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INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: A MICRO STUDY OF THE TRAJECTORY OF AO WOMEN POLITICAL REPRESENTATION IN MOKOKCHUNG TOWN, NAGALAND

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Keywords	Abstract
Customary Laws, Women And Politics, Ao Naga Women & Reservation.	This paper attempts to analyze the political trajectory of the Ao Naga women. The journey of women into the political sphere has been challenging across the globe. In Naga society too, the inclusion of women in politics has been achieved after years of persistent struggle and being secured with their right to participate in politics. Despite traditional Naga society being often described as democratic and republican, it is more often than not governed by customary laws that strictly prohibited women from engaging in political activities by stating that it would infringe on Naga customary laws and tradition as protected under Article 371(A) of the constitution of India. The recent issue of reservation for women in urban local bodies was responsible for the disturbances in the state of Nagaland. After amendment to the constitution in 1992 the central government provides 33% reservation for women in municipalities. However, Nagaland Assembly has passed another



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	Act called, Municipal and Town Council Act in 2001 which opposed reservations in urban local bodies for the Women. However, when it comes to women and politics, the Ao Naga women have limited rights as compared to men in decision making role in the society at large. Therefore, this paper is an attempt to understand the question of whether the Ao Naga community men in Mokokchung town are ready to be flexible in their customary law and allow women's participation in all political and decision-making processes.
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Introduction

The Census 2011 data provides an important demographic background for understanding the socio-political conditions of Nagaland and the Ao Naga community. Nagaland recorded a population of about 1.98 million with a literacy rate of 79.55 percent including 82.75 percent male literacy and 76.11 percent female literacy, indicating progress in education and human development. Mokokchung district, predominantly inhabited by the Ao Nagas, recorded a population density of 121 persons per sq. km. The district had a sex ratio of 925 females per 1000 males and a high literacy rate of 91.62 percent, with male literacy at 92.18 percent and female literacy at 91.01 percent, reflecting the community's strong educational advancement. Mokokchung Town recorded a population of 55,725, including 29,719 males and 26,006 females, with a sex ratio of 875 females per 1000 males. Despite the gender imbalance, the town achieved an impressive literacy rate of 93.59 percent, with male literacy at 93.81 percent and female literacy at 93.33 percent, highlighting its status as a highly educated urban centre.

Mokokchung district, predominantly inhabited by Ao Nagas, emerged as one of the most educationally advanced districts in Nagaland, with Mokokchung Town functioning as an important administrative, educational, and commercial centre. Although women actively participated in education, employment, and social organizations, their formal political representation remained limited due to the male-dominated nature of customary institutions such as Putu Menden and village councils. The question of women's political participation has emerged as one of the central concerns of contemporary democratic discourse across the world. Political participation is not merely the act of voting or contesting elections; rather, it encompasses women's involvement in decision-making processes, leadership structures, governance institutions, and public life. Historically, women have been marginalized from formal political spaces due to patriarchal social structures, gendered division of labor, and cultural ideologies that associate politics with masculinity. Indigenous and tribal women, in particular, experience a dual marginalization because of their position both as women and as members of ethnic minority communities. In many indigenous societies, women continue to negotiate between modern constitutional rights and traditional customary institutions that often limit their political agency. The issue therefore becomes not only one of representation but also of negotiating identity, culture, and power within changing socio-political contexts.

In the Indian context, women's political participation has significantly expanded after the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments of 1992, which mandated reservations for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies. These constitutional reforms sought to democratize governance and ensure inclusive participation of marginalized groups, especially women. The reservation policy provided at least one-third representation for women in local governance institutions and created



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opportunities for women to enter public decision-making processes. However, the implementation of these constitutional provisions has not been uniform across all regions of India. In several tribal societies, particularly in the North-Eastern states, the intersection between customary law and constitutional democracy has generated debates regarding women's representation in political institutions. Nagaland represents one of the most prominent examples where customary traditions and constitutional provisions came into direct conflict over the issue of women's reservation in Urban Local Bodies (ULBs).

Nagaland is widely regarded as a tribal and communitarian society where customary laws and traditional institutions play an influential role in regulating social and political life. The Naga tribes historically maintained village republics characterized by collective decision-making, community participation, and customary governance systems. Scholars often describe traditional Naga society as egalitarian and democratic in nature. Nevertheless, such democratic practices were largely confined to male participation, while women remained excluded from formal political institutions and village councils. In most Naga tribes, customary laws restricted women from occupying decision-making roles in traditional political structures. Although women contributed substantially to agricultural production, household economy, social organization, and community welfare, they rarely possessed authority in formal governance or political institutions.

Among the various Naga tribes, the Ao Nagas constitute one of the major tribes inhabiting Mokokchung district of Nagaland. The Ao community is known for its strong social organization, educational advancement, and early exposure to Christianity and modern education. Ao women have historically played significant roles in the socio-economic and cultural life of the community. They actively participate in agriculture, family management, church activities, and informal social networks. Despite their contributions, Ao women have remained largely absent from formal political leadership and institutional decision-making processes. Patriarchal norms, customary restrictions, and male dominance in public affairs have continued to shape women's political experiences within Ao society.

The trajectory of Ao women's political participation reflects the broader tensions between modern democratic ideals and traditional customary practices in Nagaland. On one hand, constitutional democracy promotes equality, political representation, and gender justice; on the other hand, customary institutions emphasize the preservation of traditional values, social cohesion, and indigenous autonomy. This contradiction became particularly visible during the debate surrounding women's reservation in Urban Local Bodies. The demand for implementing 33 percent reservation for women in municipal and town councils led to intense opposition from tribal organizations and customary bodies in Nagaland. Many opponents argued that reservation for women violated Naga customary laws protected under Article 371(A) of the Constitution of India, which grants special protection to Naga customary practices and social traditions.

