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From Biradari to Party Gatekeeping: Institutional Design and Women's Electoral Representation in Punjab's Local Governments, 2001-2015

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ABSTRACT

Pakistan's Devolution of Power Plan set aside one-third of every local council seat for women. The elections held under it, in 2001 and again in 2005, put tens of thousands of women into elected office in Punjab alone. Thirteen years later the Punjab Local Government Act 2013 cut that share to roughly fifteen per cent of a union council, and it changed something less visible at the same time: reserved seats would no longer be filled by voters but by the councillors whom voters had just elected. Polling under the new Act took place in 2015. This article asks what those two decisions did to the terms on which women entered local councils and worked inside them. The study is documentary. I read the two statutes, the election rules attached to them, and the published research on both against a coding frame built from feminist institutionalism and political opportunity structure theory, and organised around five questions: what opening the law created, who decided which woman filled it, to whom she answered afterwards, what the seat let her do, and what happened if the rule was ignored. Three of those five axes shifted sharply between the regimes. Two did not shift at all. Under both statutes the reserved seat carried no budget of its own and no guaranteed committee place. What changed was the shape of the exclusion, not its effect.



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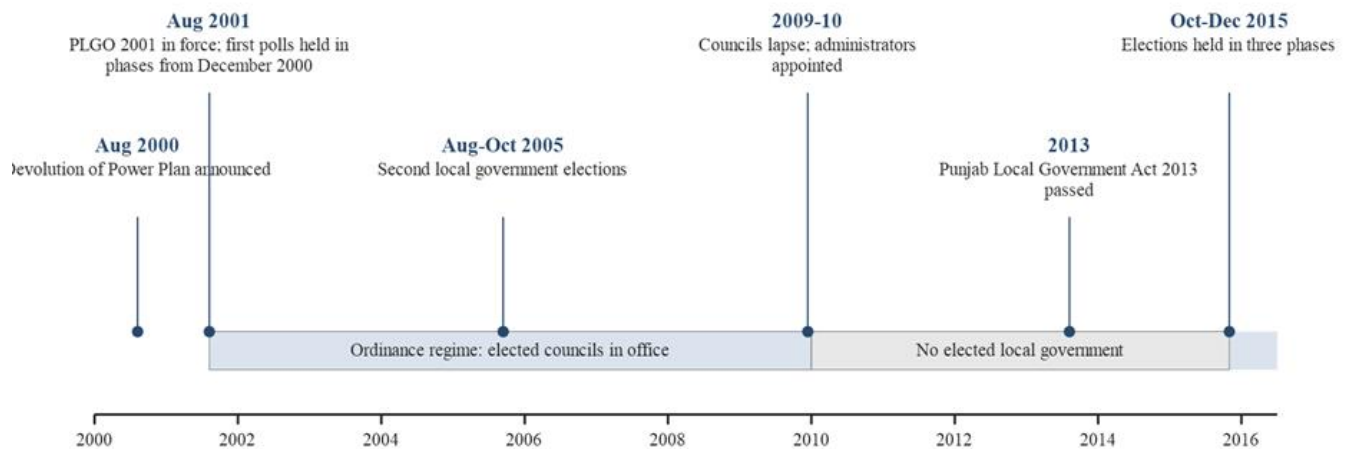
1. Introduction

Between December 2000 and August 2001, Pakistan held local government elections under a design that reserved one-third of the seats in every union, tehsil and district council for women (National Reconstruction Bureau, 2000). By the number of women, it seated at one stroke, it ranks among the largest interventions of its kind attempted anywhere in South Asia. Punjab is where the political stakes were highest, and where the effect at union council level was most visible. Thousands of women took the oath as councillors. A great many came from households with no experience of elected office of any kind.

The design did not survive. Councils elected in 2005 served out their terms at the end of

the decade, after which Punjab went roughly five years without elected local bodies while draft after draft of replacement legislation moved through the provincial assembly. What eventually emerged, the Punjab Local Government Act 2013, was built on a different template. Contests would be party-based. The union council was made smaller. The women's quota was cut substantially. And, least remarked upon at the time, women's reserved seats would no longer be filled by voters: they would be filled by the councillors whom voters had just directly elected. Delimitation disputes and litigation held up polling for two more years, and the elections were finally held in three phases between October and December 2015. Figure 1 lays out the sequence.

Figure 1: *Chronology of Local Government legislation and elections in Punjab, 2000-2015*



Note. *Compiled from the Local Government Plan 2000, the Punjab Local Government Ordinance 2001 and the Punjab Local Government Act 2013. Shaded bands mark the periods in which elected councils were actually in office.*

Put the two regimes beside each other and something odd appears. The share of council seats held by women climbed steeply after 2001 and dropped after 2015. Yet the accounts of what women could actually do once seated, written in the middle of the first decade and again after the second round, read much the same. In both periods women councillors were pushed towards a narrow band of policy business, kept away from

decisions about money, and left dependent on male relatives or male colleagues for the ordinary practical business of holding office. Had the number of seats been doing the analytical work, the two accounts would not converge like this. Something else is.

