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Jammu Kashmir Policy Lab

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This study examines the reproduction and concentration of political power through political families in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) from 1974 to 2026. Using a longitudinal mixed-methods approach, it constructs a historical database of political officeholders, identifies family-linked political networks, and measures

[Who Rules AJK? Political Families and the Reproduction of Power, 1974–2026]

their institutional influence through a Political Power Index. The study finds that verified family-linked politicians account for approximately 14.5% of Assembly membership events, while the five largest identified family networks account for 79.4% of the political power captured within the currently verified family database. These findings suggest that political-family influence in AJK is not evenly distributed and that a small number of enduring families have accumulated substantial institutional reach across generations. The study does not argue that these families collectively control AJK; rather, it identifies a pattern of elite reproduction within an otherwise competitive electoral system.

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1. Introduction

Research Problem

Political power in Azad Jammu and Kashmir is formally organized through representative institutions, competitive elections, political parties, and a parliamentary system established under the constitutional arrangements of 1974. The Legislative Assembly is the central representative institution, while the offices of Prime Minister, President, Speaker, Leader of the Opposition, and ministers provide multiple pathways through which political authority is exercised. The formal structure therefore suggests a system in which political office is accessible through electoral competition and institutional rules. Yet the formal structure of political institutions does not necessarily explain how political power is actually distributed and reproduced over time. In many political systems, electoral competition exists alongside the persistence of established political families whose members repeatedly enter public office, inherit constituencies, benefit from accumulated political networks, and transfer political influence across generations. Political families can therefore remain influential even when political parties change, governments fall, and electoral contests become increasingly competitive.

This issue is particularly important in AJK because political discussion frequently includes the perception that political power is concentrated among a limited number of families. Established political names have appeared repeatedly in the Legislative Assembly and in the highest offices of the territory across successive political periods. In some cases, political influence has also continued from one generation to another, with children or other relatives entering politics after the previous generation had already established a political base. Such patterns raise an important empirical question: **is the perception that a few families dominate AJK politics supported by the historical record?** The problem, however, is that the claim has generally remained a political observation rather than a systematically measured proposition. Political families are often discussed through prominent examples, individual personalities, or electoral narratives, but this approach can produce an incomplete picture. A family that produces one prominent Prime Minister may receive greater attention than a family that produces several members of the Legislative Assembly over decades. Conversely, counting only the number of Assembly members may underestimate the influence of families whose members have occupied the highest executive and parliamentary offices.

This study therefore approaches political family dominance as a question of **political power and its reproduction**, rather than simply asking how many politicians belong to prominent families. It examines the political careers of officeholders across the period 1974–2026 and seeks to identify whether political families have accumulated influence across different institutions and generations. The study constructs a historical political-office dataset covering members of the Legislative Assembly as well as holders of major political offices, including Prime Ministers, Presidents, Speakers, Leaders of the Opposition, and ministers. The Assembly's historical records provide a basis for tracing membership across successive legislative periods, while official records of parliamentary leadership provide additional evidence of access to higher political offices. The study then links individual politicians through documented family relationships in order to identify political families and measure their institutional reach.

The central analytical distinction is between **political representation** and **political power**. A politician who serves once as an MLA does not necessarily possess the same political influence as someone who serves repeatedly and subsequently becomes a minister, Speaker, Opposition Leader, or Prime Minister. Political family concentration must therefore be examined not only through the number of family members who enter politics but also through the offices they occupy, the duration of their political careers, and the extent to which political influence passes between generations. The research does not begin with the assumption that political families are inherently undemocratic, corrupt, or illegitimate. Family-based political participation can arise from electoral trust, political experience, social networks, ideological commitment, or genuine voter preference. The concern of this study is instead empirical: **how concentrated is political power, how persistent are political families, and through what mechanisms is political influence reproduced?**

Research Question

The principal research question is:

To what extent has political power in AJK been reproduced through political families between 1974 and 2026?

This question is supported by three subsidiary questions:

1. **Which political families have exercised the greatest influence over AJK's political institutions between 1974 and 2026?**
2. **To what extent are political families represented among MLAs, ministers, Prime Ministers, Presidents, Speakers, and Leaders of the Opposition?**
3. **Through what mechanisms have political families reproduced political influence across generations?**

These questions allow the study to move beyond the simple proposition that "a few families rule AJK." Instead, the research tests whether political power has become concentrated within a relatively narrow political elite and whether family relationships have played a significant role in maintaining that concentration. The period beginning in 1974 is deliberate. The constitutional transition of 1974 established the parliamentary framework under which the modern political institutions of AJK developed, making it an appropriate starting point for examining the long-term reproduction of political power. Extending the analysis to 2026 allows the study to examine more than five decades of political development and, importantly, to observe whether political influence has remained within the same families, moved between different families, or expanded to new political entrants.

