



Political Participation of Women in Arunachal Pradesh: Representation and Obstacles

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Abstract

Despite progress in political awareness and democratic engagement in Arunachal Pradesh, women's representation in formal politics remains minimal. This article explores the current status, barriers, and future prospects for women in politics in the state, drawing from cultural, institutional, and societal perspectives. The aim is to highlight the need for inclusive political reform and greater gender equity in governance.

Introduction

Arunachal Pradesh, nestled in the northeastern frontier of India, is celebrated for its breathtaking landscapes, vibrant tribal cultures, and unique social systems. With over 26 major tribes and more than 100 sub-tribes, the state is a mosaic of indigenous traditions, many of which traditionally uphold collective decision-making and local governance practices. Since attaining full statehood in 1987, Arunachal Pradesh has witnessed significant political evolution, including increased participation in democratic processes, the emergence of regional political consciousness, and active engagement in national politics.

However, beneath this democratic progress lies a persistent and often overlooked disparity—the underrepresentation of women in formal political institutions. While women in Arunachal have historically played critical roles in family, agriculture, and community decision-making, especially in matrilineal

or inclusive tribal structures, these contributions have not translated into proportional representation within state-level or national politics. The number of women elected to the Legislative Assembly has remained minimal, and women's leadership in political parties,

ministerial positions, and parliamentary roles continues to lag far behind their male counterparts.

This gender gap is not simply a matter of numbers but reflects deeper socio-cultural, economic, and institutional barriers that limit women's political advancement. Customary laws, patriarchal norms, lack of political mentorship, and the absence of institutional support mechanisms collectively restrict the political space available to women. Yet, despite these challenges, women in Arunachal Pradesh are increasingly voicing their aspirations, participating in local governance through reserved seats in Panchayati Raj Institutions, and becoming involved in civil society movements and advocacy.

In light of these developments, this article explores the current landscape of women's political representation in Arunachal Pradesh, the multifaceted challenges they face, and the pathways toward achieving more inclusive and gender-balanced governance. By examining both structural limitations and emerging success stories, the article seeks to highlight the importance of empowering women as equal stakeholders in the political domain of the state.

Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to examine women's political representation and challenges in Arunachal Pradesh. The research aims to assess the current status of women in politics, identify barriers to participation, and propose strategies for gender equity in governance.

Data Collection: Primary data was gathered through structured surveys administered to 50 respondents, purposively selected from urban and rural districts to reflect the state's diverse tribal and geographic contexts. The sample included both men and women to capture varied perspectives on gender dynamics. Survey questions explored awareness of political representatives, perceptions of gender equality, barriers to participation, and the impact of reservation policies (see Graphs 1–11). Semi-structured interviews with women leaders and community stakeholders provided qualitative insights into experiences and challenges. Secondary data was sourced from reports by PRS Legislative Research (2023), National Family Health Survey-5 (2020-21), Election Commission of India (2019), news outlets like The Hindu (2024) to contextualize election trends and literacy rates etc.

Data Analysis: Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages) and visualized in graphs and Pie diagrams to highlight trends, such as voter turnout and public perceptions. Qualitative data underwent thematic analysis to identify key barriers. Historical election data (1995–2024) was examined to track women's representation over time.

Ethical Considerations: Informed consent was obtained, and respondent anonymity was ensured. Data collection respected tribal customs, particularly in rural areas.

Limitations: The small sample size (50 respondents) and potential urban bias may limit generalizability, while reliance on self-reported data risks social desirability bias.

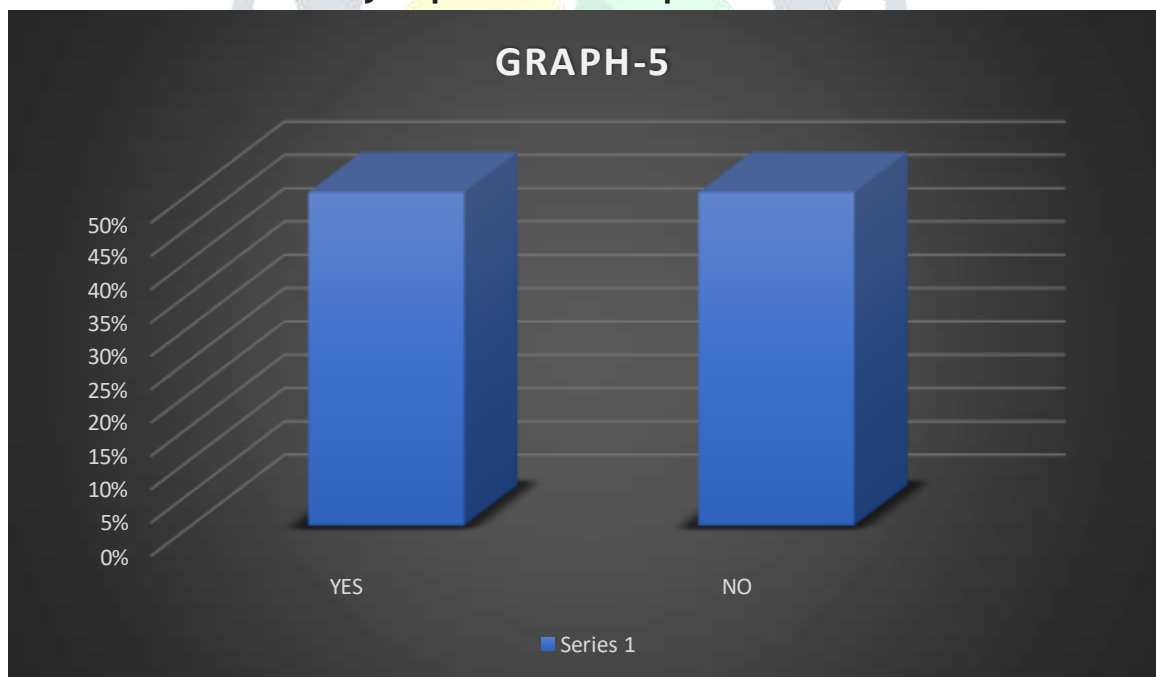
Challenges Faced by Women in Politics

a) Cultural and Social Barriers

One of the most prominent challenges is the deep-rooted patriarchy in tribal societies. Though many tribes in Arunachal grant women a respected position in family and cultural life, political leadership is traditionally seen as a male domain. Social expectations and lack of family or community support discourage many women from entering politics.

A 2020 report by the **Centre for Women and Governance in the Northeast** revealed that **over 85% of rural respondents viewed political leadership as a male responsibility**, and **only 5% of elected MLAs in the state assembly are women** (3 out of 60 seats in 2019) (PRS Legislative Research, 2023). Such gender perceptions discourage young women from even considering political careers. Family and community members often disapprove of women entering politics, fearing social backlash or disruption to traditional gender roles.

Do you think women are fairly represented in politics in Arunachal Pradesh?



SOURCE-Field Data

As presented in Graph-5 The survey illustrates a perfectly divided perception among respondents regarding the representation of women in politics in Arunachal Pradesh. **Exactly 25 (50%) respondents** believe that women are **fairly represented**, suggesting recognition of women's growing visibility and roles in political spheres. Conversely, the **remaining 25 (50%)** feel that women are **not given fair opportunities**, highlighting persistent concerns about gender inequality in political participation.