The controversy surrounding women's reservation in Nagaland exposed deep-rooted patriarchal attitudes and anxieties regarding gender roles in public life. Women's organizations, civil society groups, and human rights activists argued that denying women political representation contradicted democratic principles and constitutional guarantees of equality. At the same time, traditional organizations viewed the reservation policy as an external imposition threatening indigenous customs



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and tribal autonomy. The conflict eventually resulted in political unrest, protests, and social disturbances across the state. The issue highlighted the complex relationship between gender, customary law, ethnicity, and state politics in Nagaland.

Within this larger political context, Ao women have gradually begun asserting their political rights and public visibility. Educational advancement, urbanization, globalization, Christian missionary influence, and exposure to modern political discourses have contributed to changing perceptions regarding women's roles in society. Women's organizations such as the Naga Mothers' Association and various tribal women's groups have actively advocated for women's participation in governance and peace-building processes.

The study of Ao women's political participation is sociologically significant because it reveals the transformation of indigenous gender relations within a rapidly changing socio-political environment. Political participation is closely linked to issues of empowerment, citizenship, social inclusion, and democratic representation. For indigenous women, political participation also involves negotiating cultural identity and traditional norms. The experiences of Ao women therefore cannot be understood solely through the framework of liberal feminism or electoral politics. Rather, their political trajectory must be analyzed within the broader context of customary law, tribal identity, patriarchy, Christianity, ethnicity, and constitutional democracy.

Furthermore, the participation of women in politics has broader implications for democratic development and social transformation. Studies across different societies indicate that women's representation in political institutions contributes to more inclusive governance, greater attention to social welfare, and enhanced democratic accountability. Women leaders often raise issues related to education, health, gender violence, community development, and social justice that may otherwise remain marginalized. In tribal societies, women's participation also challenges patriarchal power structures and promotes gender-sensitive interpretations of customary practices. Therefore, understanding the trajectory of Ao women's political participation provides insight into the changing nature of gender relations and democratic practices within indigenous societies.

The present study seeks to explore the historical and contemporary dimensions of Ao women's political participation in Nagaland. It aims to examine how customary laws, patriarchal traditions, social institutions, and constitutional provisions influence women's access to political spaces. The study also attempts to understand whether Ao society is gradually becoming more receptive to women's leadership and participation in decision-making processes. By analyzing the experiences, perceptions, and challenges faced by Ao women, the study contributes to broader discussions on gender, indigenous politics, and democratic transformation in North-East India.

The study further highlights the need to critically examine the role of customary law in shaping women's political rights. While customary institutions are important markers of indigenous identity and cultural autonomy, they must also be evaluated in relation to democratic values and gender equality. The challenge lies in creating a balance between preserving indigenous traditions and ensuring women's constitutional rights. In this regard, the experiences of Ao women represent a



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critical site of negotiation between tradition and modernity, community identity and individual rights, as well as patriarchy and empowerment.

In contemporary Nagaland, the growing visibility of women in education, employment, and civil society indicates gradual social transformation. However, political institutions continue to remain predominantly male-dominated. The inclusion of women in formal governance structures is therefore essential not only for gender justice but also for strengthening democratic participation and inclusive development. The trajectory of Ao women's political participation reflects both continuity and change - continuity in the persistence of patriarchal customary norms, and change in the increasing assertion of women's agency and political consciousness.

Thus, this study attempts to understand the socio-political realities surrounding Ao women's participation in politics and decision-making processes. It explores how indigenous women negotiate their identity and rights within a society shaped by customary traditions and democratic aspirations. By situating Ao women's experiences within broader debates on gender, tribal politics, and constitutional democracy, the study contributes to the growing scholarship on indigenous women and political participation in North-East India.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the socio-demographic and socio-economic background of respondents in relation to women's participation in Urban Local Body (ULB) elections in Mokokchung Town, Nagaland.
2. To analyze respondents' perceptions toward women's political participation, reservation policies, and inclusion in traditional institutions such as Putu Menden.
3. To identify the major factors influencing women's participation and success in Urban Local Body elections.
4. To examine gender differences in political motivations, campaign priorities, and the role of social institutions such as the Church in shaping political participation.

Research Methodology

The present study adopts a quantitative research methodology to examine the trajectory of Ao women's political participation in Nagaland. Primary data were collected through a structured interview schedule and questionnaire administered exclusively limited to 15 respondents selected through purposive sampling from the Ao Naga community. The respondents included women leaders, educated youth, social activists, and members of civil society organizations in order to understand perceptions regarding women's political participation, customary laws, and reservation in Urban Local Bodies.

The collected data were coded and analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics software. Descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution and percentages were used to summarize the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents. Cross-tabulation analysis was employed to examine the association between gender, political awareness, customary beliefs, and attitudes towards women's reservation in decision-making institutions. Independent sample t-tests were conducted to identify differences in



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perceptions between male and female respondents regarding women's political participation and customary restrictions. Regression analysis was further applied to assess the influence of variables such as education, customary beliefs, and political awareness on women's political participation. The study also used secondary sources including books, journals, government reports, and scholarly articles related to gender, customary laws, tribal politics, and women's representation in Nagaland.

Review of Literature

Several scholars have examined the relationship between gender, customary law, and political participation in tribal societies. Existing literature reveals that indigenous women often experience structural exclusion from formal political institutions despite their significant socio-economic contributions.

Bina Agarwal (1994), in her study on gender and property relations, emphasized that women's exclusion from ownership, resources, and institutional authority directly affects their political participation and bargaining power within society. She argued that women's empowerment requires both economic independence and institutional representation. Studies on North-East India have particularly emphasized the complex relationship between customary laws and women's rights. Temsula Ao (2006) observed that although Naga society is often portrayed as egalitarian, women remain largely excluded from traditional political structures and village decision-making bodies. Her writings reveal the contradiction between the public image of tribal democracy and the lived experiences of women's marginalization.

