

A discourse on Women's Reservation Bill

According to a recent Pew Research Center study, more than one in every two Indians feel "women and men make equally competent political leaders," and more than one in ten believe women make better political leaders than males.

If there is a wide acceptance of female participation and female leadership, why does our nation see scarce participation of women as political leaders? Politics has never been seen as a lucrative career option for the majority of the Indian population, more so in the medium and lower income class. Parents though have started supporting the dreams of their offspring, it's undisputed that Indian families refrain from supporting political endearment or sowing the seed of a political career in the young minds. Politics has been the Prime-time televised show on all dinner tables yet never been encouraged as a career option. The negative connotations attached with Politics pushes it further down the list of 'Career Possibilities' for girls. An Indian family would choose other streams and career options over politics unless there is a political relationship and background of some sort.

There is a need to market Politics as a lucrative career option to attract talent into this domain for better solution oriented approach and better performance. Thus making politics accessible to females and not limiting it to the few with family background or influence and power is the move forward.

Lately, there has been a buzz around the Women's Reservation Bill that mandates 33% reservation for female members in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha but does reserving the fraction in both houses solve all the related problems of female participation in national politics?

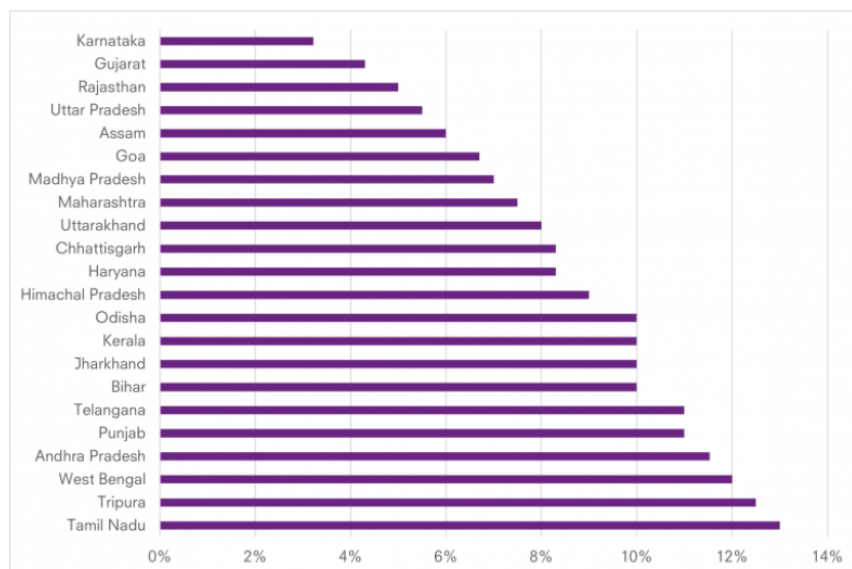
History of the Women's Reservation Bill

The Women's Reservation Bill, first tabled in the Lok Sabha in 1996 by the United Front administration led by Deve Gowda, intends to reserve one-third of seats in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies for women. The 73rd constitutional amendment, which was ratified in 1993, inspired this reservation bill. The constitutional amendment stipulated that a random one-third of village council leader, or Sarpanch, positions in the gram panchayat should be designated for women, despite the fact that it was at a lower level. The Deve Gowda government hoped to expand the women's reservation to the Lok Sabha and state legislatures by proposing the Women's Reservation Bill in the House. The law was reintroduced three times after that, in 1988, 1999, and 2008.

It was introduced in the Rajya Sabha in 2008, and after being scrutinized by the standing committee, the Upper House cleared it in 2010 and submitted it to the Lok Sabha. The measure was passed by the Rajya Sabha on March 9, 2010, after it was reintroduced, although it was still pending in the Lok Sabha. With the dissolution of those governments, all four bills lapsed.

Women make up 14.4% of the Indian parliament, with 78 out of 543 Lok Sabha members elected in 2019, the largest number ever. If the 33% reservation is passed in the Lok Sabha, the Lower House of Parliament will have at least 179 female MPs. There were 24 women in the first Lok Sabha, which was created in 1952; in the current Lok Sabha, there are 81 women, 48 of them are first-time Members of Parliament.

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment was enacted to increase the political representation of women at the local level. Since then, comprehensive study has been performed to examine the policy's impact, with the number of women elected as village sarpanches increasing significantly (Duflo 2005)¹. Furthermore, according to O'Connell's (2020)² empirical research, the mandate is to blame for a major portion of the increase of female candidates vying for state and national legislature seats since the mid-1990s. On the other hand, female representation in higher positions remains low.



