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Gender and Ballot: Issues and Challenges in Women's Electoral Participation in Phek District, Nagaland

¹ Khrutalu Dozo, ² Dr. Achanger

¹ Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, St. Joseph University, Chumoukedima, Nagaland, India

² Professor, Department of Political Science, St. Joseph University, Chumoukedima, Nagaland, India

Corresponding Author: Khrutalu Dozo

Abstract

Phek District, located in the southeastern region of Nagaland, is predominantly inhabited by the Chakhesang tribe, a community rooted in traditional patriarchal values. Despite the growing discourse on gender equality in India, women in this region continue to face significant barriers to participation in electoral politics. Strong customary norms, limited institutional support, and prevailing gender stereotypes have collectively contributed to the underrepresentation of women in political spaces. This study aims to examine the key challenges faced by women in contesting elections, assess public perceptions of women's political leadership, and explore the socio-cultural factors that hinder their active participation in decision-making.

Adopting a mixed-method approach, the study utilizes both qualitative and quantitative tools, including online questionnaires distributed through Google Forms, as well as in-depth interviews and focused group discussions with local stakeholders. The findings reveal that while women participate actively as voters, their representation as candidates and leaders remains minimal. Entrenched patriarchal norms, financial limitations, and lack of party support emerged as the key barriers. The study emphasizes that without institutional support and changing community perceptions, women's electoral participation in Phek District will remain limited.

Keywords: Women, Electoral Politics, Electoral Participation, Phek District

1. Introduction

Women's participation in politics forms the foundation of a healthy democracy and genuine gender equality. When women are actively involved in governance, it not only enhances the legitimacy of democratic systems but also ensures that policies and decisions reflect the needs and aspirations of the entire population. Globally, the growing presence of women in political institutions has been recognized as a driving force for inclusive development, fairness in governance, and the protection of human rights. Their active participation contributes to more balanced policies and promotes justice within society. The international community has repeatedly affirmed its commitment to promoting gender equality in politics through key frameworks such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979), which calls upon states to eliminate barriers to women's participation in public life (United Nations, 1979) ^[15]. Similarly, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 5, emphasize achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, with a specific focus on enhancing women's participation and leadership at all levels of decision-making (United Nations, 2015) ^[16]. These framework ensure that women are equally involved in political processes is essential not just for fair representation, but also for the effective functioning of democratic governance and for achieving sustainable development goals.

In India, women's involvement in politics has advanced notably since independence. The adoption of universal adult franchise in 1950 granted equal voting rights to both men and women, establishing the groundwork for a more inclusive and participatory democracy. At the grassroots level, the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments of 1992 marked a turning point by reserving one-third of seats for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions and urban local bodies. This landmark reform opened avenues for millions of women to directly participate in governance and decision-making at the community level, transforming local politics into a more inclusive space (Indian Express, 2023) ^[18]. More recently, the passage of the Women's Reservation Bill in 2023 mandating 33 percent reservation of seats for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies has

reinforced India's commitment to deepening gender equality in political representation (AP News, 2023) ^[17].

In contrast to India's broader progress in expanding women's political representation, in Naga society, the perception of women being truly empowered remains largely a myth. According to Vehulu Lohe (2021), while progress has been made in education and employment, particularly in urban areas, women often lack genuine decision-making power. Odyuo (2023) ^[10] further highlights that Nagaland's historically patriarchal society, reinforced by rigid male-centric customary laws, continues to constrain the election of women as candidates and political representatives. In Nagaland, political parties dominated by men give low priority to women candidates, marginalizing their efforts despite women's active roles in election campaigns (Ojha, 2014) ^[14].

Nagaland remained without a single woman legislator for more than six decades after attaining statehood in 1963. Despite women's strong presence as voters and their active roles in civil society, structural barriers rooted in patriarchal norms and customary practices excluded them from formal legislative spaces. This long-standing gap was finally bridged in the 2023 state assembly elections, when Hekani Jakhalu was elected as the first woman MLA from the Dimapur-III constituency (Times of India, 2023) ^[21]. In the same election, Salhoutuonuo Krusealso secured a seat, making it the first time Nagaland had two women legislators in its history (India Today, 2023) ^[20]. Although the number remains very limited, these milestones mark an important step toward dismantling structural exclusion and broadening the scope of women's participation in the state's political institutions.

