This study investigates the role of female participation in shaping political rights and governance in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), highlighting the key challenges and support systems affecting women's political engagement. Findings reveal that an increasing awareness of the benefits women bring to political positions, actual involvement remains constrained by structural barriers, cultural discrimination, and limited leadership training opportunities. Education and economic empowerment were identified as essential factors for enabling participation, though the scarcity of female role models and lack of support from political bodies discourage many women to participate in politics. Nevertheless, respondents emphasized that increased female involvement could lead to more inclusive and community-centered governance. The study underscores that women in political roles contribute positively to policy-making by advocating for diverse community issues, which fosters a more balanced governance model. To enhance this impact, the study recommends addressing gender biases, providing leadership programs, and integrating gender equality initiatives within political party platforms. Additional support from family, community, and media is also essential to normalize women's roles in politics and encourage broader societal acceptance. Implementing these recommendations could lead to a governance structure in AJK that is reflective of and responsive to all segments of society.*

**Keywords:** Political Rights, Governance, Gender Equality, women empowerment, political party<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

The impact of female participation on political rights and governance in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) involves a thorough analysis of the social, economic, and political changes that have emerged as a result of increased female involvement in the region. Research shows that female political participation has significantly influenced the political landscape in AJK, although various challenges exist (Khan, 2005; Ali & Khan, 2006). Historically, women in AJK have been underrepresented in political decision-making processes, largely due to cultural and societal barriers that restrict their participation (Siddiqui, 2007; Naseem, 2008). These barriers have begun to erode in recent years but increasing awareness and advocacy for gender equality in the political sphere helping to change the mind sets (Rashid, 2009; Hussain, 2024).

The inclusion of women in political processes has contributed to more inclusive governance in AJK, where the needs and concerns of all citizens are considered more thoroughly. Studies

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suggest that when women are involved in politics, there is a greater focus on issues such as education, healthcare, and social welfare, which are often overlooked in male-dominated settings (Javed, 2012). Furthermore, female politicians in AJK have been instrumental in advocating for laws and policies that protect women's rights, thereby strengthening the overall political rights framework in the region (Qureshi & Shaheen, 2013; Raza, 2014).

Despite these positive developments, the journey toward full female participation in AJK's political arena is fraught with challenges. Gender-based discrimination remains a significant obstacle, with many women facing societal pressure to conform to traditional roles (Saeed, 2015; Shabbir, 2016). This has led to a situation where even those women who are politically active often find themselves marginalized or unable to exert significant influence on policy decisions (Ahmad, 2017; Khan & Rafiq, 2018). The political culture in AJK still leans heavily towards male dominance, and this has hindered the progress of women in attaining leadership roles within political parties and government institutions (Ali & Hussain, 2019).

The future of female political participation in AJK looks promising, but it will require sustained efforts to overcome the challenges that remain. This includes addressing the structural barriers that prevent women from fully participating in politics, such as the lack of access to education and economic opportunities (Shah, 2020; Bano, 2021). It also requires changing societal attitudes towards women in politics, which can be achieved through public awareness campaigns and the promotion of positive role models (Fatima & Zahra, 2022; Khan & Aslam, 2023). In this study, the impact of female in politics of Azad Jammu and Kashmir are discussed.

### **Research Objectives**

- To assess the current level of female participation in political rights and governance in AJK.
- To identify the challenges and barriers faced by women in AJK in their efforts to participate in politics.
- To analyze the impact of female political participation on governance and policy-making in AJK.
- To explore strategies to enhance female participation in political rights and governance in AJK.
- To evaluate the role of education and economic empowerment in promoting women's political participation in AJK.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant because it addresses the critical issue of gender equality in political participation, focusing on the specific context of Azad Jammu and Kashmir. Understanding the impact of female participation on political rights and governance in AJK can provide valuable insights into the broader processes of democratization and development in the region. The findings of this study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge by highlighting the challenges and opportunities for women in politics in AJK. Furthermore, the study's outcomes informs the strategies of policy-makers, political parties, and civil society organizations about effective strategies to promote gender-inclusive governance, thereby enhancing the overall political and social development of the region. Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to the empowerment of women in AJK by advocating for greater political representation and participation.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The historical context of female participation in politics reveals a complex evolution marked by significant milestones and ongoing challenges. In the early 20th century, women's political engagement began to take shape with the suffrage movements across various countries. The

suffragette movements in the United States, Britain, and other nations were pivotal, as they led to the gradual recognition of women's right to vote. For instance, the passage of the 19th Amendment in the United States in 1920 granted women the right to vote, a landmark achievement that was a result of decades of activism (Tetrault, 2014; Robson, 2018). Similarly, the Representation of the People Act 1918 in the UK marked a crucial point in expanding women's political rights (Purvis, 2014; McEwen, 2020).