My argument is that the something else lies underneath the quota, in the institutional arrangements the quota was laid on top of, and that the 2013 reform rearranged those

arrangements without disturbing what they produce. Barring parties in 2001 did not take gatekeeping out of the process of becoming a councillor. It handed gatekeeping to the biradari, which was the only structure left that could nominate, finance and mobilise a candidate. Bringing parties back in 2015 returned gatekeeping to a formal institution, the party ticket board, but the boards recruit from the same kinship networks and reach the same conclusions through a procedure that looks entirely neutral on paper. What would have made a reserved seat worth holding in either period, an independent claim on public money and a guaranteed place where money is discussed, neither statute supplied. Exclusion moved house. It did not shrink.

Three questions organise what follows. How did the institutional architecture of women's representation change between the 2001 Ordinance and the 2013 Act? What did each regime make the operative gatekeeper for a woman seeking a seat, and to whom did it make her accountable once she held one? And why did a substantial rise, and then a substantial fall, in the reserved-seat share matter so little to women's actual authority in council?

The study moves through a review of the relevant literature, the theoretical frame and the coding it generates, the method and its limits, the findings, and a conclusion that draws out four policy implications and describes the fieldwork this design cannot replace.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Devolution in Pakistan: Proximity Without Power

The first question to ask in trying to assess what a woman gained from a council seat is what the seat itself was worth; and on this point the literature on Pakistani decentralisation is unusually concordant. As Cheema, Khwaja and Qadir (2006) demonstrate, successive governments in

Pakistan have tried to implement local government reform numerous times, each in the context of finding a political footing outside the traditional provincial parties, and with each new development an effort to maintain fiscal and administrative authority in the province. The pattern of the 2001 system is exactly the same. In theory this formed a sophisticated three-tiered system, loaded with real service delivery duties. However, in reality, all the funds were released, officials were posted, and the councils survived in the provincial sphere.

Mohmand and Cheema (2007) follow up the implications for accountability. The liaison between councillor and constituents becomes floppy when the councillor is not able to access or enlist the help of the resources needed or cannot point them to where they are needed, as the usefulness of a councillor depends more on what he or she can do to the resources above, than what he or she can do to the voters below. This is a particular issue here. It was a weak container that the women were put in in 2001 and again in 2015, and any information on women's limited substantive power has to be compared to the limited power that is available to local councillors, of either gender. So the issue is not so much whether women councillors are "weak" in themselves as whether they are "weak" in relative terms. They were. It's just whether they were weaker than the men next to them and how they were weaker.

2.2 Quotas, Numbers, and What Follows from Them

The key division in the international quota literature is that between Pitkin's (1967) descriptive and substantive representation: resemblance of representatives to the represented; action by representatives on behalf of the represented. In the room, Phillips (1995) suggests, is not just a symbol for the fact that it is there; it is a symbol of the people who are in the room, which

determines what will be discussed there. The body of empirical research is, however, unflattering of the extent to which people can be present. The findings and rates of spread of fast-track quotas around the world and the extent to which their findings differed are described by Dahlerup 2006 and Krook 2009. These changes are the result of quota effects, which get triggered by the electoral system, by the selection process of candidates and by the party organisation, as stated by Franceschet, Krook and Piscopo (2012). Design of a quota does more work than the size of it.

This is the warrant for the approach that is taken here. If mechanism is going to be more important than percentage, then a reform that reduces the percentage but alters the selection process and the basis of contest can't be assessed by counting seats. But Goetz (2003) concludes from the opposite end, asserting that it is the ability to access policy machinery and resources in the office, and not numbers, that determine effectiveness. Celis, Childs, Kantola and Krook (2008) and Childs and Krook (2009) take the question one step further from critical mass to what conditions allow a representative to act at all. In Punjab it is thus not an appropriate question to ask how many women were on the council in each term. It is the actions of each statute that determine whether or not sitting there is something.

2.3 Kinship, Patronage and the Punjab Electoral Economy

But the other half of the picture is provided by how Punjab actually votes. In a province-wide analysis of electoral politics over two or more cycles, Wilder (1999) outlines an electoral politics that revolves around candidates and their networks, rather than on party programmes, and is mobilised by the biradari affiliation. As Martin (2016) reminds us, this comes within a larger narrative of landed authority and its interaction with religious and administrative

authority. Javid (2011) demonstrates the strength of landed elite dominance in the face of putsches that were to be its end.

The most useful study is Mohmand's (2019) study of rural Punjab. But voters who are following a patron, she contends, are not irrational, nor are they just being coerced, but instead are making a defensible decision about who will be able to provide them access to the state. This is a discomfiting and difficult suggestion for quota design. If you have an electoral economy like that, then any seat is up for grabs, of course, reserved or general, and they'll be filled on an existing network unless the design does something special to knock them off. Making the seat is not so something. This trend of reduced candidate pool is noted by Cheema, Javid and Naseer (2013) as well in case of dynastic candidacy where the candidate pool is narrowed down well before initiating any formal selection process.

2.4 Women's Political Participation in Pakistan

A separate body of work shows that the constraints on women's political participation in Pakistan bite long before candidacy. Zia and Bari (1999) gave an early baseline on restrictions to mobility, registration and public presence. Bari (2005, 2010) develops the analysis at both the local and the national tier, and her account of reserved-seat parliamentarians describes a pattern that recurs in the local government material: a woman who owes her seat to a selection process run by other people finds her room for independent action narrowed to match.