Although research has examined women's electoral participation across Nagaland, Phek District has received comparatively little scholarly attention. This district, predominantly inhabited by the Chakhesang tribe, presents a distinct socio-cultural environment where traditional norms, clan hierarchies, and patriarchal values continue to limit women's access to political leadership. Despite women actively participating as voters, they rarely contest elections or hold decision-making positions, highlighting a gap between electoral engagement and political representation. The present study addresses this gap by exploring the social, familial, and institutional barriers that constrain women's political involvement in Phek District. By examining these factors, the research aims to provide a deeper understanding of the challenges women face, while offering insights for promoting more inclusive governance and supporting gender-sensitive reforms in local politics.

This study seeks to understand the factors influencing women's political participation in Phek District, Nagaland, and to explore how social, cultural, and institutional contexts shape their engagement in electoral politics. It focuses on the barriers women face in accessing leadership positions, the community and family expectations that guide their political opportunities, and public attitudes toward women's political roles. The research also examines women's awareness of political platforms and access to leadership development initiatives. By analyzing these dimensions within Phek District's unique cultural setting, the study aims to provide insights that can inform strategies for more inclusive governance and support initiatives that promote gender-sensitive participation in politics.

2. Literature Review and Significance of the Study

Jamir (2012) ^[3], *Participation of Naga women in electoral politics: A case study of Kohima town, Nagaland*, observes that political participation among Naga women remains significantly low, regardless of their marital status, educational level, or employment status. The study suggests that this limited involvement stems from a long-standing exclusion from political spaces, leading many women to perceive political matters as complex or irrelevant to their roles. Overcoming such barriers requires collective and multi-level interventions by the state, civil society, NGOs, and media to challenge and reshape traditional mindsets. Importantly, women themselves must undergo a shift in self-perception, questioning deep-rooted beliefs about their societal roles. True political empowerment, Jamir argues, involves rural and urban women alike developing a more proactive and positive attitude toward politics. Equal representation is not merely an issue of fairness but a prerequisite for ensuring that women's perspectives are adequately represented in decision-making processes.

Achanger (2022) ^[1], in his study *Electoral Politics in Nagaland: An Analysis of Voting Behaviour*, highlights the widespread political apathy among the electorate in Nagaland. His findings suggest that this apathy does not arise merely from disinterest, but rather from deeper structural and social conditions, such as lack of political education, feelings of helplessness, and limited engagement with political institutions. He argues that when citizens do not fully understand the role of government or fail to see diversity and meaningful representation in politics, they may become disillusioned and withdraw from political engagement. Such conditions lead voters to act as floating voters- choosing candidates without long-term political affiliation or ideological loyalty. While this phenomenon affects the general electorate, it becomes even more significant in the context of women's political participation, especially in conservative and patriarchal settings of Phek district. The absence of gender-inclusive political spaces may contribute to women's marginalization from active political roles, both as voters and as potential candidates. This supports the rationale for examining gender-specific barriers to electoral participation, which this current study aims to address.

Pongen (2022) ^[2], *Voter's turnout and participation of women during elections in Nagaland: An analysis*, in his study he argues that while equality of outcome through gender-based quotas is often advocated for enhancing women's representation, such measures in themselves may not automatically result in genuine empowerment - particularly in developing regions. The case of Nagaland illustrates this tension clearly. Despite a policy mandating 25 percent representation for women in Village Development Boards since 1979, the actual involvement of women in grassroots decision-making processes remains marginal. Research highlights that structural socio-cultural factors limit the impact of such quotas, often benefiting women from elite or politically connected backgrounds, while further sidelining those from marginalized communities.

The author emphasizes that political empowerment is not merely a matter of representation through affirmative action, but also of visibility, competence, and public engagement. The rare electoral successes of women in Nagaland

including near victories by Rakhila and Awon Konyak, suggest that voters are not inherently biased against women, but are more likely to support candidates with strong public rapport and strategic outreach. Tokheli Kikon's historic role as the only woman to chair a village council in a state with over 1200 villages is both exceptional and instructive. Pongen concludes that although quotas may hasten representation, long-term progress will rely on sensitizing political institutions and building inclusive, gender-responsive leadership beyond tokenism.