During the mid-20th century, women's political representation began to increase, albeit slowly. This period saw the rise of female politicians in various countries, including notable figures such as Indira Gandhi in India and Margaret Thatcher in the UK. Their leadership roles were significant as they demonstrated that women could hold high office and influence national and international politics (Scharpf, 2018; Campbell, 2019). However, despite these advances, women continued to face systemic barriers that limited their full participation in political life, such as gender bias and institutional discrimination (Burns, 2019; Haider-Markel & Meier, 2020).

The late 20th and early 21st centuries marked a period of increasing global awareness about gender equality in politics. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted in 1995 highlighted the need for greater female representation in political decision-making processes (United Nations, 2015; Tripp, 2020). This international framework aimed to address the persistent gender disparities in politics by promoting women's participation and leadership. Nonetheless, the practical impact of these efforts has varied, with some countries making significant strides while others have seen slower progress (Krook, 2016; Schwindt-Bayer, 2021).

In recent years, the rise of female political leaders around the world has been notable, with women assuming prominent roles in both national and international arenas. Figures such as Jacinda Ardern of New Zealand and Ursula von der Leyen of the European Commission exemplify the increasing prominence of women in top political positions (Hennessy, 2020; Green, 2021). Their leadership has been influential in shaping policies on a range of issues, including climate change and gender equality. Despite these advancements, challenges remain, particularly in achieving gender parity in political representation and addressing the barriers that women face in accessing political offices (Kantola, 2020; Swers, 2022).

The discrimination of gender with other social categories, such as race and class, has also become a critical area of study in understanding female participation in politics. Research has shown that women from marginalized backgrounds often face compounded challenges in political engagement (Crenshaw, 2019; Collins, 2021). For example, women of color and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds encounter unique obstacles that affect their ability to participate fully in political processes and attain leadership positions (Lorde, 2017; Chavez, 2022).

The governance structure of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) has seen various phases of development since its inception. Established in 1947, AJK operates as a self-governing region with its own government and legislative assembly, though its political and administrative powers are limited compared to Pakistan's federal structure (Choudhary, 2017; Rizvi, 2020). Over the years, there have been efforts to institutionalize governance mechanisms, but the political landscape remains complex due to the region's disputed status and the influence of external factors (Khan, 2018; Muhammad, 2021).

The legal and institutional framework in AJK provides certain provisions for female participation, although these have not always been effectively implemented. The constitution of AJK includes provisions for women's representation in the legislative assembly, but practical

enforcement has been inconsistent. Studies indicate that while there have been policies aimed at increasing female political participation, the impact on actual representation has been modest (Farooq, 2021; Shah, 2023).

The political landscape of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) has been shaped by its unique status as a self-governing region within Pakistan, with significant implications for female political participation. Since its establishment in 1947, AJK has had a semi-autonomous government structure, including a legislative assembly with representation for its residents. Despite this, women's involvement in politics in AJK has been constrained by various socio-cultural and institutional factors (Choudhary, 2017; Rizvi, 2020). The political system of AJK, while providing a framework for governance, often reflects broader regional and national challenges related to gender inequality.

Historically, female participation in AJK politics has been limited by traditional norms and societal attitudes that often restrict women's roles in public life. Women in AJK face challenges similar to those encountered in other South Asian regions, where patriarchal structures can impede female political engagement (Maqbool, 2019; Iqbal, 2022). Despite these obstacles, there have been incremental advances, such as the inclusion of women in the Legislative Assembly through reserved seats, although their overall representation remains relatively low compared to male counterparts (Farooq, 2021; Shah, 2023).

The electoral system in AJK also plays a crucial role in shaping female political participation. The proportional representation system, designed to ensure fair representation, has had mixed results in increasing women's involvement (Wali, 2020; Khan & Khan, 2021). Although reserved seats for women in the legislative assembly are intended to improve their representation, practical challenges such as limited political mobilization and societal resistance can undermine these efforts (Ali, 2019; Zafar, 2022).

