

# Women's Political Participation in South Waziristan: A Community-Based Survey

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## Abstract

*This study investigates the impact of political reforms on women's political participation in South Waziristan, Pakistan. The sample consisted of 100 females aged 18 to 45 from the region. The survey was conducted using a self-administered questionnaire, and the Statistical Package (SPSS) was used for the data analysis. The results show a comprehensive knowledge of the current state of political awareness and participation among women in the region, particularly in the context of the 18th Amendment. The study outcome showed significant knowledge about the Amendment's results, which shows a limited impact on women. The majority of respondents (64%) suggested that education initiatives should be implemented to facilitate greater involvement of women in politics. The study focuses on the fact that despite political reforms such as the 18th Amendment, women's political participation in South Waziristan remains limited. This study targeted educational initiatives and community-based efforts to improve political awareness and involvement among women in the region.*

**Keywords:** Impediments, Women Empowerment, Political Participation, South Waziristan.

## Introduction

Since ancient times, the role of women in society and their nature have been considered a central object of religious, political, and philosophical thoughts. The spiritual, social, and rulers of the Athenian and pre-industrial Western societies defined Women as a family and considered women inferior to men (Che, 2017; Punam & Sharma, 2017; Giuliano, 2015). For example, the prominent scholars of the ancient Aristotle also described man as superior and lead by nature, while women in a society are inferior. The reason is that in ancient times, women were subjugated. There is no political representation on any platform in society. With time, people recognized that women are integral parts of society, and without their participation, no society can achieve economic, political, or social growth.

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On the other hand, the world entered the Industrial Revolution, which increased women's importance in society (Brill, 2024). For this purpose, feminists and social scientists have started worldwide societal, political, and cultural movements. Sometimes, this movement is called the women's suffrage movement. The first formal women's suffrage movement began in the USA at the Seneca Fall Convention (1848). The Seneca Falls Convention sought to secure equal rights for women, including the right to vote. Thus, New Zealand became the world's first self-governing country that granted women the right to vote in 1893. Therefore, the series is started across the globe. Australia (1902), Finland (1906), the UK (1918, 1928), the USA (1920), France (1944), and Switzerland (1971) were granted voting rights to women (For details, see Appendix A).

Despite modernization and democracy, women's participation is still low compared to males in each field, particularly Politics. This low participation indicates several causes. According to Van Acker (1999), "Gender hate and traditions (That are grow with societies) entirely paralyzed the women participation in politics. The existing political, social and cultural organization and political parties are male dominant organization and parities." In the 21st century, power still holds men, like in a historically patriarchal society. Every individual is observing it in every corner of society. That is why women's representation in politics is under-represented globally. In 2009, only 18% of women were represented globally, which is too limited. Besides, in Rwanda's legislature, women secured 56.3% representation in the 2008 parliamentary elections (Rosen, 2013). While the champion of democracy granted merely 16.8% representation to women in Congress, the ratio is also low in other democratic states, such as India and Japan, which are 14.36 and 11.3%, respectively. Some new democracies indicate a high representation of women. For example, almost 44% of the women in the African National Congress are female, while the Mexican Congress is 28.2% female (Thames et al., 2013)

Since contemporary globalization, women's involvement in politics and political participation has garnered global attention, particularly in South Asia. Since Pakistan's independence, women's participation in politics has been a significant concern. Past governments prompted women's representation in parliament and initiatives to empower them (Begum, 2023). The participation increased during Musharraf's regime. This initiative has increased 17% of women's representation (reserve seats) in parliament and 33% of the quota for local government positions in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This representation enacted laws against the harassment of women and banned practices like Swara. However, evaluating the actual impact of these reforms on women's empowerment is crucial, particularly in terms of their political engagement (Bilal & Ahmad, 2018; Awan, 2016). The Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA<sup>6</sup>) have been strategically important since the 19th century under British rule and continued to be so post-Partition in 1947. British India and subsequent Pakistani governments needed to pay more attention to FATA's economic, political, and social development. The entire FATA region was governed by the Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR), a set of strict laws introduced by British India in 1901 that persisted through successive administrations in Pakistan (Areas, 2011). Before the 2018 enactment of the 25th constitutional amendment, South Waziristan was a region of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) under the 1973 Constitution of Pakistan<sup>7</sup>. In 2018, the South Waziristan Agency was

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<sup>6</sup>The Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) consists of seven tribal agencies and six Frontier Regions (FRs) from north to south. These areas include Bajaur, Mohmand, Khyber, Kurram, Orakzai, North Waziristan, and South Waziristan as agencies, and Peshawar, Kohat, Bannu, Laki Marwat, Tank, and Dera Ismail Khan as FRs.

