



## POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN AND REPRESENTATION IN POLITICS – A STUDY

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### **Abstract**

*An overview of women in Indian politics is given by this analytical study, which focuses on their representation, the difficulties they encounter, and the results of their participation. It looks at the past, emphasizing significant individuals and turning points in the political empowerment of women. The study examines how women are currently represented in Indian politics and pinpoints the causes of their underrepresentation. It talks about how the reservation policy has affected women's participation at the local level. The study also looks into how women in politics affect governance and policymaking, highlighting their beneficial effects on a range of topics. It explores the difficulties and impediments that Indian women face in politics, such as violence, stereotypes, and gender bias. This study explores the complex terrain of women's involvement in Indian politics, outlining the obstacles, advancements, and potential futures in this area. The paper examines the complex path of women in politics, spanning historical viewpoints, obstacles encountered, and empowerment programs.*

### **Introduction**

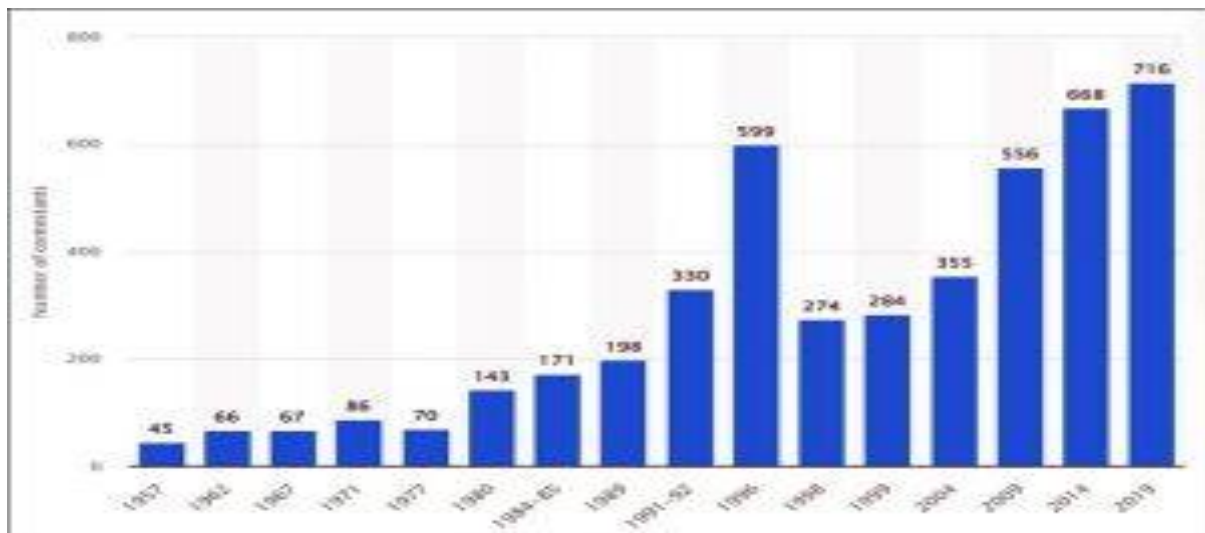
Adequate representation of women in politics is a goal of a truly representative democracy. One of the world's biggest and most robust parliamentary democracies is India. Since independence, there has been an improvement in the representation of women in the Indian Parliament. It is a crucial indicator of the nation's progress in eliminating gender inequality. Traditionally, women have been Marginalized politically: Women make up 49.58 percent of the world's population, yet historically, they have been politically marginalized in both developed and developing countries. The start of social reforms However, since the middle of the 19th century, social movements have been successful in enacting extensive reforms. International Women's Bill of Rights: Following the emergence of feminist movements in the 1960s and 1970s, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which is frequently referred to as an International Bill of Rights for women, was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979. The right of women to hold public and political office is protected by Article 7 of the Convention. Gender equality was a component of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): Promoting gender equality was one of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set forth by the United Nations in 2000 and intended to be accomplished by 2015. Goal 5 aims to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls," guaranteeing "women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life." The initiative was expanded in January 2016 to pursue 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

**The present status of Women representation in politics worldwide.**

- **Although there are more representative governments, there are still not enough women in them:** UN Women reports that as of September 2022, 30 women were elected heads of state or government in 28 different countries (out of 193 UN member states).
- **Active participation dichotomy:** The slow increase in female representation in Parliament contrasts with the sharp rise in women's voting participation in elections and other political activities.
- **Average representation of women worldwide:** As of May 2022, 26.2% of women were represented in national parliaments worldwide.
- **Above average representation:** The Americas, Europe, and Sub-Saharan Africa have women's representation above the global average;
- **Below average representation:** Asia, the Pacific region, and the Middle East and Northern Africa (MENA) region, are below average.