Socio-economic factors further influence women's participation in AJK politics. Issues such as limited access to education and economic resources can affect women's ability to engage effectively in political processes. Studies have shown that improving educational and economic opportunities for women can enhance their political participation by providing them with the skills and resources needed to compete in political arenas (Chavez, 2022; Collins, 2021).

The presence of women in political positions also enhances democratic legitimacy. Women's participation can help bridge gaps between government and society, leading to more representative and accountable governance (Paxton & Hughes, 2014; Schwindt-Bayer, 2015). By ensuring that diverse voices are heard in political decision-making, female legislators contribute to a more equitable and democratic political system, which in turn can increase public trust in political institutions.

Female political representation also impacts international relations and diplomacy. Women in high-level political roles often advocate for international cooperation on issues such as human rights, environmental sustainability, and global health (Holli, 2017; Karam & Molyneux, 2018). Their leadership can lead to stronger international partnerships and more inclusive global policies, reflecting a broader range of perspectives in international forums.

The impact of female participation on political rights extends to the representation of other marginalized groups. Women in politics often champion issues related to gender discrimination, advocating for the rights of various disadvantaged groups including racial minorities, LGBTQ+ individuals, and people with disabilities (Crenshaw, 2019; Kittilson, 2021). This discriminating approach contributes to more comprehensive and inclusive policy outcomes.

In addition to improving transparency, female participation in governance has been linked to more inclusive and representative policy-making. Women often bring diverse perspectives to policy discussions, addressing issues that may be overlooked in male-dominated settings. Studies have found that female legislators are more likely to champion policies related to social welfare, healthcare, and education, which contribute to more equitable and comprehensive governance (Krook & O'Brien, 2012; Schwindt-Bayer, 2015). This inclusivity ensures that the needs and interests of a broader segment of the population are considered in policy development.

The impact of female participation on good governance also extends to enhancing the effectiveness of public administration. Research suggests that women in governance roles tend to promote more participatory and consultative approaches to decision-making. This approach can lead to more effective and responsive governance, as policies and programs are better aligned with the needs and preferences of the public (Kittilson, 2021; Waylen, 2022). Women's collaborative leadership styles often foster greater engagement with civil society and improve the overall quality of public administration.

Studies have demonstrated that increased female representation in governance correlates with higher levels of economic development, improved social indicators, and more equitable distribution of resources (Duflo, 2012; Duflo & Topalova, 2004). This impact highlights the role of women in driving progress and ensuring that economic benefits are more evenly shared. The integration of women into governance structures can also enhance the resilience and stability of political systems. Female leaders often emphasize the importance of social cohesion and conflict resolution, contributing to more stable and effective governance (Matland, 2006; O'Brien, 2020).

However, the impact of female participation on good governance is not uniform and can vary depending on the context. Research indicates that the effectiveness of female participation in improving governance is influenced by factors such as institutional support, societal attitudes, and existing gender biases (Paxton & Hughes, 2014; Schwindt-Bayer, 2021). In environments where systemic barriers and resistance to gender equality persist, the potential benefits of female participation may be limited, necessitating targeted efforts to address these challenges.

### **Research Methodology**

This study was conducted in District Rawalakot, Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), specifically at the University of Poonch Rawalakot, which consists of 26 departments and 7 faculties. A quantitative research design with a descriptive survey approach was adopted to investigate female participation in political rights and governance in AJK. The population for the study comprises women in District Rawalakot, with a purposive sampling method used to select 100 women based on their relevance to the topic. A structured questionnaire with a 3-point Likert scale was employed as the primary data collection tool to capture participants' opinions, attitudes, and perceptions. Prior to the main data collection, a pre-test of the questionnaire was conducted on a small group to ensure clarity and reliability. Data was collected through personal visits to participants, allowing for direct interaction and clarification of any questions.

### **RESULTS**

The data analyze by using Likert-3 method and results are given below:

**Table 1: Women in AJK are actively involved in political rights and governance.**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Agree	45	45%
Undecided	8	8%
Disagreed	47	47%

Table 1 indicates a split opinion, with nearly half of the respondents agreeing that women are actively involved in political rights and governance in AJK. A smaller portion, 8%, is undecided, suggesting limited neutrality in views, while 47% disagree, showing considerable skepticism regarding active female participation.

**Table 2: There are sufficient opportunities for women to participate in politics in AJK.**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Agree	40	40%
Undecided	9	9%
Disagreed	51	51%

Table 2 shows that a majority of 58% disagree that women are encouraged to assume leadership roles in AJK politics, while only 35% agree, suggesting a perceived lack of support for women in leadership. A small undecided group (7%) reflects a limited degree of neutrality.

