



# Political Participation of women in Jammu and Kashmir: A Research Perspective

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## Abstract

The political participation of women in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) presents a compelling case of resilience amid systemic constraints, shaped by the region's conflict-ridden history, patriarchal socio-cultural norms, and evolving governance structures. This research explores the dynamics of women's electoral engagement in J&K, a Union Territory marked by its diverse demographics and political upheavals, notably the revocation of Article 370 in 2019. Despite constitutional assurances of equality and legislative measures such as the universal franchise in 1951 and the 33% reservation in Panchayati Raj Institutions in 2011 women's representation in formal politics remains marginal. Historical peaks, like the 5.33% Assembly representation in 1972, contrast with a persistent ceiling of 3% in subsequent decades, while grassroots leadership roles, such as Sarpanch, remain scarce despite reserved quotas. Drawing on secondary data from electoral records, census reports, and scholarly literature, this study highlights women's political agency, evidenced by high voter turnouts in 2014 and acts of resistance like public mourning, yet underscores how socio-economic barriers illiteracy, poverty, and domestic responsibilities limit their influence. Tribal communities, such as the Gujjars, face compounded challenges, exacerbated by conflict-induced restrictions on mobility and safety. The 2019 political shift offers potential opportunities, yet the lack of Assembly seat reservations and party support stifles progress. This research advocates for education, legal reforms, economic empowerment, and institutional innovations like Women's Legislative Caucuses to enhance women's roles. By addressing these impediments, J&K can advance toward inclusive democracy, leveraging women's participation for gender equity and sustainable governance in a region long defined by instability.

**Keywords:** *Women's, political participation, Jammu and Kashmir, focusing on gender equity, Panchayati Raj Institutions.*



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) had a population of 12.55 million according to the 2011 Census, which dropped to about 12.2 million in the J&K Union Territory after Ladakh became separate in 2019, with a population growth rate of 23.64% from 2001 to 2011; it consists of Jammu (plains and hills), the Kashmir Valley (mountainous), and Ladakh (high desert, now distinct). The region shows a gender imbalance with a sex ratio of 889 females per 1,000 males and a literacy rate of 67.16% (76.75% for males, 56.43% for females), while religiously, it's diverse with Muslims at 68.31% (dominant in Kashmir), Hindus at 28.44% (mostly in Jammu), Sikhs at 1.87%, and Buddhists at 0.9% (notable in Ladakh alongside Muslims). Language-wise, Kashmiri is spoken by 53%, alongside Dogri and Hindi/Urdu, with Urdu as the official language, and the population is largely rural (72.62%) compared to urban (27.38%), with Srinagar and Jammu as key cities. About 16.01% of residents were under 6 years old in 2011, indicating a young populace, and ethnic groups include Kashmiris in the Valley, Dogras in Jammu, nomadic Gujjars and Bakarwals, and Ladakhis (now separate); since the 2019 removal of Article 370 turned J&K into a Union Territory, no new census has updated these figures, though conflict has influenced shifts, and the economy relies heavily on agriculture (over 60%), handicrafts, and tourism ([Census of India, 2011](#); [Government of India, 2019](#); [web/X updates as of February 24, 2025](#)). Women's participation in elections in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) is an interesting topic to study because it shows how gender, politics, and culture mix in a place with a complicated history. J&K has faced conflict, military presence, and traditional rules that often limit women's roles. Still, women take part in elections as voters, candidates, or supporters, showing both their strength and the challenges, they face. This introduction explains why researching women's electoral participation in J&K matters. It looks at the region's past, its current changes, and what this means for women's equality in democracy. J&K has a tough history. It joined India in 1947, but since then, it's seen fighting, unrest, and lots of soldiers ([Singh, 2010](#)). Elections here are tricky some see them as a way to show democracy works, while others think they're just the government's way of keeping

control. In this messy situation, women's role in voting or running for office is both limited and powerful. India's Constitution says everyone, including women, has equal rights to vote and participate (Articles 14 and 15), but in J&K, things don't always match up with that promise. Research tries to figure out: How much power do women really have in elections? What helps or stops them? And does their involvement change J&K's politics?

J&K isn't all the same it's split into Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh (Ladakh became separate in 2019). Each part has different people, religions, and ways of life. For example, Kashmir has mostly Muslims, Jammu has mostly Hindus, and Ladakh has Buddhists. These differences affect how women get involved in elections ([Kazi, 2014](#)). In Kashmir, where conflict has been worst, people watch women's voting to see if they trust the system. Research needs to look closely at these differences to understand the full picture of women and politics in J&K.

