

Indian Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) & Parliamentary Elections 2014-2024: Evaluating Strategies and the Gender Gap

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Abstract

This study analyses the ratio of male to female party candidates in India and how the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s strategies from 2014 to 2024 have marginalised women, making elections a crucial turning point. Scholars have shown that women often lose elections due to party decisions and strict criteria, reinforcing male dominance. Despite promises and women casting 67.40% of the votes, female politicians remain underrepresented: the Sabha parliamentary body comprises 469 elected men out of the 543 elected members, as determined by the First-Past-the-Post system. Since independence, the INC party and the BJP have focused on Hindutva ideology, promoting a male-dominated, Hindu cultural identity. Methodically, the study reviewed relevant literature, including the Election Commission of India, the Constitution, articles, BJP websites, and campaign reports, to evaluate the BJP's winning strategies and the "Seva" group's efforts to garner women's votes. It also examined literature on factors contributing to the gender gap, under the BJP's nomination patterns, which are often aligned with class-caste clusters, geographical, and religious divisions. While, India's deeply rooted male-dominated tradition has discouraged many women from pursuing careers in politics. The result portrays the BJP as India's most male-dominated ruling party, urging the government and political parties to promote women candidates and achieve the UN's goal of having one-third of all electoral positions allotted to women. It recommends establishing inclusive media platforms among women's elites to achieve electoral equality, adopting a bottom-up approach.

Keywords: Election, Evaluation, Gender Gaps, Indian government, Male Dominance, Political Parties, Representation.

Introduction

Elections worldwide focus on choosing passionate leaders who defend democratic principles, such as justice, human rights, societal well-being, security, freedom, balance of power, and equality, which are often at risk. Arguably, feminist philosophy promotes gender equality, affirming that everyone has the right to vote for whomever they choose and to pursue any role they desire. Furthermore, governance does not arise from an individual's lineage but from the collective effort of those dedicated to overcoming leadership challenges.

India, in South Asia, has over 1.3 billion people and is the world's largest democracy,

according to the Royal Institute of International Affairs [1]. It is the seventh-largest country by land area and, as of June 2024, the most populous, surpassing China. Since its independence in 1947, India has become the largest constitutional democracy, adopting the Westminster parliamentary system, as many new states do. It reflects increasing political polarisation based on the British Westminster system, with over 2,000 parties competing locally and nationally. India's election system comprises the Head of State, the Prime Minister, and two legislatures: the 245-member Rajya Sabha and a 543-member lower house, which was elected via first-past-the-post in

2019. The Gender Electoral Political Research Group's 2024 campaign in India noted a decline in the number of women candidates compared to men, mainly due to shifts in party mandates [2].

Sridharan [3] described India as a parliamentary secular republic in 2016, where the President serves as the Head of State and the top citizen, while the Prime Minister leads the government. India has a federal system with a central authority and states at the periphery. Since 1947, India's elections for these three federal structures have been dominated by males, with only one woman serving as Prime Minister and just two female senators. Achieving political equality is essential for creating a more inclusive and representative democracy. Sridharan traced the history of voting back to the early democracies (1828-1926), when voting rights were first given to males. Women faced numerous significant barriers in their fight for voting rights, which remained largely overlooked until suffrage movements emerged across various countries to support women's empowerment [4].

Milan's review of the IEC data report [5] showed that the right to vote and be voted for was protected in India under the universal adult franchise constitution, which helped ensure political equality for women and men at the time of India's independence in 1947. Constitutionally, Indian elections are held every five years. According to Milan, any political party that gets a majority of members in the lower house, referred to as the "Lok Sabha," or to the central government in Delhi, known as the "Vidhan Sabha," and a majority in the upper house called the "Rajya Sabha," is designated as the governing party or can establish a government.

The History of Elections

Hosken noted that women struggled for equal political rights, as Europe's legal status limited their autonomy [6]. Customs and decrees reduced women's rights, preventing

single or widowed women from holding office to avoid marriage. Women's voting rights gradually expanded, and women campaigned for the right to vote.

Khaitan discussed Aristotle's research on nations that supported women's suffrage, starting with New Zealand in 1893—the first to grant women the right to vote nationally. Australia followed in 1902, with Nordic countries such as Finland (1906), Norway (1913), Denmark, and Iceland (1915) early in the 20th century. By the end of WWI, many countries endorsed women's suffrage, including the Netherlands (1917), Austria, Azerbaijan, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Georgia, Poland, and Sweden (1918). Greece (1952), Switzerland (1971), Portugal (1976), and microstates like San Marino (1959), Monaco (1962), Andorra (1970), and Liechtenstein (1984) later adopted suffrage [7].

Ute [8] recalled that women in Latin American countries gained voting rights in the early 20th century: Ecuador (1929), Brazil (1932), El Salvador (1939), Dominican Republic (1942), Guatemala (1956), and Argentina (1946). Women in Asian countries earned voting rights in the mid-20th century: Japan (1945), China (1947), Indonesia (1955), and India (1935). Women in Africa gained voting rights alongside men through universal suffrage in Liberia (1947), Uganda (1958), and Nigeria (1960). In the Middle East, universal suffrage was primarily acquired after World War II, with Kuwait extending suffrage to women in 2005 by a vote of 35-23.

Grandhi [9] described the electoral process in India from colonial times. The Indian National Congress, founded in 1885, was the first to contest elections. According to him, the process included direct elections for provincial legislatures and some central members. In 1950, India adopted its Constitution, granting universal adult franchise for citizens 18 and older. The first general election for the Lok Sabha took place in 1951-1952, with a voter turnout of over 17.3%. Gandhi mentioned that

the 1951 Representation of the People's Act set eligibility rules for parties and candidates. The Election Commission of India Act, 1951, defines the structure and functions of the Election Commission, as well as the roles of political parties.