**Table 3 Women in AJK are encouraged to take on leadership roles in politics.**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Agree	30	30%
Undecided	5	5%
Disagreed	65	65%

Table 3 shows that A majority of 58% disagree that women are encouraged to assume leadership roles in AJK politics, while only 35% agree, suggesting a perceived lack of support for women in leadership. A small undecided group (7%) reflects a limited degree of neutrality.

**Table 4: The current level of female political participation in AJK is satisfactory.**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Agree	30	30%
Undecided	5	5%
Disagreed	65	65%

Table 4 shows that A notable majority, 65%, find the current level of female political participation unsatisfactory, compared to 30% who feel it is adequate. The low undecided response of 5% shows strong opinions on this matter.

**Table 5: Women in AJK face discrimination when trying to enter politics**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Agree	60	60%

Undecided	6	6%
Disagreed	34	34%

Table 5 shows that the data reveals that 60% of respondents believe women face discrimination in political engagement, while 34% disagree. Only 6% remain neutral, indicating a strong consensus that discrimination is prevalent.

**Table 6: The political environment in AJK is supportive of female politicians.**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	25	25%
Undecided	7	7%
Disagreed	68	68%

Table 6 shows that with 68% disagreeing, the majority view is that the political environment in AJK is not supportive of female politicians. Only 25% agree, and the neutral responses remain low, at 7%, highlighting clear views on this topic.

**Table 7: Women in AJK have equal access to political opportunities as men.**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	28	28%
Undecided	6	6%
Disagreed	66	66%

Table 7 shows that the data indicates that 66% of respondents do not believe that women have equal access to political opportunities, with only 28% agreeing. A minimal undecided percentage (6%) reflects decisive opinions on this issue.

**Table 8: Female participation in politics has improved governance in AJK.**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	50	50%
Undecided	4	4%
Disagreed	46	46%

Table 8 shows that Responses show a nearly equal split, with 50% agreeing that female political involvement has positively impacted governance, while 46% disagree. Only 4% remain neutral, indicating strong but divided opinions.

**Table 9: Women in politics have positively influenced policy-making in AJK.**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	48	48%
Undecided	3	3%
Disagreed	49	49%

Table 9 shows that Almost evenly split, 48% agree that women have influenced policy-making positively, while 49% disagree. Only 3% are undecided, suggesting that the impact of female politicians on policy remains a contentious topic.

**Table 10: There are enough role models for women in AJK politics.**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	40	40%
Undecided	5	5%
Disagreed	55	55%

Table 10 shows that Most respondents (55%) feel there are insufficient role models for women in AJK politics. Only 40% agree, and 5% are undecided, reflecting a perceived lack of visible female leadership.

**Table 11: Education plays a crucial role in encouraging women to participate in politics in AJK.**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	72	72%
Undecided	3	3%
Disagreed	25	25%

Table 4 shows that A large majority, 72%, agree on the importance of education in promoting female political participation, with only 3% undecided. A small group, 25%, disagrees, highlighting education's perceived role as essential.

**Table 12: Economic empowerment is necessary for increasing women's political participation in AJK**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	75	75%
Undecided	5	5%
Disagreed	20	20%

Table 12 shows that A significant majority (75%) agree that economic empowerment is critical for women's political participation. Only 20% disagree, and 5% remain neutral, showing a strong consensus.

**Table 13: Women politicians in AJK are effective in addressing community issues.**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	55	55%
Undecided	4	4%
Disagreed	41	41%

Table 13 shows that Over half of respondents agree that female politicians are effective in addressing community concerns, while 41% disagree, and only 4% are neutral, indicating varied opinions on women politicians' effectiveness.

**Table 14: Political parties in AJK are actively working to increase female participation.**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	38	38%
Undecided	8	8%
Disagreed	54	54%



Table 14 shows that a majority of 54% believe political parties are not actively supporting female participation, while 38% agree. An undecided percentage of 8% reflects slight uncertainty.

**Table 15: Training programs are available to help women enter politics in AJK.**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Agree	32	32%
Undecided	6	6%
Disagreed	62	62%

Table 15 shows that the majority, 62%, feel training programs are inadequate for women entering politics, while 32% agree such programs exist, showing mixed perspectives with low neutrality (6%).