Dolly Kikon (2009) examined gender relations in Naga society and argued that customary practices continue to reinforce patriarchal authority despite increasing modernization and educational advancement among women. According to her, women's political exclusion is deeply embedded within the social organization of tribal institutions. Walter Fernandes and Sanjay Barbora (2002) highlighted that tribal women in North-East India occupy a paradoxical position where they enjoy relative social mobility compared to women in many mainland societies, yet remain excluded from formal political power structures. Their analysis suggests that social visibility does not necessarily translate into political representation.

Research on women's reservation in Nagaland has gained prominence after the Urban Local Bodies controversy. Changkija (2017) argued that opposition to women's reservation reflected patriarchal anxieties disguised as protection of customary law. She contended that denying women political representation undermines democratic values and constitutional equality. Similarly, Naga Mothers' Association (2017) has consistently advocated for women's participation in peace-building and governance processes. The organization played a significant role in challenging gender discrimination and promoting women's political visibility in Nagaland. Buragohain (2024) analyzed the politics surrounding women's reservation in Urban Local Bodies in Nagaland. The study explored the resistance against the implementation of 33 percent reservation for women and argued that the controversy reflected tensions between constitutional guarantees of gender equality and the protection of indigenous customary rights under Article 371(A). The author highlighted that despite high literacy



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and relatively better social indicators among Naga women, their formal political representation remains extremely limited.

A study by Kikon (2021) examined the status of Ao Naga women within customary and traditional social institutions in Nagaland. The studies argued that despite the image of Naga society as egalitarian, Ao women continue to face gender inequality in inheritance, leadership, and political participation. Through qualitative analysis, Kikon showed that patriarchal customs and institutions such as the *morung* historically excluded women from political decision-making and leadership roles. The study concluded that achieving gender justice among the Ao Nagas requires reform in customary practices and greater inclusion of women in governance and public institutions. Patton (2022) examined the relationship between customary law, gender norms, and democratic participation in Nagaland. The study found that despite women's significant social and economic contributions, patriarchal customary practices continue to restrict their political representation and leadership opportunities. It highlighted the tension between constitutional gender equality and Article 371(A), emphasizing the need for greater inclusion of women in governance.

Yhome (2021) explored the relationship between indigenous identity, gender, and political representation in Nagaland. The study argued that identity politics and customary governance often prioritize ethnic autonomy over gender equality, limiting women's political participation. It highlighted tensions between constitutional democracy and customary laws, concluding that greater inclusion of indigenous women is necessary for democratic representation and gender justice. Murry (2023) examined the political participation of Naga women and highlighted the persistent gender gap in electoral representation in Nagaland. The study found that despite women's active involvement in social and community activities, patriarchal norms, customary restrictions, and lack of institutional support limit their participation in formal politics. It also emphasized that the controversy over women's reservation in Urban Local Bodies reflected tensions between constitutional equality and customary laws under Article 371(A).

Existing studies have explored gender relations, customary law, and women's activism in Nagaland; however, there remains limited focused research specifically on the political trajectory of Ao women. Therefore, the present study seeks to fill this gap by examining the changing patterns, challenges, and possibilities of Ao women's political participation in Nagaland.

Data Analysis & Discussion

The quantitative analysis of the study examines the socio-demographic profile, socio-economic conditions, political participation, and perceptions of respondents regarding women's representation in Urban Local Body (ULB) elections in Mokokchung Town, Nagaland. The analysis is based on primary data collected from 15 respondents and interpreted using statistical tools such as frequency distribution, mean, median, and standard deviation. These tools help in understanding the central tendency, variation, and response patterns among participants.

The findings reveal that women constituted the majority of respondents, indicating stronger female participation in the study and reflecting the increasing involvement of women in local governance and political discourse. Most respondents belonged to mature age groups, were married, and shared a



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common Christian religious background, showing cultural homogeneity within the sample. Educationally, respondents were well qualified, with a considerable proportion being graduates and postgraduates, suggesting a high level of awareness and political understanding.

The data further shows that most respondents had resided in Mokokchung Town for many years, reflecting strong community attachment and familiarity with local political processes. Variables related to family structure, employment, income, and organisational affiliation provide insight into the socio-economic background of respondents. Political opinion variables reveal strong support for women's reservation and participation in institutions such as Putu Menden and ULB elections. Respondents identified grassroots involvement, leadership qualities, and organisational participation as important factors influencing women's political success. Furthermore, institutions such as the Church were viewed as significant in shaping political awareness, voter behaviour, and moral guidance during elections. Overall, the analysis reflects positive attitudes toward women's empowerment and political representation, although moderate standard deviation values indicate some diversity in socio-economic experiences and political perceptions.

Table1: Descriptive Statistics of Respondents'

Variables	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation
Respondent's Gender	1.73	2.00	0.458
Age of the Respondent	3.13	3.00	1.407
Name of the Ward	4.07	3.00	3.035
Marital Status	1.40	1.00	0.632
Religion	1.00	1.00	0.000
Employment Status	1.80	2.00	0.862
Village Name	5.60	6.00	2.473
Respondent's Education	2.93	3.00	1.163
Years Residing in Mokokchung Town	2.80	3.00	1.265
Name of the Clan	4.00	4.00	2.360
Range Name	2.40	3.00	1.298
Previous Employment	2.00	2.00	0.000
Name of Previous Employment	3.33	3.00	2.127
Number of Children	2.87	3.00	1.125
Number of Family Members	2.33	2.00	1.175
Type of Family	1.47	1.00	0.516
Annual Income	1.87	1.00	1.060
Family Political Background	1.87	2.00	0.352
Languages Known	3.33	3.00	1.496
Organisation Affiliation	2.07	2.00	0.594
Opinion on 33% Reservation for Women in ULB	1.47	1.00	0.834
Contested as Candidate in ULB Elections	3.53	4.00	1.552
Factors Influencing Women's Success in ULB	2.53	2.00	1.506



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Candidates' Election Campaigns in ULB	3.27	3.00	1.981
Opinion on Women Participation in Putu Menden	1.40	1.00	0.737
Motivating Factors to Enter Politics	2.13	2.00	1.060
Role of Church in ULB Elections	1.73	2.00	0.799

The descriptive statistics table presents the mean, median, and standard deviation values for the socio-demographic, economic, and political variables of the 15 respondents included in the study. The mean values indicate the average response category, the median represents the middle value of the distribution, and the standard deviation shows the extent of variation among respondents.

