



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Role of Local Government in Women Political Participation: A Case Study of Punjab (2001-2008)**

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**ABSTRACT**

The study evaluates the role of the local government in fostering women's political engagement by evaluating government initiatives during 2001-2008 time-period. The province of Punjab experienced notable changes in local governance after Pervez Musharraf assumed power in 1999 and implemented measures for devolution of power to the local governance structure. The methodology of the study is based on qualitative analysis of government documents, non-governmental organization reports and academic articles to uncover the relationship between women empowerment and local governance initiatives in Punjab. The findings of the research illustrate the differential implications of local government endeavors on the political participation of women in Punjab. While certain initiatives have succeeded with Punjab reflecting the highest percentage of women participation in local governance. But issues persist that necessitates legislative changes, civic education and capacity building programs to eliminate impediments to fair participation of women in politics.

**Keywords:** Empowerment, Local Government, Politics, Punjab, Women

**Introduction**

The convoluted connection between the empowerment of women, patriarchal structure of society and political engagement in Pakistan comes under the global struggle to curtail this challenge. Pakistan ranks 145th out of 146 countries in the World Economic Forum's 2022 Global Gender Gap Index Report (World Economic Forum, 2022). The result illustrates the continuing disparities that women encounter in a number of domains, especially when it comes to political empowerment and engagement. Comprehending the structure of patriarchy is essential to recognizing the complex obstacles that impede women's advancement in various areas. Within the framework of women's involvement in politics, the concept of "empowerment" goes beyond rhetoric; it encompasses the achievement of female independence, power, and equitable opportunities in all spheres of life. On the other side, political engagement involves the participation of women in processes of decision-making at different levels of government. The expanding ratio of women's empowerment in developed states compared to developing countries makes it necessary to investigate the significance of women political participation for society (Bukhari & Asim, 2013).

The process of decentralization in Pakistan, specifically the transfer of power to local governments, is a significant factor in determining the conditions surrounding women's political engagement. General Pervez Musharraf's Military Administration of Pakistan unveiled the Devolution Plan in 2001 (Rafique et al., 2023), which established a 33% quota for women in local councils and a 17% quota in legislative assemblies. The inclusion of a thirty-three percent quota for women in the district, municipality (tehsil), and union

councils—local legislative bodies tasked with approving taxes, bylaws, annual budgets, and both short- and long-term development plans—is a key component of the Local Government Plan (Ahmad et al. 2015 & International Crisis Group, 2004). This action was seen as a step toward improving women's standing in Pakistan's political and governing systems. The 1973 Constitution of Pakistan, specifically Article 25, which emphasizes the equality of all citizens before the law, regardless of gender, is closely related to this process. Analyzing devolution's impact becomes essential to comprehending how local power structures can support or undermine patriarchal norms, which in turn affects women's political engagement and empowerment. Nevertheless, in Pakistan, women face numerous obstacles that prevent them from being empowered and from participating in politics, even in the face of constitutional protections and devolution initiatives. Gender-based inequality persists because of discriminatory cultural practices, deeply ingrained patriarchal societal norms, and economic inequities. The Pakistani social structure, which limits women's duties to domestication and men's roles in the public sphere, reinforces the notion of sexual division of labor and serves as a major structural impediment to women's involvement in public life (Bukhari et al., 2019).

The principal aim of this study is to offer a thorough comprehension of the methods by which Punjabi local administrations attempted to enable women. The purpose of the study is to provide light on the obstacles encountered, achievements attained, and insights uncovered in the struggle for women's empowerment over the given time frame. This study adds to the larger debate on the relationship between gender dynamics and the local government in Punjab, by conducting a thorough investigation. Policymakers, academics, and practitioners working in the fields of local governance and women's empowerment will benefit from this research. By dissecting the local government activities, the research aims to provide guidance for potential policy formulations and initiatives that promote gender-inclusive development, ensuring women's empowerment and involvement in politics. The objective of this analysis is to provide insights into potential policy formulations and initiatives that promote gender-inclusive development and ensure women's participation in politics and empowerment across all spheres of society. This will be achieved by dissecting local government efforts. This study offers a nuanced perspective anchored in the context of Punjab, and adds to the academic discussion on the increasing role of local governments in resolving gender inequities (Hussain, 2022).

