

**Journal of Social Sciences Research & Policy (JSSRP)****An Assessment of Participation Gap between Women Voters and Women Leaders in the Politics of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa****Sonia Ambreen<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Noor Fatima<sup>2</sup>**

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Politics of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa**Corresponding Author:****Sonia Ambreen**Email: [Soniaambreen@yahoo.com](mailto:Soniaambreen@yahoo.com)**License:**

**Abstract:** Over the last decade, women's participation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's electoral politics has consistently shaped its democratic outlook, primarily as voters rather than candidates. This shift marks significant progress in a region where traditional norms have long marginalized women politically. While their growing presence at the ballot box indicates rising political awareness, their reluctance to assume leadership roles raises a crucial question: Why are women voting, but not leading? Drawing on interviews with women voters, political activists, and party insiders across selected Khyber Pakhtunkhwa district, this study explore how mainstream political parties like Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Pakistan People's Party (PPP), and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) engage women differently depending on their roles. While women are actively mobilized as voters, they are often excluded from decision-making process and rarely encouraged to lead. Internal party hierarchies, lack of mentorship, and deeply rooted socio-religious expectations all contribute to keeping women out of leadership forums. For younger women, the barriers are even higher, compounded by generational resistance and social pressure. By highlighting the lived experiences of women navigating these tensions, the study sheds light on what it means to be politically active but still politically invisible. It calls for targeted reforms within parties and at the community level to create real opportunities-not just symbolic ones-for women to lead.

**Introduction**

In recent years, something remarkable has been happening in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Women-many voting for the first time in their lives-are showing up at polling stations in increasing numbers. It's a powerful image: women wrapped in traditional shawls, lining up under the sun, determined to make their voices heard. This growing presence signals change. But it also brings into sharp focus a troubling question: if women are voting in such numbers, why aren't they leading?

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is a province where politics is still very much a man's game. Deep-rooted cultural expectations, conservative values, and male-dominated party structures continue to define who gets to lead—and who doesn't. Women who try to step beyond the voting booth and into political office often find themselves blocked by more than just party rules. They face scepticism from their communities, silence from their male colleagues, and a lack of visible role models to follow.

This study seeks to understand the gap between women's political participation as voters and their

limited role as leaders. Why are major parties in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa willing to rally women's support at the polls but reluctant to support them as candidates? What structural and cultural forces are keeping women out of leadership positions—and what can be done to change that?

### Literature Review

#### Women Voters vs. Women Leaders: A Global and Regional Perspective

At the global level, women's participation in electoral politics has registered a steadily increasing trend, particularly with voting patterns. Enlargements of suffrage increased civic rights awareness, and strategic mobilization of voters have served to narrow gaps in voter turnout by gender in most democracies (Inglehart & Norris, 2003). The success registered in women's voting rights, however, has not been converted to their political representation. Despite being in advanced democracies, women are overwhelmingly underrepresented in legislative and executive leaderships (IPU, 2023). The gap thus created—aptly referred to as the "participation gap"—indicates a disconnect between passive inclusion within and active empowerment in politics. South Asia follows the same pattern, albeit with more sociocultural complexity. India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka have had women rise to their highest leadership jobs, yet women are figures on the sidelines of daily politics, especially at provincial and local levels (Nazneen & Mahmud, 2012). Pakistan demonstrates that same dichotomy as well. As women's turnout to vote grew—setting records in some constituencies during their 2018 general elections—women's leadership within parties and public office is still limited and essentially held back by organizational and abstract limitations (Bari, 2010).

**Feminism and Institutionalism Theoretical Perspectives** Two significant theories—liberal feminism and feminist institutionalism—are useful analytical tools to consider when looking at the gap between leaders and women voters. Liberal feminism emphasizes equal opportunity and formal constraints to participation and argues that women should have equal access to schools, institutions of politics, and leadership roles as males (Tong, 2009). According to such a theory, there exists underlying support for such calls for gender quotas, voter registration drives, and women's wings within parties. Feminist institutionalism, on the other hand, considers more deeply structures and norms that shape institutional behaviour. By its terms, even when formal barriers are overcome, informal norms—in patronage networks, gender-ascribed roles, and male-dominated political cultures—continue to be restrictive for women's inclusion (Chappell & Waylen, 2013). The theory is particularly relevant in contexts such as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where institutions are prone to reproduce existing power relationships and sideline women through implicit regulations and internal parties' authority structures.