Among the socio-demographic variables, Respondent's Gender recorded a mean of 1.73, median of 2.00, and a low standard deviation of 0.458, indicating limited variation in gender distribution. Age of the Respondent had a mean of 3.13, median of 3.00, and standard deviation of 1.407, reflecting moderate diversity in age groups. Marital Status showed a mean of 1.40 and standard deviation of 0.632, suggesting that most respondents belonged to similar marital categories. Religion recorded a mean and median of 1.00 with a standard deviation of 0.000, indicating complete uniformity, as all respondents belonged to the same religious background. Respondent's Education had a mean of 2.93, median of 3.00, and standard deviation of 1.163, reflecting relatively high educational attainment with moderate variation among respondents.

The residential and community-related variables demonstrate moderate diversity. Years Residing in Mokokchung Town recorded a mean of 2.80, median of 3.00, and standard deviation of 1.265, indicating variation in the duration of residence. Village Name (Mean = 5.60, SD = 2.473) and Name of the Clan (Mean = 4.00, SD = 2.360) showed considerable variation, reflecting diverse village and clan backgrounds. Similarly, Range Name recorded a mean of 2.40 and standard deviation of 1.298, indicating representation from different ranges within the Ao community. Regarding socio-economic characteristics, Employment Status had a mean of 1.80 and standard deviation of 0.862, while Previous Employment recorded a mean and median of 2.00 with no variation (SD = 0.000). Name of Previous Employment showed a mean of 3.33 and standard deviation of 2.127, indicating diversity in occupational backgrounds. Annual Income recorded a mean of 1.87 and standard deviation of 1.060, suggesting moderate differences in income levels. Number of Children (Mean = 2.87, SD = 1.125) and Number of Family Members (Mean = 2.33, SD = 1.175) indicate moderate variation in family composition. Type of Family recorded a mean of 1.47 and low standard deviation of 0.516, suggesting that respondents were concentrated in a particular family structure category.

The political and social participation variables reveal important patterns. Opinion on 33% Reservation for Women in ULB recorded a mean of 1.47 and standard deviation of 0.834, indicating generally positive attitudes with some variation. With regard to contested as a Candidate in ULB Elections had a mean of 3.53, median of 4.00, and standard deviation of 1.552, reflecting diverse political experiences among the respondents. Factors Influencing Women's Success in ULB (Mean = 2.53, SD = 1.506) and Candidates' Election Campaigns in ULB (Mean = 3.27, SD = 1.981) displayed relatively high variation, suggesting differing perceptions regarding women's electoral success and campaign priorities.



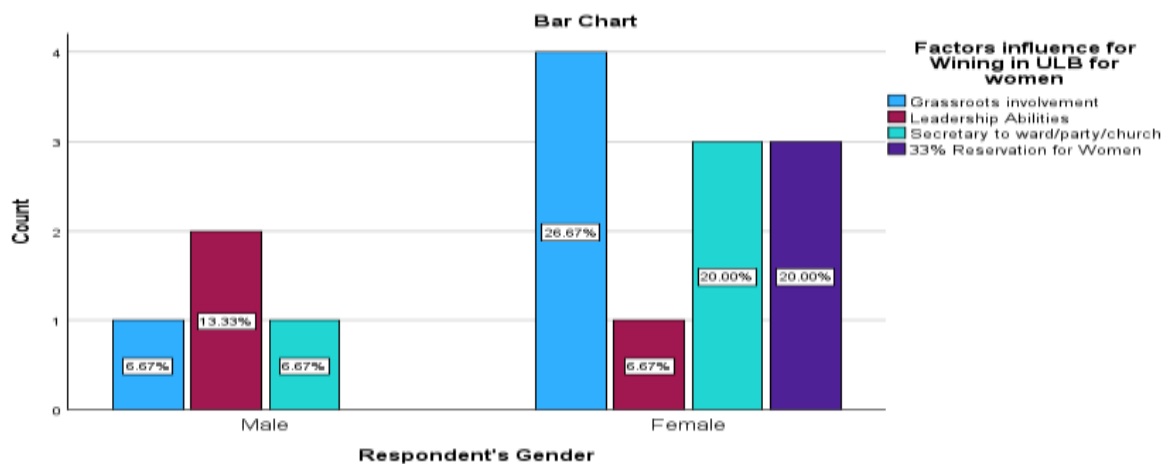
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Similarly, Opinion on Women Participation in Putu Menden recorded a mean of 1.40 and standard deviation of 0.737, indicating overall support with some differences in opinion. Motivating Factors to Enter Politics had a mean of 2.13 and standard deviation of 1.060, reflecting varied motivations among respondents. Role of Church in ULB Elections recorded a mean of 1.73 and standard deviation of 0.799, suggesting moderate variation in perceptions of church influence. Overall, the descriptive statistics indicate that while respondents shared similarities in religion, family political background, and certain socio-demographic characteristics, there was considerable diversity in political attitudes, occupational backgrounds, electoral experiences, and perceptions regarding women's participation in governance.

Table 1: Respondent's Gender and the Factors influence in winning in Urban Local Body (ULB) elections for women.