<sup>7</sup>FATA was created as a result of an agreement signed between Amir Amanullah Khan of Afghanistan and Sir Mortimer Durand, a British representative, in 1893. Since India's independence from British rule in 1947, Waziristan has been under Pakistan's administration.

renamed the South Waziristan District and made a part of the Dera Ismail Khan Division. SWA is the largest and southernmost agency among Pakistan's tribal agencies, covers an area of 3,936 square miles, and is ranked as the fourth most populous district, with 679,185 inhabitants according to the 2017 census (Khan et al., 2022; Ayub & Ullah, 2023; Mahsud et al., 2023).

### **Women's Participation in South Waziristan**

The people of FATA have been subjugated since the colonial era law since the partition and considered discriminatory and unjust as women from other regions of the country are provided reserved seats under the Constitution. Still, seats for FATA have yet to be designated by the National Assembly or the Senate. It means that FATA women face discrimination. Articles 51 and 59 of the Constitution specify the allocation of seats reserved for women in the National Assembly and the Senate from all provinces, but FATA needs to be included (Express Tribune, March 12, 2018). In South Waziristan Agency, the security situation has been unstable, and as a result, elections have been disrupted. In 2013, when elections did occur despite the conflict, voter turnout was meagre at 11.37%, which was the lowest turnout in the country (International Crisis Group, 2015, p. 13). Similarly, in the 2018 election of South Waziristan (NA-49), despite the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militants on Election Day, Women turned out in large numbers to vote. Women voters cast their votes correctly. According to DC Mohmand Wasif Saeed, the expected turnout of women voters in the area is estimated to be 50%, a significant increase from the previous turnout of around 3% (Express Tribune, July 25, 2018). In one decade, the voter gap has declined across the country. According to the latest statistics, Pakistan has over 128 million registered voters. Interestingly, the difference in the number of male and female voters has decreased. Approximately 59.32 million women (46.13%) are registered to vote, while 69.26 million men (53.87%) are registered. Dawn's analysis revealed that there is a total gender gap of 9.94 million voters, with the Punjab region contributing over five million, followed by Sindh with 2.24 million, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with 1.96 million, and Baluchistan with 0.660 million. In Punjab, out of 73.20 million registered voters, 53.44% are male (39.12 million), and 46.56% are female (34.09 million). In South Waziristan (Lower), the percentage of women among registered voters is only 34.54%. It means that out of the total registered voters in the area, approximately 34.54% are women.

On the other hand, in South Waziristan (Upper), women constitute 44.63% of the total registered voters. These figures highlight disparities in female voter registration between the Lower and Upper regions of South Waziristan, with the Upper region having a higher percentage of women registered as voters than the Lower region. Besides, it is much less than other regions of FATA and across the country (Dawn, December 18, 2023).

### **Hypotheses**

The study is focused on the following hypotheses.

**Null Hypothesis 1:** There is no societal and cultural norms are barriers to political participation in South Waziristan, Pakistan.

**Null Hypothesis 2:** There is no impact of the 18th Amendment on Women's Political Engagement in South Waziristan, Pakistan.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study has two main objectives.

1. To study the barriers to women's participation in politics in South Waziristan

2. To investigate the role of women in politics in South Waziristan pre- and post-18th Amendments.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In South Waziristan, women face discrimination and are limited to housing (Char Dewari) in the male-dominated society. As a result of gender bias, women are considered inferior to men, leading to unequal treatment and opportunities. The most appropriate approach to analyzing gender bias and discrimination in this context is the liberal feminist approach. The liberal feminism approach originated with Mary Wollstonecraft in 1792. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it remained a subject of liberal political philosophy that emphasized justice and individual rights. In the late 19th and early 20th century, suffragist movements were a critical historical moment of liberal feminist tradition, which struggled for women's right to vote. Activists of the theory believe that the legal system is necessary to achieve gender equality and justice and remove societal inequality among the groups. The theory urges gender equality, individual rights, and legal reforms. Therefore, it focuses on women having the same freedom, opportunities, and legal rights as men. According to this approach, laws and policies are essential to ensure gender equality and equal opportunities in formal and informal institutions. From the perspective of individuals within South Waziristan society, there is a need to delve into the root causes of gender disparities across various domains, including political participation. Women in South Waziristan often encounter unequal treatment in numerous aspects of life, leading to significant societal consequences stemming from these gender imbalances. The main aim of this study is to fill the gap by examining the effect of government policies on women's political empowerment post-18th amendment in South Waziristan. The study focused on two significant areas: political participation after the 18th Amendment and public engagement. The study examines how political reforms impact women's empowerment in these areas.