On the gap between women's and men's participation as voters, the most rigorous recent evidence comes from Cheema, Khan, Liaqat and Mohmand (2019), who trace it to identity registration, to restrictions on movement, and to decisions taken inside the household about whether a woman will vote at all. Their findings matter here because

they establish that household gatekeeping is not a background condition that falls away the moment a woman becomes a candidate. It is the same mechanism, operating at a later stage.

2.5 Backlash and Political Violence

The literature on gendered political violence corrects a common misreading of the Pakistani material. Krook (2020) argues that violence and intimidation aimed at women in politics is best understood as a response to their presence rather than as a general feature of a hostile environment, and Bardall, Bjarnegård and Piscopo (2020) separate out the motives, forms and impacts involved. Read that way, the reports of character attacks and pressure on women candidates in Punjab across both periods do not show that the environment was uniformly hostile. They show that the quota was doing something, and that the reaction was aimed at the women who tried to use it.

2.6 The Gap Addressed Here

What this literature lacks are comparison across the 2001 and 2013 regimes. Studies of the Musharraf-era councils generally stop before the system lapsed; studies of the 2015 elections generally open with the new Act. Nazneen, Hossain and Chopra (2019) make the broader case that women's empowerment in South Asia advances and retreats in contention rather than in a straight line. That is precisely the pattern a cross-regime reading of Punjab ought to be able to specify, and it is the reading this article supplies.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Feminist Institutionalism

The first of the two frameworks holds that institutions carry gendered rules-in-use alongside their formal rules, and that the two often part company. Mackay, Kenny and Chappell (2010) set out the programme; Krook and Mackay (2011) and Chappell and Waylen (2013) develop it; Lowndes (2020)

restates the core claim in terms of the specific mechanisms by which institutions become gendered. What matters most here is the account of change. New formal rules are rarely laid on clear ground. These are overlaid upon and are typically included within older rules and they are typically executed in the context of older rules. This is demonstrated by Kenny (2013) in the case of candidate recruitment where there is no consideration of the informal criterion of suitability and so the formal procedure reproduces the previous distribution.

This article borrows the mechanism Bjarnegård (2013) provides. The recruitment of political leaders is a judgement under uncertainty; selectors reduce uncertainty by selecting individuals who are similar to them and who sit in networks that the selector can “read.” She refers to the resource as homosocial capital. What this does is that a male-only selection body continues to select men without any of them in the room being discriminatory, just because they are legible to the selectors and not the women. Place that body in a Punjab district and the forecast for its place is clear: it will occupy women's reserved seats with women whose trustworthiness a male member of the family already knows about would be sufficient.

Helmke and Levitsky's (2004) typology completes the frame, with Waylen (2014) drawing out its implications for gender equality. Informal institutions are classified along two dimensions: whether their outcomes converge with or diverge from those of the formal rules, and whether the formal rules work in the first place. Four types result, and two of them do the work below. Substitutive informal institutions carry out functions that formal institutions are absent or unable to perform. Accommodating informal institutions operate within the formal rules while changing what those rules produce. As it turns out, the distinction separates the two Punjab regimes almost exactly.

3.2 Political Opportunity Structure

The second framework is about timing rather than mechanism. Kitschelt (1986) and McAdam (1996) argue that the prospects for outsider mobilisation depend less on the resources the outsiders hold than on how open the institutional environment is. Tarrow (2011) sets out the dimensions along which environments open and close: access to decision-making, the stability of elite alignments, the availability of influential allies, and the state's willingness and capacity to repress. The theory has been applied to social movements far more often than to quota politics, but the fit is close enough to be useful. A quota is an opening on the access

dimension. A ban on party participation removes an ally structure. Suspending local government for five years closes the access dimension outright.