One big thing to study is how women show strength but also face limits. Sometimes, women vote more than men like in the 2014 elections, where they turned out in big numbers despite danger ([Election Commission of India, 2014](#)). That shows they care about politics. But very few women run for office because of old ideas that politics is for men and because parties don't support them. So, while lots of women vote, they rarely get to lead. This makes researchers ask: Is voting real power, or just something women do in a system run by men? Studies can use numbers like how many women vote and stories from women themselves to find answers. J&K's politics changed a lot when India removed Article 370 in 2019, taking away its special status and making it two Union Territories ([Government of India, 2019](#)). These shook-up elections, with new debates about power and borders. For women, this could mean new chances to get involved, but there's no rule saving seats for them in the J&K Assembly, unlike in local councils where 33% of spots are for women ([Panchayati Raj Act](#)). Research needs to see how these changes affect women, especially after 2019. This isn't just about J&K—it connects to bigger ideas about women in democracy worldwide. In places like Northern Ireland or Afghanistan, women help build peace and vote, but they don't often get big roles ([United](#)

**Nations Women, 2020**). In J&K, women organize at the grassroots and vote, but their power is still small. Research should compare these places and question why women's work is often ignored in official politics.

Moreover, this research needs to use different tools. Political science looks at voting numbers and candidates. Sociology and anthropology explain traditions and community rules. Feminist ideas help show where women are treated unfairly and how to fix it (**Rai, 2008**). Mixing these approaches can dig deeper than just stats—it can show what women's lives are like when they try to join J&K's elections.

## 2. POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

Women's political participation in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) began on a limited scale in 1934, when the region's people were first enfranchised. Voting rights for women were restricted to those who had passed middle school or equivalent exams, a constraint justified by the Franchise Commission as a way to avoid "administrative difficulties." This changed in 1951 under Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah's government, which introduced universal franchise for state elections to the Constituent Assembly. Part X of the J&K Constitution granted women equal rights to vote and contest elections, matching men in all aspects of political life. Section 47 even allowed the Governor to nominate up to two women to the Assembly if they were underrepresented. However, no women entered the Assembly until the 1972 election, when four out of six female contestants won, achieving a peak representation of 5.33%. Since then, women's presence has never exceeded 3%, despite a steady rise in female candidates, except in 1977 and 1983. Many women lost their deposits, and in 2002, the government nominated two women due to poor electoral success.

Party-wise, women's participation has varied. In 1972, four of eight female candidates were independents, and four ran on Congress (INC) tickets. In 1977, two of four were independents, with two from Janata Dal. By 1987, nine of 23 were independents, with others from smaller parties. In 1996, 15 women contested—three independents, five INC, three BJP, and others scattered across parties. In 2002, INC and PDP

fielded four each, while in 2008, women made up 4.95% of 1,354 candidates, winning 3.4% of seats. By 2014, only 3% of 829 candidates (26 women) ran, with just two elected. At the grassroots, the 73rd and 74th Amendments to India's Constitution brought 33% reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions, transforming participation elsewhere in India. Yet, in J&K, women's involvement in local bodies remained low. In the 2002 Panchayat elections, only 2.46% of candidates were women, with just 28 female Panchs and two Sarpanchs elected out of 22,700. A 2011 law reserved one-third of Panchayat seats for women, who secured this share, but female Sarpanchs remained rare three in Kashmir and 25 in Jammu highlighting persistent barriers to women's political rise in J&K. In 2024's local context, women's Panchayat participation likely held steady at 33%, but leadership roles remain elusive, reflecting broader barriers conflict, patriarchy, and limited party support that continue to stifle women's political rise in J&K.

## 3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

**Adams et al. (2019)** discuss the global adoption of Women's Legislative Caucuses (WLCs) to promote gender equality and political representation. They argue that WLCs challenge institutionalized masculine norms and are influenced by international diffusion factors. Their study finds that WLC formation is driven by regional peer influence, active WINGOs, and gender quotas. Notably, African countries were early adopters of WLCs, highlighting their role in amplifying women's political voices. The authors suggest further research on factors influencing WLC establishment, interactions between gender equity institutions, and conditions for WLCs to achieve their goals.

**Malik, Inshah (2018)** conducted a study on the politics of mourning in Kashmir, focusing on women's shifting roles amid widespread loss from political occupation. Traditionally, men handle funeral rites like burials, while women grieve privately. However, women are now joining public mourning, challenging gender norms and reflecting a sense of emasculation. This shift highlights how mourning has become a symbol of helplessness in the region.