Purpose of the Study

According to Kaushik, India's constitution and electoral process are designed as a federal system to promote equal voting rights and the freedom to participate. However, India's electoral trajectory still relies on a hidden caste system and culture, which continues to divide the population. India's constitution banned caste discrimination to ensure equal representation and introduced quotas as an alternative. This includes a proposed fairer allocation of representation for resource sharing in jobs and education, based on equity and justice rather than the caste system [10].

Jafar [11] observed that caste culture and its practices continue to exert a strong influence on the electoral process today, affecting appointments to positions, committees, and offices. Kofi [12] recalled that India's electoral process reveals ongoing gender inequality, with approximately 80% of candidates being male and only two women presidents — Sonia Gandhi and Droupadi Murmu — since independence. Also, Indira Gandhi was the only female party leader of the NCP, serving as Prime Minister twice; however, scholars note that even her rise to prominence was closely linked to her background and her father, Jawaharlal Nehru. Thus, generally, women's participation in ministerial, governorship, and legislative roles remains limited.

The Hindu culture and religious considerations also play significant roles in shaping male patriarchy towards electoral values. For more than a century, proponents of Hindu nationalism have pursued a redefinition of India as a Hindu homeland. Malhotra [13] observed that the government preferred the Hindu religion to describe Indians' right of

independence. However, by 1947, the Independent National Congress Party (INC) leader, Mahatma Gandhi, was assassinated in the wake of 1948 after the struggle for India's independence from the colonial British. Therefore, this research aims to evaluate the BJP's gender election fairness and the gap. The study seeks to understand the complex dynamics driving elections and the representation gap in India's democracies with the following objectives.

1. To assess the BJP's methods for electoral victory
2. Investigate indicators for women or gender representation gaps
3. Identify the obstacles that deter women from winning or entering electoral politics
4. Recommend ways to advance women's participation in Indian politics

Praveen, a gender scholar, has argued that one way to ensure communities interact with community affairs through electoral democracy is through the Parliament [14]. However, the composition is exclusively male, despite women and men constituting nearly half of the country's population, and there are narrow differences in achieving its goals. In the governance process, experience has further shown that women's interests cannot be adequately addressed unless they comprise a significant number of the elected assemblies in any country.

Method

This section describes the researcher's method to obtain the necessary data and presents the results. This research adopted the descriptive approach. The descriptive approach systematically collects facts from secondary data sources. The researcher adopted this design because it will help to understand the gender representation imbalance in the Indian Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) from different perspectives. Qualitative data were obtained from previous studies, existing literature, websites, ECI data publications, BJP data, and

other relevant sources. The realistic data were analysed systematically in a thematic format.

Descriptive Analysis

Electoral Commission India (ECI) Constitutional Criteria

According to Suhas [15] in the Political Weekly issue, the Election Commission of India (ECI), the principal electoral management body in India, oversees multi-party elections. It accredits national and state-level political parties in accordance with constitutional goals and electoral criteria. Typically, the country comprises 28 states, together with the union territories of Jammu and Kashmir, the national capital area of Delhi, and Puducherry. As of March 2024, Krutika reported six national parties and 57 state political parties; however, approximately 2,764 unrecognised parties remain.

A state party intending to establish itself and get recognition via the Electoral Commission of India (ECI) registration must comply with the following requirements: must choose a symbol from the available list of symbols offered by the ECI; must secure at least 6% of the valid votes polled in an election to the state legislative assembly and win at least two seats to be recognized as a party; secure at least 6% of the valid votes polled in an election to the Lok Sabha and win a minimum of one seat in the Lok Sabha; win at least 3% of the total number of seats or any fraction thereof allotted to that state; or secure 8% or more of the total valid votes polled in the state. At the national level, Krutika reviewed that a registered party is recognized as a national party only if it fulfills any one of the three conditions: the party should secure at least 2% of the seats (11 seats) in the Lok Sabha from at least three different states; at a general election to the Lok Sabha or the Legislative Assembly, a party must poll 6% of the votes in any four or more states, and in addition, it must secure at least four Lok Sabha seats; or the party must acquire credibility as a state party [16].

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Landscape

Scholars Suhas and Kofi have shown that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), one of India's two major parties, was founded by Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Since 2014, it has been in power under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The BJP originated from the Janata Party, which held power for three years before uniting into the BJP. It aligns with right-wing ideologies and has ties to the "Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh" (RSS), a far-right paramilitary group that promotes a Hindu nationalist agenda. As of January 2024, the BJP is the largest party in India, controlling both Parliament and state legislatures.

Suhas [17] recalled that the BJP's ability to expand its support base beyond the upper castes has given the party notable momentum across all classes, including the middle class. Support for the BJP among Muslims stayed low, with only 8% of Muslim voters voting for the party. The party has often been described as right-wing throughout its history, but it has recently been labelled far-right. As of December 2023, the alliance manages 17 Indian states and union territories.

Kofi discussed the BJP's official ideology, [18] which is integral humanism, first introduced by Deendayal Upadhyaya in 1965. The party promotes social conservatism and a foreign policy focused on nationalist principles. During its initial period in national government, the BJP largely set aside its Hindu nationalist priorities and concentrated on a mainly liberal economic policy that emphasised globalisation and economic growth over social welfare.