Patton (2022) ^[4] *Political participation and political attitude: A study of Mokokchung District*, observes that men are generally more active in politics than women, a pattern that stems less from legal restrictions and more from differences in socialization and exposure to political processes. Women's participation remains limited as their social roles and responsibilities restrict their involvement in political activities, thereby reducing their sense of political efficacy. Such insights are significant when analyzing women's electoral participation in Nagaland, where cultural norms and societal expectations continue to influence the extent and nature of their political engagement.

Vekhosalu (2025) ^[11], *A discourse on clan-based political culture in Nagaland's electoral system*, highlights that in many parts of Nagaland, voting is less an act of individual democratic choice and more an expression of collective identity. A widely acknowledged yet rarely articulated principle, particularly in rural and semi-urban contexts, is to "vote as your clan votes." Electoral decisions are often shaped at the level of the family, clan, or village rather than by individuals alone, with clan allegiance frequently outweighing personal preference. This practice has direct implications for women's political participation, as candidacy and voter choice are largely determined by clan consensus, which continues to privilege male leadership and limit women's opportunities to contest elections independently.

3. Statement of Problem and Research Objectives

This research holds particular significance as it is one of the first focused studies on women's electoral participation in Phek District, Nagaland. Despite increasing national and regional discourse on gender and political representation, women from this district have not visibly participated in electoral politics either at the state or national level as contestants. By investigating the social, cultural, and structural challenges unique to this community, the study seeks to uncover the underlying reasons for this political underrepresentation. It will explore the role of customary norms, patriarchal attitudes, lack of political encouragement, and institutional barriers that may contribute to this persistent gap.

The study aims not only to diagnose the problem but also to propose actionable recommendations to encourage and empower women to actively participate in electoral politics. The findings will be of value to community leaders, policymakers, gender advocacy groups, and scholars in women's studies. Moreover, it will serve as a relevant contribution to the growing body of literature on women's political participation in India's Northeast- a region that is often underexplored in national-level academic research.

Numerous studies have been undertaken to explore the electoral participation of women in politics across various districts of Nagaland. However, there remains a significant

gap in research specifically focusing on Phek District. This district, predominantly inhabited by the Chakhesang tribe, presents a unique socio-political landscape where deeply rooted patriarchal norms continue to shape gender roles and societal expectations. Within this cultural context, women are often excluded from decision-making processes and are rarely encouraged to pursue leadership positions, particularly in the realm of politics. Phek District comprises five Assembly constituencies, Pfutsero, Chozuba, Chizami, Phek, and Meluri each with its own socio-cultural dynamics, yet collectively reflecting a broader pattern of gender-based political marginalization.

This research aims to fill the existing scholarly gap by undertaking a comprehensive study of the issues and challenges faced by women in their electoral participation within Phek District. By analyzing patterns of voter behavior, barriers to candidacy, the influence of traditional institutions, and the socio-cultural constraints, the study seeks to provide insights into the intersection of gender, tradition, and political engagement. The findings will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of women's political empowerment in tribal contexts and offer recommendations for inclusive governance and gender-sensitive electoral reforms in Nagaland.

1. To identify the major socio-cultural, political and institutional challenges that restricts women's participation in electoral politics in Phek District.
2. To examine public perceptions and attitudes (both male and female) towards women's leadership roles and political candidacy.
3. To explore the role of family, community and customary norms in shaping women's political engagement and decision-making opportunity.
4. To evaluate the level of awareness access to political platforms and availability of leadership training for women.

4. Methodology of the Study

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative techniques to generate a comprehensive understanding of the issues and challenges surrounding women's electoral participation in Phek District, Nagaland. The rationale for adopting this approach lies in its ability to capture both the measurable patterns of participation and the deeper, context-specific experiences that shape women's engagement in politics. The study population comprises residents from the five Assembly constituencies of Phek District-Pfutsero, Chozuba, Chizami, Phek, and Meluri. Using purposive sampling, a total of 100 respondents (20 from each constituency) were selected to ensure a broad representation of perspectives. The sample included both men and women above the age of 18, with 75 percent female and 25 percent male participants, reflecting the research's focus on women while also incorporating male perspectives. Respondents were chosen based on their knowledge, relevance, and willingness to contribute, ensuring that the data collected would be both meaningful and contextually informed. Educational, occupational, and social diversity were also considered to strengthen the representativeness of the sample. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Questionnaires provided quantifiable insights into voting behavior, perceptions of women's political roles, and awareness of leadership opportunities, while interviews