Note: The graph excludes states with no female ministers.

³source- IGC (March 2021)

Women's representation at the state level has fallen far behind, with women being excluded from critical positions of institutional power and decision-making.

¹Esther Duflo, Why Political Reservations?, *Journal of the European Economic Association*, Volume 3, Issue 2-3, 1 May 2005, Pages 668–678, <https://doi.org/10.1162/jeea.2005.3.2-3.668>

² Stephen D. O'Connell; Can Quotas Increase the Supply of Candidates for Higher-Level Positions? Evidence from Local Government in India. *The Review of Economics and Statistics* 2020; 102 (1): 65–78. doi: https://doi.org/10.1162/rest_a_00802

³IGC. “Leaders and Citizens: Women’s Political Participation in India,” March 31, 2021. <https://www.theigc.org/blog/leaders-and-citizens-womens-political-participation-in-india/>.

How It Has Been

Despite the fact that most national political parties have backed the bill over the years, internal political resistance has prevented it from becoming an act. The Rajya Sabha enacted a constitutional amendment bill in 2010 that stated that the reservation would be phased down after 15 years. The measure needs to be voted by the Lok Sabha and ratified by half of the legislative assemblies in order to become law. However, due to a lack of political unity, it expired four years later. The Women's Reservation Bill has been featured in the election manifestos of political parties such as the Congress and the BJP, but scarce decisive has come of it.

How female leaders mostly get elected

Female candidates in India appear to vary from male candidates in a variety of areas. First, compared to male candidates, women who are considered as suitable candidates for office are more likely to come from political or rich backgrounds. At the local level, belonging to political families who are unable to serve due to a reserved seat is a common road to panchayat leadership for women. This pattern is also evident at the national level, where 42 percent of female MPs come from political families, compared to 15 percent of male candidates, even without reservations.

Second, female candidates are far more likely than male candidates to run in reserved seats rather than general seats. Women serve in higher proportions in SC/ST reserved seats than in general-candidate seats at the national level. Reservations for women at the panchayat level can unintentionally make it difficult for women to run for seats that have come to be perceived as seats for men.

The Dilemma and The Way Out

Sometimes it's extremely challenging for political parties to identify enough qualified female candidates to meet the 33 percent reservation criteria. For example, if we already have a provision to provide reserved representation to a community in certain constituencies, finding a female representative from that community in all such constituencies is difficult.. It increases the likelihood of electing a mediocre or uninterested candidate solely to comply with the provision. Instead, to address such possibilities, the electoral commission can direct political parties to reserve tickets for female MPs to their benefit. Consequently, political parties will have the discretion to allot tickets where they deem a female candidate appropriate for a particular constituency, thus, electing more female representatives to power: which also improves the likelihood of cooperation from political parties. Reservation in Student bodies of Political parties can also provide a major platform to female bodies to interact, experience and develop leadership skills. This will not only ensure increased female representation in future but also involvement of capable candidates in national politics while refuting. This will also be able to address the taboos associated with politics and association of women with politics at the grassroot level. Furthermore, all the

political parties must form a women's wing (mahila morcha) not only to increase female representation in politics but also to interact with the female population, to destigmatize the phenomenon of politics for women.

Positive Performance

Female members of local government, according to popular perception, are just a front for their male relatives. If this is the case, we should see no difference in policy decisions made by political leaders based on their gender, because they would be controlled by men regardless of whether or not women held reserved seats. However, a well-known study by **Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004)**⁴ refuted this assumption. Based on data collected from 265 village councils in West Bengal and Rajasthan, the researchers discovered that the reservation of a council seat affects the provision of public goods, with female leaders investing more on public goods valued by women (for example, drinking water).

Several other researches also suggest that female political leaders can be effective even in the domain of economic upliftment (**Bhalotra et al. (2018)**)⁵, but that experience is essential. Basic public services are more readily available in female-headed communities when the female head has worked for 3-3.5 years, according to a survey done in Maharashtra in 2008 (**Sathe et al. 2013**)⁶. As a result, in order to improve the success of affirmative action and women's political participation efforts, capacity-building and institutional assistance are required.