In 2019, the BJP won the election with an increased majority. Soon after, on August 5, 2019, the Modi administration revoked Jammu and Kashmir's special status under Article 370, which had granted limited autonomy. In 2019, the Modi government passed the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, which amended the 1955 law to grant Indian citizenship to illegal immigrants of Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain,

Parsi, or Christian faith fleeing persecution from Pakistan, Bangladesh, or Afghanistan before December 2014. Muslims from those countries were excluded.

BJP's Winning Mechanisms and The Hindu Agenda

According to Kofi in 2019, the BJP increased its prominence, winning 37% of the popular

votes and securing 303 parliamentary seats. Yet, the most critical challenge for the BJP is its inability to eliminate extreme poverty within a democracy defined. Sanjay [19] noted that most of the BJP's support originates from the most populous and typically poorer Hindi 'heartland', a strategy aimed at promoting its Hindutva agenda, as illustrated in Figure 1.

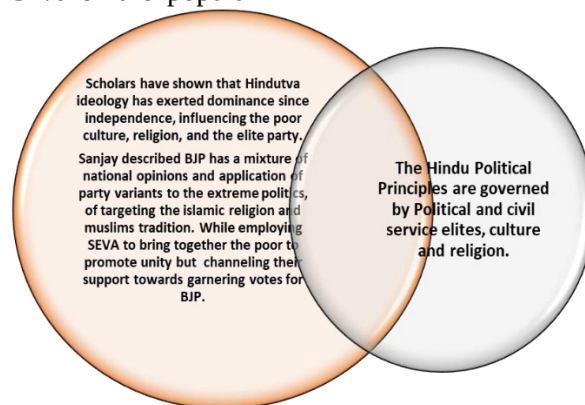


Figure 1. The Hindutva Ideology

Source: Author's Framework Designed, 2025.

States in northern India, of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Bihar. Since taking power, Suhas recalled that the BJP has focused on the Hindu agenda. Hindu nationalists dismiss religions outside India, like Sikhism and Jainism, and are hostile toward Islam and Christianity. The BJP believes other parties interact with the minorities, especially Muslims, while they promote Hindu interests. Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state, was under lockdown from 2019 to 2021 with a communications blackout, its autonomous status revoked, and thousands detained. In Assam, where Muslims are about a third of the population and illegal immigration is a concern, detention camps hold those who cannot prove citizenship [19].

The Constitution Concepts of Election and Gender Neutrality

According to Kofi, the Delimitation Commission Act, 1956, established the delimitation of constituencies for elections to the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies.

The Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961, prescribed rules and regulations for the conduct of elections in India. The Representation of the People (Amendment) Act, 1966, aimed to expand the scope of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, to make the electoral process more transparent and fair [20].

India's Election Laws, particularly the 1989 Amendment, resulted in modifications to the Representation of the People's Act, 1951, and the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, ensuring free and fair elections. Since then, India has conducted regular local, state, and national elections. The Election Commission of India (ECI) has a similar mandate to Nigeria's INEC, organising fair elections. Recently, the ECI launched initiatives to empower all voters, including special booths for women and people with disabilities, transportation to remote areas, and voter awareness campaigns.

BJP and Women's Alliances

Sanjay's studies [21] on the BJP's ethical standards in shaping governance and policy

outcomes, as well as the party's policies from 2019 to 2024, highlight the BJP's moral commitment to accountability. Critics highlight several contradictions in the beliefs and practices related to promoting in the context of governing and re-election campaigns. He discussed the positive and negative effects of the BJP's policies on women, emphasising the party's inclusion initiatives, particularly the use of "SEVA" (women's selfless service scheme) as entry points accessible to everyone at the grassroots level to discuss people's welfare. According to Sanjay, the BJP (led by Modi) party explained that his efforts to focus on the welfare of the people helped him secure a 31% victory in the 2014 elections at the community level. The BJP won 282 seats in the Lok Sabha, securing an outright majority.

Results: Evidence of Gender Representation Gaps (GR-Gap) in 2014-2024

GR-Gap: Evidence of the BJP Male-Dynasty

Kumar [22] highlighted that women's loyalty to the BJP goes beyond voting preferences, rooted in Hindu values linked to Hindutva ideology. The BJP exploits women's lack of

knowledge in voting, often surpassing the support levels of women in other parties. Recently, the BJP has intensified its efforts to mobilise female supporters, revealing a more pronounced gender bias than the women themselves.

Sanjay [23] cited the BJP 2024 party congress, which had 75% male executives and delegates from Gujarat, West Bengal, Telangana, Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan. The Congress released a third list of 57 all-male candidates for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections on March 21, 2024. According to Sanjay, no female candidates appeared on the initial BJP list of 57 male candidates. Zoya reviewed [24] of the 2024 18th Lok Sabha and found that 69 women candidates — about 30 (9.8%) — won under the BJP. Seventy-four women (13.6%) were elected overall, down from 78 (14.4%) in 2019. Zoya [25] observed a sharp decline, with 62 female MPs (11.4%) among the 543 members of the 16th Lok Sabha. This was notably lower than the 15th Lok Sabha's 58 elected females (10.7%) in 2009, but higher than the 45 (8.3%) elected in 2004 and in 1991, and the 49 (9.4%) elected in 1996. Figure 2 explains the gender ratio in the Lower House and the Upper House (Senate).