#### Women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Politics: Cultural and Institutional Obstacles

For women's political participation in Pakistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa presents a categorically challenging case. The province is characterized by pervasive tribal networks, rigid gender systems, and a history of conservative religious polity. A range of case analyses has documented situations in which women are discouraged to vote or stand for election because of cultural taboos, family opposition, and violence threats (Shah, 2018; Khattak & Sattar, 2020). In some districts, women used to be denied the vote altogether by social conventions or by outright threats. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's role for political parties complicates further. Parties like PTI, PPP, and PML-N publicly advocate for women's empowerment, but their internal policies often reflect tokenism rather than genuine inclusion. The reserved seats for women—while necessary—are used more frequently as a method for rewarding loyalty rather than effective leadership (Jalal, 2014).

Bari (2010) and Mumtaz (2018) point out that women elected on reserved seats are frequently marginalized from substantive decision-making in their political parties. Without electoral popularity or

base support of one's own, such 'leaders' seldom have the capacity to carve out independent political careers or to wield any real influence. Intergenerational dynamics on top of everything else compounds that exclusion. These new and aspiring future women politicians often fight not just a patriarchal order but also senior and older women politicians who have learned to play the system as it is played by men (Siddiqi, 2019). These tensions are largely ignored in party training programs and policy documents, as reflected in the broader general disregard for long-term, sustainable approaches to gender inclusion.

### **Research Deficiencies in the Field**

While there is already extensive literature that gives rich detail to the broader challenges of women's political participation, there are gaps to be filled—particularly for the distinct gap between voting and leadership. The overwhelming amount of scholarship focuses either on women's voting behavior (e.g., reason for vote, turnout rates) or women who are already serving in office. Not very much scholarship investigates the gap between both ends and why election turnout at higher rates does not necessarily translate to increased leadership turnout.

In addition, working in the Pakistani context, most research was invested in national data or provincial aggregate trends. The unique socio-political dynamics within Khyber Pakhtunkhwa —specifically, intra-party organization, localized gatekeeping, and inter-generational resistance—have been somewhat under-examined.

Although some qualitative studies have inquired into women's exclusion from politics in particular districts, we still have scant evidence about the roles women are permitted—or prevented from—playing inside the formal structures of mainstream political parties in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, despite the increasing visibility of women as voters.

Moreover, women who actively participate in the political process but do not hold leadership positions—such as party workers, campaign volunteers, or rally participants—remain largely overlooked in existing literature. Knowing their stories is crucial for studying how political ambition is fostered or suppressed within party culture, and how routes to leadership are facilitated or prevented.

### **Conclusion of Literature Review**

There is a striking contrast between women's empowerment as citizens and their disempowerment as leaders globally and within South Asia. Sure enough, conceptual frameworks such as liberal feminism and feminist institutionalism can explain such trends, yet there is certainly a need for localized, party-oriented, and generation-inclusive scholarship that engages with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa domain with meticulous detail. The current article tries to do exactly that by examining women's vote gap and women's leadership gap within Pakistan's province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with emphasis upon mainstream political parties and their strategies and roles.

### **Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative research design to examine women's vote and women leaders' gap associated with women's lived experiences, motivations, and organizational challenges in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The qualitative approach is best suited to this study because it assists in collecting data that is contextualized and rich and assists in capturing the nuances of social, cultural, and political situations with which women are confronted when aspiring to politically participate (Khattak & Sattar, 2020; Maxwell, 2013).

### **Research Design**

This study adopts an interpretivist paradigm that explores how people make meaning of their social and political experiences. It is valuable for the exploration of women's experiences, motives and obstacles within party politics, because it stresses context, depth, and lived realities rather than statistical

generalization. For the present study, the interpretivist paradigm is appropriate because it aims to explore how the participants make sense of and interpret social realities. In this situation, it helps us look at the reasons behind the gap between the female vote as well as the restricted representation of women as leaders, from the perspective on the women too as in the political actors. This is not intended to form empirical generalizations, but to reveal the significances, institutional practices and sociocultural constraints that structure women's political experiences in main ruling parties of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa i.e. PTI, PPP and PML-N (Bari, 2010; Chappell & Waylen, 2013).

