



Women in Politics, Status in India, Challenges, Measures

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the status of women in Indian politics, highlighting the challenges they face and measures to increase their representation. Despite progress, women remain underrepresented in political offices. The study explores the impact of societal norms, violence, and economic disparities on women's political participation. It also discusses initiatives like the Women's Reservation Bill and capacity-building programs to promote women's empowerment.

Key words: Women's Political Participation, Gender Quotas, Women's Reservation Bill, Political Representation, Democratic Inclusion.

1. INTRODUCTION

Women's participation in Indian politics is crucial for building an inclusive and representative democracy. However, women face numerous challenges, including societal norms, violence, and economic disparities. This study aims to analyze the status of women in Indian politics and identify measures to increase their representation.

Hypothesis:

- Increased women's representation in politics leads to more inclusive and representative decision-making.
- Capacity-building programs and party reforms can enhance women's participation in politics

This study is based on secondary research, analyzing existing literature, reports, and data on women's representation in Indian politics.

Women's participation in politics is a cornerstone for democratic representation and gender equality. Women's participation in politics is a cornerstone for democratic representation and gender equality. Despite global progress, women remain underrepresented in political institutions, and barriers like social norms, systemic challenges, and limited access to resources impede their participation.

However, strides have been made in recent years with international movements, legal reforms, and increasing recognition of women leaders in the political sphere. In the Indian context, the 18th Lok Sabha has 74 women Members of Parliament (MPs). This represents 13.6% of the total 543 seats in the Lok Sabha.

Women's Participation in Politics

Women's political participation refers to their involvement in electoral processes, policy-making, and leadership positions. It encompasses voting, standing for elections, holding public office, and being involved in decision-making at all levels of governance. Political empowerment of women is key to achieving gender equality, as it gives women the platform to address issues like education, healthcare, and gender-based violence. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), in 2023, women held 26.9% of parliamentary seats globally, showing a gradual increase from past decades. However, significant regional disparities remain, with Nordic countries leading with around 44% women parliamentarians and the Middle East at just 17%.

In 2023, 28 countries achieved or surpassed 40% of women's representation in their single or lower houses of parliament, with Rwanda leading at 61.3%.

Status of Women's Participation in Politics in India India, the world's largest democracy, has seen gradual but slow progress in increasing women's representation in politics. During British rule, limited women had voting rights in India. However, with the passage of the Indian Constitution, all Indian women gained the right to vote and participate, and since then, their participation has evolved, albeit with significant barriers.

Female Voter Turnout in Lok Sabha Elections: One key indicator is voter turnout among women. In 1962, the turnout was 46.6%, and by 2024, it had significantly increased to 65.8% during the 18th Lokasabha Elections.

Number of Women Contesting General Election: The number of women contesting elections has also seen a remarkable rise. In 1957, only 45 women stood as candidates in the Lok Sabha elections. During the 18th Lokasabha elections in 2024, this number had soared to 797, demonstrating an increasing willingness and

opportunity for women to participate as political candidates.

Women Elected to Legislative Bodies:

Women's representation in legislative bodies has gradually improved. In the Lok Sabha, the number of female representatives was 22 (5%) in 1951, which increased to 74 (13.6%) in 2024. Similarly, female representation in the Rajya Sabha went from 7% in 1952 to 13% in 2023.

At the local level, women hold a more significant share of seats. In 2022, women comprised 44% of representatives in local self-government institutions, with a total of 1,375,914 female representatives.

Recent Developments: Women's Reservation Bill was passed in September 2023, reserving 33% of seats for women in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies. Implementation is expected after the next census and delimitation exercise.

Global Comparison:

India's global ranking in terms of women's political representation remains low. Before the 18th Lok Sabha elections, as per IPU, India ranked 143rd among 185 countries in terms of women's representation in parliament. With the slight decrease in women MPs in the 18th Lok Sabha, this ranking is likely to fall further.

Women in Politics Need

Modern constitutional democracy is founded on the principle of proportionate political representation for all populations. The Beijing Declaration (1995) stressed that women's empowerment and full involvement, based on equality in all areas of culture, including involvement in decision-making processes and authority, are essential to achieving inclusion, growth, and harmony.