This **equal split** in opinion reflects a **deeply polarized perspective** on the status of women's political empowerment in the state. It underscores the need for further exploration into the **structural, cultural, or institutional barriers** that may be influencing these perceptions.

b) **Economic Factors**

Low access to higher education, lack of political mentorship, and financial dependence on male counterparts act as further deterrents. Women aspiring to contest elections often face difficulties in mobilizing resources and garnering public support due to systemic gender biases. According to the **National Family Health Survey-5 (2020-21)**, the female literacy rate in Arunachal Pradesh is **64.6%**, which is lower than the national average of **70.3%**. Even though educational access has improved in towns like Itanagar and Pasighat, large portions of the state remain underdeveloped and educationally backward.

c) **Educational & Awareness Barriers**

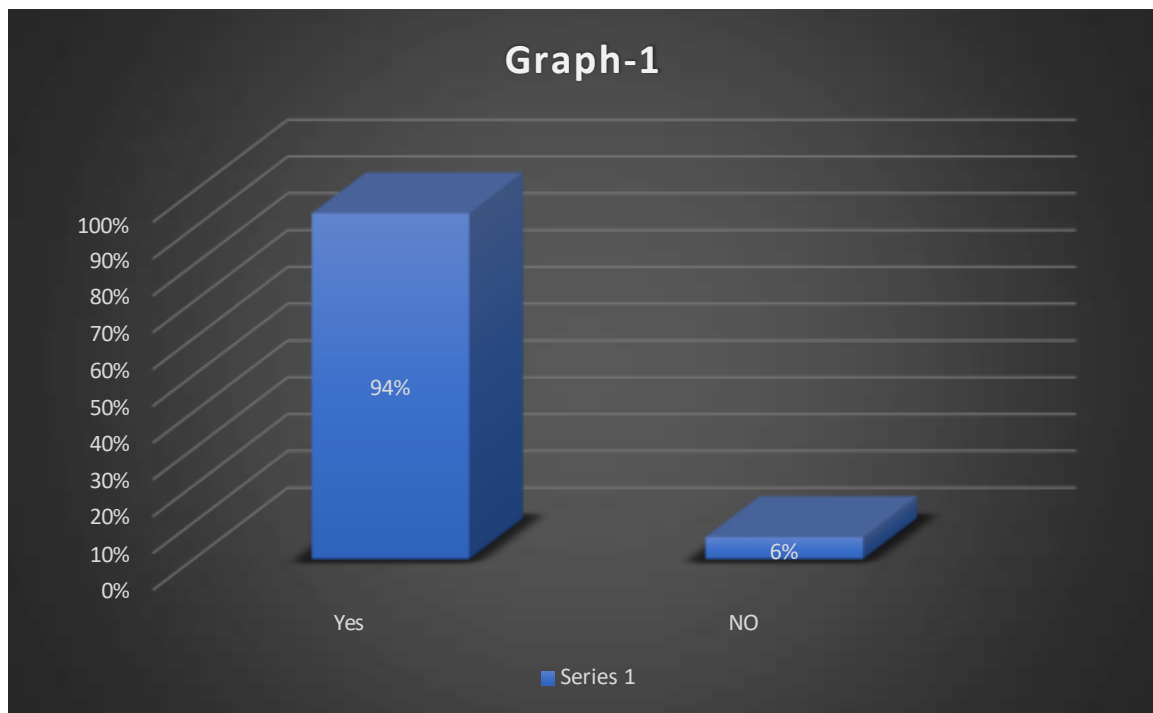
- Lower political awareness or training in rural areas.
- Limited mentorship and support networks.

Lower Political Awareness and Training in Rural Areas

In Arunachal Pradesh, a predominantly rural and tribal state, **limited access to formal education** and civic training significantly hampers women's political awareness. According to the **National Family Health Survey-5 (2020-21)**, the **female literacy rate in Arunachal Pradesh stands at 64.6%**, below the national average of 70.3%. In several interior districts like Kra Daadi, Kurung Kumey, and Upper Subansiri, female literacy is even lower, affecting their ability to understand governance processes or assert political agency.

Many rural women remain unaware of their rights under the **Panchayati Raj Act** or how to engage with political institutions. Political discussions and decision-making are still largely male-dominated spaces, especially in traditional councils or village-level meetings. This lack of early exposure to political knowledge reduces women's preparedness for public leadership roles.

Are you aware of your local Political representative?



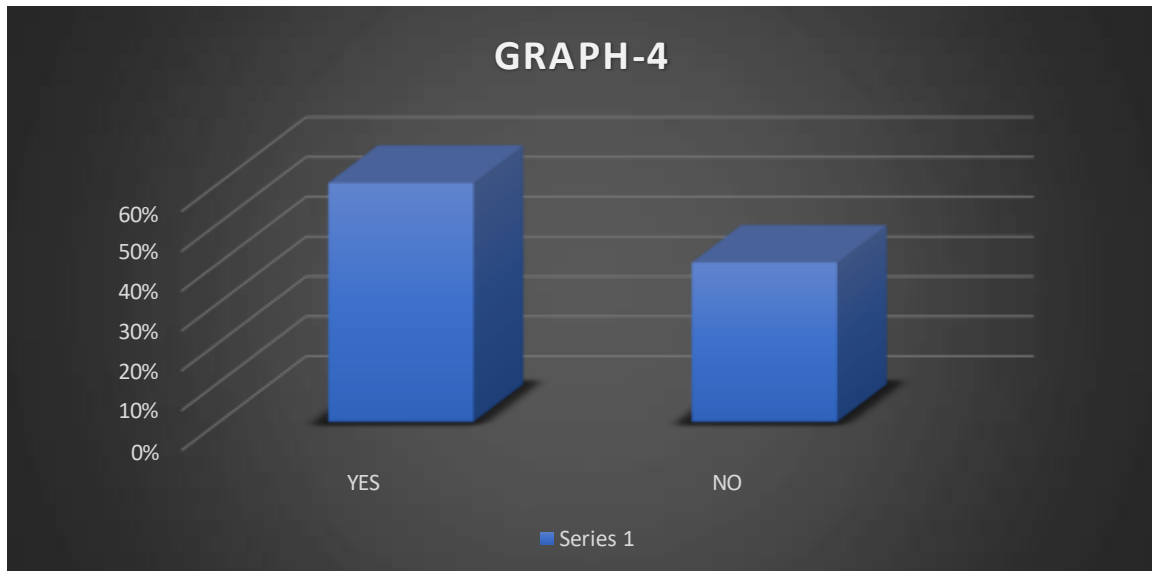
SOURCE-Field Data

As depicted in Graph-1, The survey reveals that, the overwhelming majority of respondents—**94%**—indicated that they are **aware** of their local political representative. In contrast, only **6%** of participants responded with "No", reflecting a **very small segment** that lacks such awareness.

This result signifies a **high level of political awareness** among the population surveyed, which is crucial for **democratic participation, accountability, and community engagement**. When citizens are informed about their elected representatives, it opens up opportunities for **public discourse, demand for transparency, and policy feedback** from the grassroots level.

This strong awareness also implies potential readiness among citizens to **engage in political discussions**, support **inclusive governance**, and advocate for **effective leadership** in their constituencies.