Factors Influence in winning in ULB for Women	Respondents' Gender		Total
	Male Respondents	Female Respondents	
Grassroots involvement	1 (25.0%)	4 (36.4%)	5 (33.3%)
Leadership abilities	2 (50.0%)	1 (9.1%)	3 (20.0%)
Secretary to ward/party/church	1 (25.0%)	3 (27.3%)	4 (26.7%)
33% Reservation for Women	0 (0.0%)	3 (27.3%)	3 (20.0%)
Total	4 (100%)	11 (100%)	15 (100%)

(*Primary Data - according to 15 respondents)



The cross tabulation shows the relationship between respondents' gender and their perception of the factors influencing women's success in Urban Local Body (ULB) elections. Among male respondents, leadership abilities were considered the most important factor, with 50.0% identifying it as the key reason for women winning in ULB elections, while 25.0% each pointed to grassroots involvement and secretary roles in ward, party, or church activities. None of the male respondents viewed the 33% reservation for women as an influential factor. In contrast, female respondents mainly emphasized grassroots involvement, with 36.4% considering it important, followed by secretary roles and the 33%



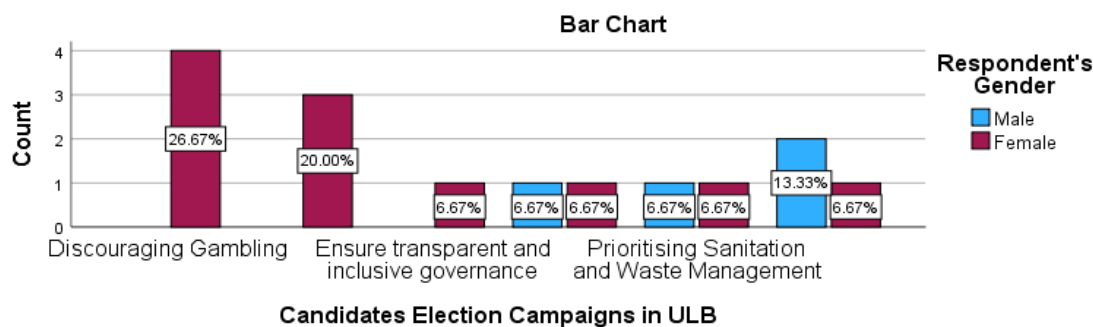
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reservation policy, each receiving 27.3% responses. Only 9.1% of female respondents identified leadership abilities as the main factor. Overall, the findings indicate that male respondents focus more on individual leadership qualities, whereas female respondents give greater importance to grassroots participation, organizational involvement, and reservation policies in supporting women's electoral success in ULBs.

Table 2: Candidates Election Campaign in ULB with Respondents' Gender

Candidates Election Campaigns in ULB	Respondent's Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Discouraging Gambling	0 (0.0%)	4 (100.0%)	4 (100.0%)
Discouraging Alcohol Consumption	0 (0.0%)	3 (100.0%)	3 (100.0%)
Ensure transparent and inclusive governance	0 (0.0%)	1 (100.0%)	1 (100.0%)
Focusing on youth and women empowerment	1 (50.0%)	1 (50.0%)	2 (100.0%)
Prioritizing Sanitation and Waste Management	1 (50.0%)	1 (50.0%)	2 (100.0%)
Broader Town Planning initiatives	2 (66.7%)	1 (33.3%)	3 (100.0%)
Total	4 (26.7%)	11 (73.3%)	15 (100.0%)

(*Primary Data - according to 15 respondents)



The cross tabulation between candidates' election campaigns in Urban Local Body (ULB) elections and respondents' gender shows that female respondents were more supportive of social reform and governance-related campaign themes, while male respondents showed relatively greater preference for broader developmental initiatives. Female respondents exclusively supported campaigns related to discouraging gambling (100%), discouraging alcohol consumption (100%), and ensuring transparent and inclusive governance (100%). Both male and female respondents equally supported campaigns focusing on youth and women empowerment and prioritizing sanitation and waste management, with each category receiving 50% support from both genders. In contrast, broader town planning initiatives were more preferred by male respondents (66.7%) than female respondents (33.3%). Overall, the results indicate that women respondents were more inclined toward welfare and governance-oriented campaign issues, whereas men showed comparatively stronger interest in infrastructure and planning initiatives.

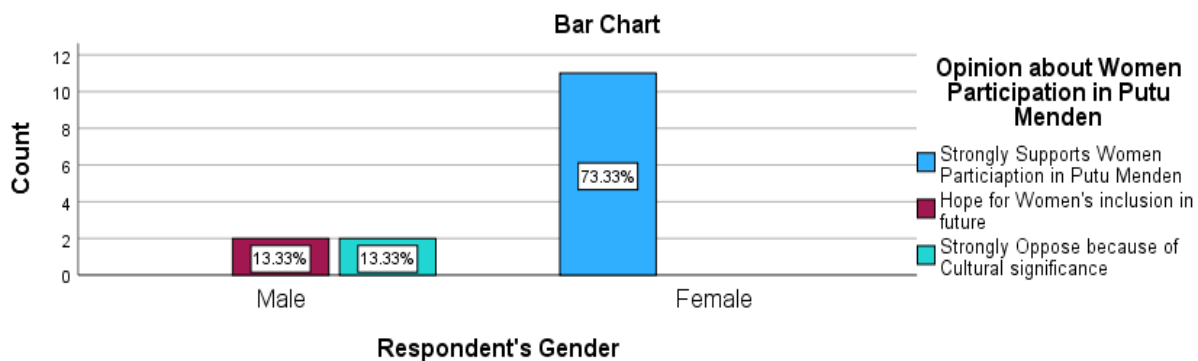


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Table 3: Respondents Gender * Opinion about Women participation in Putu Menden