### **Literature Review**

Women's leadership politics is widely recognized as it promotes equality and encourages women's participation in decision-making processes (World Economic Forum, 2022; UN Women, 2023). It fosters reduced inequality, increases aeration, and amplifies female voices, leading to a greater focus on social issues such as health and education. It is crucial for achieving gender equality, sustainable development, peace, and democracy that women are included in decision-making and participate in voting and public sectors (Markham, 2013). Various studies have highlighted the significance of female participation in politics (Dar & Shairgojri, 2022; Baksh-Soodeen, 2005; Porter, 2003; Burns et al., 2001). Although international agreements and strategies have been implemented to promote female participation in politics, women still face significant challenges globally (Kumar, 2017; Mlambo & Kapingura, 2019). Women need to be adequately represented in parliamentary and decision-making roles worldwide, with only 23% of seats held by women despite being half the global population (Radu, 2018). Gender parity in government remains a persistent challenge, particularly in poorer nations (Morobane, 2014). According to the United Nations, women's equal participation in power and decision-making is essential for gender equality and women's empowerment. (Bari, 2010), the study evaluated the performance of female parliamentarians in Pakistan who were able to enter the national legislature through gender quotas. Despite facing challenges related to the structure and functionality of the parliament, these women have shown their agency by advocating for women's voices and concerns during parliamentary proceedings. The study suggested that representation through gender quotas is not enough for

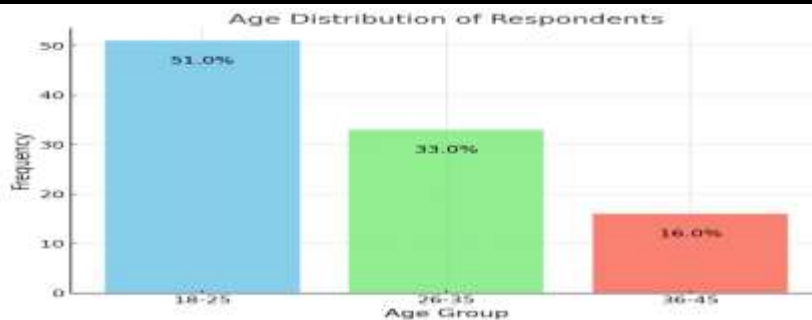
substantive representation of women's power base; connections with the women's movement and networking among women legislators are crucial steps toward achieving women's political empowerment. Several studies have highlighted institutional constraints that impede female political participation, such as political systems not accommodating women's household responsibilities, quota systems, and gender biases (Kangas et al., 2015). In many cases, contemporary forms of political empowerment tend to confine women to lower levels of leadership rather than facilitating their ascent to top political positions (Kassa, 2015). Iwanaga (2008) identified barriers to female political representation rooted in cultural, religious, and social norms (Shalaby, 2016). Siddiqi (2015) outlined household and social-level barriers to female political participation. Furthermore, despite designated female wings in political parties, they often have fewer female members than their male counterparts (Naz et al., 2010).

## Methodology

This study aims to find the causes and effects of women's political participation in South Waziristan. The research population consisted of Female BS, M.Phil/MS, and PhD Political Science and International relations students in Pakistani institutions (private and government institutions). This study used the snowball sampling approach, and a suitable sample of respondents was selected from the total population. The sample size of this study was 100 females aged 18 to 45 years who belong to the South Waziristan District, KP, and Pakistan. The questionnaire assessed women's political participation in South Waziristan District, KP. The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended questions. The questionnaire was administered by trained research assistants fluent in the local language. The collected data was entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis. Descriptive statistics, such as frequency distributions and percentages, were used to summarize this study's data.

## Results and Discussion

**Figure 1: Age distribution of survey participation**



A majority of participants fall within the younger age group. 51% of that survey fell between 18 and 25 years old. Moreover, 33% of respondents belong to the 26-35 age group. As compared to other age groups, the 35 is relatively low.

