

## Political Representation of Women in India

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#### ABSTRACT:

Women's participation in politics is a substance for democratic representation and gender equality. Regardless of global progress, women remain underrepresented in political institutions, and barriers like social norms, systemic challenges, and limited access to resources hamper their participation. Despite constitutional guarantees of equality and significant women's participation at the grassroots level, representation in higher legislative bodies the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies remains persistently low. This article investigates the status and dynamics of political representation of women in India, a crucial metric for evaluating the health and inclusivity of the world's largest democracy. The study employs a qualitative and quantitative review to map the historical trajectory of women's entry into politics, analyze the effect of assigned reservations at the local level (73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments), and critically examine the complex socio-cultural and institutional challenges that impede equitable representation. Findings highlight a striking disparity between local and national representation and underscore the urgent need for systemic reforms, including the implementation of the Women's Reservation Bill, to ensure a truly representative and gender-just political landscape.

#### KEYWORDS:

Woman, Representation, Equality, Legislative Assembly, Panchayat Raj.

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#### Introduction

Adequate political representation of women is fundamental to achieving a healthy, justifiable, and truthfully representative democracy. It ensures that diverse societal needs, particularly those of women, are integrated into policy-making. India, a parliamentary democracy with universal adult suffrage since its independence, has historically seen pioneering women leaders like first woman Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, Sarojini Naidu, Sushma Swaraj, Sheela Diks hit, Jayalalita, Prabhadevi Patil, Droupadi Murmu etc. However, the overall ratio of women in its legislative bodies has remained considerably low, contrasting sharply with the demographic reality where women constitute nearly half of the electorate and often exhibit comparable or even higher, and voters than men. This article seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of the multi-layered

issue of women's political representation in India, moving beyond mere statistics to explore the structural and societal reinforcements of this insistent gender gap.

### **Objectives**

- To analyze the historical trends and current status of women's representation in India's legislative bodies
- To identify the socio-cultural barriers that challenge and impede women's entry into and success in higher-level politics.
- To discuss potential legislative and institutional mechanisms, such as the Women's Reservation Bill (Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023), necessary for advancing gender parity in political decision-making.

### **Methodology**

This research employs a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative Analysis – Statistical data is used to track the percentage of women Members of Parliament (MPs) in the Lok Sabha (from the First Lok Sabha to the current one) and women Members of Legislative Assemblies (MLAs) across states.

Qualitative Analysis– A critical review of scholarly articles, institutional reports, and policy documents is conducted to understand the qualitative aspects: the functioning of Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) at the local level, the nature of barriers, and the political will surrounding gender-quota legislation. The study adopts an intersectional feminist perspective to frame the analysis of caste, class, and gender dynamics in political participation.

### **Women in National Parliaments of Different Countries**

Political representation of woman in the world is also low. According to UN report (September 2025) in World only 27.2 per cent of parliamentarians in single or lower houses are women, up from 11 per cent in 1995. Only six countries have 50 per cent or more women in parliament in single or lower houses: Rwanda (64 per cent), Cuba (56 per cent), Nicaragua (55 per cent), Andorra (50 per cent), Mexico (50 per cent), and the United Arab Emirates (50 per cent). A further 21 countries have reached or surpassed 40 per cent, including nine countries in Europe, six in Latin America and the Caribbean, five in Africa, and one in Asia-Pa-

cific. Globally, there are 21 States in which women account for less than 10 per cent of parliamentarians in single or lower houses, including three lower chambers with no women at all. At the current rate of progress, gender parity in national legislative bodies will not be achieved before 2063.

### Women's Representation in Parliament and State Assemblies

The total number of women contesting general elections in the country has increased from 3% in 1957 to 10% in 2024. The total number of elected women members, which was 22 in the First Lok Sabha and 27 in the Second Lok Sabha has increased to 78 in the 17th Lok Sabha and to 75 in the 18th Lok Sabha which is approximately 14% of the total members. In the Rajya Sabha also, the total number of women members in 1952 was 15, which is 42 at present. It is approximately 17% of the total members. (Ministry of Women and Child Development). Despite a steady, though slow, increase, women's representation in the Indian Parliament remains significantly below the global average (which is approximately 27% in 2024).

