

## WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN KARNATAKA STATE POLITICS: SOCIAL ATTITUDES, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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### ABSTRACT:

This study examines the behavior of society towards women representatives in Karnataka state politics, focusing on their positions in political leadership and participation in the legislative process. Existing studies highlight that women's issues are rarely prioritized, and societal attitudes often shape the extent of women's political representation. This paper explores the dynamics of social perceptions of women's leadership, analyzing both the challenges and opportunities faced by women in politics. It identifies notable obstacles to progress in increasing women's representation and argues that societal support plays a crucial role in promoting women's leadership within the Karnataka Legislative Assembly. Furthermore, the study investigates the role of political parties in selecting and supporting capable women leaders. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research draws on secondary sources to conduct a quantitative analysis of election data and qualitative insights from women politicians in Karnataka. The article ultimately evaluates the impact of women's political leadership and representation on women's empowerment and development in the state, with a specific focus on the Karnataka Legislative Assembly.

### KEYWORDS:

Society, Social Behavior, Women in Politics, Political Leadership, Participation.

### Introduction:

In the current era, it can be seen that women have been advancing educationally, politically, and economically, but when compared to men, it shows a lot of differences. In general, women are subjected to gender discrimination, women trafficking, forced labor, inequality, domestic exploitation, sexual abuse, discrimination in wages, an increase in inhuman cases against women, rifts in relationships, and psychological violence.

After independence, the forming of the Indian Constitution was

held during the period of 1947–1950. In 1950, the Constitution contained a 4-type classification of the states, like Part A – 9, Part B – 9, Part C has 10, and Part D has only 1 state. In these parts, Mysore state was in Part B. Karnataka was known as Mysore state in 1952. The first election of Mysore state was held on 27 March 1952. After the States Reorganization Act of 1956, the Mysore state was renamed Karnataka on 1 November 1956. The Mysore Representative Assembly was established in 1881 by Maharaja Chamaraja Wodeyar. The history of Karnataka politics is most important from 1952 to 2023. When we analyze the statistics of women’s participation in the legislative assembly, it is very low and shows a patriarchal system in Indian states. Karnataka state is also no exception for the lesser number of women in leadership in the legislature.

The Constitution provides that we cannot discriminate against any men and women, and also ensures freedom, equality, and justice. But normally, when we look at history, women have faced so much struggle to get social, economic, and political rights. The politics of Karnataka state reflect that women’s participation is only being a voter, not a leader. There is not much visible women’s strength in politics, and women’s political empowerment progress is disappearing in the politics of Karnataka. Because even till today, only a few women have had the opportunity to become cabinet ministers in Karnataka state. Although 16 Karnataka Assembly elections have been held, only a few women leaders have been elected as MLAs and served in some portfolios in the Karnataka state cabinet. It is ironic that not a single woman has served as the Chief Minister, Home Minister, Finance Minister, Higher Education Minister, or Leader of the Opposition Party in Karnataka. This is a sign of the inequality of women in state politics. Either women are not capable of handling these portfolios, or the male-dominated society is exercising power over women’s rights. It seems that women are confined to handling only the Women and Child Development, and Kannada and Culture departments, where the majority of them have worked. Even in a recent era like 2024, out of 33 portfolios, the fact is that a lone woman is serving as the Women and Child Development, Disabled and Senior Citizens Empowerment minister in the state cabinet. It shows the weakness of women’s political leadership and participation in Karnataka.

In Karnataka State, some women leaders have distinguished themselves by confronting caste and gender discrimination in state politics

with their abilities and leadership qualities. Among those who have actively participated in politics, B. L. Subbamma, Yashodhara Dasappa, Bellary Siddamma, Champabai Bhogale, K. S. Nagaratnamma, Mottamma, Leeladevi R. Prasad, Shashikala Jolle, Umashree, Anjali Nimbalkar, Kanija Fatima, Rupakala M., Lakshmi Hebbalkar, and Rupali Naik are prominent among those who have worked in state politics as MLAs.