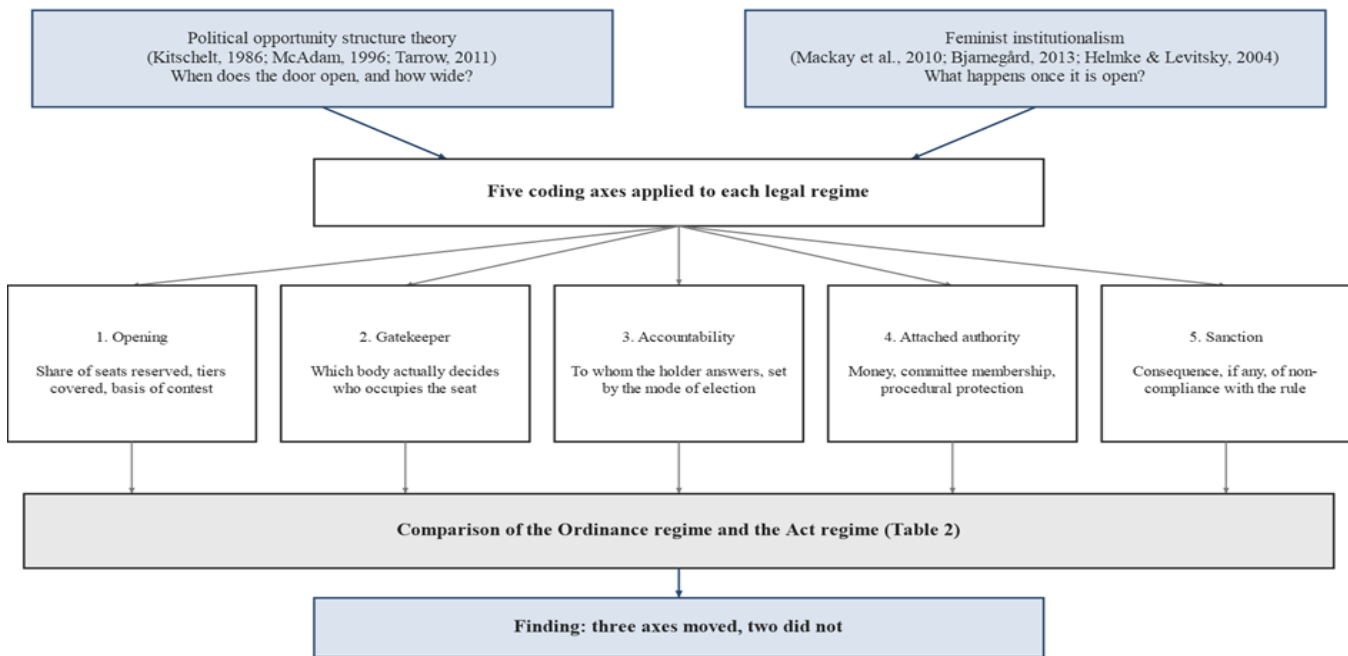
3.3 The Combined Analytical Frame

The two frameworks answer different questions, so I use them in sequence rather than side by side. Political opportunity structure theory tells us when the door opens and how far. Feminist institutionalism tells us why walking through it changes so little. Between them they generate five axes on which each legal regime can be coded. Table 1 gives the five axes, the question each asks and where each comes from; Figure 2 shows how they are derived and where they lead.

Table 1: *The Five Analytical Axes, Their Sources and the Provisions Coded Under Each*

Axis	Question it asks	Theoretical source	Provisions coded
1. Opening	What share of seats is reserved, at which tiers, and on what basis is the contest held?	Political opportunity structure	Composition and reservation clauses; party-basis provisions
2. Gatekeeper	Which body actually decides who will occupy the reserved seat?	Homosocial capital (Bjarnegård)	Nomination, candidacy and ticket-allocation provisions
3. Accountability	To whom does the holder answer once seated?	Representation theory	Mode of election for reserved seats
4. Attached authority	What does the seat entitle its holder to do?	Feminist institutionalism	Budgetary, committee and procedural entitlements
5. Sanction	What follows if the rule is not complied with?	Helmke and Levitsky typology	Enforcement clauses, and their absence

Note. *Codes were applied at section level to the Punjab Local Government Ordinance 2001 and the Punjab Local Government Act 2013.*

Figure 2: *Derivation of the Five Analytical Axes from the Two Theoretical Frameworks*

Note. *The frameworks are used in sequence, not in parallel. The first establishes when and how far the opening occurs; the second establishes what happens to those who pass through it.*

The order is not arbitrary. Each axis becomes relevant only once the one before it has been settled. A gatekeeper matters only if there is an opening to guard; accountability matters only once somebody holds the seat; and what the seat is worth matters only once she is answerable to someone for it.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Design

It is a qualitative, interpretive study by comparative institutional analysis of two legal regimes. It's documentary, and there is no primary fieldwork involved. At the start of an article it is important to state this clearly, as it determines what the article can and can't say. The analysis touches on institutional design, and upon the impacts of that design that are shown in documents of the institution as well as in the published research that is the subject of this analysis. It does not speak for the experience of female councillors and nothing below is based on the testimony I collected.

4.2 Case Selection and Period

There are three reasons why this choice of time period was made for Punjab. For Punjab, the following three reasons were given. It is the province with the most local councils and any deviation from the quota design will have the biggest absolute impact in this province. Both governments conducted full electoral cycles in Punjab and did not have partial or aborted electoral cycles. But the 5-year gap that existed between the designs during the period in which the province did not have elected local government, provides a clean break between the designs and the second design can be read as an amendment instead of an amendment. This is the most special leverage this case provides and the rarest one of its kind.

4.3 Documentary Corpus

Two bodies of material were assembled. The first is made up of primary legal and administrative instruments: The Local Government Plan issued by the National Reconstruction Bureau (2000), the Punjab

Local Government Ordinance 2001, the Punjab Local Government Act 2013, and the Election Commission of Pakistan schedules, delimitation notifications and result statements attached to the polls of 2001, 2005 and 2015. The second is the secondary record: peer-reviewed scholarship published between 1999 and 2023 on Pakistani decentralisation, gender quotas and Punjab electoral politics, together with reports from the Election Commission, from United Nations agencies and from Pakistani civil society organisations working on women's political participation.

4.4 Analytical Procedure

The corpus was analysed by directed qualitative content analysis, in which the coding frame is drawn from theory before the material is read rather than emerging from it. The five codes in Table 1 were applied to each relevant provision of the two statutes at section level, and the coded provisions were then compared across regimes by constant comparison. A second, inductive pass picked up material the frame did not anticipate, most substantially on campaign finance and on physical mobility during campaigning.