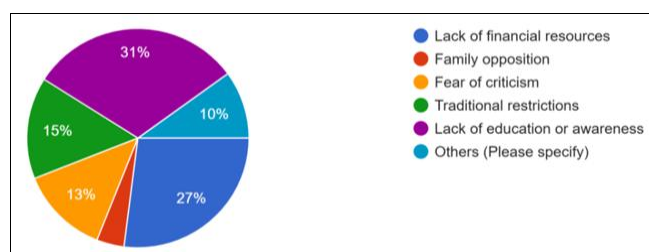
offered a deeper exploration of personal experiences, community attitudes, and the influence of customary norms on women's political engagement. These tools were selected for their effectiveness in capturing both statistical data and nuanced perspectives, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings.

For analysis, quantitative data derived from the questionnaires were processed using statistical techniques to identify trends and patterns in voter behavior and attitudes. Qualitative data from interviews were thematically coded and analyzed to uncover recurring themes and contextual dynamics that influence women's participation. The integration of these methods allowed for triangulation, strengthening the overall credibility of the results by balancing numerical evidence with in-depth qualitative insights.

Ethical considerations were strictly adhered to throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality of responses was ensured. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured that their information would be used solely for academic purposes. These measures were taken to uphold the ethical standards of research and to foster trust and openness during data collection.

5. Result and Discussions

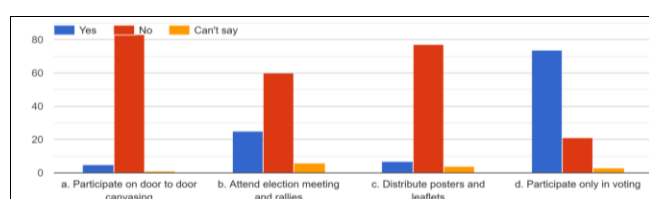
The study indicates that 31 percent of respondents believe women are unable to participate in politics due to a lack of education or awareness. Additionally, 27 percent attribute this to insufficient financial resources, 15 percent to traditional restrictions, 13 percent to fear of criticism, 10 percent to family opposition, and 6 percent to lack of education or awareness. Notably, 10 percent also cited lack of education or awareness as a contributing factor.



Sources: Survey data collection

Fig 1: Factors inhibiting women's electoral participation as reported by respondents

The study reveals minimal involvement of respondents in election campaigns, with very few participating in canvassing, rallies or distributing materials. The majority indicated participation only in voting, suggesting limited electoral engagement beyond the ballot.

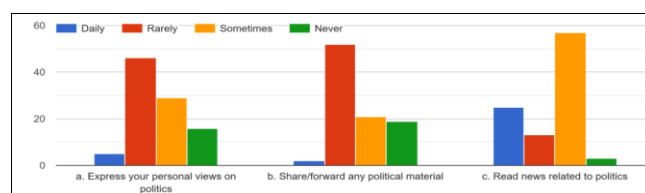


Sources: Survey data collection

Fig 2: Respondents' participation in election-related activities

In the context of social media, most respondents rarely express political views or share political materials, while

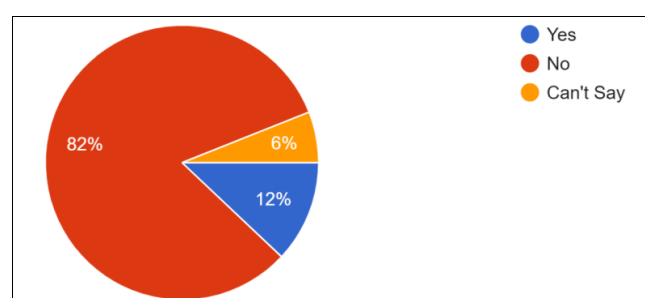
only a small proportion engage in reading political news online.