Respondent's Gender	Opinion about women participation in Putu Menden			Total
	Strongly Supports Women Participation in Putu Menden	Hope for Women's Inclusion in Future	Strongly Oppose because of Cultural Significance	
Male	0 (0.0%)	2 (50.0%)	2 (50.0%)	4 (100.0%)
Female	11 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	11 (100.0%)
Total	11 (73.3%)	2 (13.3%)	2 (13.3%)	15 (100.0%)

(*Primary Data - according to 15 respondents)



The cross tabulation between respondents' gender and opinions about women's participation in Putu Menden shows clear differences in perception between male and female respondents. All female respondents (100.0%) strongly supported women's participation in Putu Menden, indicating unanimous approval among women for greater inclusion in the cultural practice. In contrast, male respondents expressed mixed opinions, with 50.0% hoping for women's inclusion in the future and the remaining 50.0% strongly opposing women's participation due to the cultural significance of the tradition. None of the male respondents strongly supported women's participation at present. Overall, the findings reveal that female respondents strongly favoured women's participation in Putu Menden, whereas male respondents were divided between gradual acceptance and preserving traditional cultural norms.

Table 4: Respondents' Gender * Motivation factors to enter into politics

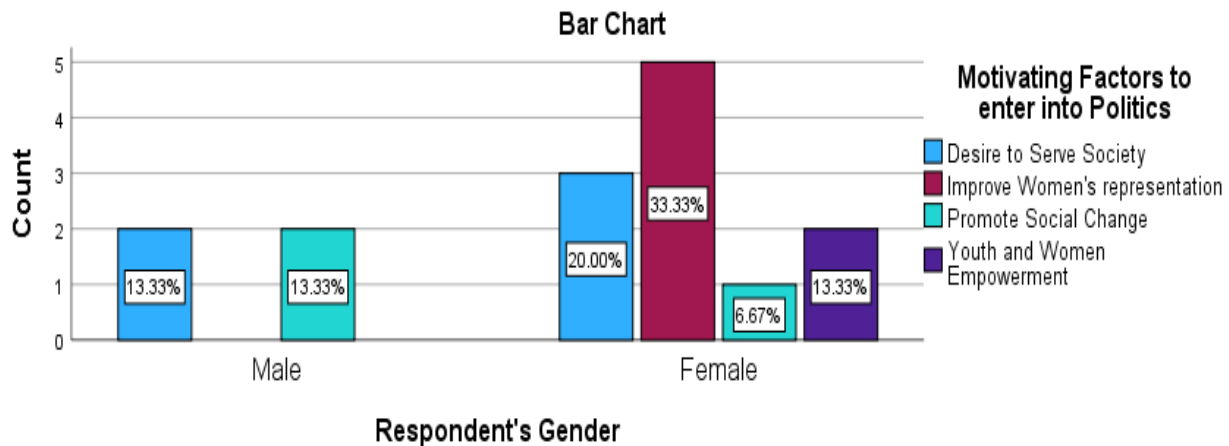
Respondent's Gender	Motivating Factors to enter into Politics				Total
	Desire to Serve Society	Improve Women's Representation	Promote Social Change	Youth and Women Empowerment	



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Male	2 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (100.0%)
Female	3 (27.3%)	5 (45.5%)	1 (9.1%)	2 (18.2%)	11 (100.0%)
Total	5 (33.3%)	5 (33.3%)	3 (20.0%)	2 (13.3%)	15 (100.0%)

(*Primary Data - according to 15 respondents)



The cross tabulation between respondents' gender and motivating factors for entering politics reveals notable gender-based differences in political motivation. Among male respondents, the primary motivating factors were the desire to serve society and promoting social change, each accounting for 50.0% of responses. None of the male respondents identified improving women's representation or youth and women empowerment as motivating factors. In contrast, female respondents were mainly motivated by improving women's representation (45.5%), followed by the desire to serve society (27.3%) and youth and women empowerment (18.2%). A smaller proportion of female respondents considered promoting social change (9.1%) as their main motivation. Overall, the findings suggest that men were more driven by broader societal and social change goals, whereas women were more motivated by enhancing women's representation and empowerment in politics.

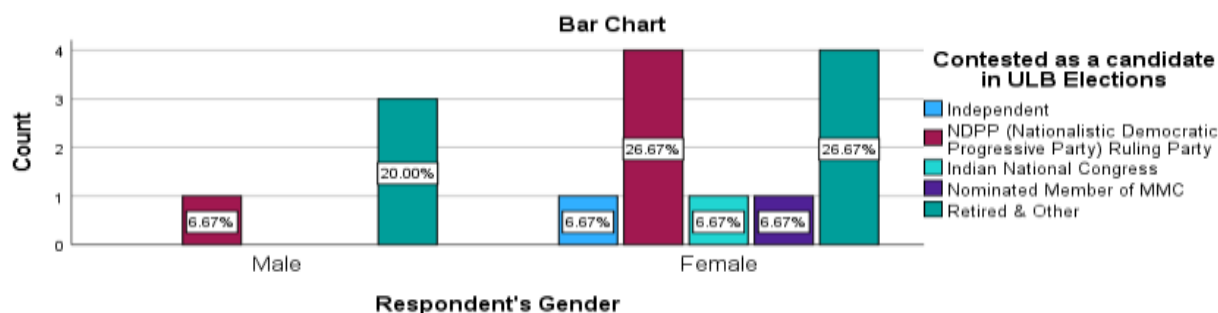
Table 5: Respondents' Gender * Contested as a Candidate in ULB Elections

Respondent's Gender	Contested as a candidate in ULB Elections					Total
	Independent	NDPP Ruling Party	Indian National Congress	Nominated Member of MMC	Retired & Other	
Male	0 (0.0%)	1 (25.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (75.0%)	4 (100.0%)
Female	1 (9.1%)	4 (36.4%)	1 (9.1%)	1 (9.1%)	4 (36.4%)	11 (100.0%)
Total	1 (6.7%)	5 (33.3%)	1 (6.7%)	1 (6.7%)	7 (46.7%)	15 (100.0%)