### Sampling Strategy

A combination of purposive and snowball sampling methods was used to screen respondents for their relevance to study objectives. Purposive sampling facilitated the deliberate selection of participants — women politicians and political office bearers, in view of their direct contextual relevance to the research question. Moreover, snowball sampling was done to recruit respondents who belong to more marginal or difficult to access groups, including women involved in internal party activity in conservative constituencies. This methodology is particularly useful in situations where 'official' lists of those to be interviewed are not available and trust is necessary for gaining access (Naderifar et al., 2017):

1. Women voters (n = 20–25) in both rural and urban districts, selected to be representative of differing voting experiences.
2. Probable women leaders (n = 12–15), for example, local-level party workers, ex-candidates, and women's wing members
3. Party functionaries and officials (n = 6–8), both male and females tasked with selecting candidates or women's outreach.

Respondents were chosen with help from civil society networks, university connections, and word of mouth by initial respondents. Care was taken to obtain representation by districts and parties (Shah, 2018).

### Data Collection Tools

Three principal data collection methods were employed:

- 1. Semi-structured interviews:** Interviews were conducted in Pashto and in Urdu, depending upon respondents' preference. Interviews took anywhere between 30 and 60 minutes and employed a flexible guide varying by participant group. Main points addressed were voting motivations, perceptions of leadership, and structures of support for parties, and socio-cultural barriers (Seidman, 2019).
- 2. Document analysis:** Party official policy statements, women's wing newsletters, and policy statements were examined to assess each party's official commitments to inclusion for women. Election Commission of Pakistan and civil society organization reports such as those by FAFEN (2021) were also used to track gender-disaggregated election data.
- 3. Field notes and observations:** When possible, the researcher attended political events, women's wing events, and campaign events to observe gender dynamics in motion and capture informal interactions that shaped participants' experiences (Emerson et al., 2011)

### Limitations

Several limitations of the study are acknowledged. First, the use of snowball sampling may have introduced bias by oversampling individuals from interconnected political networks, potentially limiting the diversity of perspectives captured (Naderifar et al., 2017). Second, the transferability of findings may be constrained, as the results are context-specific and not statistically generalizable to broader populations outside the study setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Third, the possibility of social desirability

bias exists, wherein participants may have shaped their responses to align with perceived social expectations—such as demonstrating partisan loyalty or downplaying gender discrimination. Efforts were made to mitigate this bias through rapport-building and assurances of confidentiality throughout the data collection process.

### **Ethical Consideration**

All the participants were presented with information about the study's aims and consent was obtained before participation (Israel & Hay, 2006). All names, party labels, and place names in transcription and reporting were de-identified to preserve anonymity. Women, especially those from rural settings, were interviewed with cultural sensitivity and local customs that were observed (Mumtaz, 2018). The audio recordings, as well as the transcripts, were kept secure and will be deleted five years after the publication date, in accordance with ethically-sound data management procedures.

### **Findings**

The article proceeds with a discussion of four core themes arising from the interviews, document analysis and electoral data. Each theme informs the women participation gap both as voters and leaders in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

#### **Theme 1: Why Women Vote in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa**

Notwithstanding the existing social and institutional barriers, women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are voting in significant numbers. Three salient motivations were identified:

##### **1. Political Consciousness**

Responsibility and faith in democratic processes were among the reasons many women were quoted. A respondent from Peshawar said:

"It's our responsibility as a citizen, if we don't go vote then we have no right to put demands for change" (Interview 2025-03-15, Peshawar).

##### **2. Family and Tribal Influence**

In the countryside, women did not vote, voting being their husbands' prerogative, often as the representative of extended family or tribe. A voter from Dir remarked:

"I will vote for the man supported by my father and uncle – we trust him." (Interview 2025-04-02, Dir).

