



Women's Political Participation in India

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Introduction

Women constitute slightly more than half of the world population. Their contribution to the social and economic development of societies is also more than half as compared to that of men by virtue of their dual roles in the productive and reproductive spheres. Yet their participation in formal political structures and processes, where decisions regarding the use of societal resources generated by both men and women are made, remains insignificant. Presently, women's representation in legislatures around the world is 15 percent. Despite the pronounced commitment of the international community to gender equality and to the bridging the gender gap in the formal political arena, reinforced by the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform of Action, there are only twelve countries where women hold 33% or more seats in the parliaments (UNDP Report, 2005).

Political Factors

The nature of politics is an important factor for the inclusion or exclusion of women in politics. Vicky Randall defines politics as an "articulation, or working out of relationships within an already given power structure", which is in contrast with the traditional view of politics that defines it as an activity, a conscious, deliberate participation in the process by which resources are allocated among citizens. This conception of politics restricts political activity only in public arena and the private sphere of family life is rendered as apolitical. This public-private dichotomy in traditional definition of politics is used to exclude women from public political sphere and even when women are brought into politics they are entered as mothers and wives.

Male domination of politics, political parties and culture of formal political structures is another factor that hinders women's political participation. Often male dominated political parties have a male perspective on issues of national importance that disillusion women as their perspective is often ignored and not reflected in the politics of their parties. Also women are usually not elected at the position of power within party structures because of gender biases of male leadership. Meetings of councils or parliamentary sessions are held in odd timings conflicting with women's domestic responsibilities. The larger democratic framework and level of democratization also impact women's political participation. Secular democracies in Europe and also in some of the developing countries have created relatively more space for women's participation in politics as compared to countries where religious orthodoxy has been shaping politics and democracy.

Women in India participate in voting, running for public office, and political parties at lower levels than men. Political activism and voting are the strongest areas of women's political participation. To combat gender inequality in politics, the Indian Government has instituted reservations for seats in local governments. Challenging the participation of women in politics is rampant gender inequalities--sexual violence, discrimination, and illiteracy.

Constitutional rights of women

The Constitution of India establishes a parliamentary system of government, and guarantees its citizens the right to be elected, freedom of speech, freedom to assemble and form associations, and vote. [1] The Constitution of India attempts to remove gender inequalities by banning discrimination based on sex and class, prohibiting human trafficking and forced labor, and reserving elected positions for wom-

en. The Government of India directed state and local governments to promote equality by class and gender including equal pay and free legal aid, humane working conditions and maternity relief, rights to work and education, and raising the standard of living.[2] Women were substantially involved in the Indian independence movement in the early 20th century and advocated for independence from Britain. Independence brought gender equality in the form of constitutional rights, but historically women's political participation has remained low.[3]

Political Representation Voting

The movement for women's suffrage began in the early 1900s in response to a national movement for suffrage. Shortly after Indian independence from Britain, the Indian Constitution in 1950 officially granted women and men suffrage. Prior to universal suffrage, provincial legislatures had granted women the right to vote. Madras was the first to grant women's suffrage in 1921, and other legislatures followed shortly after.[4] The rights granted in response to the movement towards suffrage were limited to qualifications of literacy and property ownership, including property ownership of husbands. [3] This allowed poorer Indian women to be excluded from voting until universal suffrage was granted to all Indian citizens.

In 1950, universal suffrage granted voting rights to all women regardless of caste, race, and income. India is a parliamentary system with two houses: Lok Sabha (lower house) and Rajya Sabha (upper house). Rates of participation among women in 1962 were 46.63% for Lok Sabha elections and rose to a high in 1984 of 58.60%. Male turnout during that same period was 63.31% in 1962 and 68.18% in 1984. Turnout in Lok Sabha elections have declined since 1984 with the most recent available data of 2004 showing 52.65% turnout for men and 44.65% for women. The gap between men and women voters has narrowed over time with a difference of 16.7% in 1962 to 4.4% in 2009.[5]

Voter turnout for national elections in the past 50 years has remained stagnant with turnout ranging between 50 to 60%. State elections have seen a growing trend in women's participation, and in some cases women's turnout is exceeding male turnout.[6] Increased turnout of women was reported for the 2012 Vidhan Sabha elections (legislative/state assemblies) with states such as Uttar Pradesh reporting 58.82% to 60.29% turnout. In the 2013 assembly elections, women's overall turnout was reported to be 47.4%, and male turnout was 52.5%. Indian states of Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Kerala, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Daman and Diu, and Puducherry all reported higher turnouts among women than men in 2013.[7]