In the age group above 35, only 16% of respondents participated in this survey.

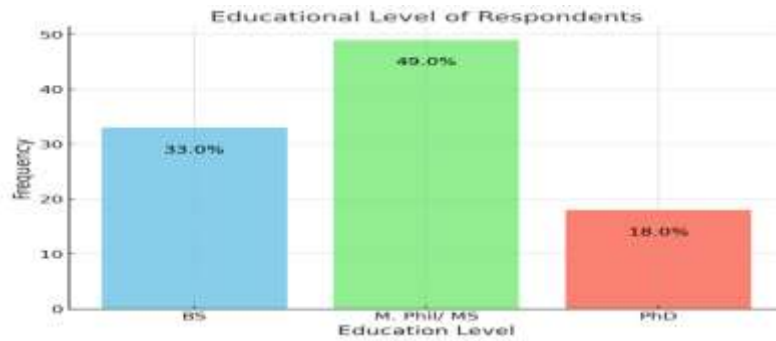
**Figure 2: Educational background of the respondents**

Figure 2 describes the outcomes of the educational background of the respondents, and it indicates the inclusive range of academic achievements among the participants. Most participants of this survey have a Bachelor of Science (BS) degree, with 33% of them. Conversely, 18% of the respondents have obtained a PhD.

The results documented that many participants hold modern education, indicating that the sample population has a well-educated and knowledgeable background. Based on this distribution, it is clear that the survey participants possess considerable academic qualifications and expertise.

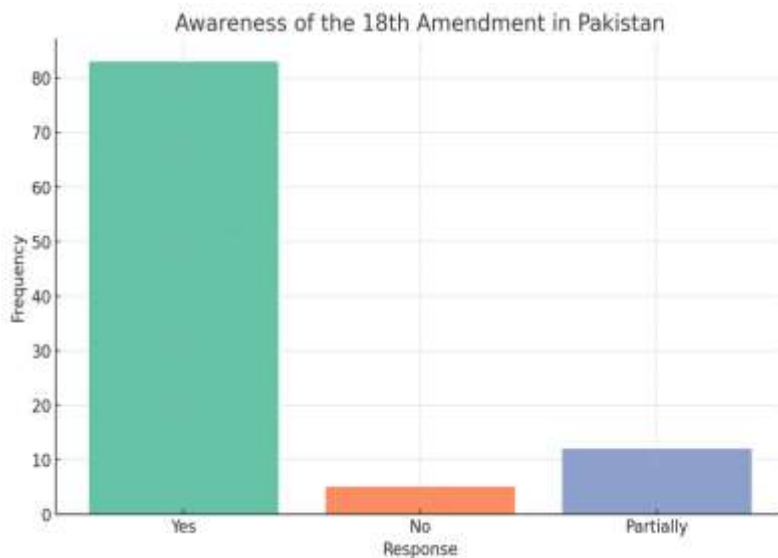
**Figure 3: Awareness of the 18th Amendment**

Figure 3 investigates the awareness of the 18th Amendment and its guarantee in the context of provincial autonomy. The results show that many respondents are well-informed about the 18th Amendment in Pakistan and confirmed more freedom granted to provinces. A significant percentage of the respondents, 83%, confirmed they were aware of the Amendment. On the other hand, only 5% per cent of respondents in the present survey are unaware of the Constitutional Amendment. Additionally, 12% of the survey

participants were partially aware of the 18th Amendment. The outcome shows that the majority of respondents comprised a level of understanding regarding this significant legislative change in Pakistan. This productive hike in awareness indicates that the 18th Amendment has triggered considerable attention and discussion among the participants.

**Figure 4: Implications of the 18th Amendment**

Understanding of the 18th Amendment's Implications on Political Structures in South Waziristan