4.5 Trustworthiness

Three procedures were used. Sources were triangulated across the types described above, so no finding rests on a single document or a single author. Provisions are cited to section level throughout, which lets a reader working from the same statutes audit the coding. And where the legal text and the secondary literature disagreed about what a provision did in practice, I treated the text as

the record of design and the literature as the record of implementation, and treated the divergence between them as a finding rather than an error to be tidied away.

4.6 Limitations

Official sex-disaggregated data on nominations, withdrawals and results at union council level are incomplete for the 2001 and 2005 cycles, so no quantitative claim is made about candidate pipelines; the article stays with the structural comparison the documentary record will support. The findings are specific to Punjab and should not be carried over to provinces whose local government legislation and social structure differ. Finally, a documentary study of institutional design can establish what a rule made likely. It cannot establish what any particular councillor lived through. Section 6.2 sets out the interview study that would close the gap, and specifies what it ought to ask.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

The study involved no human participants, no personal data and no fieldwork, and so required no ethical approval. Every statute, notification and report consulted is publicly available, and all secondary sources are cited.

5. Results and Findings

Table 2 sets out the comparison, which is then discussed axis by axis. Read down the final column and the shape of the thing is visible at once: a reform that moved almost every feature of the system while leaving two rows untouched. It is the untouched rows that carry the argument.

Table 2: *Comparative Institutional Architecture of Women's Representation in Punjab Local Government*

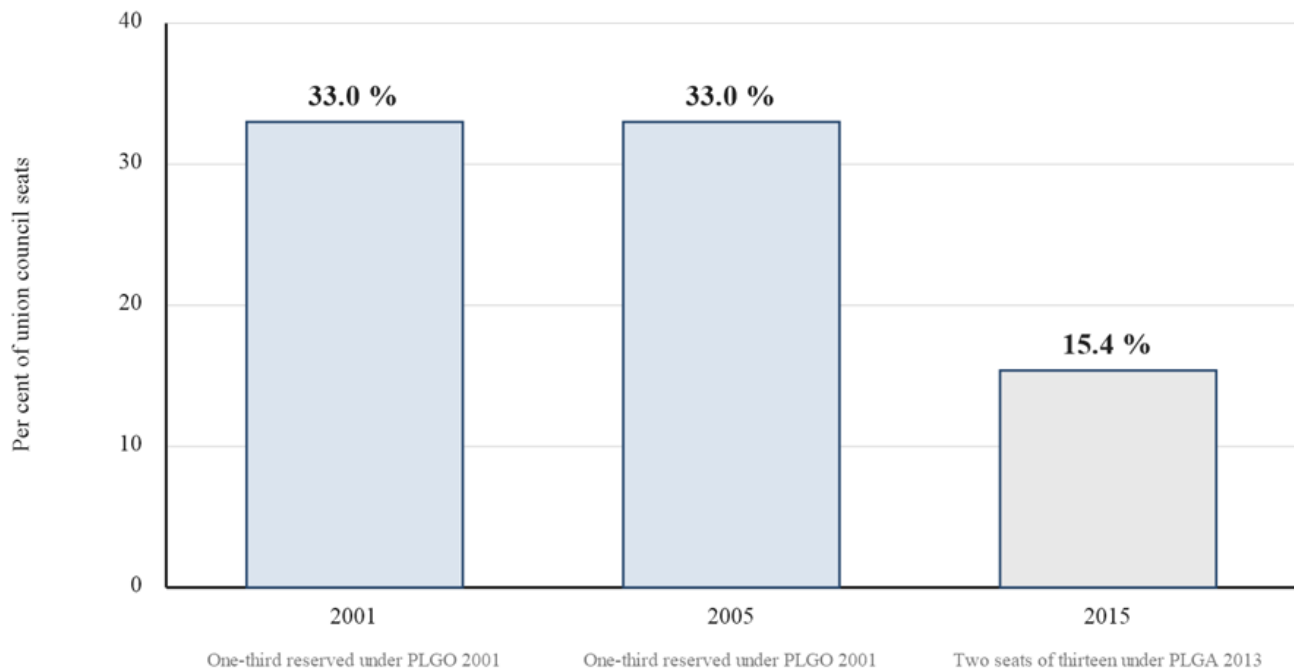
Analytical axis	Ordinance regime (2001 and 2005)	Act regime (2015)	Moved
1. Opening: basis of contest	Non-party; party affiliation barred	Party-based; tickets formally issued	Yes
1. Opening: reserved share	About one-third of seats	Two seats of thirteen, about 15 per cent	Yes
2. Gatekeeper: who selects	Biradari networks, acting substitutively	Party ticket board, embedded in the same networks, accommodating	Yes
3. Accountability: mode of election	Direct election by voters	Indirect election by the elected members	Yes
3. Accountability: answerable to	Nominally the electorate	The councillors who elect her	Yes
4. Authority: development funds	No dedicated allocation for the holder	No dedicated allocation for the holder	No
4. Authority: committees	No guaranteed committee place	No guaranteed committee place	No
5. Sanction for non-compliance	None specified	None specified	No
Context: campaign finance	Kin-funded; ceilings ineffective	Party-funded; ceilings weakly enforced	No

Note. *Compiled by the author from the Punjab Local Government Ordinance 2001 and the Punjab Local Government Act 2013. Reserved shares are those at union council level. The final column records whether the provision changed materially between the two regimes.*

5.1 The Opening Narrowed, and It Narrowed Where Women Were Most Present

The change everybody noticed was the cut in the reserved share. Under the 2001 Ordinance roughly one-third of the seats in union, tehsil and district councils were

reserved for women (Government of Punjab, 2001). Under the 2013 Act a union council of thirteen members carried two women's seats, a share of about fifteen per cent (Government of Punjab, 2013). Proportionally the quota was more than halved. Figure 3 shows the scale of it.