Sources: Survey data collection

Fig 3: Frequency of respondents' political engagement on social media platforms

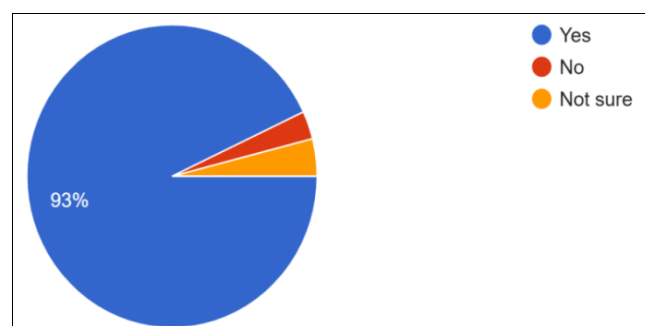
Figure depicts the respondents' membership status in political parties. The data show that a majority of respondents (82 percent) reported not being a member of any political party, while 12 percent stated that they are members. A small proportion, 6 percent were uncertain or preferred not to say.



Sources: Survey data collection

Fig 4: Membership of respondents in Political Parties

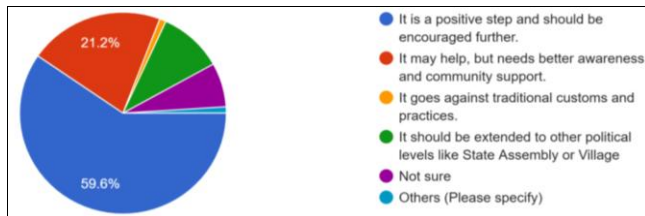
A majority of respondents with 93 percent expressed that both man and woman should have equal representation in politics.



Sources: Survey data collection

Fig 5: Respondents opinion on gender equality in political representation

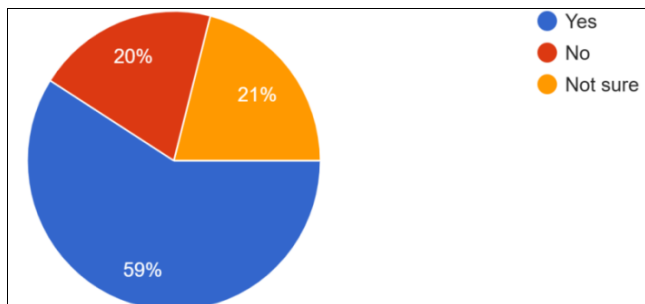
The study reveals that 59.6 percent of respondents viewed the implementation of 33percent reservation for women in Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) as a positive step that should be encouraged further. Meanwhile, 21.2 percent believed that the policy may help but requires greater awareness and community support for effective implementation. Additionally, 10.1percent felt that the reservation should be extended to other political levels such as the State Assembly or Village Councils. A smaller proportion, 7.1 percent, were unsure, while 1 percent stated that the policy goes against traditional customs and practices, and another 1 percent provided other opinions.



Sources: Survey data collection

Fig 6: Respondents' opinions on the 33 percent reservation policy for women in Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) in Nagaland

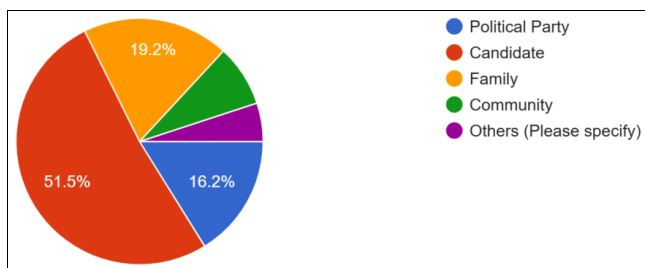
The study shows that 59 percent of the respondents agreed that societal expectations (e.g., family, Culture, Religion) limit women's political engagement, 20 percent do not agree with it, and 21 percent are unsure.



Source: Survey data collection

Fig 7: Perception of Societal Expectations Impacting Women's Political Engagement

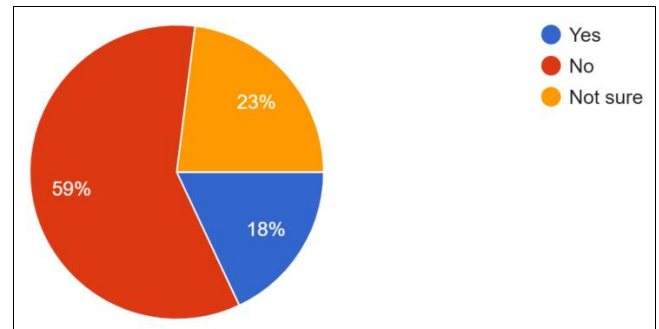
Figure presents the factors that influence respondents voting decisions. The data reveal that a majority of respondents indicated that their voting decision is most influenced by the candidate (51.5 percent), followed by political party (16.2 percent) and family (19.2 percent). A small portion mentioned community and others as influencing factors.



