

Role of Women in Politics: A Study of Punjab & Chandigarh Region

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Abstract

Women's political participation is vital to inclusive democratic representation, yet their involvement in Punjab remains significantly constrained by patriarchy, socio-cultural norms, and institutional barriers. This study examines the barriers, perceptions, and impact of policy interventions on women's political participation in Punjab. Using a mixed-method approach based on survey responses (N=100) and secondary literature, the study reveals that while reservation policies have increased local-level representation, systemic gender bias and limited mentorship continue to hinder women's rise to higher political leadership. The findings indicate a disconnect between policy and implementation, along with low public recognition of female political figures beyond dynastic leaders. The paper argues that structural reforms, increased visibility, and capacity-building frameworks are necessary to strengthen women's political leadership in Punjab.

Keywords: Women in politics, Punjab, gender studies, reservation policies, governance, participation.

Introduction

Women's participation in political systems reflects the strength of democratic governance. Although Indian women have historically held positions of national leadership—including Indira Gandhi, the first woman Prime Minister, and Pratibha Patel, the first woman President—representation gaps persist at the state and grassroots levels. Punjab, known for its agrarian economy and strong sociocultural identity, continues to demonstrate disproportionately low women's representation in politics despite literacy gains and reservation policies.

Punjab's political space remains largely male-dominated, shaped by entrenched patriarchal traditions, dynastic politics, and limited political exposure for women. This paper investigates the current status of women in Punjab politics, the barriers they face in entering leadership roles, and the impact of reservation policies on their participation.

Review of Literature

Existing research stresses that structural inequalities, patriarchal norms, and lack of financial autonomy restrict women's ability to participate meaningfully in politics (Rai; Singh; Kumar). Punjab illustrates this challenge clearly, as women constitute nearly half the population yet hold less than 10% of legislative seats (Times of India). Studies also note that visibility and media portrayal influence leadership perception, with few women gaining public recognition (Indian Express).

Intersectional feminist theory provides a foundation for analyzing these inequalities. Carole Pateman's *Sexual Contract* theorizes how women have historically been excluded from the public

sphere, including governance, while Iris Marion Young argues that political participation must evolve beyond representation to include structural justice.

Methodology

This study adopted an exploratory descriptive approach. A survey was conducted among 100 participants across Ludhiana, Jalandhar, Rupnagar and Chandigarh using random sampling. Responses were collected via Google Forms. Secondary data sources included scholarly articles, books, government reports, and online repositories. Quantitative data were analyzed through descriptive statistics, while open-ended responses were thematically coded.

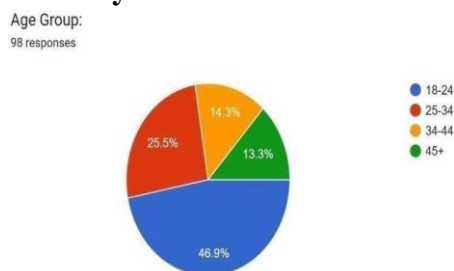
FINDINGS

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive understanding of how women in Punjab perceive political participation, how they experience the political climate, and what societal and structural barriers shape their access to leadership roles. The mixed-method data reveals patterns tied to generational change, visibility of representation, and policy gaps between mandate and implementation.

4.1 Age Group Analysis

Age demographics of survey respondents gravitate toward older voters. A whopping 46.9% of respondents belong to the 18-24 age group, emphasizing the importance of young voters as a deciding factor in reshaping Punjab's future. The 25-34 age group (25.5%) indicates that these are mid-career professionals and perhaps more politically inclined than their younger cohorts, given their work experiences and societal responsibilities. In addition, both the 34-44 (14.3%) and 45+ (13.3%) age groups make for a great deal of politically seasoned individuals who have seen past political revolutions in Punjab. These findings highlight the importance of gender sensitive policies that are geared towards particular age groups and also the need to most effectively represent young women in decision making positions. Younger women are entering politics while Punjab has seen limited female political representation; ushering a new era of female politics that brings in new perspectives and promotes progressive reforms while ensuring strong governance brings in new perspectives and promotes progressive reforms while ensuring strong governance.