Increased participation is occurring in both rich and poor states in India. The sex ratio of voters has improved from 715 female voters for every 1,000 male voters in the 1960s to 883 female voters in 2000s. [8] The Election Commission of India (ECI) has sought to increase voter turnout by cleaning up electoral rolls and removing missing or deceased members. Voter outreach has included door-to-door voter registration, and in 2014 elections, voters will be issued a photo id with polling station information to increase voter turnout.[6][9] Increased voter turnout in India is also partially due to the women voters. ECI has sought to encourage voter registration among women and participation through education and outreach on college and univer-

sity campuses. Growing participation has also been attributed to increased security at polling stations.[10]

Running for public office

India ranks low at 132 of 186 countries on the Gender Inequality Index (GI) of 2012 released by the United Nations. One of the indicators of gender inequality in this index is the number of seats held by women in the national parliament. This is where India ranks better than some other countries that have higher rankings on the GI. India has 10.9% women in the national parliament, which is higher than Hungary (8.8%), Libya (2.6%), China (9.1%), and Malaysia (9.8%). Participation still ranks low in comparison to other developing countries' national parliaments with Rwanda at 51.9%, South Africa at 41.1%, and Vietnam at 24.2%.[11]

To remedy low participation of women electors, India in 1994 established quotas (reservations) in constitutional amendments (73rd and 74th) to reserve 33% of seats in local governments for women. [12] The Women's Reservation Bill (108th amendment) has been introduced in the national parliament to reserve 33% of Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha seats for women.[13] The bill has yet to be passed by Lok Sabha and signed into law. The discussion of women's reservations began in the 1920s and continued into the 1930s until a compromise was reached with Britain to allow women in urban areas to vote. Discussion of women's reservations were again introduced in 1974 by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in India, but India did not fully establish quotas in local government until 1994.[14] Local governing bodies in India are called Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) and one-third of seats and leadership positions must be reserved for women. States such as Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Kerala, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan, Tripura, and Uttarakhand have increased reservations to 50%. The national government has also proposed to raise the level of reservations in PRIs to 50%.[15]

Seats reserved for women are rotated for assurance that each seat has an equal chance of being reserved. After the establishment of women's reservations, political participation went from 4-5% to 25-40% among women, and gave millions of women the opportunity to serve as leaders in local government.[16] Odisha, an Indian state, established reservations prior to the 73rd amendment and they had 28,069 women elected in 1992 and 28,595 women in 1997.[17] Class differences have manifested with poorer women gaining presence in panchayats, but women of a higher class being elected as chairpersons (sarpanch).[12]

Concerns remain in reserving seats for women in elected positions. The issue of training has become an increasing concern with preparing women for the role of leadership. It was found in Tamil Nadu that women lack the education and training to understand procedures in panchayats.[18] Family also plays a significant role in women's participation in government. Familial influence can be a barrier or a support system for female elected officials in terms of connections. Family connections can help women seek elected positions at both the national and local government level. There has been concern over the role of women as proxies for male family members, but women may still have important effects on policy decisions.[19] The effect of reservation for women has been increase in the number of public goods, including water and roads. Drinking water and road improvements are issues that are most frequently raised by female elected officials. The most significant issues for men are roads, irrigation, education, and water. Women are also likely to bring welfare issues such as violence against women, childcare, and maternal health to consideration.[19]

Political Parties

India has a multi-party system with the 24 registered parties at the national level.[20] The three largest parties in India are the Indian National Congress (INC), the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and the Communist Party of India (CPI).[21] Political parties have increased outreach among women voters as India's party system has become more competitive. This has included the creation of women's wings in the largest parties. The BJP's wing is the BJP Mahila Morcha, the INC's wing is All India Mahila Congress, and the CPI's wing is the National Federation of Indian Women.[21]

Women's involvement in political parties is tied to the increasing demand for equal rights. The INC held power until the 1990s. As the INC moved away from welfare politics, other parties arose to challenge the INC using poverty as the center of their agenda. The INC regained power in 2004 with the help of women's participation.[21] The INC has increased women's participation by instituting a 33% quota for women in all levels of the party. In June 2009, the INC nominated a woman to become first speaker of Lok Sabha, and also supported the election of Pratibha Patil, India's first female president.[22] Women were involved in the early establishment of the BJP. The BJP has encouraged greater representation of women by developing women's leadership programs, financial assistance for women candidates, and implementing a 33% reservation for women in party leadership positions.[22] BJP has received women's support by focusing on issues such as the Uniform Civil Code to extend equal rights to women and men regardless of religion. They have also spoken out against violence against Indian women. The CPI has also supported gender inequality issues including addressing issues of violence through the National Federation of Indian Women.[23]