##### **3. Religious Duty and Polls for Women**

Whereas separate-gender polling stations were created to accommodate purdah norms, there is evidence that in 2013 and 2014, such stations led to a 2-percentage point drop in turnout, a sign that they can produce barriers to voting (Chattha & Lakhtakia, 2020). But some women were more comfortable voting in women-only queues:

"When voting, there were no men to see me" (Interview 2025-03-10, Mardan).

Data from local government elections corroborate such trends (female turnout in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's districts was about 30 percent in 2022, although still below that of males at 41 percent) (Khan, 2022; FAFEN, 2022)

#### **Theme 2: Why Women Don't Lead**

But despite high turnout at the polls, progress for women's leadership positions has been slow. Key barriers include:

##### **1. Stigma and Gendered Norms**

Data were collected in the first half of 2014. By dint of deeply ingrained patriarchal traditions, women are discouraged from seeking the public office. A female Swat candidate said:

"Men, they say that a woman in power... is against our culture... they talk about my chastity" (Interview 2025-03-20).

## 2. Internal Party Gatekeeping

Political parties never nominate women as general seat candidates. Reserved seats, for their part, are largely decorative:

“Reserved seats are good, but who backs us in general seats?” (Women’s wing volunteer, Peshawar).

Research indicates that women on reserved seats have marginal role in the party decision making process (Khan, 2024; IPU, 2023)

## 3. Economic Constraints

Cost of campaign, in the face of high culture beliefs and responsibilities of family, keep many women from contesting. A party office bearer of PPP admitted that women are hardly ever allotted those constituencies which need financial input!

### Theme 3: Party-specific Roles—

PML-N, PPP, and PTI Analysis reveals that each party was playing its party-specific role in the case of PML-N, PPP, and PTI.

Every mainstream party treats the task of mobilizing women as voters differently from the task of promoting an appeal to women as leaders:

#### PTI:

Hailed for boosting voter registration and leading a digital campaign. However, its senior leadership is overwhelmingly male lineage, and women have limited opportunities for upward mobility (Interview, 2025-03-12, PTI official, Peshawar).

PPP: Pakistan People’s Party has offered some constrained leadership to women on reserved seats. Provincial Assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (n.d.) reports that Nighat Yasmin Orakzai held a reserved seat for women between 2013 and 2018, in line with the party- level quota system for women in politics. However, the concept of general seat candidacy is still rare and constant rhetoric of empowerment does not translate into actual nominations – exposing a difference between formal commitment and substantive representation.

#### PML-N:

Works through shadow institutions or informal networks as women’s tribal associations and community alliances but with few women in visible leadership. "PML-N is scared to see what would happen if women also contested - the party has itself experimented in setting up local community networks but cowers when it comes to fielding women in winnable constituencies" (Interview, 2025-04-05, PML-N party worker, Mardan).

### Theme 4: Adapting or Not- Adapting Local Successes and Exceptions

#### Success stories offer hope and a path for potential change:

- Samar Haroon Bilour made history in 2018 when she won a general KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA provincial assembly seat (PK 78 [Peshawar XIII]) by election to become the first woman to do so for 16 years. Widely covered by Arab News, her success was largely due to her family’s longstanding political involvement — the Bilour family was an integral part of local politics, revealing how family-based political capital can assist women in navigating systemic prejudices (Arab News 2020)
- Begum Zari Sarfaraz was a mother of woman movement of Mardan, she was a patriotic lady, whose work during the 1940s in the Pakistan Movement and afterwards encouraged the future generation to follow up for the integrity of their own region.

Ahmad (2020) highlights that Begum Zari Sarfaraz served in the NWFP Assembly from 1952 to 1956 and later in the National Assembly during the 1960s. Her efforts in women’s welfare and social service exemplify the long-term impact of early female role models in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.



These cases demonstrate how family tradition, local authority, and historical precedent have allowed women to overcome broader systemic obstacles to political integration.

### Blending Qualitative and Quantitative Data

These thematic insights are substantiated with FAFEN data and other election observations:

- From 12.8 percent gender gap in 2013 female registration rose to 7.7 percent in 2023 indicating a better enrolment (FAFEN, 2024)
- Male turnout was 41percent while that of female was 30percent in the 2022 local elections that showed that gender disparities still reign during civic activities beyond general elections day.