Why Political Families Matter

Political families matter because democracy concerns not only who wins elections but also **who has sustained access to political competition**. Formal equality in elections does not necessarily mean equality of political opportunity. Individuals entering politics may begin with very

different levels of political capital, social recognition, organizational networks, constituency connections, financial resources, and access to established party structures. The literature on political dynasties suggests that family connections can provide important advantages in political recruitment and electoral competition. Political families may inherit name recognition, organizational networks, relationships with party leadership, knowledge of electoral organization, and connections to local political brokers. These advantages can make political entry easier for relatives of established politicians than for newcomers. In this sense, political dynasties can function as mechanisms through which political capital is transferred from one generation to another.

This does not mean that voters simply inherit their representatives. Electoral success still requires political support, and political families can lose elections. Indeed, one of the important questions for this study is whether family influence survives electoral competition rather than replacing it. A family that repeatedly wins elections despite changes in parties, governments, and political circumstances demonstrates a different form of political resilience from a family whose influence depends entirely on a single officeholder. Political families can also matter at the institutional level. When members of the same family occupy different political offices over time, the family's influence may extend beyond a single constituency or electoral cycle. A political lineage that moves from the Legislative Assembly to ministerial office and subsequently to the premiership has accumulated a different form of political capital than a family represented only by a single MLA. Likewise, when political influence passes from parent to child, the relevant phenomenon is not simply electoral success but **intergenerational reproduction of political power**.

For AJK, examining this phenomenon is particularly relevant because the territory's political history contains repeated examples of established political names appearing across successive legislative periods and occupying multiple levels of political office. The question is therefore not whether political families exist. The historical record suggests that they do. The more important question is **how much of the political system they occupy and how durable their influence has been**. This study consequently treats political families as a measurable component of AJK's political elite. Rather than relying on anecdotes or perceptions, it constructs a longitudinal database covering political officeholders from 1974 to 2026. The objective is to determine whether political power has been broadly distributed across successive generations of politicians or whether a relatively small number of political families have repeatedly reproduced their presence within the political system. The answer has implications beyond the families themselves. If political power is highly concentrated among a small number of families, this may raise questions about political recruitment, opportunities for new entrants, representational diversity, party organization, electoral competition, and institutional accountability. If, on the other hand, family-linked politicians constitute only a small proportion of political officeholders and their influence is not disproportionately concentrated in high-value offices, then the common perception of family domination would require qualification.

The purpose of this research is therefore neither to condemn political families nor to defend them. It is to **measure their presence, trace their networks, assess their political power, and determine whether the claim that a few families dominate AJK politics is supported by historical evidence**.

2. Methodology

This study employs a **longitudinal mixed-methods research design** to examine the reproduction and concentration of political power through family networks in AJK between 1974 and 2026. The quantitative component constructs a historical database of political officeholders and measures the distribution of political power across individuals and families. The qualitative component examines the relationships, political succession, and institutional pathways through which political influence is reproduced across generations. The combination is necessary because the existence of political families can be established through biographical and genealogical evidence, but their political importance can only be assessed by examining the offices, duration, and institutional positions occupied by their members.

2.1 Period of Analysis: 1974–2026

The study begins in 1974 because the adoption of the Interim Constitution Act, 1974 introduced the parliamentary system under which the modern institutional structure of AJK developed. The AJK Legislative Assembly records that the second Assembly came into existence in 1975 under the 1974 constitutional framework and that the Prime Minister became the executive head elected by the Assembly. The period therefore provides a coherent institutional starting point for examining the reproduction of political power through elected and parliamentary institutions. The endpoint of 2026 captures the political system through the current eleventh Assembly and allows the research to examine more than five decades of political continuity and change. The Assembly's own historical account records successive legislative periods from the second Assembly in 1975 through the eleventh Assembly, elected in 2021, while also documenting changes in the number and composition of Assembly seats. The eleventh Assembly comprises 53 members, including seats representing AJK constituencies, refugees settled in Pakistan, women, technocrats, overseas Kashmiris, and religious scholars.

The study therefore treats **1974–2026 as a longitudinal political period rather than as a single electoral cycle**. This is important because political families are fundamentally intergenerational phenomena. A family may not dominate one election but may remain politically significant for several decades through successive members and changing political circumstances. The historical period also contains interruptions and institutional changes, including the suspension of the parliamentary system between 1977 and 1985. These periods are not ignored. Rather, they are recorded as part of the political context while the principal quantitative analysis focuses on identifiable political officeholding within the parliamentary record.

2.2 Assembly and Political-Office Database

The core quantitative dataset is constructed from official records of the AJK Legislative Assembly. The Assembly's historical member database provides records for successive legislative periods, while separate official records provide information on former Prime Ministers, Speakers, and Leaders of the Opposition. These records are supplemented, where

necessary, by official government and electoral sources and by reputable secondary sources for biographical and family verification. The database distinguishes between **individual politicians** and **office holding events**. This distinction is essential. A politician who served in three Assemblies is one person but may generate three separate Assembly membership events. Similarly, an individual who served as an MLA and subsequently became a minister or Prime Minister remains one person but accumulates several office holding events.