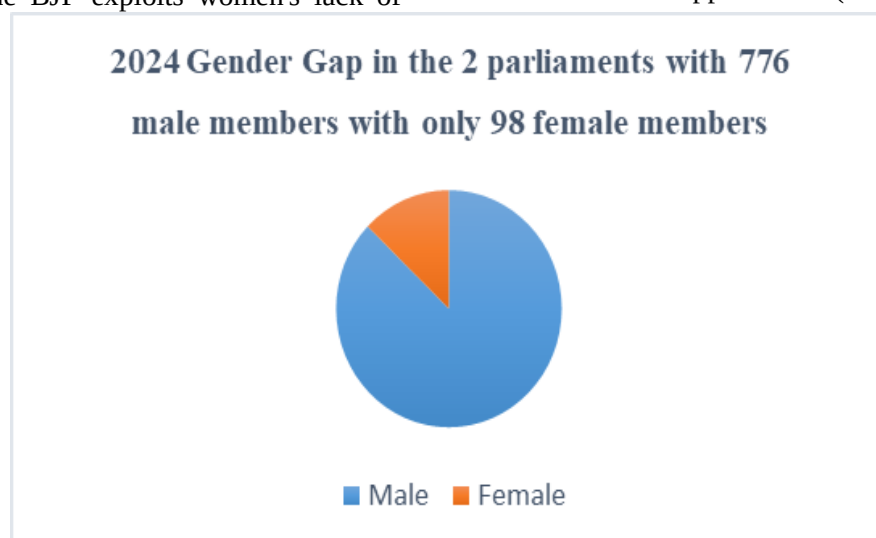


Figure 2. The 18th Lok Sabha (Lower House) and Rajya Sabha (Senate)

Source: Author's Designed & Calculations from online data,2025

This figure is lower than the target of 33% female representation set by the UN-Indian Gender Policy Review, which is expected to be reached, given the recent policy initiatives for the Indian Women's Reservation Bill proposed in 2023 and approved by parliament before the 2024 election [25]. Like other member states of the UN platform, the Indian government endorsed it to achieve a target of 35-50% women in public and private sectors since 1995.

GR-Gap: Areas of Female Representation Gap from 2014-2024

According to Dipanita, India has more than 2,000 political parties in the communities, yet women head none. Nonetheless, only six national parties are active, with just two, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC), having fewer than 40% female candidates [26], as shown in Table 1, and in Figure 3 below.

Table 1. Number of Women Elected

Year	Position	Number of Women	Percentage
2024	Lok Sabha MPs	81 out of 542	15%
2024	Rajya Sabha	29 out of 237	12%
2020	Female Ministers	16	One in each constituency
2019	Rajya Sabha	33 out of 237	13.9%
2014	Lok Sabha	81 out of 524	14.9%
2014	Rajya Sabha	24 out of 237	10.1%
2018	Female Ministers	12	One in each state

Source: Retrieved from online search; Election Commission India (ECI) website,2024

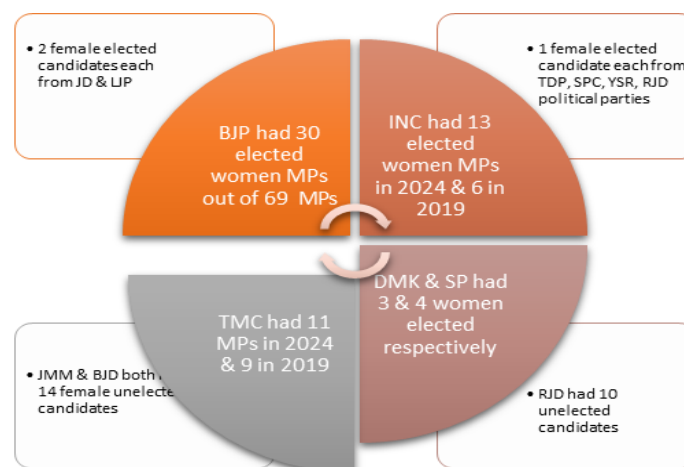


Figure 3. Women Candidates by Political Parties

Source: Author's design from ECI, data online 2025

GR-Gap: India Voting Behaviour and Gender Gap

The 1962 elections were the first for which voters' data were disaggregated by gender, with 47% of eligible women voting, in stark contrast to 63% of eligible men. Dayson [27] recalled that women's voting statistics did not align with the 47% representation shared in the voting

register, unlike their male counterparts. For example, when women voted in the 1996 national elections, he observed that the ECI survey data showed that 86% of women followed their families' advice when making polling decisions. In the 2024 elections, the India National Statistical Organisation [28] reported that the INC fielded 41 women

candidates, of whom 13, or 34%, were elected. This is an improvement over the 2019 elections, when only 6 of 52 women candidates who contested for the Indian National Congress (INC) were elected.

GR-Gap: IPU Gender Gap Statistics

Advanced research and findings by the International Parliamentary Union (IPU) on women's representation in politics indicate that the Indian parliament, comprising the Lok

Sabha and Rajya Sabha, currently has 102 women out of 664 members (as of 2024) [29]. IPU ranked India 146th ahead of Sri Lanka (182nd, 5%) and Japan (165th, 10%), but well behind Malaysia (142nd, 14.9%), Brazil (140th, 15%), Pakistan (106th, 20%), Indonesia (104th, 20%), Bangladesh (98th, 21%), Nepal (43rd, 33%), and South Africa (10th, 46%) among others. This includes Women appointed to political offices, as shown in Table 2, below.