Have you or any woman you know contested in any local election (panchayat, municipality, Legislative assembly and Parliament)?



SOURCE-Field Data

As presented in Graph-4 The survey reflects that approximately 30 (60%) of respondents answered “Yes”, indicating that either they or a woman they personally know has contested in a local election. On the other hand, about 20(40%) responded “No”, suggesting no direct or indirect experience with women's candidacy.

This is a **positive indicator of women's increasing political participation** at grassroots and formal institutional levels. When a majority of individuals report knowing women who have contested elections, it implies that **representation and visibility of women in politics is becoming more normalized** and perhaps even encouraged within communities.

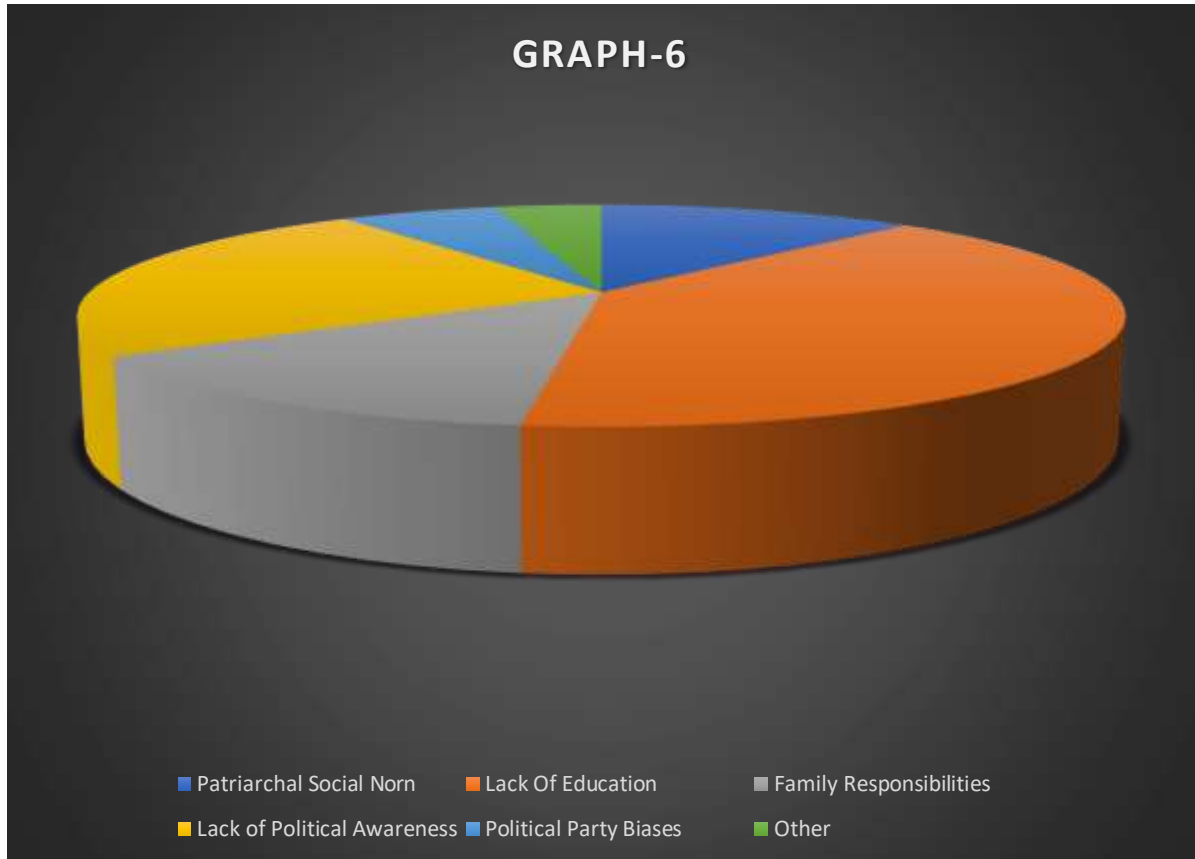
However, the remaining 40% also signals that **there are still social or structural barriers** that prevent some women from entering electoral politics. These might include lack of resources, political support, or societal acceptance. Encouraging mentorship, capacity-building, and policy support for aspiring women leaders can help bridge this gap and foster **inclusive democratic representation**.

2. Limited Mentorship and Support Networks

Women leaders in Arunachal often lack access to **mentorship, political guidance, and institutional support**. Political parties in the state rarely invest in leadership training or grassroots capacity building for women. A 2023 field report by the **North East Network** found that many women elected to Panchayati Raj Institutions felt underprepared for their roles, citing "**lack of orientation or mentorship after winning**" as a major hurdle.

Moreover, cultural norms discourage women from networking outside their families, limiting their access to peer support systems. With few senior women in politics to act as role models, aspiring female leaders often navigate political life in isolation, leading to high attrition and reduced long-term engagement.

what do you think are the main barriers to women's participation in politics?



SOURCE-Field Data

As illustrated in Figure 6, The survey reveals the key barriers to women's participation in politics as perceived by the respondents. Out of a total of 50 respondents.

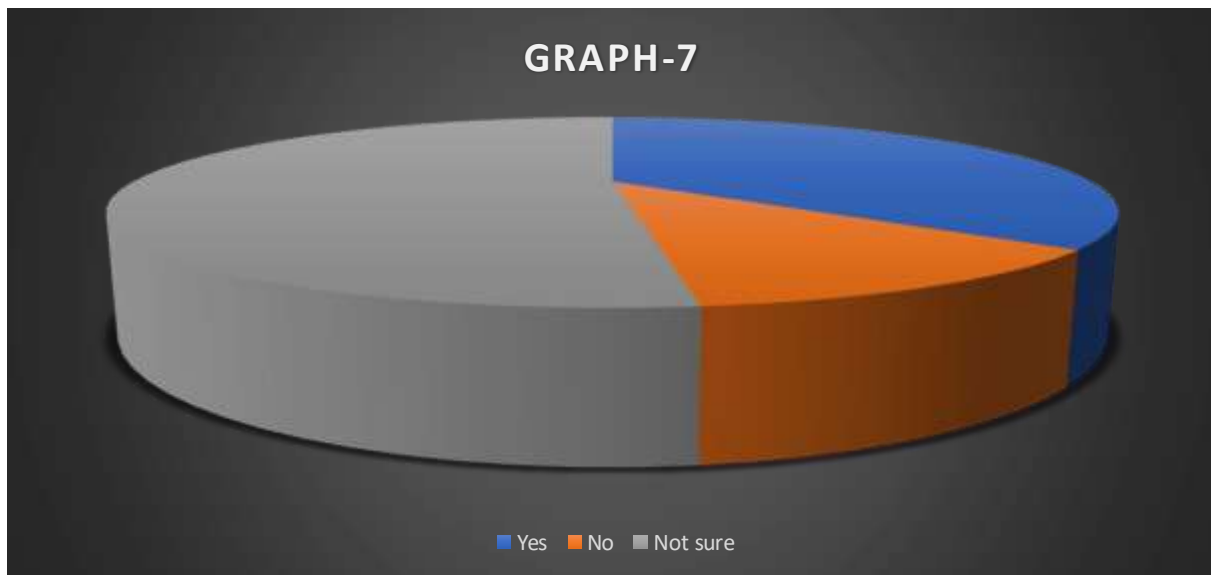
20 respondents (40%) identified **lack of education** as the primary barrier to women's political participation. **12 respondents (24%)** pointed to **lack of political awareness** as a significant factor, **7 respondents (14%)** cited **family responsibilities** as an impediment, **6 respondents (12%)** attributed the low participation to **patriarchal social norms**, **3 respondents (6%)** blamed **political parties** for their inadequate efforts to promote women's involvement in politics and **2 respondents (4%)** rejected all the listed options and instead suggested **other unidentified or less-discussed factors** as contributing to the issue.