#### **Varied representation within Asian countries:**

- The South Asian nations are performing worse than the others. According to IPU data from May 2022, women made up 34% of the population in Nepal, 21% in Bangladesh, 20% in Pakistan, 17% in Bhutan, and 5% in Sri Lanka.
- Afghanistan is not included in the study, but according to World Bank data from 2021, women made up 27% of the country's last parliament.
- In India, women's representation in the Lok Sabha (the Lower House) has stayed just below 15%.



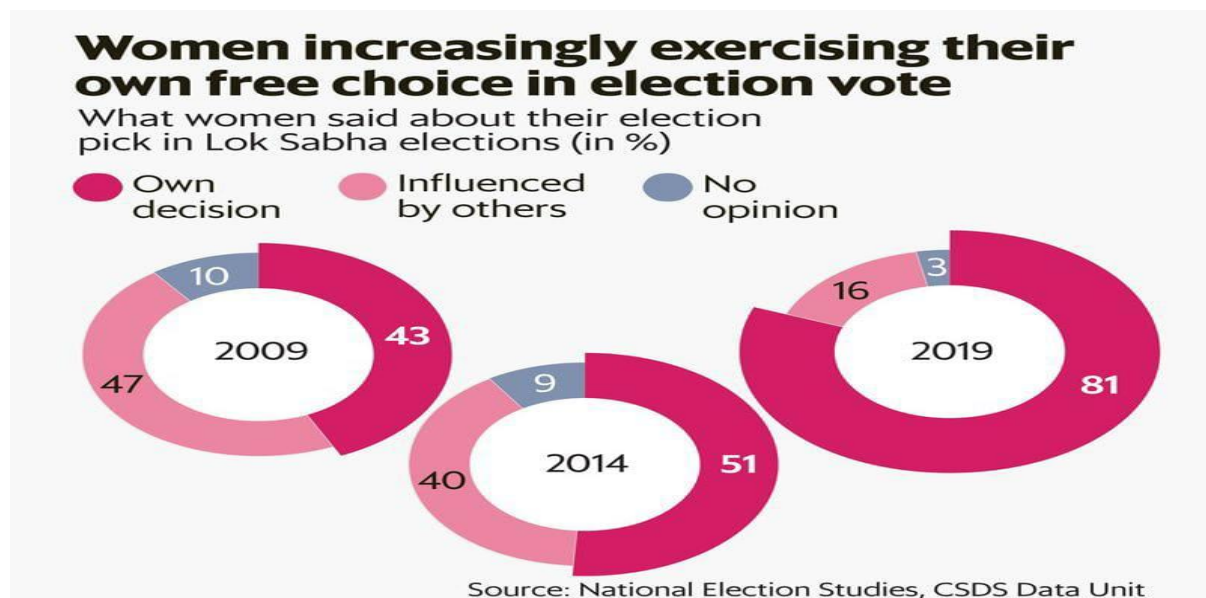
#### **Journey of Women's Political Participation in India**

- **Prior to independence:** patriarchal social structures and attitudes framed India's history of women's marginalization and exploitation.

- **Initiation of social reforms and involvement in the freedom struggle:** Women played a significant role in the Indian freedom movement, which began with the Swadeshi in Bengal (1905-08). They organized political protests, raised funds, and held leadership roles in these movements.
- **Post-Independence:** India's Constitution ensured equal status for men and women in all political, social, and economic domains following the country's independence.

### Equality guaranteed by The Constitution:

- The Constitution's Part III protects both men's and women's fundamental rights.
- By guaranteeing maternity leave, humane working conditions, and equal compensation for equal labor performed by men and women, the Directive Principles of State Policy promote economic empowerment.
- Any Indian citizen who is over 25 and registered to vote may run for office in the state legislative assemblies or the lower house of Parliament (Lok Sabha); the minimum age requirement for the upper house (Rajya Sabha) is 30.
- The Constitution's Articles 325 and 326 protect the right to vote and political equality.
- **Reservation for women in local bodies:** In 1992, the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendments to the Constitution provided for reservation of one-third of the total number of seats for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and municipal bodies.