Figure 3: *Share of Union Council Seats Reserved for Women, by Electoral Cycle*

Note. *Figures are the shares fixed by statute, not the shares of seats actually filled. The 2015 figure represents two reserved women's seats in a union council of thirteen members.*

Where the cut fell matters as much as how deep it went. The union council was the tier at which the 2001 system seated by far the most women, and the tier closest to the settlements those women lived in. It was, in other words, the point at which the quota did most of its descriptive work and at which the barriers to entry were lowest, since contesting a union council seat costs less money and less travel than contesting a district one.

5.2 Direct Election Gave Way to Indirect Election, Reversing the Direction of Accountability

Under the 2001 Ordinance, women's reserved seats at union level were filled by direct election. Whatever had constrained her path to candidacy, once a woman was on the ballot she faced an electorate, and the votes cast for her came from residents of the union council area. Under the 2013 Act, reserved seats are filled by the directly elected members of the council once the general election has concluded. A woman's

electorate is therefore the body of general members, which in practice is overwhelmingly male.

That is no mere procedural detail. It reverses the direction in which a reserved-seat councillor is answerable. Under the earlier design she held, formally at least, a mandate of her own, however that mandate had been assembled. Under the later one she holds her seat at the pleasure of the very body she was placed there to diversify, and her survival in politics depends on staying acceptable to it. In effect the design turns the reserved-seat holder from a representative into a client of the council. I find it hard to imagine an arrangement better suited to ensuring that a quota leaves the distribution of power inside the chamber undisturbed.

5.3 Banning Parties Did Not Remove Gatekeeping; It Transferred It to the Biradari

The 2001 and 2005 elections were held on a non-party basis, the stated reasoning being that local administration ought not to be

captured by national political rivalries. Whatever the merits of that, the ban had an effect on women's candidacies the design does not appear to have foreseen. In working electoral systems, parties are the institutions that absorb the fixed costs of contesting. They find and vet candidates, supply campaign organisation, move money, and give a first-time candidate an identity that does not depend entirely on her family. Take them out of a system that has just created tens of thousands of new seats for politically inexperienced women, and those functions fall to something else.

In rural and semi-urban Punjab that something else was the biradari. As the literature reviewed above establishes, kinship networks already served as the operative unit of electoral mobilisation and as the main channel of campaign finance. Once the formal alternative was prohibited, they were the only channel left. Helmke and Levitsky's (2004) typology names the arrangement precisely: the biradari operated as a substitutive informal institution, performing the nomination, financing and mobilisation functions formal institutions had been barred from performing.

What the Pakistani literature calls the proxy councillor follows directly from that, and it is worth insisting that she was a predictable output of the design rather than an aberration or a failure of individual character. The quota created a legal requirement that every council contain women. It created no organisation with any interest in finding and backing women who were politically independent. The only bodies able to put a candidate on the ballot were male-led kinship networks whose interest lay in filling the requirement with a woman whose vote in council they could count on. Wives, sisters, daughters and other female relatives met the statutory requirement and the network's interest at the same time. The seat was occupied. The vote it carried stayed where it had always been.

5.4 Restoring Parties Formalised Gatekeeping Without Dispersing It

The 2013 Act brought parties back, and it would have been reasonable to expect that to loosen kinship control by giving women a second route to candidacy. On the evidence here it did not, and the reason is structural rather than accidental. A party ticket board in a Punjab district is not some body standing outside local kinship networks and selecting from them at arm's length. It's populated by individuals who have their own jobs in those networks, and the decisions made by the selectors are made under the very conditions that Bjarnegård (2013) mentions: real uncertainty regarding whether a candidate is reliable, with high stakes on getting it right by choosing candidates with whom they already have a relationship.

When applied to a reserved seat, this yields the desired effect that looks flawless on paper. There is no rule that compels the board to take account of women who are not a part of existing political families; indeed, nothing ensues if the board does not. So, the females it selects, as you would expect, are the ones who are reliable, and a male family member known by the board vouchsafes their reliability. The kinship network no longer has to substitute for the formal institution, because it now works through it. In Helmke and Levitsky's terms it has moved from substitutive to accommodating: operating inside the formal rules while preserving the very distribution of outcomes those rules were meant to change.

This is the article's central claim, and it explains why two periods with opposed designs produce such similar accounts of women's experience in council. In 2001 women were kept out of independent candidacy by a vacuum only kinship networks could fill. In 2015 they were kept out by a formal gate those same networks control. Different route, same hands on the gate.

5.5 Neither Regime Attached Authority to the Seat

The rows of Table 2 that do not change concern what the seat lets its holder do. Neither statute attaches to a reserved seat any dedicated allocation of development funds releasable on the holder's own authority. Neither guarantees a reserved-seat member a place on the committees where budgets and schemes are settled; committee composition is left to be worked out within the council. Neither creates an enforceable entitlement to speak, to see financial records or to require an answer. And neither attaches a sanction to non-compliance, which is the fifth axis and the reason none of the other entitlements was ever tested.