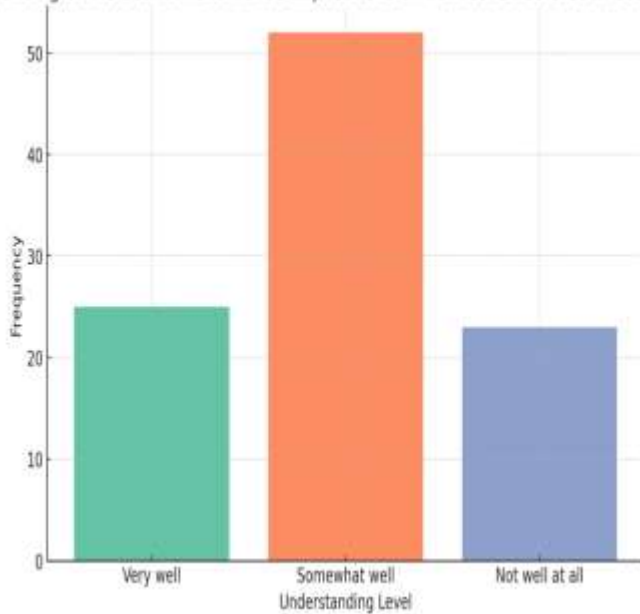


Figure 4 indicates the level of understanding regarding the implications of the 18th Amendment on political structures in South Waziristan. Among respondents, 25% per cent of survey participants reported understanding the implications "very well," whereas a considerable ratio of respondents, 52% per cent, showed that they understood them "somewhat well." Similarly, about 23% per cent of participants reported that they needed help understanding the

implications of the 18th Amendment on political structures in South Waziristan. Therefore, the findings show that a significant portion of respondents possess at least a moderate understanding of the implications of the 18th Amendment on political structures in South Waziristan.

**Figure 5: People's perceptions regarding changes in women's political participation in South Waziristan**

Changes in Women's Political Participation in South Waziristan Before and After the 18th Amendment

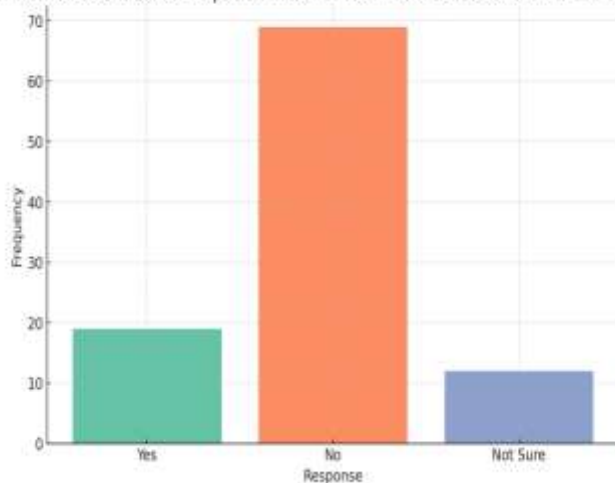
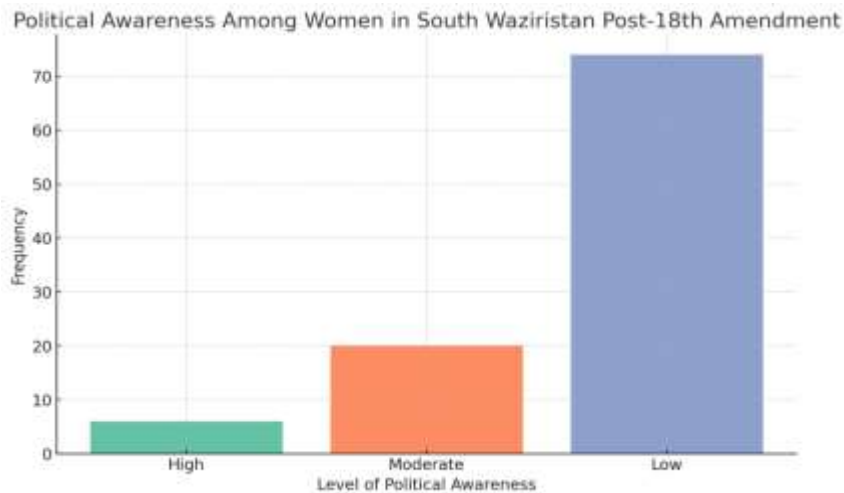


Figure 5 describes the results of people's perceptions regarding changes in women's political participation in South Waziristan before and after the implementation of the 18th Amendment. The results showed that only 19% of the respondents reported changes in women's political involvement following the Amendment. Besides, a significant majority (69%) stated that they had not

observed any noticeable changes in women's political participation pre- and post-18th Amendment. Furthermore, 12% of respondents were unsure whether any changes occurred. Most respondents did not perceive significant alterations in women's political participation in South Waziristan due to the 18th amendment.