(*Primary Data - according to 15 respondents)



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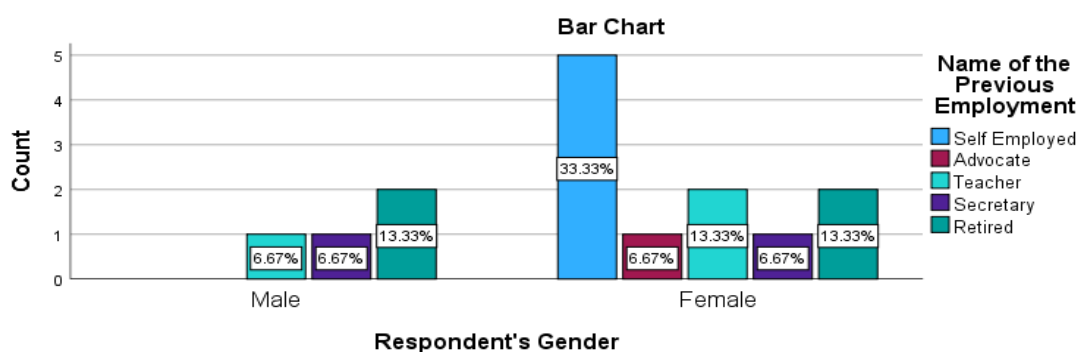


The cross tabulation between respondents' gender and their status in contesting Urban Local Body (ULB) elections highlights differences in political participation patterns among male and female respondents. Among male respondents, the majority (75.0%) belonged to the retired and other category, while 25.0% had contested under the NDPP (Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party), the ruling party. None of the male respondents contested as independents, under the Indian National Congress, or as nominated members of the MMC. Female respondents showed more diverse political participation, with 36.4% contesting under the NDPP ruling party and another 36.4% belonging to the retired and other category. Additionally, 9.1% of female respondents each contested as independents, under the Indian National Congress, and as nominated members of the MMC. Overall, the findings indicate that female respondents demonstrated broader representation across different political categories, whereas male respondents were more concentrated in the retired/other category and the ruling party.

Table 6: Respondent's Gender * Previous Employment before ULB Elections

Respondent's Gender	Name of the Previous Employment					Total
	Self Employed	Advocate	Teacher	Secretary	Retired	
Male	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (25.0%)	1 (25.0%)	2 (50.0%)	4 (100.0%)
Female	5 (44.5%)	1 (9.1%)	2 (18.2%)	1 (9.1%)	2 (18.2%)	11 (100.0%)
Total	5 (33.3%)	1 (6.7%)	3 (20.0%)	2 (13.3%)	4 (26.7%)	15 (100.0%)

(*Primary Data -according to 15 respondents)



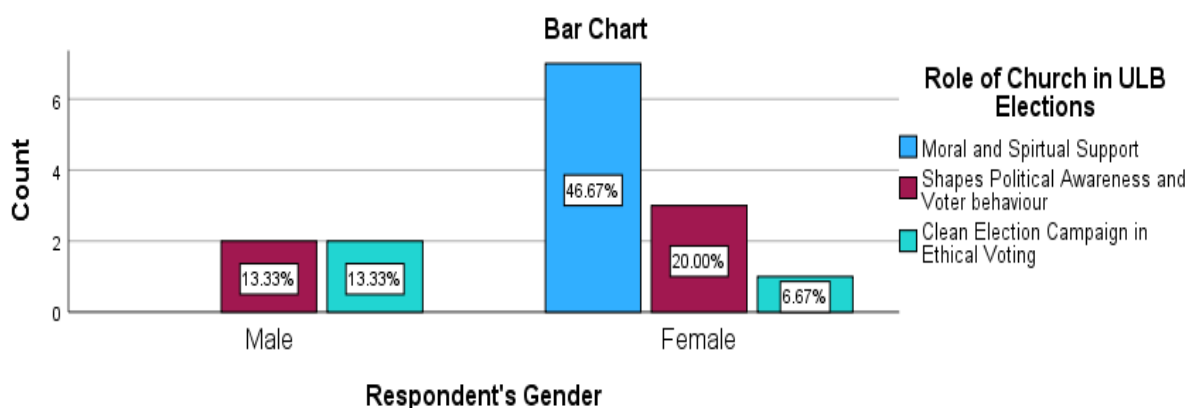
Intirenla Longkumer, M. Roja Lakshmi & Lanusama Longkumer (2026). Indigenous women and political participation: A micro study of the trajectory of Ao women political representation in Mokokchung Town, Nagaland. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research & Reviews*, 5(9), 76-93.

The cross tabulation between respondents' gender and previous employment indicates noticeable differences in occupational backgrounds among male and female respondents. Among male respondents, the majority (50.0%) were retired, while 25.0% each had worked as teachers and secretaries. None of the male respondents reported being self-employed or advocates. In contrast, among female respondents significant proportions (44.5 percent) were self-employed, indicating the active economic participation of Ao Naga women in independent livelihood activities. These self-employment activities commonly include weaving and handicrafts shop, tailoring shop, food processing, and local market trading. This followed by teaching and retirement, each accounting for 18.2%. Smaller proportions of female respondents had worked as advocates and secretaries (9.1% each). In contrast, male respondents were mainly concentrated 50% are from retired service and followed by equal percentage of 25% in teaching and served as secretary. The findings reflect the important contribution of Ao Naga women to household income generation and local economic activities through diverse forms of self-employment such as weaving and handicrafts shops, tailoring shop and food processing and local market trade.