Table 2. Women in Higher Political Offices

Political Party	Name	Dates	Office Elected /Appointed
Indian National Congress	Sonia Gandhi	2004-2009	Leader of the INC
Indian National Congress	Indira Gandhi	1966-1977	Prime Minister
Indian National Congress	Sarojini Naidu	1925/1936	1st female president of the Senate, First woman governor of Uttar Pradesh
BJP	Kiran Bedi	2014	Lieutenant Governor of Puducherry
Indian National Congress	Pratibha Patil	2007-2012	Former 12th Senate President of India
BJP	Droupadi Murmu	2022-date	Elected Senate president & former Governor of Jharkhand
BJP	Smriti Irani	2023	Information adviser
Opposition party	Mamata Banerjee	2022-2024	Chief Minister
BJP	Nirmala Sitharamani	2023-2024	Finance Minister

Source: Retrieved from Secondary data cited online by ECI data report, 2019

GR-Gap

The status of women MPs from 1957 to the present date is assigned as follows in Table 3 and Figure 4.

Table 3. The Women in Parliaments 1957-2024

Year of Election	Lok-Sabha Rep	Women MPs	Women %
2024	18th	74	13.7
2019	17th	78	14.4
2014	16th	62	11.4
2009	15th	45	11
2004	14th	40	10
1999/2000	13th	35	8.7

1994/5	12th	27	4.2
1990/91	11th	49	9
1982	6th	19	3.4
1977	5th	29	5.3
1972	4th	35	5.8
1967	3rd	31	5.6
1962	2nd	24	4.3
1957	1 st	24	4.3

Source: Retrieved online from Indian National Statistics (INS) 2024, Electoral Participation by Gender.

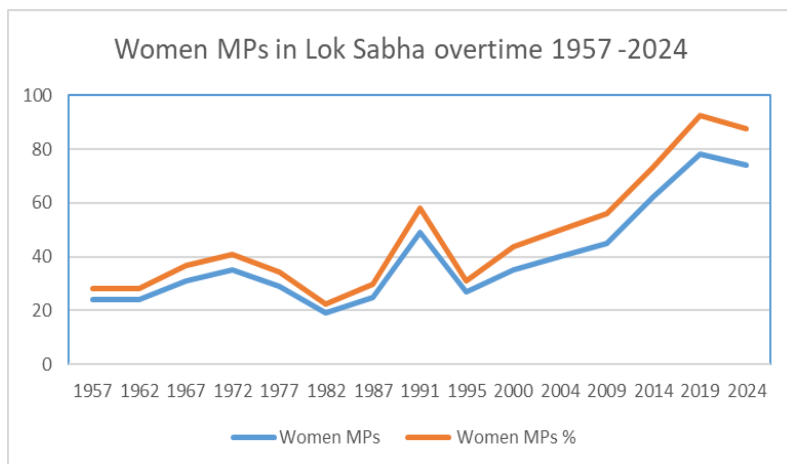


Figure 4. Women MPs 1957-2024

Source: Author's Design & Calculations from online INS data.

GR-Gap

The 10 National Political Parties and the Gender Gap in 2019& 2024, noted as follows in Table 4.

Table 4. National Political Parties and the Gender Gap in 2019 & 2024

The 10 National Political parties	2019 Candidates	2024 Candidates	Women elected to the National Assembly	Women elected to the Rajya Sabha
Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)	56 (73.2%)	69 (43.4%)	30 (40.5%)	18
India National Congress (INC)	43	13	13 (17.6%)	4
Trinamool Congress (TMC)	-	40	11 (14.9%)	2
Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM)	-	33	6	-
Biju Janata Dal (BJD)	-	33	3	-
Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD)	-	29	3	-
Samajwadi Party (SP)	-	20	2	-
Telugu Desam Party	-	1	1	-
Lok Janshakti Party	-	2	1	-

Janata Dal United	-	2	1	-
Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK)	-	3	2	-
Total			74	24 (98)

Source: Author's Calculations from online INS political parties' representation data

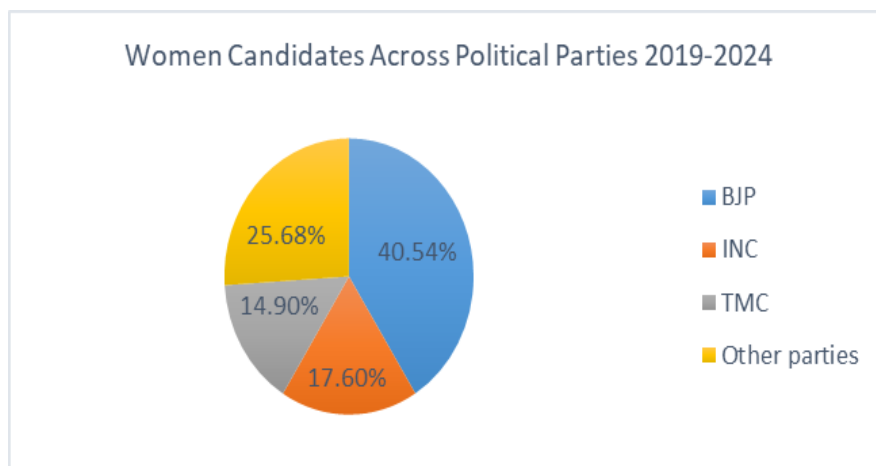


Figure 5. Women Candidates 2019-2024

Source: Author's Design from online ECI website data on 2019-2024 elections.

GR-Gap

In total, there are 668 men out of the 766 members in both parliaments (Lok Sabha: 542 and Rajya Sabha: 224), of which 24 are women

in the Rajya Sabha (Upper House Representatives) and 74 are women in the Lok Sabha (Lower House of Representatives), as shown in Figure 6.