Sources: Survey data collection

Fig 8: Factors influencing voting decisions among respondents

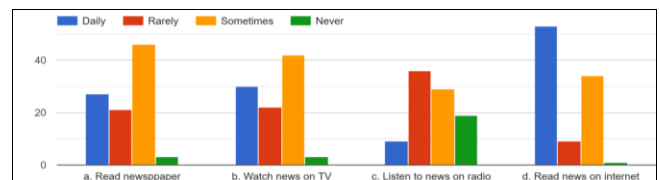
A total of 59 percent respondents reported that no woman from their family or community had ever shown interest in contesting elections (Lok Sabha or Assembly), while 18 percent indicated that some women had shown such interest. The remaining 23 percent of respondents were nor sure.



Sources: Survey data collection

Fig 9: Women's interest in contesting elections within family or community

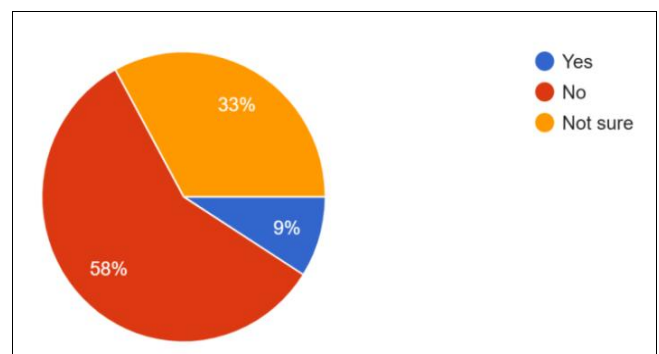
Figure illustrates the frequency with which respondents obtain news from various sources. It shows that respondents access news through newspapers, television, radio, and the internet at varying levels. A considerable number read newspapers and watch news on TV either daily or sometimes. Listening to news on the radio is relatively less frequent, while reading news on the internet records the highest daily usage among respondents.



Sources: Survey data collection

Fig 10: Frequency of accessing news through different media

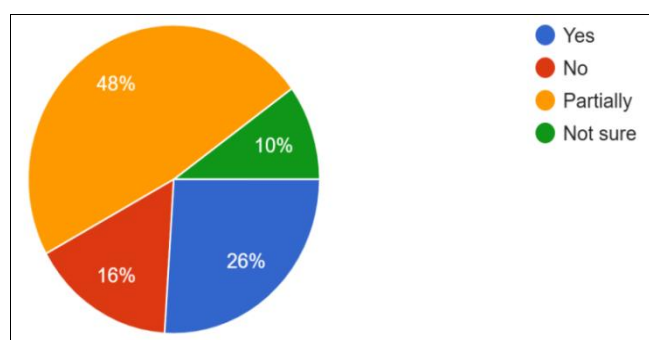
The study reveals that a majority of respondents (58 percent) perceive an insufficiency of leadership and capacity-building programmes for women aspiring to enter politics in Phek District. In contrast, 33 percent remain uncertain about the availability of such programmes, while only 9 percent consider the existing training opportunities to be sufficient.



Sources: Survey data collection

Fig 11: Respondents' perceptions on the availability of leadership and capacity-building programmes for women

The study indicates that 48 percent of respondents partially believe women in the community have adequate access to information and resources necessary for electoral participation, either as voters or as candidates. Meanwhile, 26 percent fully agree with this view, 16 percent disagree, and 10 percent remain uncertain.



Sources: Survey data collection

Fig 12: Respondents' perceptions of women's access to information and resources for electoral participation

5.1 Socio-cultural, Political, and Institutional Challenges Restricting Women's Participation in Electoral Politics in Phek District