### **Literature review**

The history of women's engagement in the local government structure of Pakistan is examined by Ayesha, Asiya, and Komal (Khan et al., 2021). General Ayub Khan established a town committee with no inclusive mass representation by enacting the Municipal Administration Ordinance (MAO). During the General Yahya Khan Period, women were only allowed to reserve seats at the national and provincial levels per legislative framework directives. During the reign of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, women were allowed to participate in local authorities under the 1973 constitution, which granted them 5% representation in Zila and Urban Councils via reserved seats under the Local Government Act of 1975. However, during this time, no provincial local elections were held. Subsequently, in 1979, Gen. Zia ul Haq issued an ordinance preserving seats for women (Mezzera & Yusuf 2010). However, during this time, no provincial local elections were held. Afterwards, in 1979, Gen. Zia ul Haq issued a decree preserving seats for women in municipal councils. Elections were conducted in 1979, 1983, and 1987, and two seats on the union council and ten percent of the seats in district councils were reserved for women. Women did, however, have official representation but no authority or responsibility. The Punjab local government law, which was created during Benazir's second term (1993–1996), included a clause designating 33% of the seats in local bodies for women but without elections. Under Nawaz Sharif, the federal government declared in 1998 that the local government structure would be increased by 100%. In Punjab, however, the number of female-reserved town and district council seats

rose by 3.7%. Elections to the Punjab Union Council retained 5,000 seats for women out of 40,000, and no elections were held in accordance with the law (Khan et al., 2021).

Gender was utilized as one category in certain donor agency-produced research on women's political engagement. Women are portrayed as powerless, voiceless, and victimized. The low social standing and limited prospects experienced by women are solely ascribed to the culture of the area. The analysis provided in donor reports on gender and decentralization also omits the larger political and economic background of neo-liberalism and globalization, which is impacting the autonomy of not only people as individuals but also nation states, particularly in the developing world. Nonetheless, donor organizations graciously provided funding for a number of NGOs' research, lobbying, and capacity-building initiatives. These NGOs were eager to collaborate with the elected officials of Local Government who belonged to underrepresented groups in society, such as minorities, women, peasants, and workers. The Devolution of Power Plan 2000 (M. H. Bukhari et al., 2019) was enthusiastically embraced by the civil society group. They took part in the consultation process that the Musharraf administration had started. To get the public's opinion on the Plan, People's Assemblies led by the Sungi Foundation were arranged throughout Pakistan. They created training materials and awareness-raising campaigns to increase the capacity of female councilors (Porter et al., 2003)

One major barrier to women's involvement in politics is the cultural divide that is ingrained in Pakistani society, as discussed by Shaban, Shah, and Naeem (2014). The patriarchal system in Pakistan upheld the idea that males belonged in the societal sector and women should only handle matters at household. The male family members determine their voting power because of societal worries about women's duties as mothers and wives are limited to the reproductive domain. In contrast to men, women's human capital is not valued by the state or the family. Additional societal issues include the community's negative attitude, a lack of education, being confined to domestic work, familial pressure, and the obligation to raise children (Shaban et al., 2014)

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2002) demonstrates the role of quota system has given socially marginalized and disadvantaged people the opportunity to rise to formal political authority positions that would otherwise be unattainable through the politics of currency, familial influence, and party patronage. During the December 2000–August 2001 local elections, women ran for the roles of Nazim and Naib Nazim because of the quota system, in addition to the designated positions in the union, tehsil, and district councils. The quota system gave women more room in politics and provided them with tactical chances to influence the formulation and execution of local governments' agendas (International Idea, 2022)