This distribution indicates that **educational and awareness-related challenges** are perceived as the most significant barriers, followed by social and institutional constraints.

d)) **Role of Political Parties and Institutions**

Political parties in Arunachal Pradesh rarely field female candidates, often citing winnability as a factor. There is minimal effort toward grooming women leaders or creating internal platforms for their development. Without strong institutional backing, most women remain on the fringes of party politics.

Do women have equal opportunities in political parties in your area?



SOURCE-Field Data

As illustrated in Figure 7, The survey presents respondents' perceptions regarding equal opportunities for women in political parties in their local area. The data reveals that:

18 (36%) of the respondents answered "Yes", indicating that they believe women do have equal opportunities in political parties. **6 (12%) of the respondents** responded "No", suggesting that a small portion of the population perceives a lack of equality in political participation within party structures. A majority of **26 (52%)** chose "Not sure", reflecting a significant level of uncertainty or lack of awareness regarding the status of women in political parties.

This data indicates a notable **ambiguity among respondents**, with the highest proportion unsure about the issue. While a reasonable number affirm the presence of equal opportunities, the uncertainty highlights the need for greater **transparency, awareness, and visibility of women's roles** within political parties at the grassroots level.

Role of Reservation and Policies

- 1) Impact of **33% reservation in Panchayati Raj Institutions** for women.
- 2) How local governance has created political space for women leaders.
- 3) Suggestions for extending similar support to state assembly elections.

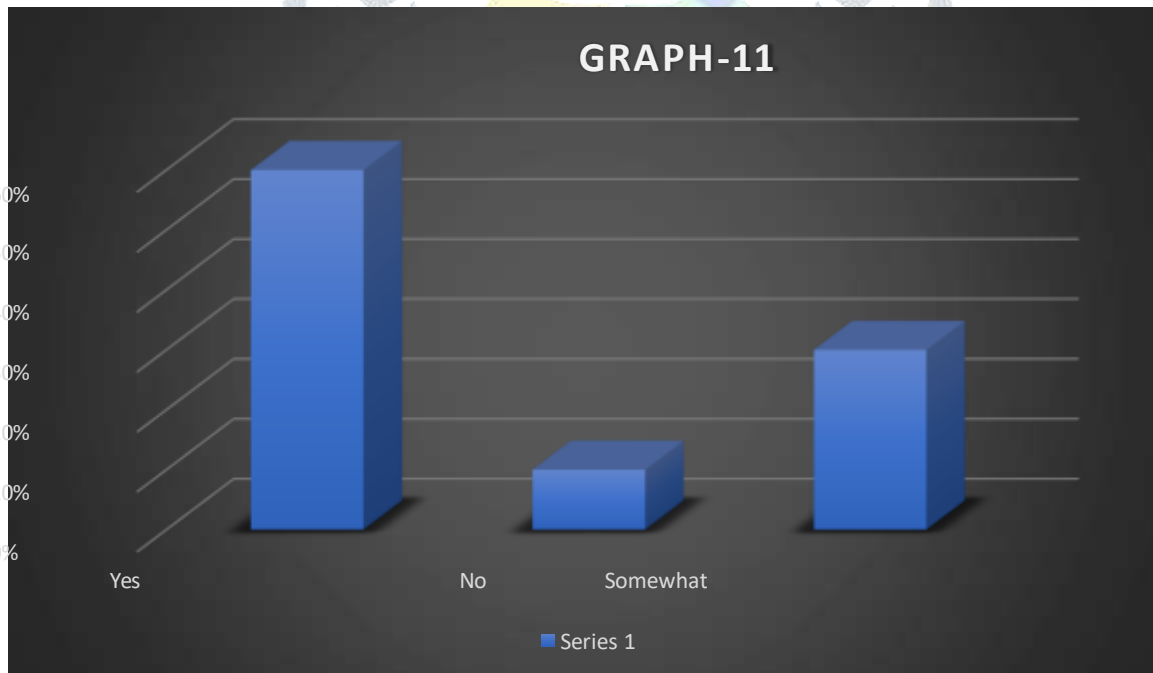
- The implementation of **33% reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)** in Arunachal Pradesh has been a significant step in promoting grassroots political participation among women. This policy, aligned with the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, has enabled thousands of women to hold positions as Gram Panchayat Members, Anchal Samiti Members, and Zilla Parishad Chairpersons across the state.

- According to the **Ministry of Panchayati Raj (2022)**, women now constitute over **4,200 elected representatives** in local bodies across Arunachal Pradesh. This has allowed many first-time female leaders to gain experience in governance, budget planning, conflict resolution, and public speaking—skills critical for advancement in higher politics.
- Local governance platforms have also **normalized the presence of women in public office**, particularly in tribal areas where traditional structures often exclude them. A 2021 survey by the **Northeast Network** found that **65% of women PRI members** in Arunachal Pradesh reported increased respect and recognition from their communities after taking office.

However, this progress has not translated to higher levels of political representation. In the **2019 State Assembly elections**, only **3 woman (out of 60 MLAs)** could able to get seat in the state assembly—just **5% representation**.

There is currently no reservation for women in state assemblies or Parliament, which limits the pipeline of experienced women leaders.

In your opinion, is reservation for women in local governance helping in real empowerment?



SOURCE-Field Data

As presented in Graph-11, The survey reveals public opinion regarding the effectiveness of women's reservation in local governance as a tool for genuine empowerment. The distribution of responses is as follows:

A **majority of 30 (60%)** of respondents answered **"Yes"**, suggesting a **strong belief** that reservation policies are **contributing positively** to the empowerment of women at the grassroots political level. **15 (30%) of respondents** selected **"Somewhat"**, indicating a **mixed perception**—while progress is acknowledged, they feel the impact may be **limited or conditional**. Only 5 (10%) responded **"No"**, reflecting a **minority view** that reservations have **not significantly contributed** to real empowerment.

This data suggests that reservation in local governance is largely seen as a **constructive and**

enabling mechanism, though the presence of “somewhat” responses points to the need for **effective implementation**, capacity-building, and **supportive political environments** to translate opportunity into **tangible empowerment**.

Status of Women Political Representation

As of recent legislative sessions, the number of women MLAs in Arunachal Pradesh has been alarmingly low, often limited to one or two members in a 60- member assembly. At the Panchayati Raj level, although reservation policies have improved participation, the effectiveness and autonomy of women representatives are often constrained by patriarchal structures and family dominance.