For the Assembly component, the historical records currently assembled contain **447 member records across the nine post-1974 Assembly periods included in the dataset**. This figure is therefore an event-level or record-level denominator, not a claim that 447 different individuals served in the Assembly. Repeated politicians, returning members, and explicitly identified by-election or replacement entries must be reconciled at the person level before calculating the number of unique politicians.

Each record is coded according to the following principal variables:

Variable	Description
Person ID	Unique identifier assigned to each politician
Name	Standardized name
Assembly period	Legislative period in which the person served
Constituency	Constituency or category of seat
MLA event	Assembly membership event
Minister	Ministerial office where verified
Prime Minister	Prime ministerial office where verified
President	Presidential office where verified
Speaker	Speakership where verified
Opposition Leader	Leadership of the opposition where verified
Family ID	Identifier for the political family
Family relationship	Nature of documented relationship
Generation	Position within the family's political succession
Evidence source	Source supporting the coding

The database is designed to permit two complementary forms of analysis. The first measures the **representation of political families**, asking how many politicians or Assembly events are associated with identified families. The second measures **political power**, asking which families have occupied the most consequential offices and for how long.

2.3 Definition of a Political Family

A central methodological problem is determining what qualifies as a political family. The study therefore adopts a transparent operational definition rather than relying on public reputation or media descriptions.

For this research, a **political family** is defined as:

A family in which at least two members of the same extended family have held elected or major political office in AJK during the study period.

This approach is consistent with comparative research that defines a political dynasty through the presence of multiple members of the same family in political office rather than requiring a particular number of generations or a particular political party. The definition is intentionally broad enough to capture two-generation families while allowing the analysis to distinguish them from deeper and more established dynasties.

Family relationships are coded conservatively. The study recognizes direct relationships such as:

- parent–child
- siblings
- grandparent–grandchild
- spouse relationships where both individuals independently held political office

More distant relationships are included only when reliable evidence establishes the connection. A shared surname by itself is **not sufficient evidence of a family relationship**. Likewise, political alliances, friendships, constituency associations, tribal or clan affiliations, and party relationships are not treated as familial relationships unless a verifiable kinship connection exists. This distinction is particularly important in AJK where surnames, titles, regional identities, and political associations can sometimes create an appearance of familial connection without establishing a documented relationship.

The study also distinguishes between a **political family** and a **political dynasty**. Every dynasty is a political family, but not every political family necessarily constitutes a deep dynasty. A family with two politically active members may therefore be classified as a political family, while a family demonstrating multiple generations, repeated office holding, and sustained political influence can additionally be classified as a political dynasty. This allows the research to examine not only whether families exist but also how deeply political power has been reproduced within them.

2.4 Family-Linkage and Verification

After the political-office database is assembled, each individual is examined for documented relationships with other officeholders. Family links are verified through official biographies, Assembly records, election records, reputable newspaper reporting, published biographies, and other credible documentary evidence.

The coding process follows a conservative rule:

A family relationship is coded only when sufficient evidence exists to establish the relationship.

Where evidence is uncertain, the relationship is marked as unverified rather than inferred. This prevents the research from artificially increasing the apparent concentration of political power by assigning individuals to families on the basis of surname similarity or political association. The resulting dataset can then be represented as a network in which individual politicians constitute nodes and verified family relationships constitute connections between them. This makes it possible to identify not only individual political families but also overlapping networks in which several relatives have held different offices or represented different constituencies.

2.5 Measuring Political Power

Counting the number of politicians belonging to a family is insufficient for assessing political influence. A family that produces four ordinary MLAs does not necessarily exercise the same institutional influence as a family that produces a Prime Minister, President, Speaker, ministers, and several MLAs.

The study therefore constructs a **Political Power Index** based on office holding. The preliminary weighting system assigns greater values to offices carrying greater institutional authority:

Office	Weight
President	10
Prime Minister	10
Speaker	7
Leader of Opposition	5
Minister	3
MLA	1

The score is calculated by summing verified office holding events:

Political Power Score = President × 10 + Prime Minister × 10 + Speaker × 7 + Opposition Leader × 5 + Minister × 3 + MLA × 1

The purpose of the index is not to claim that political power can be reduced perfectly to a numerical value. Rather, it provides a transparent method for comparing the **institutional reach** of different political families.

The highest weights are assigned to Prime Minister and President because these offices represent the highest levels of executive and constitutional authority within the AJK political system. The Speaker receives a lower but substantial weight because of the institutional importance of legislative leadership. The Leader of the Opposition receives a separate weight because opposition leadership represents a significant position within parliamentary politics. Ministerial and ordinary Assembly membership receive progressively lower weights.

The index will be subjected to sensitivity testing in the final analysis. This means that the conclusions will not depend solely on one arbitrary weighting scheme. Where appropriate,

alternative weighting arrangements will be tested to determine whether the ranking of the major political families changes substantially.

2.6 Measuring Concentration

The research uses several measures rather than relying on a single percentage.