**Literature Review:** The reviewed literature offers a historical background of women's representation in Karnataka state, particularly regarding the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments. But the focus on the impact of women representatives in the decision-making process highlights many hurdles. Regarding the issues and challenges faced, this literature is restricted in its areas and provides merely a descriptive and critical analysis of women's positions and the dynamics of social perceptions of women's leadership. (Dr. Shakila Hegde and others, 2024; Kundan Kumar, 2020)

#### **Objectives of the Study:**

1. To study the condition of women representative leaders in state politics, Karnataka.
2. To evaluate the challenges of women leaders in Karnataka politics.

**Theoretical Framework:** The theory of representation and leadership emphasizes that everyone has their own abilities and, according to that, they find their identity in society through their qualities. The theory focuses on the opportunity to participate in state politics and gain representation. But some prejudiced ideological norms do not allow women leaders to have the right to be represented in the political system, even if they are qualified to govern effectively. Participation in policy decision-making processes is seen to be passive. Women are actively participating in the process of electing their leaders as voters. It is seen that they are failing to find their identity alone by holding the power under some male leaders.

#### **Women in Karnataka Politics:**

Women are facing significant challenges in Karnataka state politics, such as illiteracy and the absence of availability of well-developed education systems for women's leadership. Proxy representation, where women are elected and power is "controlled" by male family members, is particularly prevalent in Local Self-Governments. Financial constraints:

many women are financially dependent on their families. Fighting elections can be costly, and massive financial resources are required. Women do not receive appropriate financial backing from political parties. Patriarchal norms: male predominance in political institutions is responsible for the lesser participation of women in politics. Patriarchal norms and deep-rooted societal beliefs often restrict women from participating in public life. Sexual violence: 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. Multiple responsibilities at work and at home: due to family responsibilities and lack of support, many women are not entering politics. And finally, gender discrimination.

### Methodology:

This study uses a mixed-methods approach, drawing on secondary sources, to conduct a quantitative analysis of election data and qualitative insights from women politicians in Karnataka. Data is taken from the General Election Reports (1952–2023) for the Legislative Assembly of Karnataka. A descriptive method is used for this study.

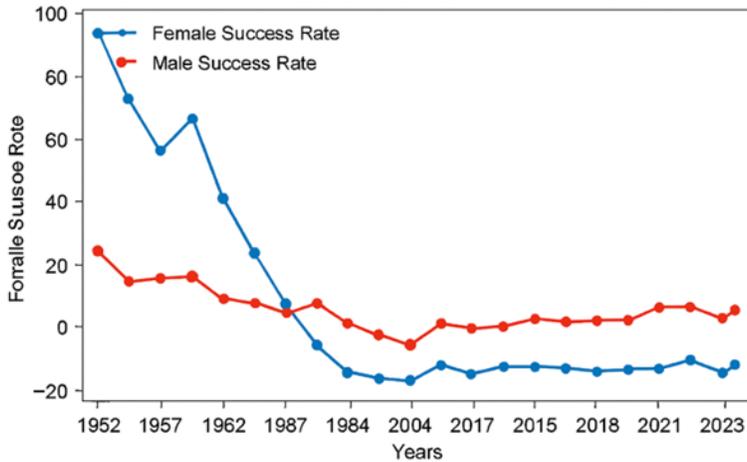
### Data Interpretation:

Sl No	Year of the legislative Assembly	Elections Contested Female candidates	Elected Female candidates	Female Success Rate	Elections Contested male candidates	Elected male candidates	Male Success Rate
1	27/03/1952	03	03	100%	174	77	44.3%
2	25/02/1957	24	17	70.8%	565	162	28.7%
3	19/02/1962	30	18	60.0%	649	190	29.3%
4	21/02/1967	09	05	55.6%	718	211	29.4%
5	05/03/1972	28	00	0%	772	28	3.6%
6	25/02/1978	34	08	23.5%	1125	216	19.2%
7	01/05/1983	38	01	2.6%	1327	223	16.8%
8	03/05/1985	108	08	7.4%	00	216	Data anomaly
9	24/11/1989	78	10	12.8%	1964	214	10.9%