4.2 Education Level Analysis

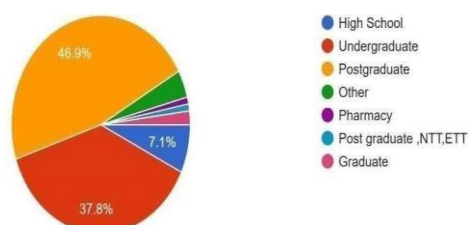


Factor of Education in Political Awareness and Participation According to the survey, the major proportion of participants are postgraduates (46.9%), followed by undergraduates (37.8%). A knowledgeable voting public will be more engaged in the political process, scrutinize policies

and a champion for representation. This is in line with a trend of budding educational empowerment of women in Punjab that saw them level up, up the ladder in the face of competition for roles in leadership. In addition to the people with a high school education (7.1%), others from specialized areas like pharmacy, pharmacy and teaching (7.1%) also suggest that political awareness is not limited to a discipline. With the exponential increase in higher education among women enacted in Punjab, women have taken on an active governance role in policymaking and social reform. These statistics reaffirm the need for educational programs that encourage women to continue to engage with politics and take positions of decision-makers.

Education Level:

98 responses



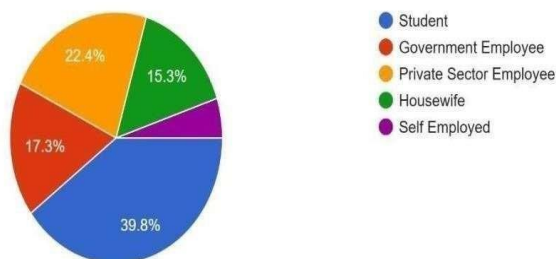
4.3 Occupation Analysis

Therefore, the survey inputs reflect the diversity of occupations of the surveyed women in order to avoid any bias in the perspective of women's participation in the political setup of the province of Punjab. The greatest percentage (39.8%) of respondents identified as a student, showing that a significant portion of politically aware people are Generation Y, which ultimately is imperative to the future of women's representation in politics. 17.3% of respondents are government employees indicating whether stable jobholders may be active in the political bandwidth. Employees from the private sector (22.4%) and the selfemployed (15.3%) prove that professionals in work-places have an interest in governance and policies that affect their work environments. Percentage wise lower, house wives have more political discussions too, signifying that even if their socio-cultural barriers could be fighting to death, still they are being bolder to participate in political debates.

These discoveries resonate with previous studies about changing political attitudes among women, since working status affects political engagement. The views that women from different professions bring to governance will have different approaches on characteristics and making inclusive policies.

Occupation:

98 responses

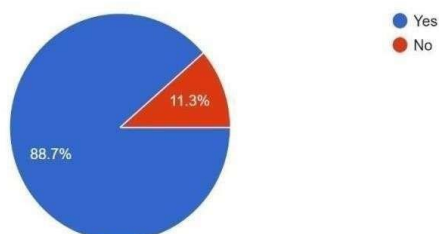


4.4 Perception of Women Politicians in Punjab

89.9% of the answers testified that women politicians do exist in Punjab, and 11.3% of them rejected this statement. This indicates that most acknowledge female political involvement. Yet recognition in itself does not equate action or effect.

Do you think of women politicians in punjab ?