First, it calculates the proportion of **unique politicians** with verified political-family connections.

Second, it calculates the proportion of **Assembly membership events** associated with political families.

Third, it calculates the share of major political offices held by family-linked politicians.

Finally, it calculates the concentration of political power among the largest political families.

The principal family concentration measure is:

Top Five Family Power Share = Power of five largest families ÷ Total power of all identified political families × 100

A separate measure will calculate the proportion of **total political power**, including both family-linked and non-family politicians, attributable to the five largest families. This distinction is essential. If five families possess 75 percent of the power held by all identified political families, that does not mean that they possess 75 percent of all political power in AJK. The denominator must be stated explicitly in every calculation.

The study will therefore report family concentration in a way that distinguishes between:

1. **Family representation**
2. **Family political power**
3. **Concentration of power within political families**
4. **Concentration of total political power**

This prevents the research from turning a preliminary concentration statistic into a broader claim than the evidence supports.

2.7 Data Quality and Limitations

The principal strength of the study is its longitudinal scope and reliance on official political records. Its principal limitation is that historical political-family relationships are not maintained in a single official database. Family relationships therefore require additional verification and may be more difficult to establish for earlier political generations than for contemporary politicians.

The study also recognizes that office weights are analytical choices rather than objective measures of political importance. A Prime Minister may exercise greater political influence than an MLA, but the precise numerical difference cannot be observed directly. The index should therefore be interpreted as a **comparative measurement tool**, not as an absolute measurement of political power. Finally, the study measures observable political office holding and documented family relationships. It does not assume that holding office automatically proves informal influence, patronage, corruption, or nepotism. Nor does the presence of a political family establish that elections were manipulated or that voters lacked agency. These are separate empirical questions. The methodology is therefore designed to answer a narrower and more defensible question: **how frequently have members of the same families occupied political office, how extensively have their careers reached across institutions and generations, and how concentrated has the resulting political power become?**

The answer to those questions provides the empirical basis for evaluating the broader claim that a small number of families rule AJK.

3. Political Families in AJK

The political history of AJK since the introduction of the parliamentary system in 1974 contains a recurring feature that is difficult to capture through election results alone: the return of familiar political families across successive generations. Politicians have entered the Legislative Assembly through different parties and constituencies, and governments have changed repeatedly, but political influence has often remained connected to established family networks. This section identifies those networks, examines the relationships linking their members, and traces the extent to which political participation has been reproduced from one generation to another.

For the purposes of this study, a political family is identified when at least two members of the same family have held elected or major political office during the study period. The identification is based on documented relationships rather than surname similarity. The purpose is not to suggest that every member of a political family possesses the same level of influence, but to establish whether political participation has been reproduced through familial connections.

3.1 Identifying Political Families

The initial examination of the 1974–2026 political-office database identifies a number of recurring political families and family networks. These include the **Qayyum–Attique network**,

Rathore family, Sikandar Hayat family, Sultan–Tanveer–Yasir network, Farooq Haider family, Yaqoob–Zaman network, Ibrahim family, Qamar–Zia network, and Suhbat Ali–Anwar network, among others.

These families differ considerably in size, duration, geographic base, and institutional reach. Some consist primarily of a parent and child who entered politics in successive generations. Others contain siblings who simultaneously or successively occupied political office. A smaller number have developed into more extensive political networks in which several members of the same family have occupied different offices over a longer period. The existence of these families should not, however, be interpreted as evidence of equal political influence. A family represented by two ordinary Assembly members is analytically different from a family whose members have occupied the premiership, presidency, speakership, ministerial positions, and opposition leadership. The purpose of identifying the families at this stage is therefore to establish the **network of political participation** from which the subsequent analysis of political power can be conducted.

The distinction between family presence and family power is particularly important in the AJK context. The Assembly has passed through successive political periods since 1975, and individual politicians have often returned to office after periods outside the Assembly. A family may therefore accumulate political influence through several members and several political generations without necessarily controlling a majority of Assembly seats at any single point in time.

3.2 Family Relationships

The political-family networks identified in the database are based on different forms of kinship. The most significant relationship is the **parent–child relationship**, because it provides the clearest evidence of intergenerational political succession. In other cases, political networks have been formed through siblings, while some families extend across multiple generations.

One of the clearest patterns is the continuation of political participation from an established political figure to a younger family member. The **Qayyum–Attique network**, for example, connects Abdul Qayyum Khan with his son Attique Ahmed Khan. Both became major political figures in AJK, with Attique Ahmed Khan subsequently occupying the office of Prime Minister and other significant parliamentary positions. The **Rathore network** provides another important example of political continuity. Raja Mumtaz Hussain Rathore occupied major political offices, including the premiership and speakership, while political participation subsequently continued through members of the next generation, including Faisal Mumtaz Rathore.⁴³ The significance of this network lies not merely in the existence of a familial relationship but in the movement of political influence from one generation into another. The **Sultan network** similarly demonstrates how political participation can extend across generations and between close relatives. Sultan Mahmood Chaudhry became one of the major political figures of AJK, serving as Prime Minister and later President, while political participation subsequently continued through relatives including Yasir Sultan. The network also demonstrates that family influence does not necessarily

depend upon one individual continuously occupying office; it can persist when political roles are distributed among different members of a family.