**Lone, Mehraj (2014)** This study examines the challenges faced by women panchayat

representatives in Baramulla, Jammu and Kashmir, highlighting that 44% are uneducated, leading to poor understanding of their roles. Illiteracy fosters a lack of confidence and conviction, making women feel insignificant in panchayats. Household and farm responsibilities further limit their participation, perpetuating their marginal role in Panchayati Raj Institutions.

**Karpowitz, Christopher F. et al. (2017)**

This research investigates how party leadership influences the election of women to legislative bodies, focusing on candidate supply and voter demand. It finds that beyond quotas, proactive party intervention and promoting female candidates significantly boost women's representation, offering a practical solution to underrepresentation in politics.

**Khan, Nyla and Gandhi, G. K (2014)**

This book traces the evolving political consciousness of Kashmiri women, spotlighting their role in self-defence corps to foster nationalist identity and selfhood. It explores their contributions to political participation, education, and employment, despite challenges like terrorism, showing how women engage in political discussions across various settings.

**Jan, Muzamil and Zaroo, M. Y (2013)**

this work delves into the psychosocial and survival needs of Kashmiri women, addressing their societal integration and evolving relationships with men. It highlights issues like social freedom and depression, with special attention to tribal women (Gujjars, Hanjies) and the status of disabled women in the region.

**Akhter, Shahzada (2011)**

this book provides an overview of women's socio-economic and political status in India, with a focus on Kashmiri women's historical and contemporary conditions. It examines the National Conference's role in their empowerment, situating their progress within the broader context of the Indian women's movement.

**Khan, N. A (2011)**

This book portrays the suffering of Kashmiri women amid violence from state and non-state actors, critiquing organizations like Dukhtaranae Millet for enforcing patriarchal norms and restricting traditional freedoms. It explores the efforts of women's organizations in the valley, questioning their impact on women's autonomy.

**Singh, Balbir (2008)**

This book explores the limited political engagement of women in Jammu and Kashmir, noting their low electoral participation. It highlights how women's rights advocates within political parties faced rejection from party leadership, reflecting a broader disinterest in elevating women's roles in state politics.

**S. Jasbir and Vohra, A. (2007)**

The authors analyze the 2004 Permanent Residents (Disqualification) Bill in Jammu and Kashmir, which stripped women of permanent resident status if they married outsiders. They argue it reinforces gendered hierarchies, linking women's citizenship to marital choices, while aiming to preserve the state's special status.

**Jan, Muzamil (2005)**

This study assesses the socio-economic struggles of Gujjar women in Kashmir, revealing their poverty, illiteracy, and reliance on shrinking pastures. It notes early marriages, lack of personal income or land access, and medium-level family debt, with minimal housing and life comforts.

**Jan, Salima (2004)**

This book examines Kashmiri women artisans, emphasizing their contributions to family and society through handicraft work. It argues that these jobs enhance their decision-making power and job satisfaction, reshaping perceptions within a sociological and gender context.

**Khanna, C. W (2003)**

This work highlights women as silent victims of armed conflict in Jammu and Kashmir, focusing on challenges from state actors. It critiques past gender inequalities, explores global laws protecting women, and addresses sex-based brutality in conflict zones.

**Shafi, Aneesa (2002)**

This book traces the evolving roles of Kashmiri women in a patriarchal society undergoing modernization. It notes how upper and middle-class women were traditionally confined to domestic roles, while lower-class women worked for survival, with the 1930s freedom movement catalyzing new economic roles and challenges.

#### 4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The political participation of women in Jammu and Kashmir is a critical issue that intersects with gender equity, governance, and democratic representation. Despite constitutional provisions and policy measures aimed at



enhancing women's political engagement, their electoral participation remains constrained due to socio-cultural, economic, and political barriers. This study is significant as it explores the historical, cultural, and structural challenges that hinder women's involvement in elections, including patriarchal norms, lack of political awareness, security concerns, and social stigma. By analyzing electoral patterns, the study contributes to the broader discourse on gender and democracy, providing empirical evidence on women's political engagement in a conflict-prone region. It offers valuable policy insights for policymakers, political parties, and civil society organizations to promote gender-inclusive governance through reservation policies, constitutional amendments, and grassroots political participation in Panchayati Raj institutions. Additionally, this research highlights how increased political participation can enhance women's role in decision-making and contribute to their social and economic empowerment. By comparing the case of Jammu and Kashmir with other marginalized regions, the study provides a regional and comparative perspective on the factors affecting women's political engagement. Ultimately, it underscores the importance of inclusive democracy and gender-balanced governance, serving as a resource for academicians, policymakers, and activists working towards women's political empowerment in Jammu and Kashmir.

## 5. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

- To study the political participations of women in jammu and Kashmir.