**Table 16: The media in AJK supports the political participation of women.**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Agree	45	45%
Undecided	4	4%
Disagreed	51	51%

Table 16 shows that Responses are split, with 51% disagreeing that media supports female political participation, while 45% agree. Only 4% are neutral, indicating strong opinions on media support.

**Table 17: Family support is essential for women to engage in politics in AJK.**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Agree	78	78%
Undecided	3	3%
Disagreed	19	19%

Table 17 shows that a large majority (78%) agree that family support is crucial for women's political engagement, with minimal neutrality (3%). Only 19% disagree, showing strong consensus on family's role.

**Table 18: Legal frameworks in AJK protect and promote women's political rights.**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Agree	50	50%
Undecided	5	5%
Disagreed	45	45%

Table 18 shows that Responses are split, with half of the respondents agreeing on legal protections, while 45% disagree. Only 5% are undecided, reflecting slightly divided opinions on legal support.

**Table 19: Increasing female participation in politics will lead to more inclusive governance in AJK.**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Agree	70	70%

Undecided	3	3%
Disagreed	27	27%

Table 19 shows that A strong majority (70%) believe that increased female participation will result in more inclusive governance, with only 3% neutral. A smaller group, 27%, disagrees.

### Findings

This study explored the impact of female participation on political rights and governance in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), with data collected from 100 respondents. The analysis revealed a range of perceptions regarding women's involvement, opportunities, and influence within the political framework of AJK.

1. **Level of Female Participation:** Responses indicate a divided opinion on women's active involvement in political rights and governance, with 45% agreeing that women participate actively, while 47% disagreed. Similarly, 51% of respondents felt that there are insufficient opportunities for women in politics, suggesting that despite some involvement, barriers to broader participation remain evident.
2. **Encouragement for Leadership:** A significant portion of respondents (58%) disagreed with the statement that women in AJK are encouraged to take on leadership roles in politics. This indicates a perceived lack of support for female leadership within political circles, possibly due to cultural or systemic challenges.
3. **Satisfaction with Current Participation Levels:** When asked about satisfaction with the current level of female political participation, a notable 65% expressed dissatisfaction, emphasizing that female representation in politics is seen as inadequate. This dissatisfaction highlights the need for increased inclusion efforts and support mechanisms.
4. **Perceived Discrimination:** The study found that a majority (60%) agreed that women face discrimination in political environments, with only 34% disagreeing. This result underscores an acknowledged barrier that women in AJK reportedly encounter when attempting to engage in political roles.
5. **Political Environment:** Only 25% of respondents agreed that the political environment in AJK is supportive of female politicians, while 68% disagreed. This finding suggests a prevailing view that the current political atmosphere may not be conducive to women's political ambitions or participation.
6. **Equal Access to Opportunities:** When examining whether women have equal access to political opportunities, 66% of respondents disagreed, indicating a perception that gender disparities in political access persist, limiting women's representation and advancement in AJK's political landscape.
7. **Influence on Governance and Policy-making:** Responses were nearly evenly split on the impact of female participation on governance, with 50% agreeing that women have contributed positively to governance in AJK and 46% disagreeing. However, the study noted strong agreement (70%) that increased female participation would lead to more inclusive governance in the region.
8. **Role of Role Models and Education:** A majority (55%) felt there were insufficient female role models in AJK politics, suggesting a gap in visible female leadership that could inspire greater participation. Education was viewed as crucial by 72% of

respondents, indicating that educational advancements are essential for encouraging women to pursue political careers.

9. **Economic Empowerment and Family Support:** The study highlighted economic empowerment as a significant factor, with 75% agreeing that it is necessary for increasing women's political participation. Additionally, 78% of respondents emphasized the importance of family support, underlining its role as a foundation for women's engagement in political activities.
10. **Legal Frameworks and Political Support:** Although 50% agreed that AJK has legal frameworks to protect women's political rights, there was still a strong sentiment (45%) that these protections may be inadequate or underutilized. Furthermore, the majority view (54%) was that political parties in AJK are not actively working to increase female participation, suggesting a need for greater institutional support.
11. **Training Programs and Media Support:** Respondents expressed a perceived lack of training programs for women aspiring to political roles, with 62% disagreeing that such programs are available. Additionally, opinions on media support were divided, as 51% felt that the media does not adequately support female political participation.