**Figure 6: People's perceptions regarding changes in women's political participation in South Waziristan**

There are many opinions about the level of political awareness among women in South Waziristan



post-18th Amendment. In Figure 6, only 6% of the respondents believed that the level of political awareness among women was high, while 20% considered it moderate. However, a vast majority of 74% thought that the political awareness among women in South Waziristan was low. The result indicates most people believed that the level of political awareness among women in the region could be

higher post-18th Amendment. Therefore, there may be opportunities to initiate programs to increase political education and awareness among women to encourage their participation and engagement in the political process.

**Figure 7: Primary barriers that stopped women from actively participating**

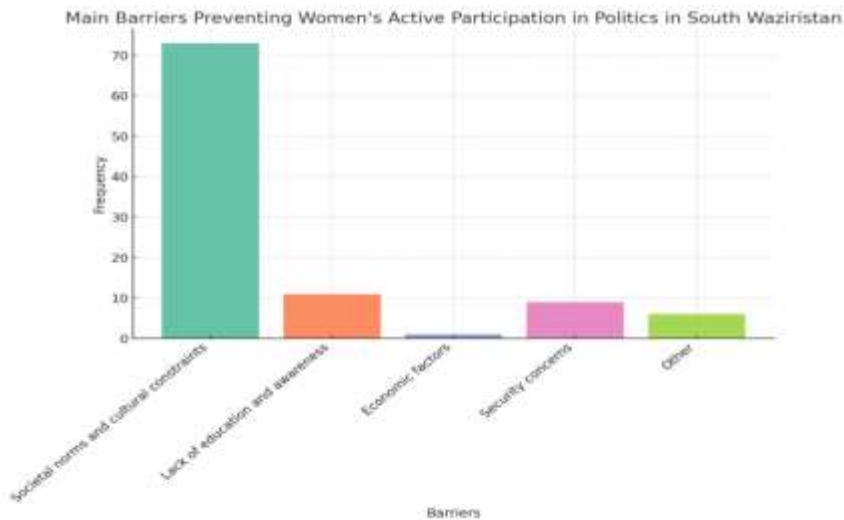


Figure 7 shows the outcomes of the primary barriers that stopped women from actively participating in politics in South Waziristan. For most respondents (73%), societal norms and cultural constraints are the main obstacles. At the same time, a smaller proportion of respondents cited a lack of education and awareness (11%), security concerns (9%), and economic factors (1%) as barriers. Moreover,

6% of respondents mentioned other factors. The societal norms and cultural restrictions are the most significant barriers to women's political engagement in South Waziristan. Moreover, efforts to improve education, address security concerns, and enhance economic opportunities could further contribute to overcoming barriers to women's political participation in the region.



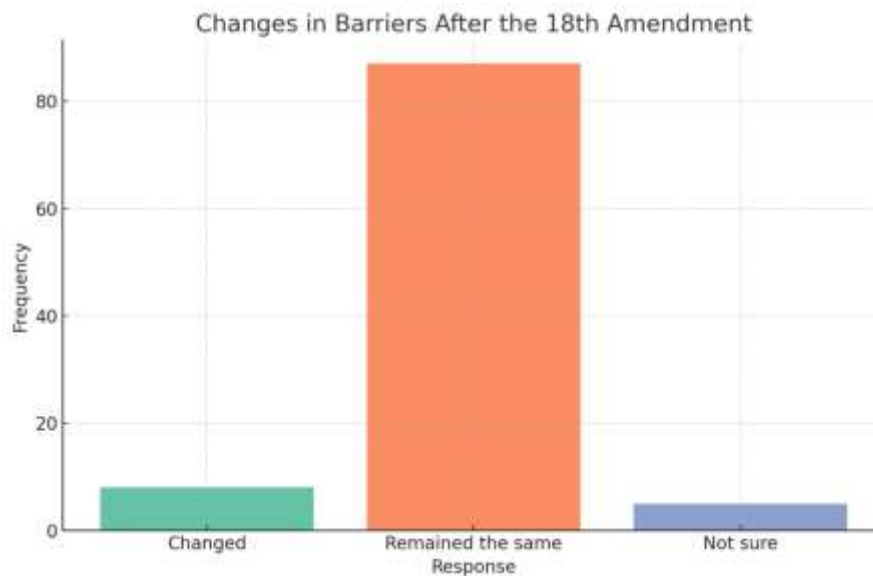
**Figure 8: Perception of the changes in barrier**

Figure 8 shows that a perception of the changes in barriers to women's participation in politics in South Waziristan resulted in the application of the 18th Amendment. A small proportion of respondents (8%) reported that barriers had changed after the Amendment. At the same time, the majority (87%) believed the barriers remained the same. Furthermore, 5% of respondents stated they

needed more certainty about whether any changes had occurred. The results conclude that the barriers to women's political participation in South Waziristan remained unchanged following the 18th Amendment. This result suggests that legislative reforms may have occurred but have yet to significantly impact the fundamental societal and cultural factors that impede women's active political involvement.