Women's participation in political parties remained low in the 1990s with 10-12% membership consisting of women.[23] Indian women have also taken the initiative to form their own political parties, and in 2007, the United Women Front party was created, and has advocated for increasing the reservation of seats for women in parliament to 50%.[24] Women only govern four of India's political parties. From 1980-1970, 4.3% of candidates and 70% of electoral races had no women candidates at all.[25] As of 2013, it has been reported of the members of parliament 11% were women in Lok Sabha and 10.6% in Rajya Sabha.[26]

Political activism

Women's organizations in India first began to emerge in the early 1900s, and later in the 1970s after a period of limited activity from 1950s to 1970s.[27] One of the earliest women's organizations, Bharat Stree Mahamandal, formed in 1910 and focused on helping women escape oppression from men.[28] Women's associations had traditionally began with the help of men giving few women access to work and education, while limiting the expansion of traditional gender roles.[29] In 1927, the All India Women's Conference (AIWC) was formed to advocate for women's education and was helpful in the passage of the Hindu Code of Bills between 1952 and 1960.[30] Women were also active in the freedom movement in protesting British colonial rule over Indian holding protests and public meetings in support of independence.

The new wave of feminism in the 1970s was in response to gender inequality issues and stagnant development in India.[31] The Committee on the Status of Women in India released a report in 1974, and had a significant influence in the reemergence of activism towards gender equality. The report highlighted the significant differences between men and women in India, including the disparity in the sex ratio, mortality rates, employment, literacy, and wage discrimination. The report fueled the women's movement by signifying the ongoing discrimination towards women in India.[32] Gender inequality has remained the focus of the women's movement with specific emphasis on issues such as the Uniform Civil Code, Women's Reservation Bill, and sexual violence against women.[33] Women's organizations both informal and formal have developed at the rural, urban, national, and state levels in India. Women's organizations in India address a variety of issues from the environment, poverty, empowerment, and violence against women.[34] One of the most prominent women's organizations in India is the AIWC, which was established in 1927, focusing on empowering and educating Indian women. The AIWC has over 100,000 members and 500 branches in India, and has helped with the passage of the Sarda Act, Maternity Benefit Act, and Hindu Code Bills. [35][36]

Indian women are significantly involved at the grass roots level of activism. The Chipko movement that arose in 1970s is one example of success among the women's movement in India, as women protested the deforestation in Uttarakhand leading to the protection of the region.[37] Since the Indian independence, women's organizations have focused on issues of violence towards women. Women's movements have focused on rape, female mortality rates, female foeticide, dowry deaths, sati, and domestic abuse.[31] Tragedies such as the Ma-

thura rape case in 1972, the dowry death of Tarvinder Kaur in 1979, the death of Roop Kanwar by practice of sati in 1987, the gang rape of Bhanwari Devi in 1992, and the New Delhi gang rape case in 2012, have kept the movement focused on rape and given rise to many women's organizations at the local and national level.[38]

Election 2014: Imbalanced participation of women

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.

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. 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.

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.

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 'win-ability' 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

Note: * Including one nominated member

Source: Election Commission of India

However, 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. 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. 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 clichéd 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.

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 centres 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.

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.

Indian Politics: Women Candidates In 2014 Lok Sabha Elections

Women make up 49% of our population – but their representation in Parliament and in the Elections is far lower.

Will the 16th Lok Sabha Elections go down in history as the biggest baloney of the decade, or are they simply an indication of the future? It's no secret that we Indians love a good show, but our seasoned showmen have managed to exceed themselves this time. Hyperbole has been aplenty – from vicious personal digs to divisive statements, fashion dressing and Slapgate. What gets conveniently overlooked are the real issues – such as health, education, equality and safety.