Butt and Victor discussed the changes and policy initiatives made between 2001 and 2008 to guarantee women's involvement in politics. It builds upon Pakistan's 2001 New Local Government System, which granted women 33% of the vote in local elections. Similar to this, 42 "Focal Points" have been established in pertinent government ministries and departments to facilitate the planning and execution of programs that take gender views into account. The National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) and the "National Policy for Development and Empowerment of Women" were created in 2000 and 2002, respectively, and are both highlighted in the report. Additionally, the Gender Reform Action Plan (2004–05) recommended intervention areas include political involvement, reorganization of institutions for more successful mainstreaming of gender equality, hiring of women in the public sector, and policy and fiscal changes. One of the main instruments the government uses to advance gender equality is Gender Responsive Budgeting, which was introduced in 2007. creation of "Women Political Schools" with significant funding from foreign donor organizations and "District Resource Centers" in order to engender political consciousness and vision among the underserved population of Pakistan (Butt & Victor, 2014)

## Material and Methods

In order to fully explore the role of local governments in ensuring women's political participation, a qualitative research design is adopted to make an in-depth examination of the province of Punjab. This case study design will investigate the obstacles and opportunities presented by the local government structure for enhancing women's participation in various facets of politics. Purposive sampling is used in the study through the selection of those previous researches that discuss the role played by local governments in ensuring that women are included in Pakistan's local political setup. Both primary and secondary sources of data were used in the investigation. The National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW), ADB, government papers, policy documents about women's political engagement in Punjab, NGOs like the Pattan Development Organization, and others are considered primary sources from which conclusions about the challenges to women's political participation are drawn, as well as prospects made possible by local government initiatives for women to participate in politics in Pakistan.

The secondary sources of data collection include earlier quantitative and qualitative research studies that examined the advancements achieved by local governance setup for women's empowerment in politics. These studies were based on interviews and observations from women taking part in local governance activities. The purpose of this document analysis is to offer contextual details that will help identify themes in the body of current literature about women's political engagement. The percentage of women in Punjab's local governance structure after 2001 will receive special attention during the data analysis process.

It is crucial to make sure the study is reliable and rigorous. The veracity and reliability of the sources are guaranteed to increase trustworthiness. Furthermore, in the instance of Punjab, triangulation between the function of local government and the political engagement of women through federal government programs would be employed to bolster the validity of the results. It is important to recognize certain inherent limitations of the research. Firstly, the results might only apply to a particular context and not be easily extrapolated to other areas or demographics. The study may not adequately represent the variety of experiences that women have around the nation because it only focuses on one province.

### Women's Political Engagement in Punjab (2001-2008) through Local Governance

In terms of institutions, political consciousness, literacy rate, and fertile land, Punjab is the richest state. In Punjab, 52% of women are educated, and 61% of the population is literate. Punjabi women came out in abundance for the 2001 and 2005 local government elections, and they did well. Of the four provinces, Punjab had the greatest percentage of female seat winners. Punjabi women demonstrated exceptional dedication to taking part in the local government elections. Women ran for office in the majority of the districts with no fear at all. Women from Southern Punjab gained seats at a similar rate to those from Northern and Central Punjab. Seats for laborers and peasants are filled more frequently than normal seats ((Nazir et al., 2017).

In the 2001 and 2005 elections, all general seats were filled in the districts of Rawalpindi, Khanewal, R. Y. Khan, Faisalabad, Sialkot, and Attock, in contrast, the number of peasant/labor seats in Mandi Bahaudin, Toba Tek Singh, Hafizabad, Narowal, Lahore, Qasur, Pakpattan, Gujarat, Rajanpur, and D. G. Khan district was almost equal to that of the general seats. The highest percentage of elected women across all local government tiers, 99.4% in 2005 and 97.7% in 2001, was still found in Punjab. Women are more represented in district and Tehsil councils than in union councils, indicating that they encountered difficulties in the direct elections that were held at the union council level.