Other family networks demonstrate variations of the same phenomenon. The **Sikandar Hayat family** connects successive generations of political participation, while the **Yaqoob–Zaman network** illustrates the importance of sibling and family connections within political careers. The **Qamar–Zia** and **Suhbat Ali–Anwar** networks similarly demonstrate the movement of political participation between generations.¹⁵ These relationships should be understood as networks rather than isolated genealogical connections. Once several members of a family have entered politics, the political resources accumulated by one generation can potentially become available to subsequent members. These resources may include name recognition, constituency familiarity, political contacts, party relationships, organizational experience, and accumulated knowledge of electoral competition. The database therefore records not simply whether two politicians are related but the **type and direction of the relationship** between them.

3.3 Intergenerational Succession

The most important feature of political families is not simply the presence of relatives in politics but **political succession across generations**. Intergenerational succession occurs when political participation established by one generation is followed by the political participation of a younger generation. This process can take several forms. A politician may be succeeded by a child in the same constituency. A younger family member may enter a different constituency but benefit from the family's established political identity. A family member may enter politics through a different political party while retaining the family's political reputation. Alternatively, several members of the same family may occupy different political positions simultaneously, creating a broader family network rather than a simple succession chain.

The AJK experience demonstrates elements of all these forms.

The transition from **Abdul Qayyum Khan to Attique Ahmed Khan** represents a direct parent–child continuation of political participation. The continuation of the **Rathore political network** through Faisal Mumtaz Rathore represents another example in which a political identity established by an earlier generation remains relevant to subsequent political participation. Similarly, the continuation of political participation within the **Sultan network** illustrates how political influence can move beyond the original officeholder and become associated with a wider family network. Intergenerational succession does not mean that the younger politician automatically inherits electoral office. The successor must still compete within an electoral and party system and may face opposition from other political families or political newcomers. The analytical significance of succession therefore lies in the **starting position** available to the younger politician. A family name with an established political history can provide social recognition and political networks that are not equally available to individuals entering politics without such a background.

This distinction is central to the concept of elite reproduction. Elite reproduction does not require political office to be formally hereditary. In a democratic electoral system, voters continue to determine who wins elections. Political reproduction occurs when the advantages associated with an established position are transferred sufficiently across generations to make continued political participation more likely. The AJK case is therefore better described as **electoral reproduction of political influence** rather than hereditary office holding. Political families do not legally inherit Assembly seats or executive positions. Instead, political capital may be transmitted through family relationships and subsequently converted into electoral and institutional power.

3.4 A Brief Historical Pattern, 1974–2026

The historical pattern becomes clearer when examined across the entire period.

The first phase following the 1974 constitutional transition established the foundations of parliamentary politics in AJK. Political competition during the early period was shaped by established political personalities, regional political bases, and broader party alignments. The interruption of the parliamentary system between 1977 and 1985 created a significant institutional break, but political networks did not disappear. With the restoration of the parliamentary system in 1985, established political figures again became important participants in electoral politics.

During the subsequent decades, political families increasingly became visible as continuing political networks rather than simply individual political careers. The 1985–1990 and 1990–1991 periods were followed by renewed parliamentary competition in the 1990s and 2000s, during which several established political figures and their relatives appeared repeatedly in the political record. The 1990s and 2000s are particularly significant because they demonstrate that political family influence could survive changes in party alignment and government. Political families did not necessarily remain permanently associated with a single governing party. Instead, individual politicians and family networks operated within changing party configurations, adapting to shifts in electoral competition and political alliances.

The 2000s and 2010s provide further evidence of intergenerational continuity. Established political families remained present while younger relatives began entering political office. The resulting political landscape was therefore not a simple replacement of one generation by another. Older and younger generations could co-exist, with political experience, family reputation, and organizational networks distributed among several relatives. The 2016–2021 and 2021–2026 periods demonstrate that this pattern has continued into contemporary AJK politics. The current political landscape includes members whose political identities are connected to earlier generations of political leadership. The presence of such politicians does not by itself establish political dominance, but it demonstrates that family-linked political participation remains a significant feature of the political system.

Across the full period, therefore, three broad patterns emerge.

First, **political families are persistent**. Several families appear across more than one legislative period and, in some cases, across multiple decades. Second, **political participation is**

increasingly intergenerational. Political families are not limited to the careers of individual politicians; in several cases, political participation continues through children, siblings, or subsequent generations. Third, **family influence operates across institutions.** The most politically significant families are not simply those with multiple MLAs. Their members have occupied different levels of the political system, including legislative, ministerial, executive, and parliamentary leadership positions.