Women make up 49% of India's population, but hardly get any attention during the elections – from interviews to live coverage, it's men who occupy centre stage. Things are a little different this year – savvy advertisers were quick to point out the "Power Of 49" to their political masters, who in turn have ensured that there is a bullet point on Women & Welfare on the last page of their manifestos. So while the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has promised to address women's safety, BJP & Congress have sworn to expedite a legislature that guarantees 33% reservation for women in the Lok Sabha (There are 60 women in the current Lok Sabha, a mere 11%).

While we are conflicted about reservation for women in Parliament, the promises around the Bill made us wonder: How many women are fighting the national elections? What is the performance of major political parties in promoting women candidates? Are there significant differences between male and female candidates when it comes to education, financial assets or registered criminal cases?

To come up with some answers, we used data compiled by Association For Democratic Reforms, which analysed self-sworn affidavits of 5380 candidates (out of 5432 candidates) who have contested or are contesting in Phase 1 to 6 of the 2014 Lok Sabha Elections. Here is what we came up with:

1. Women make up a mere 7% (402) of the 5380 candidates that are part of ADR's analysis. This is a drop from the 556 women candidates who contested in the last General Elections (2009), and the highest ever number of 599 in the 1991-92 General Elections. For perspective, the female population of India is currently estimated to be 614,397,079, or 614.4 million. (2014 numbers are for Phase 1-6 of the 2014 Elections.)
2. If this number seems disappointing, we can take heart from the fact that the number of women contesting the General Elections was less than the magical number of 100 merely 37 years ago – only 70 women were in the fray in the 1977 General Elections.
3. If you think that political parties are promoting women candidates, think again: One third of the 402 women candidates in this year's elections are Independents. Amongst major political parties, newbie Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) seems to be serious about the cause of women representation – it has the largest number of women candidates (39) in fray. In contrast, the BJP has fielded 20 women candidates.

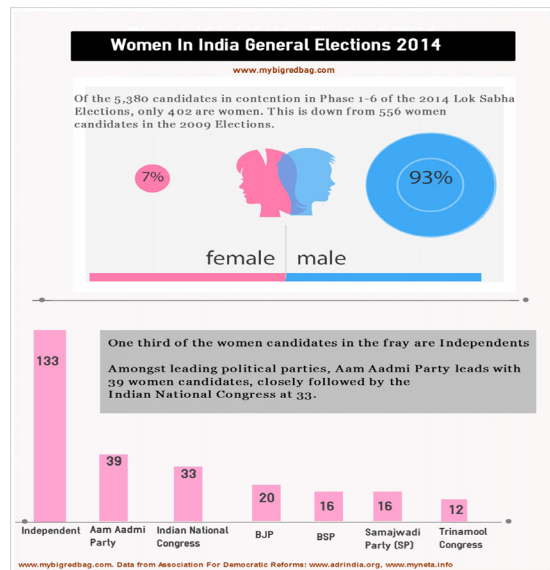
How about regional parties led by women leaders, such as the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) led by Mayawati, AIADMK led by Jayalalitha and Trinamool Congress led by Mamata-Di? AIADMK is the worst performer here, with a mere 4 women in contention. In contrast, Trinamool Congress has 12 women candidates and BSP has 16.

4. When it comes to registered criminal cases, women candidates are only marginally better than their male counterparts – 14% of them have criminal cases registered against them, compared to 16% for male candidates (the overall average for all candidates is 16%).

5. Money makes the world go round for politicians in India, and more so for women. 31% of the women candidates have declared assets

greater than 1 crore, compared with 26% for men (the overall average for all candidates is 26%).

6. Luckily, education is more important for our women contestants – 53% of them are Graduates or above, compared with 48% for male candidates the overall average for all candidates is 48%).



Women Candidates and the 2014 Lok Sabha Elections

The low number of women candidates nominated by political parties in the 2014 election suggests that not much has changed since 2009. Many parties have articulated support for increasing women's participation in electoral politics at the national level, but often this has not materialised in greater opportunities for aspiring women candidates. Gender quotas have existed in local councils since the mid 1990s, but no gender quota exists at the national level. During the last two parliaments, the coalitions led by the Congress Party attempted to pass a constitutional amendment to reserve a third of seats for women in the national parliament and state assemblies (otherwise known as the Women's Reservation Bill). The intention is to provide a legal quota where only women candidates can contest in selected constituencies, guaranteeing the election of a larger number of women to the national parliament and state assemblies. The bill was introduced (2008) and passed (2010) in the Rajya Sabha but not the Lok Sabha. Had the Congress Party-led government achieved this manifesto promise, and in time for the 2014 election, around 181 women could have been elected to the Lok Sabha (if implemented in its currently proposed form). This compares with 58 women elected to a House of 543 MPs in 2009, or approximately 11 per cent.