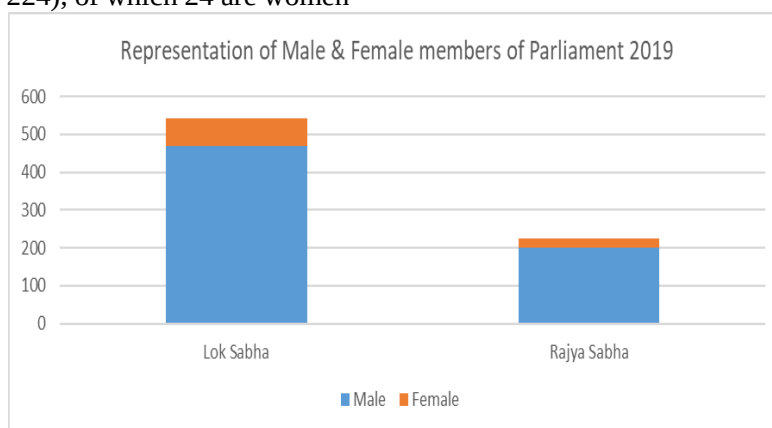


Figure 6. Representation of Male & Female Members of Parliament 2019

Source: Author's design based on an online search of the 2019 election INS data.

GR-Gap

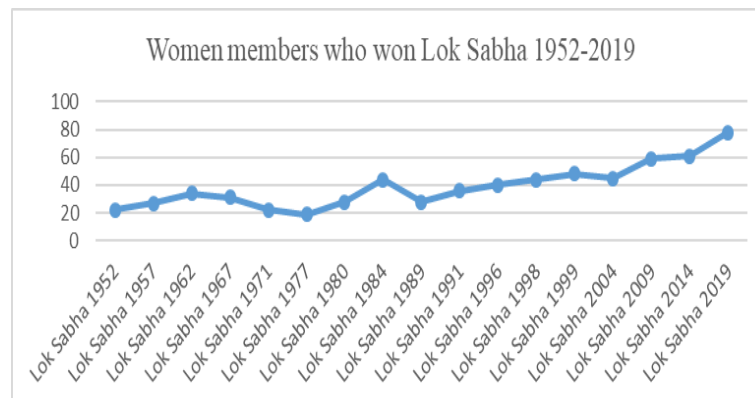
Parihart recalled that in the 2014 general election, 61% of women voted; thus, historically, women's voter turnout has fluctuated in parallel with men's [30]. However, a convergence occurred in 2009, where women's participation increased even as men's

decreased. Since then, women have exercised their right to vote in increasing numbers, with the gender gap largely vanishing in voting patterns in the 2019 general election, but remaining an impasse in the election data. Tables 5 and 7 below explain the historical trend.

Table 5. Historical Trend of Women Who Won Parliamentary Seats 1952-2019

Year	Total Number of Seats	Women Who Won	% of Total
1952	489	22	4.4
1957	494	27	5.4
1962	494	34	6.7
1967	523	31	5.9
1971	521	22	4.2
1977	544	19	3.4
1980	544	28	5.1
1984	544	44	8.1
1989	529	28	5.3
1991	509	36	7.0
1996	541	40	7.4
1998	545	44	8.0
1999	543	48	8.8
2004	543	45	8.1
2009	543	59	10.9
2014	543	61	11.2
2019	524	78	14.9

Source: Retrieved online: Indian National Statistics (INS) 2024, Seats won by Women 1952-2019

**Figure 7.** Women members who won in the Lok Sabha

Source: Author's Search and Design: from online Lok data on elections,1952-2019.

Discussion

Historically, women in India, such as those in Parihart [31], have faced significant political and legal restrictions that have limited their participation in various activities, raising concerns about the country's cultural practices and values. For instance, in the early days, women could not even apply natural, straightforward makeup like film actresses because Hindu law forbade it. Although this status quo has changed over the last three

decades, the lasting impact of this shift is evident in the continued skewing of political participation away from women. According to Parihart, a critical obstacle is the widespread perception of politics as a murky agenda, which implies it is immoral for women who are unavoidably and culturally sensitive to the realities of night meetings, exaggerated manifestoes, party unholy alliances, among others, and being looked down upon by their community or friends as role models. Political

parties and male stakeholders exploit these realities to make politics and elections appear unsuitable for women. This perception is entrenched in all patriarchal societies, where women are often tasked with upholding family honour and social status. Consequently, patriarchal societies can quickly establish norms that incur reputational costs, prompting household heads to trace women's social or political behaviour. Some Indian Hindutva sees it as a moral ideal rooted in the concept of selfless service.

Factors Lowering Women's Participation

According to Ludden [32], evidence from the field and literature has shown that India's electoral politics, like those in many other countries, have been significantly corrupted by a lack of transparency and accountability during campaign funding, with widespread bribery used to secure votes or influence election outcomes to the party's advantage. Politicians are seen bribing their way through the same institutions that demand accountability; this has led to Indian elections being conducted by corrupt officials or politicians with a skewed disposition toward private and ethical business exchanges, and to the grooming of candidates through "clientelism" among the political elite. Ludden also recalled the consequences of corruption in India, as assessed by Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, which ranked India 93rd out

of 180 nations. He explained that 68% of male officials in India depend on money from government social welfare schemes while paying bribes to get elected, with the implications of engendering inequality, a lack of trust, a weakened economy, social division, and a poverty crisis.

Praveen's examination of the OFR (Observation Research Foundation) 2024 report on Indian constitutional and legal frameworks [33] reveals significant variations in how different countries approach gender equality in political representation. India's constitution includes specific protections for women's rights, as well as the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments of 1993, which reserved one-third of seats in local governance institutions for women. Thirty years after its enactment, OFR observed that India has elected approximately 1.4 million women to regional offices and decision-making positions, establishing a foundation for women's political engagement that extends beyond tokenism. However, it is worth noting that similar quotas have not been extended to state and national legislatures, despite the passage of the Women's Reservation Bill in 2022 by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP); it remains unimplemented.