### Conclusion

The study's conclusions reveal a nuanced picture of female participation in political rights and governance within Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). Findings indicate that while women are involved in politics, their representation and active participation remain limited. This limitation suggests an urgent need for increased opportunities and encouragement to enable more substantial involvement of women in political spheres. The results highlight the critical role that greater representation could play in advancing gender equity in governance. Systemic barriers and discrimination continue to impede women's progress in politics. Respondents expressed that women often face substantial challenges, including a political environment perceived as unsupported and unequal access to opportunities compared to men. These obstacles suggest a need for more comprehensive policies that can dismantle such barriers, allowing women to enter and thrive in political roles more freely. Addressing these challenges is essential to create a more balanced and equitable political landscape in AJK.

Despite these challenges, there is broad agreement among respondents that female participation in politics positively influences governance and policy-making. Women's inclusion is seen as enhancing the quality of governance through more balanced and inclusive decision-making processes. This perspective supports global research linking increased female representation with more comprehensive governance, suggesting that AJK could benefit from more substantial female participation in political leadership and decision-making. Education, economic empowerment, and family support emerged as critical factors influencing women's involvement in politics. Education and financial independence are essential in building women's confidence and capability to participate in political roles, while family backing provides the foundational support necessary for such engagement. The study underscores that these personal and societal supports are indispensable to women's political empowerment, indicating areas where interventions could make a meaningful difference in encouraging women's political ambitions.

The lack of institutional support and female role models further limits women's participation in AJK politics. Many respondents felt that the political landscape lacks adequate visibility of successful female politicians, and that political parties are not sufficiently proactive in encouraging female involvement. Enhancing the visibility of female role models and increasing institutional support from political parties could help to inspire and support more women in

pursuing political careers, adding valuable diversity to political representation. Furthermore, there are gaps in training opportunities and media support for women in politics in AJK. Respondents highlighted the lack of structured training programs and supportive media coverage, both of which could play significant roles in enhancing women's preparedness and visibility in politics. Strengthening these areas could help build a pipeline of qualified, confident women ready to take on political roles, ultimately improving the effectiveness of governance.

### **Summary**

This study explored the status of female participation in political rights and governance within Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), focusing on the level of involvement, the challenges faced, and the potential impact of increased female representation. The findings reveal that while there is some degree of female political engagement in AJK, it remains limited. Many respondents felt that women are underrepresented and lack the necessary support to actively participate in the political sphere. There are cultural and structural barriers that impede women from fully contributing to governance, highlighting the need for initiatives that promote gender equality in politics.

Respondents pointed out that the opportunities for women to enter politics in AJK are insufficient, with many feeling that discrimination is still prevalent. The political environment, though improving, was not perceived as particularly welcoming to female politicians. Women often face biases and a lack of institutional backing, which discourages their involvement in political roles. Addressing these issues through policy reforms could make politics a more accessible field for women and encourage broader participation, potentially leading to significant shifts in the political landscape of AJK.

Education emerged as a vital factor in supporting women's political aspirations. Respondents agreed that educated women are more likely to seek leadership roles and contribute to governance. Economic empowerment was also identified as a key enabler for female political participation, as financial independence can provide women with the confidence and resources needed to pursue political ambitions. Family support was seen as another critical component, especially in a region where family values hold substantial influence. Policies that emphasize women's education and economic empowerment could, therefore, be instrumental in increasing female participation in AJK politics.

The study also found a consensus that female participation positively impacts governance by introducing diverse perspectives and promoting inclusive decision-making. Respondents noted that women bring unique insights to policy-making, which can lead to more balanced and effective governance. However, the lack of prominent female role models in AJK politics poses a challenge, as visible leaders can inspire younger women to enter politics. Training programs and media support could also play a crucial role in shaping public perception, encouraging more women to participate in politics and contributing to a more equitable political environment.

### **Recommendations**

Based on this study, several targeted actions are recommended to enhance female participation in AJK's political rights and governance:

1. **Educational Programs:** Invest in programs that build women's political knowledge and confidence, enabling greater participation through workshops and seminars.

2. **Mentorship Initiatives:** Establish mentor-proprietorship programs with experienced female leaders to inspire and support aspiring women, fostering role models within the political sphere.
3. **Supportive Policies:** Implement gender-sensitive policies and legal frameworks, including potential quotas for female candidates, to ensure women's representation and protect their political rights.
4. **Economic Empowerment:** Promote economic independence for women through financial initiatives, reducing dependency and enabling women to pursue political roles confidently.
5. **Community Support:** Encourage family and community backing for female participation in politics through awareness campaigns and community leader advocacy, breaking down societal barriers.

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