Barriers against Leadership and Political Participation

The lack of women in political leadership is mostly due to gender disparities in political engagement. While female voter turnout has recently equaled – and in some cases even surpassed the male voter turnout, women's political participation in non-electoral activities continues to lag. Women seldom participate in important political activities, such as campaigning and meeting with public officials.

Female candidates who decide to run for office face a steep uphill battle. On average, female candidates had less education and experience than male candidates. While the evidence is mixed, their local positions are frequently nominal, and many everyday functions are delegated to their spouses or another close male authority.

⁴ Chattopadhyay, Raghavendra, and Esther Duflo. "Women as Policy Makers: Evidence from a Randomized Policy Experiment in India." *Econometrica* 72, no. 5 (September 2004): 1409–43.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0262.2004.00539.x>.

⁵ IGC. "Female Politicians and Economic Growth: Evidence from State Elections in India." Accessed May 30, 2022.
<https://www.theigc.org/project/female-politicians-and-economic-growth-evidence-from-state-elections-in-india/>.

⁶ India, Ideas For. "Can the Female Sarpanch Deliver? Evidence from Maharashtra." Ideas For India. Accessed May 30, 2022. <http://www.ideasforindia.in/topics/governance/can-the-female-sarpanch-deliver-evidence-from-maharashtra.html>.

India has completed 73 years of being a republic, but we are still very far from reaching equal representation and making politics an aspirational career choice for young girls. As a country, we have made significant progress. Both men and women in India now vote in equal numbers, but we have a long way to go when it comes to women's political participation beyond voting. This includes campaigning for candidates, running for office, and holding political office.

Politics and Women

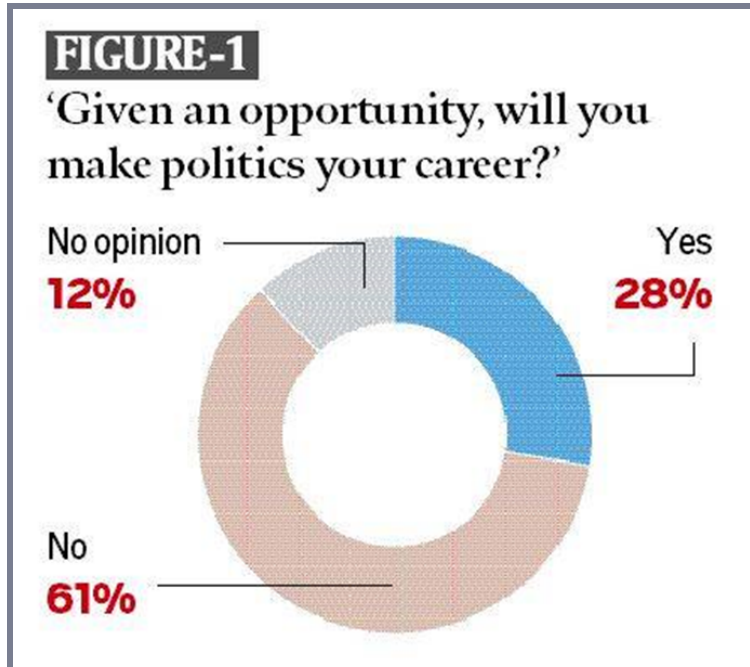
According to a research from Uttar Pradesh in 2019, women trail behind males in various aspects of political engagement, including understanding how political institutions work and confidence in their own leadership abilities. Women's participation in politics can be boosted through improving their knowledge, self-confidence, voice, and mobility. This must begin early in the lives of young girls in order for them to develop the ability to think critically and play a role in determining India's future.

Qrius (previously 'The Indian Economist') discovered that most schools and parents avoid talking to pupils about politics. Unfortunately, this forces young people to rely on unreliable sources and social media for their political information, leading to skepticism among our younger generation.

Qrius gathered data from over 400 children and young adults between the ages of 11 and 24 across 24 Indian states to better understand how young people, particularly young girls, see politics. It discovered that the primary terms to describe India's politics were 'corrupt,' 'confusing / difficult,' and 'filthy.'

Difference In Political Aspirations

Even while both male and female respondents claimed that they would vote (if they were eligible), there was a considerable disparity in their political objectives, according to the same organization. Only 19.7% of female respondents said they would be interested in getting engaged in politics in the future, whereas 32% of male respondents said they would. In comparison to their male counterparts, female respondents said they were less familiar with political processes and their local elected representatives. They were also less inclined to talk about politics with their friends and relatives.