**Figure 9: People's opinions about the measures**

Figure 9 shows the results of people's opinions about the measures that can be taken to increase the participation of women in politics in South Waziristan. According to the survey, the majority of respondents (64%) suggested that education initiatives should be implemented to facilitate greater involvement of women in politics. Following this, 30% of respondents indicated that awareness campaigns could enhance women's political participation. A smaller proportion (6%) of respondents identified legal reforms as a potential measure to promote women's political engagement. Respondents strongly agreed on the importance of education initiatives and awareness campaigns in fostering women's political participation in South Waziristan.

## Discussion

The results of this study investigated several significant perspectives on women's political participation in South Waziristan, particularly in the context of the 18th Amendment. The age distribution of participants, mainly younger women, suggests a growing interest among the youth in political matters (Ayub & Ullah, 2023). However, the lower participation rate of higher-aged women shows potential generational differences in political engagement, possibly due to changing levels of exposure to education and political discourse. The educational background of respondents reveals a well-educated sample, with a significant portion holding a Bachelor of Science (BS) degree and a notable percentage having attained a PhD (Qadir, 2023; Khan et al., 2022; Wazir,

2020). This suggests that the women surveyed are likely to have the intellectual resources to engage with political issues, which is crucial for fostering informed participation in the political process. Therefore, the awareness of the 18th Amendment is high among the respondents, with 83% indicating knowledge of the legislative change. However, while awareness is widespread, understanding its implications for political structures in South Waziristan is more moderate, with only 25% fully grasping its impact (Gul & Sherazi, 2022; Abbasi et al., 2023; Hussain, 2022; Wazir, 2020). Despite the awareness of the 18th Amendment, the perceived impact on women's political participation is minimal. A significant 69% of respondents reported no noticeable changes in women's involvement in politics post-Amendment, and 74% believe that political awareness among women remains low (Ur Rehman, 2023; Khalid, 2023; Negi, 2023). The primary barriers to women's political participation are identified as societal norms and cultural constraints, with 73% of respondents citing these as the main obstacles. This finding highlighted that the primary challenges that legislative reforms alone cannot overcome. Security concerns, economic factors, and a lack of education and awareness also contribute to the limited political engagement of women, though to a lesser extent. The results also showed that to increase women's political participation, education initiatives and awareness campaigns are crucial. The strong support for these measures among respondents indicates recognition of the need for ordinary efforts to empower women politically (Aman, 2023; Khan et al., 2023; Khan, 2023). Legislative reforms, while important, are seen as less effective without accompanying efforts to change societal attitudes and provide women with the knowledge and skills necessary to participate actively in politics (Wazir et al., 2023; Gohar et al., 2024).

## Conclusion

The study concludes that the scenario of political awareness, educational backgrounds, perceptions of legislative Amendment, and barriers to women's political participation in South Waziristan pre- and post-18th Amendment. The results of this survey show a comprehensive knowledge of the current state of political awareness and participation among women in South Waziristan, particularly in the context of the 18th Amendment. This study's findings showed a significant level of understanding about the Amendment itself, yet a limited impact on women's political involvement. Despite the legislative changes, societal norms and cultural constraints remain the most significant barriers to women's political participation. The data indicate the need for targeted educational initiatives and awareness campaigns to address these challenges and encourage greater political engagement among women in the region. It is evident that while legislative reforms are a step in the right direction, substantial efforts are still required to translate these changes into tangible improvements in women's political participation in South Waziristan. The study recommends some effective policies based on the results. More comprehensive strategies are needed to address both structural and cultural impediments to empower women effectively in the political arena in South Waziristan. The study results suggested significant recommendations to policymakers, such as highlighting the policy reforms after the 18th Amendment. Therefore, to improve community-based awareness, targeted educational programs should create an environment where women can actively and equally participate in politics. This study has certain limitations, primarily focusing on political aspects within a limited time and with limited resources. Future research should cover the entire region of FATA (now merged with KP) and explore the economic and societal dimensions of the area as well.

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