As of the 2024 elections, the Arunachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly comprises 60 members, of whom only **four are women**, accounting for **6.66%** of the assembly. This marks a slight increase from the 2019 elections, where three women were elected. Notably, all four women elected in 2024 were from the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). [Geo24 News](#)

Despite women constituting a significant portion of the electorate, their representation in the assembly remains disproportionately low. In the 2024 elections, only **eight women** contested for assembly seats, highlighting the persistent gender gap in political candidacy.

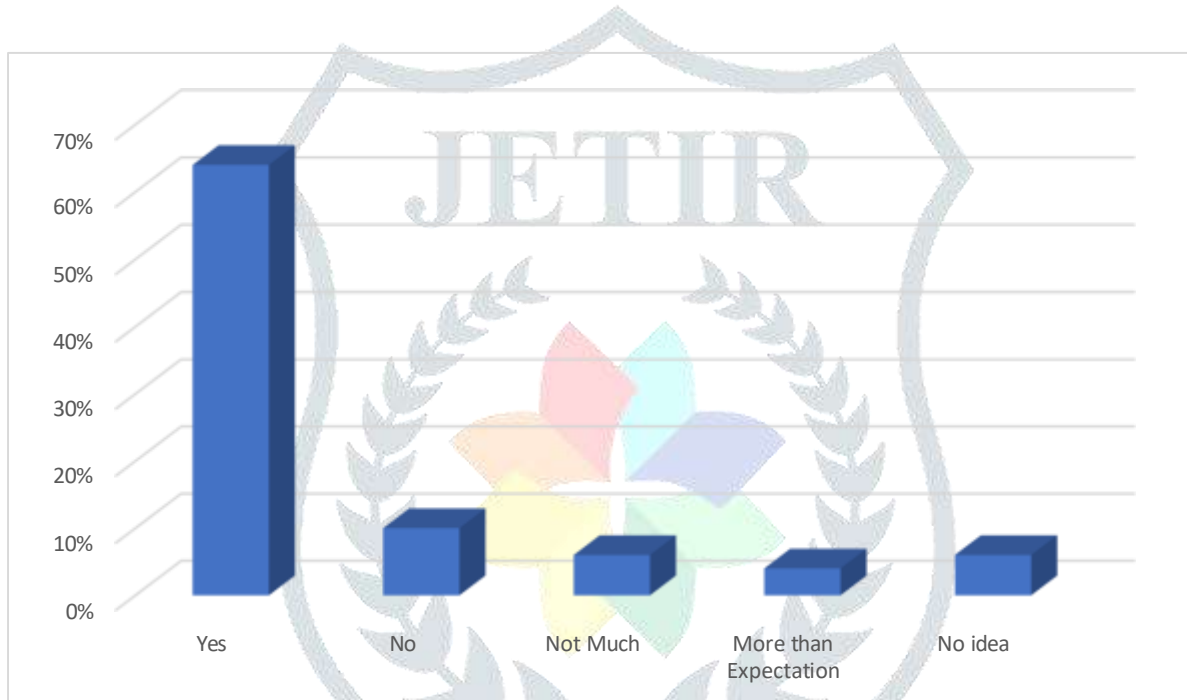
YEAR	Total MLAs	Total Women MLAs
1995	60	1
1999	60	1
2004	60	0
2009	60	2
2014	60	1
2019	60	3
2024	60	4

Have there been any notable changes in women's participation in politics compared to earlier times?

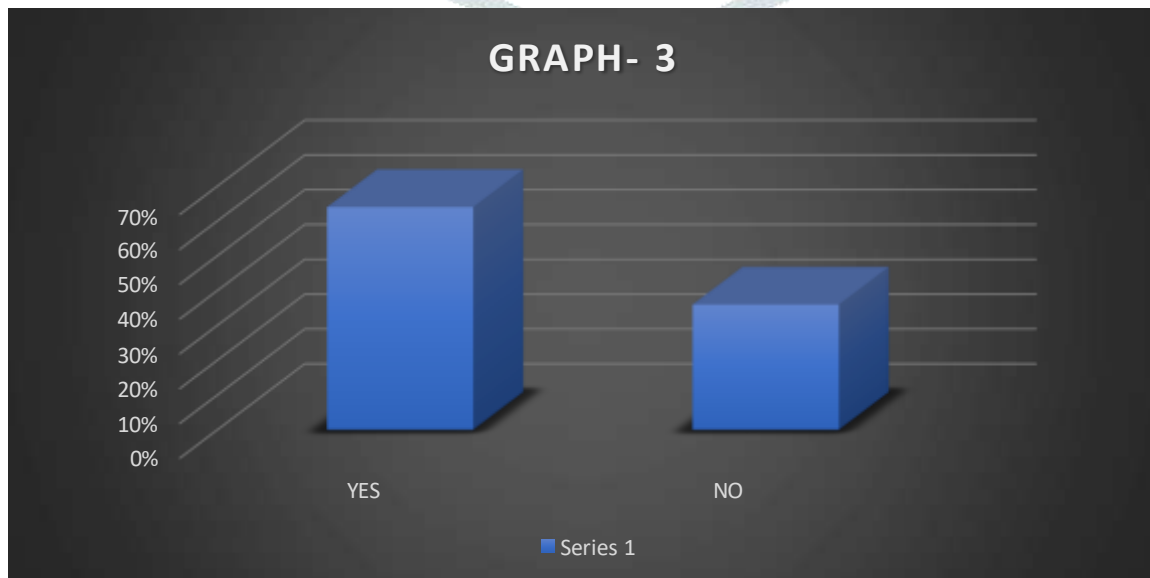
Ans: Based on the survey findings, a majority of respondents feel that there has been a **noticeable improvement** in women's participation in politics compared to earlier times. Many acknowledged positive changes, indicating increased involvement and visibility of women in political spaces. A smaller portion of respondents, however, believe that **not much** has changed, while a few noted that the progress has **exceeded their expectations**. Some still feel there has been **no change or have no clear opinion** on the matter.

Overall, the survey reflects a general optimism about the evolving role of women in politics, though it also highlights that more consistent efforts are needed to ensure broader and sustained participation.

DATA	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Yes	37	64%
No	5	10%
Not Much	3	6%
More than expectation	2	4%
No idea	3	6%



Have you ever attended a political meeting, rally, or campaign?



SOURCE-Field Data

As presented in Graph-3 The survey reveals that a **majority of respondents—approximately 32 (64%)—have attended** a political meeting, rally, or campaign event. Meanwhile, about **18 (36%) reported that they have never participated** in such activities.

This indicates a **notable level of political engagement** among the participants beyond just voting. Attending political events often signifies a **deeper involvement and interest in democratic processes**, enabling individuals to gain firsthand understanding of party

ideologies, candidate agendas, and policy discussions.

Women's Voter Turnout in Arunachal Pradesh: A Rising Trend

Over the past two decades, Arunachal Pradesh has witnessed a steady increase in voter participation, with women playing a pivotal role in shaping electoral outcomes. In the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, female voter turnout reached a remarkable 85.54% in Arunachal East and 75.62% in Arunachal West—both higher than their male counterparts. This trend reflects a consistent rise from earlier elections, where female turnout was 55.31% in 2004 and approximately 76.9% in 2014.