The effect is that a reserved-seat councillor's practical value to her constituents is set entirely by her standing with whoever controls the money, which under both regimes meant the council leadership and, behind it, the network that got her the seat. A woman councillor with no independent claim on funds cannot build a constituency of her own, because she has nothing to deliver to it. Without a constituency of her own she has no base from which to resist the network that nominated her. The absence of attached authority is therefore not one constraint among several. It is what closes the loop and makes the others self-reinforcing.

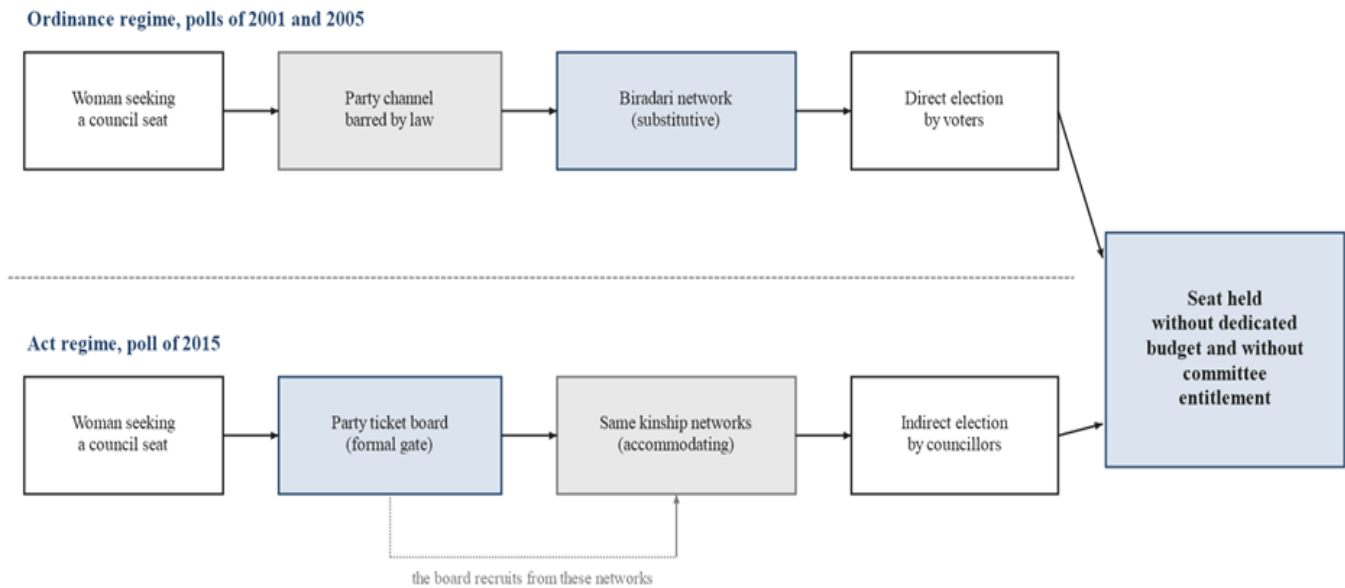
The same finding explains why the substantial descriptive gains of the earlier period never accumulated into anything. Two

full terms of large-scale female presence in local councils, from 2001 to roughly the end of the decade, produced no cohort of women with independent local bases who could contest general seats in 2015 on their own record. The system had put women in office without giving them anything to be judged on.

5.6 Continuity of Function Beneath Discontinuity of Form

The findings were integrated and it was found that three of the five axes had moved significantly between the regimes. The opening was shortened and its grounds shifted from non-party to party. The informal kinship arrangement became the formal party one. The arrangement for bringing up the reserved seats was turned upside down, and so was the accountability. Any normal measure is to the tune of a complete redesign.

No change was observed in the other two axes. The reserved seat was empty in 2001, 2005 and again in 2015, there was no money behind the reserved seat, no guarantee of access to the committees on which the money was determined, and the reserved seat was held by a selection process managed by men. The reforms altered the path women had to take to council and the number who made it to council. They left undisturbed the two things that determined the value of the arrival. The two routes are compared in figure 4.

Figure 4: *The Displacement of Gatekeeping Between the Two Regimes*

Note. *The gate changes hands between the regimes; the destination does not. Under the Ordinance regime the biradari substituted for a formal institution that had been prohibited; under the Act regime it operates through one. In both cases the seat carries no independent claim on public money and no guaranteed place on the committees that allocate it.*

That is the sense in which exclusion was displaced rather than dismantled, and the implication for reform design is direct enough. Adjust the size of a quota in a patronage democracy without attaching independent authority to the seat, and you

change the composition of the chamber and very little else.

5.7 Answers to the Research Questions

Table 3 summarises the answers, and each is set out below.