The study identified several socio-cultural, political, and institutional factors that limit women's participation in electoral politics. A significant proportion of respondents (31 percent) reported that a lack of education or awareness hinders women from engaging in politics, while 27 percent cited insufficient financial resources as a major barrier. Additionally, 15 percent pointed to traditional restrictions, and 13 percent expressed that fear of criticism prevents women from active political involvement. These factors collectively indicate that both societal norms and personal limitations contribute to constrained political participation (Fig 1). In terms of actual electoral engagement, the findings reveal that women's participation beyond voting is minimal. Very few respondents reported involvement in campaign activities such as canvassing, attending rallies, or distributing materials. The majority engage only in casting their votes, suggesting that structural and social factors may limit women's active involvement in electoral processes (Fig 2). Social media engagement also appears limited. Most respondents rarely express political opinions or share political content online, and only a small proportion reported reading political news, indicating low digital political engagement among women (Fig 3). Furthermore, a majority of respondents (82 percent) reported not being members of any political party, while only 12 percent were party members, and 6 percent were uncertain or preferred not to say. This highlights low political affiliation as an institutional barrier, limiting women's access to party networks, leadership opportunities, and decision-making platforms (Fig 4). Overall, these findings suggest that women in Phek District face multiple, overlapping socio-cultural, financial, and institutional challenges that restrict their active participation in electoral politics.

5.2 Public Perceptions and Attitudes toward Women's Leadership and Political Candidacy

The findings reveal an overwhelmingly positive perception among respondents regarding gender equality in political representation. A large majority (93 percent) agreed that

both men and women should have equal opportunities and representation in politics, reflecting a strong societal endorsement of women's participation in leadership and decision-making roles (Fig 5). When asked about the recent implementation of the 33 percent reservation for women in Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) in Nagaland, 59.6 percent of respondents viewed it as a positive step that should be encouraged further. Another 21.2 percent believed that while the policy is beneficial, its effectiveness depends on greater awareness and community support. Furthermore, 10.1 percent felt that the reservation should be extended to other political levels, including the State Assembly and Village Councils, indicating support for broader inclusion of women in governance. In contrast, a small minority (1 percent) expressed that the policy goes against traditional customs and practices, while another 1 percent offered other unspecified opinions. About 7.1 percent of respondents remained unsure about their stance (Fig 6). Overall, these findings indicate a shifting public attitude toward recognizing women's leadership potential and political rights. While the majority express progressive and supportive views, the presence of a small conservative segment underscores the continued influence of traditional beliefs and the need for awareness programs to strengthen community acceptance of women's political participation.

5.3 The Role of Family, Community, and Customary Norms in Shaping Women's Political Engagement

The findings indicate that family, community expectations, and customary norms play a significant role in influencing women's participation in politics within Phek District. A majority of respondents (59 percent) agreed that societal expectations rooted in family, culture, and religion tend to limit women's political engagement, while 20 percent disagreed and 21 percent were uncertain (Fig 7). This suggests that traditional and patriarchal values continue to define acceptable roles for women, thereby discouraging their participation in public and political spaces. When asked about factors influencing voting decisions, 51.5 percent of respondents stated that their choices were primarily guided by the candidate's profile, followed by family influence (19.2 percent) and political party preference (16.2 percent), with a small percentage citing community and other factors (Fig 8). The inclusion of family and community as key influences indicates the collective nature of decision-making in Naga society, where individual political choices especially for women are often shaped by family and social expectations. Further, the data reveal that 59 percent of respondents reported that no woman from their family or community had ever shown interest in contesting elections (Lok Sabha or State Legislative Assembly), while only 18 percent stated that some women had done so, and 23 percent were unsure. This finding underscores the lack of visible female role models in politics and suggests a social environment that offers limited encouragement or acceptance for women's political ambitions (Fig 9). Overall, these findings demonstrate that customary norms, familial expectations, and cultural beliefs continue to exert a strong influence on women's political engagement. While individual interest in politics may exist, the absence of community and family support acts as a critical barrier, reinforcing the need for greater sensitization and attitudinal change at the household and community levels.