Other Obstacles Reviewed

This includes factors that have contributed to gender imbalance through corruption in Indian politics, as shown in Figure 8 below.



Figure 8. Consequences of Corruption

Source: www.badlavsevasamiti.org.

First, there are still decades of early marriage, high bride price traditions, and selective abortion, which have caused a significant imbalance between males and females. Second, Praveen recalled that the BJP's policies aimed at reducing India's 40% unemployment rate, which is higher in poorer northern states than in the more developed southern states. Third, culturally, southern India mainly supports the Hindu nationalist movement with Hindutva, which has lasted for a century. At independence, nationalists envisioned India as the homeland for South Asia's Hindus, similar to Pakistan for Muslims.

He observed that in exact arithmetic, the BJP provided one-to-one representation to wider

parts of India, aligning women at the grassroots with the BJP's party values as a responsibility to humanity [33]. It capitalised on this support in the recent general election (2023-24) to establish a significant presence among women in key areas of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. Through this practice, Indian election observers found that the BJP received more votes from women than its opponents or other political parties. International observers reported that the BJP successfully mobilised women voters by 66%, if not more, in the 2019 election.

However, the main obstacles to lower women's representation are analysed in Table 6.

Table 6. Factors Lowering Female Representation

Political /Institutional Determinants	Socio-Cultural & Religious Conditions	Economic determinants
• The practice of caste-based division in Indian politics. The class system affects many victories and defeats. • Strict criteria set by political parties and the practice of zoning candidates out of the primary election diminish women's political confidence. • Lack of government reform on gender based bias, violence and constitutional rights lowers their interest in politics. • No support base formulae for gender balance in Nigeria.	• Lack of effective networking and media campaign for equal representation before each election. • Patriarchal practices and preference for males over females are reinforced by women's reproductive roles: early marriage, pregnancy, childbirth, and parenting. • The influence of ethno-religion, early marriages, arranged marriages, and dowry practices reinforces restrictions on women	• Lack of campaign finances and sponsors. • Poverty among women hampers their political loyalty, from the bottom up, as their support goes to wealthier candidates. • Lack of women's voice at the governance level • The deficiency of party support committees in campaigning for women candidates.

Source: www.ipu.org Carnegie International Observer Report on Indian elections 2019-2024.

Anirvan [34] observed that women who identified with the BJP's political preferences showed strong signs of challenging other political parties in the Hindi heartland states, especially those organised along caste lines. The Seva strategy adopted by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 2014 shifted the trend of cultural revivalism, aiming to reform the party system and caste dynamics, with a move toward 'mercantilist' economic ideologies.

Critical Assessment

The Carnegies' research on the 2019 Election [35] defines the popularly acclaimed Class of Caste (the poorest of the poor), a traditional definition of Indian communities and persons, which the BJP mobilises as a vertical cleavage in its strategy. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's campaign in 2023 recognised this strategic method in his

campaign manifesto's policy, which he politicised to eliminate the traditional caste identities, where women constituted one of the "biggest caste" groups, along with youth and farmers.

There were also indications that the BJP employed a caste strategy to help grassroots women secure campaign support. In the 2022 state assembly elections, Bihar secured 99 of the 125 seats (77%) for BJP-led candidates, who won in constituencies where women's voter turnout exceeded men's. The BJP's grip among women was also noticeable in Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state, as indicated by community-specific, gender-disaggregated data from exit polls conducted by Axis-MyIndia during the 2022 Legislative Assembly election.

The Indian Human Development Report [36] states that the BJP held interface meetings between women and men from upper- and lower-caste areas as part of a one-to-one campaign. Both have long created a core element of the BJP's support base among upper caste groups, Muslims, and Yadavs due to their Hindutva ideologies. Notably, among caste groups (swing voters) such as Jats, Kurmis, and non-Yadav as well as non-Jatav, referred to as Scheduled Castes (SCs), even among Jatav members of the Dalit community, who have long supported the Bahujan Samaj Party (SP), a versatile regional political front that has hitherto emerged as a response to upper-caste domination, are now with the ruling BJP.

According to Ivan Doherty [37], the BJP's strategy was focused on transforming women's active participation within Political Parties to match their numbers in elections. It recalled that the "BJP Hindu Women Reservation Bill," which was passed in the Lok Sabha in 2022, accelerated the BJP's seemingly paradoxical success in recruiting women and engaging them in the public sphere campaign. This gave the party advance influence over other parties that have not adopted the BJP Bill strategy. The reservation bill to increase the number of

female seats is peculiar to the BJP alone. Political parties solicited women's votes from targeted "pro-women" advocates or stakeholders who mobilised them to vote.

Besides, the list of such mobilising programs and stakeholders or agencies is extensive. These include: Janata Dal (United)'s agency implementation of exclusions in the Bihar party; All India Trinamool Congress's Kanyashree party; Conditional Cash Transfer Program; JBP's Ladli Behna unconditional cash transfer (in Madhya Pradesh); and Ujjwala gas cylinder subsidies at the national level. These were among the programs, agencies, or stakeholders that followed up and engaged with women to garner their allegiance by voting for the party that attended to their welfare. Despite these initiatives from political parties, none of the strategies yielded a measurable increase that matched the rise in women's voting support for the BJP.