10	26/11/1994	117	07	6.0%	0	217	Data anomaly
11	05/09/1999	62	06	9.7%	1279	218	17.0%
12	20/04/2004	101	06	5.9%	1614	218	17.0%
13	22/05/2008	107	03	2.8%	2135	221	13.5%
14	05/05/2013	175	06	3.4%	2772	218	10.4%
15	12/05/2018	219	07	3.2%	2417	217	7.9%
16	10/05/2023	185	10	5.4%	2429	214	9.0%

(Sources: Statistical Report On General Election, 1951 – 1972 To The Legislative Assembly Of Mysore, 1978–2023 Karnataka Election Commission Of India, New Delhi)

Success Rate of Candidates in Legislative Assembly Elections



(Sources: Statistical Report On General Election, 1951 – 1972 To The Legislative Assembly Of Mysore, 1978–2023 Karnataka Election Commission Of India, New Delhi)

In the 1950s–60s, women had higher chances of winning when they contested. From the 1970s onward, women’s chances fell sharply, even as participation rose. Today, women are contesting in large numbers but remain underrepresented in actual seats. This table highlights the persistent gender imbalance in political representation, and participation is improving, but success remains disproportionately low for women. Early Elections (1952–1967): Women had remarkably high success rates (100% in 1952, 70.8% in 1957, 60% in 1962, 55.6% in 1967). In fact, women were more successful than men in these years, despite being very few in number.

This suggests that early female candidates were often strong, well-supported, or strategically chosen. Sharp Decline (1972–1983): Women’s success rate dropped drastically. 0% in 1972 (none elected despite 28 contesting). Only 2.6% in 1983. Men also saw a dip (e.g., only 3.6% success in 1972), but their numbers ensured representation. This period reflects increasing competition and possibly structural barriers for women. Mid-1980s Anomalies (1985 & 1994): The above data shows male contested = 0 but elected = 216/217, which is inconsistent. Likely a recording error or missing data. Women’s success rate was still low (7.4% in 1985, 6% in 1994). 1990s–2000s time period: Women’s participation was high (62 in 1999, 101 in 2004, 107 in 2008). Success rates remained below 10%, while men hovered around 10–17%. This shows women were contesting more but not converting participation into seats. Recent Elections (2013–2023): Women contested in large numbers (175 in 2013, 219 in 2018, 185 in 2023). Success rates stayed very low (3–5%), compared to men’s 8–10%. Despite progress in participation, representation remains stagnant.

**Suggestions:**

- Mandatory pre-electoral training of women candidates.
- Community Political Reservation for (SC, ST, and OBC) actively providing chances to women representatives.
- National and regional political parties should encourage the political leadership of women.
- Conduct public seminars on various academic platforms to discuss and find solutions to the problems of women’s leadership in politics.
- The 50% Women’s Reservation Bill must be implemented effectively in the State Assembly in Karnataka.

**Conclusion:**

Today, it is very difficult for women leaders to enter politics. However, women have been progressing slightly due to the reservation system, though they have to face several problems, especially in recognizing their identity. Due to reservation, women are taking the helm of power at the local level. This is a positive thing. There was a desire to bring 33% women’s reservation at the national and state levels of politics (Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha). This reason also has a negative impact on women’s

political leadership. The main ambition of political parties is to gain power. But wherever a woman is given a ticket and put into the election fray, the parties are showing negligence towards women because of the fear of facing defeat. The fact is that women are staying away from the political field due to issues like family problems. Nowadays, women are working equally in all fields and participating in developmental thoughts, but this rate has not increased in politics. The social perspective regarding women must change when they enter as representatives in state elections in Karnataka.

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