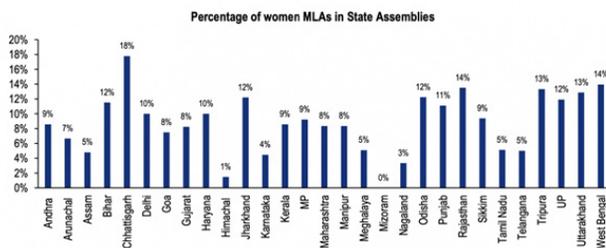
S No	Year	Number of women MPs	Percentage of Women MPs
1	1951	22	4.50%
2	1957	22	4.45%
3	1962	31	6.28%
4	1967	29	5.58%
5	1971	28	5.41%
6	1977	19	3.51%
7	1980	28	5.29%
8	1984	43	7.95%
9	1989	29	5.48%
10	1991	39	7.30%
11	1996	40	7.37%
12	1981	43	7.92%
13	1999	49	9.02%
14	2004	45	8.29%
15	2009	59	10.87%

16	2014	66	12.15%
17	2019	78	14.36%
18	2024	75	14%

### Source Election Commission of India

**State Legislative Assemblies:** The average representation of women in State Assemblies is generally worse, typically standing at around 9–10%, with very few states crossing the 15% mark. This low representation highlights a significant democratic scarcity and places India in a low rank globally for women in national legislatures.

9% of MLAs are women



Note: This does not include data for Puducherry and Sikkim.  
Sources: Websites of State Assemblies; PRS.

**Source:** <https://thewire.in/government/in-charts-what-womens-representation-in-indias-parliament-assemblies-looks-like-now>

### The Grassroots Revolution: 73rd and 74th Amendments

A dramatic change has occurred at the local level due to the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments (1992). These amendments mandated the reservation of not less than one-third (33%) of seats and chairperson positions for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (rural local bodies) and Municipalities (urban local bodies). This is often cited as the world's largest exercise in democratic decentralization and gender parity. The country has about 14.5 lakh Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), which is about 46% of the total elected representatives, unparalleled in the world. There are 21 States in the country who have made provision for 50% reservation for women in PRIs. Studies indicate that EWRs have led to improved provision of public goods (e.g., drinking water, sanitation) that align with women's priorities. They have also gained political experience and challenged traditional pa-

triarchal norms, often acting as a “nursery” for future political leaders. Despite the numbers, EWRs often face the phenomenon of “Sarpanch-Pati” (the proxy rule by the husband or male relative), lack of training, limited access to resources, and resistance from male counterparts and bureaucracy.

### **Challenges to Representation of women in Centre and State Level Politics:**

**Socio-Cultural Barriers:** Deeply rooted patriarchal norms view politics as a male dominion. Women face the twin load of domestic responsibilities and political work, as well as stereotypes questioning their competence and leadership capabilities.

**Political Parties:** Parties, which are the gatekeepers to power, are largely male-dominated and often exhibit a lack of political will to nominate a sufficient number of women candidates in winnable seats.

**Winnability Argument:** Male candidates are often preferred based on perceived winnability, which is often a self-fulfilling prophecy rooted in established male networks and financial muscle.

**Finances and Networks:** Political campaigning is increasingly monetized, and women often lack access to the necessary financial resources and the established, male-centric political networks required to contest and win elections.

**Political Violence and Harassment:** Women face higher risks of character assassination, public scrutiny, and political violence, which acts as a strong disincentive for entry.

### **Measures to Enhance Women Participation In Politics:**

The way forward for women in politics involves legally mandating political parties to allocate one-third of tickets to women, empowering women’s organizations, 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 Organizations:** Women’s organizations 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 sensitization 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.

The Women's Reservation Bill (Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023): This landmark bill, passed by Parliament, seeks to reserve 33% of seats for women in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies. The implementation is contingent upon the completion of the next Census and subsequent allocation, suggesting a delay of several years. Its eventual implementation is expected to be a transformative moment, forcing political parties to change their candidate selection processes and rapidly changing the gender composition of India's top decision-making bodies.

## **Conclusion**

The political representation of women in India presents a paradox: unprecedented success at the grassroots level coexisting with persistent underrepresentation at the national and state levels. The 73rd and 74th Amendments have proven that mandated political quotas are a powerful tool for structural change, successfully mobilizing millions of women into governance. However, the move to higher echelons of power is thwarted by deeply ingrained patriarchal systems within society and political institutions. The passing of the Women's Reservation Bill is a crucial step toward rectifying this historical injustice, but its deferred implementation means that for the immediate future, the challenge of achieving gender parity in India's top legislatures will continue. Ultimately, the future of India's democracy hinges on its ability to move from symbolic gestures to

substantive representation, ensuring that its legislative bodies fully reflect the talent and diversity of its female population.

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