Source-Lokniti-CSDS, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung)

Similar findings were explored by Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and Lokniti-CSDS who collaborated on a project and they discovered that only around a quarter of the women polled expressed interest in pursuing a career in politics if given the chance.

Making Politics Accessible for Young Girls

Young individuals who are more exposed to politics, such as through participation in democratic procedures at school or college or through personal acquaintances with politicians, are more likely to display interest in politics than those who are not.

Civil society organizations in the West are preparing the next generation of female voters by introducing them to their local political leaders and conducting political dialogues.

It is necessary to deconstruct the preconceptions and notions about young women and political power to make politics an aspirational career choice. Several civil society organizations in the West, such as Teach a Girl to Lead, are preparing the next generation of female voters who want to be political leaders by exposing them to their local political representatives and conducting political conversations. We also need to deconstruct politics for young girls, build positive narratives about politics by highlighting female politicians as role models, and provide opportunities for them to participate in democratic processes that will stir political ambition. Educators, civil

society, and philanthropy must work together as we prepare for state elections and a general election in the near future to create an enabling environment for young girls to participate in political processes.

33 % reservation in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha will ensure an increased female participation. However, If we do not have capable female candidates aiming for national politics, this move will not take us anywhere. We need to ensure that there are young and talented women who wish to engage with politics and pursue it to strengthen and increase female leadership positions in national politics. We also need to demystify the connotations attached with the term 'politics' and make politics easy to access and experience in some form.

REFERENCES

1. India, Ideas For. "Are Women Politicians Good for Economic Growth?" Ideas For India. Accessed May 30, 2022. <http://www.ideasforindia.in/topics/social-identity/are-women-politicians-good-for-economic-growth.html>.
2. India, Ideas For. "Can the Female Sarpanch Deliver? Evidence from Maharashtra." Ideas For India. Accessed May 30, 2022. <http://www.ideasforindia.in/topics/governance/can-the-female-sarpanch-deliver-evidence-from-maharashtra.html>.
3. N, Shree D. "Five Charts That Show the Extent of Political Power Women Have in India." *Citizen Matters* (blog), February 26, 2019. <https://citizenmatters.in/women-in-power-a-reality-check-of-parliament-and-assemblies-10393>.
4. News18. "Future Is Female, But Why Are Women Leaders Missing from India's Political Arena?" Accessed May 30, 2022. <https://www.news18.com/news/buzz/future-is-female-but-why-are-women-leaders-missing-from-indias-political-arena-3486224.html>.
5. IGC. "Leaders and Citizens: Women's Political Participation in India," March 31, 2021. <https://www.theigc.org/blog/leaders-and-citizens-womens-political-participation-in-india/>.
6. India, Ideas For. "The Persistent Gender Gap in Political Participation in India." Ideas For India. Accessed May 30, 2022. <http://www.ideasforindia.in/topics/social-identity/the-persistent-gender-gap-in-political-participation-in-india.html>.
7. Welle (www.dw.com), Deutsche. "Why Are There Few Women in Indian Politics? | DW | 11.03.2022." DW.COM. Accessed May 30, 2022. <https://www.dw.com/en/why-are-there-few-women-in-indian-politics/a-61098984>.
8. India Development Review. "Why Isn't a Career in Politics Aspirational for Girls and Women? | IDR." Accessed May 30, 2022. <https://idronline.org/article/gender/what-holds-girls-and-women-back-from-a-career-in-politics/>.
9. Chattopadhyay, Raghavendra, and Esther Duflo. "Women as Policy Makers: Evidence from a Randomized Policy Experiment in India." *Econometrica* 72, no. 5 (September 2004): 1409–43. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0262.2004.00539.x>.

10. Firstpost. "Women's Reservation Bill in Rajya Sabha: What It Is and the Political Hold-up against It," April 4, 2022.
<https://www.firstpost.com/politics/womens-reservation-bill-in-rajya-sabha-what-it-is-and-the-political-hold-up-against-it-10515801.html>.
11. IGC. "Female Politicians and Economic Growth: Evidence from State Elections in India." Accessed May 30, 2022.
<https://www.theigc.org/project/female-politicians-and-economic-growth-evidence-from-state-elections-in-india/>.
12. India, Ideas For. "Can the Female Sarpanch Deliver? Evidence from Maharashtra." Ideas For India. Accessed May 30, 2022.
<http://www.ideasforindia.in/topics/governance/can-the-female-sarpanch-deliver-evidence-from-maharashtra.html>.