## 6. RESEARCH QUESTION

- What are the key factors influencing women's political participation in Jammu and Kashmir?

## 7. METHODOLOGY

This study on the political participation of women in Jammu and Kashmir relies on secondary sources of data to analyze trends, challenges, and influencing factors. The research involves an extensive review of existing literature, government reports, policy documents, electoral data, and scholarly articles to provide a comprehensive understanding of women's electoral engagement. Books, journal articles, and

research papers on gender and politics, particularly those focusing on conflict-prone regions, form the core sources of data. Census reports, election commission records, and national policy documents are examined to assess women's voter turnout, candidacy rates, and representation in governance. Additionally, comparative analysis with other marginalized regions helps contextualize findings. The study employs content analysis and thematic categorization to interpret secondary data, ensuring a critical and systematic approach. This methodology enables an in-depth, evidence-based exploration of women's political participation in Jammu and Kashmir while identifying gaps for future research.

## 8. REVIEW-BASED DISCUSSION ON POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

The political participation of women in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) is a subject of considerable academic interest, given the region's unique socio-political landscape. Despite constitutional provisions and policy frameworks aimed at gender equality, women's engagement in electoral politics remains constrained due to various socio-cultural, economic, and institutional barriers. The available literature sheds light on diverse aspects of women's political representation, from historical participation and legislative interventions to socio-economic challenges and the influence of conflict on their political agency. This discussion synthesizes key themes emerging from previous research, providing a comprehensive understanding of the factors shaping women's political participation in J&K.

❖ **Historical Context and Legislative Framework:** [Khan and Gandhi \(2014\)](#) offer an insightful exploration of the evolving political consciousness of Kashmiri women. Their research highlights the historical role of women in self-defense corps and nationalist movements, showing that political engagement has long been an intrinsic, albeit underrepresented, aspect of women's experiences in the region. [Akhter \(2011\)](#) further examines the role of the National Conference in empowering Kashmiri women, situating their progress within the larger Indian women's movement. However, these

studies also point to systemic constraints that continue to hinder full political participation. The issue of legislative discrimination is a recurring theme in the literature. [Jasbir and Vohra \(2007\)](#) analyze the 2004 Permanent Residents (Disqualification) Bill, which stripped women of their permanent resident status if they married outsiders. This legislation reinforces patriarchal norms, effectively limiting women's agency and reinforcing gender hierarchies within the political framework of the region. [Singh \(2008\)](#) also highlights the limited engagement of women in J&K's political sphere, citing how women's rights advocates within political parties often face resistance from party leadership. These findings illustrate how legal and institutional barriers continue to marginalize women within the political system.

- ❖ **Challenges in Grassroots Political Engagement:** [Lone \(2014\)](#) examines the experiences of women panchayat representatives in Baramulla, J&K, revealing that a significant proportion (44%) are uneducated, leading to poor comprehension of their political roles. Illiteracy, coupled with domestic responsibilities, restricts their ability to engage meaningfully in governance, perpetuating their marginalization in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). The study highlights how socio-economic factors, such as lack of education and financial dependence, further limit women's participation in decision-making processes at the grassroots level. Jan (2005) provides a case study of Gujar women, emphasizing their socio-economic struggles, including poverty, illiteracy, and lack of land ownership. These factors significantly impede their ability to participate in political processes, as they remain preoccupied with survival concerns. The research suggests that socio-economic upliftment through education and economic independence could enhance women's political engagement in marginalized communities.
- ❖ **Role of Political Parties and Electoral Representation:** [Karpowitz et al. \(2017\)](#) explore the role of party leadership in influencing the election of women to legislative bodies. Their findings suggest that beyond

quotas, proactive intervention by political parties in promoting female candidates is crucial for increasing women's representation. This insight is particularly relevant to J&K, where party dynamics and patriarchal structures often hinder women's political aspirations. Adams et al. (2019) discuss the global adoption of Women's Legislative Caucuses (WLCs) as a mechanism to promote gender equality. Their research suggests that such platforms could challenge institutionalized masculine norms and facilitate greater political engagement for women in J&K. Given the regional challenges, establishing WLCs could serve as a catalyst for enhancing women's representation and participation in legislative decision-making.