97 responses

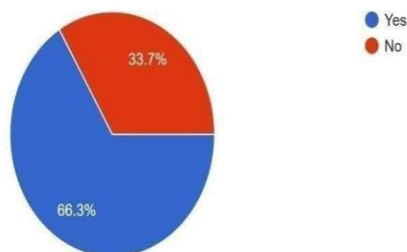


4.5 Voting Participation Analysis

Here is what the survey results show vote has been cast at 66.3%. This data indicates strong voter turnout, but the one-third who have not yet voted also suggests political apathy, barriers to access or lack of faith in the system. Educated working-class women as a voter demographic are just one indicator of an increasing interest in policy-making and governance. One of the reasons behind this could be the Women's Reservation Bill and other initiatives aimed at boosting women's political engagement. Yet, there are further diversifying challenges that inhibit voter turnout for which more needs to be done to overcome, including the lack of political trust, lack of representation of women candidates and constraints imposed by society. It will seriously empower women in the electoral politics of Punjab to carry out more campaigns and awareness programmes to encourage first-time voters, especially women and to enable better literacy in politics among women.

Have you ever voted in Punjab election?

98 responses



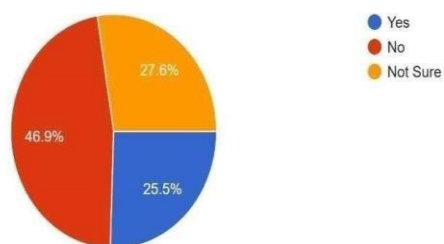
4.5 Equal Political Opportunity for Women in Punjab

The responses of these participants show that the number (46.9%) of those who think that women are equal in Punjab is shocking.

Conversely, 25.5 percent take the opposite side and state that women also have equal opportunities, with a 27.6 percent of people undecided. This means that, there is an evident gender gap in political representations. The findings are disturbing and show that less than half of respondents think that women and men have equal opportunities in (saying) politics, and the societal (and) structural barriers that persist against encouraging women to participate in political life. For others, the uncertainty might be a sign of ignorance of, or unfamiliarity with, women in the political arena.

Do you think Women have equal political opportunity in Punjab?

98 responses



4.6 Women and Politics: Analyzing Political Barriers

Women try to get into politics as such challenges are visible through the survey results. The most frequently mentioned barrier was family responsibilities, which were cited as a serious problem by 57 respondents (58.8%), who said that the discrepancy between domestic chores and inclusive of help and political ambitions is a serious problem. This highlights how societal norms dictate that women tend to household duties rather than careers — a belief that is particularly strong in Punjab, where adverse gender attitudes are as prevalent as ever.

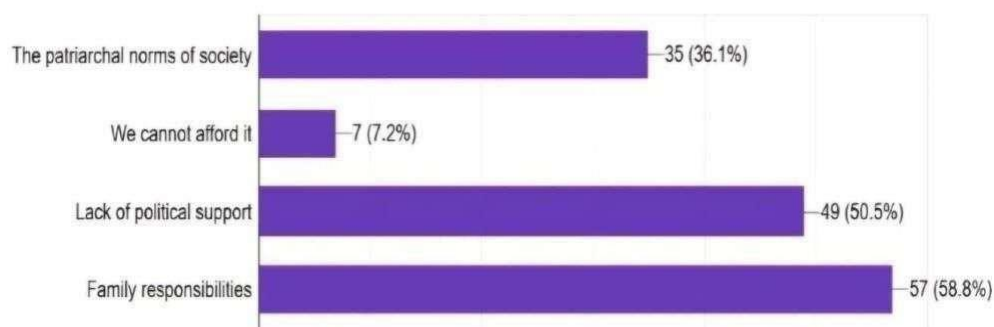
Respondents cited lack of political support (49 respondents; 50.5%) as a major barrier. Women are usually under-served by mentorship, funding, and party nominations, limiting their ability to create a political force.

Cultural patriarchal norms were reported as a barrier by 35 respondents (36.1%) and have been flagged as a significant obstacle, with common belief that politics is a male domain. Seven

respondents (7.2%) noted financial burden as another factor limiting participation, pointing out how economic restrictions further contribute to limiting women's participation. These results echo the main elements outlined in this dissertation, demonstrating how cultural, financial, and structural barriers have persisted to constrain women's political representation in Punjab.