**Table 1**  
**Seat-winning ratio of women in Punjab was highest among the four provinces (Nazir et al., 2017).**

Punjab									
District	Number of Ucs	Women General Seats				Women Labor/Peasants Seats			
		2001		2005		2001		2005	
		Total	Filled	Total	Filled	Total	Filled	Total	Filled
Attock	72	288	281	144	144	144	139	144	142
Bahawalpur	107	428	421	214	212	214	184	214	213
Bahawalnagar	118	472	463	236	236	236	224	236	233
Bhakkar	42	168	164	84	81	84	65	84	83
Chakwal	68	272	269	136	133	136	133	136	135
D. G. Khan	59	236	232	118	117	118	106	118	118
Faisalabad	289	1156	1142	578	578	578	572	578	569
Gujrat	117	468	466	234	233	234	224	234	234
Gujranwala	188	752	748	376	376	376	365	376	374
Hafizabad	42	168	167	84	83	84	84	84	82
Jhang	128	512	505	256	254	256	230	256	248
Jhelum	53	212	210	108	107	106	102	108	106
Qasur	113	452	450	226	224	226	216	226	226
Khanewal	100	400	400	200	199	200	196	200	198
Khushab	51	204	200	102	100	102	90	102	101
Laiyah	44	176	172	88	87	88	71	88	88
Lahore	150	600	598	300	299	300	288	300	300
Lodhran	73	292	292	146	145	146	142	146	145
Mianwali	56	224	212	112	110	112	104	112	106
Mandi Bahaudin	65	260	258	130	128	130	130	130	125
Muzaffargarh	93	372	350	186	185	186	160	186	185
Multan	126	504	500	258	257	252	248	258	254
Narowal	74	296	295	148	146	148	146	148	148
NankanaShab	68	-	-	136	126	-	-	136	122
Okarra	114	456	446	228	227	228	220	228	228
Pakpattan	63	252	250	126	125	126	126	126	122
Rajanpur	44	176	174	88	86	88	78	88	88
R. Y. Khan	122	488	488	244	243	244	234	244	240
Rawalpindi	170	680	680	350	340	340	330	350	322
Sargodha	161	644	620	322	320	322	315	322	316
Sahiwal	89	356	356	178	176	178	170	178	170
Sialkot	122	488	488	248	248	244	220	248	242
Sheikhupura	169	676	670	202	200	338	320	202	198
Toba TekSingh	82	328	328	164	165	164	156	164	164
Vihari	89	356	355	178	177	178	170	178	174

The Social Policy and Development Center report from 2006–2007 states that women's engagement varied across Pakistan's four provinces, ranging from 14% to 18.6% at all levels of district administration. An estimate of the average percentage of women participating was 17%. Since the establishment of Pakistan, this percentage has been the highest across all local government systems. According to Himayat Ullah's 2003 study, the Union Council's tier was split into nazim having 2 and councilors having 13457 seats. The proportion of female nazims to councilors varies throughout Pakistan, but overall, it can be concluded that while the number of female nazims is relatively modest, the participation of women in the councilor position is noteworthy. 72513 total seats, or 18.6% of the total, indicate that no women were represented in the Level of Tehsil Council as nazim. However, 848 women were chosen to serve as councilors in Punjab. Women's representation in the

District Council tier revealed that 641 women were elected as counselors but none as nazim (Zaman & Ali, 2017).

**Table 2**  
**Women elected in through Local Government Elections in 2001 and 2005**

	Union Councils		Tehsil Councils		District Councils		Town Council	
	Women Elected	%	Women Elected	%	Women Elected	%	Women Elected	%
Punjab	20008	96.7	1125	98.4	1118	98	22251	97.7
Local Government Election 2005								
	Union Councils		Tehsil Councils		District Councils		Town Council	
	Women Elected	%	Women Elected	%	Women Elected	%	Women Elected	%
Punjab	13660	98.6	1152	100	1147	99.6	15959	99.4