These patterns provide the foundation for the next stage of the research. Identifying political families demonstrates that familial networks are present in AJK politics, but it does not establish how much political power they actually possess. A family with several members in the Assembly may be less politically influential than a smaller family whose members repeatedly occupy the highest offices. The next section therefore moves from **mapping political families to measuring their power.** It asks not simply which families exist, but which families have accumulated the greatest institutional influence between 1974 and 2026.

4. Who Holds the Power?

The identification of political families establishes that familial networks have been a recurring feature of political life in AJK, but the existence of these networks does not by itself demonstrate political dominance. A family with two Assembly members over several decades cannot automatically be considered more powerful than a family whose members have occupied the premiership, presidency, speakership, ministerial positions, and opposition leadership. The central purpose of this section is therefore to move from **family identification to the measurement of political power.**

The analysis uses the Political Power Index established in the methodology. Each verified office holding event is assigned a weight according to the institutional importance of the office: President and Prime Minister receive 10 points each, Speaker 7, Leader of the Opposition 5, Minister 3, and MLA 1. The resulting scores allow different political families to be compared using a common measure.

4.1 Family and Non-Family Representation

The Assembly dataset contains **447 membership records/events** across the historical legislative periods examined. These records represent Assembly membership events rather than 447 unique individuals. This distinction is important because politicians can return to the Assembly in different legislative periods, while by-election and replacement records can also generate separate membership events.¹ Within the family database currently verified for this study, **65 Assembly membership events** are associated with identified political-family networks. This represents approximately **14.5 percent** of the 447 Assembly membership events.

This figure should be interpreted as a **minimum verified family representation rate**, rather than a final estimate of all family-linked political participation. The family-linkage process is

deliberately conservative: a politician is assigned to a family only where a sufficiently documented relationship with another officeholder has been established. Unverified relationships are not included. The 14.5 percent figure therefore answers a relatively narrow question: **What proportion of the Assembly membership events in the current verified dataset can be directly linked to identified political families?** It does not answer the more important question of whether those families possess a disproportionate share of political power. That question requires consideration of the offices held by family members.

4.2 The Top Five Political Families

The Political Power Index reveals a substantially different picture from simple Assembly representation.

The five highest-scoring family networks in the current dataset are:

Rank Political family/network Power points

1	Qayyum–Attique	127
2	Rathore	69
3	Sultan–Tanveer–Yasir	68
4	Sikandar Hayat	43
5	Farooq Haider	43
Total Top five		350

The five families collectively account for **350 of the 441 political-power points** currently assigned to the identified family networks.

The resulting concentration is:

$$350 \div 441 \times 100 = 79.4 \text{ percent}$$

Thus, the current analysis indicates that:

The five most powerful identified political families account for 79.4 percent of the political power contained within the family networks currently identified in the dataset.

This is a striking level of concentration. Approximately four-fifths of the political power captured by the identified family networks is concentrated within only five networks.

However, the denominator must be stated clearly. **79.4 percent does not mean that five families possess 79.4 percent of all political power in AJK.** It means that they account for 79.4 percent of the power currently attributed to the political families identified in this study.

This distinction is methodologically essential. The study is investigating whether political families are disproportionately powerful, not attempting to demonstrate that every form of political influence in AJK can be assigned to a family.

4.3 The Top Ten Family Networks

The current family-power database contains nine major family networks for which sufficient office holding information has been assembled. Their combined power is **441 points**.

Rank	Family/network	Power points
1	Qayyum–Attique	127
2	Rathore	69
3	Sultan–Tanveer–Yasir	68
4	Sikandar Hayat	43
5	Farooq Haider	43
6	Yaqoob–Zaman	28
7	Ibrahim	25
8	Suhbat Ali–Anwar	22
9	Qamar–Zia	16
Total		441

Because only nine family networks currently meet the criteria for inclusion in this verified power table, a separate tenth-family ranking is not artificially constructed. The table therefore represents the **top nine currently verified networks** rather than inventing a tenth category.

The concentration is visible immediately. The first five networks possess 350 points, while the remaining four possess 91. The political power contained within the identified family networks is therefore not evenly distributed among them.

4.4 Where Does the Power Come From?

The concentration becomes more meaningful when the composition of the scores is considered.

The highest-scoring families are distinguished not merely by the number of Assembly members they have produced but by the **range and seniority of offices** occupied by their members.

A family can accumulate political power through several pathways:

Legislative presence — repeated membership in the Assembly

Executive office — ministerial appointments

Parliamentary leadership — Speaker and Opposition Leader

Executive leadership — Prime Minister

Constitutional office — President

The highest-scoring networks contain combinations of these positions.

This demonstrates why a simple count of MLAs would produce an incomplete picture of political concentration. Legislative representation provides the foundation of electoral politics, but senior political offices provide substantially greater institutional reach.

For example, a family that produces several MLAs but never reaches executive leadership will generate a lower power score than a smaller family whose members repeatedly reach the premiership, presidency, or other senior offices.

The index therefore captures a central characteristic of political-family power: **institutional reach rather than numerical presence alone**.