### Three main parameters to assess women's participation in politics in India

1. **Women as Voters:** In the last Lok Sabha election of 2019, almost as many women voted as men a watershed in India's progress towards gender equality in politics which has been called a "silent revolution of self-empowerment". The increased participation, especially since the 1990s, is attributed to a number of factors.



2. **Women as Candidates:** Overall, however, while women candidates in parliamentary elections have increased over time their proportion compared to male candidates remains low. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, of the total of 8,049 candidates in the fray, less than 9 percent were women.
3. **Women's Representation in Parliament:** Although women's participation as voters in elections has increased significantly, the data on women's representation in both the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha suggests that the proportion of women representatives has remained low in comparison to their male counterparts.

### Analysis

Gender equality and democratic representation are predicated on women's political engagement. Women are still underrepresented in political institutions despite advancements made worldwide, and obstacles such as societal norms, structural difficulties, and restricted access to resources prevent them from participating. Nonetheless, international movements, legislative changes, and the growing acceptance of female political leaders have all contributed to significant advancements in recent years. In India, there are 74 female Members of Parliament (MPs) in the 18th Lok Sabha. This amounts to 13.6% of the Lok Sabha's 543 seats.

### Women's Participation in Politics

The term "women's political participation" describes their engagement in leadership roles, policymaking, and election procedures. Voting, running for office, holding public office, and participating in decision-making at all governmental levels are all included. Achieving gender equality requires women's political empowerment because it provides them with a voice in matters such as gender-based violence, healthcare, and education. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) reports that women held 26.9% of parliamentary seats worldwide in 2023, indicating a steady rise over previous decades. Significant regional differences still exist, though, with the Middle East having only 17% of women lawmakers and the Nordic region leading with about 44%. With Rwanda leading the pack at 61.3%, 28 nations reached or exceeded 40% female representation in their single or lower houses of parliament in 2023.

### Status of Women's Participation in Politics in India

Women's representation in politics has increased gradually but slowly in India, the largest democracy in the world. In India, women's voting rights were restricted during British rule. All Indian women, however, were granted the right to vote and to participate after the Indian Constitution was passed, and their participation has since changed, despite major obstacles.

- **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:** There has also been a notable increase in the number of women running for office. There were only forty-five women running for the



Lok Sabha in 1957. This number skyrocketed to 797 during the 18th Lok Sabha elections in 2024, indicating that women are becoming more willing and able to run for office.

- **Women Elected to Legislative Bodies:** The representation of women in legislatures has steadily increased. In 1951, there were 22 (5%) women in the Lok Sabha; by 2024, that number had risen to 74 (13.6%). Likewise, the percentage of women in the Rajya Sabha increased from 7% in 1952 to 13% in 2023.
- Women occupy a larger proportion of seats at the local level. With 1,375,914 female representatives overall, women made up 44% of representatives in local self-government organizations in 2022.
- **Recent Developments:** In September 2023, the Women's Reservation Bill was approved, allocating 33% of seats in state assemblies and the Lok Sabha to women. Following the subsequent census and delineation process, implementation is anticipated.
- **International Comparison:** India continues to rank poorly in the world for women's political representation. According to the IPU, India was ranked 143rd out of 185 countries in terms of the representation of women in parliament prior to the 18th Lok Sabha elections. With the slight decrease in women MPs in the 18th Lok Sabha, this ranking is likely to fall further.

### **Women in Politics Need**

The foundation of contemporary constitutional democracy is the idea that all populations should have equal access to political representation. The Beijing Declaration (1995) emphasized that attaining inclusion, development, and harmony requires women's empowerment and full participation, founded on equality in all spheres of culture, including participation in authority and decision-making processes.

- **Gender Equality:** SDG 5 aims to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" and guarantee "women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life." Women's political engagement is essential to achieving this goal.
- **Addressing Women-Specific Issues:** Female politicians frequently support causes such as laws against domestic abuse, maternal healthcare, reproductive rights, and girls' education, making sure these issues receive the legislative attention they merit.
- **Social Benefits:** Economies typically gain when women have political clout. A McKinsey Global Institute report estimates that by 2025, reducing gender disparities in political leadership and other occupations could boost global GDP by \$28 trillion.
- **Economic Growth:** Corruption is typically lower in nations with greater representation of women and higher economic growth.

### **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:**

The Constitution's Articles 325 and 326, which ensure universal adult suffrage and prohibit sex-based exclusion from the voter list, guarantee women's political equality and the ability to vote. • The Constitution's Articles 84 and 173 guarantee that any Indian citizen who is registered to vote may run for office in the Parliament or state legislatures.