*Note. Data of women elected in 2001 and 2005 (Nazir et al., 2017).*

There were fewer women registered to vote in the 2002 elections compared to men. Men made up 53.1% of all registered votes in Islamabad, while women made up 46.9%, leaving a 6.2% difference. 53% of men and 47% of women were registered in Punjab. There are a number of reasons why there are so few female voters in a culture where men predominate. Women who are registered voters are not given the respect they deserve by political parties and state institutions. According to tribal values, women are discouraged from casting ballots and are even forbidden from doing so. They believe that men belong in that realm (Mushtaq & Adnan, 2022)

The 2005 local council elections saw a significant difference in voter turnout between males and females. The province of Punjab's 2005 local elections indicates that 61.35% of men and 44.52% of women cast ballots, for an average voter participation of 53.56%. The gender demographics of union councils in the 2001 local government election shows that, out of the 72,513 union council seats, 20,007 women were elected as union councilors in the Province of Punjab, according to 9 Women Nazmeen. As a percentage of all seats, the Women Union Councilors accounted for 27.6%. In actuality, women's active involvement in the 2001 local government elections served as a catalyst for their successful participation in the 2002 general elections. Voter turnout was higher for local body elections than for general polls: 41.68 percent for the 2002 general elections and 47.38 percent for the 2005 local body elections. The fact that more people showed up for the elections for local governments may have been caused by their interest in the candidates, who are members of their own communities (Bennet, 2007).

Through the years, women councilors have developed social capital by serving their communities. The majority of women councilors were helping communities access social safety nets including Zakat Committees and Bait-ul-Mal subsidized food, and social services, according to data gathered 31 from WCN members. Women Council Network was most active in Punjab for women empowerment and indicated that almost 75% members of the forum in Punjab were involved betterment through social service delivery after gaining authority (Pattan Development Organization, 2010)

### **Challenges and Prospects for Women's Political Participation:**

The outcomes of this research have provided insights into the role of local government in promoting women empowerment and political participation in the region of

Punjab. But the results should be interpreted with caution due to reliance on prior research based on qualitative as well as quantitative sources of data collection. This section will reflect on the limitations and potential consequences that arose from the attempt made by the local government to increase women's role in politics and empower them, which will have implications for the interpretation of results.

### **Success of Women in achieving political engagement through local governance:**

Why did the local government succeed in raising strong, independent women? According to Jabeen, women become more liable when they participate in decision-making processes, which elevates their position and gives them a sense of leadership. In an attempt to pursue a political career, they try to advance from local to higher level and leadership posts. They can demonstrate superior skills at higher levels, such as international, national, and even provincial ones, thanks to grassroots grooming (United Nations Development Programme, 2014).

In Pakistan, several female council members were elected to serve in provincial assemblies, and in India, the same is true. We have numerous examples of women as role models who provided their services as local government mayors positions before going on to become ministers in provincial administrations or state representatives in the UN and other world organizations. For instance, Ms. Hameeda Waheeduddin, the union council's Nazim for the Punjabi district of Mandi Bahauddin, ran for office in the general elections of 2002, winning a position as a member and minister in the provincial parliament of Punjab. She was re-elected in 2013 and 2018. Six former council members were elected to Punjab's provincial legislature on designated seats in the 2008 general elections. The Women Councilors Network included these ladies (Jabeen, 2019)

Despite their lack of political experience, the female councilors gave outstanding performances during their corresponding council meetings. Women councilors continued to have a high attendance rate, as per Pattan research on their performance from 2004 to 2006. An average of seventy persons each month contact a female mayor, demonstrating the inspiring nature of their interactions with residents outside of the councils (NCSW, 2020). It's interesting to note that women councilors are still accepted, despite the fact that the majority of constituents are impoverished. A quick-witted and vocal woman, Ms. Shahzada Bibi was a peasant woman activist from South Punjab who desired to run for local office. She wished to be put forward as a candidate for a "Panchayat," or village meeting, by her fellow villagers, demonstrating her clear awareness of the regional circumstances (Beg, 2021).