4.5 Political Power Is More Concentrated Than Family Representation

One of the most important findings emerging from the dataset is the difference between the **share of Assembly representation** and the **share of political-family power**.

The verified family networks account for approximately:

14.5 percent of Assembly membership events

Yet within the political-family pool, the top five families account for:

79.4 percent of political power

These figures cannot be directly compared as if they have the same denominator. They answer different questions.

The first measures family representation in Assembly membership events.

The second measures concentration **within the identified family-power pool**.

Nevertheless, together they illustrate an important analytical possibility: political families do not need to occupy a majority of Assembly seats to exercise substantial institutional influence. A relatively small number of family-linked politicians may occupy disproportionately important offices.

This is precisely why the research distinguishes between **representation** and **power**.

4.6 Key Statistics

The current dataset produces five principal findings:

Indicator	Current result
Assembly membership records/events	447
Verified family-linked Assembly events	65
Family-linked Assembly events	14.5%
Identified family-network power points	441
Top five share of identified family power	79.4%

These statistics should be treated as the **current verified results of the family-power dataset**, not as the final measurement of every political family that has existed in AJK.

The most important result is therefore not simply the number 79.4. It is the pattern behind it: **political power within the identified family networks is highly concentrated.**

4.7 What Does the 79.4 Percent Finding Tell Us?

The 79.4 percent finding provides the first quantitative indication that political-family influence in AJK is not evenly distributed among all families. Five networks account for approximately four-fifths of the power captured within the identified family system. This suggests that the political-family structure itself has an internal hierarchy. Some families have accumulated substantially greater institutional reach than others.

The finding also changes the question posed at the beginning of the research.

The question is no longer simply:

Are there political families in AJK?

The evidence already demonstrates that there are.

The more important question becomes:

Why have certain families been able to accumulate and reproduce political influence across generations while others have remained politically marginal?

The answer requires examination of the mechanisms through which political capital is transmitted. Family reputation, constituency networks, party structures, political alliances, previous officeholding, and intergenerational succession may all contribute to political continuity. At the same time, the 79.4 percent figure must not be interpreted as evidence that five families literally control AJK. Elections remain competitive, political families lose elections, new politicians enter the system, and political influence can decline or disappear. The finding

instead identifies a **pattern of concentration within the family-linked political elite**. The next section therefore moves from the question of **who holds political power** to the question of **how that power is reproduced**.

The central finding at this stage can be stated cautiously:

The evidence assembled so far indicates that political-family power in AJK is highly concentrated. The five largest identified family networks account for 79.4 percent of the political power captured within the currently verified family database, despite family-linked politicians representing only a minority of Assembly membership events.

Whether this concentration survives the completion and verification of the full 1974–2026 family-linkage dataset is ultimately an empirical question. If the concentration remains close to its present level after all historical relationships have been systematically coded, it would provide strong evidence that AJK's political elite has been substantially shaped by a small number of enduring political families.

5. How Is Power Reproduced?

The concentration of political power identified in the previous section raises a further question: **how does political influence remain within the same families across different electoral periods and generations?** Family presence alone cannot explain political continuity. Political families operate within an electoral system in which voters choose representatives, parties compete for government, and politicians can lose elections. The reproduction of political influence must therefore occur through mechanisms that connect family background with electoral, institutional, and organizational resources.

Four mechanisms are particularly important in the AJK case: **family succession, constituencies, political parties, and political networks**.

5.1 Family Succession

The most visible mechanism is intergenerational succession. When a politician's child or another close relative enters politics after the earlier generation has established a political reputation, the younger politician does not begin from the same position as an entirely new entrant. The family name may already possess recognition within a constituency, while existing political relationships and organizational structures may remain available to the successor. This does not make electoral victory automatic. The successor must still obtain political support. The importance of succession is instead that the family can transfer accumulated political capital from one generation to the next. In several AJK political families, the movement from one generation to another provides evidence of this process.

Political succession is therefore best understood as **the transmission of political opportunity**, rather than the hereditary transfer of office. The office itself remains electorally contested, but the resources surrounding political participation may be inherited.

5.2 Constituencies

The second mechanism is the persistence of political influence within constituencies. Political families can develop long-term relationships with voters, local political workers, community leaders, and other intermediaries. Over time, these relationships can become associated not only with an individual politician but with the wider family name. A constituency can consequently become an important political asset. When one family member retires, loses office, or moves into another political position, a relative may enter the same political arena with an existing network of recognition and support.

This does not mean that constituencies are permanently controlled by families. Electoral defeats and political changes demonstrate that voters retain the ability to reject established politicians. The relevant question is whether the probability of continued political participation is enhanced by an established family presence. The longitudinal dataset therefore examines whether the same families repeatedly appear in the same constituencies or political areas across different generations.

5.3 Political Parties

Political parties provide another mechanism through which family influence can be reproduced. Political families do not operate outside the party system; they require party nominations, alliances, electoral symbols, and organizational support to compete effectively. At the same time, established political families may possess political resources that make them attractive candidates for parties. Name recognition, electoral experience, constituency networks, and an established voter base can reduce the organizational risk associated with selecting a candidate.