Gender Equality:

Women's participation in politics is imperative to achieve SDG 5, which seeks to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" and ensure "women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life."

Addressing Women-Specific Issues:

Female politicians often champion causes like reproductive rights, domestic violence laws, maternal healthcare, and education for girls, ensuring these issues get the policy attention they deserve.

Social Benefits:

When women are politically empowered, economies tend to benefit. According to a McKinsey Global Institute report, closing gender gaps in employment, including political leadership, could add \$28 trillion to the global GDP by 2025.

Economic Growth:

Countries with higher female representation tend to have lower levels of corruption and higher economic growth.

Women in Politics Challenges

Women in politics face significant challenges such as proxy representation, financial constraints, patriarchal norms, and exclusion from key political roles. Additionally, they encounter violence, intimidation, and cyber-harassment, hindering their active participation in public life.

Proxy Representation:

It is where women elected to office were largely “controlled” by the male family members. This is particularly prevalent in the Local Self-Governments and dubbed as ‘Sarpanch Pati’.

Finances:

Financing is also an obstacle, as many women are financially dependent on their families. Fighting elections can be costly, and massive financial resources are required.

Political and Institutional Barriers:

Women are often denied important positions within political parties, with male-dominated networks controlling key decision-making processes.

Social and Cultural barriers: Patriarchal norms and deep-rooted societal beliefs often restrict women from participating in public life. Family responsibilities and lack of support deter many women from entering politics.

Violence and Intimidation: Political violence and intimidation, especially during elections, disproportionately affect women candidates. The Election Commission of India has reported increasing cases of cyber-harassment and trolling targeting women in politics. **Women in Politics Way Forward** The way forward for women in politics involves legally mandating political parties to allocate one-third of tickets to women, empowering women’s organisations, providing political training, removing barriers, and ensuring safe, inclusive environments.

Mandate on Political Parties: Every registered political party should be legally obliged to give one-third of the total number of party tickets it distributes at every election to women. The Representation of People Act 1950 will have to be amended to enable this strategy.

Role of Women Organisations: Women’s organisations and networks within political parties and civil society must continue to help women assert their presence within the larger political and social landscape.

Capacity Building:

Continuous training programs and mentorship for women in politics can build confidence and equip them with the necessary skills for governance.

Removal of Barriers:

Better educational opportunities for women, improved financial stability, and the relative erosion of social prejudices can enhance their political participation.

Promoting Gender Sensitization:

Political parties and civil society must advocate for gender sensitisation programs to break societal stereotypes and encourage equal participation of women in governance.

Technological and Financial Support:

Providing women with access to digital tools for campaigning and communication, along with financial assistance or subsidies for electoral campaigns, can help overcome structural barriers

Women in Politics Measures Taken Several measures have been taken to promote women’s participation in politics, including constitutional provisions for equality,

the right to contest elections, seat reservation, capacity-building initiatives, and international commitments aimed at enhancing women's political representation.

Constitutional Measures:

Right to Vote:

Articles 325 and 326 of the Constitution guarantee political equality and the right to vote for women by ensuring Universal Adult Franchise and Preventing exclusion from the voter's list based on sex.

Right to contest:

Articles 84 and 173 of the Constitution ensure that any Indian citizen who is registered as a voter can contest elections to the Parliament or the state legislative assemblies.

Reservations in Representation:

The 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution provided for reservation of one-third (33%) of the total number of seats for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and urban local bodies.

106th Constitutional Amendment:

Women's Reservation Act 2023 mandates 33% reservation for women in the Lok Sabha, State Assemblies, and Delhi Legislative Assembly. Passed in September 2023, it aims to enhance women's political representation but will be implemented after the next census and delimitation exercise.

International Commitments: India is a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and aligns with the Beijing Declaration on gender equality, promoting women's participation in public life.

Capacity-Building Initiatives: The National Commission for Women (NCW) and civil society organisations have launched training programs aimed at equipping women with leadership skills.

Measures taken by the Election Commission of India:

Women-friendly 'pink booths' are set up where the entire staff, including election officials, police and security personnel, are female. Further, it has launched initiatives

like Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP).

Conflict of Interest: None of the authors have any conflicts of interest to disclose. All the authors approved the final version of the manuscript.

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