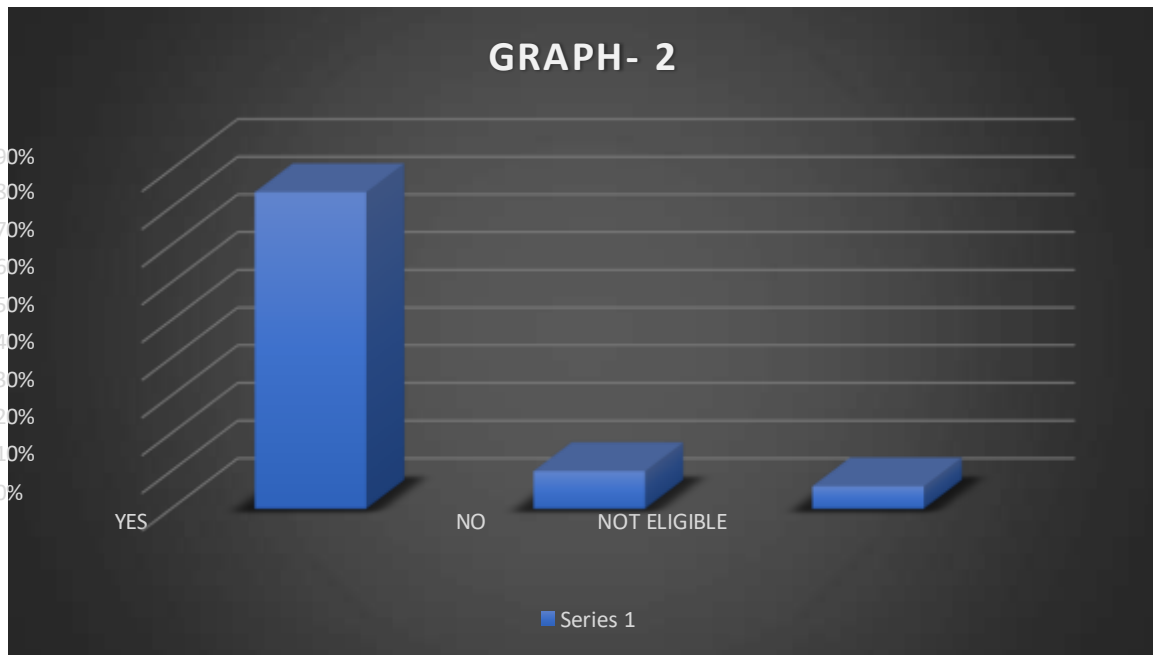
Notably, the overall voter turnout has grown from 56.35% in 2004 to over 82% in 2019, highlighting an evolving political consciousness among the electorate. The increasing engagement of women not only demonstrates their active participation in democracy but also signals a positive shift toward gender-inclusive politics in Arunachal Pradesh.

Here's a detailed table showing voter turnout in the last **five Lok Sabha elections** in Arunachal Pradesh, including gender-wise breakdown where available:

Year	Overall Turnout	Female Turnout	Male Turnout
2024	72.74 % (state average)	East:85.54 %, West: 75.62 %	East: 81.13 %, West 71.41 %
2019	82.11 %	—	—
2014	79.12 %	≈76.9 %	—
2009	68.17 %	—	—
2004	56.35 %	55.31 %	56.72 %

- **Women consistently turn out at high rates**, frequently matching or surpassing men—especially evident in 2004 and the 2024 constituencies.
- **Turnout has steadily increased**: from about 56 % in 2004 to over 82 % in 2019.
- The **2024 Lok Sabha elections** broke a new record with a female turnout topping 85 % in Arunachal East.

Have you ever voted in an election?



SOURCE-Field Data

As presented in Graph-2, The survey reveals that **significant majority** of the respondents—over **42(84%)**—answered "Yes", indicating that they have **participated in elections** by casting their vote. In contrast, only a **small fraction 5 (10%)** responded with "No", and an equally minor portion **3 (6%) respondents** marked themselves as "Not Eligible", likely due to age or other disqualifying factors.

This strong voter turnout among participants reflects a **high level of civic engagement** and **political responsibility**. It suggests that the majority of the respondents **value their democratic right** and are willing to take part in the **electoral process**. This pattern of participation is a positive indicator for **representative governance**, as it ensures that leaders are chosen through **active citizen involvement**.

Prominent Women Political Leaders of Arunachal Pradesh and Their Contributions

Arunachal Pradesh has witnessed the steady rise of women in political leadership, with several trailblazing figures making impactful contributions to the state's governance and social progress. From pioneering legislative reforms to leading development initiatives in remote regions, these women have broken gender barriers and played vital roles in shaping inclusive policies.

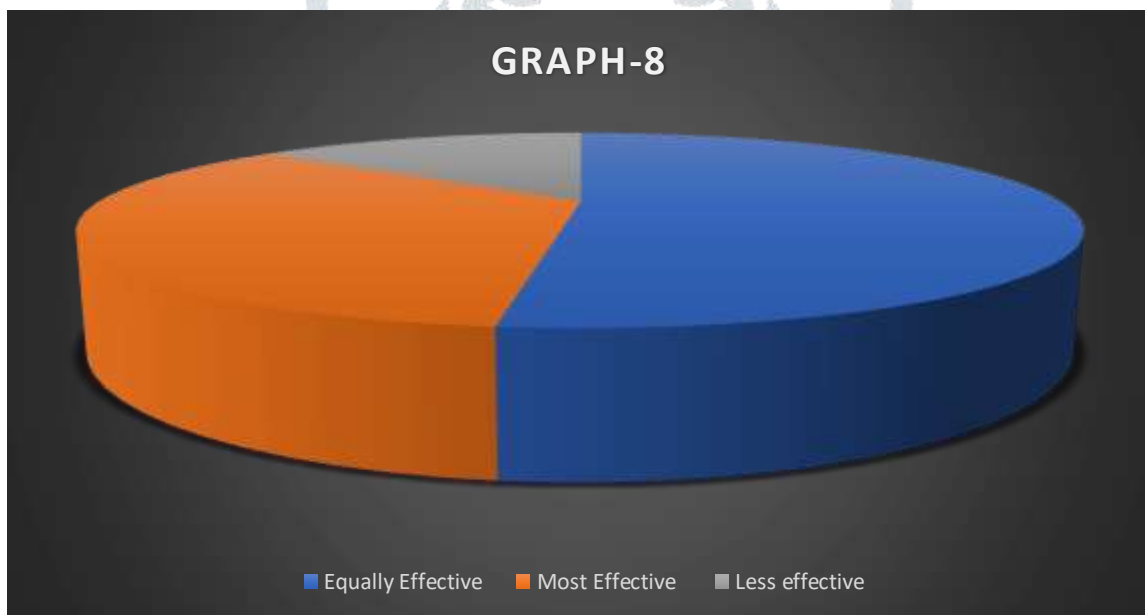
The table below highlights key women political leaders, their positions, and notable initiatives

Leader	Position & Tenure	Key Initiatives / Milestones
Dasanglu Pul	Minister since 2024	Cultural centre, APSAC leadership, remote-area development, heritage support
Nyari Welly	MLA 1980–1988	Outlawed harmful socio-cultural practices through assembly bill
Niani Natung	Minister 2001–2004	Led social welfare and women's development initiatives
Tsering Lhamu	MLA since 2023	Elected unopposed; among four women MLAs
Nyabi Jini Dirchi	MLA since	Won significant ST constituency seat

Leader	Position & Tenure	Key Initiatives / Milestones
	2024	
Karya Bagang	MLA 2009, 2014	First female representative for her constituency

These leaders represent not only political empowerment but also a broader movement toward gender-inclusive governance in Arunachal Pradesh. Their efforts continue to inspire future generations of women to participate actively in public life and policymaking.