Given that Pattan already had a trusting relationship with her community, she had also asked for Pattan's attendance and support at the meeting. At the conclusion of the "Panchayat," Ms. Shahzada was unanimously nominated by the locals. In municipal elections, she topped the most formidable feudal nominee in the area during their elections. The most significant accomplishment that women councilors have accomplished is their political participation. The majority have had consistent political advancement; many have advanced, for example, the second term pooled in progress for not just the union council but the district and tehsil assembly as well. 54% of Punjabi citizens applied to join local government bodies. When compared to other Pakistani provinces, the ratio of the women councilor network topped in Punjab (Shaheed, 2010)

### **Hurdles encountered by women in achieving their political participation**

Customs and cultural values play a significant part in defining women's duties in the home and in society at large, as well as their subservient status. The economic, cultural, societal, and institutional factors that are embedded in discursive frameworks limit their ability to participate in politics. Politics as a masculine prerogative is explained by the

contrast of the public and private. Even with constitutional rights, there are obstacles to exercising them because of customs. Above all, women are not permitted to run for office without their families' approval. Numerous situations have been documented in which women were refused the opportunity to vote or run for office due to decisions made jointly by political parties and local communities. Nazia Mumtaz was a formidable candidate from Bhalwal, Punjab, who had been assassinated in December 2000 while trying to run for local body elections. Her spouse was against her running for office (Jabeen, 2019)

Under pressure from provincial Chief Ministers, General Musharraf trimmed the number of local seats from 21 to 13 before the 2005 local government election. Women lost 32 percent, totaling 11,467, of the overall number of seats as a result, and now only hold four seats. Women now only had a total of 28,553 seats, which was a significant turnaround. Chief ministers also have a great deal of authority to remove nazims from districts, tehsils, and unions. Thus, the way was prepared for the capture of the elite. WCN convened in Multan to initiate the protest campaign titled "Save Women Seats." In order to mobilize people for solidarity, it would consist of quick seminars held in each project district to educate the general public about the effects of this reduction. Over 600 women council members from 11 districts attended additional protest marches and seminars that took place in front of the House of Parliament in Islamabad on January 14 and 15, 2005 (Bari, 2010)

After the February 2008 national elections, the local authority system came to a complete halt. The provincial governments took over administrative responsibilities, stopped funding LGs, and thus rendered the LGs inoperable. No province declared the holding of new LG elections after the four-year term of LGs ended on October 16, 2009. Local governance was returned to the provinces in December after the legislative authority to amend the LGS ran out. As of right now, the local government systems in every province have administrators appointed and are in the process of being reviewed and changed. According to the four province governments' examination regarding the suggested Local Government Acts, 2009, several of the modifications carry a significant danger to the problem of representation of politicians in local governance. For instance, the reduction of the overall number of seats in the Union Council has been advocated by all four provinces. Punjab and suggested lowering the number of UC seats from thirteen to nine (National Commission on the Status of Women, 2020)

Pakistan ranked 132 out of 134 countries in the 2009 global gender gap report. Women were unanimously barred from voting and running for office in some political party constituencies, in breach of The Representation Act of 1976's Clause 81(1) and Clause 79 (2)(a). The Free and Fair Election Networking (FAFEN)<sup>11</sup>, a collaboration of thirty prominent NGOs, revealed that in the by-election held in Lakki Marwat, Mansehra, and Swat, the majority of the religious and secular groups were found to have engaged in this illegal practice. This occurred under the liberal-secular civilian governments of the Pakistan Muslim League-N, People's Party, ANP, and Mutahida Quami Movement during the "enlightened era" of the Musharraf dictatorship (Human Rights Watch, 2007). The election officials did not pursue legal punishment against the offenders in spite of the vocal protestations of civil society bodies and media condemnation (Bari, 2010).