Do you believe there are barriers for women looking to become politicians? (Select all that apply)

97 responses

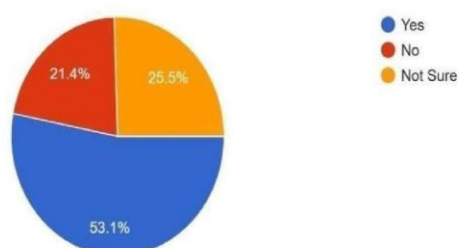


4.7 Effectiveness Of Women Reservation Policies

This data reveals that 53.1% respondents believe that reservation policies have positively promoted women's participation in the Politics of Punjab. But that is the contrary opinion of 21.4% , while 25.5% remain undecided. It suggests that while some may consider reservations to have brought greater representation for women, such mechanisms question their adequacy or implementation. Meaning that respondents are confused, indicating that there needs to be more on ground awareness and evaluation of impact of such policies in relation to empowering communities.

Do you see reservation policies (for example, women's quota in the Panchayats) as encouraging women's political participation?

98 responses



4.8 What measures do you suggest to enhance women's role in Punjab's politics?

Several key measures to promote women participation in political leadership were identified by the respondents. But equal opportunities & the need for a level playing field for women to compete was one of the big reasons behind the panelist's theme. It was also said that awareness campaigns should be held to inform women about their rights, the political process and their leadership roles. A few advocated for flexible working conditions, allowing women to juggle political careers alongside family commitments. Another key suggestion was for political reservations, so that women would have a greater representation in decision-making bodies. Grassroots awareness is also considered important in stimulating more Punjab women into

leadership role. The results also point to a greater need for systemic reform, cultural changes and policy intervention foster an environment that enables women to engage in the political arena unhindered by social or structural forces.

4.9 The female political leaders from Punjab that you are aware of

The survey reported that over 60% of the respondents identified **Harsimrat Kaur Badal** as the female political leader they knew best, underlining the strong daughter of the Punjab political soil. She has been a prominent figure in the **Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD)**, serving as their leader besides holding the office of

Union Minister of Food Processing Industries. Being married to **Sukhbir Singh Badal**, she belongs to a political family that has deep roots in the Punjab political landscape and this solidifies her recognition as well.

Yet it's troubling that almost half the people questioned said they didn't know of any female political leaders, showing that women in politics are simply not visible. Less popular names, like **Parneet Kaur** and **Jagir Kaur**, were named by a mere 1-5% of respondents each, indicating that female political leadership in Punjab appears to be concentrated around a few facing and well-known personalities. This is a sign of women making strides but not where we want to be in politics that is beyond the legacy. The prominence of Harsimrat Kaur Badal's name in the responses also points to the much broader issue of dynastic politics in Punjab, where political power is often confined within a handful of powerful families.

This may well explain why other female figures as Parneet Kaur (Congress leader, former Minister of State for External Affairs) or Jagir Kaur (former SGPC president) ranked much lower. Yet, despite playing significant roles in politics, they have not resonated with the public as much do to lack of media coverage, political party establishment, or grassroots outreach. The fact that nearly half of respondents could not name any female political leaders is another indication of the lack of visibility, engagement and recognition of women in mainstream politics. This may be due to social norms, fewer people occupying higher political offices, or the fact there are limited opportunities for women to be at the head of significant political movements. These barriers and entrapments need to be embanked through realization, training, and empowerment to pave the way for women representation in politics in Punjab and these solutions need to be formulated and implemented with the help of the stakeholders involved.

Discussion

Although the reservation system has increased female participation at local levels, patriarchal norms and financial constraints continue to limit participation at higher political tiers. Political parties often treat women candidates as symbolic rather than intentional representatives, reflecting what scholars refer to as "tokenistic inclusion" (ResearchGate). Low visibility and lack of mentorship further weaken pipeline development for future women leaders.

Conclusion

Women's participation in Punjab politics is increasing, yet progress remains uneven. Without structural reforms including leadership training, mandatory party-level quotas, political funding access, and media

visibility, women will remain underrepresented. Policy success requires multi-level reform rather than symbolic inclusion.

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