**Reservations in Representation:**

- One-third (33%) of the seats in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and urban local bodies are reserved for women, according to the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution. Women's Reservation Act 2023, the 106th Amendment to the Constitution, requires 33% of seats in the Lok Sabha, State Assemblies, and Delhi Legislative Assembly to be reserved for women. It will be put into effect following the next census and delimitation process, but it was passed in September 2023 with the intention of increasing women's political representation. International Commitments: India supports women's participation in public life by supporting the Beijing Declaration on gender equality and is a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).
- **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).

**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 Representation in Politics

A record 40% of women were represented in the House of Commons in the United Kingdom's recently concluded general elections, underscoring the notable advancements other nations have made in increasing women's political participation. On the other hand, India's female parliamentary representation is still far less than the 25% global average.

## Country wise data on women representation\*

Women representation in parliament varies across different democracies



**Moving forward:** Trinamool Congress MPs take selfies at the Parliament House complex during the first session of the 18th Lok Sabha, on June 25. PTI

Country	% of elected women	Quota in Parliament	Quota in political parties
Sweden	46%	No	Yes
South Africa	45%	No	Yes
Australia	38%	No	Yes
France	38%	No	Yes
Germany	35%	No	Yes
U.K.	40%	No	Yes
U.S.	29%	No	No
Pakistan	16%	Yes	No
Bangladesh	20%	Yes	No

\*(as of September 2023) |

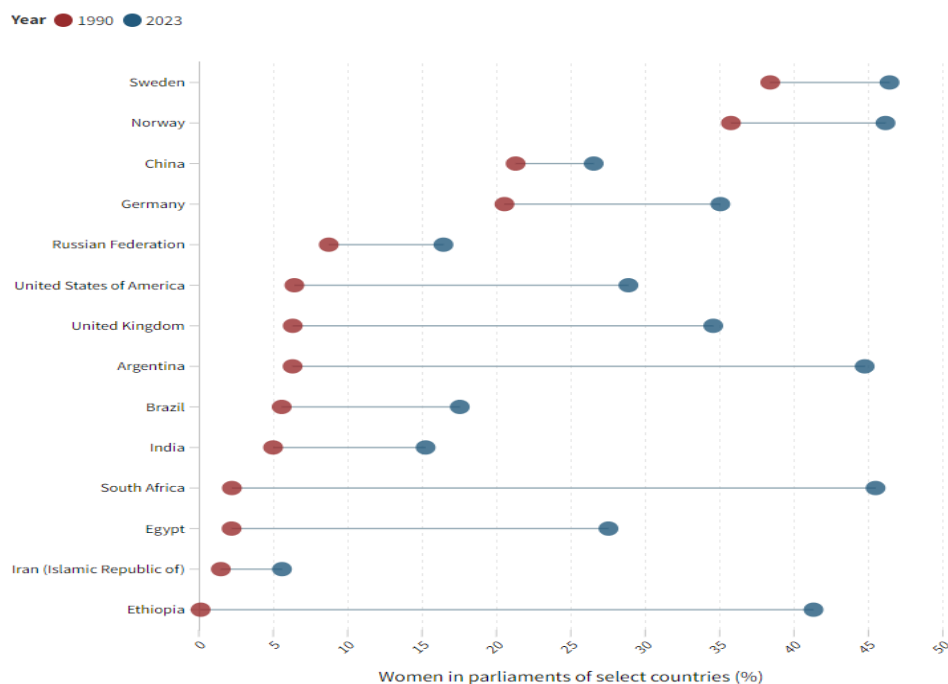
### What is the Status of Women's Representation in Indian Parliament?

- Women's Representation in Parliament: In the Lok Sabha, the percentage of women members has risen from 5-10% until 2004 to 13.6% in the current 18th Lok Sabha, while in the Rajya Sabha, it is 13%.



- Also, the number of women contesting elections has shown a gradual increase over the past 15 years.
- In 1957, just 45 women candidates were contesting the Lok Sabha election; in 2024 there were 799 (9.5% of the total candidates contested).
- West Bengal leads in electing the most women MPs, with 11 representatives. The Trinamool Congress has the highest proportion of women among its Lok Sabha MPs, at 38% in the 18th Lok Sabha.
- This is far below the global average of around 25%.