How effective do you think women leaders are compared to men?



SOURCE-Field Data

As illustrated in Graph-8, The survey reveals that respondents were asked to assess the effectiveness of women leaders in comparison to their male counterparts. The data shows the following distribution of opinions:

A majority of **26 (52%)** of respondents believe that women leaders are **equally effective** as male leaders. **17 (34%)** consider women to be the **most effective**, indicating a strong belief in women's leadership capabilities. Only **8 (14%)** view women leaders as **less effective** than their male counterparts.

This analysis reveals that most respondents have a **positive perception of women's leadership**, with nearly all recognizing their capabilities as equal to or exceeding those of men. The relatively low percentage of respondents who perceive women as less effective suggests a shift towards **greater acceptance and confidence in women in leadership roles**, particularly in political and public spheres.

Recommendations

To enhance women's political participation in Arunachal Pradesh, the following steps are suggested :-

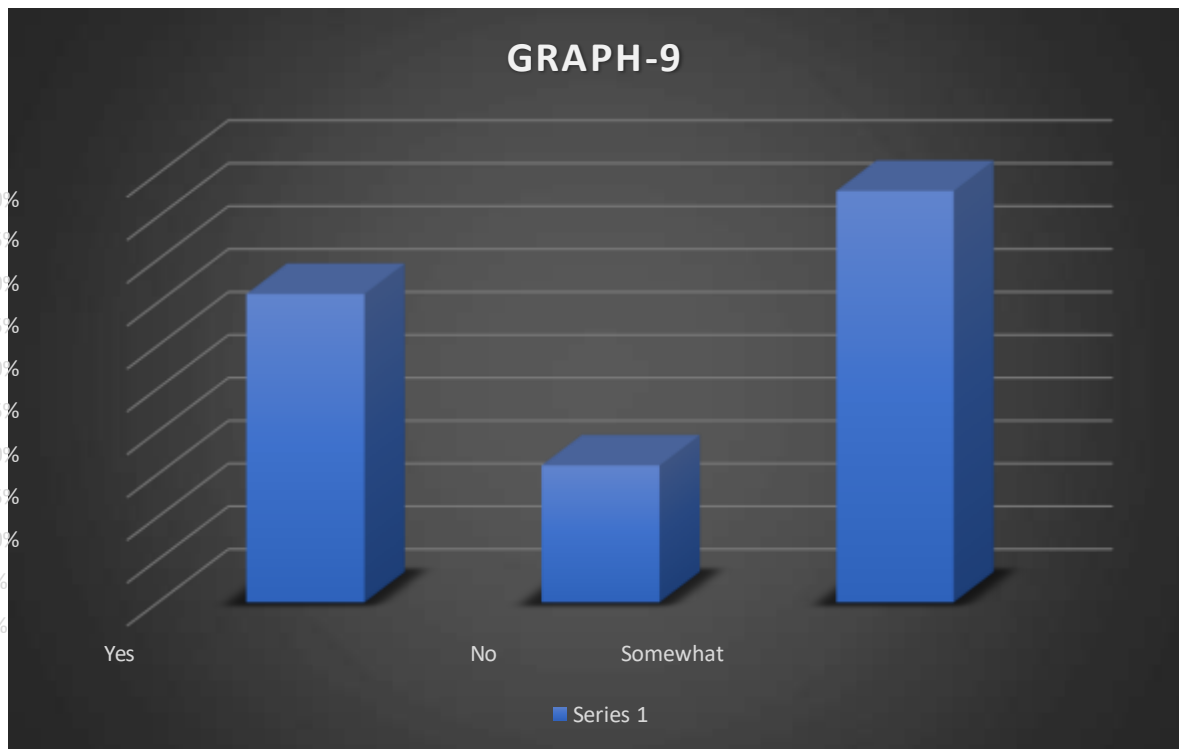
Increase Political Education and Training for Women

In remote districts of Arunachal Pradesh, limited access to civic education restricts women's understanding of political processes. The state government, NGOs, and educational institutions should collaborate to conduct regular **leadership workshops, governance training, and legal awareness programs** tailored for women at the grassroots level, especially targeting elected Panchayati Raj members and aspiring youth leaders.

Encourage Political Parties to Adopt Internal Quotas for Women

Major political parties in Arunachal Pradesh—such as the BJP, INC, and regional outfits—should introduce **voluntary internal quotas or gender parity mandates** in candidate selection. This proactive step can ensure that more women are given tickets to contest elections beyond just token representation. Mentoring programs within parties should also be strengthened to support women throughout their political careers.

Do you think society encourages women to take political roles?



SOURCE-Field Data

As illustrated in Graph-9, The survey reveals that respondents' perceptions of societal support for women's participation in political roles. The responses are distributed as follows:

24 (48%) of respondents selected "**Somewhat**", indicating a belief that societal encouragement exists but is **limited or conditional**. **18 (36%) of respondents** answered "**Yes**", suggesting they perceive a **positive and supportive environment** for women aspiring to political roles. Only **8 (16%) of respondents** responded "**No**", showing that a small segment feels society does **not encourage** women in politics.

This data implies that while a significant portion acknowledges **some level of societal encouragement**, there is still **room for improvement** in making political spaces more supportive and inclusive for women. The relatively high percentage of those responding "somewhat" suggests that cultural and structural barriers may still **influence or restrict full encouragement**.

Reform Customary Laws to Support Gender Equality

Several tribal customary laws, while culturally significant, often restrict women's property rights, inheritance, and decision-making roles. In consultation with tribal councils and community elders, **gender-sensitive reforms** should be gradually introduced, especially in areas impacting political participation. Any reform must be inclusive and respectful of cultural identity while aligning with constitutional values of equality.