5.4 Awareness, Access to Political Platforms, and Availability of Leadership Training for Women

The findings suggest that women in Phek District exhibit varying levels of access to political information and awareness, primarily influenced by media exposure and the availability of support initiatives. Data show that respondents rely on multiple sources - newspapers, television, radio, and the internet to obtain news and information. Among these, online news consumption recorded the highest frequency, indicating that digital media has become a vital channel for staying informed. Reading newspapers and watching television were also common, while listening to the radio was least frequent. This pattern highlights the importance of media access in fostering political awareness, particularly among younger or urban respondents (Fig 10). However, despite exposure to media, the findings reveal limited institutional support mechanisms to enhance women's political participation. A majority (58 percent) of respondents perceived that leadership and capacity-building programmes for women aspiring to enter politics are insufficient in the district. In contrast, 33 percent were uncertain about the existence of such programmes, and only 9 percent believed the current opportunities are adequate (Fig 11). This reflects a significant gap in training infrastructure and suggests that women lack formal avenues to develop political skills, leadership confidence, and networking capacity. Regarding access to political platforms and resources, 48 percent of respondents partially agreed that women in their community have adequate access to information and resources necessary for electoral participation, while 26 percent fully agreed, 16 percent disagreed, and 10 percent remained uncertain (Fig 12). These responses reveal mixed perceptions, indicating that although some women are becoming more informed and engaged, access to essential political resources remains uneven and often dependent on social position, education, or locality. Overall, the findings suggest that limited leadership training opportunities, uneven access to political resources, and dependence on digital awareness channels collectively shape women's ability to participate effectively in politics. Strengthening institutional frameworks, expanding training initiatives, and improving information accessibility would be critical to enhancing women's political empowerment and representation in the district.

6. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that women in Phek District continue to face multiple socio-cultural, political, and institutional barriers that limit their participation in electoral politics. Consistent with Jamir (2012) [3], women's limited engagement reflects long-standing exclusion from political spaces, compounded by low education, financial constraints, and fear of criticism. While most women participate in voting, their involvement in campaign activities, party membership, and social media engagement remains minimal, highlighting persistent structural and societal challenges.

Public perceptions toward women's leadership, however, appear largely progressive, with 93 percent of respondents supporting gender equality in political representation. Support for the 33 percent reservation in Urban Local Bodies suggests growing recognition of the importance of inclusive governance. Yet, a small minority continues to

adhere to traditional norms, indicating that socio-cultural attitudes, while shifting, still influence women's political opportunities a finding echoed by Ponggen (2022) [2] and Patton (2022) [4].

Family, community, and customary norms were identified as key determinants of political engagement. Clan-based and family-centered voting patterns, as highlighted by Vekhosalu (2025) [11], continue to privilege male leadership and constrain women's independent political choices. The absence of women role models within families or communities further reinforces these barriers, consistent with Achanger (2022) [1], who notes that structural and social conditions, rather than individual disinterest, underlie political apathy among women.

Finally, the study highlights gaps in awareness, access to political platforms, and leadership training. Despite frequent use of media for information, most women perceive insufficient capacity-building programs and limited access to resources for electoral participation. This aligns with Ponggen's (2022) [2] observation that affirmative policies, such as quotas, must be accompanied by efforts to build competence, visibility, and meaningful engagement to achieve genuine political empowerment.

Overall, the findings confirm that while attitudinal shifts and policy interventions are gradually improving women's prospects in politics, deep-rooted cultural norms, institutional gaps, and limited support structures continue to hinder full participation. Addressing these challenges will require multi-level interventions, including community sensitization, targeted leadership training, and expanded access to political resources, to ensure that women are not only represented but also empowered to participate effectively in governance.

7. Study Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the research was conducted only in Phek District, which may limit the generalizability of the results to other districts or regions of Nagaland. Second, the study relied primarily on self-reported survey responses, which may be influenced by social desirability bias, particularly regarding sensitive topics like gender norms and political participation. Third, while the study examined socio-cultural, political, and institutional factors, other contextual variables such as economic status, and urban-rural differences were not explored in depth. Despite these limitations, the study provides important insights into the barriers and enablers of women's electoral participation in the district and can inform future research and policy interventions.

8. Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the socio-cultural, political, and institutional factors influencing women's electoral participation in Phek District, Nagaland. The findings reveal that while women actively participate in voting, their involvement in campaign activities, party membership, and leadership roles remains limited due to traditional norms, financial constraints, lack of awareness, and inadequate institutional support. Public attitudes toward gender equality are largely positive, and policies like the 33 percent reservation in Urban Local Bodies are welcomed, yet persistent social and cultural barriers continue to restrict full political engagement. The study has significant theoretical

and practical implications. It reinforces existing literature on patriarchy, gendered socialization, and structural constraints, while highlighting the need for targeted interventions to empower women politically. Practically, the findings suggest the importance of community sensitization, leadership training, and expanded access to political resources to enhance women's participation and representation. In conclusion, achieving meaningful women's electoral participation requires a multi-level approach that combines policy measures, societal change, and individual empowerment, ensuring that women are not only represented but also able to influence decision-making effectively.

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