There are good reasons for these numbers not to transfer into leadership, covering substantive issues, but the qualitative findings help us understand that party exclusion, social stigma and resource limitations do not affect voting, but they do impact on candidacy and leadership elevation.

### Insight Findings

Theme	Key Insights
<b>Women as Voters</b>	Motivated by a sense of duty, parental example, religious values; turnout ~30–40%
<b>Barriers to Leadership</b>	Shame, mudslinging within the party, financial strain
<b>Mainstream Dynamics</b>	<b>Party</b> PPP depended on reserved seats; PTI gets voters, not leaders out; PML-N still searching for women

<b>Success Cases</b>	Women can use family and historical politics to circumvent institutional barriers
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These results highlight a paradox, that despite enhanced voting mobilization among women, they still face a variety of institutional and sociocultural barriers to rise to leadership in mainstream Khyber Pakhtunkhwa parties.

### Discussion

The present study highlights the enduring divide in women's voters and leaders in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Though there has been a notable increased participation of female voters marked by a 30–41 per cent female turnout in local elections (FAFEN, 2022) this increase has not led to enlarged female political representation. This contrast underscores the shortcomings of the formal mechanisms of reserved quotas, separate polling stations for women and other creates of votes — signalling the interconnectivity of longstanding sociocultural practices and institutional stagnation.

### Bridging Theory and Evidence

From a liberal feminist point of view, the increasing turnout represents progress toward equal engagement in civic life. Through voting, women practice political subjectivity, a basic democratic right (Tong, 2009). But policy change, making seats reserved and women-centric campaigns by parties are half the solution.

Feminist institutionalism seeks to understand why formal initiatives to incorporate women into politics—such as reserved seats, women-only campaigns and voting—so frequently fall short of challenging informal institutional norms and entrenched cultural beliefs that are consistently used to keep women out of power (Chappell, Waylen & certain, 2013).

Our qualitative findings support this perspective, revealing how social stigma, party gatekeeping, and economic constraints operate as underlying informal norms that continue to reinforce male dominance in political leadership (Interview data, 2025). Often, male party members who publicly support women's rights simultaneously act as barriers to female representation. Additionally, internal party structures

tend to consistently prioritize male candidates, further limiting women's access to meaningful roles. These patterns reflect what Chappell and Waylen (2013) argue—that informal institutional norms play a crucial role in shaping the actual impact of formal inclusion mechanisms.

### **Differentiating the Party: Mobilization versus Leadership**

PML-N, PPP, and PTI are clearly not playing the same part. PTI has been relatively successful in getting women to vote through digital campaigns and community level outreach especially urban areas. But it has long lagged in building women's leadership pipelines. PTI's method is in line with a mobilize-first-then-lead-later strategy that increases women's participation in civic life without institutionally promoting leadership (Interview, 2025).

PPP, on the other hand, has been an apostle of symbolic leadership, through the reserved seats—but women hardly run for the general seats. Relatively progressive stance historically.

Little effort is made by the PML-N to include women, whom the party prefers to leave as allies of tribal elites than leaders. And since gender inclusion seems instrumental to them as an electoral and political strategy, it can be argued from a theoretical frame (Khan, 2022; Mumtaz, 2018) that parties are likely to be more interested in relatively uncontentious gender aspects, without questioning power structures in their own organizations.

### **Cultural and Socio-Economic Obstacles**

Campaign-related economic costs are higher for women - and being confronted with the understanding that politics are not "women's business" casts doubts upon women's leadership caliber (Interview, 2025). The economic (through the cost of travel, the loss of stipends, etc) and social cost (lack of social incentives) barriers to female leadership are not effectively addressed by current policy frameworks. This trend is reflected in comparative studies of South Asia - where only economic empowerment can ensure the process of changing political representation (Nazneen & Mahmud, 2012).

### **Success Stories; Templates for Reform**

The election of Samar Haroon Bilour from PK 78 in October 2018—becoming the first woman in 16 years to win a general seat in KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA —demonstrates how women can inherit political capital through their family's legacy in a system that otherwise limits female leadership opportunities (Arab News, 2020).

The likes of Zari Sarfaraz remind us of how family legacy can help structure the political aspirations of women.