The relationship is therefore potentially reciprocal. Families benefit from parties because parties provide organizational structures and electoral platforms, while parties may benefit from established families because they can provide recognizable and electorally competitive candidates. An important feature of AJK politics is that political families cannot always be understood through permanent attachment to a single party. Political alignments change, governments change, and politicians may move between political formations. The persistence of a family across such changes would therefore provide stronger evidence of family-based political resilience than persistence under one party alone.

5.4 Political Networks

The fourth mechanism is the broader political network surrounding a family. Political influence is rarely produced by kinship alone. Family relationships can connect politicians to former officeholders, party leaders, ministers, legislators, local organizers, business and social networks,

and other political actors. Over time, these connections can accumulate into a form of political capital that extends beyond the individual officeholder.

This is why the study treats political families as **networks rather than genealogical trees alone**. A family may contain several politicians who occupy different offices, constituencies, and political positions. One member may provide executive experience, another legislative representation, and another organizational or constituency connections. Their combined political resources can produce a level of influence greater than that suggested by counting individual officeholders separately. The concept of political networks also helps explain why political families can survive electoral setbacks. The loss of one officeholder does not necessarily eliminate the family's political resources. Other relatives, party relationships, constituency connections, and accumulated political reputation may allow the network to re-enter political competition.

5.5 Reproduction Rather Than Permanent Control

These mechanisms suggest that political family power in AJK should not be understood as permanent control of the political system. Political reproduction is a **process of continuity within competition**. Families can reproduce political influence when they successfully transfer political capital, maintain constituency relationships, retain access to political parties, and preserve networks across generations. But they can also decline when voters reject them, rival families emerge, parties change, or younger political entrants establish competing networks. The central finding of this study is therefore not that political families automatically inherit political office. Rather, the evidence points toward a system in which **family background can become a durable political resource**.

This distinction is crucial to understanding the broader question of who rules AJK. If political families repeatedly convert inherited political resources into electoral victories and access to senior offices, then the political system may remain formally competitive while simultaneously reproducing a relatively stable political elite.

The final question is therefore not whether AJK has elections. It clearly does. The question is whether **equal electoral competition produces equal political opportunity**. That is the central issue to which the conclusion now turns.

6. Conclusion

This study began with a simple but important question: **who rules AJK?** The question emerged from a persistent perception that political power in AJK has remained concentrated among a limited number of political families. Rather than accepting or rejecting that perception in advance, this research examined the political record from 1974 to 2026 to determine whether family connections have played a meaningful role in the reproduction of political power. The evidence points to a qualified answer. **AJK is not governed by a fixed group of families in any**

formal or absolute sense. It remains an electoral political system in which voters determine representation, political parties compete, governments change, and established politicians can be defeated. At the same time, the political history examined in this study demonstrates a persistent pattern of family-based political continuity. The same political families have appeared across successive periods, reached important political offices, and, in several cases, transferred political participation from one generation to another.

The most significant finding is the **concentration of political power within the identified political-family networks.** The Political Power Index developed for this study shows that the five highest-scoring family networks account for **79.4 percent of the political power attributed to the political families currently verified in the dataset.** This is a substantial concentration within the family-linked political elite. The 79.4 percent figure, however, requires an important qualification. It does **not** mean that five families possess all political power in AJK. The denominator is the total political power currently attributed to the identified political-family networks. The finding therefore demonstrates that political-family power is highly concentrated among a small number of families, rather than establishing that those families collectively control the entire political system.

This distinction is central to the argument of the study. The evidence does not support the simplistic claim that "five families rule AJK." It supports a more precise conclusion: **a relatively small number of enduring political families have accumulated a disproportionately large share of the political power that can be traced to family-linked political networks.** The study also demonstrates why political representation and political power cannot be treated as the same phenomenon. Family-linked politicians constitute only a portion of the Assembly membership records examined, yet some of the identified families have reached offices carrying substantially greater institutional authority. The premiership, presidency, speakership, opposition leadership, and ministerial positions give political families forms of influence that cannot be captured through a simple count of Assembly members. The persistence of these families across decades is also significant. Political influence has not simply remained attached to individual politicians. In several cases, political participation has continued through children, siblings, or subsequent generations. This suggests a process of **elite reproduction**, in which political resources accumulated by one generation can contribute to the political opportunities of another.

The central conclusion is clear:

AJK is not a political system ruled exclusively by a few families, but its political history reveals a substantial pattern of elite reproduction in which established political families have repeatedly converted political capital into continued access to political office across generations. The concentration of 79.4 percent of identified family-linked political power within the five highest-scoring family networks makes that pattern difficult to dismiss as a series of isolated family successes.

The question for AJK's future is therefore not whether political families should disappear from politics. It is whether the political system can ensure that **political opportunity remains sufficiently open for both established political families and new political actors to compete on meaningful terms.**

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