Table 7: Respondent's Gender * Role of Church in ULB Elections

Respondent's Gender	Role of Church in ULB Elections			Total
	Moral and Spiritual Support	Shapes Political Awareness and Voter Behavior	Clean Election Campaign in Ethical Voting	
Male	0 (0.0%)	2 (50.0%)	2 (50.0%)	4 (100.0%)
Female	7 (63.6%)	3 (27.3%)	1 (9.1%)	11 (100.0%)
Total	7 (46.7%)	5 (33.3%)	3 (20.0%)	15 (100.0%)

(*Primary Data - according to 15 respondents)



The cross tabulation between respondents' gender and perceptions of the role of the Church in Urban Local Body (ULB) elections reveals differing viewpoints among male and female respondents reveals that moral and spiritual support was perceived as the most important role of the Church in Urban Local Body (ULB) elections, accounting for 46.7 percent of the total responses. This was followed by shaping political awareness and voter behavior at 33.3 percent, while promoting clean election campaigns and ethical voting constituted 20.0 percent, making it the least reported role overall. Among



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female respondents, a majority (63.6 percent) emphasized the Church's role in providing moral and spiritual guidance, indicating the strong influence of religious institutions on women's political perceptions and participation. In contrast, male respondents equally highlighted the Church's role in shaping political awareness and promoting ethical voting practices, each accounting for 50.0 percent. Only 9.1% of female respondents associated the Church with promoting clean election campaigns and ethical voting. The findings suggest that the Church continues to play a significant socio-political role in influencing electoral values, voter behavior, and ethical political participation within Ao Naga society.

Results and Discussion

The study is based on exclusively 15 respondents' perspective which highlights significant gender differences in perceptions of women's political participation and representation in Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) in Mokokchung Town. Women constituted 73.3% of the respondents, while men accounted for 26.7%, reflecting stronger female engagement with the issue of political representation. The findings reveal broad support for women's political participation, particularly among female respondents.

Regarding factors influencing women's success in ULB elections, grassroots involvement (33.3%) emerged as the most important factor, followed by organizational experience as secretary to ward/party/church (26.7%). Leadership abilities (20.0%) and 33% reservation for women (20.0%) were also identified as significant contributors. Female respondents emphasized grassroots participation (36.4%) and reservation (27.3%), while male respondents highlighted leadership abilities (50.0%). This suggests that women view institutional support and community engagement as essential, whereas men focus more on individual leadership qualities.

The analysis of election campaign priorities shows that discouraging gambling and alcoholism (26.7%) was the most important campaign issue, entirely supported by women respondents because of concerns about family instability, financial problems, and youth welfare. Broader town planning initiatives (20.0%) and discouraging alcohol consumption (20.0%) followed. Campaigns focusing on youth and women empowerment (13.3%) and sanitation and waste management (13.3%) were also important. Female respondents strongly supported campaigns against gambling, alcohol consumption, and transparent governance (100% support in each category), while male respondents mainly prioritized town planning initiatives (66.7%).

A strong gender divide was observed regarding women's participation in Putu Menden. Overall, 73.3% strongly supported women's inclusion. All female respondents (100%) favored participation, whereas male respondents were divided, with 50.0% hoping for future inclusion and 50.0% opposing it due to the cultural significance of the institution. This reflects the continuing tension between customary traditions and democratic ideals of gender equality.

The major motivations for entering politics were the desire to serve society (33.3%) and improving women's representation (33.3%). Among women, improving women's representation was the leading motivation (45.5%), followed by serving society (27.3%). Male respondents were equally motivated



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by serving society and promoting social change (50.0% each). These findings indicate that women enter politics largely to address gender inequality and expand female representation in governance.

Political participation patterns show that 46.7% belonged to the retired/other category, while 33.3% were associated with the NDPP, reflecting the party's influence in Mokokchung Town. Female respondents demonstrated broader political participation, contesting as NDPP candidates (36.4%), independents (9.1%), INC candidates (9.1%), and nominated MMC members (9.1%). Occupationally, self-employment (33.3%) was the most common background, particularly among women (44.5%), reflecting their active involvement in owning shops of weaving, handicrafts, tailoring, food processing, and local trade. The Church emerged as a major institution influencing political participation, with 46.7% identifying its role as providing moral and spiritual support, 33.3% highlighting political awareness and voter behavior, and 20.0% emphasizing clean election campaigns and ethical voting.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that Ao Naga women are gradually increasing their political participation and visibility in Urban Local Bodies despite the persistence of patriarchal customs and traditional barriers. High literacy levels in Mokokchung district (91.62%) and Mokokchung Town (93.59%) have contributed to greater political awareness and empowerment among women. The implementation of 33% reservation has also created opportunities for women to enter local governance and leadership positions.

The findings reveal that women strongly support social welfare, transparent governance, gender equality, and inclusion in decision-making institutions. 73.3% of respondents supported women's participation in Putu Menden, while women unanimously (100%) favored such inclusion. Grassroots involvement (33.3%), organizational experience (26.7%), and reservation policies (20.0%) were identified as key factors influencing women's electoral success. Women were primarily motivated by improving representation (45.5%) and addressing gender inequalities in governance.

Overall, the study concludes that Ao Naga society is undergoing a gradual transformation in attitudes toward women's leadership. While customary institutions continue to remain largely male-dominated, growing educational attainment, urbanization, church support, grassroots participation, and reservation policies are creating pathways for greater political inclusion of Ao women. The trajectory of Ao women's political representation reflects an ongoing negotiation between customary traditions and democratic values, indicating positive progress toward more inclusive and gender-sensitive governance in Mokokchung Town.

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AUTHORS CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors contributed substantially to the conceptualisation, research design, data collection and analysis, interpretation of findings, and preparation of the manuscript. All authors participated in



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drafting, reviewing, and revising the article, approved the final version, and agreed to its submission for publication.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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