These are successes that teach us that, though inclusion policies are required, they are NOT enough. The leadership of women often needs such intangible assets as intergenerational capital, local legitimacy, and familistic blessing to surmount normative and institutional hurdles. These results reflect global insights that social networks and legacy continue to be important factors in women's political life histories (McBride, 2013).

### **Policy and Party-level Suggestions**

And if we accept these theoretical and empirical insights, several propositions come out:

1. Mentorship and Leadership Pipelines: Parties should make an investment in training female party members—particularly those at the grassroots and young women—to contest an election, and to transition from mobilizing 14 voters to governing (ibid.).
2. Quota Expansion and Candidate Assistance: Reserved seat quotas must be augmented with targets for contesting general seats that are tied to campaign financing requirements and leadership training programs (Krook, 2009).



3. Community and Family Engagement: Engagement with the community (which includes male family members, particularly tribal elders) in outreach programs can help see the role of women in leadership differently and make stigma less (Shaheed, 2018).
4. Economical Support to Female Candidates: Setting up for campaign funds or stipend for female aspirants, probably through women wings or outside NGOs can possibly reduce the financial constraint.
5. Monitoring and Accountability: Independent institutions (Election Commission of Nepal, civil society groups) should continually monitor the performance of parties on the participation of women in leadership roles (not merely on voter turnout indicators).

### **Conclusion of Discussion**

This article contributes to theoretical and policy discussions by showing that, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the gulf between women voters and leaders is perpetuated by a complicated set of cultural attitudes and institutional obstacles. For it is one thing to have the window of women's electoral participation opened as a matter of both right and quota, but quite another to effect meaningful representation in actual leadership, and here, we must begin to think in terms of a more thoroughgoing transformation of party structure, resource allocation, and cultural instantiation.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

#### **Conclusion**

This research probed into an enduring gender divide between women's voting and the subsequent low political representation among leadership, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, such as by the mainstream political parties: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). Even though women's turnout has expanded over time because of educational campaigns and policy reforms, their mobilization into leadership positions face societal, institutional and economic barriers.

The results substantiated that sociocultural norms, especially in rustic and tribal regions, still prevent women from free mobility and participation in public. Political parties serve as double-edged sword, mobilizing women for votes but rarely offering pathways for leadership development. Women are generally relegated to token roles and available seats but are without real decision-making power. The structural exclusions as well as the patriarchal guard on the gates, combined with lack of financial resources and limited mentorship, amplify these issues.

The gap between formal inclusion processes and actual empowerment supports feminist institutionalist theories, positing that institutional cultures and informal practices frequently undermine policy-level reforms around gender (Chappell & Waylen, 2013). Bridging this participation gap is more than a matter of legal reforms or quota allocations; it would entail deep change in party apparatus, cultural narratives and political norms.

#### **Recommendations**

In the light of the study's findings and theoretical foundation, the following suggestions are made:

##### **1. Institutional Party Reforms**

- Mainstream political parties should articulate clear criteria and transparent processes to nominate women candidates from general seats rather than through a quota system.
- Decisions of women's wings should be given binding status and the wings should be made part of the central party strategies.

##### **2. Training and Mentorship Programs**

- Political parties and CSOs should also work on developing future women leaders, at the local level.
- All training shall include public speaking, media outreach, fundraising, and building constituents.

### 3. Support for the Economy and for Logistics

Create election-support funds for women candidates, particularly in low-income areas or rural legislative districts, to alleviate campaign-related financial requirements (Krook, 2009).

### 4. Community Service and Service Learning

- Organize community sensitizations targeting the male family members and local leadership to change the perceptions about women and their ability to lead.
- Cultivate family and tribal endorsements for female candidates to engender social legitimacy.

### 5. Review and Oversight opportunities

- The election commission of Pakistan and independent watchdogs should observe intra-party practices on gender inclusion and issue periodic audits on women's leadership participation.
- Create a leadership development index, to monitor the way women move through party ranks.

### Final Note

The disconnect between women's right to vote and their representation in leadership is holding back the true democratic and inclusive political system in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Progress in female voting, but the fate of gender equity in ruling hinges on structural, party-degree, and cultural shifts. This project adds to that ongoing discussion through pinpointing major obstacles and suggesting potential pathways.

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