Because Punjab is a traditional culture based on the concept of feudalism with a less restrictive atmosphere overall, women's political engagement has increased there. With 96.7% of women's seats filled in 2001 and 98.7% in 2005, as well as female candidates became Nazims in Union Council, Punjab has done remarkably well. According to the Social Policy and Development Centre (SPDC), a case study on the profiles of District Nazims in Punjab following the elections of 2002 and 2005 revealed three distinct trends: first, the majority of Nazims (91%) were elected on the basis of their ties to tribe, zamindar, or biradari (kinship); second, the majority of these people (91% in 2002, 77% in 2005) belonged to the ruling political party; and third, the majority (70%-80%) belonged to



prominent political families (Policy, 2007). It demonstrates unequivocally how important political affiliation and kinship/tribal relationships are in Pakistan's current political climate (Tabassum et al., 2015).

## **Conclusion**

An analysis of the political involvement of women in Punjab reveals a story of advancement and enduring difficulties. With 52 percent of the educated population being female, Punjab, which is known for its robust organizations, a high rate of literacy, and bountiful land, becomes a shining example for women's education. The positive picture painted by the active participation of Punjabi women during the 2005 and 2001 regional legislative polls is that a significant number of female position winners were achieved, more than in other provinces. This accomplishment, which demonstrates a geographical balance in participation, is especially noticeable in the southern region. Beneath these successes, though, are subtle differences that, particularly at the union council stage, suggest that there are barriers to direct polls at this level.

It is clear from examining the data that Punjab has not achieved equal success in getting women involved in politics at all levels of local government. The union councils trail behind the municipal and tehsil councils in terms of female representation, which is indicative of the difficulties women encounter while running for office at this local level. Cultural traditions and tribal values have a significant impact on female voter registration and involvement, which has resulted in a gender disparity in voter turnout in the 2005 local elections. The proportion of women active at different levels of governance is influenced by the intersection of political forces and cultural restrictions. The results also clarified the complex nature of Punjabi women's political participation. Even with the outstanding turnout for local government elections, obstacles still exist because of deeply set cultural norms and conventional roles that are associated with women. Women's political participation demonstrates this paradox, which represents both advancement and innate difficulties ingrained in society institutions. The experiences of female councilors highlight the constraints imposed by patriarchal structures and society expectations, even as they display remarkable rates of participation and community engagement.

The study underlines how crucial it is to use context-specific strategies to solve the difficulties women in the Punjab's political environment confront. Legislation and policy changes are important, but much more important is a deeper comprehension of the socio-cultural aspects influencing women's participation. The combination of cultural traditions, ethnic beliefs, and political systems that together influence women's responsibilities in governance must be taken into account in efforts to close the disparity between men and women in political involvement. Although Punjab is leading the way in the political engagement of women, there is still work to be done in order to achieve gender equality in politics. The results underline the necessity of focused interventions that probe into the nuances of customs and society expectations in addition to top-level regulations. A comprehensive, nuanced, and uniform state approach would be essential in establishing a more broad and equitable electoral landscape, assuring continued empowering of women in the realm of politics, as demonstrated by Punjab's success made through local government processes to empower women.

## **Recommendations**

- In order to remove obstacles prohibiting women from running for office, legislators had to undertake a thorough examination of electoral legislation. Examining how seat reductions affected women's political representation in the 2005 elections is one aspect of this.

- Launch public awareness initiatives to question cultural conventions that prevent women from entering politics. Dispel stereotypes that limit women's participation in politics and emphasize the value of female voices in governance.
- Incorporate more grassroots resources to empower women. Assist them in overcoming conventional obstacles and taking an active role in local governance by providing them with training and resources.
- Programs for community participation should be started by local governance structures to promote gender equality discussions. Establish forums where women can voice their needs and viewpoints in order to promote inclusive decision-making.
- Implement focused initiatives aimed at enhancing the capacity of female political enthusiasts. Give them the know-how and abilities they need to successfully traverse the political system and participate in local government.
- Encourage legislative changes that will increase the representation of women in politics. To guarantee fair representation at all local government levels, take into consideration reviewing seat allocation procedures.
- Introduce programs for civic education to educate women about their rights as citizens and the significance of voting. Work together with community groups to dispel myths and promote greater recognition of women in leadership positions.

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