As the two largest parties in parliament, the incumbent Congress Party and the main opposition party, the BJP, have had a crucial bearing on the proportion of women MPs elected to parliament in the recent past. This is likely to be the case also for the 16th Lok Sabha, though perhaps more for the BJP than the Congress Party given the anticipated anti-incumbency effect that is likely to affect the latter. Both parties have articulated support for women's reservation. In 2014, both parties have re-nominated nearly all of their sitting women MPs. Party calculations of 'winnability' aside, this is perhaps a sign that these two parties are at least trying to maintain their existing pool of strong women MPs. However, in 2014 both parties have not significantly increased their proportion of women candidates compared to nominations in 2009. In 2014, the Congress Party has nominated a slightly higher proportion of women, and its highest at least since the early 1980s, but this is still only 13% of its candidates compared to 10% in 2009. The main opposition party, the BJP, has nominated slightly less (9% compared to 10% in 2009). If an anti-incumbency effect results in a poor performance for the Congress Party and a positive outcome for the BJP, this may reduce the proportion of women elected to the 16th Lok Sabha compared to 2009.

As is well known, a handful of women politicians in India are very senior and operate at the highest levels of electoral politics. Some are the

highest office bearers of their political party, some are Chief Ministers of sub-national states. These senior women politicians are exceptional, however, in the male-dominated field of electoral politics. A closer look at the nomination of women candidates in 2014, based on candidate lists on party websites, reveals some further dynamics and raises questions about the enduring obstacles to women's participation in electoral politics.

To begin with, opportunities for women candidates are highly uneven across states and more concentrated than aggregate party figures suggest. Both the Congress Party and the BJP have nominated no women candidates in many of the States and Union Territories where they are contesting. Women candidates for the BJP, for example, feature in less than half of 33 States and Union Territories where the party is contesting. In states like Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, a number of parties have nominated very few women candidates (the BJP and Congress in Karnataka has 4% and 7% women candidates respectively). Women candidates are also concentrated in a handful of particular states. A striking statistic is that more than half (20) of the BJP's women candidates in 2014 are contesting from only three states: Uttar Pradesh (11), Gujarat (4) and Madhya Pradesh (5). Women candidates for the Congress are still concentrated in a few states, including in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, but not to the same extent. (While this might be unsurprising because Uttar Pradesh returns to parliament the highest number of MPs of any state, the proportion of women candidates is still above the party's national average). The significance of this concentration is that while Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh are currently strong states for the BJP, the likelihood of the party's success in Uttar Pradesh is uncertain. If the BJP does well in the election overall but fares poorly in Uttar Pradesh, the number of women candidates elected to the Lok Sabha is likely to be affected. Even if the BJP does well in all three states, and consequently returns the majority of its women candidates to the Lok Sabha, issues of unevenness and dependence on a small number of states will remain.

Pertinent questions for women's inclusion in electoral politics

This unevenness in nominations raises questions about the internal working of political parties and concerns of inclusive democratic politics. The first question concerns whether the party's election committees consider the paucity of women candidates nominated as a problem to be addressed, despite public support for women's political participation. A second question is whether the national party leadership can influence state units to nominate more women candidates, or whether other internal party factors ultimately dominate. A third question is whether, in the contemporary context of coalition politics, aspiring women candidates benefit from, or are disadvantaged by, seat-sharing arrangements between national parties and smaller regional parties. While senior women politicians who lead regional and state-based parties have been very influential at the national level particularly when coalitions are fragile, as was seen in 1999, aspiring women candidates often do not occupy senior party posts. As a result, they may be disadvantaged when a limited number of seats have to be shared among a number of senior party leaders from different parties. A fourth question asks what kind of party organisational environment exists at the subnational level and whether this effectively enables (or inhibits) women to participate in party politics.

Greater participation of women in electoral politics is only one aspect of a broader concern for democratic inclusion. There is also no guarantee that women MPs will 'act for women' once elected to parliament, so issues of accountability will remain, as with all MPs. But India's low proportion of women MPs is a striking contrast to the increasing presence of women in local councils and municipal corporations, made possible by gender quotas. These quotas may be good for the 'pipeline' of potential parliamentary candidates, but in the absence of a legally mandated reservation, the opportunities appear to be few and far between.

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