

## A study on imbalanced participation of women: A special reference to Lok Sabha election 2014

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### Abstract

The marginalization of women in electoral politics is deeply embedded in the party system and the imbalanced gender power relations in the main political dispensations in India. They continue to be discriminated against not only in terms of seat allotments to contest elections but also within the rank and file of major political parties.

The reasons for women being on the fringes are varied but the focal factor that excludes them from the process is the patriarchal and male-dominant party competition structure that continues to exist in the Indian subcontinent. This not only dissuades females from electoral politics but also acts as a barrier in their quest to share political power.

It becomes imperative in this context to review the participation of women in the various stages of elections to find out why it continues to remain uneven and distorted even after six decades of independence.

**Keywords:** Lok Sabha Election, Women Participation, Politics

### Introduction

In contrast to the exclusionary policies followed by parties and the poor representation of women in legislative bodies both at the national and state levels, their participation as voters has seen a significant push in the late 1990s and reached an all-time high in the recent Lok Sabha election.

The political participation of women can be analyzed using a triangle model deconstructing their electoral interactions at three stages within the framework of general elections. At the top are women in the Lok Sabha. Their representation has increased from 22 seats in the 1952 election to 61 seats this

year, a phenomenal increase of 36 percentage points. However, gender disparity remains skewed as nine out of ten parliamentarians in the Lok Sabha are men<sup>[1]</sup>.

In 1952, women constituted 4.4 percent of Lok Sabha members, and now account for around 11 percent, but it is still below the world average of 20 percent. Both national and regional parties are following the policy of exclusion of women in allotting seats. The reason for not giving tickets to women candidates at the national and state level is based on the perception that they lack the factor.

**Table 1:** Representation of Women in Lok Sabha 1952-2014

Lok Sabha	Total no. of seats (Elections Held)	No. of Women Members who won	% of the Total
First (1952)	489	22	4.4
Second (1957)	494	27	5.4
Third (1962)	494	34	6.7
Fourth (1967)	523	31	5.9
Fifth (1971)	521	22	4.2
Sixth (1977)	544	19	3.4
Seventh (1980)	544	28	5.1
Eighth (1984)	544	44	8.1
Ninth (1989)	529	28	5.3
Tenth (1991)	509	36	7.0
Eleventh (1996)	541	40*	7.4
Twelfth (1998)	545	44*	8.0
Thirteenth (1999)	543	48*	8.8
Fourteenth (2004)	543	45*	8.1
Fifteenth (2009)	543	59	10.9
Sixteenth (2014)	543	61	11.2

### Research Study

An analysis of the success rate of women candidates as compared to men reveals that it has been higher in the last three general elections. In 2014, the success rate of women was 9 percent as compared to men at 6 percent.

The under-representation of women in the Lok Sabha, and from crucial decision-making positions such as in the

Cabinet, are pointers of their systematic exclusion from the political structure and the deeply embedded gender basis in Indian society. Though women head a significant number of national and state-level political parties, the overall representation of women within the rank and file of these parties is dismal.

Women who have made their presence felt in inner-party circles have also been relegated to the second rung of leadership and have failed to breach the glass ceiling. They rarely play any role in formulating policies and strategies in political parties and are at best assigned the job of keeping an eye on women's issues and mobilizing them if need be for electoral benefits for their parties.

**Table 2:** Seats allotted to women by national parties in general elections

National Parties	2004		2009		2014	
	Contested	Won	Contested	Won	Contested	Won
All India	355	45	556	59	668	61
Congress	45	12	43	23	57	4
BJP	30	10	44	13	37	28
Others	280	23	469	23	574	29

Source: Election Commission of India

Though, women continue to be under-represented in legislative bodies and relegated to the fringes in party cadres, their participation as voters has taken a quantum leap. The participatory upsurge witnessed among women as voters in the 1990s reached its peak in the general election held in 2014. [2]

Their participation in the electoral process as voters has steadily increased from 46.6 percent in 1962 to around 65.7 percent this year. The difference in voter turnout among men and women, as wide as 16.7 percent in 1962, has narrowed to 1.5 percent in 2014.

The reservation of 33 percent seats for women in panchayati raj institutions in the 1990s gave women a sense of sharing power with men equally. It acted as a catalyst and provided much-needed momentum, which resulted in the upsurge of women voters.

### Significance of the Study

The highest voter turnout among women in this election could be due to many reasons but the intense voter awareness campaigns of the Election Commission and door-to-door campaigns by political parties are the most plausible determinants to explain this phenomenon.

The analysis of the pattern of women's voting reveals that they have never voted en bloc like Dalits and Muslims in any election. It also shows that there has never been a concerted effort by political parties in mobilizing them. A quick scan of the manifestos of major political parties in the last few general elections shows that gender issues figured prominently.

But manifesto promises on women's issues are cliched and are conveniently forgotten afterwards. The failure in passing the women's reservation bill in parliament is a clear testimony of the lack of seriousness and will of political parties in addressing women's issues [3].

### Conclusion

To conclude, the only silver lining in the dark clouds hovering over women's participation in formal politics has been the marked increase in voting turnout among women. The women's movement and gender politics in India is

currently divided over the question of affirmative action for women in parliament and state legislatures.

It revolves around two main issues: first, the issue of overlapping quotas for women in the general category and for those in backward caste communities and second, the issue of elitism. Thus, affirmative action for women in legislative bodies is the need of the hour as it would go a long way in removing obstacles that inhibit their participation. It would bridge the wide men-women gap in the electoral set-up and pave the way for gender-inclusive electoral politics [4].

Political parties such as the Samajwadi Party and the Rashtriya Janata Dal that played a destructive role in scuttling the women's reservation bill in the last Lok Sabha have been marginalized in this election. We hope the new government will build an all-party consensus and make an honest effort to pass the bill.

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