IEC Conference [38] notes India's first election in 1951 was won by the Indian National Congress (INC), which had 95% male members. Despite a non-Congress government in 1974, the male-dominated environment continued. Since 2014, the BJP has been the ruling party in India. The Election Commission of India (ECI), under the ruling government, shows the influence of incumbency. The BJP is often referred to as "the male succession affluence dynasty." Additionally, the growing political awareness of young women is now seen as a symbol of an informed society and a means to ensure their voices are heard and valued. It is essential to provide young women with the resources and support they need to take part in the electoral process, thereby promoting fair and inclusive representation.

Many policymakers and scholars have studied the importance of gender in Indian politics. Egwu notes the 2006 National Gender Policy supports a 35% affirmative action quota for women [39]. Articles 40 and 42(1), as well as Section 77(2), of India's Constitution prohibit discrimination on the basis of gender.

Despite these laws, women still face marginalisation in politics, especially during elections, even in democratic governments.

Omotoso points out that there is still much work to be done regarding issues of equity and equality, both locally and globally, when analysing transnational democracy from a feminist perspective [40]. She notes that many scholars have identified women's marginalisation across politics and society.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations emerge for advancing women's participation and performance in Indian politics:

1. The Indian government and political parties should urgently implement the Women's Reservation Bill, establishing actionable quotas with timelines and accountability, similar to local councils where women hold two-thirds of civil and political positions.
2. **Mandatory Gender Quotas within Political Parties:** All political parties should adopt mandatory internal quotas for women candidates, moving beyond the BJP's limited approach. These quotas should apply to candidate selection, party leadership positions, and campaign committees.
3. **Electoral Commission Oversight:** The Election Commission of India (IEC) should be empowered to monitor and enforce gender representation requirements. Parties failing to meet the minimum thresholds for women candidates should face penalties or risk losing recognition.
4. **Capacity Building Programs:** Regular training programs should be established for women interested in politics, covering political knowledge, campaign strategies, public speaking, and networking. These programs should be offered in various regional languages to ensure accessibility.
5. **Financial Support Mechanisms:** Special funding should be allocated for women candidates to address the financial barriers that prevent many women from entering politics. This could include campaign finance support, childcare provisions during campaigns, and security arrangements.
6. **Address Cultural and Social Barriers:** Community awareness programs should be launched to challenge patriarchal attitudes that view politics as unsuitable for women. These programs should engage religious and community leaders, families, and educational institutions.
7. **Media Representation:** Guidelines should be established for equitable media coverage of women candidates, moving beyond focusing on their appearance or family status to substantive coverage of their political platforms and achievements.
8. **Cross-Party Women's Caucuses:** Establishment of cross-party women's caucuses at national and state levels to collectively advocate for women's political participation and address common challenges faced by women politicians.
9. **Mentorship Programs:** Structured mentorship programs pairing experienced women politicians with newcomers to provide guidance, support, and networking opportunities.
10. Conduct regular gender audits of political parties and electoral processes to identify gaps and track progress in women's representation over time.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated the persistent gender gaps in Indian parliamentary elections from 2014 to 2024, with a significant focus on the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Despite women comprising approximately half of India's voting population and showing higher

voter turnout, their representation in Parliament remains abysmally low —less than 15%, far below the UN's recommended target of 33-50%.

The findings show India's democracy is incomplete without more women in governance. Women's MPS rose from 4.3% in 1957 to 13.7% in 2024, but gender parity remains distant without decisive action. UN Secretary-General António Guterres noted that gender equality is still 300 years away in many nations, despite progress in Rwanda, Canada, and the Netherlands.

The passage of the Women's Reservation Bill is positive, but it requires swift implementation with clear timelines and accountability. Parties should go beyond mere gestures to enact structural reforms that enable women's meaningful political participation. Growing political awareness among young women shows potential, but institutional reforms, cultural shifts, and sustained political will are needed individually and collectively to maintain these reforms.

This research compares two glove-fitting methods for both hands to effective governance, emphasising the need for balanced representation in politics. Achieving gender equality in India requires coordinated efforts from the government, individuals, civil society, and women's groups to address Access, Conscientisation, Action, and Equity (ACAE). Only with such unity can India realise its democratic potential and ensure women's voices influence decision-making.

Clarification on Ethical Approval, Data Availability & Author's Contribution

1. This article is NOT a field work product.
2. All data were sought from Secondary Data online, as explained in the pages for Abstract, Methods, and the data citations have been edited and added accordingly.

Acknowledgement

I want to express my sincere gratitude to the individuals and my supervisors, Prof. Mehnaz Najimi and Prof. Victor Isumonah, who have played a crucial role in ensuring the successful completion of this research paper. This study is the result of extensive research, critical analysis, and rigorous thinking, which would not have been possible without the support and contributions of various entities involved in the fieldwork, including the 100 participants and friends.

I would also like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to the legal experts and scholars who provided valuable insights and guidance in navigating the intricate ethical frameworks of India and Nigeria.

Lastly, I would like to take this opportunity to thank my colleagues, friends, and family members for their unwavering support and encouragement throughout my research journey. Each contributor has played a crucial role in creating this research article through a collaborative effort.

Conflict of Interest

The researcher affirms the absence of any conflicts of interest in the investigation, examination, and dissemination of this article, as a Ph.D. student in the political science department at Texila University, this article is part of the requirements to obtain a Ph.D. degree; thus, the study has been performed with complete objectivity and ethical standards, and no monetary or non-monetary motives have impacted the outcomes, evaluations, or deductions discussed in this manuscript.

My dedication is exclusively towards attaining academic excellence and scientific accuracy while investigating the legitimacy of electoral processes and gender representation within the mentioned nations, as part of my educational requirements.

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