Provide Economic and Logistical Support for Female Candidates

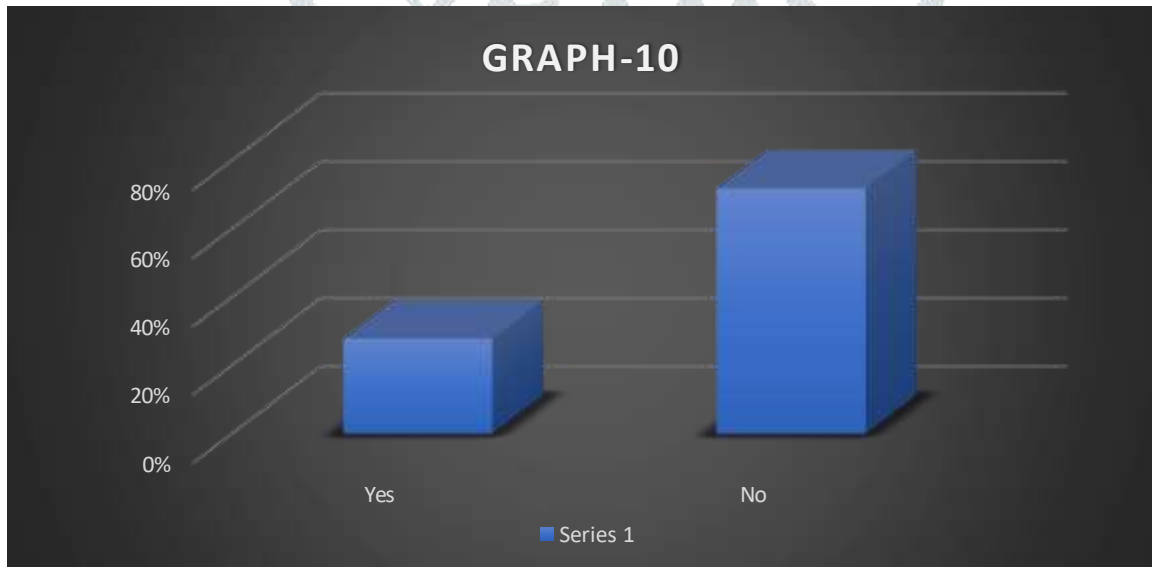
Many aspiring women politicians in Arunachal face financial barriers when contesting elections. To level the playing field, the state can introduce **grants, subsidies, or public funding mechanisms** specifically for female candidates. Additional support—such as travel allowances, campaign material assistance, and security in sensitive regions—can enhance

participation from marginalized and remote communities.

Strengthen Civil Society and Grassroots Support for Women Politicians

Civil society organizations in Arunachal, including women's self-help groups and youth clubs, should be encouraged to create **support networks for women leaders**. These platforms can provide mentorship, advocacy, and peer learning opportunities. Moreover, collaborative efforts between NGOs and village-level institutions can help normalize the idea of women as political decision-makers in tribal communities.

Have you personally faced or witnessed gender bias in political spaces?



SOURCE-Field Data

As illustrated in Graph-10, The survey reveals that respondents' personal experiences or observations regarding gender bias within political spaces. The findings are as follows:

36 (72%) of respondents answered "No", indicating that the majority have **not personally experienced or witnessed** gender bias in political contexts. **14 (28%) of respondents** responded "Yes", suggesting that over one-third have either **personally faced or observed gender-based discrimination or unequal treatment** in political environments.

Although a majority deny any direct exposure to gender bias, the **significant minority (28%)** reflects the **ongoing presence of gender disparities** within political spheres. This data underscores the need for continued awareness, policy intervention, and cultural change to ensure **inclusive and equitable political participation for all genders**.

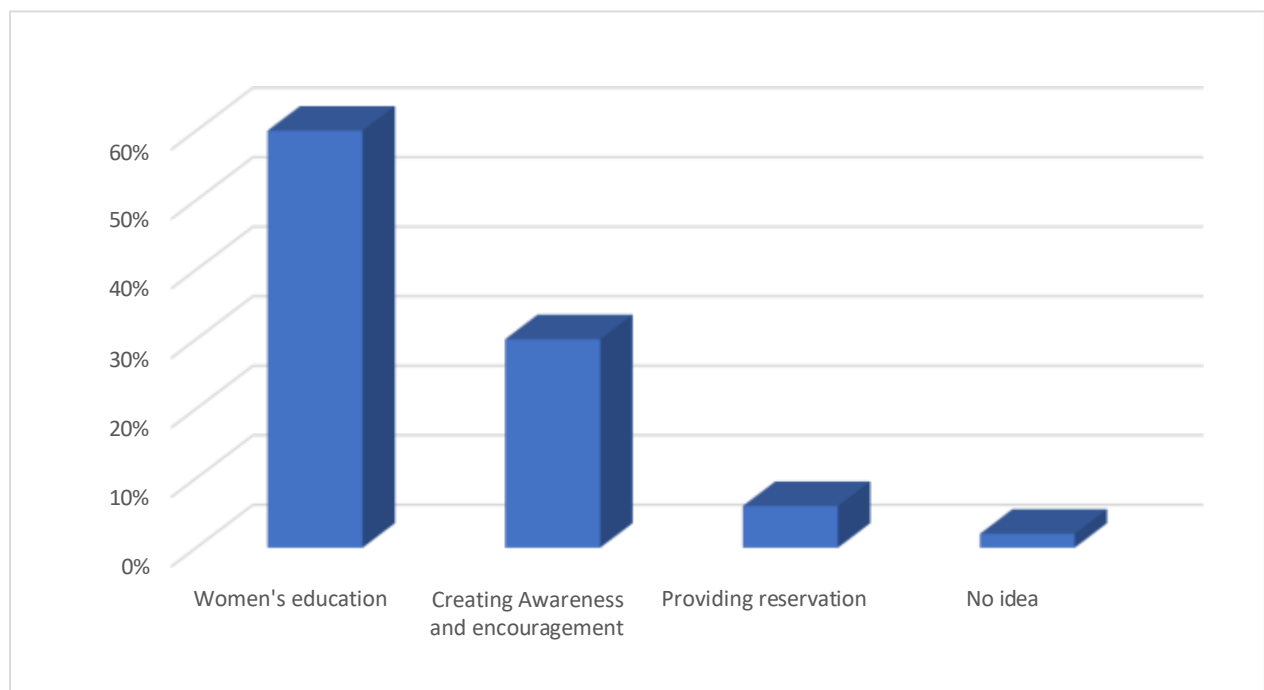
In your opinion, how can women's participation in politics be improved in Arunachal Pradesh?

Ans: According to the survey conducted, most respondents believe that focusing on **women's education** is the key to increasing their participation in politics. Educated women are seen as more confident and aware of their rights, making them more likely to engage in political activities.

A considerable number of respondents also emphasized the importance of **creating awareness and encouraging** women through community support and motivation. Some participants suggested that **providing political reservations** could open more opportunities for women in leadership roles.

However, a small section of respondents had **no clear idea** on how to improve women's political participation, reflecting the need for further awareness at the grassroots level. The survey highlights that a combined effort in education, awareness, and policy support is essential for enhancing women's role in politics in Arunachal Pradesh.

DATA	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Focusing on Women's Education	30	60%
Awareness and encouragement towards politics.	15	30%
Providing Reservation	3	6%
No Idea	2	4%



Conclusion

Despite notable advancements in democratic engagement and the introduction of reservation policies at the grassroots level, women in Arunachal Pradesh continue to face systemic challenges in formal politics. Cultural norms rooted in patriarchy, limited access to education and mentorship, and the reluctance of political parties to field female candidates collectively hinder the progress toward gender parity. While the success of the 33% reservation in Panchayati Raj Institutions has empowered thousands of women at the local level, this progress has yet to translate into substantial representation in the State Legislative Assembly or national political platforms.

Encouragingly, the increasing participation of women in village governance, civil society, and public discourse reflects a slow but visible shift. The election of four women MLAs in the 2024 state elections—the highest so far—offers a glimpse of possibility. However, to move beyond symbolic representation, there must be sustained political will, institutional reforms, and societal transformation.

True democracy in Arunachal Pradesh—and indeed across India—will only be realized when women are not only participants but equal stakeholders in political decision-making. Bridging this gender gap is not just an equity imperative but a necessary condition for inclusive, resilient, and effective governance in the state.

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