- ❖ **Conflict, Political Marginalization, and Gendered Resistance:** [Khan \(2011\)](#) and [Khanna \(2003\)](#) analyze the impact of conflict on Kashmiri women, highlighting their status as silent victims of state and non-state violence. The studies critique how conflict exacerbates gender inequalities, restricting women's mobility, social freedoms, and political engagement. [Malik \(2018\)](#) explores the transformation of mourning practices among Kashmiri women, illustrating how public mourning has become a form of resistance against political oppression. This shift suggests that despite structural barriers, women are asserting their political identities in unconventional ways. Shafi (2002) provides a historical perspective on how modernization has affected women's roles in Kashmiri society. While upper and middle-class women have traditionally been confined to domestic roles, lower-class women have engaged in labor-intensive work. The study notes that the 1930s freedom movement played a crucial role in redefining women's economic and political contributions, setting the stage for gradual changes in gender roles.
- ❖ **Impact of Socio-Economic Conditions on Political Agency:** [Jan and Zaroo \(2013\)](#) examine the psychosocial and survival needs of Kashmiri women, discussing issues such as social freedom, depression, and tribal women's status. Their research highlights how economic and psychological constraints further limit women's ability to engage in political activities.

This aligns with [Singh's \(2008\)](#) findings that women's rights advocates often struggle to gain recognition within political parties due to entrenched patriarchal structures. [Salima Jan \(2004\)](#) focuses on Kashmiri women artisans, emphasizing how handicraft work contributes to their economic independence and decision-making power within households. While this economic empowerment does not directly translate into political participation, it signifies a shift in gender dynamics that could eventually lead to increased political engagement.

## 9. RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Based on the literature review, several key recommendations emerge:

- **Education and Capacity Building:** [Lone's \(2014\)](#) study on women panchayat representatives highlights the urgent need for education and leadership training programs. Ensuring literacy and political awareness among women can enhance their participation in governance.
- **Legal Reforms and Gender Quotas:** Addressing discriminatory policies, such as the Permanent Residents (Disqualification) Bill ([Jasbir & Vohra, 2007](#)), is crucial for promoting gender-inclusive governance. Implementing gender quotas and affirmative action policies can provide women with greater access to political office.
- **Economic Empowerment:** [Jan's \(2005\)](#) study on Gujar women underscores the importance of economic independence in enhancing political participation. Providing women with access to financial resources, employment opportunities, and land ownership can increase their agency.
- **Strengthening Institutional Support:** Establishing Women's Legislative Caucuses ([Adams et al., 2019](#)) in J&K can create a supportive environment for women politicians, enabling them to challenge institutionalized masculine norms.
- **Addressing Conflict-Related Barriers:** Recognizing the impact of conflict on women's political participation ([Khan, 2011](#); [Khanna, 2003](#)) and providing

platforms for women to engage in peacebuilding efforts can be instrumental in enhancing their political agency.

Moreover, the political participation of women in Jammu and Kashmir remains constrained by socio-cultural norms, economic barriers, legal restrictions, and conflict-related challenges. While historical movements and contemporary resistance efforts have demonstrated women's potential for political engagement, structural impediments continue to limit their full participation. The reviewed literature underscores the need for targeted interventions in education, legal reform, economic empowerment, and institutional support to foster an inclusive political landscape for women in the region. By addressing these challenges, J&K can move toward a more gender-equitable and participatory democracy.

## 10. CONCLUSION

The political participation of women in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) reflects a complex interplay of resilience and restriction, shaped by the region's tumultuous history, socio-cultural norms, and ongoing conflict. Despite constitutional guarantees of equality and legislative efforts like the universal franchise in 1951 and Panchayat reservations in 2011, women's engagement in electoral politics remains limited. Historical milestones, such as the election of four women to the J&K Assembly in 1972, highlight their potential, yet representation has rarely exceeded 3% since. At the grassroots, while the 33% reservation in Panchayati Raj Institutions has ensured some participation, leadership roles like Sarpanch remain elusive, underscoring persistent barriers rooted in patriarchy, illiteracy, and domestic burdens.

Research reveals that women in J&K demonstrate political agency evident in high voter turnouts, such as in 2014, and unconventional resistance like public mourning yet systemic obstacles prevent this from translating into meaningful power. Socio-economic challenges, including poverty and lack of education, particularly among tribal communities like the Gujjars, compound these issues, while conflict further restricts mobility and safety. The 2019 revocation of Article 370 introduced new political dynamics, potentially opening avenues for women, but the absence of Assembly seat reservations and

limited party support continue to hinder progress. This study underscores the necessity of multifaceted interventions: education and capacity-building to boost political awareness, legal reforms to dismantle discriminatory policies, and economic empowerment to enhance independence. Comparative insights from global contexts, like Women's Legislative Caucuses, suggest institutional mechanisms could amplify women's voices.

Ultimately, fostering women's political participation in J&K is not just a regional concern but a critical step toward inclusive democracy. By addressing these structural and cultural impediments, J&K can harness women's potential to reshape its political landscape, contributing to gender equity and sustainable governance in a region long marked by instability.

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