- Women's Representation in State Legislatures: The national average of women's representation in State Legislative Assemblies stands at a mere 9%, with no state having more than 20% women legislators.
- Even Chhattisgarh, the state with the highest representation, has only 18% women MLAs.
- Global Scenario: India ranks 143 out of 185 countries in terms of women's representation in the lower house of Parliament.
- Sweden has 46% female MPs, South Africa (45%), the UK (40%) and the US (29%). India lags behind countries like Vietnam, the Philippines, Pakistan, and China in gender representation.



### What are the Reasons for the Underrepresentation of Women in Politics?

- Sociocultural Barriers: Women's political participation is restricted by gender stereotypes and patriarchal norms. These obstacles are exacerbated by household duties, a lack of family support, and differences in economic empowerment and education, particularly in rural areas.
- Political Party Dynamics: Women are frequently relegated to "safe" or "unwinnable" seats by male-dominated parties because they are reluctant to run for office. Women's candidacy is further hampered by the absence of internal quotas or affirmative action guidelines.
- Challenges in the Election System: Established male candidates with substantial organizational and financial support are given preference under the first-past-the-post system. Women are further disadvantaged by the high expense of elections, the pervasiveness of criminalization, and the influence of money in politics.

- Institutional and Legal Barriers: Women's access to politics has been restricted by the postponed implementation of the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments, which call for a one-third reservation for women in local bodies.
- The repeated failure to pass the Women's Reservation Bill, which proposed 33% reservation for women in Parliament and state legislatures, is another major institutional barrier.
- Lack of Political Will: Insufficient prioritisation of women's political empowerment by major parties and lack of sustained pressure from women's movements and civil society perpetuate the status quo.

### **What are the Arguments in Favour of Women's Reservation in Indian Parliament?**

**Increasing Women's Political Representation:** At the moment, women make up a much smaller percentage of Parliament than the global average of about 25%. This disparity would be lessened and more equal representation of women in the Indian Parliament would be guaranteed with a 33% reservation. **Encouraging Gender Equality and Inclusive Governance:** Patriarchal norms, a lack of resources, and gender-based violence are just a few of the sociocultural, political, and economic obstacles that Indian women must overcome in order to participate in politics. They are also underrepresented in political decision-making, despite making up almost 50% of India's population. Increasing their representation would help address the particular difficulties faced by women and result in more gender-sensitive policies. **Increasing Democratic Participation:** Women's active involvement in politics would be strengthened if one-third of seats were set aside for them, enhance inclusive democracy and implement more policies that are focused on women and children and will contribute to human development. For example, women representatives have been instrumental in eliminating child marriage, promoting maternal health, and guaranteeing access to potable water in numerous villages.

### **What Measures Have Been Taken to Address the Underrepresentation of Women in Indian Politics?**

- **Constitutional Amendments:**
- Women's participation in local governance was increased by the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments (1992/1993), which reserved a third of seats for them in Panchayats and Municipalities. Although its implementation is pending the next delimitation process, the 106th Constitutional Amendment (2023) proposes a one-third reservation of seats for women in the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies. Following the start of the 106th Amendment Act, which includes a delimitation exercise, the reservation will be put into effect following the first census.
- **The Women's Reservation Bill:**

When the bill was first introduced in 1996, it called for a 33% reservation for women in state legislative assemblies and the Lok Sabha. The lack of political agreement among the major parties has prevented the bill from being passed despite multiple attempts.



- **Voluntary Party Quotas: Several political parties in India have female representation in their candidates for elections.**

The Naam Tamilar Katchi is notable for having 50% female candidates, followed by the Nationalist Congress Party with 40% and the Lok Janshakti Party with 40%. The percentage of women in Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, Biju Janata Dal, and Rashtriya Janata Dal was 33%, 33%, and 29%, respectively. In contrast, the All India Trinamool Congress had 25% of its candidates be women, and the Samajwadi Party had 20%.

- **Empowerment Schemes and Programs:**

Initiatives like the Mahila Shakti Kendra, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, and STEP have aimed to improve women's socio-economic status, but have had limited direct impact on enhancing their political participation.

- **Civil Society and Women's Movements:**

There has been sustained advocacy by women's rights groups, activists, and organisations for greater political representation.

## Conclusion

Despite making up half of the global population, women are the most marginalized group in practically every way. Women live as an oppressed class and are neglected in the home, community, and society. They have historically had the lowest socioeconomic standing and been subjected to severe forms of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse. They have suffered from gender-based violence, and the patriarchal nature of society has made their suffering even worse. Slow progress has been made in creating opportunities for women in Indian parliamentary politics. To change the conversation about governance and policy-making and move India closer to becoming a fully inclusive and representative democracy, more women must be present in these positions.

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