Table 3: *Research Questions, Findings and the Axes on Which They Rest*

Research question	Finding	Axes
1. How did the institutional architecture change?	It changed on three of the five axes: a reduced reserved share concentrated at the most accessible tier, a shift from non-party to party-based contests, and a shift from direct to indirect election.	1, 2, 3
2. Who was the gatekeeper, and to whom was the holder accountable?	Ordinance regime: the biradari, acting substitutively, with the holder answerable in practice to the network that nominated her. Act regime: the party ticket board, accommodating to the same networks, with the holder answerable to the councillors who elect her.	2, 3
3. Why did changes in the reserved share matter so little?	Because the share was never the operative variable. Substantive authority follows from control over money and access to the committees that allocate it, and neither statute attached either to a reserved seat.	4, 5

Note. *Axis numbers refer to Table 1.*

The first question asked how the institutional architecture changed. As Table 2 shows, it changed on three of the five axes: the reserved share was cut and the cut fell at the tier most accessible to women; contests moved from a non-party to a party basis; and reserved seats moved from direct to indirect election, taking the identity of the gatekeeper with them.

The second asked who the operative gatekeeper was under each regime, and to whom the holder answered. Under the Ordinance regime the gatekeeper was the biradari, acting substitutively in the space the party ban had vacated, and the holder answered nominally to an electorate and practically to the network that had nominated her. Under the Act regime the gatekeeper is the party ticket board, a formal institution accommodated to the same networks, and the holder answers to the general members who elect her.

The third asked why changes in the reserved share mattered so little to substantive authority. They mattered little because the share was never the operative variable. Authority in a local council follows from control over money and from access to the committees that allocate it, and neither statute attached either of those to a reserved seat. Raising the share raised the number of women without such authority. Lowering it lowered that number. Neither move touched the condition that made the seat ineffective in the first place.

6. Conclusion

Punjab's two experiments in reserving local council seats for women were built on opposite principles and arrived at much the same place. The first opened a wide door and removed the one institution capable of helping outsiders through it, so kinship

networks filled the seats with women they could rely on. The second narrowed the door, restored the missing institution, and then gave that institution the power to fill women's seats without reference to voters at all, so the same networks made the same choices through a procedure that was formally beyond reproach. In both cases the seat carried no authority of its own. In both cases the women holding it were left dependent on the men who had arranged for them to hold it.

Theoretically this is a strong endorsement of the claim, established in the comparative quota literature and put most directly by Franceschet, Krook and Piscopo (2012), that quota design matters more than quota size. Punjab comes close to a natural test: it varied the size in one direction and the design in another, and the design effects dominated. The case also suggests a qualification to the way political opportunity structure theory is usually applied to gender quotas. An opening on the access dimension is necessary, but it is neither sufficient nor neutral. An opening made without a corresponding ally structure will be filled by whatever organisation is already able to mobilise, and in a patronage democracy that organisation will be the one the quota was meant to get around.

The limits of the argument bear restating. This is a documentary study of institutional design. It establishes what the rules made likely and what the published record reports. It does not establish what any individual councillor experienced, and it should not be read as though it does.

6.1 Policy Implications

Four implications follow from the findings, each tied to a particular one. Table 4 sets out the mapping.

Table 4: *Policy Recommendations, the Findings They Address and the Instrument Required*

Recommendation	Addresses	Instrument required
Restore direct election to reserved seats at union level	Section 5.2; axis 3	Amendment to the Punjab Local Government Act
Attach a defined, separately auditable share of the local development allocation to each reserved seat, releasable on the holder's own signature	Section 5.5; axis 4	Amendment plus provincial finance rules
Require a statutory minimum share of general-seat tickets for women, enforced at list scrutiny with an automatic consequence for non-compliance	Section 5.4; axes 2 and 5	Elections Act amendment; Election Commission rules
Require publication of sex-disaggregated nomination, withdrawal and result data at union council level	Limitation in Section 4.6	Election Commission standing order

Note. *Section numbers refer to this article; axis numbers refer to Table 1.*

First, direct election to reserved seats should be restored. Indirect election makes a woman councillor answerable to the body she was put in council to change, and no adjustment to the reserved share makes up for that reversal.

Second, and most importantly, a defined and separately auditable share of the local development allocation should be attached to each reserved seat and made releasable on the holder's own signature. This goes to the constraint the analysis identifies as binding. Without it, every other reform simply adjusts the composition of a body whose women members still have nothing to deliver to a constituency of their own.

Third, registered parties should be required to allocate a statutory minimum share of general-seat tickets to women, enforced by the Election Commission at list scrutiny and carrying a defined, automatic consequence for non-compliance. A requirement without a sanction is exactly the sort of formal rule that accommodating informal institutions absorb without effect.

Fourth, the Election Commission should publish sex-disaggregated nomination, withdrawal and result data at union council level as a standing obligation rather than on request. The gaps in that data for the earlier cycles are why this study could not test its structural argument against candidate-pipeline evidence, and they will constrain every subsequent evaluation the same way.

6.2 Directions for Further Research

The obvious next step is the interview study a documentary design cannot substitute for, and the frame used here specifies what it should ask. A purposive sample drawn from both regimes, stratified across Central and South Punjab and across reserved-seat and general-seat holders, would let the five axes be tested against experience: how nomination was actually secured and by whom, to whom the councillor understood herself to be answerable, what access to funds and committees she in fact had, and what happened when she tried to act against the wishes of the network that nominated her. The most informative contrast available is probably between the small number of

women who won general seats and the much larger number who held reserved ones, since it isolates what independent political capital

does inside an otherwise constant institutional environment.

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